

## North Wessex Downs AONB

**4.36** The North Wessex Downs AONB includes the rural service centres of Hungerford, Lambourn and Pangbourne, together with the service villages of Bradfield Southend, Chieveley, Compton, Great Shefford, Hermitage and Kintbury.

### North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - The Vision

**4.37** The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) will be a place where the landscape is managed to conserve and enhance its natural beauty in accordance with its national designation. With its legacy of historical associations and richness in historic sites and features the area will be a focus for conservation with low impact leisure and green tourism activities which help to sustain vibrant and balanced rural communities. As a primarily agricultural landscape the traditional land based and rural economy of the area, such as agriculture and the racehorse industry, will continue to thrive and support the social and economic needs of the communities of which they are a part.

**4.38** The North Wessex Downs AONB covers 74% of West Berkshire and makes a significant contribution to the uniqueness of the District. The settlement pattern will be maintained as both distinctive and ancient with a small and dispersed population within villages and small towns that have a strong sense of identity. The AONB will have appropriate sustainable growth throughout the plan period to support the local communities and rural economy.

**4.39** As a rural service centre Hungerford will prosper as a self-sufficient, historic medieval market town, serving the needs of its residents and the surrounding rural areas. The town will have an enhanced role as a tourist destination within the AONB based on its wealth of independent stores, local produce and stronger retail offer, markets and festivals/events and also as a base to explore the surrounding countryside. Some housing and employment development will take place and this will respect the historic form of the built environment within the AONB. The Commons, River Kennet and the Kennet and Avon Canal will be protected and enhanced as important areas of recreation and nature conservation recognising their contributions to the economy and environment.

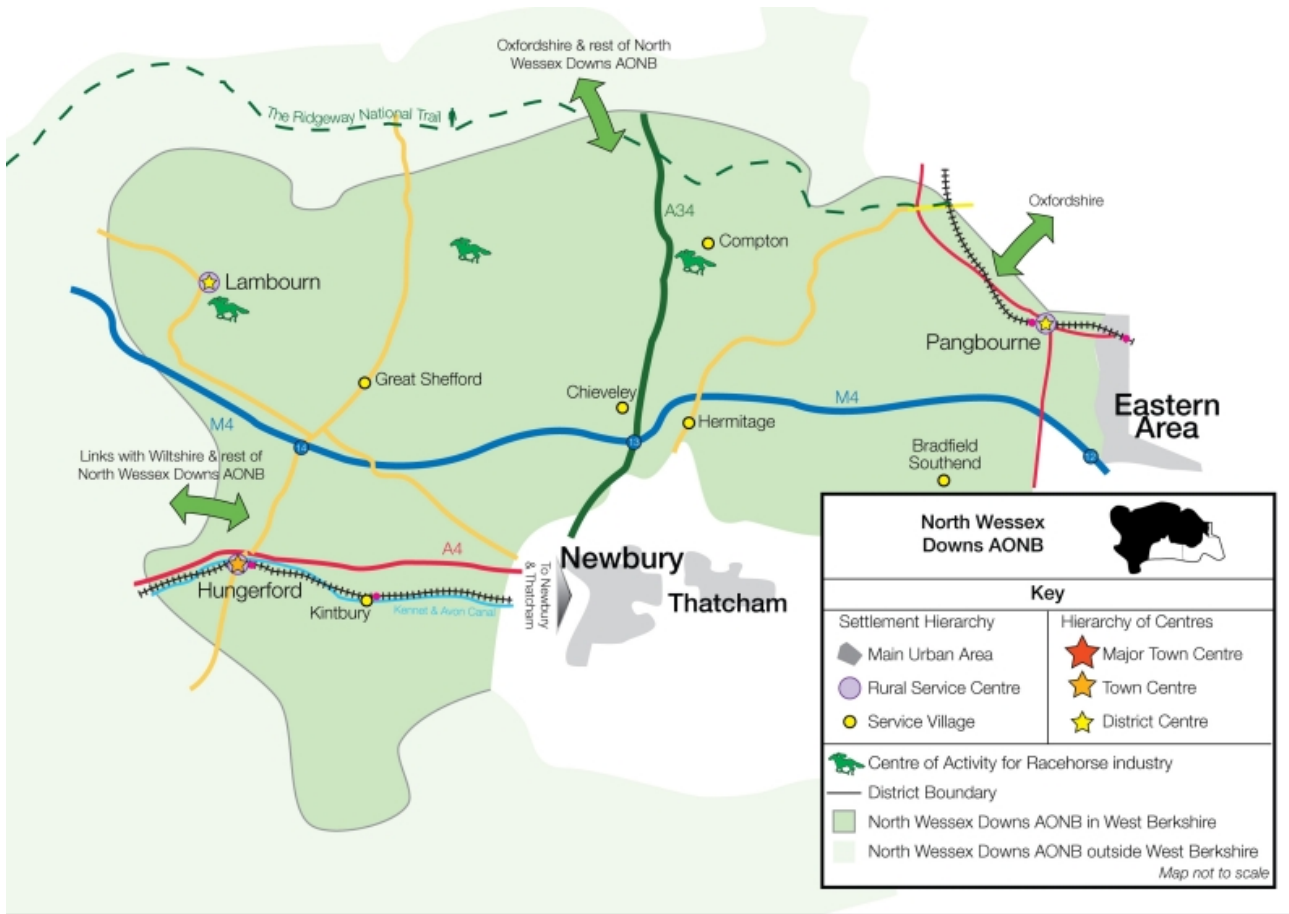
**4.40** Lambourn will be a busy working village that serves as the heart of one of the most important areas for horseracing in the country. As a key service centre for the surrounding rural area it will continue to provide a range of employment, shops and facilities for the local community whilst being well connected via public transport to Swindon and Newbury. A modest level of housing growth will have maintained the viability of services and contributed towards the housing needs of the local people and the local economy whilst respecting the historic built environment and unique character associated with the horseracing industry.

**4.41** Pangbourne will remain an accessible thriving village community in an attractive and accessible setting within the AONB and will serve as a rural service centre for the surrounding villages. Small scale extensions in keeping with the existing character and pattern of development and in line with Pangbourne's role as a rural service centre will help address issues of local housing need and provide opportunities for local people to buy a home in the village. The thriving district centre will continue to provide a good range of retail and leisure facilities, in the form of shops, pubs and restaurants. The diverse range of retail and leisure outlets will also help to form an important tourism base.

**4.42** The service villages will continue to meet the needs of their residents and surrounding communities for facilities and services. Some small-scale development will have taken place to meet local needs, support the rural economy and sustain local facilities.

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**Figure 3 North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**



### Area Delivery Plan Policy 5

#### North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

##### Housing

- The North Wessex Downs AONB will have appropriate and sustainable growth that conserves and enhances its special landscape qualities. During the Core Strategy period provision will be made for the delivery of up to 2,000 dwellings, of which over half have already been built or have planning permission. Provision of this scale of housing is subject to the overarching objective for the AONB set out at the beginning of this policy. If preparation of the Site Allocations and Delivery DPD indicates that there are insufficient developable sites to provide the balance of the 2,000 dwellings whilst adhering to the landscape priority of the policy, any shortfall will be provided on sites allocated outside the AONB.
- There will be further opportunities for infill development and for development on previously developed land. New housing allocations will be focused on the rural service centres and service villages within the North Wessex Downs, with the emphasis on meeting identified local needs. The development will be allocated through the Site Allocations and Delivery DPD or a subsequent planning document, and will depend on the role and function that the settlement performs, supported by suitable development opportunities, identified through the SHLAA. The conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the landscape will be the paramount consideration in assessing these sites.
- The SHLAA has assessed the future development opportunities in the AONB. Landscape sensitivity work has been a critical part of the assessment, given the 'great weight' to be

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given to the conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape and countryside within the AONB. The outcome of this work has shown a 'basket' of potentially developable sites from which to select at the Site Allocations stage.

- Within the North Wessex Downs AONB there are three rural service centres; Hungerford and Lambourn in the west of the District and Pangbourne in the east. In the western part of the AONB, development will be focused in Hungerford as the more sustainable rural service centre. Hungerford is considerably larger than Lambourn and performs a more significant function for a large catchment area. Hungerford town centre is defined as one of only two town centres in the District, reflecting the range of goods and services which it provides for the surrounding area. More information is set out below which describes Hungerford's role, and these factors will be used to inform decisions about the level of growth to be allocated to the town. The capacity for growth on the edge of Hungerford has been assessed.
- Lambourn, whilst performing the role of a rural service centre, does so at a more local level, due to its size and location, and this will influence the future level of growth. In terms of services and facilities, there is a particular emphasis in Lambourn on the needs of the equestrian industry. More limited growth will take place in Lambourn due to the town's comparatively smaller district centre and relative remoteness.
- Pangbourne, in the east, is a thriving community similar in size to Lambourn. It plays an important role as a service centre for the eastern areas of the AONB and provides a district centre shopping function with a range of services and facilities. Whilst there are some opportunities for growth at Pangbourne, those outside the current settlement boundary are partly constrained by environmental considerations in terms of the floodplain and the sensitivity of the landscape. This will restrict the amount of development to take place at Pangbourne.
- There are six service villages within the AONB in West Berkshire. The service villages will continue to provide a range of services to their communities and surrounding areas. A limited level of development will be accommodated to meet local needs, including employment, housing, amenity and community facilities, to maintain the areas as vibrant and balanced communities with their own sense of identity.
- The level of development to be allocated to each will depend on the role and function which they are to perform for the surrounding area and the availability of suitable sites identified through the SHLAA. Compton and Hermitage have opportunity sites adjacent to the existing village settlement boundary at Compton Institute for Animal Health and Denison Barracks. These could potentially provide a greater level of growth than that normally expected in a service village, which will have implications for the distribution of development. However, as well as infrastructure and sustainability issues associated with these sites, there is not yet any clarity about any timescales for developing them or the appropriate scale of development. Therefore the extent of any contribution from these sites cannot be clarified at this stage.
- In terms of the 'basket of sites' identified by the SHLAA, no further development opportunities have been identified at this time in Bradfield Southend, so development opportunities here may be more limited. Great Shefford shows limited future development opportunities through the SHLAA, whilst Kintbury and Chieveley demonstrate a wider range of opportunities to be assessed through the Site Allocations and Delivery DPD.
- Smaller villages within the AONB will continue to support the needs of their residents and surrounding communities for facilities and services.
- The AONB will be managed by working in partnership with the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Council of Partners and by implementing the statutory North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. <sup>(37)</sup>

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### Environment

- Recognising the area as a national landscape designation, development will conserve and enhance the local distinctiveness, sense of place and setting of the AONB whilst preserving the strong sense of remoteness, tranquillity and dark night skies, particularly on the open downland. Development will respond positively to the local context, and respect identified landscape features and components of natural beauty.
- Development will respect and respond to the historic environment of the AONB. In Hungerford the historic features, character and identity of the burgage plots extending either side of the High Street, and its highly distinctive medieval market town character will be respected.
- Conservation Area Appraisals will be undertaken for the Hungerford, Lambourn and Pangbourne Conservation Areas in accordance with the Council's programme.
- Traditional and local rural skills, such as the skills of hedge laying, woodland management and thatching will be supported so that they help to deliver a wide range of public benefits which include the conservation and enhancement of the area's special qualities and features and sustaining the vibrancy of the rural economy.
- In the Hungerford area, Portdown Common, Freeman's Marsh, the River Kennet and the Kennet and Avon Canal will be protected and enhanced as important areas of recreation and nature conservation. Improvements to access to these areas and the surrounding countryside will be implemented when opportunities arise.

### Economy

- The equestrian and racehorse industry will continue to be supported as a nationally and locally important part of the economy, including Lambourn's role as a nationally important centre for the racehorse industry, in accordance with Policy CS12 'Equestrian/Racehorse Industry'.
- With an accessible economic base with good access to the road and rail network Hungerford will continue as a self-sufficient rural service centre providing a focus for local employment and local businesses.
- New small scale office developments in Hungerford, Lambourn and Pangbourne will be directed towards the town centre. Changes of use/redevelopment of existing offices will be guided by policy CS9.
- The Protected Employment Areas within the AONB will continue to play a vital role in supporting the local economy, especially those in edge of centre locations. The role, function and boundaries of these Protected Employment Areas will be reviewed through the Site Allocations and Delivery DPD.
- Small, local businesses will be supported, encouraged and protected within the AONB providing local job opportunities and maintaining the rural economy.
- Positive management of the AONB will take place through partnership working to ensure its continuation as a location for leisure and green tourism. The AONB will continue to play an important role in attracting visitors and investment. The landscape and recreational role of the waterways, which make a positive contribution to the character and cultural heritage of the AONB, will be strengthened as part of this.
- Hungerford will have an enhanced role as a tourist destination within the AONB (within and beyond the District boundary), promoting its diverse retail offer, regular market and acting as a base to explore the surrounding countryside.
- Economic development will be supported through the North Wessex Downs LEADER programme, and any similar subsequent schemes, which offers grants for farmers, foresters, rural businesses and community organisations within the AONB to enable them to strengthen their support for the local economy. The funding is available for a wide range of activities

such as farm diversification, adding value to timber, tourism activities and projects that will benefit local communities.

- Opportunities for appropriate small scale renewable energy schemes, which use local resources will be encouraged if they can be accommodated within the landscapes of the North Wessex Downs.

### **Accessibility**

- Opportunities will be sought to improve the accessibility to and within the AONB, bringing improved public transport links and the retention of services and facilities as well as stronger signage to enhance the identity of the North Wessex Downs.
- Opportunities will be taken to manage congestion and improve accessibility linkages within Hungerford, in particular the north/south links within the community and encouraging the use of public transport. Opportunities will be sought to provide improved and safe pedestrian and cycling access within the town and to the surrounding countryside.
- Demand for improved accessibility to and from Lambourn will be managed through enhanced public transport to Newbury, Hungerford and across the District boundary to Swindon.
- Facilities at Pangbourne railway station will be improved in partnership with First Great Western; including additional parking where possible, and greater accessibility to facilitate interchange between modes.

### **Community Infrastructure and Services**

- The retail offer in Hungerford town centre will be encouraged and supported whilst preserving its unique character and local, independent businesses. The town centre commercial boundary and primary shopping frontage will be reviewed through the Site Allocations and Delivery DPD.
- Fibre broadband will be installed in Hungerford enabling super-fast broadband speeds for businesses, schools and homes in the area. This will contribute towards reducing the need to travel as residents will have better access to online services and will have benefits for education and the economy.
- Lambourn is defined as a district centre in Policy CS11 'Hierarchy of Centres'. The historic market district centre will continue to provide a range of shops and services meeting the needs of local people and visitors. Opportunities will be sought to strengthen its role in serving surrounding communities.
- The retail and service offer in the district centre of Pangbourne will be protected and enhanced. The district centre boundary and its primary shopping frontages will be reviewed in the Site Allocations and Delivery DPD.

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### **Delivery and Monitoring**

The strategy for the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will be implemented through the range of core policies identified in Section 5 'Core Policies'.

Infrastructure requirements are set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

Monitoring will be through a range of indicators which are outlined in Section 6 'Monitoring Framework'.