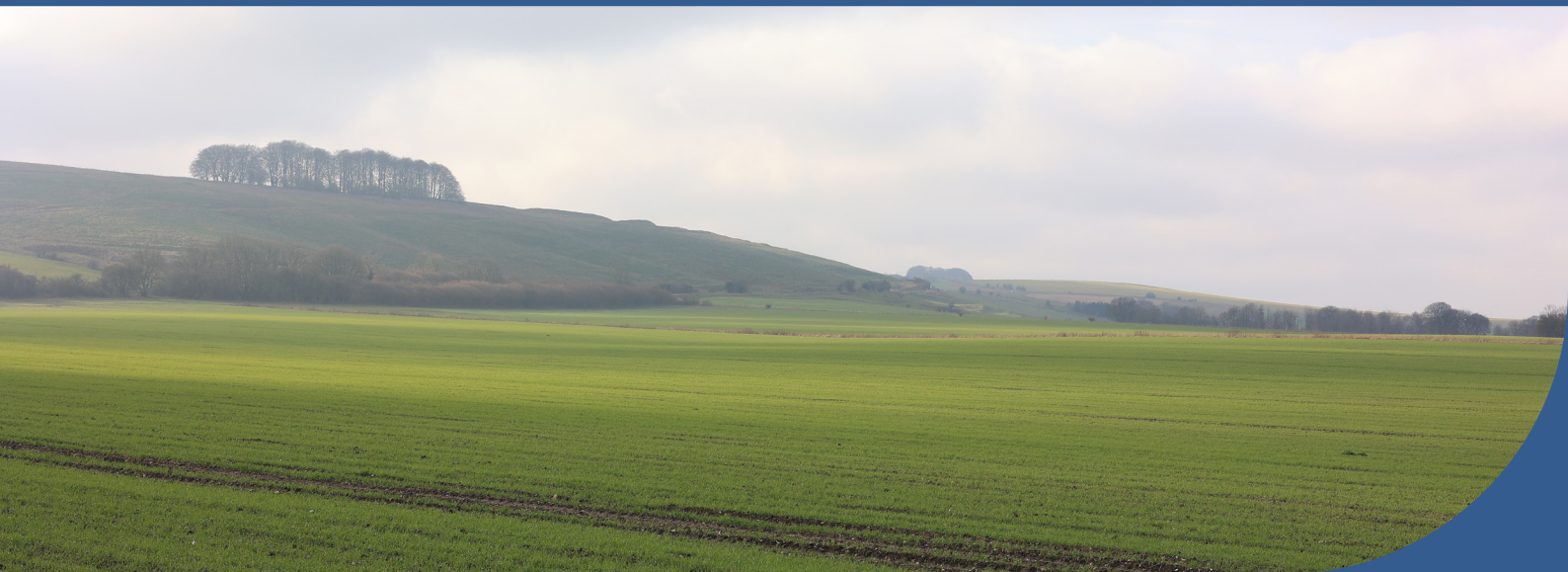


Landscape Character Assessment

Swindon Borough Council

August 2025



LEPUS CONSULTING
LANDSCAPE, ECOLOGY, PLANNING & URBAN SUSTAINABILITY

Landscape Character Assessment

Swindon Borough Council

FINAL

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Cover photo: View towards Barbury Castle in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

About this report & notes for readers

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This assessment is based on the best available published information at the time of writing. No attempt to verify secondary data sources has been made and they have been assumed to be accurate as published. This report was prepared between January 2025 and August 2025 and is subject to and limited by the information available during this time.

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Abbreviations

ALC	Agricultural Land Classification
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
AOD	Above Ordnance Datum
GLVIA	Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
ha	Hectares
LCA	Landscape Character Area
LCT	Landscape Character Type
LDU	Landscape Description Unit
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
LPA	Local Planning Authority
m	Metre
NCA	National Character Area
NFI	National Forest Inventory
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
OS	Ordnance Survey
PPG	Planning Practice Guidance
PRoW	Public Rights of Way
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SBC	Swindon Borough Council
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest

Executive summary

- E1. This report comprises a Landscape Character Assessment to support the preparation of the Swindon Borough New Local Plan. It updates the Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) identified in 2004 and adopted in Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) as part of the Swindon Borough Local Plan in 2011.
- E2. Landscape character may be defined as a distinct and recognisable pattern of elements or characteristics in the landscape that make one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.¹
- E3. Landscape Character Assessment is the process of identifying and describing variations in the character of the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features (characteristics) that make landscapes distinctive. This process results in the production of a Landscape Character Assessment². This Landscape Character Assessment has been written considering the latest guidance and legislation. Eight LCAs have been identified. Each LCA includes a description, key characteristics, designations and policy, forces for change and landscape guidelines to plan, manage and protect distinctiveness.
- E4. The information included in this Landscape Character Assessment is for the use of a variety of stakeholders including planning applicants, developers, development management officers and neighbourhood development plan groups.
- E5. This Landscape Character Assessment should be used to understand the distinctive landscape qualities of an area to give context to scheme proposals. The prevailing character of the landscape will help to shape the design and layout of development.

¹ Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscape-character-assessments-identify-and-describe-landscape-types> [Accessed: 25/04/25]

² Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscape-character-assessments-identify-and-describe-landscape-types> [Accessed: 25/04/25]

1 Introduction

1.1 Appointment and scope of work

1.1.1 Swindon Borough Council (SBC) is in the process of preparing a new Local Plan, which will provide for the development needs of the borough until at least 2043. Lepus Consulting has been appointed by SBC to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment to support the development of the New Local Plan³.

1.1.2 Lepus Consulting is a multi-disciplinary environmental assessment and planning practice, based in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, specialising in landscape appraisal and management.

1.2 Swindon New Local Plan

1.2.1 The Swindon Local Plan 2026 was adopted in 2015. A Local Plan 'Review' was commenced under an early review direction from the Inspector, with a plan period to 2036. Following a decision by SBC in December 2022, the production of a Local Plan review has been replaced by the Local Development Scheme for a 'New Local Plan' to 2043. An update to the LDS is scheduled which indicates that consultation on the Regulation 18 and 19 stages of the New Local Plan is programmed for Spring and Autumn 2025. This Landscape Character Assessment will inform the Regulation 18 stage plan for public consultation from March 2025.

1.3 Landscape Character Assessment

1.3.1 Landscape Character Assessment is the process of identifying and describing variations in landscape character within a defined area. It sets out to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features that give each landscape its distinctive identity. The outcome of this process is the production of a Landscape Character Assessment.

1.3.2 This report updates the Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) identified in 2004 and adopted in the 'Landscape Character Areas Supplementary Guidance'⁴ as part of SBC's Local Plan in 2011.

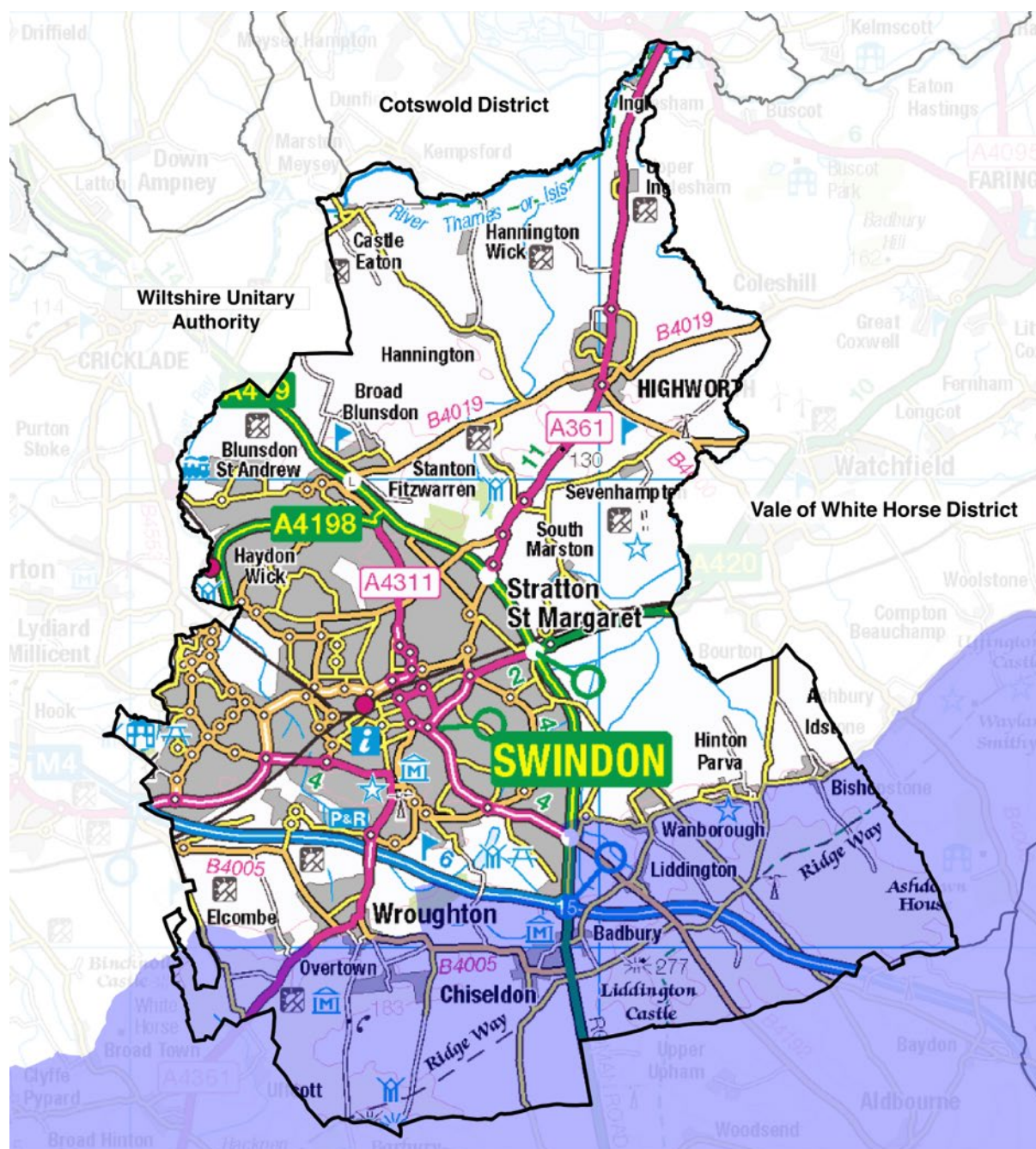
1.4 Geographic context of Swindon

1.4.1 The borough of Swindon covers 230km² (or 23,000ha) and is located within the county of Wiltshire in the South West region of England. Swindon's southern and western boundaries meet Wiltshire Unitary Authority, with Cotswold District to the north and Vale of White Horse District to the east. Swindon is approximately 70 miles to the west of central London and 35 miles to the east of central Bristol. A map showing the location of Swindon and surrounding Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) is presented in Figure 1.1.

³ Swindon Borough Council. Swindon Local Plan 2026 and New Local Plan – New Local Plan. Available at: https://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20113/local_plan_and_planning_policy/635/swindon_local_plan_2026_and_new_local_plan/2 [Accessed: 25/04/25].

⁴ Swindon Borough Council (December 2004) Swindon Borough Local Plan 2011 Revised Deposit Draft: Landscape Character Areas. Adopted Summary Planning Guidance. Available at: https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/5191/landscape_character_areas_supplementary_planning_guidance [Accessed: 25/04/25].

- 1.4.2 The borough includes the town of Swindon, the market town of Highworth, the large village of Wroughton, and a number of smaller villages and hamlets. Part of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, AONB) is located within the borough, to the south. A baseline review of natural, cultural and social aspects of the borough can be found in Chapter 4.



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- ☐ Swindon Borough
- ☐ North Wessex Downs NL
- ☐ Boundaries of other Local Planning Authorities



PROJECT	Swindon Landscape Character Assessment	DRAWN	WE
CLIENT	Swindon Borough Council	CHECKED	ND
TITLE	Study area location	SCALE@A4	1:105000
VERSION	LC-1246_Study_Area_3	DATE	20/02/2025

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Figure 1.1: Study area location map

2 Planning policy

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 This Landscape Character Assessment has been undertaken within the context of relevant planning policy. Planning policy and other material considerations are taken from the following:

- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)⁵
- Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)⁶
- Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026⁷

2.1.2 Further details of these planning policies are provided below.

2.2 National Planning Policy Framework

2.2.1 The NPPF acts as guidance for LPAs, both in plan preparation and making decisions about planning applications. The environmental objective of the NPPF is:

“to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.”

2.2.2 NPPF paragraphs relevant to landscape character are set out in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: NPPF paragraphs relevant to landscape character

Paragraph 135	<i>“Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments: ...c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);”</i>
Paragraph 187	<i>“Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: ...a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan). ...b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.”</i>

⁵ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (December 2024) National Planning Policy Framework. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2> [Accessed: 25/04/25]

⁶ Planning Practice Guidance (2021) Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance> [Accessed: 25/04/25]

⁷ Swindon Borough Council (2015) Swindon Local Plan 2026. Available at: https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/3988/swindon_borough_local_plan_2026 [Accessed: 25/04/25]

2.3 Planning Practice Guidance

- 2.3.1 The Government publishes Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)⁸ to accompany the NPPF. In relation to landscape matters, the Natural Environment PPG provides broad guidance primarily relating to the development of local planning policy and accompanying evidence.
- 2.3.2 Landscape matters are included as part of the guidance on the natural environment, specifically information about how policies can conserve and enhance landscapes and how the character of landscapes can be assessed.⁹

2.4 Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026

- 2.4.1 The Swindon Local Plan was formally adopted in March 2015¹⁰. The Council is currently in the process of developing a New Local Plan. Policy EN5: Landscape Character and Historic Landscape, from the Local Plan 2026 has been reproduced in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Policy EN5 from Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026

Policy EN5: Landscape Character and Historic Landscape	<p><i>“a. Proposals for development will only be permitted when:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>the intrinsic character, diversity and local distinctness of landscape within Swindon Borough are protected, conserved and enhanced;</i> <i>the design of the development and materials used are sympathetic to the surrounding landscape;</i> <i>unacceptable impacts upon the landscape are avoided; and,</i> <i>where other negative impacts are considered unavoidable, they are satisfactorily mitigated.</i> <p><i>b. In meeting the requirements of EN5a, applications for development should demonstrate how they have taken into account Landscape Character Assessment and assessed the potential impact of the proposal upon the following attributes of the landscape:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>existing landscape form, features, topography and character;</i> <i>the contribution of the landscape to biodiversity and wildlife;</i> <i>local geology and geo-diversity;</i> <i>views, visual amenity and the landscape setting;</i> <i>valuable historic and heritage areas and assets;</i> <i>environmental amenity such as tranquillity & noise, pollution and light pollution; and,</i> <i>the existing social, physical, economic and environmental roles and functions of the landscape at the local and strategic scale (for example as a place of cultural and leisure activity, living, employment and separation of settlements).</i> <p><i>c. The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a nationally recognised area of landscape protection. Proposals within the Borough which are within and or abuts the North Wessex Downs AONB must accord with relevant criteria set out in the AONB Management Plan and [in]... the NPPF. Proposals outside the AONB should not adversely affect its setting.”</i></p>
--	---

⁸ Planning Practice Guidance (2021) Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance> [Accessed: 25/04/25]

⁹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (December 2024) National Planning Policy Framework. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2> [Accessed: 25/04/25]

¹⁰ Swindon Borough Council (2015) Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026. Available at: https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/3988/swindon_borough_local_plan_2026 [Accessed 25/04/25]

3 Landscape Character Assessment Methodology

3.1 Overview

3.1.1 Landscape Character Assessment is the process of identifying and describing variations in the character of the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features (characteristics) that make landscapes distinctive (see Figure 3.1). This process results in the production of a Landscape Character Assessment¹¹.

3.1.2 The methodology for this study has been derived from aspects of:

- 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual and Impact Assessment Third Edition' (GLVIA) (2013)¹²
- Natural England (2014) 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment'¹³
- Natural England (2019) 'An approach to landscape sensitivity assessment – to inform spatial planning and land management'¹⁴

3.1.3 The assessment can be summarised as having four key stages:

- **Stage 1:** Define the purpose, scope and study area for the project
- **Stage 2:** Desk study
- **Stage 3:** Field study
- **Stage 4:** Classification and description of LCAs

3.1.4 Natural England's 2014 guidance sets out five principles for Landscape Character Assessment :

- 1) Landscape is everywhere and all landscape and seascape has character;
- 2) Landscape occurs at all scales and the process of Landscape Character Assessment can be undertaken at any scale;
- 3) The process of Landscape Character Assessment should involve an understanding of how the landscape is perceived and experienced by people;
- 4) A Landscape Character Assessment can provide a landscape evidence base to inform a range of decisions and applications; and

¹¹ Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscape-character-assessments-identify-and-describe-landscape-types> [Accessed: 25/04/25]

¹² Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Third Edition) Abingdon: Routledge

¹³ Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscape-character-assessments-identify-and-describe-landscape-types> [Accessed: 25/04/25]

¹⁴ Natural England (2019) 'An approach to landscape sensitivity assessment – to inform spatial planning and land management' Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/817928/landscape-sensitivity-assessment-2019.pdf [Accessed: 25/04/25]

- 5) A Landscape Character Assessment can provide an integrating spatial framework – a multitude of variables come together to give us our distinctive landscapes.

3.1.5 The process of Landscape Character Assessment, as described in 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment' is illustrated in Figure 3.2.

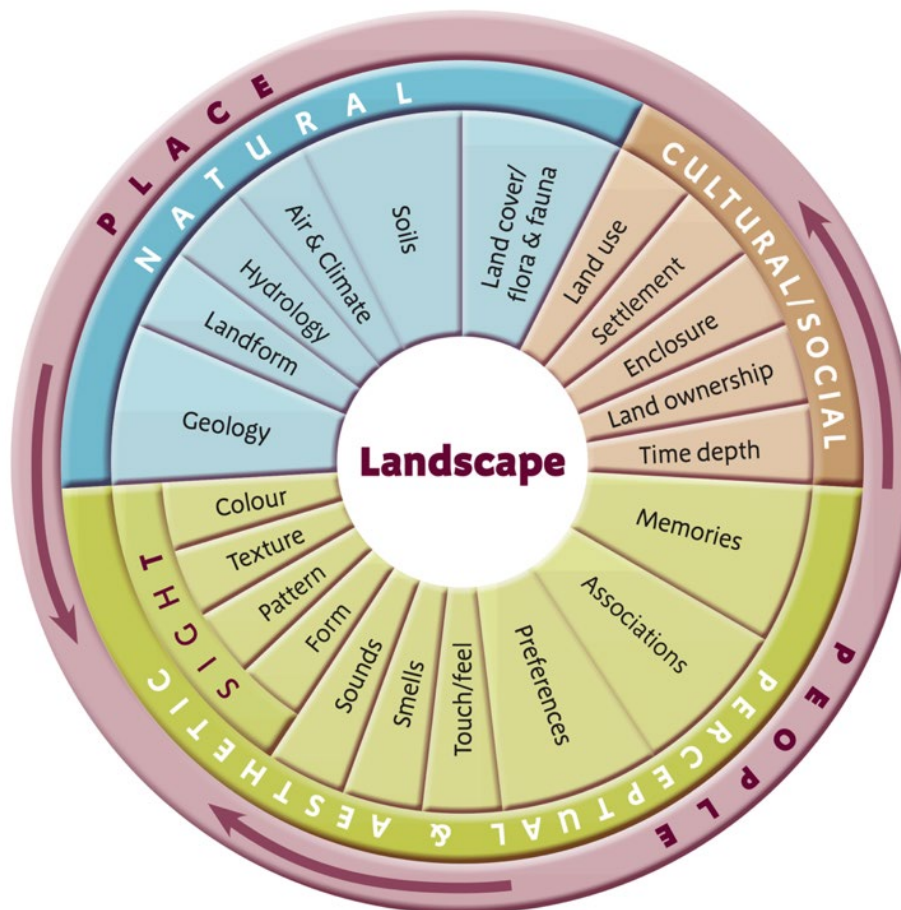


Figure 3.1: What is Landscape?

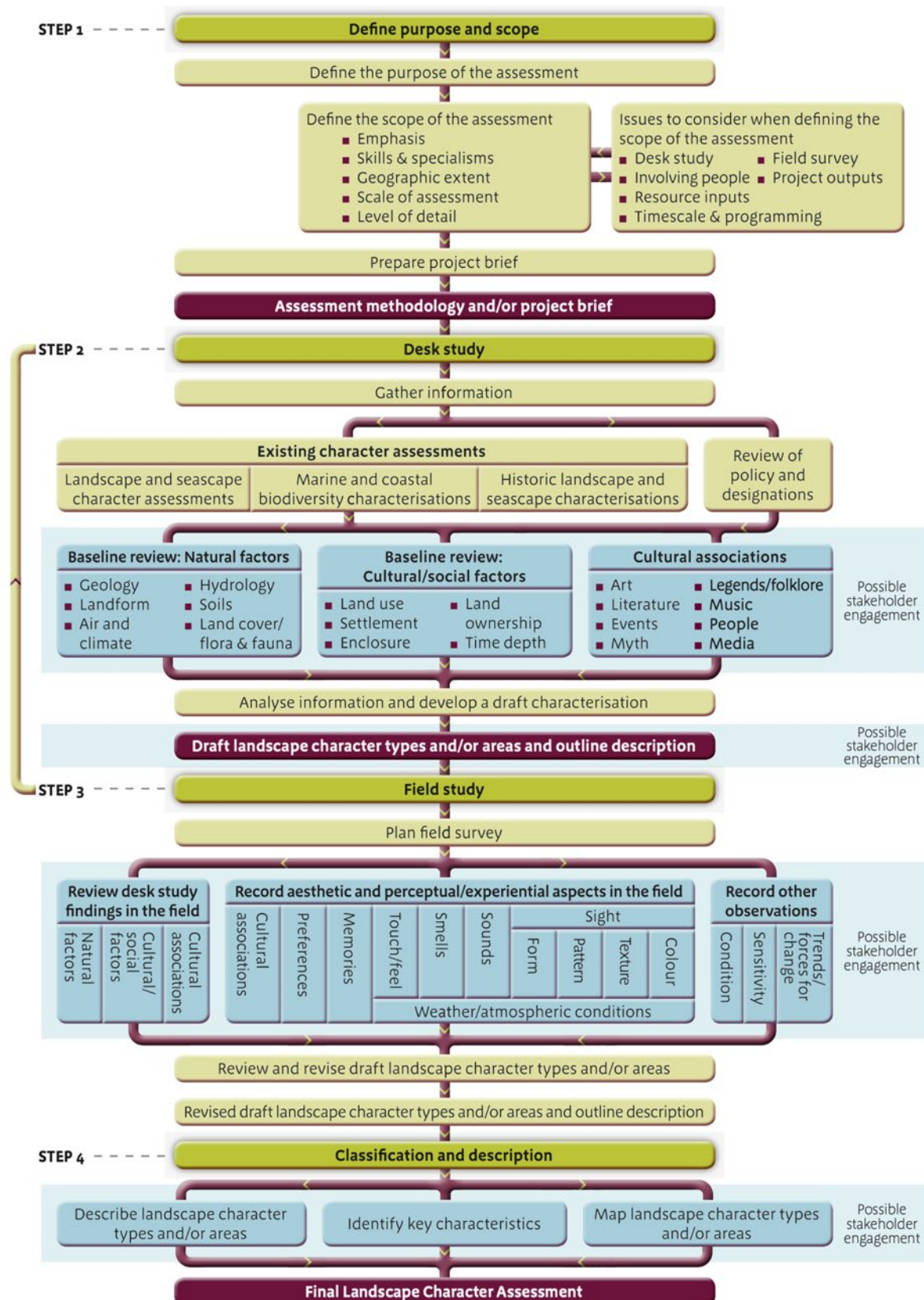


Figure 3.2: Landscape Character Assessment – the process

3.2 Define purpose and scope of the project

3.2.1 SBC requested a Landscape Character Assessment to be undertaken to inform:

- Local Plan policies
- Planning decisions
- Green infrastructure planning and strategy
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments
- Landscape Sensitivity Assessments

3.2.2 This Landscape Character Assessment reviews and updates the LCAs identified in 2004 and adopted in SPG¹⁵ as part of SBC's Local Plan in 2011.

3.3 Desk study

3.3.1 The desktop study stage consists of an information gathering exercise to prepare a baseline review of natural, cultural and social aspects of Swindon Borough. This relies largely on information from the following sources:

- National Character Areas (NCAs) in Swindon Borough: Upper Thames Clay Vales¹⁶, Midvale Ridge¹⁷ and Berkshire and Marlborough Downs¹⁸
- LCAs identified in 2004 and adopted in SPG¹⁹ as part of SBC's Local Plan in 2011
- Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment (December 2005)²⁰
- North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (2002)²¹.

¹⁵ Swindon Borough Council (December 2004) Swindon Borough Local Plan 2011 Revised Deposit Draft: Landscape Character Areas. Adopted Summary Planning Guidance. Available at: https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/5191/landscape_character_areas_supplementary_planning_guidance [Accessed: 25/04/25]

¹⁶ Natural England (2014) NCA Profile: 108 Upper Thames Clay Vales (NE570). Available at: <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5865554770395136> [Accessed: 25/04/25]

¹⁷ Natural England (2013) NCA Profile: 109 Midvale Ridge (NE417). Available at: <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5431100> [Accessed: 25/04/25]

¹⁸ Natural England (2015) NCA Profile: 116 Berkshire and Marlborough Downs (NE482). Available at: <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4822422297509888> [Accessed: 25/04/25]

¹⁹ Swindon Borough Council (December 2004) Swindon Borough Local Plan 2011 Revised Deposit Draft: Landscape Character Areas. Adopted Summary Planning Guidance. Available at: https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/5191/landscape_character_areas_supplementary_planning_guidance [Accessed: 25/04/25]

²⁰ Prepared on behalf of Wiltshire County Council by Land Use Consultants (LUC) (December 2005) Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment. Available at: <https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planning-landscape-conservation> [Accessed: 06/01/25]

²¹ LUC (2002) North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment. Available at: <https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Landscape-Character-Assessment-Full-report1.pdf> [Accessed 27/01/25]

- 3.3.2 The spatial GIS data used to inform this Landscape Character Assessment is listed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: GIS data used in this Landscape Character Assessment

Dataset	Source
Ancient woodland	Natural England
Built-up areas	Ordnance Survey
Country Parks	Natural England
Flood zones	Environment Agency
Geology	British Geological Survey
Historic environment and heritage assets (listed buildings, scheduled monuments and registered parks and gardens)	Historic England
National Character Areas	Natural England
Nature conservation designations (Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Nature Reserves)	Natural England
Priority habitat inventory	Natural England
Terrain	Ordnance Survey Terrain 50
Watercourses and surface water	Ordnance Survey
Woodland	National Forest Inventory

3.4 Field study

- 3.4.1 As stated in ‘An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment’²²:

“the field study is an essential part of the Landscape Character Assessment process. It presents the opportunity to observe and understand how all the factors identified as part of the desk study interact and are perceived and experienced, to give us landscapes of distinct character. It also enables the identification of other factors that are not evident from the desk study and the chance to record aesthetic and perceptual aspects”.

- 3.4.2 The guidance goes on to explain why Landscape Character Assessment can be used to inform land use planning and specifically local plans. Landscape is typically appreciated under umbrella headings of (i) Natural, (ii) Cultural and Social, and (iii) Perceptual and Aesthetic factors.

3.5 Classification and description of Landscape Character Areas and/or Types

- 3.5.1 Landscape classification can be prepared at a variety of scales depending on the purpose and scope of the project. The scale of the area to be assessed determines the likely level at which the differences between homogeneous and distinctive factors are separated to identify character areas.

²² Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscape-character-assessments-identify-and-describe-landscape-types> [Accessed: 22/04/25]

- 3.5.2 The Landscape Character Assessment guidance from Natural England²³ states that this part of the process deals with the final classification and description of LCAs and/or LCTs, and explains:
- The difference between LCAs and/or LCTs, and their use
 - Classification at different scales
 - Involvement of people
 - Boundary confirmation
 - Naming LCAs and/or LCTs
 - Describing landscape character
 - Mapping LCAs and/or LCTs.
- 3.5.3 Overall, the landscape classification was informed by these stages which were used to define areas of distinct, recognisable and consistent character, and group areas of similar character together. LCAs do not, generally, include main settlements, although they may wash over rural dwellings and farmsteads.
- 3.5.4 Swindon's LCA Supplementary Planning Guidance document (2011), identified eight LCAs, excluding its established urban area. These LCAs have been reviewed and updated in this study. The following information has been assembled for each LCA:
- Maps and photos
 - A description of the key landscape characteristics in terms of natural, cultural and social features, as well as key aesthetic and perceptual qualities
 - Key characteristics
 - Designations and policy
 - Forces for change
 - Landscape guidelines to plan, manage and protect distinctiveness.
- 3.5.5 A range of factors that combine to influence landscape character that have been considered for each LCA are listed in Table 3.2.

²³ Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscape-character-assessments-identify-and-describe-landscape-types> [Accessed: 22/04/25]

Table 3.2: Range of factors that combine to influence landscape character

Natural factors	
Geology	Geology (solid and drift)
Landform	Landform/topography Geomorphology
Hydrology	Rivers and drainage Water quality and flows
Air and climate	Climate Microclimate Patterns of weather
Soils	Soils Agricultural Land Classification (ALC)
Land cover/flora & fauna	Habitats/biodiversity Land cover Vegetation cover Tree cover – forest/woodland
Cultural & social factors	
Land use (and management)	Land cover Agricultural land use
Settlement	Settlement patterns Building types and styles Materials
Enclosure	Pattern and type of field enclosure (rural) Urban morphology
Time depth	Archaeology and the historic dimension
Cultural associations	
Art, literature, descriptive writings, music, myth/legend/folklore, people, events and associations	Obtained through a desk review
Perceptual & aesthetic factors	
Memories and associations	Obtained via stakeholder engagement
Perceptions	Some aesthetic factors might be identified as part of the desk study e.g. sense of wildness, remoteness and tranquility
Touch/feel/smells/sounds/sight	Identified largely via field survey

3.6 Definitions

3.6.1 The definitions presented in Table 3.3 have been reproduced from Natural England's Landscape Character Assessment Guidance (2014)²⁴ and are used throughout this report.

Table 3.3: Natural England (2014) definitions

Landscape Character Areas*	These are single unique areas which are the discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape type. Each will have its own individual character and identity, even though it shares the same generic characteristics with other areas of the same type.
Landscape Character Assessment	This is the process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features (characteristics) that make landscapes distinctive. This process results in the production of a Landscape Character Assessment.
Landscape Character Types*	These are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different areas in different parts of the country, but wherever they occur they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, historical land use, and settlement pattern.
Landscape Quality (or condition)**	This is based on judgements about the physical state of the landscape, and about its intactness, from visual, functional, and ecological perspectives. It also reflects the state of repair of individual features and elements which make up the character in any one place.
Landscape Value**	The relative value or importance attached to a landscape (often as a basis for designation or recognition), which expresses national or local consensus, because of its quality, special qualities including perceptual aspects such as scenic beauty, tranquillity or wildness, cultural associations or other conservation issues.
Sensitivity ***	A term applied to specific receptors, combining judgements of the susceptibility of the receptor to the specific type of change or development proposed and the value related to that receptor.
Susceptibility ***	The ability of a defined landscape or visual receptor to accommodate the specific proposed development without undue negative consequences.

Sources:

* The Countryside Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage (2002) Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland (CAX 84), the Countryside Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage, April 2002.

** The Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2002), Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Second Edition, London: Spon Press.

*** Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2013), Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition, London: Routledge.

²⁴ Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscape-character-assessments-identify-and-describe-landscape-types> [Accessed: 22/04/25]

4 The landscape of Swindon Borough

4.1 Natural factors

Landform and geology

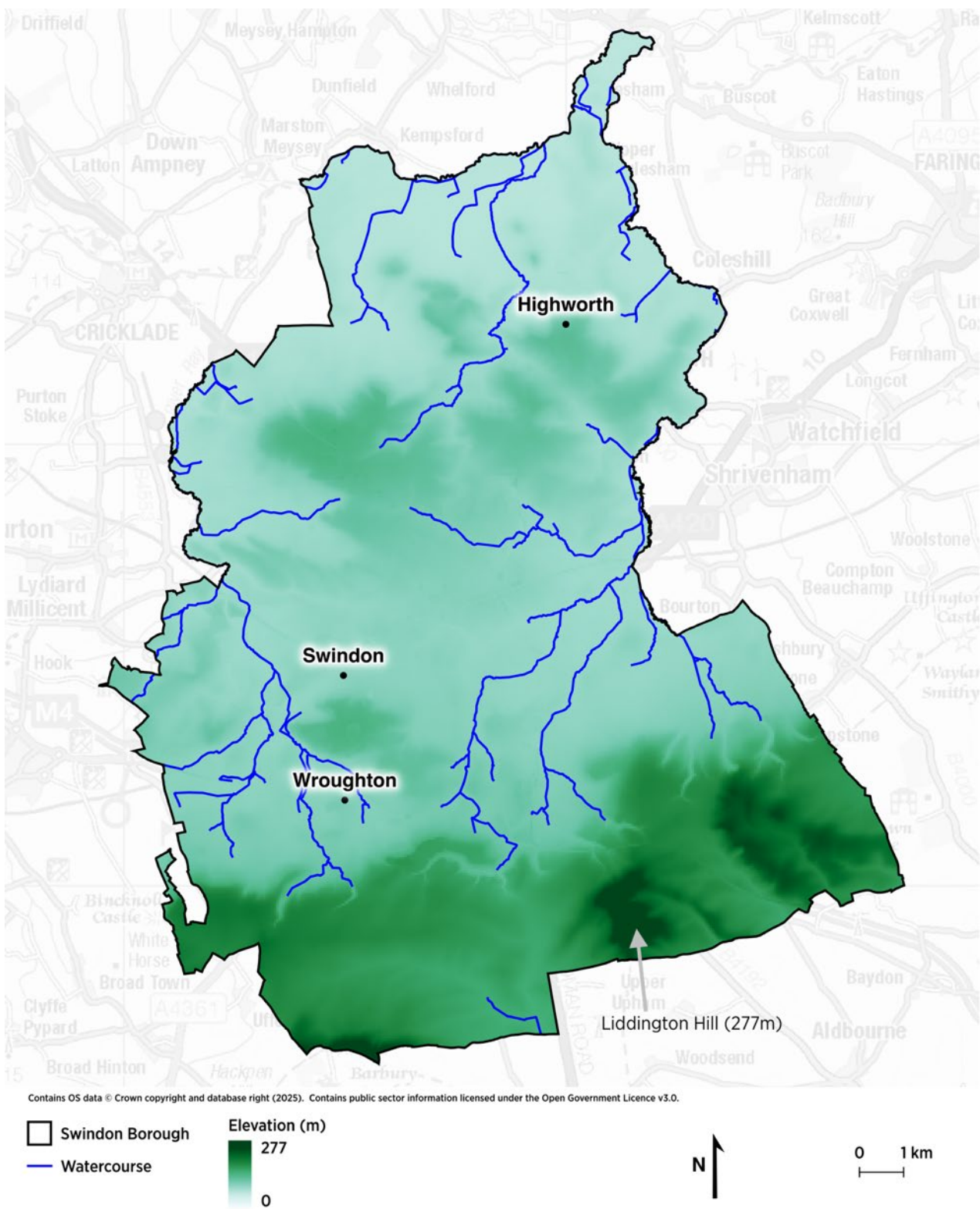
4.1.1 The topography varies greatly across the borough (see **Figure 4.1**) , ranging from the low-lying upper Thames clay vale in the north to the escarpment of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape in the south. The highest point in the borough is at Liddington Hill at 277m AOD (see Figure 4.1).

4.1.2 The bedrock geology (at 1:625,000 scale) of the borough mostly comprises West Walton formation, Ampthill clay formation and Kimmeridge clay formation (undifferentiated)²⁵. Corallian group (limestone, sandstone, siltstone and mudstone), is situated within the centre of the borough, with Kellaways formation and Oxford Clay formation (undifferentiated – mudstone, siltstone and sandstone) to the north. The south of the borough comprises of Gault formation and Upper Greensand formation (undifferentiated – mudstone, sandstone and limestone) and grey chalk.

Hydrology

4.1.3 Numerous watercourses flow through the borough of Swindon (see Figure 4.1). The River Thames flows in an easterly direction across the northern boundary of the borough, to the south of Kempsford and Lechlade-on-Thames. The River Thames is joined by tributaries including the River Cole, the Share Ditch and Bydemill Brook. The River Ray flows in a north westerly direction within the western area and flows west to meet the River Cherwell at Islip, Oxfordshire. The River Cole flows in a northern direction along the north-eastern boundary of the borough. Water bodies in the borough include Coate Water (28ha) located 5km to the south-east of central Swindon.

²⁵ BGS (2024) GeoIndex (onshore). Available at: <https://www.bgs.ac.uk/map-viewers/geoindex-onshore/>
[Accessed 22/04/25]



PROJECT	Swindon Landscape Character Assessment	DRAWN	WE
CLIENT	Swindon Borough Council	CHECKED	ND
TITLE	Topography and watercourses	SCALE@A4	1:105000
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Figure 4.1: Topography and watercourses

Land cover and biodiversity

4.1.4 No European sites are located within the borough (Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas or Ramsar sites). There are nine Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the borough of Swindon, shown on the map in Figure 4.2 and listed below:

- Bincknoll Dip Woods SSSI
- Burderop Wood SSSI
- Clout's Wood SSSI
- Coate Water SSSI
- Great Quarry, Swindon SSSI
- Haydon Meadow SSSI
- Okus Quarry SSSI
- Old Town Railway Cutting, Swindon SSSI
- The Coombes, Hinton Parva SSSI

4.1.5 There are seven Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) in the borough (see Figure 4.2). These are:

- Barbury Castle LNR
- Coate Water LNR
- Quarry Wildlife Garden LNR
- Radnor Street Cemetery LNR
- Rushey Platt Canalside Park LNR
- Seven Fields LNR
- Stanton Park LNR

4.1.6 Priority habitats in the borough (Natural England's Priority Habitat Inventory²⁶) are listed in Table 4.1 and presented on the map in Figure 4.2.

Table 4.1: Priority habitats in Swindon (Natural England's Priority Habitat Inventory)

Priority habitat	Area (ha) within Swindon	Percentage of Swindon (23,009ha)
Lowland calcareous grassland	146	0.6%
Deciduous woodland	50.6	0.2%
Good quality semi-improved grassland	24.3	0.1%
Lowland meadows	18.6	0.08%
Lowland fens	15.9	0.07%
Traditional orchards	8.5	0.04%
Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh	0.6	0.003%
Purple moor grass and rush pastures	0.4	0.002%

²⁶ Natural England (2024) Priority Habitats Inventory (England). Available at: <https://naturalengland-defra.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/Defra::priority-habitats-inventory-england/about> [Accessed 22/04/25]

- 4.1.7 Woodland covers 1,633ha (National Forest Inventory (NFI), 2022), which is 7.1% of the borough. The NFI²⁷ covers any forest or woodland in Great Britain of at least 0.5ha in area, with a minimum width of 20m, and that has at least 20% tree canopy cover. NFI data classifies woodland into types. Woodland types in Swindon are listed in Table 4.2. There are 181ha of ancient woodland in the borough and the largest areas are found at Burderop Wood, Great Wood and Clouts Wood.

Table 4.2: National Forest Inventory (2022) woodland types in Swindon

Woodland type	Area (ha) within Swindon	Percentage of Swindon (23,009ha)
Broadleaved	878.9	3.8%
Young trees	366.9	1.6%
Assumed woodland	163.3	0.7%
Conifer	63.1	0.3%
Mixed mainly conifer	45.0	0.2%
Ground prep	38.1	0.2%
Mixed mainly broadleaved	32.3	0.1%
Felled	28.9	0.1%
Coppice	3.5	0.02%

²⁷ Forest Research (2024) National Forest Inventory. Available at: <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/national-forest-inventory/> [Accessed 28/01/25]

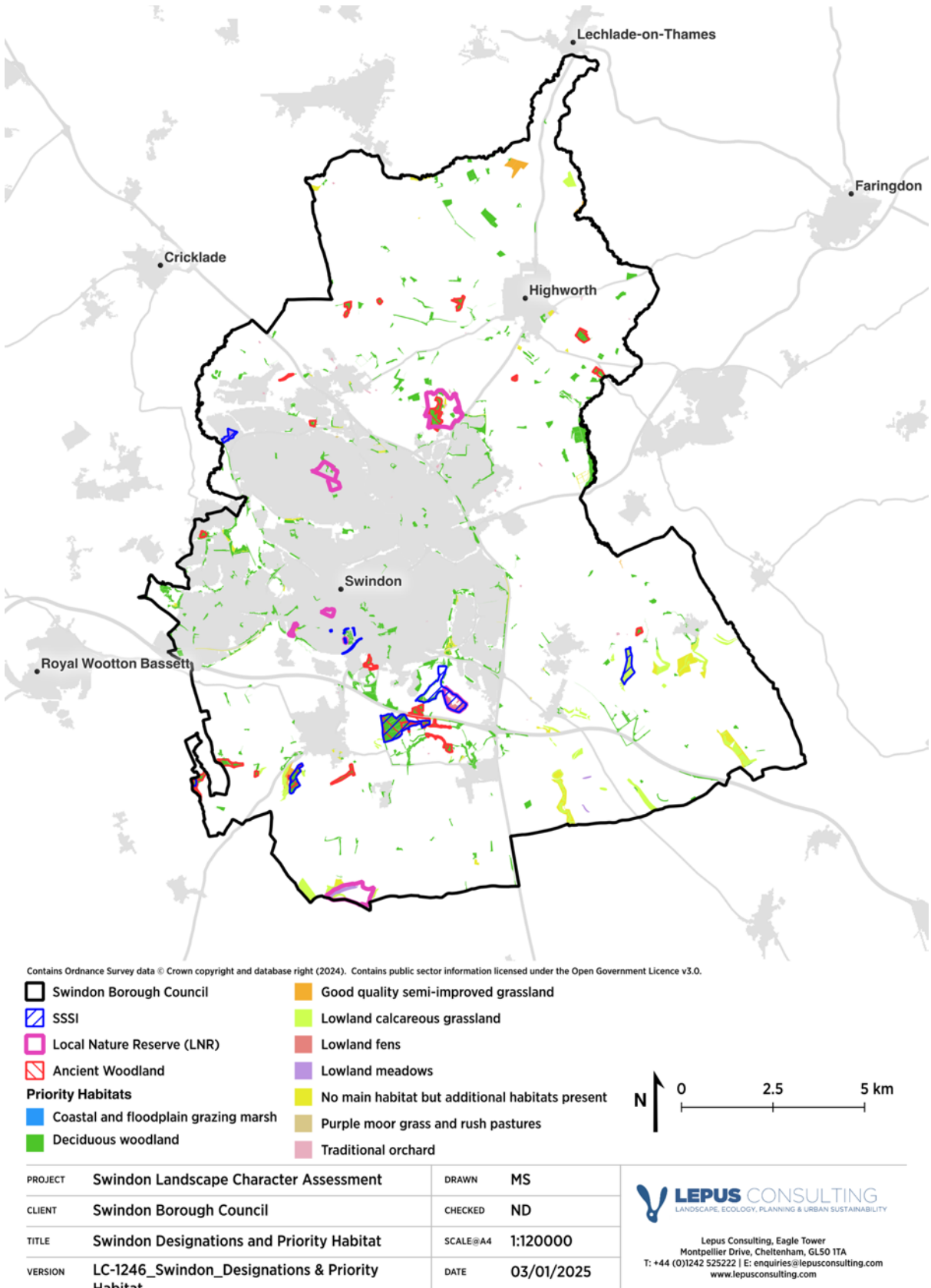


Figure 4.2: Nature conservation designations and priority habitats in Swindon

4.2 Cultural and social factors

Land use, settlement and infrastructure

- 4.2.1 The borough includes the town of Swindon, the market town of Highworth, the large village of Wroughton, and a number of smaller villages and hamlets. Outside the urban areas, the landscape is predominantly agricultural comprising extensive areas of arable and pasture. The borough is traversed by key transport routes, including the M4 motorway, the A419, the A420, and the Great Western Main Line.

- 4.2.2 Five Country Parks are located within the borough: Barbury Castle, Coate Water, Lydiard Park, Mouldon Hill and Stanton Park (see Figure 4.3). Country Parks are typically located near urban areas and provide green spaces for the enjoyment of the nature and the outdoors. The Coombes at Hinton Parva is land designated by the National Trust, also designated as an SSSI, located within the south-east of the borough²⁸.

Historic environment and heritage assets

- 4.2.3 The borough contains a rich historic environment with heritage assets including 27 conservation areas²⁹, 53 scheduled monuments and numerous listed buildings (14 Grade I, 29 Grade II* and 621 Grade II). There are three Registered Parks and Gardens (Registered Parks and Gardens) within the borough including Lydiard Park (Grade II), Queen's Park, Swindon (Grade II) and Town Gardens, Swindon (Grade II) (see Figure 4.3). The Ridgeway National Trail, Britain's oldest road, runs through the borough within the North Wessex Downs³⁰.

²⁸ National Trust Open Data. National Trust land datasets. Available at: <https://open-data-national-trust.hub.arcgis.com> [Accessed: 02/01/25].

²⁹ Swindon Borough Council. Conservation areas. Available at: https://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20059/land_and_premises/373/conservation_areas [Accessed: 30/12/24].

³⁰ National Trails. The Ridgeway. Available at: https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/trails/the-ridgeway/ [Accessed: 02/01/25].

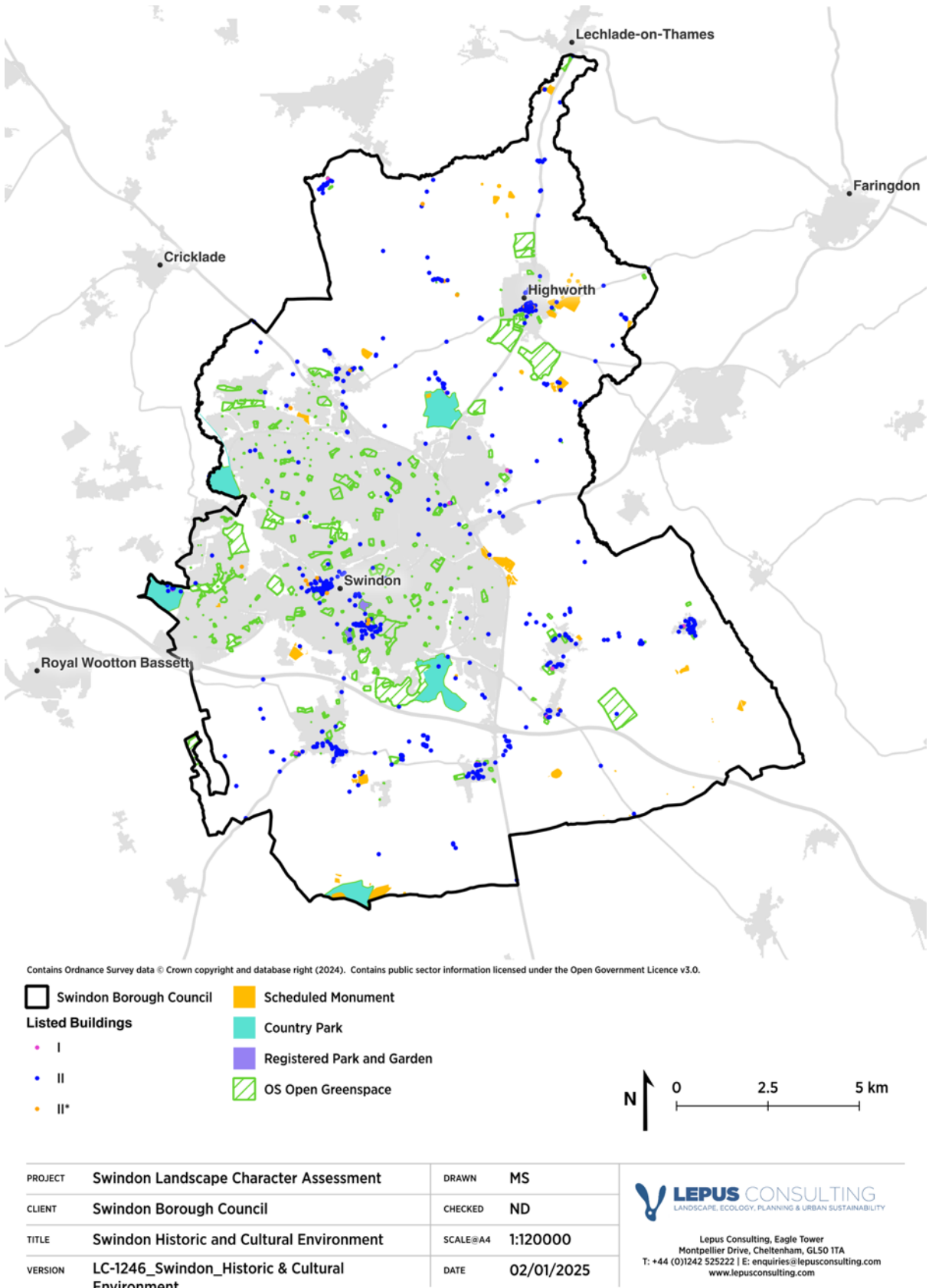


Figure 4.3: Historic environment and recreation assets in Swindon

5 North Wessex Downs National Landscape

5.1 Description

- 5.1.1 The North Wessex Downs National Landscape (formerly AONB) is an expansive chalk downland landscape spanning the counties of Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire. The North Wessex Downs was designated as an AONB in 1972 under the National Parks and Access to Countryside Act 1949. The North Wessex Downs covers approximately a quarter of the borough of Swindon (6,414 hectares) (see Figure 5.1). The North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019-2024³¹ describes the landscape as:

“a visibly ancient landscape of great beauty, diversity and size. It embraces the high, open arable sweeps of the chalk downs and dramatic scarp slopes with their prehistoric monuments and beech knolls, the moulded dip slopes, sheltered chalk river valleys, intimate and secluded wooded areas and low-lying heaths with a rich mosaic of woodland, pasture, heath and commons”.

5.2 Special landscape qualities

- 5.2.1 Special landscape qualities of the North Wessex Downs, identified in the AONB Management Plan 2019-2024³² are listed in Table 5.1

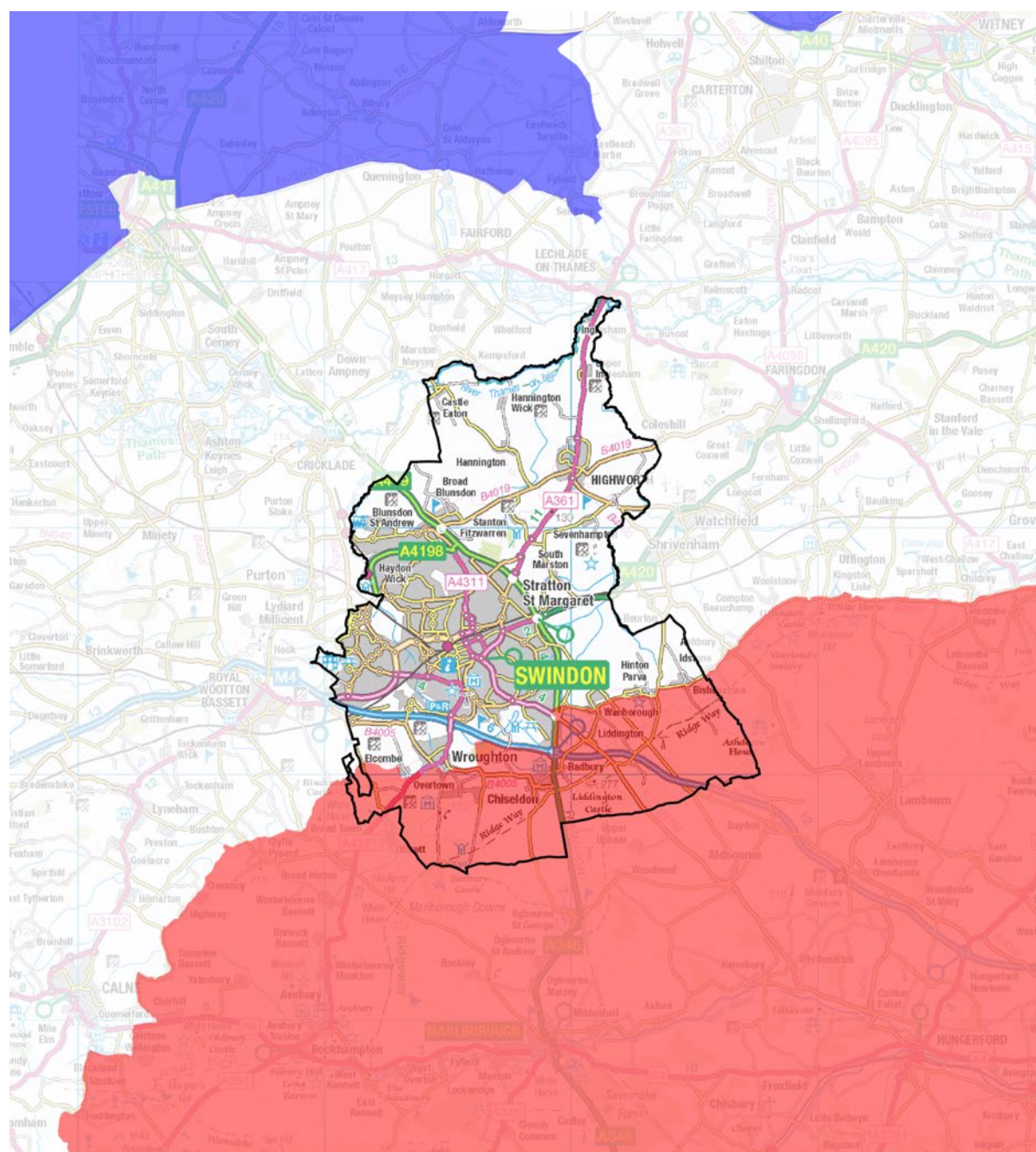
Table 5.1: Special landscape qualities of the North Wessex Downs (AONB Management Plan 2019-2024)

Special landscape qualities of the North Wessex Downs (AONB Management Plan 2019-2024)

- Open Downland extending from Roundway Down near Devizes to Lardon Chase overlooking the Thames at Streatley is dissected by dry valleys and long steep scarps, with limited tree cover and a sense of remoteness and tranquillity;
- Downland with Woodland on the dip slope descending to Kennet Valley and south across the Hampshire Downs, offering softer contours, woodland cover and a mix of field patterns;
- Centered on Savernake Forest and West Woods, the Wooded Plateau consists of extensive tracts of semi-natural ancient woodland, wood pasture with majestic veteran trees, and 18th and 19th century Beech plantations, as well as more recent coniferous plantations;
- At the northernmost tip of Salisbury Plain, the open rolling landform of the High Chalk Plain creates a bleak, spacious landscape under arable production and devoid of settlement, with long views and a strong sense of remoteness and isolation;
- The distinctive northern Downs Plain and Scarp plunges down from the chalk plain to the Vale of White Horse, creating a dramatic recognisable horizon;
- The Vales of Pewsey and sections of the Thames Valley floor adjoining the Chilterns AONB offer productive loamy and alluvial soils where springs issue from the chalk and compact settlements contrast with scattered farmsteads;
- The River Valleys of the Kennet, Lambourn, Pang and Bourne form very distinct linear landscapes, characterised by a rich mix of grazed pastures, water meadows, wetland and woodland. Steeply rising slopes create an intimate and enclosed character; and
- The Lowland Mosaic, curving around Newbury and the lower Kennet Valley has a varied geology of clays, silts and sands giving rise to a diverse mix of soils and, in turn, a mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodlands, plantations, remnant heathland and more open farmland areas where sunken lanes heighten the sense of seclusion.

³¹ North Wessex Downs National Landscape (2019) North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019-2024. Available at: <https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/our-work/management-plan/> [Accessed 28/01/25]

³² North Wessex Downs National Landscape (2019) North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019-2024. Available at: <https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/our-work/management-plan/> [Accessed 28/01/25]



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- Swindon Borough
- Cotswolds
- North Wessex Downs



PROJECT	Swindon Landscape Character Assessment	DRAWN	WE
CLIENT	Swindon Borough Council	CHECKED	ND
TITLE	National Landscapes	SCALE@A4	1:200000
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Figure 5.1: National Landscapes within and surrounding Swindon Borough

6 Classification of Landscape Character Areas

6.1 National Character Areas

6.1.1 At a national level, landscape character has been defined by the assessment work of Natural England, which has divided England into areas of similar landscape character called National Character Areas (NCAs). There are three NCAs located within the borough of Swindon:

- Berkshire and Marlborough Downs³³
- Midvale Ridge³⁴
- Upper Thames Clay Vales³⁵

6.1.2 Descriptions of the three NCAs within the borough are provided in Table 6.1.

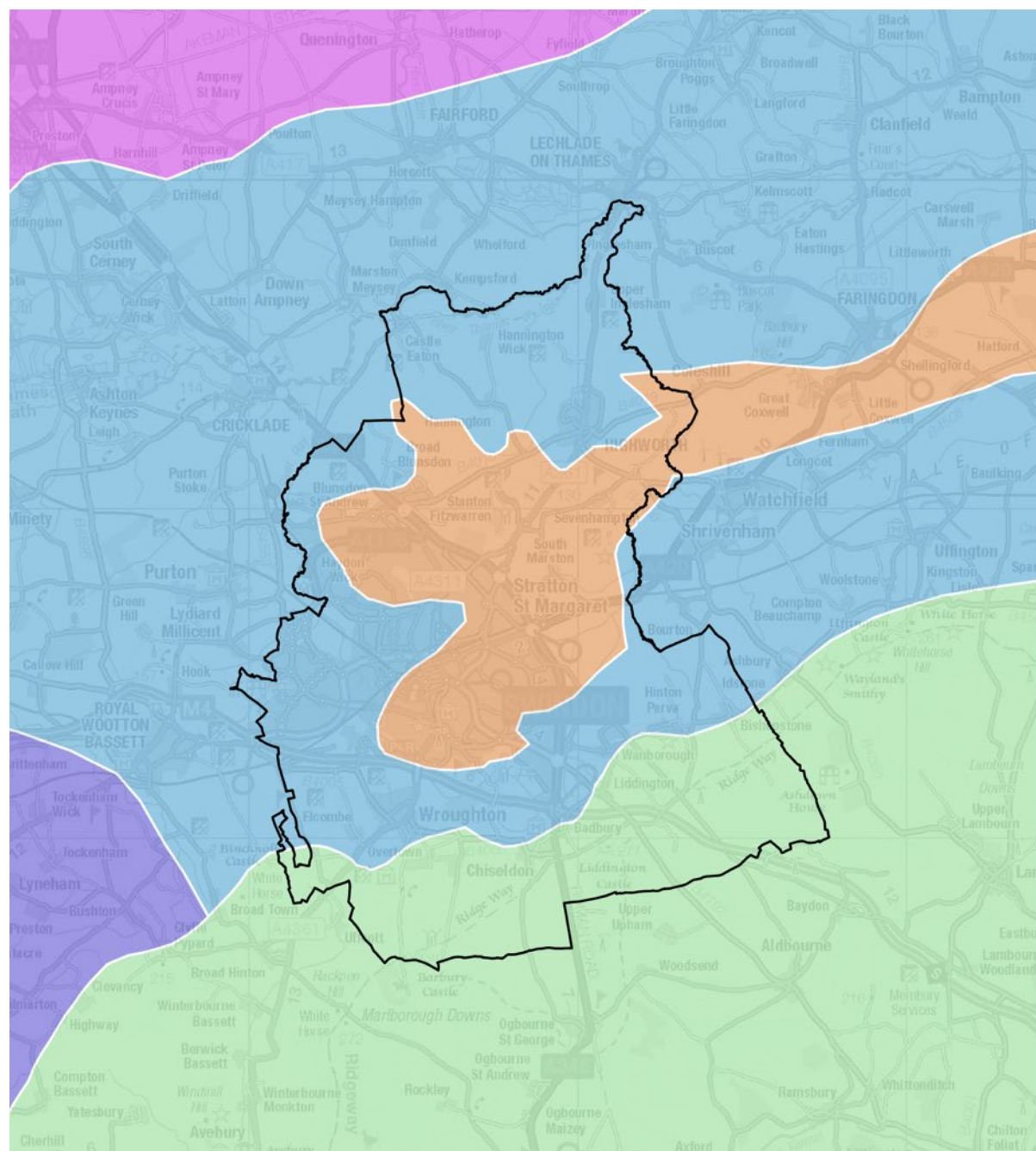
Table 6.1: Descriptions of NCAs in Swindon Borough

Berkshire and Marlborough Downs NCA	<i>"Vast arable fields stretch across the sparsely settled, rolling Chalk hills of the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs National Character Area (NCA). There are extensive views from the escarpment in particular, punctuated by landmarks including chalk-cut horse figures, beech clumps and ancient monuments. Historic routeways, including the Ridgeway National Trail, provide public access across this landscape. Writers and artists have been inspired by this landscape, including Eric Ravilious and Richard Jefferies, while monuments around Avebury have attracted historians and antiquarians such as John Aubrey. Avebury stone circle is a popular visitor destination and part of a World Heritage Site and there are numerous other Scheduled Monuments and heritage features across this landscape. Heritage features are at risk from damage by cultivation and animal burrowing. The natural beauty and special scenic qualities of the area lead to the majority of the area (97 percent) being included in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty."</i>
Midvale Ridge NCA	<i>"The Midvale Ridge National Character Area (NCA) is a band of low-lying limestone hills stretching east-west from the Vale of Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire to Swindon. It is surrounded by the flat lands of the Oxfordshire clay vales, giving extensive views across the surrounding countryside. It is a predominantly agricultural area with a mixed arable/pastoral farming landscape, cereals being the most important arable crop. The main towns are Swindon, at the western end, and Oxford, which lies across the centre of the area, but otherwise the settlement pattern is characterised by small nucleated villages along the top of the ridge and along the springline. The soils types are a mix of heavy rendzinas, stagnogleys and lighter sandy brown earths with small patches of sandy soils."</i>
Upper Thames Clay Vales NCA	<i>"The Upper Thames Clay Vales National Character Area (NCA) is a broad belt of open, gently undulating lowland farmland on predominantly Jurassic and Cretaceous clays. Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site falls within the NCA, along with around 5,000 ha of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and smaller areas of the Chilterns AONB and the Cotswolds AONB. Two of its Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) are designated for their lowland meadow vegetation communities, while Little Wittenham SAC has one of the most studied great crested newt populations in the UK. There are contrasting landscapes, including enclosed pastures of the claylands with wet valleys, mixed farming, hedges, hedge trees and field trees and more settled, open, arable lands. Mature field oaks give a parkland feel in many places."</i>

³³ Natural England (2015) NCA Profile: 116 Berkshire and Marlborough Downs (NE482). Available at: <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4822422297509888> [Accessed: 22/04/25]

³⁴ Natural England (2013) NCA Profile: 109 Midvale Ridge (NE417). Available at: <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5431100> [Accessed: 22/04/25]

³⁵ Natural England (2014) NCA Profile: 108 Upper Thames Clay Vales (NE570). Available at: <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5865554770395136> [Accessed: 22/04/25]



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- Swindon Borough
- Avon Vales
- Berkshire and Marlborough Downs
- Cotswolds
- Midvale Ridge
- Upper Thames Clay Vales



0 1 km

PROJECT	Swindon Landscape Character Assessment	DRAWN	WE
CLIENT	Swindon Borough Council	CHECKED	ND
TITLE	National Character Areas	SCALE@A4	1:150000
VERSION	LC-1246_NCAs_2	DATE	03/02/2025

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Figure 6.1: NCAs in Swindon Borough

6.2 Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment (2005)

- 6.2.1 The Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment was prepared for Wiltshire County Council and published in December 2005³⁶. This assessment was undertaken at 1:50,000 scale. The assessment identified 16 landscape types in Wiltshire which have a distinct and relatively homogenous character with similar physical and cultural attributes. These landscape types are sub-divided into component LCAs, of which 28 have been identified. These are discrete geographic areas that possess the common characteristics described for the landscape type.

6.3 Landscape Character Areas Supplementary Planning Guidance of the Borough of Swindon (2004)

- 6.3.1 LCAs in Swindon were identified in 2004 and adopted in SPG³⁷ as part of SBC's Local Plan in 2011. The SPG explains the methodology, specific characteristics and highlights the key issues relating to each landscape character area that should be addressed when considering development proposals. The SPG sets out eight LCAs: Downs Plains, High Downs, Lydiard Ridge, Midvale Ridge, Scarp, Thames Vale, Vale of White Horse and Wroughton Vale. The SPG sets out how a combination of settlement patterns, geology, landform, land cover, vegetation, historical, cultural and social influences were used to define the LCAs. This occurred through a desk-based study and a field survey. The SPG proposes landscape guidelines to help inform and aid development proposals and decision making to ensure development proposals are integrated successfully into their surrounding LCA.

6.4 North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment (2025)³⁸

- 6.4.1 The North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment updates the North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment from 2002³⁹. This study builds upon existing local authority assessments to develop a comprehensive and consistent characterisation for the National Landscape. Eight LCTs were identified, each with component LCAs. Two landscape types are located within the borough of Swindon: 'Down Plains and Scarp' and 'Vales'.

³⁶ Wiltshire County Council by Land Use Consultants (LUC) (December 2005) Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment Final Report. Available at: <https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planning-landscape-conservation> [Accessed: 06/01/25].

³⁷ Swindon Borough Council (December 2004) Swindon Borough Local Plan 2011 Revised Deposit Draft: Landscape Character Areas. Adopted Summary Planning Guidance. Available at: https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/5191/landscape_character_areas_supplementary_planning_guidance [Accessed: 22/04/25].

³⁸ North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment (2025). Available at: <https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/North-Wessex-Downs-Landscape-Character-Area-Assessment-2025.pdf> [Accessed: 01/08/25]

³⁹ Countryside Agency (2002) North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment Technical Report. Available at: <https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/the-landscape/landscape-character/> [Accessed 31/01/25]

6.5 Landscape Character Areas

6.5.1 The boundaries and descriptions of the eight LCAs identified in the old classification (2004 study) form the basis for the new classification. Site visits to determine the new LCA boundaries took place in January 2025. The new LCAs are listed in Table 6.2 and presented on the map in Figure 6.2.

Table 6.2: LCAs in Swindon Borough

LCA	Change from 2004 classification
Down Plains	Removed urban areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chiseldon
High Downs	No change
Lydiard Ridge	No change
Mid Vale Ridge	Removed urban areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stanton Fitzwarren • Hannington Updated urban area extents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad Blunston • Highworth • South Marston • Symmetry Park
Scarp	Removed urban areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Badbury • Liddington • Wanborough and Upper Wanborough • Bishopstone • Hinton Parva Updated urban area extents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wroughton
Thames Vale	Included Mouldon Hill Country Park within Thames Vale LCA. Removed urban areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Castle Eaton • Lower Village Updated urban area extents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highworth • Tadpole Garden Village
Vale of White Horse	Removed urban areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wanborough and Upper Wanborough • Bishopstone Updated urban area extents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symmetry Park
Wroughton Vale	Updated urban area extents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • East Wichel and Croft • Wroughton

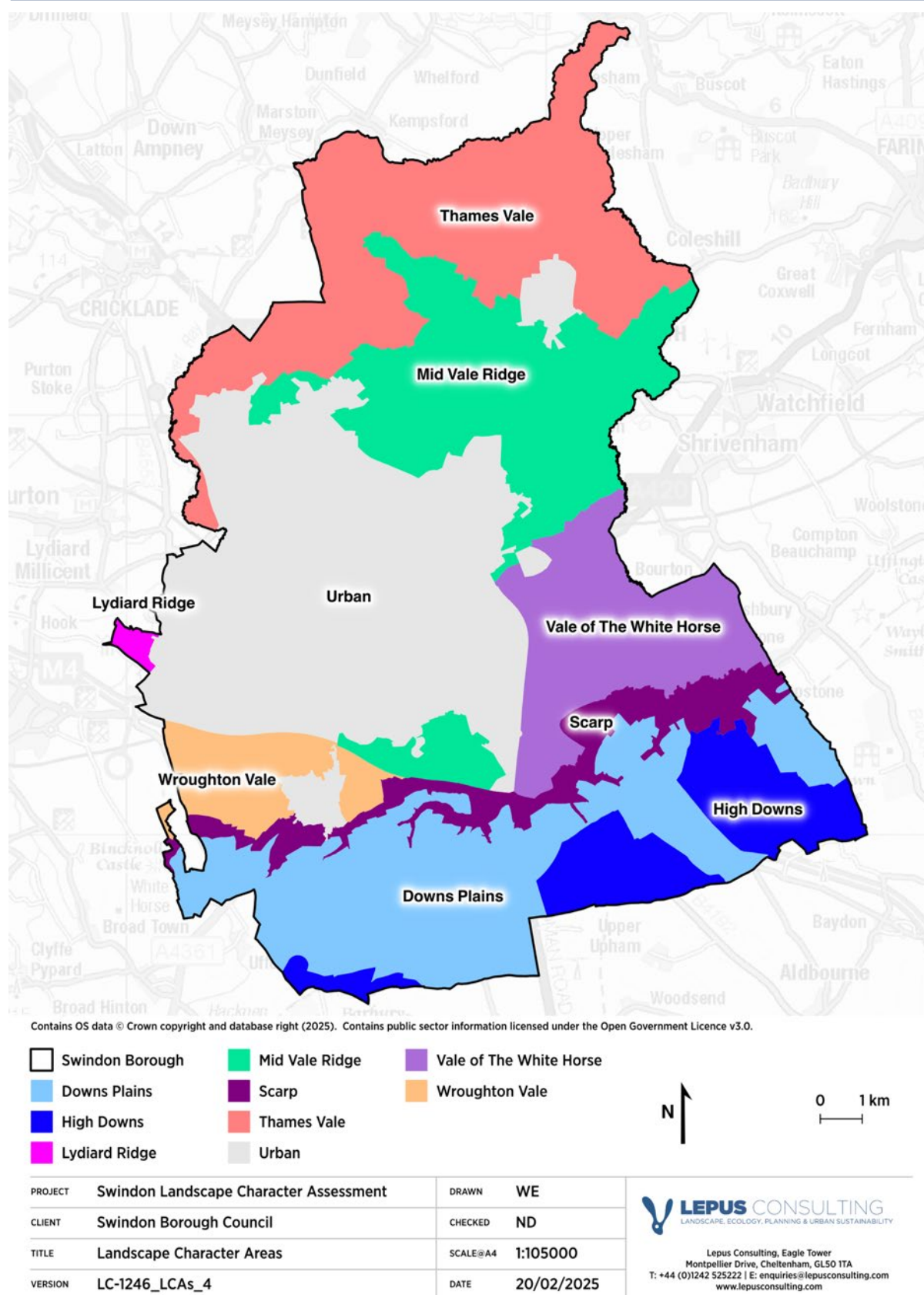


Figure 6.2: LCAs in Swindon Borough

7 Downs Plains LCA



Views facing east towards rolling chalk downland from the Ridgeway National Trail



Views facing southeast from the Ridgeway National Trail



Views facing south towards the High Downs from Hackpen



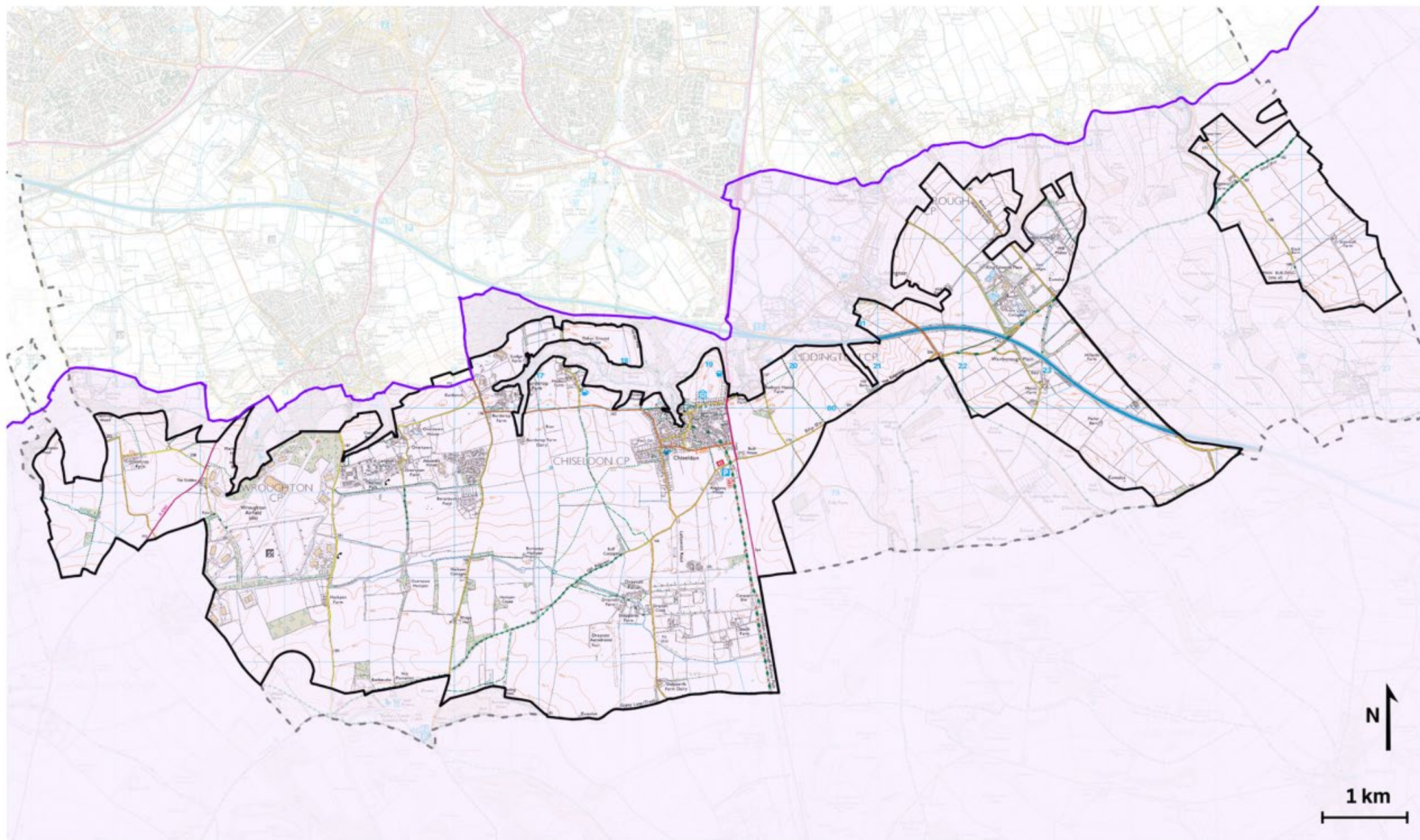
Views facing southeast from Hackpen



Views facing northeast from Nell Hill, the Ridgeway Farm



Bishopstone Lynchets, Scheduled Monument



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- Downs Plains LCA
- Swindon Borough
- North Wessex Downs NL

PROJECT	Swindon Landscape Character Assessment	DRAWN	WE
CLIENT	Swindon Borough Council	CHECKED	ND
TITLE	Downs Plains LCA	SCALE@A4	1:57000
VERSION	LC-1246_Downs_Plains_LCA_2	DATE	09/04/2025



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7.1 Description

- 7.1.1 The Downs Plains LCA constitutes an important stepping stone between the High Downs and the low-lying Vales. The LCA is characterised by an open landscape with large field patterns and isolated, scattered forms of development. There are historic settlements including Chiseldon village. There is a greater concentration of planting, focused on hedgerows, in contrast to the clumps of trees prevalent in the High Downs. The proximity and high visibility of this area from the High Downs ensures that any development could potentially be highly intrusive and should be considered accordingly. The Downs Plains LCA lies within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

7.2 Key characteristics

- 7.2.1 The key characteristics of the Downs Plains LCA are presented in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: Key characteristics of the Downs Plains LCA

Natural factors	
Geology	Upper levels of Lower Chalk.
Landform	High plain (approximately 170-180m AOD) gently falling from north to south and of varying width, lying between the Lower and Middle Chalk escarpments.
Hydrology	A few minor watercourses flow southwards towards the River Og. An area of flood zone 3 is present and associated with a watercourse flowing between Wroughton Airfield and Draycot Foliat.
Soils	Soils are loamy and clayey. The ALC is mostly grade 2 with areas of grades 3 and 4. An area of ALC grade 1 is near Burderop Wood.
Land cover, flora & fauna	Land cover predominantly comprises large arable fields. Woodland and hedgerow cover is minimal.
Cultural & social factors	
Land use	Land use across the area is predominantly agricultural with large, extensive arable fields. Equestrian establishments are found across the area. A large solar farm is present at Wroughton Airfield.
Settlement	Dispersed farms and agricultural buildings are scattered across the area. In the west, settlements generally relate to military developments associated with Wroughton Airfield. The largest settlement in the area is the village of Chiseldon.
Enclosure	Large, open rectilinear fields, the product of parliamentary enclosure with more recent boundary removal. Fields defined by post and wire fencing with occasional hedgerows.
Time depth	Roman roads run north-south and the Ridgeway National Trail runs east-west. The disused Wroughton Airfield from World War II is located within the LCA. Parish boundaries form narrow bands running north-south.
Cultural associations	
Art, literature, descriptive writings, music, myth/legend/folklore, people, events and associations	Chiseldon Local History Group was formed in the 1980's to record and preserve objects and information related to the Parish of Chiseldon ⁴⁰ . The largest group of Iron Age cauldrons ever discovered in Europe were unearthed in a field south-west of Chiseldon. ⁴¹

⁴⁰ Chiseldon Local History Group (2025) About us. Available at: <https://www.chiseldonlhg.org.uk/about> [Accessed 20/02/25]

⁴¹ Chiseldon Local History Group (2024) Parish History. Available at: <https://www.chiseldonlhg.org.uk/parish-history> [Accessed: 20/02/25]

	American Artist and Journalist Kate Tyron visited Burderop Park in 1910 ⁴² and created numerous paintings from around the estate and wrote about it in her diary.
Perceptual & aesthetic factors	
Memories and associations	Obtained via stakeholder engagement.
Perceptions	Open, windswept landscape. Largely undeveloped and tranquillity levels are high.
Sounds	Sound levels are generally low across the area due to the limited number of modern roads. The M4 runs east-west around Foxhill.
Sight	Sweeping views across the open landscape towards the High Downs, Iron Age Hill forts and tree clumps.

7.3 Designations and policy

7.3.1 Key designations within the Downs Plains LCA:

- The Downs Plains LCA is set within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape;
- Listed buildings including Church of the Holy Cross (Grade I)⁴³ at Chiseldon;
- The Ridgeway National Trail crosses through this area;
- Scheduled monuments including medieval settlement remains at Overtown, Roman villa near Starveall Farm and earthwork enclosures; and
- Chiseldon Conservation Area and part of Hodson Conservation Area.

7.4 Forces for change

7.4.1 Threats, pressures and current changes to Downs Plains LCA are outlined in **Table 7.2**:

Table 7.2: Forces for change in Downs Plains LCA

Force for change	Impact on Downs Plains
Urban development and planning policy	Pressures for further expansion of settlements, as well as demand for large scale development that would be highly visible.
Land use change	Further amalgamation and enlargement of fields and the breakdown of traditional field boundaries associated with intensive farming practices. Incongruous shelterbelt planting creating a discordant feature within the context of the open plain.
Climate change and biodiversity	Move to renewable energies and increased installation of land-based solar farms.
Transport and infrastructure	The visual and noise impact of the M4 motorway is increasing due to increasing vehicle traffic.
Recreational use	Maintenance and increased popularity of the Ridgeway National Trail.
Heritage conservation	Changes in historic field boundaries and alterations of views towards historic settlements.

⁴² Bothy Gardens. *History*. Available at: <https://www.bothygardens.com/history> [Accessed: 20/02/25]

⁴³ Historic England. Church of the Holy Cross. Available at: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1023312> [Accessed: 06/01/25].

7.5 Landscape guidelines

7.5.1 Landscape guidelines to plan, manage and protect the distinctiveness of the Downs Plains LCA include:

- Conserve the open views across the plain and the clear scarp skylines;
- Conserve the distinct character and pattern of settlement and resist further expansion onto the open plain;
- Reflect the existing pattern of isolated units through an open, dispersed development pattern;
- Ensure that scale and massing is restrained and low key, and appropriate to its surroundings;
- Where opportunities arise, ensure that existing elements of the built form, which compromise landscape character through their scale and visual intrusiveness, are integrated into the landscape;
- Reinstatement of hedgerow boundaries where appropriate to improve habitat connectivity;
- Have regard to the area's location within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape; and
- Ensure that vistas towards the High Downs are not interrupted or compromised.

8 High Downs LCA



View north from Barbury Castle Country Park



View towards Barbury Castle Hillfort (scheduled monument)



View towards Downs Plains from lane near the Ridgeway



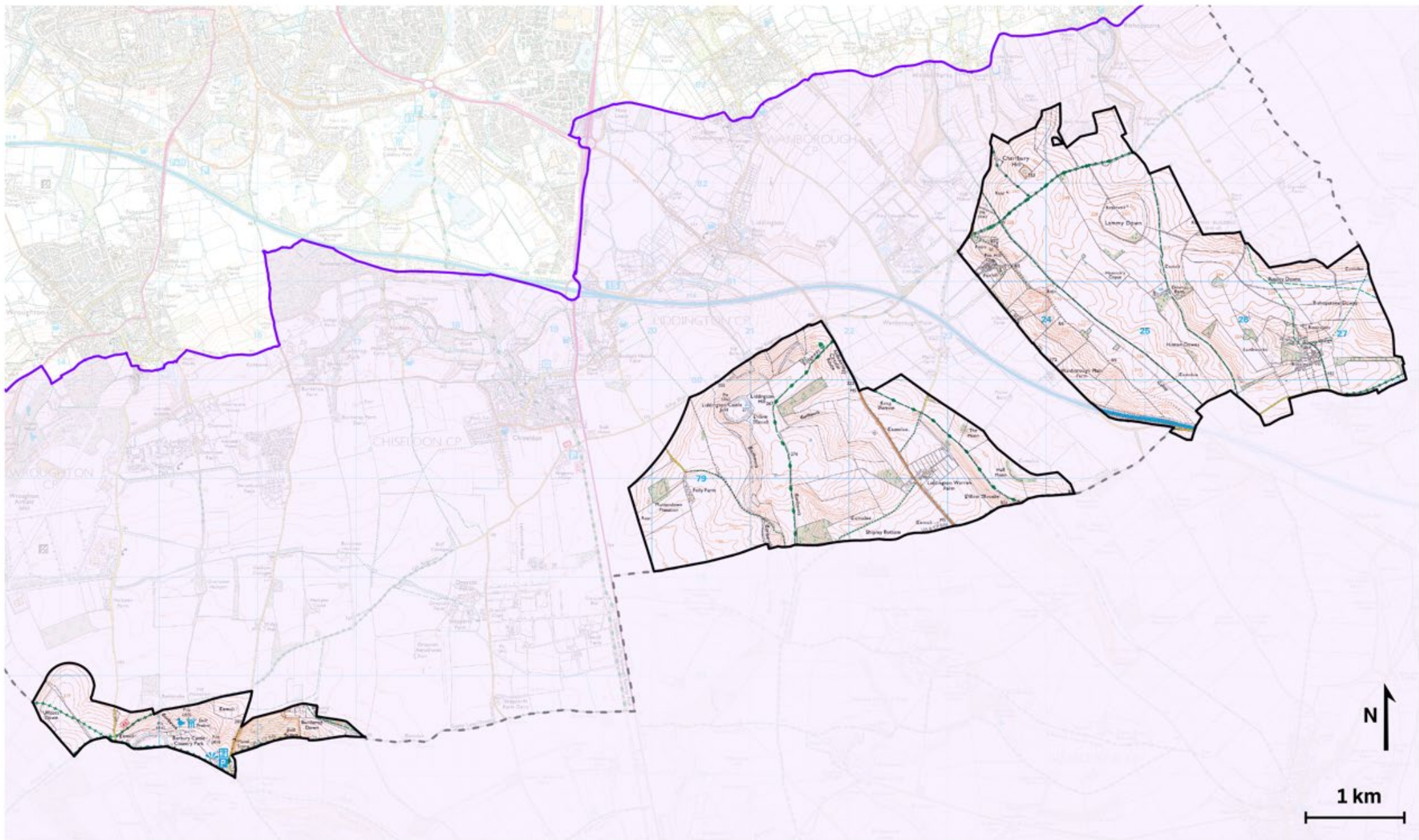
View west from lane near the Ridgeway



Views south from the Ridgeway National Trail



Starfish Decoy Bunker near the summit of Liddington Hill, off the Ridgeway National Trail



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- High Downs LCA
- Swindon Borough
- North Wessex Downs NL

PROJECT	Swindon Landscape Character Assessment	DRAWN	WE
CLIENT	Swindon Borough Council	CHECKED	ND
TITLE	High Downs LCA	SCALE@A4	1:49000
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8.1 Description

- 8.1.1 The High Downs LCA comprises an elevated plateau of rolling chalk downland, characterised by an open and exposed landscape with a perception of remoteness from urbanised settlements. The height, minimal tree planting and large field patterns give this landscape far reaching views over its surroundings. The distinctive landform, simple arable land cover, absence of settlement and large skies create a landscape with a sense of remoteness and exposure. Human settlements within this area are limited to small, isolated farms and dwellings, scattered in a dispersed pattern. This LCA coincides with the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

8.2 Key characteristics

- 8.2.1 Key characteristics of the High Downs LCA are presented in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1: Key characteristics of the High Downs LCA

Natural factors	
Geology	Middle Chalk on the escarpment. Upper Chalk on the ridges and hilltops which sometimes has a clay with flints capping.
Landform	High, rolling landform with steep hillsides ranging from 170m to 277m AOD at Liddington Hill. North-west facing escarpment and dry river valleys running southwards.
Hydrology	The landscape is largely devoid of water due to the porosity of the chalk bedrock.
Soils	Predominantly shallow, light, free draining calcareous and nutrient poor black or brown soils. ALC is mostly grade 3 with areas of grade 2 and 4.
Land cover, flora & fauna	Woodland is virtually absent apart from the occasional linear shelterbelt and distinctive Beech clumps crowning the summits. Limited number of hedgerows defining field boundaries. Isolated blocks of chalk grassland survive along the steep scarp slopes and dry valley sides.
Cultural & social factors	
Land use	Dominated by intensively managed arable farmland of large rectilinear fields defined by post and wire fencing with few hedgerows.
Settlement	There are no modern settlements in this LCA. The landscape is sparsely populated, generally restricted to scattered farms and equestrian establishments, which contribute to a strong sense of isolation.
Enclosure	Large, open rectilinear fields defined by post and wire fencing with occasional hedgerows.
Time depth	Extensive remains of early man's occupation including Iron Age hillforts, the Ridgeway National Trail and burial mounds.
Cultural associations	
Art, literature, descriptive writings, music, myth/legend/folklore, people, events and associations	Liddington Castle was popular with writer Richard Jefferies, who is famous for depicting rural life in England: <i>"Liddington Hill and its 'castle', a camp of a single but very deep fosse, was a chief haven to Jefferies"</i> ⁴⁴ . Barbury Castle was photographed by Bill Brandt in 1948 ⁴⁵ . Artist Eric Ravilious has depicted areas of the Wiltshire landscape which are strongly associated with, and visible from, the High Downs in Swindon ⁴⁶ .

⁴⁴ Thomas (1909) Richard Jefferies, His Life and Work.

⁴⁵ The Museum of Modern Art (2025) Bill Brandt, Barbury Castle, Marlborough Downs, Wiltshire, 1948. Available at: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/160360> [Accessed 20/02/25]

⁴⁶ The Wiltshire Museum (2021) Eric Ravilious. Available at: <https://www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk/ravilious-in-wiltshire/> [Accessed 21/07/25]

Perceptual & aesthetic factors	
Memories and associations	Obtained via stakeholder engagement
Perceptions	Elevated, exposed landscape with long distance views. A strong sense of remoteness and isolation. Tranquility levels are high. The presence of scheduled monuments including hillforts at Liddington Castle and Barbury Castle contribute to a rich sense of time depth.
Sounds	Sound levels are generally very low across the landscape. The M4 motorway just crosses through the area near Peak Downs.
Sight	An expansive and simple rural landscape, with strong sweeping skylines with a strong sense of exposure and remoteness.

8.3 Designations and policy

8.3.1 Key designations within the High Downs LCA:

- The High Downs LCA is located within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape;
- Barbury Castle LNR: a 50ha site notable for its chalk grassland and associated wildlife⁴⁷;
- Listed buildings: two Grade II milestones;
- Scheduled monuments including hillforts at Liddington Castle and Barbury Castle;
- Barbury Castle Country Park; and
- The Ridgeway National Trail crosses through this area.

8.4 Forces for change

8.4.1 Threats, pressures and current changes to High Downs LCA are outlined in **Table 8.2**:

Table 8.2: Forces for change in High Downs LCA

Force for change	Impact on High Downs
Urban development and planning policy	Development of new large-scale farm buildings.
Land use change	Agricultural intensification resulting in a loss of chalk grassland, as well as a breakdown of traditional field boundaries associated with intensive farming practices.
Climate change and biodiversity	Move to renewable energies resulting in the potential construction of wind turbines.
Transport and infrastructure	The visual and noise impact of the M4 motorway is increasing due to increasing vehicle traffic. Potential development of communication masts.
Recreational use	Maintenance and increased popularity of the Ridgeway National Trail
Heritage conservation	Agricultural intensification altering the setting of historic assets, as well as changes to views towards historic assets.

8.5 Landscape guidelines

8.5.1 Landscape guidelines to plan, manage and protect the distinctiveness of the High Downs LCA include:

- Reflect the existing pattern of isolated units through an open, dispersed development pattern;
- Retain the strong sense of isolation and remoteness across the area;

⁴⁷ Swindon Borough Council. Parks and open spaces in Swindon – Barbury Castle. Available at: https://www.swindon.gov.uk/directory_record/8463/barbury_castle [Accessed: 03/01/25]

- Ensure that the scale and massing of the development does not adversely impact on the views into and out of the area, reflecting its high visibility and prominence, both inwards and outwards;
- Ensure that the skyline remains free from development;
- Where appropriate, ensure that any planting reflects existing planting levels and styles (e.g. tree clumps on the skyline and maintains the openness of the High Downs);
- Where appropriate, provide for alterations to the landform to the screen the development in a manner that echoes the existing landform;
- Have regard to the area's location within the North Wessex National Landscape;
- Conserve and enhance areas of chalk grassland and pasture, encourage management to improve species diversity and prevent scrub encroachment. Consider opportunities for extending and linking chalk grassland along the scarps and dry valley sides, and creating mosaics of chalk grassland and ecologically rich arable land;
- Protect the remaining sites of historic interest and above ground archaeological features. Consider opportunities for extending areas of pasture around archaeological monuments;
- Retain the historic character of the lanes and scheduled monuments; and
- Manage the Ridgeway National Trail and ensure all other PRoW networks remain accessible in order to enhance the recreational amenities of the High Downs.

9 Lydiard Ridge LCA



Parkland in Lydiard Park



Lydiard Park House (Grade I listed building)



Tree-lined pathway in Lydiard Park



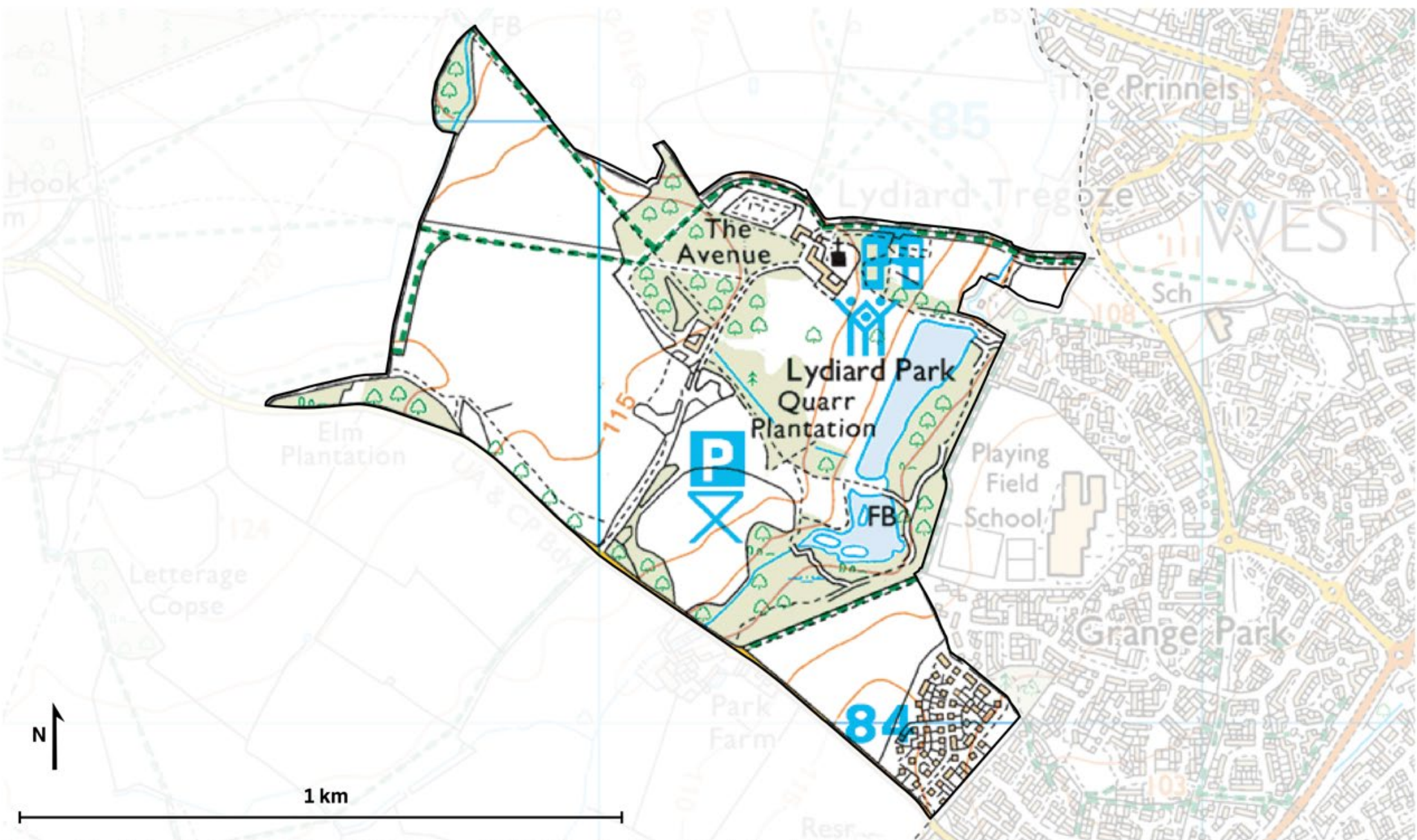
Parkland south of Lydiard Park House



Deciduous woodland in Lydiard Park




View north towards Swindon in Lydiard Park



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<div><div></div> Lydiard Ridge LCA</div> <div><div></div> Swindon Borough</div>	PROJECT	Swindon Landscape Character Assessment	DRAWN	WE
	CLIENT	Swindon Borough Council	CHECKED	ND
	TITLE	Lydiard Ridge LCA	SCALE@A4	1:8000
	VERSION	LC-1246_Lydiard_Ridge_LCA_2	DATE	09/04/2025

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9.1 Description

9.1.1 The Lydiard Ridge LCA lies on the western extremity of the Borough occupied by Lydiard House, a listed building and its surrounding grounds. Lydiard Ridge is identified as being of historic value. It is situated on land marginally higher than its surroundings in a mature parkland setting. The house and grounds were constructed to complement each other, forming a dominant influence on the landscape. The grounds are open to the public, as one of the borough's country parks.

9.2 Key characteristics

9.2.1 Key characteristics of the Lydiard Ridge LCA are presented in Table 9.1.

Table 9.1: Key characteristics of the Lydiard Ridge LCA

Natural factors	
Geology	Corallian Limestone forms the ridge, with the northern boundary marked by a fault.
Landform	This small area forms a raised plateau above the clay vales.
Hydrology	Two small streams flow northwards through the area. The eastern stream flows through two large ponds and the dry bed of Lydiard Lake. An area of flood zone 3 is present and associated with the watercourse flowing through the ponds.
Soils	Soils are loamy and clayey. The area is entirely ALC grade 3.
Land cover, flora & fauna	Substantial areas of parkland, deciduous woodland, parkland trees and hedgerows.
Cultural & social factors	
Land use	Land use across the area is mostly parkland and woodland. Most of the area is within Lydiard Country Park. Lydiard House functions as a museum and management centre including a visitor centre and recreation facilities. Field boundaries are a mixture of hedgerow, woodland and post and wire fencing.
Settlement	The park is located on the western edge of the Swindon urban area.
Enclosure	Woodland encloses much of the area.
Time depth	There is a strong sense of time depth at Lydiard Park. The 18 th century parkland estate was created from the Royal Braydon Forest. The Church of St Mary is located adjacent to Lydiard House.
Cultural associations	
Art, literature, descriptive writings, music, myth/legend/folklore, people, events and associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lydiard Park hosts festivals including BBC Radio 1s Big Weekend in 2009; Many ghost stories are noted within Lydiard Park⁴⁸, including that of previous resident Sir John St John rumoured to be roaming the grounds; and Hook Street, adjacent to Lydiard Park Country Park, has been depicted in the art of Nelson Woolford, 1968⁴⁹. The novel <i>The Heir of Starvelings</i> by Evelyn Berckman depicted the dereliction of Lydiard Park house and the decline of the owner's fortunes.
Perceptual & aesthetic factors	

⁴⁸ Friends of Lydiard Park. Lydiard House Ghost Stores. Available at: <https://www.friendsoflydiardpark.org.uk/tales-of-lydiard-articles/lydiard-house-ghost-stories/> [Date accessed: 20/02/25]

⁴⁹ Friends of Lydiard Park. Painting of Hook Street, Lydiard Tregoze by Nelson Woolford, 1968. Available at: <https://www.thelydiardarchives.org.uk/item/painting-of-hook-street-lydiard-tregoze-by-nelson-woolford-1968> [Date accessed: 20/02/25]

Memories and associations	Obtained via stakeholder engagement
Perceptions	There is a limited sense of remoteness due to the close proximity to the town of Swindon. The area offers wide open greenspaces and woodland areas for open-air recreation.
Sounds	Sound levels from vehicular traffic are generally low across the area.
Sight	Filtered views through trees of built form in western Swindon are possible from the grounds adjacent to Lydiard House. In the south, there are views towards the North Wessex Downs.

9.3 Designations and policy

9.3.1 Key designations within the Lydiard Ridge LCA:

- Listed buildings, including Church of St Mary (Grade I) and Lydiard Park (Grade I)
- Lydiard Park is designated as a Country Park and Registered Park and Garden (Grade II)

9.4 Forces for change

9.4.1 Threats, pressures and current changes to Lydiard Park LCA are outlined in **Table 9.2**:

Table 9.2: Forces for change on Lydiard Ridge LCA

Force for change	Impact on Lydiard Ridge
Urban development and planning policy	Pressure from increased housing and infrastructure in the surrounding area which may negatively impact the historic setting.
Land use change	Alterations to recreational amenities including restoration of original pathways.
Climate change and biodiversity	Loss of trees due to pests of disease. Increased flood risk and erosion of heritage assets.
Transport and infrastructure	Increased traffic and noise may impact the historic setting of the RPG and country park.
Recreational use	Increased visitor pressure as nearby development increases populations and limits availability of greenspace.
Heritage conservation	Development may be restricted due to the historic significance of Lydiard Park.

9.5 Landscape guidelines

9.5.1 Landscape guidelines to plan, manage and protect distinctiveness of the Lydiard Ridge LCA include:

- Where opportunities arise, maintain and restore the 18th century landscaped grounds of Lydiard House;
- Prevent adverse impacts on the setting of either the house or surrounding grounds;
- Maintain vistas into and out of the park;
- Retain the dominance of Lydiard House;
- Ensure linkages with Swindon through the borough's network of strategic green corridors are retained; and
- Maximise accessibility by means of cycling and walking and such that they link into the existing cycle and footpath network.

10 Mid Vale Ridge LCA



Coate Water



View towards Swindon from Blunsdon St Andrew



View south from Lushill



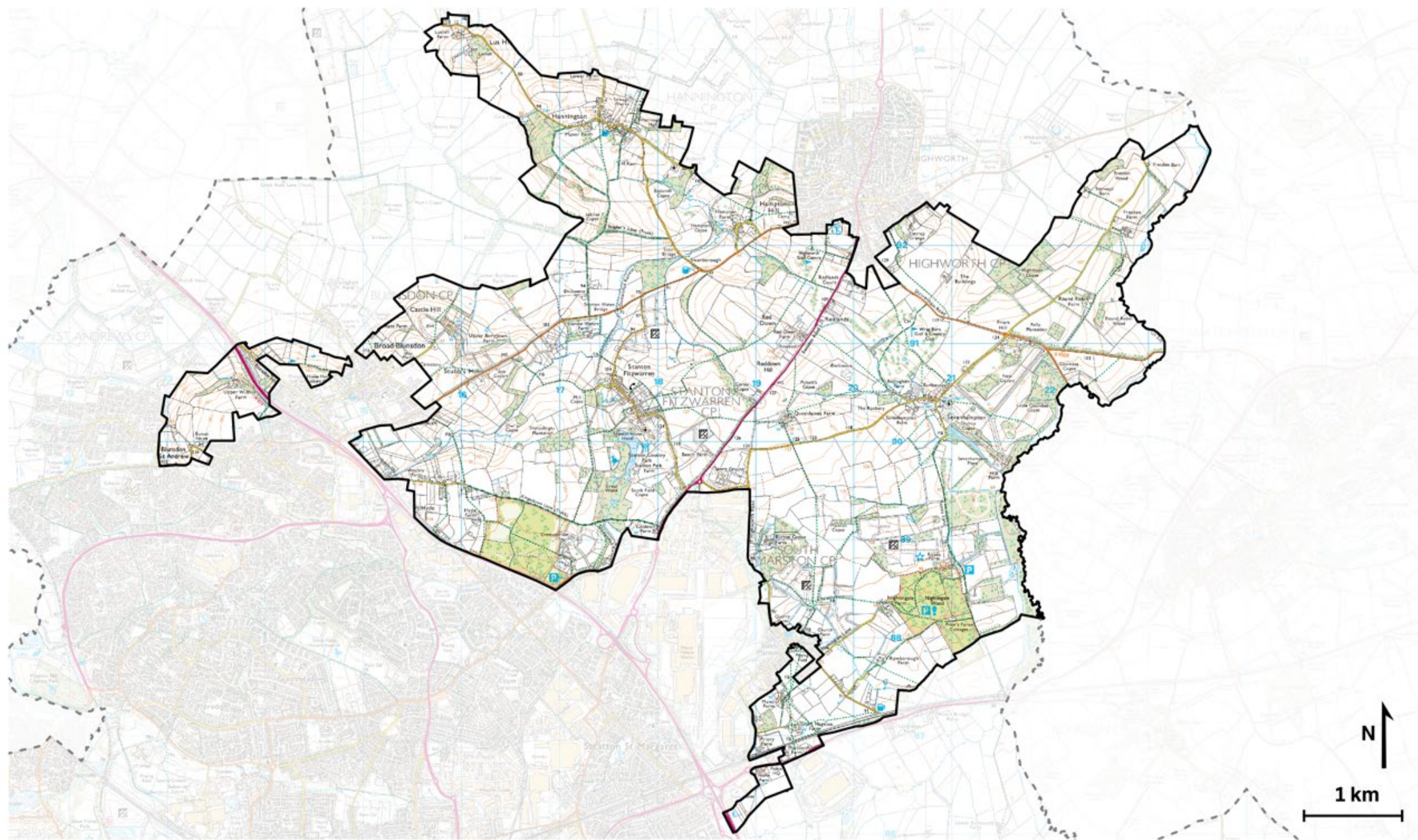
View east from Lushill with distant views of the Thames Vale



View north-east from Stanton Country Park



Rush pasture, Broome Manor Lane



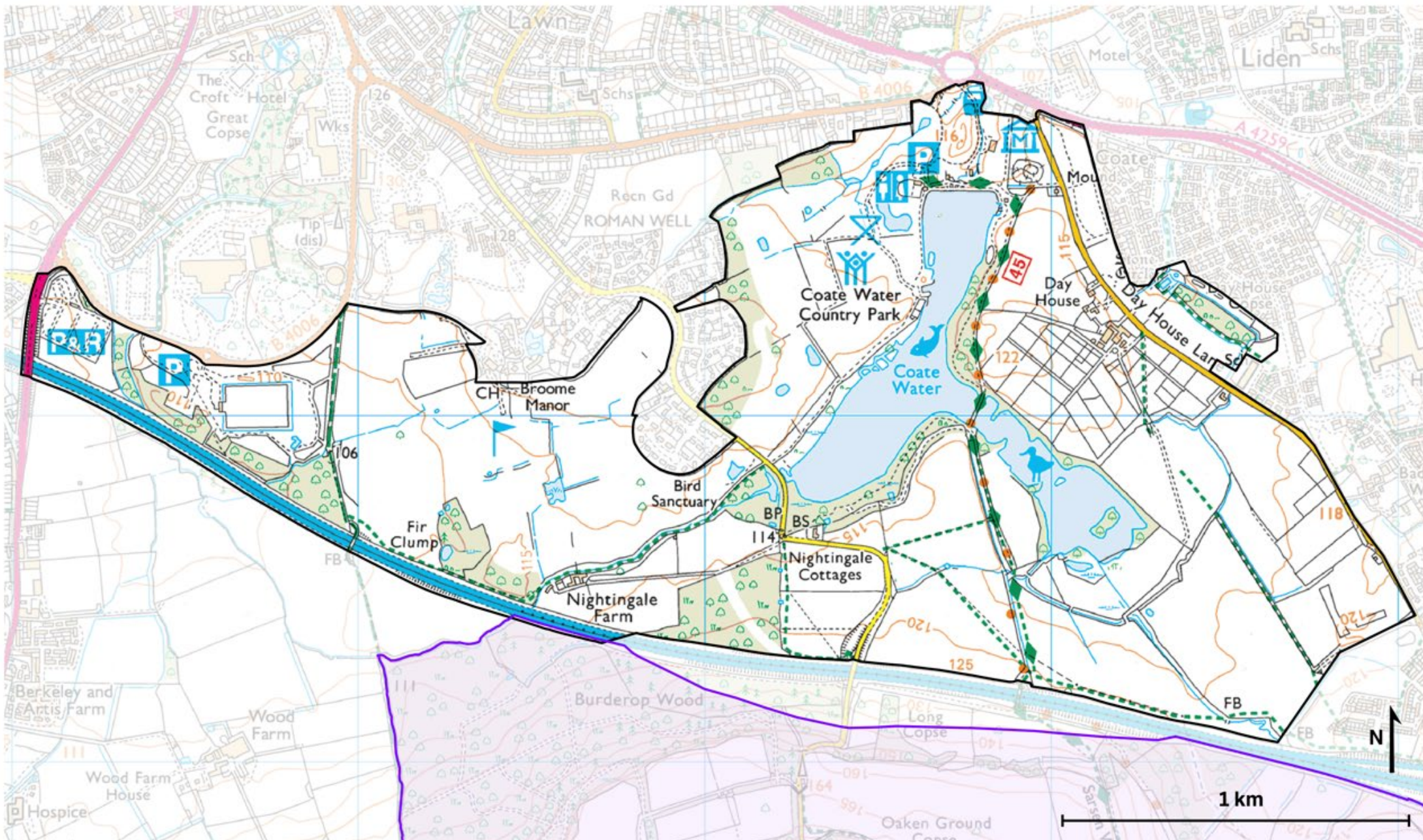
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- Mid Vale Ridge LCA
- Swindon Borough

PROJECT	Swindon Landscape Character Assessment	DRAWN	WE
CLIENT	Swindon Borough Council	CHECKED	ND
TITLE	Mid Vale Ridge LCA (North)	SCALE@A4	1:49000
VERSION	LC-1246_Mid_Vale_Ridge_LCA_North_2	DATE	09/04/2025

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- North Wessex Downs NL
- Mid Vale Ridge LCA

PROJECT	Swindon Landscape Character Assessment	DRAWN	WE
CLIENT	Swindon Borough Council	CHECKED	ND
TITLE	Mid Vale Ridge LCA (South)	SCALE@A4	1:14000
VERSION	LC-1246_Mid_Vale_Ridge_LCA_South_2	DATE	09/04/2025



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10.1 Description

10.1.1 The Mid Vale Ridge LCA encompasses a low-lying, irregular outcrop of limestone. This LCA is characterised by three distinct areas, two to the north-east and one to the south of Swindon. The southern Mid Vale Ridge area comprises the area of land to the south of Swindon that encompasses Coate Water and the open land to the west of Coate Water and is bounded by the M4 motorway, the eastern edge of Coate Water and Swindon's settlement boundary. The other Midvale Ridge Area contains the hilltop settlements of Blunsdon, Hannington and Highworth, which run along the Corallian Ridge. Included within the Corallian Ridge are the small valley settlements of Stanton Fitzwarren, Sevenhampton and South Marston. Views over the surrounding lower clay vales are visible from the Midvale Ridge, particularly northwards over the Thames Vale.

10.2 Key characteristics

10.2.1 Key characteristics of the Mid Vale Ridge LCA are presented in Table 10.1.

Table 10.1: Key characteristics of the Mid Vale Ridge LCA

Natural factors	
Geology	Main east west ridge of Corallian Limestone with isolated areas of Oxford and Kimmeridge Clays. Lower Greensand and Kimmeridge Clay located in the Coate area.
Landform	Rolling landform of valleys, ridge, hill and plateau tops (90m to 140m AOD). Ridge is dissected by the north-south valleys of the Rivers Ray and Cole.
Hydrology	The River Ray and Cole run north-south through the area, with numerous tributaries draining the main valleys. Important lakes are situated at Stanton Fitzwarren, Sevenhampton and Coate Water. Areas of flood zone 3 are present and associated with the River Cole, Bydemill Brook and at Coate Water Country Park.
Soils	Soils are loamy and clayey. ALC is mostly grade 3 with areas of 2 and 4. An area of ALC grade 1 is located to the east of Coate Water Country Park.
Land cover, flora & fauna	Land cover is predominantly arable and pasture, interspersed with woodlands, including Stanton Great Wood. Hedgerows with trees connect wooded areas.
Cultural & social factors	
Land use	Predominantly agricultural with a mixed arable and pastoral landscape, cereals being the most important crop. Land-based solar farms and industrial developments are present, notably near South Marston.
Settlement	A settled landscape with a number of large villages, several smaller settlements and scattered farmsteads. The area is visually influenced by the presence of commercial buildings on the edge of Swindon, at the South Marston Industrial Estate.
Enclosure	Fields are generally moderate in size, with smaller fields situated around South Marston, Kingsdown Lane and Blunsdon.
Time depth	Evidence of time depth include an Iron Age hillfort at Castle Hill, the 18 th century landscape at Stanton Country Park, the disused Highworth railway line and several mill sites. A stone circle is immediately northeast of Day House, Coate. Areas of ridge and furrow are also present.
Cultural associations	
Art, literature, descriptive writings, music, myth/legend/folklore, people, events and associations	Coate Water was the birthplace of the nature writer Richard Jefferies, where his home is now a museum open to the public. Kate Tyron made several paintings of Coate, having been inspired to visit the area having read the writings of Richard Jefferies.
Perceptual & aesthetic factors	
Memories and associations	Obtained via stakeholder engagement

Perceptions	Limited sense of remoteness and isolation due to close proximity to Swindon and Highworth.
Sounds	Noise from vehicular traffic can be heard from the A419, A361 and B4019 which run through the area. The M4 motorway runs along the southern boundary in the Coate area.
Sight	Views across the Vale of White Horse towards the High Downs, and across the Thames Vale towards the Cotswolds.

10.3 Designations and policy

10.3.1 Key designations within the Mid Vale Ridge LCA:

- Coate Water SSSI: designated for its standing open water, neutral lowland grassland and broadleaved mixed and yew woodland⁵⁰
- Coate Water LNR: Wiltshire's first LNR, designated in 1976⁵¹ and Stanton Park LNR: covering 36ha including the lake, woodland and grassland⁵²
- Ancient woodlands covering approximately 48ha including Great Wood at Stanton Country Park
- Listed buildings including Church of St Leonard (Grade I)
- Scheduled monuments including a hillfort and lynchets at Castle Hill, medieval settlement remains and a stone circle immediately north east of Day House, Coate
- Country Parks: Stanton Park and Coate Water
- Conservation Areas at Hannington, Sevenhampton, Stanton Fitzwarren and Hampton

10.4 Forces for change

10.4.1 Threats, pressures and current changes to Mid Vale Ridge LCA are outlined in **Table 10.2**:

Table 10.2: Forces for change in Mid Vale Ridge LCA

Force for change	Impact on Mid Vale Ridge
Urban development and planning policy	Loss of rural character and visual intrusion from expansion in northern Swindon, in particular that from Tadpole Garden Village. Landscape buffers are under strain from development pressures.
Land use change	Loss and fragmentation of open farmland due to the development of housing or roads.
Climate change and biodiversity	Agricultural intensification increases pressure on soil, water and biodiversity resources. Move to renewable energies resulting in the potential installation of land-based solar farms. Loamy and clayey soils are vulnerable to increased rainfall. Heat stress can impact crops. Loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees due to the expansion of arable farming.
Transport and infrastructure	The visual and noise impact of the A419 and A361 roads is increasing due to vehicle traffic. Potential development of logistics and business parks, particularly around Broad Blunsdon.
Recreational use	Erosion of footpaths particularly on chalky soils, increased litter and dog waste.

⁵⁰ Natural England. Coate Water SSSI – Condition of Features and Units. Available at: <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteFeatureCondition.aspx?SiteCode=S1001511&SiteName=Coate%20Water%20SSSI> [Accessed: 03/01/25]

⁵¹ Swindon Borough Council. Parks and open spaces in Swindon – Coate Water. Available at: https://www.swindon.gov.uk/directory_record/8464/coate_water [Accessed: 03/01/25]

⁵² Swindon Borough Council. Stanton Park. Available at: https://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20077/parks_and_open_spaces/488/stanton_park [Accessed: 03/01/25]

Heritage conservation	Loss of ridge and furrow and changes to historic field patterns.
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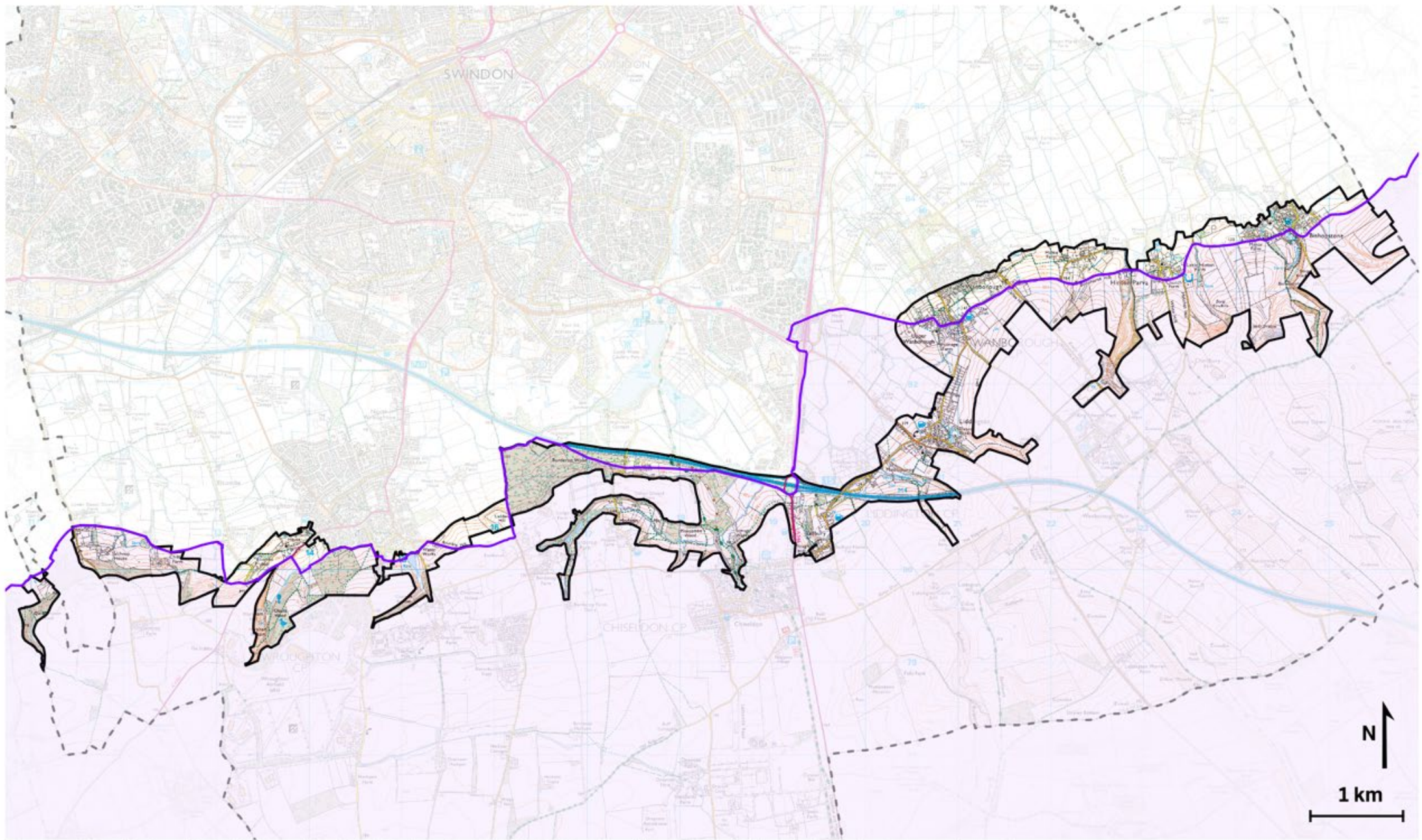
10.5 Landscape guidelines

10.5.1 Landscape guidelines to plan, manage and protect distinctiveness of the Midvale Ridge LCA include:




- Ensure that non-developed hilltops remain free from development to preserve the prominence and quality of existing hilltop settlements;
- Where opportunities arise, provide for additional tree planting that maintains the scale and dispersed pattern of existing woodlands;
- Provide planting to contain the development within a discrete area, reflecting the undulations of the landscape;
- Retain the perception of distinctiveness and separation from Swindon; and
- Limit uncontrolled expansion of urban areas.

11 Scarp LCA





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-  North Wessex Downs NL
-  Scarp LCA
-  Swindon Borough

PROJECT	Swindon Landscape Character Assessment	DRAWN	WE
CLIENT	Swindon Borough Council	CHECKED	ND
TITLE	Scarp LCA	SCALE@A4	1:52000
VERSION	LC-1246_Scarp_LCA_2	DATE	09/04/2025

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11.1 Description

- 11.1.1 The Scarp slope marks a dramatic step down into the clay vales. The steepness of the slope, accompanied by a generous quantity of planting, forms a highly visible backdrop to the Vale of White Horse and Wroughton Vales. Existing settlements along the spring line are traditional small villages that are well integrated into their surrounding landscape. Public vantage points offer far reaching views over the clay cakes towards the Cotswolds. The Scarp LCA lies partially within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

11.2 Key characteristics

- 11.2.1 Key characteristics of the Scarp LCA are presented in Table 11.1.

Table 11.1: Key characteristics of the Scarp LCA

Natural factors	
Geology	Lower Chalk and Gault Clay.
Landform	A steep north-west facing hillside overlooking the Clay Vales (115m to 170m AOD) dissected at intervals by very steep sided coombes at Liddington. The steep scarp forms a dramatic landform feature.
Hydrology	Numerous chalk springs along the lower part of the scarp slope flowing northwards. An area of flood zone 3 is present and associated with a watercourse flowing between Hodson and Coate Water.
Soils	Soils are loamy and clayey. ALC mostly grade 3 with areas of grade 2 and 4. An area of ALC grade 1 is present near Burderop Wood.
Land cover, flora & fauna	Substantial woodland covers the scarp, particularly to the west of Chiseldon at Burderop Wood. Surviving areas of chalk grassland are present, including at The Coombs, Hinton Parva.
Cultural & social factors	
Land use	Mostly agricultural with arable farmland and pasture.
Settlement	Springline settlements at Bishopstone alongside large country houses and parkland such as Burderop House. Small, twisted, sunken roads connect the villages. The M4 motorway forms the northern boundary at Burderop.
Enclosure	Fields of varying sizes are enclosed with blocks of woodland, and hedgerows with trees.
Time depth	Farms follow a similar pattern from the Iron Age. Parish boundaries form narrow bands running north-south, connecting the Clay Vales and Downs Plains.
Cultural associations	
Art, literature, descriptive writings, music, myth/legend/folklore, people, events and associations	Folklore from local villagers said that the Coombs at Hinton Parva were haunted by witches and goblins. Burderop Wood has also been depicted in the art of Kate Tryon.
Perceptual & aesthetic factors	
Memories and associations	Obtained via stakeholder engagement
Perceptions	The sense of remoteness and tranquillity levels are generally higher to the east, away from the M4 motorway and the urban areas of Swindon and Wroughton.
Sounds	Noise from vehicular traffic on the M4 motorway is an aural detractor.
Sight	Sweeping views northwards towards Swindon, Vale of White Horse, Midvale Ridge and the Cotswolds. Church towers often form part of the skyline in views

11.3 Designations and policy

11.3.1 Key designations within the Scarp LCA:

- The Scarp LCA is partially located within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape;
- Bincknoll Dip Woods SSSI: comprises of two blocks of woodland located on a steep north west facing escarpment⁵³. The SSSI is of considerable importance due to the presence of populations of nationally and internationally rare mosses;
- Burderop Wood SSSI: wet Ash (*Fraxinus*)-Maple (*Acer*) and acid pedunculate Oak (*Quercus*)-Hazel (*Corylus*)-Ash woodland with rich ground flora alongside extensive areas of permanently saturated ground⁵⁴;
- Clout's Wood SSSI: lies on the steep scarp of the lower chalk south of Swindon, extending onto the plateau above and valley floor below the slope⁵⁵. The site is a good example of a mainly Ash-Maple-Hazel and invasive English Elm (*Ulmus*) woodland with a rich ground flora;
- The Coombes, Hinton Parva SSSI: an area of botanically rich chalk grassland, a habitat nationally reduced by agricultural intensification⁵⁶;
- Ancient woodlands covering approximately 96ha including Burderop Wood, Quidhampton Wood and Clouts Wood;
- Listed buildings, including Parish Church of St John and St Helen (Grade I) at Wroughton and the Parish Church of St Andrew (Grade I) at Upper Wanborough;
- Scheduled monument: Lynchets 850m west of Ridgeway Farm; and
- Conservation Areas at Bishopstone, Hinton Parva, Upper Wanborough, Liddington, Badbury. Part of the Chiseldon and Hodson Conservation Areas.

11.4 Forces for change

11.4.1 Threats, pressures and current changes to Scarp LCA are outlined in **Table 11.2**:

Table 11.2: Forces for change in Scarp LCA

Force for change	Impact on the Scarp
Urban development and planning policy	Pressure for expansion of villages along the scarp, as well as a demand for large-scale development that would be visible on the skyline.
Land use change	The conversion of remaining grassland sites to arable farming has led to a reduction in grazing livestock. Agricultural intensification has led to the amalgamation and enlargement of fields and the breakdown of traditional field boundaries.
Climate change and biodiversity	Lack of woodland management which were formerly managed by coppicing.
Transport and infrastructure	The visual and noise impact of the M4 motorway is increasing due to vehicle traffic.
Recreational use	Blockage and fragmentation of footpaths linking to the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

⁵³ Natural England (1987) Bincknoll Dip Woods SSSI Citation. Available at: <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1002219.pdf> [Accessed: 03/01/25]

⁵⁴ Natural England (1986) Burderop Wood SSSI Citation. Available at: <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1002413.pdf> [Accessed: 03/01/25]

⁵⁵ Natural England (1986) Clout's Wood SSSI Citation. Available at: <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1003234.pdf> [Accessed: 03/01/25]

⁵⁶ Natural England (1989) The Coombes, Hinton Parva. Available at: <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1005603.pdf> [Accessed: 03/01/25]

Heritage conservation	Alteration of views towards historic assets.
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11.5 Landscape guidelines

11.5.1 Landscape guidelines to plan, manage and protect distinctiveness of the Scarp LCA include:

- Maintain the scenic views northwards towards the Cotswolds;
- Protect and manage the belts of semi-natural woodland along the scarp slope with careful attention paid to new planting and maintaining the wooded appearance of the slope;
- Ensure that structures do not punctuate the scarp skyline when viewed from the north or from the Downs Plains;
- Have regard to the area's location within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape;
- Where appropriate, provide for a lowering of ground level through the removal of surface material, enabling the development to be inset into the slope, thereby reducing its overall height;
- Be restricted to single storey, where necessary, to reduce the visual impact of development;
- Protect and enhance the PRoW networks to ensure recreational access is retained linking the North Wessex Downs to the surrounding landscape; and
- Retain the perception of distinctiveness and separation from Swindon.

12 Thames Vale LCA



View east within Moulton Park Country Park



View east from Moulton Park Country Park



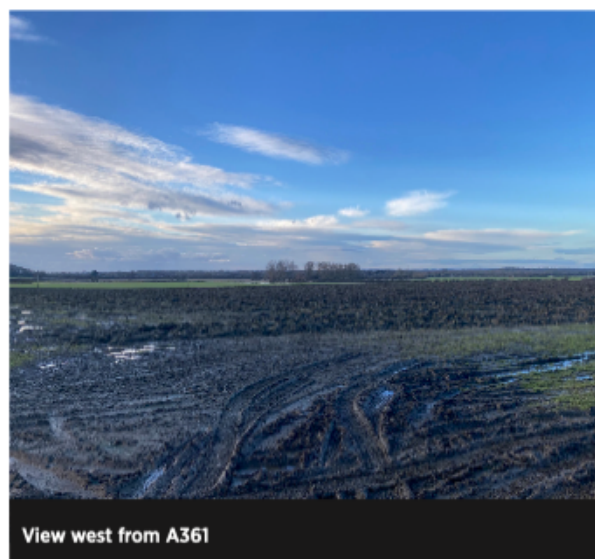
View north-east near Castle Eaton



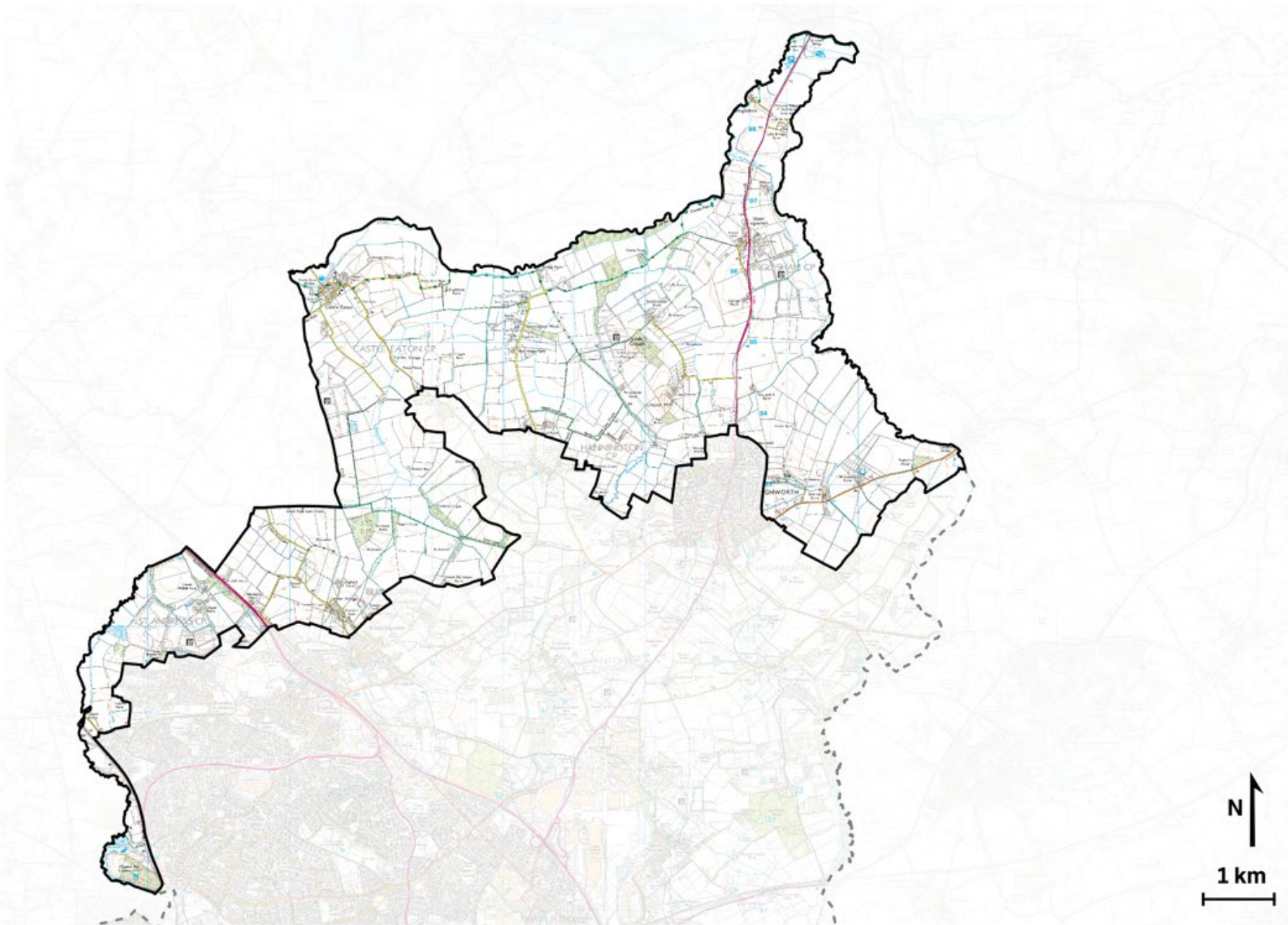
View north-west near Castle Eaton



Pentylands Country Park



View west from A361



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-  Thames Vale LCA
-  Swindon Borough

PROJECT	Swindon Landscape Character Assessment	DRAWN	WE
CLIENT	Swindon Borough Council	CHECKED	ND
TITLE	Thames Vale LCA	SCALE@A4	1:75000
VERSION	LC-1246_Thames_Vale_LCA_2	DATE	09/04/2025

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12.1 Description

- 12.1.1 The Thames Vale LCA comprises the alluvial plain adjoining the River Thames in the north of the borough. Hydrology plays an important role in forming this landscape, with frequent ditches and willow and poplar trees present across the floodplain. In conjunction with the existing hedgerows, there are occasional blocks of tree planting, punctuating the landscape. Although development has taken place within this area, the landscape is largely open and is dominated by a series of small settlements with scattered, isolated groupings making up the remainder.

12.2 Key characteristics

- 12.2.1 Key characteristics of the Thames Vale LCA are presented in Table 12.1.

Table 12.1: Key characteristics of the Thames Vale LCA

Natural factors	
Geology	Oxford Clay with alluvial and gravel deposits relating to the River Thames, River Cole and River Ray and their floodplains.
Landform	Generally flat, low-lying large-scale valley (75m to 80m AOD) with occasional areas of higher ground.
Hydrology	The River Thames, River Cole and River Ray flow through the area, along with Bydemill Brook. Large areas of flood zone 3 are present and associated with the River Thames, River Cole, River Ray, Share Ditch and Bydemill Brook.
Soils	Soils are loamy and clayey. Mostly ALC grade 3 with areas of grade 2 and 4.
Land cover, flora & fauna	Few wooded areas punctuate the landscape on higher ground such as Crouch Hill. Poplar trees and pollarded willow trees are an important aspect of the River Thames floodplain.
Cultural & social factors	
Land use	Predominantly pastoral land use, with some arable areas. Large land-based solar farms at Inglesham, Little Crouch and west of Lus Hill.
Settlement	Few scattered small, nucleated villages on areas of higher ground.
Enclosure	Large scale fields with hedgerows and occasional trees or open drainage channels defining the field boundaries.
Time depth	Highworth circles (scheduled monuments) are located in this LCA.
Cultural associations	
Art, literature, descriptive writings, music, myth/legend/folklore, people, events and associations	There are recorded stories of a black dog haunting the area around Inglesham. ⁵⁷ There are many travel blogs written about the Cricklade to Lechlade section of the Thames Path, where a large proportion of this section runs through the Thames Vale.
Perceptual & aesthetic factors	
Memories and associations	Obtained via stakeholder engagement
Perceptions	Tranquillity levels are generally quite high, particularly around Castle Eaton and Lus Hill.
Sounds	Noise levels are generally low across the area. Vehicular traffic can be heard near the A419 and A361.
Sight	Extensive views across to the Mid Vale Ridge and Highworth. Churches at Lechlade form important focal points in the landscape.

⁵⁷ Highworth Historical Society. Inglesham Ghost Stories: The Black Dog of Inglesham. Available at: <http://highworthhistoricalsociety.org.uk/inglesham-ghost-stories/>. [Date accessed: 20/02/25]

12.3 Designations and policy

12.3.1 Key designations within the Thames Vale LCA:

- Ancient woodlands covering approximately 6ha including Ashmead Brake and Crabtree Copse
- Listed buildings including Parish Church of St Mary (Grade I) and Church of St John the Baptist (Grade I)
- Scheduled monuments including medieval settlements and Highworth circles.
- Mouldon Hill Country Park
- Conservation Areas at Castle Eaton, Upper Inglesham and Lower Blunsdon

12.4 Forces for change

12.4.1 Threats, pressures and current changes to Thames Vale LCA are outlined in **Table 12.2**:

Table 12.2: Forces for change in Thames Vale LCA

Force for change	Impact on Thames Vale
Urban development and planning policy	Loss of rural character and visual intrusion from expansion in northern Swindon, in particular surrounding Highworth. New residential and commercial buildings with associated infrastructure threaten the character of small villages and scattered farmsteads.
Land use change	Loss and fragmentation of open farmland due to the development of housing or roads.
Climate change and biodiversity	Move to renewable energies resulting in the potential installation of land-based solar farms. Loamy and clayey soils are vulnerable to increased rainfall, in particular where flood risk is likely to increase within the River Thames floodplain. Loss of mature hedgerow trees.
Transport and infrastructure	The visual and noise impact of the A419 is increasing due to vehicle traffic. Potential development of logistics and business parks, particularly around Broad Blunsdon.
Recreational use	Erosion of footpaths particularly on chalky soils, increased litter and dog waste.
Heritage conservation	Loss of ridge and furrow and changes to historic field patterns. Alterations in views towards heritage assets and historic settlements.

12.5 Landscape guidelines

12.5.1 Landscape guidelines to plan, manage and protect distinctiveness of the Thames Vale LCA include:

- Ensure that the scale and massing of development does not adversely affect the area's perception of remoteness;
- Retain views and vistas to key local settlements and landmarks, for example local churches such as in Lechlade;
- Increase tree planting along watercourses using typical riparian species such as Alder and Willows;
- Ensure that any woodland planting does not prejudice existing vistas;
- Reflect the high visibility of this area from the Mid Vale Ridge;
- Where appropriate, restore former landscape features such as meandering river channels, where these would benefit the landscape and its wildlife; and
- Ensure effective management of drainage ditches and floodplains in a way that improves biodiversity connectivity.

13 Vale of White Horse LCA



View north-east from Horpit



View towards the Scarp from Horpit



View east from The Forty, Bishopstone



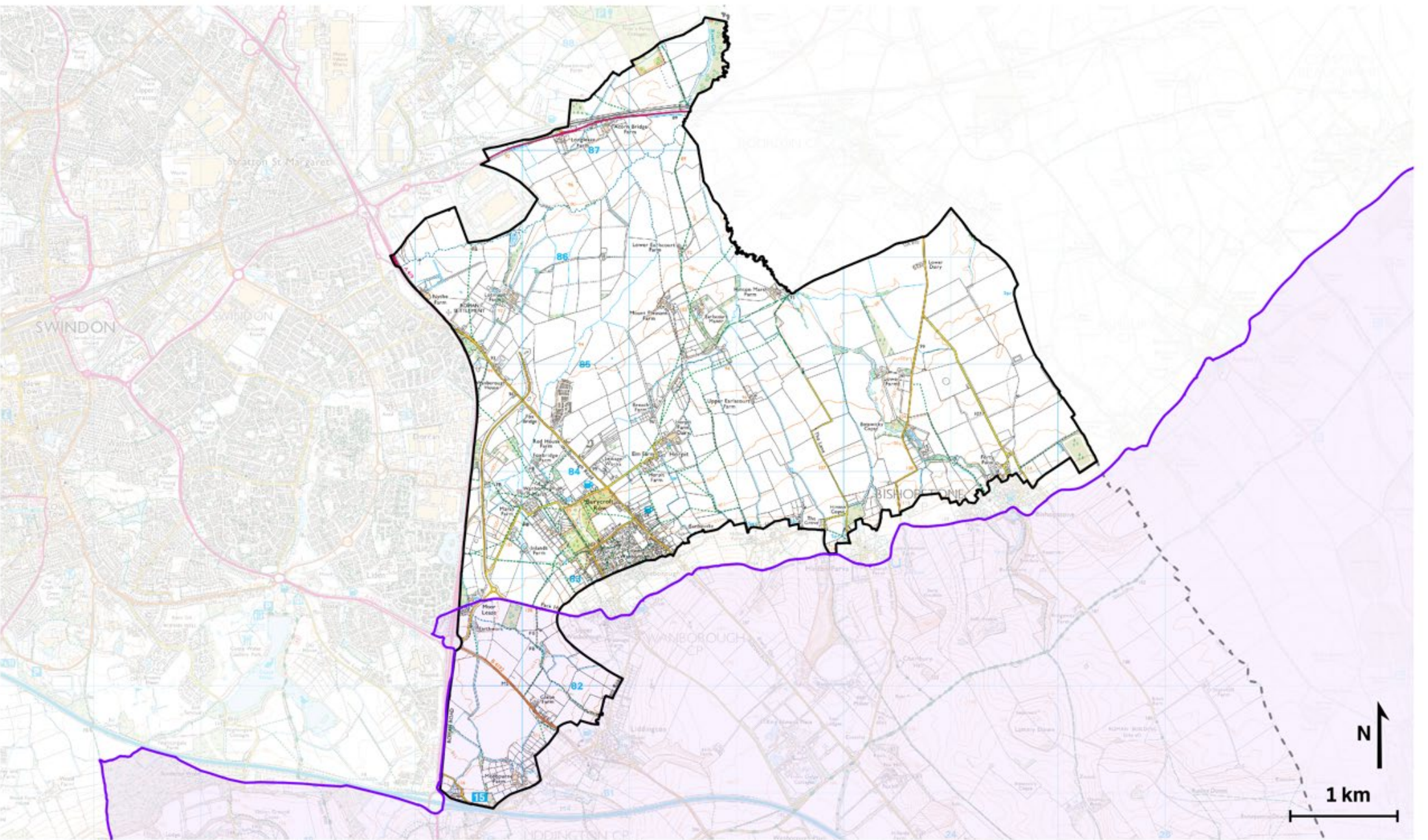
View west from Pack Hill



View towards Wanborough from Pack Hill



View towards the North Wessex Downs from Pack Hill



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North Wessex Downs NL

Vale of White Horse LCA

Swindon Borough

PROJECT	Swindon Landscape Character Assessment	DRAWN	WE
CLIENT	Swindon Borough Council	CHECKED	ND
TITLE	Vale of White Horse LCA	SCALE@A4	1:45000
VERSION	LC-1246_VoWH_LCA_2	DATE	09/04/2025

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13.1 Description

- 13.1.1 The Vale of White Horse LCA extends eastwards from Swindon towards Shrivenham and beyond. Settlements are generally small, giving the perception of a remote, open landscape distant from human activity. The relatively level terrain with minor undulations allow for far reaching views across the area, including towards the Midvale Ridge LCA and the Downs LCA. This area is increasingly influenced by new development on Swindon's eastern edge. The south-western corner of the LCA, comprising the land to the south of Pack Hill, lies within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

13.2 Key characteristics

- 13.2.1 Key characteristics of the Vale of White Horse LCA are presented in Table 13.1.

Table 13.1: Key characteristics of the Vale of White Horse LCA

Natural factors	
Geology	The LCA comprises of Gault Clay to the north and Kimmeridge Clay to the south, with a narrow band of Lower Greensand dividing the two clays.
Landform	Broad, flat, low-lying valley.
Hydrology	The River Cole, Dorcan Stream and other small streams cross through the area. Several chalk streams flow northwards across the vale from the scarp. Areas of flood zone 3 are present across the area and associated with watercourses including the River Cole.
Soils	Soils are loamy and clayey. ALC grade 3 and 4 with smaller areas of grade 2.
Land cover, flora & fauna	Fields are bounded by hedgerows with scattered standard trees, with very few wooded areas.
Cultural & social factors	
Land use	Land use is predominantly agricultural with a patchwork of arable and pastoral fields.
Settlement	Farms are scattered across the area.
Enclosure	Large fields with a strong north to south linear pattern following the Parish boundaries.
Time depth	The disused Wiltshire and Berkshire canal runs along the northern boundary. A deserted Medieval village is located adjacent to Wanborough, with Roman settlement and roads at Lotmead.
Cultural associations	
Art, literature, descriptive writings, music, myth/legend/folklore, people, events and associations	Alfred Williams would sketch views from the North Wessex Downs looking on to Vale of White Horse ⁵⁸ . He is also known for his poetry. 'Dobbin Day' is a unique celebration involving bread which takes place annually in Wanborough at St Andrews Church, a tradition dating back to 1745 when a bursary was provided to the parish and interest was forever required to provide bread to the poor. 'Dobbin Day field' is located in the Marsh which provides for the loaves of bread ⁵⁹ .
Perceptual & aesthetic factors	
Memories and associations	Obtained via stakeholder engagement

⁵⁸ Sackett (2018) *Villages of the White Horse*, 1913. Available at: <https://wshc.org.uk/villages-of-the-white-horse/> [Accessed: 20/02/15]

⁵⁹ Wanborough Village Trail. *Dobbin Day*. Available at: https://www.wanborough.info/Wanborough%20History%20Project/dobbin_day.html [Accessed: 20/02/25]

Perceptions	Tranquillity levels are higher to the east, away from the A419 and Swindon urban area.
Sounds	Noise levels are generally low across the area. Noise pollution increases with proximity to the A420 to the north, the A419 to the west and the M4 motorway to the south.
Sight	Extensive views towards the North Wessex Downs and Mid Vale Ridge. Views towards commercial buildings on the outskirts of Swindon are a visual detractor.

13.3 Designations and policy

13.3.1 Key designations within the Vale of White Horse LCA:

- The far southern part of The Vale of White Horse LCA is located within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Ancient woodlands covering approximately 2.4ha at Hinton Copse.
- Listed buildings (all Grade II).
- Scheduled monuments including Hall Place⁶⁰, a late Tudor and early Jacobean period country house, and the Site of Roman town, west of Wanborough House⁶¹

13.4 Forces for change

13.4.1 Threats, pressures and current changes to Vale of White Horse LCA are outlined in **Table 13.2**:

Table 13.2: Forces for change in Vale of White Horse LCA

Force for change	Impact on Vale of White Horse
Urban development and planning policy	Loss of rural character and visual intrusion from expansion to the east of Swindon, in particular in relation to the New Eastern Villages. New residential and commercial buildings with associated infrastructure threaten the character of small villages and scattered farmsteads.
Land use change	Agricultural intensification and the introduction of arable rotation threatens the remaining medieval field patterns and traditional pastoral landscape. Loss and fragmentation of open farmland due to the development of housing or roads.
Climate change and biodiversity	Move to renewable energies resulting in the potential installation of land-based solar farms. Loamy and clayey soils are vulnerable to increased rainfall. Loss of mature hedgerow trees.
Transport and infrastructure	The visual and noise impact of the A420 is increasing due to vehicle traffic. Potential development of logistics and business parks, particularly around South Marston.
Recreational use	Erosion of footpaths particularly on chalky soils, increased litter and dog waste.
Heritage conservation	Changes to historic settlements and alterations of views towards historic assets.

13.5 Landscape guidelines

13.5.1 Landscape guidelines to plan, manage and protect distinctiveness of the Vale of White Horse LCA include:

⁶⁰ Historic England (1997) Hall Place. Available at: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1016325> [Accessed: 03/01/25]

⁶¹ Historic England. Site of Roman town, W of Wanborough House. Available at: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1004684> [Accessed: 03/01/25]

- Ensure that the scale and massing of development does not adversely affect the area's perception of remoteness;
- Where appropriate, have regard to the area's close proximity to, and in the case of the land to the south of Pack Hill, its location within, the North Wessex Downs National Landscape;
- Where opportunities arise, provide additional tree planting to increase tree cover by creating blocks of woodland;
- Reflect the existing pattern of isolated units through an open, dispersed development pattern;
- Minimise small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or improvements to the road network which could impact the rural, peaceful character of the landscape; and
- Retain the perception of distinctiveness and separation from Swindon.

14 Wroughton Vale LCA



Solar farm north of Wroughton



Footpath within woodland north of Wroughton



Newly planted trees near Wroughton



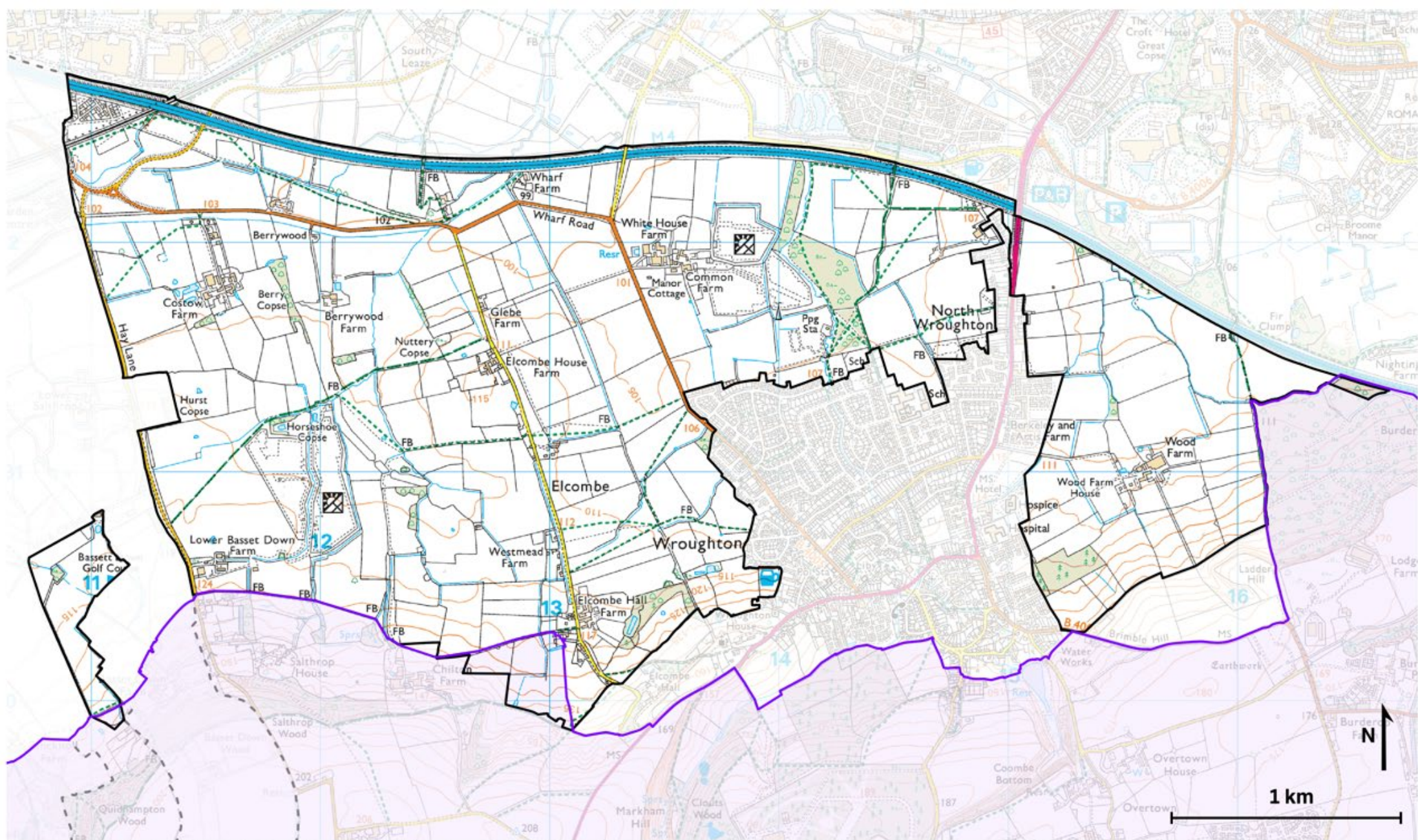
View east from Wroughton



View from Elcombe towards St John the Baptist & St Helen Church



View towards Swindon from Elcombe



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- North Wessex Downs NL
- Wroughton Vale LCA
- Swindon Borough

PROJECT	Swindon Landscape Character Assessment	DRAWN	WE
CLIENT	Swindon Borough Council	CHECKED	ND
TITLE	Wroughton Vale LCA	SCALE@A4	1:21000
VERSION	LC-1246_Wroughton_Vale_LCA_2	DATE	09/04/2025



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14.1 Description

- 14.1.1 Wroughton Vale is bounded by Burderop Wood to the east, the M4 to the north and the scarp slope to the south. Outside the village of Wroughton, the landscape is predominantly agricultural with scattered farms and settlements. Farms tend to cluster around smaller field patterns, indicative of traditional dairy farming. The northern part of Wroughton Vale is influenced by its proximity to Swindon, which creates a contrast to the otherwise rural setting.

14.2 Key characteristics

- 14.2.1 Key characteristics of the Wroughton Vale LCA are presented in Table 14.1.

Table 14.1: Key characteristics of the Wroughton Vale LCA

Natural factors	
Geology	The area is underlain with Kimmeridge Clay.
Landform	Low lying, generally level vale enclosed by scarp slope to south.
Hydrology	Several chalk streams flow northwards across the valley, forming tributaries of the River Ray. There are numerous ponds across the area. Areas of flood zone 3 are present and associated with watercourses in northern parts of the area, adjacent to the M4 motorway.
Soils	Soils are loamy and clayey. Mostly ALC grade 3 with smaller areas of grade 4.
Land cover, flora & fauna	Hedgerows with trees comprise the main green infrastructure asset. There are several small woodlands present across the area including Berry Copse.
Cultural & social factors	
Land use	Land use across the area comprises arable farmland and improved pasture. Large land-based solar farms are present to the north of Wroughton and in the west of the area.
Settlement	Houses and farms are scattered across the area. The village of Wroughton dominates the eastern end of the vale.
Enclosure	Field sizes vary and are enclosed by hedgerows with occasional Oak trees and post and wire fencing.
Time depth	Areas of ridge and furrow are evident. Disused airfields and military sites are located within the LCA.
Cultural associations	
Art, literature, descriptive writings, music, myth/legend/folklore, people, events and associations	The diary of Jockey Tom Olliver provides accounts of horses being exercised in the Wroughton Vale area. ⁶² The Science Museum at Wroughton Airfield was painted by artist Robert Soden. ⁶³
Perceptual & aesthetic factors	
Memories and associations	Obtained via stakeholder engagement
Perceptions	There is a limited sense of remoteness due to close proximity to Swindon, Wroughton and the M4 motorway
Sounds	Vehicular traffic on the M4 motorway is an aural detractor in northern parts.

⁶² Wroughton History Group. *The Tom Ollivers*. Available at: <http://www.wroughtonhistorygroup.co.uk/the-tom-ollivers/>. [Accessed: 20/02/25]

⁶³ Robert Soden (1994) Science Museum Wroughton. Available at: <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co67418/science-museum-wroughton> [Accessed 20/02/25]

Sight	The relatively open landscape allows for moderate distant views in an east-west direction across Wroughton Vale. Wide ranging views south towards the Scarp slope are possible.
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14.3 Designations and policy

14.3.1 Key designations within Wroughton Vale LCA:

- A small southern part of the Wroughton Vale LCA is located within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Listed buildings (all Grade II)

14.4 Forces for change

14.4.1 Threats, pressures and current changes to Wroughton Vale LCA are outlined in **Table 14.2**:

Table 14.2: Forces for change in Wroughton Vale LCA

Force for change	Impact on Wroughton Vale
Urban development and planning policy	Loss of rural character and visual intrusion from expansion to the south of Swindon. New residential and commercial buildings on the urban edge of Swindon.
Land use change	Agricultural intensification and the introduction of arable rotation threatens the remaining medieval field patterns and traditional pastoral landscape. Loss and fragmentation of open farmland due to the development of housing or roads.
Climate change and biodiversity	Move to renewable energies resulting in the potential installation of land-based solar farms. Loamy and clayey soils are vulnerable to increased rainfall. Loss of mature hedgerow trees.
Transport and infrastructure	The visual and noise impact of the M4 is increasing due to vehicle traffic, including increased HGV traffic.
Recreational use	Erosion of footpaths particularly on chalky soils, increased litter and dog waste.
Heritage conservation	Erosion of historic ridge and furrow and changes to historic field boundaries.

14.5 Landscape guidelines

14.5.1 Landscape guidelines to plan, manage and protect distinctiveness of the Wroughton Vale LCA include:

- Ensure existing ponds and wildlife habitats, and sites that adjoin, abut or link these with other wildlife habitats, are conserved and where possible enhanced;
- Reflect the existing pattern of buildings, be they on an individual basis or in small groups;
- Maintain, and where possible enhance, the perception of separation between Swindon and Wroughton, through the use of planting;
- Have regard to the area's close proximity to the North Wessex National Landscape; and
- Proposals should be carefully designed to contribute positively to the sense of place and built heritage.

15 Conclusion

15.1 About this report

15.1.1 This report comprises a Landscape Character Assessment to support the preparation of the Swindon Borough New Local Plan. It updates the LCAs identified in 2004 and adopted in SPG as part of the Swindon Borough Local Plan in 2011. Eight LCAs have been identified, these are: Down Plains, High Downs, Lydiard Ridge, Mid Vale Ridge, Scarp, Thames Vale, Vale of White Horse and Wroughton Vale. Each LCA includes a description, key characteristics, designations and policy, forces for change, and landscape guidelines to plan, manage and protect distinctiveness.

15.1.2 Site visits to determine the LCA boundaries took place in January 2025. Information presented in this report is based off data gathered at the time of site visits.

15.2 Landscape character of Swindon

15.2.1 In summary, this Landscape Character Assessment found that the landscape across the borough of Swindon varies greatly, ranging from the low-lying upper Thames clay vales in the north to the elevated rolling chalk downland hills within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape in the south. The urban area of Swindon town dominates the central region of the borough. Other notable urban areas include the market town of Highworth, the large village of Wroughton, and a number of smaller villages and hamlets. Beyond the urban areas, the predominant land use across the borough is agricultural, with extensive areas of arable and pasture. The borough is also traversed by key transport routes, including the M4 motorway, the A419, the A420, and the Great Western Main Line. The landscape is undergoing considerable changes, with settlement expansion exerting pressure on the surrounding countryside, particularly to the east of Swindon. Land-based solar farms are an increasing feature across the landscape.

15.2.2 Key features which contribute positively to landscape character across the borough include:

- Ancient woodlands, notably at Burderop Wood, Great Wood and Clouts Wood
- The open rolling downland landscape of the North Wessex Downs
- The northern scarp slope of the North Wessex Downs is a dramatic landform feature
- Distinctive Beech clumps crowning the summits at Liddington Hill and Barbury Castle
- Habitats to support biodiversity including areas of calcareous grassland, notably at Hinton Parva and Markham Hill
- Biodiversity designations that contribute to landscape character including nine SSSIs and seven LNRs
- A strong sense of time depth in places with the presence of scheduled monuments, notably Iron-Age hillforts at Liddington Castle and Barbury and strip lynchets at Bishopstone
- Church towers often form part of the skyline in views, including the church of St John and St Helen at Wroughton and the church of St Andrew at Upper Wanborough
- Small hills at Lus Hill and Crouch Hill which rise above the low-lying Thames Vale
- The extensive patchwork of arable and pastoral fields, lined with hedgerows and trees and interspersed with pockets of deciduous woodland
- Watercourses and their riparian zones including the River Thames, the River Ray and the River Cole

- The network of PRow including the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails which provide access to the countryside
- The five Country Parks in the borough provide spaces for open air recreation

Habitats Regulations Assessments

Sustainability Appraisals

Strategic Environmental Assessments

Landscape Character Assessments

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments

Green Belt Reviews

Expert Witness

Ecological Impact Assessments

Habitat and Ecology Surveys



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