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# South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO)

## Supporting Document C4

### Outline Strategy for Addressing Potential Effects on the North Wessex Downs

J696-AJ-A02X-ZZZZ-RP-EN-100039

Version: 1.0

Standard Gate three submission for SESRO  
SRO

## Notice – Position Statement

- This document has been produced as the part of the process set out by RAPID for the development of the Strategic Resource Options (SROs). This is a regulatory gated process allowing there to be control and appropriate scrutiny on the activities that are undertaken by the water companies to investigate and develop efficient solutions on behalf of customers to meet future drought resilience challenges.
- This report forms part of the suite of documents that make up the ‘Gate 3 submission.’ Gate 3 of the RAPID programme represents a checkpoint on the way to solutions being prepared for consent applications. The intention at this stage is to provide RAPID with an update on activities being undertaken in preparation for consent application submission; activities’ progress including programme through to completion; and consideration of specific activities to address particular risks or issues associated with a solution. The regulatory gated process does not form part of the consenting process and will not determine whether an SRO is granted planning consent.
- Given the stage of the SROs in the planning process, the information presented in the Gate 3 submission includes material or data which is still in the course of completion, pending further engagement, consultation, design development and technical / environmental assessment. Final proposals will be presented as part of consent applications in due course.
- The project information captured in this document reflects a design freeze in October 2024 following the non-statutory consultation, to meet the requirements of RAPID’s gated process. Since then, the design has continued to evolve which includes further work with Affinity Water and Southern Water partners to form agreed requirements for the development consent application, such as the incorporation of Southern Water’s proposed water treatment works into the SESRO consent. You can find the latest information about the design and development of the project at <https://thames-sro.co.uk/projects/sesro/>.

## Disclaimer

This document has been written in line with the requirements of the RAPID Gate 3 Guidance (v3, January 2024) and to comply with the regulatory process pursuant to Thames Water’s, Southern Water’s and Affinity Water’s statutory duties. The information presented relates to material or data which is still in the course of completion. Should the solution presented in this document be taken forward, the co-sponsors will be subject to the statutory duties pursuant to the necessary consenting process, including environmental assessment and consultation as required. This document should be read with those duties in mind.

## Outline Strategy for addressing Potential Effects on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

### Revision history

Version	Date	Submitted at
1.0	21-07-2025	RAPID submission

## Table of contents

Revision history.....	3
Glossary .....	6
1 Introduction and Context .....	7
1.1 Introduction .....	7
1.2 SESRO .....	7
1.3 RAPID .....	7
1.4 Purpose of this Report .....	8
1.5 Structure of Report .....	9
2 Background Planning Context .....	10
2.1 Statutory Purpose of the Designated Landscape – Natural Beauty .....	10
2.2 Levelling-up and Regeneration Act.....	10
2.3 North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan .....	11
2.4 Setting of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.....	12
2.5 North Wessex Downs AONB Nature Recovery Plan .....	13
3 Landscape and Visual Baseline.....	14
3.1 Landscape Character Assessment .....	14
3.2 Visual Amenity.....	15
4 Potential Landscape and Visual Effects .....	16
4.2 Potential landscape and visual effects identified in the Gate 2 Landscape and Visual Appraisal.....	16
4.3 Potential landscape and visual effects identified in the EIA Scoping Report .....	16
4.4 Operation .....	17
4.5 Conclusion .....	18
5 Design Principles and Mitigation .....	19
6 Consultation and Engagement.....	21
6.1 Background.....	21
6.2 Consultation and Engagement Feedback.....	21
7 Outline Strategy for Addressing Potential Effects on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape at Gate 4 .....	23
7.2 Assessment of Special Qualities .....	23
7.3 Design, Mitigation and Enhancement .....	23

Outline Strategy for addressing Potential Effects on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

7.4 Effects on the Statutory Purpose of the Protected Landscape .....25

8 Summary and Conclusion ..... 27

References ..... 28

Appendix A - Special Qualities of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape .....30

List of tables:

Appendix Table A.11 – Special Qualities of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape .30

List of figures:

Figure 1 – Interim Master Plan Design Development Process

Figure 2 – Indicative Flowchart Outlining Implementation of Mitigation

## Glossary

Terms and acronyms	Definition
Assarts	Term for creating fields by clearing woodland
Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment	<i>'A tool used to identify and assess the likely significance of the effects of change resulting from development both on the landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and on people's views and visual amenity.'</i> (Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (3rd edition) (GLVIA3) (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013)
Landscape Character Areas	<i>'These are single unique areas which are the discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape type.'</i> (GLVIA3)
Landscape Character Types	<i>'These are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogenous in character.'</i> (GLVIA3)
Tranquillity	<i>'A state of calm and quietude associated with peace, considered to be a significant asset of landscape.'</i> (GLVIA3)

## 1 Introduction and Context

### 1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Under the Water Industry Act 1991, every water company must prepare and maintain a Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP). This plan is updated every five years and sets out how companies are required to produce WRMPs every five years. The water-stressed status of south-east England was recognised by Ofwat (the Water Services Regulation Authority) following submission of the WRMP 2019 (Various Water Companies, 2019), and subsequently, funding was provided for water companies to investigate, then develop Strategic Resource Options (SROs) that will benefit customers and the wider society and help protect and enhance the environment. Thames Water's WRMP 2024 was published on 18 October 2024, following a direction to publish from the Secretary of State in August 2024. The WRMP24 aligns with the revised draft Water Resources South East (WRSE) regional plan and establishes the need for a new 150Mm<sup>3</sup> reservoir (the South East Strategic Reservoir Option, or SESRO) that will primarily supply Thames Water, Southern Water and Affinity Water customers.

### 1.2 SESRO

- 1.2.1 In 2019, Ofwat provided funding for water companies to investigate and develop new large scale SROs which are expected to play a crucial role in meeting long-term water needs, particularly in the south east which is described as *“seriously water stressed”*. SESRO is a strategically important SRO which requires development by multiple partners for wider regional benefit beyond one company's supply boundaries. This type of scheme is lengthy and complex to consent and develop. In accordance with Thames Water's WRMP, SESRO is required to be operational by 2040.

### 1.3 RAPID

- 1.3.1 The Regulators' Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development (RAPID), a joint team made up of the three water regulators: Ofwat, the Environment Agency (EA) and the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI), was set up to support and oversee the progress of SROs. At Price Review 19 (PR19), Ofwat introduced a new gated process for which RAPID provides advisory oversight. At each gate, RAPID assesses the progress made in the development of each solution and provides recommendations to Ofwat on whether to release the next tranche of funding to continue scheme development. This process allows comparison of the solutions at regular intervals, and has clear checkpoints, or 'gates', to assess progress and determine which solutions should be taken forward for further work.
- 1.3.2 The gates, for a standard SRO, set out by Ofwat in PR19 are as follows:
- Gate 1 – Initial feasibility, design and multi-solution decision making.

- Gate 2 – detailed feasibility, design and multi-solution decision making.
- Gate 3 – finalised feasibility, pre-planning investigations and planning applications.
- Gate 4 – Planning application, procurement strategy and land purchase.

## 1.4 Purpose of this Report

1.4.1 This outline strategy is required because there could potentially be a significant impact on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape if not mitigated.

1.4.2 The Strategic regional water resource solutions guidance for Gate three, Version 3 (RAPID, January 2024), sets out the requirement for an outline strategy as follows:

*'For solutions that may affect ... Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty [AONB] [National Landscape], the likely effects on those areas should be assessed, having regard to the statutory purposes for which the areas are designated. An outline strategy should be provided summarising the likely effects on these areas and showing how these effects will be addressed, having regard to the statutory purposes for the designations. Where mitigation or other measures need to be taken in connection with the effects on these areas, the outline strategy should set out how these measures are to be implemented and an indicative timetable for implementation. The outline strategy and indicative timetable should be sufficiently developed for RAPID to assess its likely deliverability. We recommend consulting with ... relevant local authorities and Natural England ... on the strategy.'*

1.4.3 The North Wessex Downs National Landscape is located over 2km south of SESRO. Therefore, the RAPID requirements apply because the Project may indirectly affect the National Landscape.

1.4.4 This report covers the RAPID requirements for Gate 3 and presents the proposed strategy for an Annex to the Landscape and Visual Effects chapter of the Environmental Statement (ES) for the Development Consent Order (DCO) application, ahead of the Gate 4 submission to RAPID.

1.4.5 Landscape and visual assessment carried out to date, reported within the Gate 2 Landscape and Visual Appraisal in the SESRO Terrestrial Environmental Appraisal Report (Thames Water, 2022), and the Landscape and Visual Effects chapter of the EIA Scoping Report (J696-AJ-A02X-ZZZZ-RP-EN-100100, Thames Water, 2024), underpins this outline strategy. The Interim Master Plan, including mitigation, at Gate 3 is subject to development, therefore, this outline strategy provides a high-level overview of potential mitigation and enhancement. Further landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA), based on a refined Master Plan and confirmed mitigation, will be carried out and reported within the ES for the DCO application ahead of the Gate 4 submission to RAPID. The LVIA



will be used to inform the strategy within the Annex to the Landscape and Visual Effects chapter of the ES.

## 1.5 Structure of Report

1.5.1 This report has been prepared to provide technical supporting information for the SESRO SRO Gate 3 submission to RAPID. This report is Supporting Document C4. An overview of the SESRO Project is provided in the Gate 3 main report to RAPID (primarily, in section 2).

1.5.2 The structure of this supporting document is as follows:

- Chapter 1 – presents the introduction and context, the structure and purpose of this report
- Chapter 2 – sets out the background planning context
- Chapter 3 - presents baseline information about landscape character and visual amenity
- Chapter 4 – summarises the potential landscape and visual effects
- Chapter 5 - sets out how the design principles and mitigation proposals applied within the SESRO Interim Landscape and Environmental Master Plan with Below Ground Emergency Discharge Tunnel (hereafter referred to as the Interim Master Plan), as included in the Gate 3 main report submitted to RAPID (J696-AA-XXXX-XXXX-RP-CP-100005), have considered local landscape character and would help to reduce potential effects on the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Chapter 6 – provides a summary of relevant stakeholder consultation and engagement carried out, which includes suggestions made for how the Project could further the purpose of the designation in line with the duty on relevant authorities introduced by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023 (refer to section 2.2).
- Chapter 7 – sets out the outline strategy for identifying and addressing potential effects on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape at Gate 4. This presents how design principles and mitigation proposals will be developed further at Gate 4 to take account of the duty to further the purpose of the National Landscape. A timetable for implementation is included in this chapter.

## 2 Background Planning Context

### 2.1 Statutory Purpose of the Designated Landscape – Natural Beauty

- 2.1.1 The North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 (North Wessex Downs AONB, 2019) states the following about the statutory purpose of the designated landscape:

*‘The primary purpose of AONB [now National Landscape] designation is set out in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 as “conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area”. The Act elaborates on this primary purpose, stating that any reference “to the conservation of natural beauty of an area includes a reference to the conservation of its flora, fauna and geological and physiographic features”.*

*Natural beauty goes well beyond scenic or aesthetic value. The natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs is a function of the relationship between people and place over time. It encompasses everything that makes the area distinctive: the area’s geology and landform; its climate, soils and rivers; its wildlife and ecology; its rich history of human settlement and land use over millennia; its archaeology and buildings, and cultural associations; and the people who have occupied the area in the past and those who live and work here now.’*

### 2.2 Levelling-up and Regeneration Act

- 2.2.1 The LURA 2023 places a duty on relevant authorities to ‘*seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area*’. Any relevant authority must take all reasonable steps to explore how the statutory purposes of protected landscapes can be furthered. Relevant authorities for the Project include Natural England (NE), North Wessex Downs National Landscape and Thames Water.
- 2.2.2 Due to the recent nature of the legislation, there are no firm precedents at the time of writing that demonstrate how a development has furthered the purpose of a designated landscape or guidance to follow on how to achieve this. There are a small number of projects going through DCO examination at the time of writing where the duty applies including the Lower Thames Crossing which is due to be determined in May 2025.
- 2.2.3 Guidance for Local Planning Authorities on CROW s.85 duty (National Landscapes Association, 2024) was issued in November 2024. This largely applies to local planning authorities and refers to forthcoming guidance on the duty from Defra.
- 2.2.4 The Protected Landscapes duty: Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to

further the purposes of Protected Landscapes (Defra, 2024) (hereafter called The Protected Landscape Duty) was published 16 December 2024. This requires relevant authorities to *'take appropriate, reasonable, and proportionate steps to explore measures which further the statutory purposes of Protected Landscapes'...* *'where reasonably practical and operationally feasible'*.

- 2.2.5 Thames Water, as the promoter of the SESRO Project, will continue to monitor emerging guidance, practice and precedents to ensure compliance against the LURA (2023) amendment.

## 2.3 North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan

### Special Qualities

- 2.3.1 All AONB (National Landscape) management plans should include *'an assessment of the special quality of the AONB'*. The North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 defines overarching themes for special qualities that *'make this landscape unique'*, in relation to:

- Landscape
- Rural land management
- Biodiversity
- Historic environment
- Natural resources
- Developments
- Communities
- Tourism, leisure and access

- 2.3.2 Beneath each theme are the underlying special qualities, such as the *'Downs Plain and Scarp'* that *'plunges down from the chalk plain to the Vale of White Horse, creating a dramatic recognisable horizon.'* A full list of the special qualities is provided in Appendix A.

### Aims and Objectives

- 2.3.3 The North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 sets out key issues, strategic objectives and policies under each theme identified in paragraph 2.3.1. Of particular relevance to this outline strategy, examples of key issues under the landscape theme include, but are not limited to:

- *'Managing the Ridgeway National Trail and other rights of way to maximise enjoyment by responsible users, protect wildlife and cultural heritage, and minimise conflicts.'*
- *'The need to maintain and, where possible, extend chalk grassland habitat.'*
- *'The need to conserve and enhance the remoteness and expansive open scale of the downland landscape.'*

- ‘The need for viable agriculture and forestry to continue to contribute to AONB purposes.’
- ‘The need for appropriate woodland management, including the viable use of timber products, particularly for fuel.’
- ‘Encouraging restoration of wood pasture landscapes, husbandry and ecology and ensuring future veteran tree succession.’
- ‘The need to maintain and enhance adjacent seasonal flood meadows, grazed pastures, fen, damp woodlands and historic parkland.’
- ‘The need to ensure continued improvement of water quality and water resources in rivers...’

## 2.4 Setting of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

2.4.1 The North Wessex Downs AONB Position Statement (North Wessex Downs AONB, 2019) provides guidance on development within the setting of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. There is no defined boundary for the setting but it is described as *‘the area within which development and land management proposals, by virtue of their nature, size, scale, siting, materials or design can be considered to have an impact, either positive or negative, on the natural beauty and special qualities of the North Wessex Downs AONB’*. Proposals within the setting should also *‘have regard to the inter-relationship with the AONB and the landscape character and special qualities’*. Examples of proposals that could result in an adverse effect on the National Landscape identified within the Position Statement include:

- ‘development which would have a significant visual impact on views in or out of the AONB...’
- loss of tranquillity through the introduction or increase of lighting, noise, or traffic movement....’
- introduction of abrupt change of landscape character...’
- change of use of land such that to cause harm to landscape character...’

2.4.2 The Position Statement also provides guidance on the design requirements for proposals within the setting of the National Landscape:

- ‘measures to consider impact on the setting of the AONB, including where required through Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments;
- care over orientation, site layout, height and scale of structures and buildings;
- consideration not just of the site but also the landscape and land uses around and beyond it;
- careful use of colours, materials and non-reflective surfaces;
- restraint and care over the installation and use of street lighting, floodlighting and other external lighting to prevent harm to the dark night skies of the AONB;

## Outline Strategy for addressing Potential Effects on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

- the grouping of new structures and buildings close to existing structures and buildings to avoid new expanses of development that are visible and out of context (though detrimental impact on historic buildings/groupings will need special consideration to avoid insensitive development); and
- detailed mitigation measures, for example including native landscaping (where possible contributing to BAP [Biodiversity Action Plan] targets), and noise reduction (though again landscaping in certain contexts can be damaging to historic features/deposits/landscape/character so again will require careful consideration)'.

### 2.5 North Wessex Downs AONB Nature Recovery Plan

- 2.5.1 The North Wessex Downs AONB Nature Recovery Plan (produced on behalf of the North Wessex Downs AONB Council of Partners, 2023) seeks to direct the National Landscape's priorities for nature, working with partners, stakeholders and community groups. The plan sets out habitat vulnerability to climate change and suggests measures that will help key habitats to be more resilient. It identifies actions, targets and practical opportunities.

### 3 Landscape and Visual Baseline

#### 3.1 Landscape Character Assessment

##### Published Landscape Character Assessment

3.1.1 The North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (Land Use Consultants, 2002) defines landscape character types within the National Landscape that have *‘a distinct and relatively homogenous character with similar physical and cultural attributes, including geology, landform, land cover, and historical evolution.’* The landscape character types have been subdivided into landscape character areas (LCAs), that are *‘discrete geographical areas’* with *‘a distinct and recognisable local identity’*. The SESRO EIA Scoping Report has identified key LCAs in the National Landscape with the potential to be indirectly affected by the Project:

- Downs Plain and Scarp: 5C Hendred Plain
- Downs Plain and Scarp: 5F Liddington - Letcombe Open Scarp

3.1.2 At a district scale, the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and its setting is covered by the Vale of White Horse Landscape Character Assessment (Hankinson Duckett Associates on behalf of Vale of White Horse District Council, 2017) and the South Oxfordshire Landscape Character Assessment (South Oxfordshire District Council, 2017). At the time of writing, Vale of White Horse District Council had completed consultation on its Reg 19 Local Plan. A revised landscape character assessment forms part of the evidence base, which is currently under review and will be considered within the landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) for the EIA.

##### Project Level Landscape Character Assessment

3.1.3 The SESRO EIA Scoping Report (J696-AJ-A02X-ZZZZ-RP-EN-100100, Thames Water, 2024) explains that project level LCAs will be identified as part of the LVIA *‘to provide an appropriate and consistent level of scale for the purposes of the assessment’*.

3.1.4 The project-level LCAs are being developed, based on refined LCAs from the published district level Vale of White Horse District Landscape Character Assessment (Hankinson Duckett Associates, on behalf of Vale of White Horse District Council, 2017) and the South Oxfordshire Landscape Character Assessment (South Oxfordshire District Council, 2017), with reference to the North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment, where applicable. The project-level LCAs are being defined based on desktop material and field verification.

3.1.5 A proportionate approach is being adopted for defining project level LCAs,

focussing on the landscapes that would potentially be significantly affected by SESRO and the North Wessex Downs National Landscape within the extent of the study area and the footslopes / setting of the National Landscape.

- 3.1.6 Ongoing engagement with landscape stakeholders through the Landscape and Visual Technical Liaison Group (TLG), comprising NE, North Wessex Downs National Landscape, the EA, South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC), Vale of White Horse District Council (VoWHDC) and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) is being carried out in relation to the project level LCAs.

## 3.2 Visual Amenity

- 3.2.1 The SESRO EIA Scoping Report (J696-AJ-A02X-ZZZZ-RP-EN-100100, Thames Water, 2024) indicates that there are middle-distance to distant views from the vale landscape within the indicative location for SESRO towards higher ground in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, as well as views from the National Landscape back towards the vale. A series of viewpoints have been selected in the SESRO EIA Scoping Report to represent these views. Effects on these views are proposed to be assessed as part of the LVIA.



## 4 Potential Landscape and Visual Effects

- 4.1.1 This chapter provides a summary of the potential landscape and visual effects during construction and operation identified in the Gate 2 Landscape and Visual Appraisal within the SESRO Terrestrial Environmental Appraisal Report (Thames Water, 2022) and EIA Scoping Report (J696-AJ-A02X-ZZZZ-RP-EN-100100, Thames Water, 2024).

### 4.2 Potential landscape and visual effects identified in the Gate 2 Landscape and Visual Appraisal

- 4.2.1 At Gate 2, the Landscape and Visual Appraisal within the SESRO Terrestrial Environmental Appraisal Report (Thames Water, 2022) considered the potential overall effects on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and its setting. The appraisal identified that indirect effects on the National Landscape would potentially result from intervisibility with the Project, which would alter the character of the setting of the National Landscape and affect elevated views from the Ridgeway National Trail, which are key landscape characteristics of the distinctive north-facing scarp (a special quality) of this part of the National Landscape.
- 4.2.2 The appraisal concluded that, although some significant effects may result during construction and year 1 of operation, by year 15 of operation, and despite the high sensitivity of the National Landscape, indirect effects on the key characteristics and special qualities of the National Landscape would have reduced compared with the effect at winter year 1 of operation. The effect on elevated valued views from the National Landscape would also have reduced. This is because established landscape mitigation would help to integrate and soften the Project into the vale landscape within the setting of the National Landscape. It is, therefore, considered unlikely that the effects on the National Landscape would be significant long-term, assuming that appropriate mitigation is implemented.

### 4.3 Potential landscape and visual effects identified in the EIA Scoping Report

#### Construction

- 4.3.1 During construction, potential landscape and visual effects are potentially associated with:
- Large scale excavation and earthworks, including widespread earthworks for the formation of the reservoir and replacement floodplain storage
  - Movement of construction plant and machinery including cranes
  - The presence of construction compounds, temporary rail sidings and haul routes



## Outline Strategy for addressing Potential Effects on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

- Construction lighting
- Vegetation removal to facilitate construction, such as hedgerows and trees along field boundaries, as well as some woodland

4.3.2 During construction there would potentially be adverse effects on landscape character, particularly where the landscape would be directly affected. There could also potentially be indirect adverse effects from intervisibility with the large-scale construction activities for the reservoir on the wider landscape, including the scarp of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

4.3.3 Surrounding visual receptors would potentially experience adverse visual effects during construction, particularly from the edges of surrounding nearby settlements and nearby public rights of way (PRoW). There would potentially be adverse visual effects on users of the Thames Path National Trail and on views from and towards the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, including from the Ridgeway National Trail.

### 4.4 Operation

#### Winter Year 1

4.4.1 In winter year 1 the landscape mitigation planting would generally not have established.

4.4.2 There would potentially be extensive adverse effects on landscape character, particularly where the landscape would be directly affected. This would be caused by the large-scale change in landscape character, in particular the loss of farmland and vegetation, replaced by a large bunded reservoir within the flat landform. The presence of associated infrastructure, traffic and lighting, along with increased recreational use, would potentially affect the rural character of the landscape and the sense of tranquillity. Indirect effects would potentially affect the wider landscape, including the scarp of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, caused by intervisibility with the large-scale bunded reservoir and associated traffic and infrastructure, including localised lighting.

4.4.3 In winter year 1, surrounding visual receptors would potentially experience adverse visual effects as a result of the introduction of the Project, particularly from the residential edges of surrounding nearby settlements and nearby PRoW. There would potentially be adverse visual effects on users of the Thames Path National Trail and adverse effects on views from and towards the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, including from the Ridgeway National Trail.

#### Summer Year 15

4.4.4 In summer year 15 of operation, the landscape mitigation planting would have established and would help to integrate the Project into the landscape.

- 4.4.5 It is likely that the adverse landscape and visual effects identified during winter year 1 would have reduced by summer year 15, when considering the established planting. However, the permanent change in landscape character caused by the loss of farmland and introduction of a large bunded reservoir would potentially cause residual adverse landscape effects, particularly where the landscape would be directly affected. Visual effects could potentially remain in summer year 15, such as from highly sensitive receptors where the composition of the view is substantially altered or clearly noticeable.

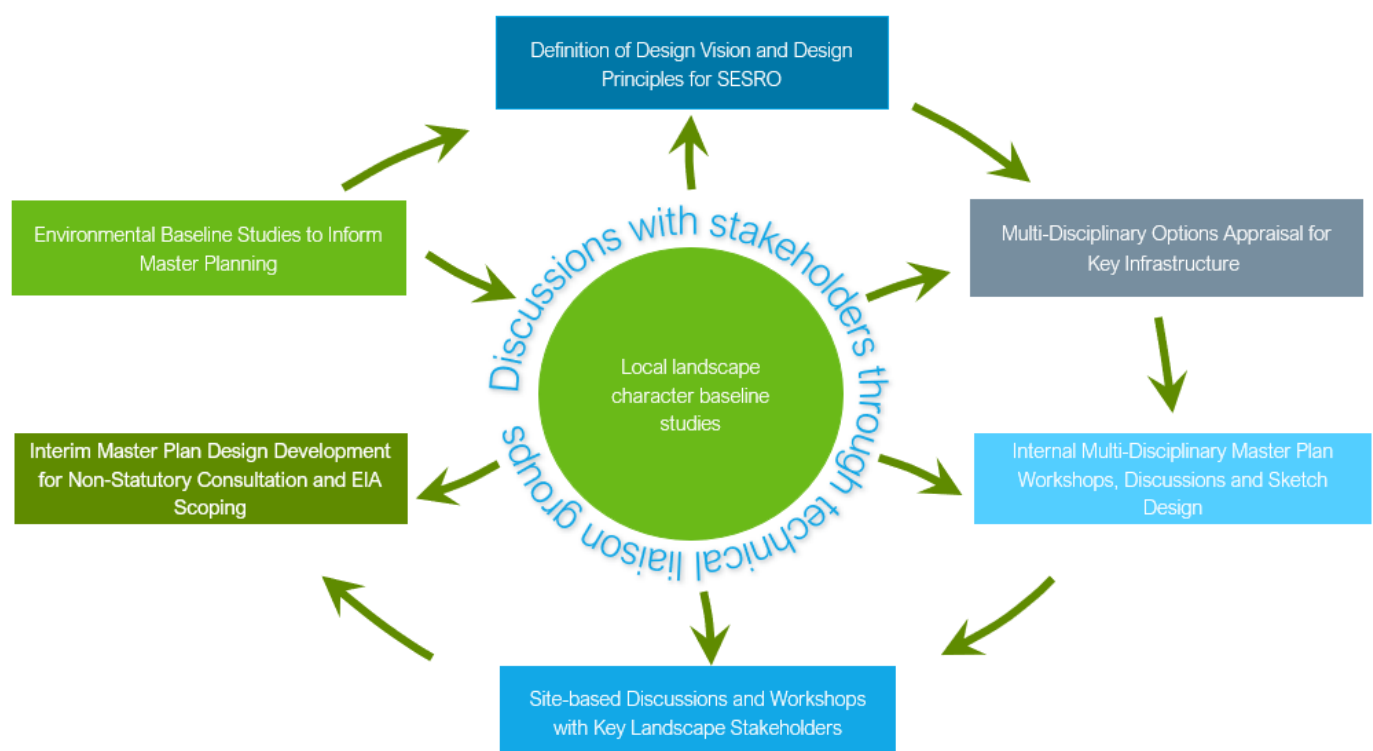
## 4.5 Conclusion

- 4.5.1 The potential landscape and visual effects reported in the EIA Scoping Report are high-level at this relatively early stage of the EIA process and do not include an assessment of effects on individual landscape and visual receptors, including sensitive receptors associated with the National Landscape. This is because further design development is required in order to complete the LVIA. However, assuming that appropriate mitigation and enhancement is implemented, as indicated on the Interim Master Plan, it is considered likely that the overall conclusions of the Gate 2 Landscape and Visual Appraisal, with regards to the National Landscape, would remain unchanged. It is, therefore, considered unlikely that effects on the National Landscape would be significant long-term.
- 4.5.2 A comprehensive LVIA, based on a refined Master Plan and confirmed mitigation, will be carried out and reported within the ES for the DCO application, ahead of the Gate 4 submission to RAPID. The LVIA will be used to inform the strategy within the Annex to the Landscape and Visual Effects chapter of the ES at Gate 4 as discussed further in Chapter 7.

## 5 Design Principles and Mitigation

- 5.1.1 A landscape and environmental led design process has been followed to develop the Interim Master Plan included in the Gate 3 main report submitted to RAPID (J696-AA-XXXX-XXXX-RP-CP-100005). This has involved the development of a design vision and overarching and zone-specific design principles, which have been informed by studies of the local landscape character, and which have subsequently informed the Interim Master Plan design. Figure 1 illustrates the Interim Master Plan design development process.

Figure 1 – Interim Master Plan Design Development Process



Source: Thames Water internal.

- 5.1.2 Elements of the Interim Master Plan design that could reduce effects on the National Landscape, its setting and its special qualities, by helping to integrate the proposals into the surrounding landscape and views and reinforce existing landscape character, include:

- The introduction of new views from new PRoW or permissive paths within SESRO towards the scarp of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.
- Removal of existing detractors in the landscape, such as solar farms.
- Sensitive design and siting of permanent buildings, structures and infrastructure.

## Outline Strategy for addressing Potential Effects on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

- Sensitive design of reservoir embankments, including curvatures within the crest alignment that provide a more natural visual waterline and gentle undulations and dips in the earthworks.
- Planting of hedgerows, small woodlands and woodland copses on the reservoir embankments, to help integrate the embankment into the surrounding landscape.
- Lagoons with marginal habitat and wet woodland for biodiversity and visual amenity enhancement at the reservoir's edge.
- Floating islands of as natural a shape as practicable to soften the reservoir edge.
- Existing vegetation along retained watercourses enhanced and gapped up with native trees and scrub.
- Characteristic pattern of wide verges with swales for road drainage and hedgerows with standard trees along the access road from the A415 Marcham Road.
- Wetland habitat mosaic with reeds, species rich wet grassland and floodplain marsh, as well as localised areas of wet woodland along the western watercourse diversion.
- Wet woodland, wetland habitat mosaic, wildlife ponds, scrapes and nature trails along the eastern watercourse diversion.
- Enhancement of existing retained hedgerows and tree belts.

5.1.3 The design principles and Master Plan for SESRO will be updated at key milestones in the design development as the Project progresses towards the DCO application. As part of this, the mitigation and enhancements incorporated into the design will continue to be developed to address potential effects on the National Landscape and further the purpose of the designation, in line with the strategy set out in chapter 7.

## 6 Consultation and Engagement

### 6.1 Background

- 6.1.1 Thames Water has been engaging with key landscape stakeholders since Gate 2 through the Landscape and Visual TLG, comprising NE, North Wessex Downs National Landscape, the EA, SODC, VoWHDC and OCC.
- 6.1.2 Focused discussion has been carried out regarding technical landscape matters. Design Principles, Master Plan development and mitigation have also been discussed. A separate site visit and Master Plan workshop with the Landscape and Visual TLG and wider representatives from the EA has been carried out.
- 6.1.3 Viewpoint locations, the approach to the LVIA and assessment criteria have been developed and refined through engagement with the Landscape and Visual TLG. The need to define project level LCAs has also been established.
- 6.1.4 Feedback from the Landscape and Visual TLG has helped to inform the Draft Design Principles for the Project (J696-AA-ZZZZ-RP-ZDP100001), related to environmental features and infrastructure, which have been developed to underpin the Master Plan. Stakeholder input has helped to shape the Interim Landscape and Environmental Master Plan (J696-AJ-A02X-ZZZZ-RP-EN-100010) and mitigation.
- 6.1.5 The key feedback of relevance to this outline strategy is set out below.

### 6.2 Consultation and Engagement Feedback

- 6.2.1 A comment was made by NE on the Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) within the South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO) Terrestrial Environmental Appraisal Report issued at Gate 2 in 2022:

*'We would like to draw the applicant's attention to the requirement for an Annex to the Landscape and Visual chapter of the ES which sets out the effects on the statutory purpose of the NWD AONB [North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, now referred to as the North Wessex Downs National Landscape], i.e. the effect of the proposed development on the 'natural beauty' of the designated landscape. The document should answer the question: **'Will the statutory purpose of the designation, underpinned by the identified special qualities as set out on the NWD-AONB Management Plan, be significantly and adversely effected by the granting of approval?'**, in order to ensure that the decision maker is able to make a fully informed decision on the acceptability of the proposed scheme.'*

- 6.2.2 Engagement on the outline strategy was carried out with the Landscape and Visual TLG in September 2024.

- 6.2.3 An outline of initial thoughts on the strategy was presented and the TLG was asked for comments, including suggestions of what else can be investigated by way of furthering the purpose of the designation. In summary, the TLG suggested that further work could be carried out on the Master Plan to align with the objectives of the North Wessex Downs Management Plan 2019 – 2024 and guidance within published landscape character assessments in order to further the purpose of the designation. Integration of the Project into the wider landscape was raised as a key need.
- 6.2.4 The TLG made suggestions related to furthering the purpose of the designation as follows. These comprised both on-site and off-site measures, including within the National Landscape.
- **Off-site enhancements and potential agreements with landowners beyond the Project boundaries.** The National Landscape have a good relationship with large landowners on the scarp, and there may be opportunities to work in partnership to achieve enhancements here. There is the potential to reach separate legal agreement for off-site works in the National Landscape.
  - **Partnership opportunities:** For example, tying in with Local Nature Recovery Strategies, such as the North Wessex Downs AONB Nature Recovery Plan and Oxfordshire's Nature Recovery Strategy which has recently been consulted upon and is expected to be published in spring 2025.
  - **Improvements to public access such as PRow and permissive paths:** The potential to improve the east/west footpath links and also to look at how the transport corridor works if the Steventon to East Hanney road moves further south, as it becomes more related to the railway, creating a double transport route. Concern that there might be less vegetation, which may make the diverted road more visible than the existing road. New Green Infrastructure work is available in the emerging local plan and will be considered.
  - **Advanced Landscape Works:** Consider early implementation of planting/phased landscape mitigation. There may be the potential to integrate advanced landscape work with protected species mitigation.
- 6.2.5 Advice will continue to be sought from stakeholders during Gate 4 to determine how the purpose of the designation can be furthered.

## 7 Outline Strategy for Addressing Potential Effects on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape at Gate 4

- 7.1.1 This chapter outlines the strategy for identifying and addressing potential effects on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape at Gate 4 in accordance with the Protected Landscapes duty's requirement *'to demonstrate with proportionate, reasoned, and documented evidence the measures to which consideration has been given when seeking to further the statutory purposes of Protected Landscapes'*.

### 7.2 Assessment of Special Qualities

- 7.2.1 The special qualities of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape are what makes it unique and they are key to the natural beauty of the protected landscape. Preliminary consideration, subject to further assessment, identifies that a small proportion of the special qualities could be indirectly affected by the Project, such as *'The distinctive northern Downs Plain and Scarp [which] plunges down from the chalk plain to the Vale of White Horse, creating a dramatic recognisable horizon'* and *'The sense of remoteness and tranquillity...'*
- 7.2.2 An assessment will, therefore, be undertaken to determine how the special qualities would change as a result of the Project. Initial appraisal work would be undertaken to identify which of the special qualities are of relevance. Many of the special qualities are unlikely to be relevant, as the National Landscape would not be directly affected by the Project. Agreement would be sought with stakeholders on the shortlist of special qualities.
- 7.2.3 Once a shortlist of special qualities has been agreed, an assessment of the likely change in special qualities would be undertaken with reference to the LVIA. For example, the assessment of the special quality relating to the 'dramatic recognisable horizon' would consider the outcome of the visual impact assessment at LVIA viewpoints facing the scarp of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. Reasoning would also be provided for the remaining special qualities to demonstrate why they would not be affected.

### 7.3 Design, Mitigation and Enhancement

- 7.3.1 The duty to *'seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area'* will be considered with regard to the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. Emerging practice will be considered as precedents. There is an opportunity to aim to further the conservation and enhancement of the National Landscape and setting during the development of the Master Plan, prior to DCO application.
- 7.3.2 Guidance on The Protected Landscapes Duty will also be considered, as well as emerging guidance regarding reservoirs from NE. Advice will continue to be



sought from stakeholders to determine how enhancement could be achieved on the Project.

- 7.3.3 As the new requirements are established through recently published Defra guidance (2024) and forthcoming guidance (from Natural England on reservoir design) and emerging practices, appropriate, reasonable and proportionate steps will be taken to implement the requirements for SESRO. This will include consideration of how measures that further the purpose of the designation can be embedded within the design principles and Master Plan, where reasonably practical and operationally feasible. An iterative design process will continue to be applied during the development of the SESRO Master Plan submitted as part of the DCO application to respond to the assessment of change on special qualities arising from the Project. This will build on the design principles and proposed mitigation measures within the SESRO Interim Master Plan described above, to determine if there are any further measures required to reduce adverse change in the special qualities. Any embedded design measures, design principles, mitigation or enhancement measures identified would be described in the Annex to the Landscape and Visual assessment chapter of the ES at Gate 4 and taken into account in the assessment of change on the special qualities arising from the Project.

#### On-site measures

- 7.3.4 Consideration will be given to on-site mitigation and enhancements, such as those presented within section 5.1.2, and opportunities for early measures such as planting.

#### Off-site measures

- 7.3.5 Consideration will also be given to enhancements, in addition to mitigation, outside of the Gate 4 Master Plan order limits. Measures will seek to help to deliver the aims and objectives of the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan (refer to paragraph 2.3.3), for example, consideration will be given to measures such as extensions to chalk grassland habitat and restoration of areas of wood pasture. Measures will also be informed by the North Wessex Downs AONB Nature Recovery Plan (refer to paragraph 2.5.1), along with Oxfordshire's Nature Recovery Strategy which is due to be published in spring 2025.
- 7.3.6 Other enhancements could include, but are not limited to, exploring the potential to:
- Provide landscape enhancements within the National Landscape and/or adjacent to the site and in the wider area such as planting of woodland blocks to enhance the character of the National Landscape and/or integrate the reservoir into the wider landscape
  - Improve public access including PRow, permissive paths and cycle networks to link to and from SESRO



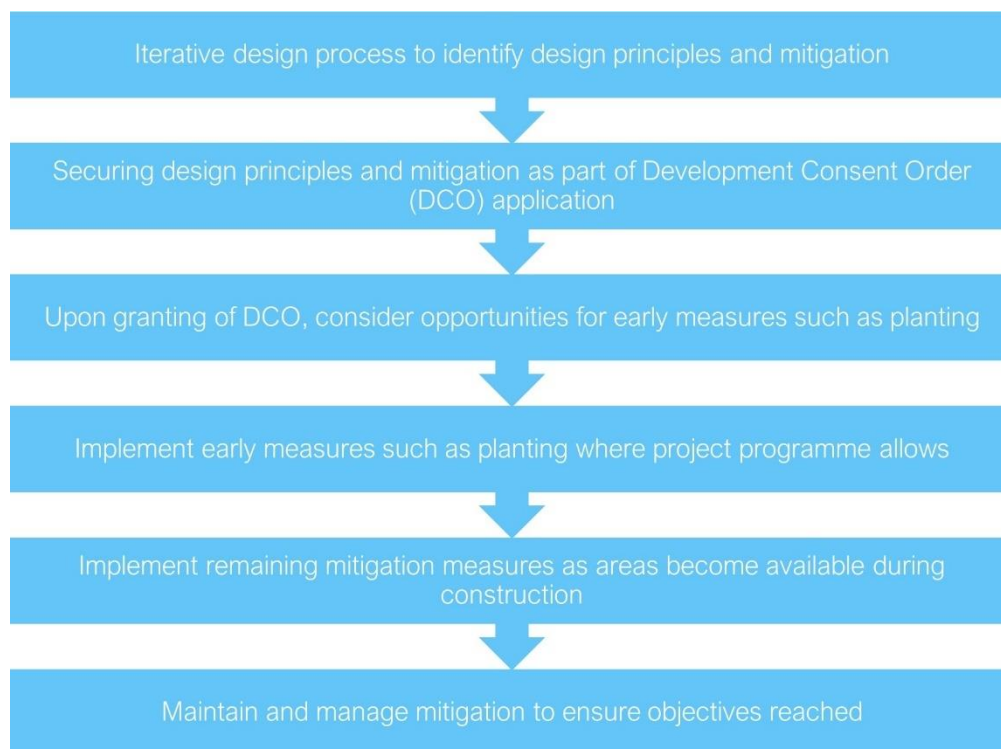
## Outline Strategy for addressing Potential Effects on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

- Provide water catchment enhancements upstream to improve water quality
- Explore integrated flood mitigation solutions, to contribute to water catchment enhancements downstream of SESRO.

### Timetable for implementation

- 7.3.7 An indicative strategy for how mitigation measures would be implemented/ a timetable for implementation is illustrated in Figure 2 below. Where measures fall outside the order limits of SESRO, mechanisms would be explored to secure these. This could for example be by agreement or covenants with landowners. Further details would be provided in the Annex to the Landscape and Visual Assessment chapter of the ES at Gate 4.

Figure 2 – Indicative Flowchart Outlining Implementation of Mitigation



Source: Thames Water internal.

## 7.4 Effects on the Statutory Purpose of the Protected Landscape

- 7.4.1 The LVIA for the Project will be reported within the ES for the DCO application, ahead of the Gate 4 submission to RAPID. Once the assessment of the likely change arising from the Project on the relevant special qualities of the National Landscape has been made in line with Section 7.2, a final assessment will be made as to whether the statutory purpose of the designation and the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape would be significantly adversely affected by the SESRO Project. This will consider all changes in the relevant special qualities together and the nature and extent of these changes,

## Outline Strategy for addressing Potential Effects on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

taking into account design principles and mitigation measures to reduce adverse change and enhancements to further the purpose of the protected landscape.

## 8 Summary and Conclusion

- 8.1.1 The North Wessex Downs National Landscape is located over 2km south of SESRO. As such, the Project may indirectly affect the National Landscape. This report has considered the RAPID requirements for an outline strategy for addressing the potential effects at Gate 3, setting out the proposed approach for the strategy for an Annex to the Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment of ES chapter at Gate 4.
- 8.1.2 Engagement with relevant stakeholders on the approach to the strategy, including suggestions for how the Project could further the purpose of the National Landscape designation in line with the duty on relevant authorities introduced by the LURA 2023. There are no firm precedents at the time of writing that demonstrate how a development has furthered the purpose of a designated landscape or guidance to follow on how to achieve this, although this is likely to emerge during Gate 4. Stakeholder engagement will continue as the Project progresses towards DCO application.
- 8.1.3 In summary, at Gate 4 it is proposed to set out the nature and extent of all changes to the relevant special qualities of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, taking into account design principles and mitigation measures that will continue to be developed to reduce adverse change and enhancements to further the purpose of the designation. Consideration will be given to both on-site and potential off-site measures within the wider landscape, including potentially within the National Landscape.

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## Outline Strategy for addressing Potential Effects on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

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## Appendix A - Special Qualities of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

A.1.1 Appendix Table A.1 lists the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, extracted from the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 (North Wessex Downs AONB, 2019).

Appendix Table A.11 – Special Qualities of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

Special Qualities
Theme: Landscape
<i>'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.</i>
<i>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.</i>
<i>Centred 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.</i>
<i>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.</i>
<i>The distinctive northern Downs Plain and Scarp plunges down from the chalk plain to the Vale of White Horse, creating a dramatic recognisable horizon.</i>
<i>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.</i>
<i>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.</i>
<i>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'.</i>
Theme: Rural land management

## Outline Strategy for addressing Potential Effects on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

Special Qualities
<i>'A landscape under the influence of agricultural management with typically large farmed estates, a high proportion of which are engaged in agri-environment agreements.</i>
<i>Varied field patterns; the open downlands are characterised by large regular fields, largely the product of 18th century Parliamentary enclosure, with more recent boundary removals creating vast fields, as on the Marlborough Downs. By contrast, the Vale of Pewsey in the south west of the AONB is the product of medieval clearance which created numerous, small, irregularly-shaped fields or assarts.</i>
<i>Stock fencing and extant hedgerows in the vales and river valleys containing some mature trees.</i>
<i>A growing forestry sector and different types of woodland, many with public access. Although oak and ash are the main forest canopy species there is a wide range of stand types including hornbeam coppice, oak/ash stands, hazel oak stands, and birch and ash/wych elm coppice.</i>
<i>Equestrian activity, including the 'Valley of the Racehorse' in the Lambourn area that attracts visitors and businesses.</i>
<i>Significant land management for field sports, including highly valued game fishing which supports the native brown trout'.</i>
Theme: Biodiversity
<i>'Designated wildlife sites that are home to rare habitats and species, including:</i> <i>A nationally significant area of chalk grassland including rare flora such as field fleawort, bastard toadflax, musk orchid and burnt orchid, early gentian, chalk eyebright, Chiltern gentian, dwarf mouse-ear, tuberous thistle and round-headed rampion; invertebrates such as the wart-biter cricket and important butterfly populations including Adonis blue, silver-studded blue, marsh fritillary, chalkhill blue, small blue, silver-spotted skipper and Duke of Burgundy fritillary.</i> <i>Substantial areas of broadleaved woodland and wood pasture, including a significant concentration of ancient woodlands, which provide roosting and/or feeding sites for bat species including Bechstein's, barbastelle, greater horseshoe and noctule; long rotation hazel coppice that provides important habitat for mammals such as dormice; concentrations of calcareous bluebell woods; and a number of nationally scarce moss species.</i> <i>Rare chalk streams and rivers with a high diversity of aquatic plants and invertebrate species including those that are nationally scarce, such as the white-clawed crayfish, supporting nationally and locally scarce bird species, mammals including otters and nationally declining water voles, and healthy fish populations including brown trout, salmon, grayling, perch, chub and dace.</i> <i>Arable habitats which are home to rare and colourful arable weeds, such as dense flowered-fumitory, slender tare and shepherd's needle, which are dependent on a regular cropping regime. Arable land use also provides feeding and breeding habitat for a number of rare and declining farmland birds including skylarks and stone-curlews.</i> <i>A rich mosaic of associated wetland habitats creating distinctive valley landscapes including fens, floodplains, water meadows, carr and wet woodland. As an example, the Red Data Book plant summer snowflake survives in seasonally flooded woodlands along the Kennet Valley'.</i>

## Outline Strategy for addressing Potential Effects on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

Special Qualities
<i>Opportunities for landscape-scale conservation that crosses boundaries.</i>
Theme: Historic environment
<i>'Neolithic and Bronze Age ritual and funerary monuments including Knap Hill and Windmill Hill causewayed enclosures; West Kennet and Wayland's Smithy chambered tombs; Silbury Hill; Avebury stone circle and its surrounding ceremonial landscape; Bronze Age round barrows including Seven Sisters and Seven Barrows groups.</i>
<i>Iron Age, Roman and post-Roman defences and settlements, including Oldbury, Barbury Castle and Uffington Castle; Cunetio (Mildenhall) Roman town, Littlecote villa and the Roman road through Savernake Forest; Fyfield and Overton Down field systems; Wansdyke, Grim's Ditch and Devil's Ditch linear earthworks.</i>
<i>Medieval and post-medieval settlements and buildings, including castle earthworks, tithe barns, parish churches, and the layouts and historic buildings of Marlborough, Hungerford, Ramsbury and many smaller villages.</i>
<i>Country houses and landscaped parks and gardens such as at Basildon Park, Highclere Castle, Tottenham House and Ramsbury Manor and Savernake Forest, many originating as medieval deer parks.</i>
<i>Post-medieval buildings and infrastructure including the Kennet and Avon Canal; extant and former railway lines and tunnels; watermills, windmills and pumping stations; water meadows; 18th/19th-century planned farmsteads; First and Second World War airfields, pillboxes, ammunition dumps and practice trenches'.</i>
Theme: Natural resources
<i>'Cretaceous, Tertiary and Quaternary geological features like Sarsen Stones.</i>
<p><i>This geology in turn influences the main soil types of the North Wessex Downs:</i></p> <p><i>Thin chalk soils of the open downland, now primarily under arable production.</i></p> <p><i>The capping of Quaternary Clay with Flints over the chalk found as pockets of reddish brown clay containing flint pebbles. These areas are particularly characteristic of the Downland with Woodland and Wooded Plateau Landscape Character Types.</i></p> <p><i>Quaternary Coombe deposits found where accumulated frost-weathered debris was carried down slope by melt waters at the end of the last glaciation. These have created till deposits in the dry valleys of the downs providing richer pockets of soil, often under arable production.</i></p> <p><i>Deep well-drained loamy soils over Greensand and river alluviums in the Vale of Pewsey, traditionally under pasture with large areas forming winter flood meadows.</i></p> <p><i>A mixed soil mosaic to the east of Newbury with nutrient-poor acidic soils over plateau gravels intermixed with fertile loamy soils overlying the London Clay, characterised by the Medieval landscape of the Lowland Mosaic Landscape Character Type.</i></p>



## Outline Strategy for addressing Potential Effects on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

Special Qualities
<i>Carbon storage in the characteristic habitats of the North Wessex Downs such as chalk grassland and broadleaved woodland.</i>
<i>Rivers with shallow sloping banks, clean shallow ‘washed’ river gravel beds (riffles) contrasting with deeper shaded pools.</i>
<i>Often a complex pattern of river channels (as on the Kennet downstream of Marlborough) reflecting the past use of the river to supply water to an extensive network of water meadows and mills, most of which are now disused. Upper winterbourne sections and winterbourne tributaries, flowing only during winter and spring when groundwater levels are at their highest.</i>
<i>Clear natural water fed from the chalk aquifer by springs which issue in the valleys of the chalk dip slope at the point where the water table comes to the surface. Limited fluctuations in water temperature throughout the year, resulting from the filtration of groundwater as it percolates through the chalk’.</i>
Theme: Development
<p><i>‘The sense of remoteness and tranquillity that comes from an undeveloped and rural quality with only limited human intervention, containing typically modest villages with distinctive and ancient settlement patterns:</i></p> <p><i>The Open Downland, Downland with Woodland and High Chalk Plain areas are generally very sparsely populated, containing scattered isolated farms, equestrian establishments or small hamlets sheltering in the dry valleys and folds of the chalk upland.</i></p> <p><i>Wooded Plateau contains a distinct pattern of settlement comprising a remote ‘uninhabited’ western plateau, smaller settlements such as Froxfield and a concentration of villages in the east of the area, in the valley of the River Dun.</i></p> <p><i>In the Downs Plain and Scarp character area, attractive springline villages cluster along the base of the northern ridge or along the valley of Avebury Plain. 20th century military installations, including Wroughton Airfield and a First World War camp near Draycot Foliat, are dominant and defining features of the area.</i></p> <p><i>The Vales are settled landscapes with a concentration of compact small towns, clustered villages, hamlets and many dispersed residential and farm buildings, while the River Valleys display a concentration of nucleated and linear settlement including tiny hamlets clustered around a church, many small villages and market towns.</i></p> <p><i>The Lowland Mosaic remains one of the most densely settled Landscape Character Types, with a diverse range of settlements ranging from large manor houses, villages, numerous hamlets and lines of houses along the roads and lanes.</i></p> <p><i>Distinctive architectural styles that vary throughout the AONB but within specific areas create a sense of place and vernacular local character due to the availability of local building materials and traditional building styles. This includes traditional knapped flint and brick, timber-framed farm buildings, thatch and tiled roofs, use of Sarsen Stone, blue flint and tile, and clunch and cobb walls.</i></p>

## Outline Strategy for addressing Potential Effects on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

Special Qualities
<i>A sparse road network, but with good access from a number of economically significant towns such as Swindon, Andover, Whitchurch, Basingstoke, Reading, Devizes, Newbury and Didcot, resulting in an economy that is largely 'outward looking' towards these 'boundary towns' and beyond.</i>
<i>Within the North Wessex Downs, the traditional land based and rural economy contrasts with a growing high tech and creative sector'.</i>
Theme: Communities
<i>'Containing a dispersed and small population spread over a large area; the majority live in the small villages and the two market towns of Marlborough and Hungerford, with the high downs including large expanses without any significant habitation. The number of young people within villages is declining as they relocate to areas with better service provision and cheaper housing, resulting in a higher proportion of middle-aged and elderly people.</i>
<i>Unemployment is low and economic activity rates are high, with many jobs in high value-added industries within a short journey from villages in the AONB. Swindon, Newbury and Basingstoke in particular have developed international reputations within the ICT industry with some of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. The economic influence of London, the Thames Valley and north Hampshire is most keenly felt to the south-east and east of the AONB and in particular those villages with good access to mainline stations.</i>
<i>The Armed Forces still play a significant role in the local economy, especially in places such as Tidworth and Ludgershall to the south of the AONB on the Wiltshire/ Hampshire border.</i>
<i>Good access to the wider area and road network means that much of the AONB is highly accessible to commuters working in the adjacent towns. The east of the AONB – West Berkshire, Basingstoke and Deane, and South Oxfordshire – has greater pressure on housing stock and recruitment than the west of the region.</i>
<i>There is a well-structured and resourced farming industry, with substantial assets of land, machinery, knowledge and entrepreneurial ability. Many examples of diversification into food processing, tourism and provision of space for economic activity can be seen across the North Wessex Downs.</i>
<i>Villages and small towns enjoy a strong sense of identity and wellbeing linked to the historic landscape, with active and resourceful community groups.</i>
<i>There is a strong local resonance and affinity with the landscape of the North Wessex Downs, particularly the individual downs and river valleys, and other outstanding features'.</i>
Theme: Tourism, Leisure and access

## Outline Strategy for addressing Potential Effects on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

Special Qualities
<i>'Some of the finest cultural landscape in England including chalk downland, river valleys, ancient woodland, historic sites. There is recognition of the landscape in literature and the arts, with locations such as Watership Down, Uffington White Horse and the Wittenham Clumps inspiring well known works.</i>
<i>Historic attractions reflecting the industrial and socioeconomic history of the area including the Kennet and Avon Canal, Didcot and Swindon Railway Museums, Crofton Beam Engines and the Wilton Windmill.</i>
<i>Picturesque market towns and small villages with independent shops, superb pubs, restaurants and plenty of B&amp;Bs and hotels. A growing reputation for local food and produce.</i>
<i>Rich archaeological history and evidence of our ancestors that can be found in greater concentrations than in much of the rest of the country.</i>
<i>Great country houses at Highclere, Basildon Park, Littlecote and Ashdown and the medieval, Norman and Saxon churches.</i>
<i>An extensive rights of way network offering many opportunities for quiet enjoyment of the countryside away from crowds, by ramblers, cyclists and horse-riders, including the Thames Path and Ridgeway National Trails, access land, commons and accessible woodland.</i>
<i>A 'hot spot' for antiques between the towns of Hungerford, Marlborough and the village of Pewsey'.</i>

Source: North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan.



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