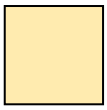
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE:
Open Downs



Mostly in mid Hampshire on chalk.

SIMILAR AND ASSOCIATED TYPES HAMPSHIRE DISTRICT AND BOROUGH LEVEL ASSESSMENTS	
Basingstoke:	**Primary association**: Exposed Arable, Open Arable, Semi Enclosed Chalk and Clay Farmland
East Hampshire	Open Downland Mosaic (3dii – very little)
Eastleigh	n/a
Fareham	Open Arable Downs
Gosport	n/a
Hart	Open arable Downs
Havant	Settled Chalk Ridge
New Forest	Open Arable Downs
Rushmoor	n/a
Test Valley	Open Chalklands
Winchester	Open Arable, Open Arable Exposed, Scarp Downland and Grassland
SIMILAR AND ASSOCIATED TYPES IN NEIGHBOURING AUTHORITY ASSESSMENTS	
Dorset	Open Chalk Downland
West Berkshire	Open Downland,
West Sussex	Open Downs
Wiltshire	Open Downland, Low Chalk Plain and Scarp

KEY IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS AND BOUNDARY DEFINITIONS

- Large scale open rolling landscapes, with dry valleys often but not exclusively in elevated areas and typically with low hedges few woodlands resulting in commanding long distance views and a perception of big skies.
- Strongly associated with major scarps landscape type – often includes smaller scale scarp and dip slopes of escarpments.
- Shallow soils over chalk with less clay content than other downland landscape types.
- Strong and discrete association with the pattern of Neolithic and Bronze Age settled and farmed landscapes. Barrows and hillforts crown the summits and sites with commanding visual prospect.
- Often associated with areas of late formal enclosure, and 20th C prairie fields over former common downland.
- Fragments and isolated areas of species rich chalk downland and occasional chalk heath can still be found together with scrub and woodland confined to steeper, remoter areas and often with SSSI status.
- Strong visual seasonal variation because of predominance of arable crops from bright yellow oil seed rape in Spring to golden fields of wheat and barley to bare soil and flints and green flush of winter wheat.
- Sparse settlement, with occasional isolated farms and barns. Blocks of modern farm buildings and large scale sheds, punctuate the open landscape. At more detailed level flint sheepfolds, barns and shepherd's cottages are a visual reminder of the former extent of sheep grazing.

PHYSICAL

GEOLOGY, LANDFORM, ELEVATION:

Bedrock and Superficial Geology: Upper chalk typically chalk and flint such as the soft Seaford or hard chalk of the Lewes Nodular formation. Small proportion of more marl and clay chalks such as Newhaven formation. Clay and silt deposits predominantly limited to the dry valley bottoms.

Landform and Elevation: Elevated areas and dip slopes in the Hampshire chalk landscape. Gently undulating compared with Downland Mosaic Small Scale and Wooded Downland Plateau landscapes. Sweeping contours very evident because of the low woodland and shrub cover. Often in juxtaposition to major and mini scarps but rarely includes very steep land.

SOILS TYPES:

Typical soil type pattern: Shallow chalk soils dominate with occasional patches of more clayey soils. Type 343i and h are the dominant types with 0342a more frequent west of the Itchen valley. Calcareous silty soils over chalk, well drained and variably flinty. Possibly less flinty than Downland Mosaic types which tend to have closer association with the very flinty 581d soils. This may account partly for why this landscape is favoured for arable farming where ploughing is easier.

FUNCTIONS:

Hydrological function: Often overlies major groundwater vulnerability zone and grade 1 and 2 source protection zones often associated with this landscape type.

Food and Biomass: Almost exclusively grade 3 and far less proportion of unclassified agricultural grade than Downland Mosaic type, primarily as these areas are associated with woodland. Varied – moderate to high biomass potential of short rotation crops.

Biodiversity potential: There is very varied potential for chalk grassland creation. Often this landscape remained open downland until relatively recently and would have been far more species rich than post enclosure and 20th century farming intensive arable management. The BOA descriptions below are areas which offer greatest potential for chalk grassland restoration.

LANDCOVER AND LAND USE PATTERN:

Dominant arable use. Intensive farming practices equivalent to the factory floor of the agricultural industry. Where improved grassland fields occur, which is rare, this is usually associated with river valley sides. Low trimmed thorn hedges with few hedgerow trees. In places there are long mainly coniferous shelter belt planting and in some places planting around farmsteads The large or very large fields are often laid out in a very regular or planned grid pattern style. The mid 20th century was associated with significant hedgerow removal and has contributed to the increase in field size and development of prairie fields. Hedges are generally low - less than 1.4m high and less than 1.5m wide (HCC hedgerow data set. Fields bounded by hedges frequently over 20ha, very few under 5ha (typically around farmsteads/settlements) average size about 15ha.

HYDROLOGY:

Small chalk stream tributaries are characteristic with spring line settlements often present at the junction with lower clay landscapes.

EXPERIENTIAL

ACCESS AND TRANSPORT ROUTES:

General absence of major roads and indirect winding lanes. Most of the access resource is in the form of linear routes and there is little open access and common land. Areas of open access downland can occur on the steeper slopes.

TRANQUILLITY:

Clear association with the more tranquil areas mapped by CPRE 2007. Key to this is the undeveloped character of the landscape and comparative feeling of remoteness, although the land use pattern is dominated by arable use and there is little diversity.

BIODIVERSITY

The Open Downs landscape character type is an arable farming landscape with some areas of improved grassland.

Although arable land is often regarded as species poor, it does provide habitat to species such as the harvest mouse, stone curlew and corn bunting. Many insects spend their entire life cycle within arable fields, creating food sources for birds and other species.
There are some occasional patches of woodland, mainly broadleaved but also mixed plantations and coniferous plantations, often planted as field boundaries or along streams: Plantation woodlands often have impoverished flora and can be developed on previously cultivated soils. There are occasional areas of active coppice and parkland/ wood pastures but these tend to be isolated within an over-riding arable landscape. There is little remaining active coppice; where coppice is still active, woodlands can support a specialist range of flora and butterfly fauna reliant on the continuation of cutting practices and the stools created by coppicing. Ancient and semi-natural woodland is limited to small patches in this landscape character type. There are some patches of forestry scrub which is usually associated with woodland and provides cover for a number of species.

Close to streams there are occasional patches of marshy grassland. Unimproved and semi-improved grasslands, including neutral and calcareous grasslands, also exist within the arable landscape.

In some places the hedgerow network is strong, however, elsewhere fields tend to be larger and the hedgerow network less well defined.

There area number of Biodiversity Opportunity Areas in this landscape character type:

- Itchen Valley BOA identifies opportunities for wet woodland, lowland meadow, purple moor grass and rush pastures, floodplain grazing marsh and reed bed habitat creation and enhancement.
- Portsdown Hill BOA identifies opportunities for lowland calcareous grassland creation and enhancement.
- The South Downs BOA identifies opportunities for lowland calcareous grassland and lowland mixed deciduous woodland habitat creation and enhancement.
- Dean Hill BOA identifies opportunities for lowland calcareous grassland and lowland mixed deciduous woodland creation and enhancement.
- Martin Down – Boulsbury – Toyd Down BOA identifies opportunities for lowland calcareous grassland and lowland mixed deciduous woodland habitat creation and enhancement.
- Test Valley BOA identifies opportunities for wet woodland, lowland meadow, purple moor grass and rush pastures, floodplain grazing marsh and reed bed habitat creation and enhancement.
- Tidworth BOA identifies opportunities for lowland calcareous grassland creation and enhancement.
- Porton Down BOA identifies opportunities for lowland calcareous grassland creation and enhancement.

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT *(leave to Historic. Specialist)*

ARCHAEOLOGY

There is only very light archaeological evidence for the open downs in the Mesolithic, but there is a strong correlation between the open downs and Neolithic Long barrows. The archaeological evidence suggests that the earliest agriculture and settlement favour this landscape type. Bronze Age settlement and burial mounds also favour this landscape type suggesting its continuing evolution as a settled and farmed landscape. This continues into the Iron Age, but with the distribution spilling out more into other downland types. In the Roman period settlement and field system are more evenly distributed across downland types, but the more important Roman sites tend to have bias off the open downland. This may suggest that whilst open downland had a continuity of estate and ownership, the new estates had more opportunity to be established on marginal downland landscapes. In general there is a bias in intensity of settlement towards the west.

HISTORIC LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

A mixture of chronologically polarised landscapes from Dowland HLT 6.1 to late large scale parliamentary and formal agreement enclosure landscapes of the 18th and 19th centuries to 20th century reorganisation and field enlargement through hedgerow loss, creating prairie fieldscapes. Downland areas are isolated islands now and occur in adjoining scarps, the latter often retain unenclosed downland characteristics which were pervasive in this landscape prior to late enclosures.

HISTORIC BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Settlement types by form: Predominantly low to very low density farmsteads, and very few villages.

Building materials and type: Typically medium to large farmsteads post 1750 origin or enlarged farmstead of older origin (the latter being fairly unusual). Farmhouses typically set back from farmyard and associated barns. Barns typically on three sides and include threshing barns, typically quite large and granaries on straddle stones. Post WW2 arable intensification and mechanisation lead to modern trend for large double sheet metal barns and round ground silos which sometimes swept aside the traditional buildings. Brick and some flint, although probably lower proportion than in the downland mosaic landscapes 18th origin century farmhouses may have been rebuilt / refaced in brick. Association with cob buildings and possibly associated with eastern most extremity of distribution of a tradition that was termed the 'Wessex cob tradition'.

VISIBILITY

Prominency: This landscape forms the relatively lower parts of the chalklands. The scarps, downlands and woodlands on the high chalklands, however, sometimes form a distant and extensive skyline viewed from the higher ground in adjoining areas. The exception to this is at Portsdown where the area of open arable is very prominent surrounded by lowland mosaic and coastal plain types.

Enclosure: Very open landscape with few woods and trees. Low hedges heavily trimmed and often fragmented. In places coniferous shelter belts break the sweeping contours and the long views

Public perceptions: Sense of remoteness which is emphasised by low levels of development and absence of major settlements.