

# North Herts Landscape Study (Character, Sensitivity and Capacity)



This document is based on the original Landscape Character Assessment work carried out by Bابتie in 2004 and the subsequent Sensitivity and Capacity work carried out by The Landscape Partnership in 2011.

The original location, assessment and evaluation remain the same. The later work adds sensitivity and capacity to the evaluation and additional guidelines on built development guidelines to supplement the landscape management guidelines. Additional information on the methodology are also included.

North Herts Landscape Study (Character, Sensitivity & Capacity) was agreed in 2011 as background evidence to support the LDF.

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### 1.1 Background

In April 2002 North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) and Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) commissioned Jacobs Babbie (formerly the Babbie Group) to undertake the landscape character assessment of the District and the rural parts of Stevenage in accordance with current national guidance. The assessment process also required consultation with stakeholder groups.

The Landscape Character Assessment was adopted by NHDC as the Council's agreed Landscape Character Assessment for the District in March 2005. The information will be used for:

- Advising on development control matters for both NHDC and SBC
- Policy development for future development plans
- Providing a framework for other landscape planning
- Countryside conservation and management activities, access and recreation projects and support to grant applications

### 1.2 NHDC Policy

The context for Landscape Character Assessment is set out in PPG7 which states that the character approach 'should help in accommodating necessary change without sacrificing local character. It can help ensure that development respects or enhances the distinctive character of the land and the built environment'.

North Herts District Local Plan no. 2 with Alterations recognises the importance of using distinctiveness in landscape character. Policy 12 – Landscape Conservation, Improvement and Creation requires development to fit into the landscape and to add to the character of North Hertfordshire's landscapes.

Stevenage Borough Local Plan policy EN23 – Landscape Conservation Areas refers to the Hertfordshire Landscape Strategy and the need to maintain and enhance landscape features.

### 1.3 Context

The Countryside Agency in conjunction with English Nature has published a document called *The Character of England – Landscape, Wildlife and Natural Features (1996)*. The assessment divided England into 181 areas of landscape of broadly consistent character linked to natural areas of distinctive wildlife value (see Figure 1).

The physical influences assessed included geological, topographical and soil base factors. The effects of human activity, namely the cultural and historical influences, which affect the appearance of the landscape, were also considered. In particular data was obtained from English Nature and English Heritage and contributing significantly to the assessment process. Further relevant background information can be obtained from the document published by Hertfordshire County Council – *A Landscape Strategy for Hertfordshire, Volume 1*.

North Hertfordshire District comprises two nationally recognised Character Areas.

- 87 East Anglian Chalk – the eastern part of the District
- 110 Chilterns – the area west of Stevenage

In addition small fragments of the following Character Areas are also represented:

- 86 South Suffolk and North Essex Claylands – occurring in the vicinity of the southern District boundary to the east of Stevenage.
- 88 Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands – a small salient in the north
- 111 North Thames Basin – in the Knebworth area



**Figure 1**  
The Character of England



The transition between the two main areas occurs along a line running broadly between Letchworth and Stevenage following the valley through the Chilterns escarpment commonly referred to as the Stevenage Gap.

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) has recognised that the level of detail provided by the nationally based assessment was inappropriate for the evolution of County and District level policy and guidance. In recent years a more detailed landscape character assessment has been undertaken in southern Hertfordshire. The work undertaken by Jacobs Babbie for NHDC and SBC now extends the coverage to the north of the county.

### 1.4 The Landscape Strategy for Hertfordshire

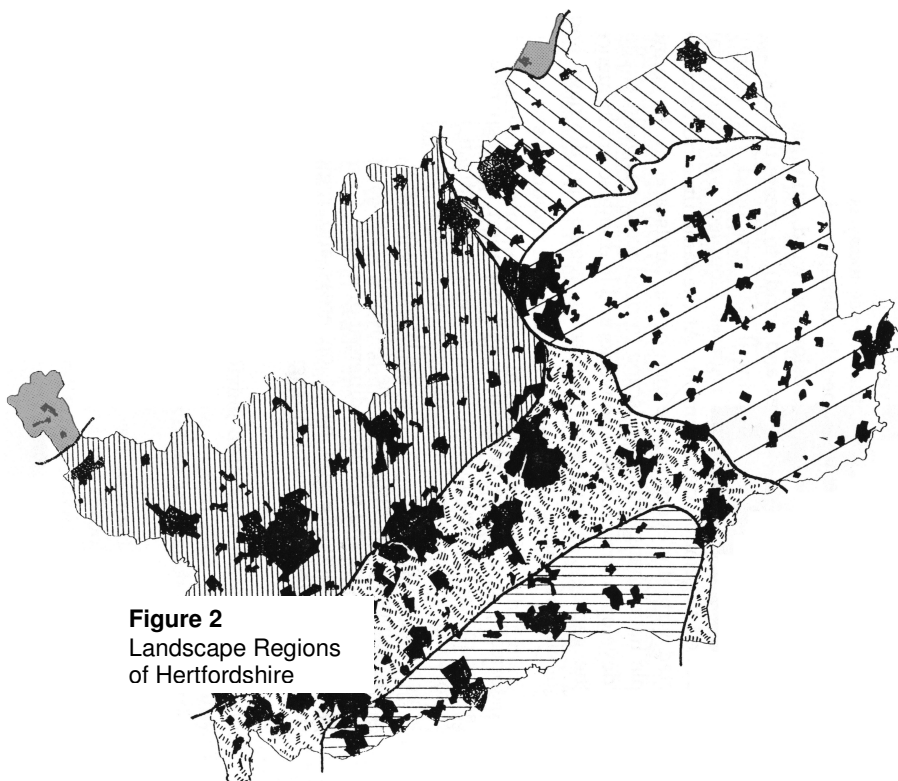
The County Structure Plan makes reference to Volume 1 of the Landscape Strategy for Hertfordshire (1998). The strategy identified six county based regions (Character Areas) which correspond to sub-divisions of the national Character Areas, illustrated on the Character Map of England (see Figure 1). North Hertfordshire covers the following regions:

- Region 1 The Northern Vale Salients
- Region 2 The Chilterns
- Region 3 The East Anglian Chalk
- Region 4 The East Hertfordshire Plateau

### 1.5 North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment (see Figure 2)

The District based landscape character assessment has looked in more detail at the many physical and cultural differences that combine to make up the regions at county level. Character Areas within North Hertfordshire and Stevenage are made up of broadly homogeneous areas of landscape identified through desk based study, site based appraisal and stakeholder participation.

Robust and consistent observation and analysis has produced 37 Character Areas. This document seeks to identify the distinctive characteristics of these landscapes as a basis for policies and action plans to reinforce and conserve the landscape character and distinctiveness.

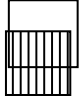


**Figure 2**  
Landscape Regions  
of Hertfordshire





Region 1: The Northern Vale Salients. A transition zone between the Chilterns scarp face and the adjacent open plains (Oxfordshire and Bedfordshire)



Region 2: The Chilterns



Region 3: The East Anglian Chalk (North Hertfordshire Ridge). A sub-section of the Chilterns



Region 4: The East Hertfordshire Plateau. (The South Suffolk and North Essex Claylands).

Region 5: The Central River Valleys. A sub-section of the Northern Thames Basin.

Region 6: The South Hertfordshire Plateau. A sub-section of the Northern Thames Basin.

### 2.1 Geology

The key geological influence in North Hertfordshire and Stevenage is the lower cretaceous Chalk, an extensive strata which continues under the southeast of England. The northern edge of the Chalk is represented by the chalk scarp which extends from Barton-le-Clay in the west to beyond Steeple Morden in the northeast (both of which lie outside the District). Running parallel and mainly to the north of the District is an exposed band of Gault clay which lies under the Chalk. The Chalk extends southwards, beyond the District boundary to a line running between Welwyn Garden City and Bishops Stortford, where the Chalk disappears below the London clay.

There are three types of quaternary deposit within North Hertfordshire and Stevenage. These include:

- Sand and gravels laid down by glacial meltwaters
- Clay with flints resulting from natural weathering process and containing a high proportion of flints and gravels
- Boulder clay and glacial drift deposits laid down by glaciers during the second Ice Age

These deposits come together at the Stevenage Gap. The Langley Valley which lies to the west of Stevenage is a large channel carved out by glacial meltwaters where the sand and gravel deposits laid down by the retreating ice remain. To the east of the valley lie the Boulder clay deposits. This represents the southern extent of the glacial cover from the last Ice Age. West of the Stevenage Gap is the area that lay outside of the zone of glacial cover and there the light chalky soils incorporate weathered flints and gravels.

### 2.2 Soils

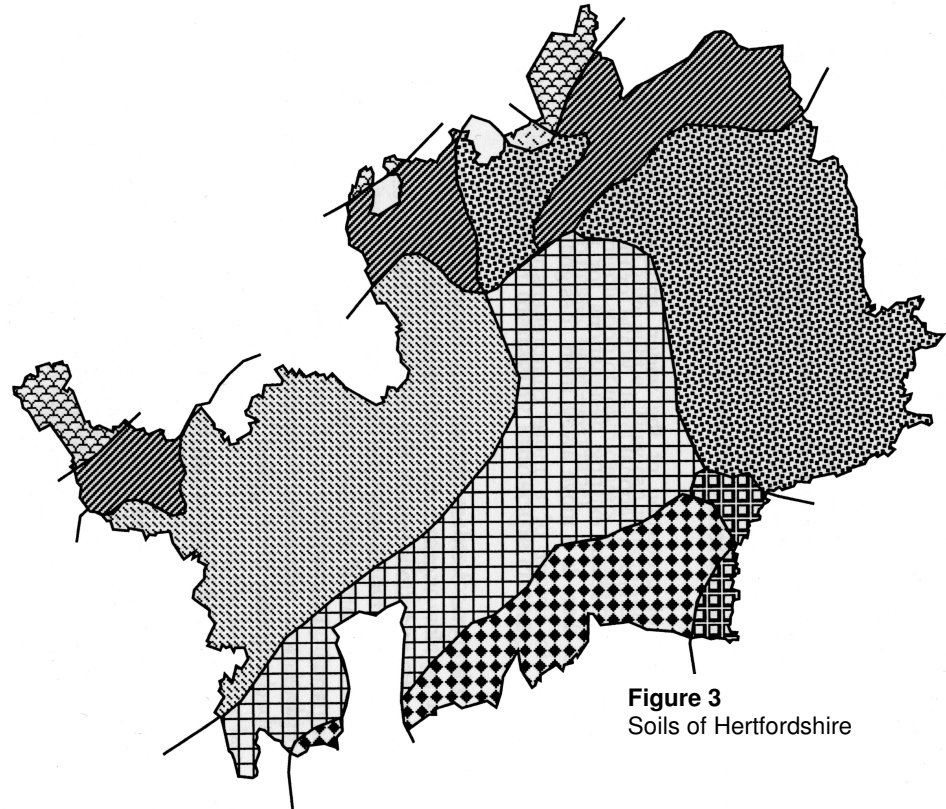
Figure 3 illustrates the soils found within Hertfordshire. The northern edge of the District includes a complex arrangement of varying soil types associated with the lowland landscapes extending north of the District, these include:

- Stagnogley soils - clayey soils and non-calcareous loams. These are located in the north of the District covering a larger area around Hinxworth and two smaller fragments north of Hexton and north west of Pirton
- Brown Earths - well drained loamy soils usually over gravel. A single area of brown earths occur north of Letchworth
- Rendzinas - well drained shallow chalky soils. These lie in three locations, covering a broad band extending across the whole northern part of the District.

In the south of the District and around Stevenage there are three main soil types.

- Paleo Argillic Brown Earths: Associated - Agrillic brown earths and stagnogley. Deep well drained loamy soils over clay with associated pockets of chalk soils over gravel sometimes with impeded drainage. Stevenage lies mainly within this area.
- Calcareous Pelosols - permeable chalky clay soils, often stony. Extending in a broad band over the plateau landscape stretching from Stevenage to the southeast corner of the District.
- Paleo Argillic Brown Earths: Associated – Brown calcareous earths and agrillic brown earths. Loamy or silty soils over clay, associated with calcareous soils. These soils occupy the southwest corner of the District.

## 2.0 Physical Features of the Landscape



**Figure 3**  
Soils of Hertfordshire



**Rendzinas:** Associated – Brown Calcareous earths and argillic or paleo-argillic earths. Parent material: chalk and associated drift. Character: well drained, shallow chalky soils, with deeper loamy or clayey/flinty soils.



**Paleo Argillic Brown Earths:** Associated – Brown calcareous earths and argillic brown earths. Parent material Pleateau (clay with flints) and associated drift over chalk. Character: Deep well drained to moderately well drained loamy (usually silty) over clayey or occasionally clayey soils with associated less clayey or calcareous soils.



**Stagnogley Soils:** Associated – Calcareous pelosols and brown earth. Parent material: Jurassic or cretaceous clay and associated drift. Character clayey soils and non-calcareous loamy or loamy over clayey soils.



**Calcareous Pelosols:** Associated – Stagnogley soils and argillic brown earths. Parent material: chalky glacial drift. Character: Slowly permeable, well structured, calcareous clayey soils, associated with non calcareous clayey soils with impeded drainage or less clayey better drained soils, often stony.



**Brown Earths:** Associated – Argillic brown earths and alluvial gley soils. Parent material: River-terrace drift and associated alluvium. Character: Deep or moderately deep, well-drained loam soils, locally shallow over gravel associated with clayey or loamy soils with high ground water.



**Paleo Argillic Brown Earths:** Associated – Argillic brown earths and stagnogley soils. Parent material: Glacial, glaciofluvial or river-terrace drift and associated brick earth. Character: Deep well-drained to moderately well-drained loamy (often silty) or loamy over clayey soils, usually stony and locally shallow over gravel. Associated with loamy over clayey soils with impeded drainage.



**Stagnogley soils:** Associated – Argillic brown earths or brown earths. Parent material: Cretaceous or Tertiary clay and associated drift. Character: Clayey or loamy over clayey soils with impeded drainage, associated locally with better-drained mainly loamy soils.



**Argillic Brown Earths:** Associated: Paleo argillic brown earths and alluvial gley soils. Parent material: River-terrace drift, brick earth and associated alluvium. Character: Deep well-drained loamy (often silty) soils, locally stony or shallow over gravel, associated with poorly-drained and clayey soils with high ground water.

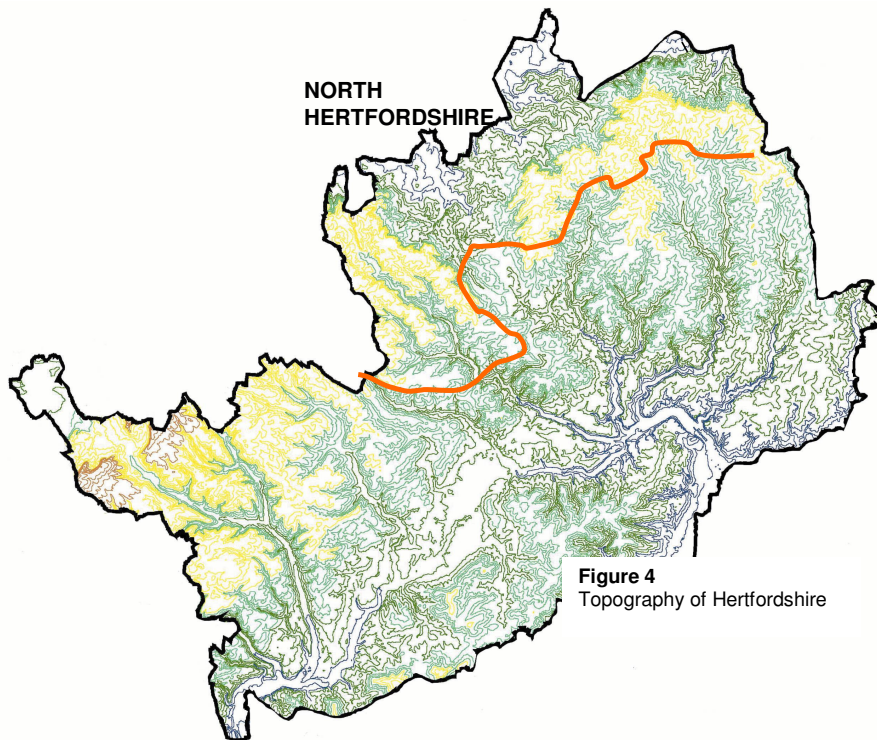
## 2.0 Physical Features of the Landscape

### 2.3 Topography

North Hertfordshire and Stevenage occupy the upland area of the Chilterns scarp and chalk plateau. The scarp extends from the western boundary of the District, north of Luton running east to Royston and continuing eastwards beyond the District boundary. The Icknield Way path which traditionally followed the scarp edge is much in evidence, following various routes such as the Upper Icknield Way and the Lower Icknield Way. The Stevenage Gap is a broad valley that cuts through the scarp, having been eroded by post glacial melt waters. Telegraph Hill and Deacon Hill, south of Hexton are the highest points on the scarp. In the east of the district the scarp becomes shallower and less distinct.

North of the scarp lies the Midlands lowland. South of the scarp lies the chalk plateau which dips gently to the southeast and the Thames Valley. Numerous valleys drain off the chalk plateau contributing to the Thames catchment and feeding into the Thames via the Mimram, the Beane and the Rib valleys. These three tributaries flow into the Lee valley at Hertford, which subsequently feeds the Thames on the east side of London.

A particular characteristic of the chalk landscape is the number of dry valley, some of which have been deeply incised and resulting in a locally undulating landform.



**Figure 4**  
Topography of Hertfordshire

### 3.1 History

Early activity was focused to the south of the county in the lower Lea and Colne river corridors. As sea and river levels began to rise, the more densely wooded upland areas of the Chilterns to the west and northwest began to be colonised. This trend continued into the Neolithic period characterised by the appearance of ritual monuments in the landscape such as long barrows, of which a good example is located at Therfield Heath, Royston. Large areas of woodland underwent clearance during the Bronze Age and round barrow cemeteries were constructed in prominent positions in the landscape. By the later Bronze Age the concern with marking out territories took the form of linear banks and hill-forts such as Wilbury Hill and Arbury Banks. The Late Bronze Age growth in population continued in the Iron Age and concerns with ownership of land are visible in the large scale hill-fort of Ravensburgh Castle, Hexton.

With the Roman invasion a series of new structures was imposed on the landscape of Hertfordshire. A network of roads linked the developing urban and commercial centres such as Verulamium, Welwyn, Braughing, Ware and Baldock. Running through the north of the county were Ermine Street and Stane Street along which smaller settlements developed. Roman style towns such as Baldock developed on the sites of existing native settlements. Developments in the countryside focused on the villas which provided produce for these towns. Known villa sites are located on south facing slopes of the Chilterns and examples can be found in the vicinity of Letchworth and Hitchin.

During the 9<sup>th</sup> century the River Lea represented the boundary between Danelaw and the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex. This resulted in differing settlement patterns and associated land management expressed by place names and the existence of villages and greens to the east and large areas of common land to the west of the county. During the late Anglo-Saxon period there were many very large estates in the county composed of a central manor with subordinate or dependent parts. The manor of Hitchin held 12 dependencies including Hexton which was forcibly attached by King Harold.

During the Norman period motte and bailey castles were constructed and good examples can be found at Hertford and Berkhamsted Castles and in North Hertfordshire at Pirton and Great Wymondley Castle where they dominated existing settlements. The 12<sup>th</sup> century also witnessed a boom in church building and re-building and many churches in the district retain fabric from this time. Another feature of the medieval period demonstrating the wealth of the county are the many moated sites associated with wealthy farms and manors. Hunting parks for the procurement of food also became major features of the medieval landscape and traces of these can still be found in the modern landscape. At a lower social level, the distribution of deserted medieval villages demonstrates a higher frequency in the north of the county where the farming land was poorer.

In the post-medieval period Hertfordshire began to be favoured as a location for country retreats by the aristocracy and landed gentry who otherwise lived in London. A great many monastic houses were converted such as Hitchin Priory and Wymondley. By the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century new country houses such as Cassiobury, Gorbambury, Knebworth and Theobalds were being constructed reflecting the shift in ownership of the land from the church. The associated parks were increasingly ornamental and Theobalds created under James I became very influential.

During the post-medieval period the major industries of the county were predominantly brewing, malting and papermaking. These manufacturers supplied the ever growing London markets and influenced the network of transportation that emerged during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The land was enclosed creating a patchwork pattern of fields that have gradually been superseded by larger prairie fields visible in the landscape today.

### 3.2 Buildings and Settlement

The county does not possess good building stone and many historic buildings are constructed from brick, timber or flint with stone dressings. Pirton demonstrates many fine traditional buildings dating to the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, which employ a range of styles and materials including clunch. Many churches of the county utilise flint and freestone and have slender spires known as the 'Hertfordshire spire'. Traditionally, settlement in the north of the county has been dispersed punctuated by nucleated settlements and country estates.

However, with the development of modern Portland cement and the railways, new settlements and industries were created. The development of towns in the north of the county has been concentrated along the A1(M) and Great Northern Railway corridors. Of particular note are the early 20<sup>th</sup> century pioneering garden cities of Letchworth and Welwyn which explored new ideas in housing and urban design. By contrast the northeast of the county has seen very little modern development.

### 3.3 Transport

#### Roads

The prehistoric Icknield Way crosses the northern part of the county following the chalk spine on an east-west orientation. The Romans constructed a network of roads connecting urban and commercial centres. Ermine Street crosses the eastern part of the county and was the main strategic road connecting London with the north. Several roads linked Baldock with Ermine Street to the east and to Stane Street to the south providing communication with St Albans (Verulamium).

The Great North Road ran through Baldock and provided the first main halting stage between the capital and the north. It is thought that the increasing demands of the malting and brewing industry had an impact on the road systems. From the early 18<sup>th</sup> century the Great North Road and the turnpike system was created. Indeed, McAdam was employed as surveyor to several of these turnpike trusts.

The development of towns and the rise in car ownership in the county during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries had further impacts on the road system. The first roundabout was constructed in Letchworth in 1910 and the Welwyn Bypass, opened in 1928, was one of the first to be built in the county. The St Albans Bypass which became part of the M1 was the first motorway to be built in the south of England in 1958-9. The M1, M25 and M10 have all been constructed in the south and east of the county while the A1(M), the former Great North Road, runs through the north of the county.

#### Rivers

The rivers provided communication routes as well as power for mills. The types of industries that focused on these rivers were flour milling and wool fulling during the medieval and post-medieval period and paper milling from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century and malting from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. As London grew the industries of Hertfordshire expanded demanding better transport networks to carry agricultural produce, malt, building materials and other goods. The major rivers to the south of the county such as the Lea were improved through canalisation.

#### Railways

The railways developed in a radial pattern from London. The Great Northern Railway was constructed in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century running through Hitchin and connecting London with York.

#### Luton Airport

The footprint of Luton Airport lies outside of the District boundary, however the flight path crosses that part of the District that lies immediately to the east of the Airport. The Airport infrastructure extends into the countryside to the east. Plans for the expansion of the Airport are currently being prepared.

### 4.1 Assessment Methodology

The key elements of the method used in the study following the guidance set out in the Countryside Agency's Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland, 2002 is described below.

#### 4.1.1 Briefing and Familiarisation Tour

Following the award of the contract, an initial briefing meeting was held between North Hertfordshire District Council Planning Policy and Projects Team and key members of the project team to discuss the project brief and programme. A familiarisation tour of the study area followed to gain a flavour of the range of landscapes involved.

#### 4.1.2 Project Monitoring

The project was monitored throughout the contract period by members of the Planning Policy and Projects Team. Monitoring included the use of the following:

- Progress meeting
- Liaison by phone
- Work programme – consultant provided work plan identifying the main activities against the contract period
- Correspondence – by letter, fax and e-mail

### 4.2 Desk Study

The initial desk study was sub-contracted to Stephen Warnock, following guidance in the brief. This stage involved the division of the study area using The Living Landscape Project methodology into a number of Landscape Description Units or (LDU) identified at 1:25,000 scale. The following sets out the level of detail which was considered during the assessment process.

#### 4.2.1 Level 1

Sub-division at a national/regional scale in accordance with the Joint Character Map of England combining both Landscape Character Regions and Natural Areas. This information provides a framework for analysis at a finer grain: Levels 2 and 3.

#### 4.2.2 Level 2 : Physiography and Soils

The following topics were considered and a relevant category identified at 1:25,000 scale

##### **Topography**

Flat = F  
Low-lying = L  
Rolling/undulating = R  
Valley = V  
Sloping = S  
Upstanding/plateau = U

##### **Geology**

Fluvial-glacial and river drift = F  
Till (glacial drift) = T  
Clay = C  
Limestone/chalk = L  
Mixed = M

##### **Soils**

Sandy brown soils = S  
Brown free-draining soils = B  
Clay soils = C  
Gleyed (poorly draining) soils = G  
Mixed soils = M

The study area was divided into LDUs based on a combination of the above factors and a combined coding given, eg VLB denoting a limestone/chalk valley with brown free-draining soils.

#### 4.2.3 Level 2 : Cultural Pattern

The physiographic pattern, ie the way that man has utilised the land, also referred to as the 'cultural pattern' was then added using the following categories:

##### **Land Cover**

Urban = U  
Cropland = C  
Pastoral = P  
Rough = R

##### **Settlement Pattern**

Nucleated = N  
Clustered = C  
Dispersed = D  
Unsettled = R  
Meadow = M

### **Tree Cover**

Wooded = W  
Scrub = S  
Estate = P  
Unenclosed = U  
Secondary = S  
Open = O  
Other trees = T  
Trees and woods = A

### **Farm Type**

Large estates = E  
Large farms = F  
Small farms = S  
Unenclosed/common Land = U

### **4.2.4 Level 3 : Land Cover Coding (Scale 1:25,000)**

This information provided a further level of resolution and sub-division of the LDUs. The following categories were given:

### **Current Land Cover**

Urban = U  
Woodland = W  
Parkland = Pk  
Rough = R  
Disturbed = D  
Other = O

### **Historic Field Pattern**

Irregular = I  
Sub-regular = S  
Regular = R  
Geometric =- G  
Unenclosed = U

### **Field Size**

Small = 1  
Small-medium = 2  
Medium-large = 3  
Large = 4

All the above data was collated as a series of overlays suitable for reading against a 1:25,000 scale OS base.

## **4.3 Field Study**

### **4.3.1 Fieldwork**

The fieldwork was carried out in two phases. The area to the west of the A1(M) was surveyed as Phase 1 over the period May-June 2002. The land to the east of the A1(M) - Phase 2, was surveyed during August-September 2002.

The survey team consisted of a team of two, including a landscape architect, who was responsible for drafting the text and defining the boundaries of each character area surveyed, and another landscape-related professional. A cross-referencing process was built-in, to ensure consistency of appraisal across both the study area and the previous studies for Southern Hertfordshire and St Albans District.

### **4.3.2 Recording**

Each LDU was systematically appraised by the survey team. Field survey record sheets were used to record data. A sample of the two-page pro-forma used is included in Appendix A. The form was updated from that used in previous studies in Hertfordshire to allow for greater transparency in the completion of the Evaluation Matrix. The use of forms was supplemented by additional notes and photographic records. Both notes and photographs informed the process of drafting a description of and illustrating each character area in the final report.

## **4.4 Literature Review**

In parallel with the desk study and fieldwork a literature review was carried out. This provided background information and informed the process of defining character areas. The methodology specification in the contract documents provided an important list of suggested sources. This was supplemented by other source materials, including documents identified through stakeholder involvement, see Bibliography in Appendix B.



### 4.5 Draft Landscape Character Areas

Draft Landscape Character Areas were defined, using a combination of the results derived from the desk study and survey data from the fieldwork. This was an iterative process involving the identification of those LDUs which were character areas in their own right and those which required aggregating or subdivision on the basis of consistent landscape characteristics identified during the survey process

LDUs had been identified from consideration of the physical characteristics of landform, geology and soils. When considered on the ground the boundaries to the LDUs often did not follow obvious physical features such as the edge of a road or a woodland. During the survey process it was considered that LDU boundaries should be adjusted to follow boundaries or edges, which could be seen as being more defensible during any future planning process undertaken by the Local Authority. Under certain circumstances there was no physical boundary on the ground or in close proximity and it was then considered appropriate for a boundary to follow a contour line or a break of slope. These boundaries are identified on the Landscape Character Areas plan by a separate notation.

The assessment process leads to the placing of lines on a plan defining the boundaries to Landscape Character Areas. In certain circumstances the lines follow clearly defined changes in the appearance and character of a landscape on either side of this line, eg around the edge of a settlement. However, there is often a much subtler transition in the landscape between boundaries and elements of one landscape character area seep into an adjacent character area. In these circumstances the boundary line marks a zone of transition where the balance of defining characteristics has moved from one area to another.

When considering the boundaries of the Character Areas, as illustrated on the GIS version of this document it should be noted that boundaries have been recorded at a scale of 1:2,000 matched against a 1:10,000 Ordnance Survey base. Working at this level of detail, decisions have been made about the practical consideration of locating a boundary on a plan say in relation to which side of a property or road that boundary may lie on. These decisions rely on a combination of available OS data and field assessment but

will inevitably be subject to review and potential change in the long term. Consequently the Character Area boundaries should not be regarded as definitive, but as representing the best judgement on matters of a transitory quality.

### 4.6 Stakeholder Involvement

An important part of the landscape character assessment was the involvement of the local community. The details and outcomes of the process are set out more fully in a supplementary report. The key elements involved are set out below:

#### 4.6.1 Tier A – Community of Interest

This group included an extensive list of authorities and societies with a professional, statutory or local interest in the process, including most of those that had been involved in similar previous studies. Those who registered an interest in receiving further information were then sent draft area boundaries, with outline supporting text and invited to a meeting on 31 July 2002 for the Phase 1 areas west of the A1(M) and on 13 November 2002 for the Phase 2 areas east of the A1(M) held at North Hertfordshire District Council Offices. At these meetings attendees received a presentation on the background to landscape character assessment and details of the process underway. Attendees were also given the opportunity to discuss their views and to make suggestions on the draft information previously circulated. Other information was made available on request. The main contribution made by this category of stakeholders was to rigorously review and challenge the suggested area boundaries and to provide detailed information to populate the Character Area statements.

#### 4.6.2 Tier B – Community of Place

Views of the local community were sought via the Hertfordshire Citizens Panel. The Citizens Panel is a strictly representative cross-section of the community who have agreed to participate in a number of sampling processes. The consultation process has been co-ordinated by Hertfordshire County Council. Contributors' responses to each of the character areas will be analysed and a summary provided by Hertfordshire County Council.

### 4.7 Report Format

Following the receipt of inputs from stakeholders and the continuing literature review, the landscape character descriptions were developed into a final form. A consistent pattern was used to describe each Character Area taking the form of a nominal four to five pages of text and illustrations as set out below:

The text for the report was also provided as an Access database, to enable the GIS map data to be made interactive with the text. The data described above was delivered to the client in both hard copy and on CD-rom.

#### 4.7.1 Location

- Location – brief geographical description.
- Landscape character – summary statement of the area
- Key characteristics – main elements defining the character
- Distinctive features – individual features of note

Each Character Area is illustrated by a diagrammatic location plan and photographs of the area. (To be provided at a later date). The Character Areas are also identified on a map. This was done digitally as an ArcView 3.2 project set against a 1:10,000 scale OS base, at a resolution of 1:2000 scale. Some of the Character Areas identified were further sub-divided to show a finer level of resolution.

#### 4.7.2 Assessment

##### **Physical influences**

- Geology and soils
- Topography – including degree of slope and altitude range
- Hydrology
- Land cover and land use
- Vegetation and wildlife

##### **Historic and cultural influences**

- Field pattern and field size
- Transport pattern
- Settlement and built form

### 4.7.3 Evaluation

- Visual and sensory perception
- Rarity and distinctiveness
- Visual impact of built development
- Accessibility
- Community views
- Landscape and related designations
- Condition and robustness matrix

The evaluation process required that detailed professional judgement was given to the following criteria.

**Visual and sensory perception.** This included views to, from and within an area, the scale of elements, sense of enclosure, visual unity and noise/tranquillity. Information was largely gleaned during the field survey process and recorded on the survey sheets.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** Rarity was assessed after consideration of the frequency of the landscape type within North Hertfordshire. Distinctiveness relates to those particular landscape characteristics or features that help distinguish one landscape Character Area from another and make it special. This may have referred to individual features or the overall character. The entry for rarity and distinctiveness was added later in the report process when an overview of the whole study area was available.

**Visual impact of built development.** This identified the magnitude and extent of the impact of built features on local landscape character including settlements, roads, railways, etc. Data was gathered during the field survey and presented on the survey sheets.

**Accessibility.** A qualitative assessment of the number lengths of rights of way, areas of publicly accessible land and the presence of associated recreational activities.

**Community views.** Views of the local community have been sought by HCC and a summary will be incorporated into the final report.

**Condition and Robustness matrix.** See section 4.8 below.

### **Landscape and related designations.**

Relevant designations were collated from NHDC, HCC, English Nature and English Heritage. These include:

- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
- Landscape Conservation Areas (LC)
- Historic Parks and Gardens on the English Heritage Register (GD)
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Local Nature Reserves (LNR)
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments (visible features) (SAM)

### **4.7.4 Guidelines**

A general strategy and list of area-specific guidelines for managing change is included for each Character Area. A set of guidelines is also provided for each area that will help to guide appropriate development within the Character Area. Where Character Areas extend outside of North Hertfordshire, the guidelines only apply to land within North Hertfordshire.

### **Analysing Landscape Change**

- 4.8** In order to assess any landscape's potential ability to adapt to change without losing its intrinsic character, it is necessary to analyse the condition of the landscape and balance this against the strength of character (Robustness) as demonstrated by the more permanent elements of the landscape. Landscape condition is determined from an evaluation of the relative state (poor/moderate/good) of elements within the landscape which are subject to change, such as landuse, survival of hedgerows, extent and impact of built development. Robustness, which is also called "Strength of Character" in other assessments in Hertfordshire, is determined from an evaluation of the impact of relatively stable factors, such as landform and land cover, the apparent continuity of an historic pattern, the degree of visibility of and within the area and its distinctiveness or rarity.

Seven factors were considered for each Character Area (see 'Condition and robustness matrix' for any Character Area). Each was evaluated in the field and an entry made on the survey sheet. They were then considered against a three-point scale (poor, moderate and good for Condition, weak, moderate and strong for Robustness) and entered in the matrix table. Values for the factors on each axis were then aggregated

and a majority total applied. The resulting intersection on the matrix determined the general strategy for each Character Area (see last page of each character area description). This evaluation via matrix enables a general guideline to be determined. Once this primary assessment has been established, specific guidelines can be formulated. These will address issues within each Character Area, with a view to improving both condition and strength of character as necessary, to reinforce distinctiveness and to promote appropriate long-term management.

### 4.9 Landscape Sensitivity, Value and Capacity Sensitivity

In order to identify the suitability of each Character Area to accommodate development, the inherent landscape sensitivities for each Character Area were determined. These are key landscape attributes, features and characteristics that contribute to character and would be potentially sensitive to any type of development. Sensitivity was considered in terms of both landscape character and visual sensitivity. A professional judgement was used to define the key landscape character and visual sensitivities and develop an overall summary of the level of sensitivity for each character area on a three point scale of High, Moderate and Low. In some Character Areas, where there is variation in sensitivity across the Character Area, a range of sensitivities has been given e.g. Moderate to High or Low to Moderate

The following provides a basis for determining the sensitivity judgements. A majority of the factors under each category would need to apply to a Landscape Character Area to fall within that category.

#### High Sensitivity:

- Key features/characteristics are currently or likely to be adversely affected by future change
- Change would be likely to have an adverse impact on landscape character
- A highly valued landscape or containing highly valued components
- A landscape in good condition/of high quality, with characteristics or elements that make a strong positive contribution to landscape character
- A landscape containing landscape characteristics/elements that would be irreplaceable or difficult to replace
- A landscape that is highly visible both internally and from surrounding landscapes
- A landscape which demonstrates a unified character
- A landscape with no or few detractors

#### Moderate Sensitivity:

- Some key features/characteristics that make up the landscape are likely to be affected by future change
- Change may have an adverse impact on the landscape character
- A moderately valued landscape or containing moderately valued elements
- A landscape in moderate condition whose characteristics or elements make some positive contribution to wider landscape character
- A landscape containing landscape characteristics/elements that are likely to be replaceable to some extent
- A landscape that is partially visible both internally and from surrounding landscapes
- A landscape that retains a coherent character
- A landscape with few or moderate number of detractor

#### Low Sensitivity:

- Key features/characteristics that make up the landscape are unlikely to be adversely affected by introduction of new development/change
- Change is unlikely to have an adverse impact on landscape character overall
- A landscape of limited/low value
- A landscape in poor or declining condition whose characteristics or elements do not contribute positively to wider landscape character
- A landscape in need of restoration and development
- A landscape containing landscape characteristics/elements that are likely to be easily replaceable
- A fragmented or disjointed landscape
- A landscape with widespread or high number of detractors

#### Value

The value placed on a landscape can be measured based on designations and a range of other criteria, including public consensus. Consultation with the local community in relation to landscape value has not formed part of this study. However, a range of other factors can be used as indicators of the value that may be attributed to a Character Area. Natural England prepared a consultation document entitled 'Guidance for assessing

landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England'. Appendix 1 of the consultation document included detailed criteria for assessing Natural Beauty. These are very similar to those identified in Natural England's document 'Topic Paper 6: Techniques and criteria for judging capacity and sensitivity'. Some 27 Natural Beauty criteria are included in the Natural England report and these have been applied to each of the North Hertfordshire Landscape Character Area units. In the context of this study it was not possible to assess some indicators (NB21 and NB25-27), either in the field or as a desk-based study, as this was outside the scope of this study. Where the LCAs extend over the district boundary only that part of the area within NHDC has been included in the assessment. The criteria used are as follows:

- Landscape Quality
  - NB1 - Characteristic natural and man-made elements are well represented throughout
  - NB2 - Landscape elements are in good condition
  - NB3 - Incongruous elements are not present to a significant degree, are not visually intrusive, have only localised influence or are temporary in nature
- Scenic quality
  - NB4 - Landscape character lends a clear and recognisable sense of place
  - NB5 - Landform shows a strong sense of scale and contrast
  - NB6 - There are striking landform types or coastal configurations
  - NB7 - Landcover and vegetation types form an appealing pattern or composition in relation to each other and/or to landform
  - NB8 - Strong aesthetic qualities, reflecting factors such as scale and form, degree of openness or enclosure, colours and textures, simplicity or diversity, and ephemeral or seasonal interest
  - NB9 - Memorable or unusual views and eye-catching features or landmarks
- Relative wildness
  - NB10 - Relatively few roads or other transport routes

- NB11 - Distant from or perceived as distant from significant habitation
- NB12 - Extensive areas of semi-natural vegetation
- NB13 - Uninterrupted tracts of land with few built features and no overt industrial or urban influences
- NB14 - Open, exposed to the elements and expansive in character
- NB15 - Absence or apparent absence of active human intervention
- Relative tranquillity
  - NB16 - Presence and/or perceptions of natural landscape, birdsong, peace and quiet, natural-looking woodland, stars at night, stream, sea, natural sounds and similar influences
  - NB17 - Presence and/or perceptions of traffic noise, large numbers of people, urban development, overhead light pollution, low flying aircraft, power lines and similar influences
- Natural heritage features
  - NB18 - Visible expression of geology in distinctive sense of place and other aspects of scenic quality
  - NB19 - Presence of striking or memorable geo-morphological features
  - NB20 - Presence of wildlife and/or habitats that make a particular contribution to distinctive sense of place and other aspects of scenic quality
- Cultural heritage features
  - NB22 - Presence of settlements, buildings or other structures that make a particular contribution to distinctive sense of place and other aspects of scenic quality
  - NB23 - Presence of visible archaeological remains, parkland and/or designed landscapes that provide striking features in the landscape
  - NB24 - Visible presence of historic landscape types or specific landscape elements or features that provide evidence of time depth or historic influence on the landscape

Application of the above indicators for each of the existing Landscape Character

Areas in North Hertfordshire District has been assessed on the basis of a range from 1- 5 where:

1= Very poor representation of the indicator for natural beauty/landscape value

2= Poor representation of the indicator for natural beauty/landscape value

3= Moderate representation of the indicator for natural beauty/landscape value

4= Good representation of the indicator for natural beauty/landscape value

5= Very good representation of the indicator for natural beauty/landscape value

The entry for each criterion is therefore given a corresponding numerical score of 1-5, based on the above. These are then totalled to give an overall score for each LCA. The approach resulted in a potential score range from 22- 110. However, the actual scores attained ranged between 40 and 87. This resulted in the following bandings for natural beauty/landscape value:

40 – 49 = Low natural beauty/landscape value

50 – 59 = Moderate low natural beauty/landscape value

60 – 68 = Moderate natural beauty/landscape value

69 – 78 = Moderate high natural beauty/landscape value

79 – 87 = High natural beauty/landscape value

The place in the above bandings was used as a measure of landscape value in the Landscape Character Areas in North Hertfordshire. This was done in the absence of data on community views and influencing the value by designations. A separate study has been produced for North Hertfordshire District Council detailing the Natural Beauty scoring for each Landscape Character Area.

### Capacity

After a consideration and description of the inherent sensitivity and value of each character area, the capacity of each Landscape Character Area to accommodate different forms of

development was identified. Capacity can be understood as the opposite of sensitivity while also allowing for value as a moderating factor. Therefore e.g. a high sensitivity landscape would be likely to have a low capacity; however the level of capacity will vary with the type of development concerned. The following categories of development were considered,

- Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)
- Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)
- Major transport developments/improvements
- Commercial/warehouse estates
- Individual large/bulky buildings
- Large scale open uses (e.g. car storage)
- Mineral extraction/waste disposal
- Incremental small scale development
- Utilities developments (e.g. masts, pylons, wind turbines)

For each form of development, the inherent landscape sensitivities and value were considered. A professional judgement was then made as to the capacity of the landscape to accommodate the form of development, on a three point scale of High, Moderate and Low. In some Character Areas, where there is variation in capacity across the Character Area, a range of capacities has been given with the prevalent sensitivity stated first e.g. Moderate to High or Low to Moderate.

### 5.1 Introduction

Previous landscape character assessment undertaken by The Landscape Partnership for HCC, to the south of the District, included Character Areas overlapping the District boundary. The numbers given to those Character Areas (34, 37, 133) have been retained to avoid potential for confusion. Alternative versions of LCA 34, 37 & 133 exist within the HCC study and should be referred to in parallel with the character areas in this document. The alternative versions can be found at:

LCA 34:

LCA 37:

LCA 133:

Four Character Areas (39, 132, 144 & 145), previously identified by The Landscape Partnership, also lie across the District boundary and exist within the HCC study. These Character Areas are not included in this study but can be obtained by clicking on the relevant link below.

LCA 39:

LCA 132:

LCA 144:

LCA 145:

New Character Areas identified by the NHDC and SBC assessment have been numbered sequentially from 200. (NB Numbers 204, 206 and 207 have not been used). The numbering of the Character Areas runs generally from south to north for those to the west of the A1(M) and from west to east for those to the east of the motorway.

Some boundaries to Character Areas, especially those to the north and northeast have been drawn to provisional boundary lines where it is clear from site survey that the Character Area extends significantly into the neighbouring county. In these instances and after discussion with neighbouring authorities, it has been noted that boundaries will be considered in further detail by those authorities at an appropriate time.

Where Character Areas extend beyond the District boundaries the descriptions cover the general character of the whole area but detailed description relates only to those parts within or overlapping the NHDC boundary.

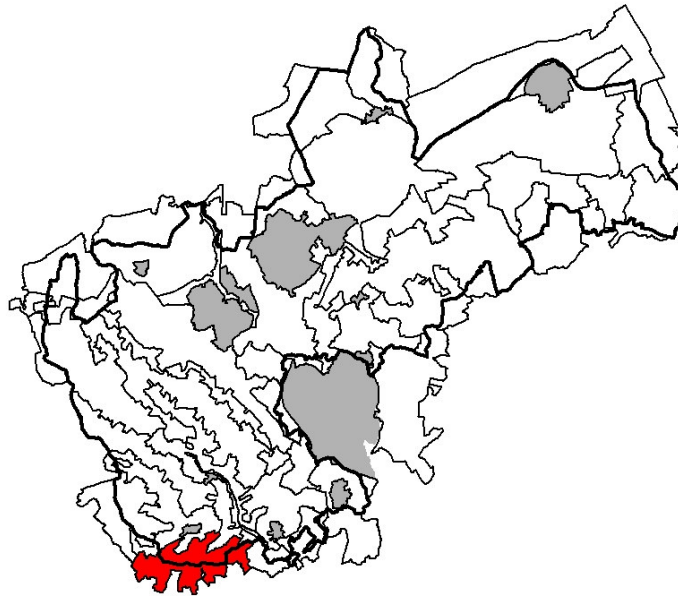
This is where the LCA 34, 37, 132 and 133 can be found. Originally done by TLP in April 2005 for Welwyn Hatfield District Council.

<http://www.welhat.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id+1168&p=0>

This is where the LCA 39, 144, and 145 can be found. These were adopted in 2007 as EH LCA.

[http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/media/pdf/5/m/LCA\\_SPD\\_PDF.pdf](http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/media/pdf/5/m/LCA_SPD_PDF.pdf)

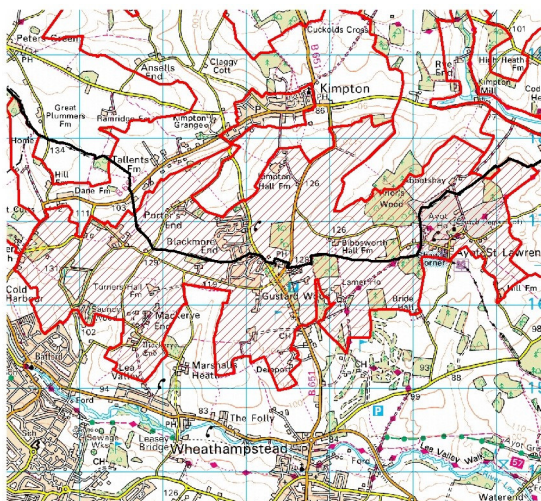
## LOCATION



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## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

In the north this Character Area extends from the B652 Harpenden to Kimpton Road and the Kimpton to Codicote Bottom Road. The southern boundary extends beyond the District boundary to the edge of the Lea valley.



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## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Elevated plateau landscape. Land use is mainly large arable fields. (Character Area has a higher density of settlement in the west than the east). However, the Character Area has a comparatively remote and tranquil atmosphere.

## KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Elevated plateau landform
- Large arable field pattern
- Small parcels of grazing land on sub-urban fringes
- Smaller pockets of woodland in the west, one large woodland block in the east
- Remote quiet aspects with few detracting features
- 20<sup>th</sup> century housing development at Blackmore End, well screened on the fringes by woodland

## DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

Fringes of Ayot House parkland



**ASSESSMENT****PHYSICAL INFLUENCES****Geology and Soils**

Soils are fine silty lying over clay soils with slowly permeable subsoils. There are also some well drained clay soils over chalk and variable amounts of flint. The underlying geology is plateau drift and clay with flints. Pockets of chalk are also found on the surface.

**Topography**

The plateau extends across the area from east to west with spurs, defined by incised dry valleys, extending to the north and south (particularly south of the District boundary).

**Degree of Slope**

The plateau appears to be flat. The actual degree of slope is typically less than 1:250.

**Altitude Range**

120m to 130m.

**Hydrology**

There are no significant water courses. Valleys are dry, however, there are a number of small ponds associated with settlements.

**Land cover and land use**

Arable farming is the predominant land use. On the fringes of the settlements there are smaller areas of pasture. A high proportion of the grazing land is given over to use for horse paddocks. Scattered woodland cover occurs in the west particularly on the fringes of the settlements. Many of the woods have been replanted with alien conifers. The parkland north of Ayot House lies mainly outside the District boundary, however, a small fragment falls within North Hertfordshire.

**Vegetation and wildlife**

Prior's Wood is classified as an ancient woodland, the main species being oak, hornbeam with some beech where the Chalk is closer to the surface. Understorey species include hawthorn and holly. Gustard Common and heath is remnant heather acid grassland with juniper, which is rare in Hertfordshire. Ayot St Lawrence is important for pipistrelle and long-eared bats.

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

Ayot St Lawrence on the eastern boundary and just outside of the District boundary dates back to Saxon origins. The village is connected with George Bernard Shaw who lived there for almost 50 years. Many of his works were written here and the village retains strong connections with its rich cultural heritage. The footpath network extends northwards from the settlement connecting the eastern part of the area with the heart of the village.

**Field Pattern**

Loss of field boundaries due to the amalgamation of fields in the north and east has resulted in a pattern of large irregular fields. Fields are slightly smaller in the west due to the irregular distribution of settlements, local lanes and blocks of woodland.

**Transport Pattern**

There is a higher proportion of roads and lanes in the western part of the area compared to the east.

**Settlement and Built Form**

The western side of the area supports a dispersed settlement pattern with a concentration of more modern, 20<sup>th</sup> century properties at Blackmore End. The eastern side of the area is open and has very little evidence of settlement.

**EVALUATION****VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The Character Area is only locally visible from the surrounding area due to the elevated level of the land form. The western side has a greater sense of cohesive landscape character. The eastern part has lost a high proportion of its original field pattern consequently suggesting a downgraded landscape character. There is a general tranquil atmosphere.

**Rarity and Distinctiveness**

The landscape type is frequent in the county.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

To the west Blackmore End contains the largest settlement. The development is well screened by blocks of woodland cover.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

The western part is well served by a network of roads and local lanes. To the east a number of small lanes and footpaths radiate out from the centre of Ayot St Lawrence (outside of the District boundary). The settlement is a popular tourist attraction during the summer.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) have undertaken Tier B (Community of Place) consultations. Views of the local community have been sought and contributor's responses to each of the Character Areas will be analysed and a summary of the responses provided by HCC.

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

LC3            Landscape Conservation Area  
GD 1902    Ayot Park

**EVALUATION**

**CONDITION**

Land cover change:	Widespread
Age structure of tree cover:	Mature or young
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	Scattered
Management of semi-natural habitat:	Good
Survival of cultural pattern:	Interrupted
Impact of built development:	Low
Impact of land-use change:	High

**Matrix Score:** **Moderate**

**ROBUSTNESS**

Impact of landform:	Apparent
Impact of land cover:	Prominent
Impact of historic pattern:	Apparent
Visibility from outside:	Locally visible
Sense of enclosure:	Partial
Visual unity:	Coherent
Distinctiveness/rarity:	Frequent

**Matrix Score:** **Moderate**

CONDITION	GOOD	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	MODERATE	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	POOR	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
		ROBUSTNESS		

**EVALUATION**
**INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY**
**Landscape Character Sensitivities**

- Blackmore End is the largest settlement within the Character Area and the only significant settlement within the North Hertfordshire part of Blackmore End Plateau. The settlement is largely 20<sup>th</sup> century in origin and less historic than Ayot St Lawrence, which is located largely outside North Hertfordshire but would be sensitive to inappropriate or unsympathetic development and any form of development not in scale with the village
- Small to medium blocks of woodland are characteristic of the Blackmore End Character Area. These include former hornbeam coppice woodland with a bluebell understorey and would all be sensitive to removal, incursion and lack of or inappropriate management
- The character area includes a significant presence of horsiculture, particularly in the centre of the Plateau. Such areas are characterised by post and rail or white wire fences and the removal of boundary vegetation. This practice is detrimental to the landscape character and Blackmore End Plateau is vulnerable to further horsiculture activity and any associated removal of boundary vegetation
- Hedgerow removal has created very large arable fields at the centre of the Character Area. The landscape is sensitive to further removal of hedges
- Minor roads through the Character Area are narrow and enclosed by vegetation or hedge banks. They would be sensitive to widening or alterations
- Ayot House parkland, although not a registered park or garden, falls within this Character Area and could be at risk from development pressure and inconsistent management. The northern edge of the parkland falls within North Hertfordshire

Overall Blackmore End Plateau is considered to be of **moderate to low sensitivity**. The more historic elements of the Character Area are generally outside North Hertfordshire and the core of the area has lost many of the characteristic elements present in the east and west of the Blackmore End Plateau.

**Visual Sensitivities**

- Within the Character Area as a whole roads are generally enclosed by woodland and hedgerows or sunken, restricting views across the plateau. This is less the case within the part of North Hertfordshire between Ayot St Lawrence and Blackmore End where fields are larger and more open allowing more expansive views
- The elevated plateau landform ensures that views into the Character Area from adjacent areas are localised. This is the case for areas to the north of the North Hertfordshire parts of the Character Area

In visual terms, Blackmore End Plateau is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. Views within the Character Area are relatively enclosed but would be sensitive to the removal of hedgerows and woodland, as has occurred within eastern parts of the North Hertfordshire areas of the Blackmore End Plateau.

**LANDSCAPE VALUE**

Overall Blackmore End Plateau is considered to be of **moderate low landscape value**. Although there is a lack of incongruous elements and a perceived distance from larger settlements, the landscape and landform is not particularly memorable and there is limited time depth and local distinctiveness.

**EVALUATION**
**CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT**
**Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)**

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural nature. It would introduce elements that would alter the character and affect the existing key characteristics such as the relative absence of detractors and the tranquil atmosphere.

The landscape capacity for major urban extensions or new settlements is considered to be low.

**Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)**

This type of development would not be entirely appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural and undeveloped character. Some small scale expansion of Blackmore, carefully designed and in keeping with the existing character of the village, could possibly be accommodated. Any proposed expansion should seek to create more of a village centre character.

The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered to be low to moderate.

**Major transport developments/improvements**

This type of development would generally not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to the largely rural character of most routes at present. Upgrading of existing roads and lanes could erode the character of the landscape. Additional traffic would also affect the peace and tranquillity of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for major transport developments/improvements is considered to be low.

**Commercial/warehouse estates**

This type of large scale development would not be appropriate in this Character Area. There are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. Existing minor roads would be inappropriate for any significant larger volumes of traffic and/or HGVs.

The landscape capacity for commercial/warehouse estates is considered to be low.

**Individual large/bulky buildings**

There may be some limited capacity for sympathetically located and designed individual large buildings, particularly if they were of an agricultural character and in keeping with the rural character. However, large buildings, if not carefully located, would be visible across much of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for individual large/bulky buildings is considered to be low to moderate.

**Large scale open storage**

This type of large scale development is unlikely to be appropriate in this Character Area as there are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. Extensive development would also disrupt the open landscape and elevated plateau landform.

The landscape capacity for large scale 'open' uses is considered to be low.

**EVALUATION**

**Mineral extraction/waste disposal**

This Character Area is currently relatively rural in appearance with small scale linear development. Whilst some small scale mineral extraction could be accommodated with careful design and mitigation measures, larger scale extraction or waste disposal would not be in keeping with the character of Blackmore End Plateau. If minerals schemes were consented, restoration proposals should be mainly at grade and include for additional planting in character with existing patterns.

The landscape capacity for mineral extraction is considered to be low. Waste disposal would be a problem in all character areas due to the presence of aquifers.

**Incremental small scale development**

There may be some capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were agricultural or vernacular in form and style and in keeping with the rural character. However, large buildings, if not carefully located, could erode the rural and undeveloped character of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for incremental small scale developments is considered to be low to moderate.

**Utilities developments e.g. masts, pylons, wind turbines**

There are currently very few of detractors in the area. Utilities developments or elements such as masts or wind turbines are likely to have a major impact on the rural character of Blackmore End Plateau. Large scale tall elements such as these would be highly visible within the Character Area, as well as in surrounding Character Areas.

The landscape capacity for utilities developments is considered to be low to moderate.

**GUIDELINES**

**STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE**

**Strategy: Improve and Conserve**

NB. Guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire.

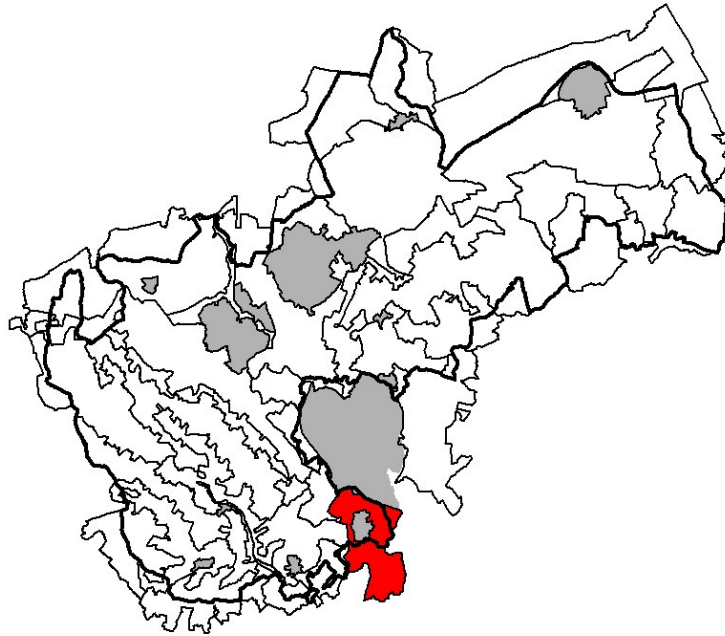
**Landscape management guidelines**

- Promote management of ancient woodland to encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Encourage diverse woodland management practice
- Promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and areas of semi natural habitat and the creation of links between habitat areas
- Promote hedgerow restoration along the lines of historic field boundaries and for the creation of visual links between existing woodland areas
- Promote the use of traditional field hedges in place of post and wire enclosures to new grazing areas
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network
- Promote the management of old ponds and the creation of new ponds

**Built development guidelines**

- Maintain the tranquil quality of the landscape whilst encouraging access for visitors to neighbouring focal attractions e.g. Shaw’s Corner
- Protect from further extensive residential development
- Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow winding lanes and associated hedge banks, sunken lanes, verges and hedges
- Retain the rural character of Blackmore End Plateau, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the Character Area
- Avoid the continued spread of new development and large detached properties around the periphery of Blackmore End
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing scarce woodland blocks or hedgerows
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area
- Conserve and enhance Ayot House parkland

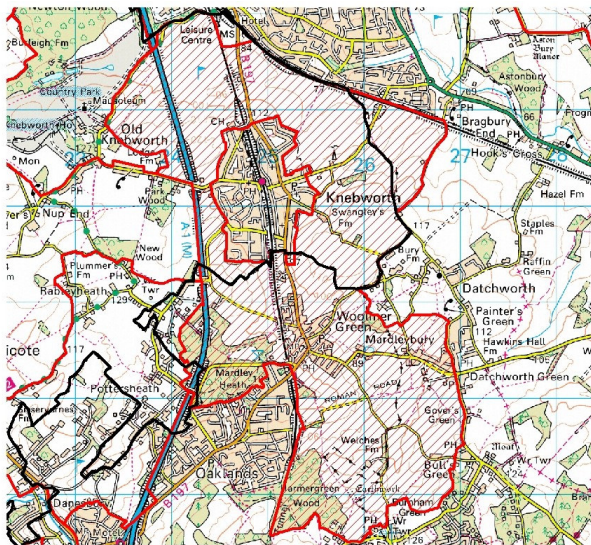
## LOCATION



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**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA**

The Character Area lies to the east of the A1(M) and south of Stevenage. Half lies outside of the District. The main area of interest is that surrounding the settlement of Knebworth with a smaller triangle of this land lying to the west of the motorway.



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**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

Gently undulating landform enclosing the settlement of Knebworth. Open and mainly arable farmland. Parkland to the north given over to use as golf course. Character Area abuts the railway in the north which encloses the southern end of Stevenage. Open views to edges of Knebworth settlement.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- Large scale open arable farmland
- Parkland in the north
- Edges of Knebworth settlement
- Prominent in the landscape

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- Crossed by A1(M)
- Crossed by mainline railway
- Telecommunication towers and water pumping stations



**ASSESSMENT**

**PHYSICAL INFLUENCES**

**Geology & soils**

Deep fine loam and clay over slowly permeable clay subsoils, over plateau drift (Hornbeam 3 series). Superficial deposits of Clay-with-flints at Woolmer Green.

**Topography**

Undulating west-facing slope with local variations - slight valley formation running north-south and now containing a railway, often in tunnel.

**Degree of slope**

1 in 50.

**Altitude range**

85m to 120m.

**Hydrology**

There is little water in this Character Area; one ditch drains westwards to Hempstall Spinney but the local topography discourages any northwards drainage into Stevenage Brook. There are some springs. Mardleybury Pond is one of the few waterbodies in this area.

**Land cover and land use**

Open arable farmland and woodland.

**Vegetation and wildlife**

No ecological information was available for this Character Area, but it would be anticipated to show some characteristic acidic communities such as those found within the Knebworth Character Area.

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

The Scheduled Monument of Deards End Bridge, over the railway, lies north of Knebworth.

**Field Pattern**

The historic agricultural landscape is composed of a mixture of prairie fields with relict elements within 18th century and later enclosure, ancient woodland, pre 18th century 'irregular' enclosure, 19th - 20th century plantation, post-1950s enclosure and prairie fields with post-1950s boundary loss. A small pocket of commons with an open margin lies to the south and pre 18th century 'irregular sinuous' enclosure lies to the west.

**Transport Pattern**

There is a strong network of winding lanes linking the villages to the larger plateau settlements. The B197 runs parallel to the railway on the western edge between Mardley Heath and Knebworth, through Woolmer Green. The Roman road between Welwyn and Watton has dwindled here to a lane and a footpath.

**Settlements and Built Form**

There are several buildings of note in the vicinity of Knebworth designed by Lutyens including the red brick church of St. Martin, the Golf Club House (1908) and Homewood (1900).

**EVALUATION**

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The part within the District is comparatively open in character. The rolling landform helps to create enclosure and separation. The Character Area is crossed and enclosed by transport corridors adding to the general development pressure on the Character Area.

**Rarity & distinctiveness**

No distinctive features but Park Wood ancient woodland (hornbeam coppice) abuts southwest boundary.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

Urban impact of Stevenage and Knebworth. The motorway and railway corridors contribute to the sense of encroachment.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

Roads radiate out from Knebworth, crossing the area. Little footpath provision. Bridleway connection between Knebworth and Stevenage.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) have undertaken Tier B (Community of Place) consultations. Views of the local community have been sought and contributor's responses to each of the Character Areas will be analysed and a summary of the responses provided by HCC.

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

LC1	Landscape Conservation Area
SAM HT81	Deards End Bridge over railway: Knebworth

**EVALUATION**

**CONDITION**

Land cover change:	Localised
Age structure of tree cover:	Mature
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	Scattered
Management of semi-natural habitat:	Not obvious
Survival of cultural pattern:	Declining
Impact of built development:	High
Impact of land-use change:	Low

**Matrix Score:** **Moderate**

**ROBUSTNESS**

Impact of landform:	Prominent
Impact of land cover:	Prominent
Impact of historic pattern:	Insignificant
Visibility from outside:	Locally visible
Sense of enclosure:	Contained
Visual unity:	Coherent
Distinctiveness/rarity:	Unusual

**Matrix Score:** **Strong**

CONDITION	GOOD	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	MODERATE	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	POOR	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
ROBUSTNESS				

**EVALUATION**

**INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY**

**Landscape Character Sensitivities**

- The Character Area as a whole has a gently undulating landform, although the fringes of Stevenage within North Hertfordshire are slightly flatter
- Hedgerow removal has created large arable fields in parts of the Character Area and left hedge banks without their hedges. The landscape is sensitive to further removal of hedges
- Individual trees are present in a few locations along roads and field boundaries. These are often over mature and would be vulnerable to loss and lack of a replacement programme
- Large woodland blocks are present within the wider Character Area. Within North Hertfordshire there are a limited number of relatively small woodland blocks which would be sensitive to encroachment of development or removal
- Within the Character Area there is a strong network of winding lanes, which are often cut into the landscape. These routes would be vulnerable to 'improvement' schemes and removal of the banks that remain from former hedge banks
- The A1(M) and the railway lines have disturbed and fragmented the parts of the Character Area within North Hertfordshire, particularly where the elevated sections create physical barriers to the rest of the Character Area. These elements require more careful integration.
- A number of incongruous elements have been introduced into the Character Area, including telecommunication masts, which currently act as detractors

Overall Datchworth Settled Slopes is considered to be of **low sensitivity**. The largely open Character Area is heavily influenced by the settlements of Stevenage and Knebworth, as well as the major transport corridors.

**Visual Sensitivities**

- Views across the Character Area are generally open and expansive due to a lack of hedgerows and vegetation
- Skylines when looking out of Datchworth Settled Slopes are generally wooded, with the woodland located outside the Character Area. Built development in Stevenage or Knebworth occasionally breaks these skylines
- The settlements of Stevenage and Knebworth look out over the Character Area
- Elevated views from railway lines and the A1(M) where they are on embankment.
- Roads throughout the Character Area are generally open, allowing views across the Character Area.

In visual terms, Datchworth Settled Slopes is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. Views within the Character Area are relatively open. However, areas of settlement and transport corridors have impinged on views into the Character Area, including the close proximity of Stevenage.

**LANDSCAPE VALUE**

Overall Datchworth Settled Slopes is considered to be of **low landscape value**. The area is heavily influenced by human activity, the landform is not particularly memorable and little remains of any semi-natural vegetation or habitats.

**EVALUATION**

**CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT**

**Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)**

This type of development would not be entirely appropriate within this Character Area, as it could cause coalescence of the settlements of Stevenage and Knebworth. Visual impacts could also be high, due to the openness of Datchworth Settled Slopes. Increased housing development would be likely to affect the existing narrow lanes that remain in the Character Area, which could remove aspects of the remaining character of the landscape. Any development that does proceed should be well contained by vegetation to minimise the extent of visual intrusion into the Datchworth Settled Slopes.

The landscape capacity for major urban extensions or new settlements is considered to be moderate to low.

**Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)**

This type of development would not be entirely appropriate within this Character Area, due to the possibility of coalescence of the settlements of Stevenage and Knebworth. There may be some scope for small scale expansion of Stevenage and Knebworth, carefully designed and in keeping with the existing character. However, expansion of Stevenage would extend beyond the natural boundary of the railway. Mitigation planting would also need to be given careful consideration, to ensure that there is not visual intrusion into the wider Character Area.

The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered to be moderate.

**Major transport developments/improvements**

This type of development could be relatively appropriate within this Character Area, due to the presence of both the A1(M) and the railway lines at present. Improvements to these transport links could present the opportunity to improve their fit within the landscape and soften their appearance and the effect on the setting of Stevenage and Knebworth.

The landscape capacity for major transport developments/improvements is considered to be moderate.

**Commercial/warehouse estates**

This type of large scale development could be in keeping with the existing land uses adjacent to some parts of this character area, including larger settlements. Careful consideration of the landscape treatment to the edges of any consented development would be required, to ensure that there is not visual intrusion into the wider Character Area.

The landscape capacity for commercial/warehouse estates is considered to be moderate to low.

**Individual large/bulky buildings**

There may be some limited capacity for sympathetically located and designed individual large buildings, particularly if they were of an agricultural or vernacular form. However, large buildings, if not carefully located, would visually intrude on the largely open Datchworth Settled Slopes.

The landscape capacity for individual large/bulky buildings is considered to be moderate.

**Large scale open storage**

The openness of much of the Datchworth Settled Slopes would make it difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses without significant visual impacts. Careful consideration of the landscape treatment to the edges of any consented development would be required, to ensure that there is not visual intrusion into the wider Character Area.

The landscape capacity for large scale 'open' uses is considered to be low to moderate.

## **EVALUATION**

### **Mineral extraction/waste disposal**

Mineral extraction is unlikely to be appropriate in Datchworth Settled Slopes due to the close proximity to built up areas and existing open aspects.

The landscape capacity for mineral extraction is considered to be low. Waste disposal would be a problem in all character areas due to the presence of aquifers.

### **Incremental small scale development**

There is likely to be some capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were of an agricultural nature and in keeping with the rural character. However, due to the existing open nature any proposals would need clear justification or carefully designed mitigation to avoid visual intrusion into the Datchworth Settled Slopes.

The landscape capacity for incremental small scale developments is considered to be low to moderate.

### **Utilities developments e.g. masts, pylons, wind turbines**

There are currently a number of detractors in the area. These include existing telecommunications masts, which are visible throughout the Character Area. Further utilities developments or elements such as masts or wind turbines are likely to have a major impact on the open character of Datchworth Settled Slopes. Large scale tall elements such as these would be highly visible within the Character Area, as well as in surrounding Character Areas and from Knebworth and Stevenage.

The landscape capacity for utilities developments is considered to be low to moderate.

**GUIDELINES**

**STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE**

**Strategy: Conserve and Restore**

NB. Guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire.

**Landscape management guidelines**

- Encourage restoration of historic hedgerows and management of relic hedges
- Consider the possibilities of creating footpath routes in the area
- Consider opportunities for woodland planting

**Built development guidelines**

- Strict control of development around the setting of Old Knebworth and Knebworth Park is a priority
- Encourage the use of woodland planting to screen new development and to provide ecological diversity
- Encourage diverse woodland planting along the A1(M) corridor
- Ensure that any new development on the edge of Stevenage is well contained by vegetation to improve the extent of visual intrusion from the major urban area into the Character Area
- Ensure that new development does not lead to coalescence of the settlements of Stevenage and Knebworth
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or hedgerows
- Ensure that lighting associated with new development does not create additional urbanising influences on the Character Area
- Encourage the integration of transport corridors into the Character Area through carefully designed earthworks and planting schemes
- Use the opportunity of any new developments to create new accessible green infrastructure for the local population

**LOCATION**

From Lamsden Common, north of Watton-at-Stone, this area extends northwards along the valley to Walkern and up as far as Cromer. It is defined to the west by the urban edge of Stevenage and to the east by the narrow Benington settled ridge and the Cottered/Ardleley settled plateau .

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

Open arable farmland with small grouped woodlands linked by hedges. Medium to large-scale field pattern over strongly undulating slopes, with a remote character despite proximity to Stevenage.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- strongly undulating west-facing slope
- sharp transition to ridge to east and to urban edge to west
- built edge of Stevenage generally well concealed and contained by mature and semi mature woodland.
- woods located to the tributary valley heads and on the upper slopes adjacent to Stevenage
- well-managed hornbeam coppice woodland
- large fields and arable cultivation
- few settlements
- expansive views from the edges to the Beane Valley

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- historic features around Walkern
- Aston End village to the upper slopes a smaller scale intimate landscape with pasture



## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

### Geology & Soils

Deep fine loamy over clayey and clay soils with slowly permeable subsoils, over plateau drift (Hornbeam 2 series), with well-drained calcareous loams over chalky drift on the valley slopes (Swaffham Prior series) and slowly permeable calcareous clay soils over chalky till (Hanslope series) on the plateau to the west. Chalk is visible at the surface on both sides of the river.

### Topography

Strongly undulating valley slopes.

### Degree of slope

1 in 10 on the steepest slopes to 1 in 40 further north.

### Altitude Range

60 m to 100m.

### Hydrology

A few streams flow into the river, especially south of Walkern, and the river has a significant impact on local topography, having carved out a well-marked U-shaped valley. The main source of the Beane is the springs to the north of the village. To the east a narrow plateau forms an interfluvium between the Beane valley and The Old Bourne tributary. The Beane has a predominantly natural chalk stream character, with shallow banks and gravel beds set within an intensively agricultural landscape, but now suffers from reduced flows due to water abstraction at Whitehall. There are no surface streams or ponds on the slopes to the north west.

### Land Cover and Land Use

A few streams flow into the river, especially south of Walkern, and the river has a significant impact on local topography, having carved out a well-marked U-shaped valley. The main source of the Beane is the springs to the north of the village. To the east a narrow plateau forms an interfluvium between the Beane valley and The Old Bourne tributary. The Beane has a predominantly natural chalk stream character, with shallow

banks and gravel beds set within an intensively agricultural landscape, but now suffers from reduced flows due to water abstraction at Whitehall. There are no surface streams or ponds on the slopes to the north west.

### Vegetation and Wildlife

A few streams flow into the river, especially south of Walkern, and the river has a significant impact on local topography, having carved out a well-marked U-shaped valley. The main source of the Beane is the springs to the north of the village. To the east a narrow plateau forms an interfluvium between the Beane valley and The Old Bourne tributary. The Beane has a predominantly natural chalk stream character, with shallow banks and gravel beds set within an intensively agricultural landscape, but now suffers from reduced flows due to water abstraction at Whitehall. There are no surface streams or ponds on the slopes to the north west.

## HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

A few streams flow into the river, especially south of Walkern, and the river has a significant impact on local topography, having carved out a well-marked U-shaped valley. The main source of the Beane is the springs to the north of the village. To the east a narrow plateau forms an interfluvium between the Beane valley and The Old Bourne tributary. The Beane has a predominantly natural chalk stream character, with shallow banks and gravel beds set within an intensively agricultural landscape, but now suffers from reduced flows due to water abstraction at Whitehall. There are no surface streams or ponds on the slopes to the north west.

### Field Pattern

Variable; usually large and regular or irregular (which is difficult to discern in the field at this scale) but occasionally appearing to be of a smaller scale around the farms. The large common arable fields of the area indicated by the survival of the names such as Churchend Common, probably originated in the late Saxon period and most survived well into the 19th century, in spite of piecemeal enclosure over the centuries. However the

area is now dominated by large fields enclosed in the 18th or 19th centuries, and by later, piecemeal, 20th century enclosure. There are also a few small areas where smaller fields suggest earlier, pre-18th century irregular enclosure. The arable regime led to woodland clearance at an early date, with the remaining areas of ancient woodland surviving only on the higher slopes on the western margin of the area. Small areas of 19th and 20th century woodland plantation have had little impact on its character.

#### **Transport Pattern**

Winding, narrow-verged lanes link to the wooded plateau settlements of the north east, which focus on Dane End. Whemstead (sic) Road marks the boundary between the valley slope and the plateau, while Walkern Road runs north/south below the plateau edge on the eastern valley slope. To the west a network of narrow lanes links Aston village and Aston End to the encroaching housing development on the edge of Stevenage.

#### **Settlement and the Built Form**

The central area and the river valley itself are unsettled, but there is settlement at the northern end and Aston village in the west, very close to the eastern edge of Stevenage. Until the mid-20th century Stevenage was a small town on the Great North Road and appears to have had very little influence on the landscape of this area

The oldest houses in Walkern date from the 17th century, often with Georgian facades over older structures. Its church has a 14th-century tower and a late Saxon sculpture above the south door. Walkern is described in Munby as 'one of the most attractive street villages in Hertfordshire...a medieval pattern of houses along the street, with crofts behind them and hedges marking the boundary with the arable fields behind' (p. 86)

Aston has a 13th-century church, while Aston House is of brick, c.1700, with chequer brick stables of the same date. The village has 16th-century cottages, with little building between the reigns of Elizabeth I and Victoria, but considerable development in the last quarter of the 20th century.

There are a few isolated farms, such as Whempstead Gate Farm and Gregory's Farm, but no hamlets.

#### **Other Sources of Area Specific Information**

Rowe, A. The Protected Valley, Hamels Publishing (1999).

Munby, L., The Hertfordshire Landscape, Hodder and Stoughton (1977).

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

From the outside this area is visible from the west, less so from the plateau to the east, being concealed by topography. The overwhelming impressions here are of remoteness, tranquillity and continuity, a sense that nothing has changed much over the centuries. Within the area there are quite extensive views as there is little woodland and the topography is quite simple.

**Rarity and Distinctiveness**

Although this area is similar to the boulder clay plateaux of the north-east of the county, this is its first expression in the centre of the county. It also demonstrates well the south west/north east shift in vegetation patterns across the county, with boulder clay and alluvial gravels on opposite sides of the river, both mixed with chalk.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

This area is quite widely visible due to its sloping landform and elevated position. It offers extensive views across the Beane valley, which to the east are blocked by the plateau landform. It is a simple, unified landscape of arable fields, rendered more interesting by the often sculptural shape of the landform. Despite the proximity of Stevenage to the west there is very little visual impact from the town.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

Readily accessible from both Stevenage and Hertford by A Roads, but unlikely to offer recreational opportunities due to the dominance of arable production. A Chain Walk links the extensive footpath network to Watton in the south, and a footpath runs up the valley from Frogmore Hill to Walkern. There are several footpaths from the development on the eastern edge of Stevenage.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

The Beane Valley has been promoted by HCC as a special project. There was insufficient data from the community exercise to establish a perceived level of distinctiveness; this area has been estimated as (D).

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

SAM : Earthworks in Box Wood  
 Areas of Archaeological Significance:  
 Landscape Conservation Area.  
 SSSI: Benington High Wood.  
 Heritage Roadside Verge: Walkern Road

<b>CONDITION</b>	
Land cover change	Localised
Age Structure of Tree cover	Mixed
Extent of Semi-natural habitat survival	Fragmented
Management of Semi-natural habitat	Good
Survival of Cultural pattern	Interrupted
Impact of built development	Low
Impact of land use charge	Low
<b>STRENGTH OF CHARACTER</b>	
Impact of land form	Prominent
Impact of land cover	Apparent
Impact of historic pattern	Continuous
Visibility from outside	Widely visible
Sense of enclosure	Open
Visual unity	Coherent
Distinctiveness / Rarity	unusual

Strengthen and Reinforce	Conserve and Strengthen	Safeguard and Manage
Improve and Reinforce	Improve and Conserve	Conserve and Restore
Reconstruction	Improve and Restore	Restore Condition to Maintain Character

**EVALUATION**

**INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY**

**Landscape Character Sensitivities**

- The River Beane is generally well vegetated but not a significant feature of the Character Area. The vegetation would be sensitive to removal and the sinuous route of the river vulnerable to straightening. However, the river falls just outside the North Hertfordshire parts of the Character Area
- Hedgerows are generally good and maintained at a fairly tall height throughout the Character Area, although less present in the eastern area within North Hertfordshire. They would be vulnerable to poor management or removal
- Fragmented woodland blocks are located throughout the Character Area, although less present in the eastern area within North Hertfordshire. Much of the woodland is ancient and would be sensitive to poor management or removal
- Narrow winding roads, often with hedge banks or narrow verges, are present throughout the Character Area, although the B1037 in the eastern area within North Hertfordshire is a busier road. These routes would be vulnerable to 'improvement' schemes and removal of hedge banks
- The largely open and predominantly unsettled character, with little intrusion of adjacent built up areas, would be vulnerable to change

Overall Middle Beane Valley is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. The largely open Character Area would be sensitive to the introduction of unsympathetic elements and extensive development.

**Visual Sensitivities**

- Views into the valley within North Hertfordshire are generally from the east, with topography concealing views from the west
- Views along and across the valley are largely open due to the limited amount of fragmented woodland, although there is more enclosure within the western parts of the Character Area in North Hertfordshire
- Views from the edges of the valley are extensive
- The edge of Stevenage is currently well contained and there is little visual influence on the Middle Beane Valley
- The varied skyline when looking out of the valley

In visual terms, Middle Beane Valley is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. Views within the Character Area are relatively open. However, very few incongruous features or areas of settlement have impinged on views into the Character Area, despite the close proximity of Stevenage.

**LANDSCAPE VALUE**

Overall Middle Beane Valley is considered to be of **moderate low landscape value**. Aspects of particular value within Middle Beane Valley are the minimal number of incongruous elements, the relatively few transport routes through the area and the relative tranquillity, although there is a general lack of distinctiveness.

**EVALUATION**

**CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT**

**Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)**

This type of development would not be appropriate within the North Hertfordshire parts of this Character Area, due to its open rural nature in the east and the relatively small parcels of land in the west. It would introduce elements that would alter the character and affect the existing key characteristics such as the lack of large scale intrusive development. Increased housing development would be likely to affect the existing minor roads, which could erode the character of the landscape.

The landscape capacity for large urban extensions or new settlements is considered to be low.

**Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)**

This type of development would not be entirely appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural and undeveloped character. There may be some scope for small scale expansion of Stevenage in the western parcel of land, carefully designed and in keeping with the existing character. Mitigation planting and retention of existing woodland would also need to be given careful consideration, to ensure that there is not visual intrusion into the wider Character Area.

The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered moderate in the west to low in the east.

**Major transport developments/improvements**

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to the largely rural character of most routes at present. Upgrading of existing roads and lanes could erode the character of the landscape. Additional traffic would also affect the peace and tranquillity of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for major transport developments/improvements is considered to be low.

**Commercial/warehouse estates**

This type of large scale development would not be appropriate within the North Hertfordshire parts of this character area. There are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the North Hertfordshire areas and surrounding land uses are either residential or agricultural. Existing minor roads would be inappropriate for any significant larger volumes of traffic and/or HGVs.

The landscape capacity for commercial/warehouse estates is considered to be low.

**Individual large/bulky buildings**

There may be some limited capacity for sympathetically located and designed individual large buildings, particularly if they were of an agricultural character and in keeping with the rural character. However, large buildings, if not carefully located, would intrude on the largely undeveloped Middle Beane Valley.

The landscape capacity for individual large/bulky buildings is considered to be low to moderate.

**Large scale open storage**

The openness of much of the Middle Beane Valley would make it difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses without significant visual impacts. This would not be in keeping with the rural character of the area and could introduce new elements that would conflict with the existing characteristics. There may be a need to upgrade local roads, which could further dilute the landscape character, and there is limited land available within the North Hertfordshire parts of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for large scale 'open' uses is considered to be low.

**EVALUATION**

**Mineral extraction/waste disposal**

This Character Area is currently relatively rural in appearance with little intrusive development. Whilst some small scale mineral extraction could be accommodated with careful design and mitigation measures, larger scale extraction or waste disposal is likely to be highly visually intrusive due to cross valley views. There may be a need to upgrade local roads, which could further dilute the landscape character. Restoration proposals for any consented schemes should be mainly at grade and include for additional planting in character with existing patterns.

The landscape capacity for mineral extraction is considered to be low to moderate. Waste disposal would be a problem in all character areas due to the presence of aquifers.

**Incremental small scale development**

There may be some capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were of an agricultural nature and in keeping with the rural character. However, due to the existing open character any proposals would need clear justification to avoid visual intrusion into the Middle Beane Valley.

The landscape capacity for incremental small scale developments is considered to be low to moderate.

**Utilities developments e.g. masts, pylons, wind turbines**

There are currently very few detractors in the Middle Beane Valley. Utilities developments or structures such as masts or wind turbines are likely to have a major impact on the rural character of Middle Beane Valley. Large scale tall elements such as these would be highly visible within the Character Area, as well as in surrounding Character Areas.

The landscape capacity for utilities developments is considered to be low to moderate.

**GUIDELINES****STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE****Strategy: Improve and Conserve**

NB. Guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire.

**Landscape management guidelines**

- Encourage landowners to safeguard existing hedges, increase hedged field boundaries, create permanent grass strips around field margins and prevent spray drift, using financial incentives as available, with a particular view to enhancing the quality of habitats adjacent to existing high-quality habitats in the Beane valley.
- Consider the possibilities of creating circular footpath routes in the area, especially from the re-opened railway station in Watton-at-Stone (adjoining area), to take advantage of views over the sculptural landform.
- Focus hedging opportunities on internal field boundaries, not those along roads and footpaths which could interrupt views over this area.
- Consider the retention/replanting of trees along the watercourse to reflect its location. Care should be taken to select species that will reflect local distinctiveness and a quasi-waterside location but that can survive without a permanent water source.
- Continue to manage both the established and young woodlands to the western boundary with Stevenage to minimise the visual impact of the settlement on the landscape to the east.
- Encourage traditional woodland management measures including coppicing.

**Built development guidelines**

- Retain the rural character of Middle Beane Valley, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the Character Area
- Avoid the location of new development in visually intrusive locations, such as on the edges of the valley where it would be visible on the currently largely undeveloped skyline
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of or incursion in to existing woodland blocks or hedgerows
- Ensure that new development on the edge of Stevenage is well contained by vegetation to continue the characteristic of little visual intrusion from the major urban area into the Character Area
- Encourage the conservation of the existing settlement pattern and resist any development which would significantly affect this.
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area
- Use the opportunity of any new developments to create new accessible green infrastructure

**LOCATION**

The area stretches approximately 4km along the upper course of the Mimram valley, to the south of Codicote Bottom, encompassing the broad valley slopes to the north and south of the water course.

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

A broad curving open valley, with gently undulating slopes and a flat open valley floor. West of Pulmer Water the valley floor is flat and agricultural cultivation has been taken right up to the water's edge in places, rendering the watercourse almost invisible. In contrast to the east a narrow sub area of pasture follows the flood plain of the River Mimram which begins to braid and then sharply turns a 90 degrees corner southwards. The settlements of Old Welwyn and Danesbury enclose the eastern end of the valley and a distinct change in land cover and vegetation associated with the underlying geology and soils forms the north western end. The southern slopes of the valley are much broader and more gently undulating than the northern slopes. Arable crops and the lack of hedgerow vegetation create a uniform character, texture and colour to the majority of the landscape. The area feels open and light with many opportunities to take views right across the valley. Despite its proximity to settlement, the area has a fairly remote character.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- gently undulating broad valley slopes
- sinuous country lanes
- isolated residential and farm buildings in red brick
- regular field pattern
- flood meadows and wetland habitats adjacent to River Mimram east of Pulmer Water
- arable cropping
- lack of hedgerows and woodlands

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- pollarded and coppiced willows at Singlers Marsh wildlife site
- informal recreational activities in Singlers Marsh area
- forded river crossings
- open cast lime quarry and associated planting



## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

### Geology & Soils

The soils are mainly shallow well drained calcareous coarse and fine loamy soils over chalk rubble, (Aberford association). Striped and polygonal soil patterns exist and there is locally a slight risk of water erosion. To the valley edges and near Singlers Marsh there are some deep fine loamy over clay with flints soils with seasonal waterlogging, (Hornbeam 2 association).

### Topography

A gently sloping valley bowl focused on the course of the river Mimram and the Kimpton road that follow the valley floor. This unusual curving river valley feature has been created by the water flowing around a solid glacial plug on which the village of Codicote is located. The slopes undulate particularly around Ryefield farm in the south of the area.

### Degree of slope

Slope gradients range from 1 in 10 on the slopes around Ryefield farm to the south of the area to 1 in 30 on the broader more open slopes to the west. Along the Mimram the levels drop by as little as 1 in 400

### Altitude Range

Levels range from 120m near Tanyard Lane to 65m along the river valley floor.

### Hydrology

The River Mimram flows along the bottom of the valley although to the west it is barely perceptible as the arable landscape continues right up to its banks. The river becomes more evident to the east of the area where minor roads cross the river by fords. Land around Pulmers Water and at Singlers Marsh becomes seasonally water logged and shallow pools of water become apparent on the surface. This renders the land unsuitable for arable crops and the land is instead managed by periodic grazing. The River Mimram is one of the main tributaries of the River Lea which it enters within the confines of the county town of Hertford.

### Land Cover and Land Use

Land cover and land use is prominent in the valley due to the openness of the area

caused by the lack of hedgerows, woodland vegetation and settlement. Land cover comprises open farm land, with land use being primarily arable. The secondary land use is pastoral with areas of informal recreation at Singlers Marsh. Woodland cover is fragmented and insignificant but there is some new tree planting associated with the northern part of the estate of Ayot House. Some localised areas of settlement bordering the Singlers Marsh sub-area.

### Vegetation and Wildlife

Small islands of woodland and scrub vegetation border the river Mimram in the east. Oak, weeping willow and pussy willows have grown in these wet areas and coppiced and pollarded willows can be found in the Singlers marsh area. Hawthorn and blackthorn scrub mixed with willow can be found further along the river Mimram to the west.

The valley slopes are dominated by intensive farmland, whilst areas of unimproved marshy, neutral and calcareous grassland still exist along the course of the river and support a varied flora including cowslips, despite the increase in horse grazing.

Singlers marsh is an important area of wetland habitat and Longhorn cattle used to graze the area. Locally scarce flora found here include the Meadow Saxifrage and Bistort and other less rare species such as Pond sedge, Yellow Flag Iris, Meadow Sweet, Lesser Stitchwort, Wood Rush, Dog's Mercury, Sorrel and Germander Speedwell. Hedgerow species include privet and holly with occasional oak, holly and ash as hedgerow trees. A screen of Leyland Cypress have been planted around the area of a disused chalk quarry on the northern slopes of the valley. Associated areas of scrub and rough grassland can be found and fossils and flints have been exposed by the former excavations.

Fauna local to the area include birds such as Black Caps and White Throats and mammals such as Water Shrew and Harvest Mice. The valley is noted for its resident population of Water Voles, which seem to be surviving the continuing threat from mink.

### **HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

A much visited area by passing travelers using the old Great Northern Road linking Welwyn and the village of Codicote. Reverend Joseph Spence a traveler in 1743 noted that the corn was thriving well in the area around Welwyn (Welling) and there were 'sweet woods' and fields planted with Walnut trees. The mills that used to work along this stretch of the river may have been used for fulling, milling flour or the pulping of rags for paper. There are several archaeological sites on the north facing slopes of the valleys and around Singlers bridge.

#### **Field Pattern**

The historic field pattern is predominantly pre 18th century irregular enclosure, subsequently rationalized by 19th century parliamentary enclosure and then by late 20th century enlargements. The valley is dominated by the medium to large arable fields in a largely regular formation. There is evidence of historic field boundaries such as the bare raised banks where a hedgerow once grew and the occasional hedgerow tree now standing in isolation in the carpet of cropland. Headlands are non-existent, creating a strong scene of intensively farmed fields with over managed hedgerows.

#### **Transport Pattern**

The transport pattern is largely dictated by topography and the hydrology of the area. Kimpton road follows the base of the valley which is a narrow road, bordered in part by low and intermittent hedgerows, banks and narrow verges. The road is joined occasionally at right angles by smaller lanes and tracks that climb the slope towards isolated farms and settlements. Codicote village lies on the route of the old Great North Road (the Hitchin road) which divides the unsettled arable land of the Codicote Bottom valley in the west from the settled incised slopes to the east. The road was historically well used by traders and merchants and those taking spring waters at Welwyn (Welling).

### **Settlement and the Built Form**

Settlement is very sparse in the valley contributing to the rural character of the area. At the eastern end of the valley, around the Singlers Marsh water meadows, the landscape becomes confined by the roman settlement of Welwyn and the spread of development along either side of the river. The mill is a black timbered building. Other houses in the locality are generally 20th century and comprised of a mixture of brick, render and timbered construction types. A cemetery borders the valley on the western gentle slopes. The house at the ford crossing and crossroads at Pulmers water comprise a two storey red brick building. The lodge house and remnant tree avenue along the carriage drive to Ayot House, (see Area 34) lies within the valley.

The Hertfordshire way clips the south west corner of the area, following the Avenue from Ayot lodge up the slopes to Ayot House.

### **Other Sources of Area Specific Information**

Brian Waters: Thirteen Rivers to the Thames  
 Malcolm Tomkins: So That Was Hertfordshire - Traveler's Jottings 1322-1887  
 Nikolaus Pevsner: The Buildings of England - Hertfordshire  
 Jeffery W. Whitelaw: Hidden Hertfordshire  
 Hertfordshire's Federation of Women's Institutes: The Hertfordshire Village Book  
 Tony Rook: The History of Hertfordshire

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

A contained valley of medium scale landscape elements. Views are limited by topography and vegetation on the horizon. Views to the east of the area are confined more by vegetation and settlement close to the edges of Welwyn.

**Rarity and Distinctiveness**

This area is unusual in Hertfordshire due to the shape and confinement of the valley, skirting the southern boundary of Codicote village.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

The most dominant impact on the area is the lime quarry on the south facing slopes and its surrounding screening by tall ornamental fir trees. The road and settlement has an influence on the eastern tail of the valley. Management techniques at the Singlers marsh wildlife site increases the contrasting scale of visual impact and landscape change further along the river valley.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

The Singlers Marsh Nature Reserve is a valuable local amenity for public access. Access to the countryside along the floor of main arable valley is poor however there are a number of routes that cross the valley, including fords over the river and one route through the historic park and garden of Ayot Place.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

The MORI survey indicates that this area is not widely regarded for its distinctiveness although this conceals an entirely different local picture. A survey of 1500 households in adjoining Welwyn, undertaken in 2000, with a 37% response rate, yielded 80% support that the river Mimram and its wildlife was the village's greatest asset.

"The river Mimram always had an attraction for us children. In summer we would build dams to deepen the water so we could swim. In winter, Singlers Marsh would freeze and we could slide or skate on the ice" Tony Jones. "Welwyn in the 1930's and 40's' Codicote Historian No. 35 Nov 1991.

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

Areas of Archaeological Significance (5No.)  
 Wildlife Site: Singlers Marsh  
 Landscape Conservation Area (majority)  
 Welwyn Conservation Area (adjacent)  
 Historic Park and Garden: Ayot Park

<b>CONDITION</b>	
Land cover change	Widespread
Age Structure of Tree cover	Mature or Young
Extent of Semi-natural habitat survival	Relic
Management of Semi-natural habitat	Poor
Survival of Cultural pattern	Declining
Impact of built development	Low
Impact of land use change	High
<b>STRENGTH OF CHARACTER</b>	
Impact of land form	Prominent
Impact of land cover	Dominant
Impact of historic pattern	Insignificant
Visibility from outside	Concealed
Sense of enclosure	Contained
Visual unity	Coherent
Distinctiveness / Rarity	Unusual

Strengthen and Reinforce	Conserve and Strengthen	Safeguard and Manage
Improve and Reinforce	Improve and Conserve	Conserve and Restore
Reconstruction	Improve and Restore	Restore Condition to Maintain Character

**EVALUATION**

**INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY**

**Landscape Character Sensitivities**

- Hedgerows along minor roads within the Character Area are often tall, particularly along roads that travel up the valley slopes. Those within the valley bottom are often more clipped. These hedgerows are infrequent within the Character Area as a whole and would be sensitive to removal.
- The slopes of the steep valley feature that forms the Character Area are largely open and would be vulnerable to change
- The corridor of the River Mimram is generally well vegetated, particularly with a variety of willows, which would be vulnerable to clearance work
- Remaining pasture within the bottom of the valley adds variety to the landscape and would be sensitive to conversion to arable farmland
- The Hertfordshire Way promoted footpath, which runs through the western end of the North Hertfordshire part of the Character Area
- The predominantly unsettled character of the area would be vulnerable to change
- The very minor roads that pass through the Character Area, often including passing places and occasionally fords, would be sensitive to improvement
- The River Mimram is not a significant feature in the landscape. However, it would be vulnerable to work that affected its current naturalistic state

Overall Codicote Bottom Arable Valley is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. The gently rolling valley landscape is relatively rural, despite its close proximity to urban areas, and has retained areas of grazing and flood meadows in the valley bottom.

**Visual Sensitivities**

- Open views along the sweeping chalky slopes
- Occasional cross valley views through gaps in vegetation
- Skylines are generally open throughout the Character Area, but slightly more wooded to the west
- Codicote Quarry chalk pit has caused an intrusive visual impact on the south facing chalk slopes within the North Hertfordshire part of the Character Area

In visual terms, Codicote Bottom Arable Valley is considered to be of **moderate to high sensitivity**. Views along the open valley slopes and the areas of open skyline would be particularly sensitive to development.

**LANDSCAPE VALUE**

Overall Codicote Bottom Arable Valley is considered to be of **moderate landscape value**. Aspects of particular value are the visual intactness of the landscape and the relative sense of remoteness.

**EVALUATION**

**CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT**

**Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)**

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural and undeveloped character. It would introduce a scale of development that would be entirely out of keeping with the Character Area at present and its undeveloped location. Large scale development could not be accommodated within Codicote Bottom Arable Valley without a significant visual impact and interrupting key views. The steeply sloping and undulating landform would also make major development difficult to accommodate.

The landscape capacity for major urban extensions or new settlements is considered to be low.

**Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)**

This type of development would be inappropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural and undeveloped character. Any development would reduce the openness of the Character Area and would be difficult to accommodate on the steeply sloping and undulating landform.

The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered to be to low.

**Major transport developments/improvements**

This type of development would not generally be appropriate within this Character Area, due to the largely rural character of most routes at present. Upgrading of existing narrow, twisting lanes could erode the character of the landscape. Additional traffic would also affect the peace and tranquillity of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for major transport developments/improvements is considered to be low.

**Commercial/warehouse estates**

This type of large scale development would not be appropriate in this character area. There are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. Existing minor roads would be inappropriate for any significant larger volumes of traffic. Upgrading of existing narrow lanes could erode the character of the landscape. Additional traffic would also affect the peace and tranquillity of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for commercial/warehouse estates is considered to be low.

**Individual large/bulky buildings**

There may be some limited capacity for sympathetically located and designed individual large buildings, particularly if they were of a vernacular appearance and in keeping with the rural character. However, large buildings could be highly visible within the Character Area if not carefully located.

The landscape capacity for individual large/bulky buildings is considered to be low to moderate.

**Large scale open storage**

This type of large scale development would not be appropriate in this character area and there are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. Extensive development would also disrupt the open views and sloping landform.

The landscape capacity for large scale 'open' uses is considered to be low.

**EVALUATION**

**Mineral extraction/waste disposal**

This Character Area currently contains a quarry that is visually intrusive. Further extraction could be equally intrusive on the slopes or valley floor. Restoration proposals for any consented schemes should be mainly at grade or possibly as wetland along the valley and include for additional planting in character with existing patterns.

The landscape capacity for mineral extraction is considered to be low to moderate. Waste disposal would be a problem in all character areas due to the presence of aquifers.

**Incremental small scale development**

There may be some very limited capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were of an agricultural or vernacular design and in keeping with the rural character. This could include carefully planned sites on the edge of Welwyn or Danesbury. However, large buildings, if not carefully located, could erode the rural and undeveloped character of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for incremental small scale developments is considered to be low to moderate.

**Utilities developments e.g. masts, pylons, wind turbines**

There are very few detractors such as these within this Character Area at present. New utilities developments or structures such as masts or wind turbines would have a major impact on the rural character of Codicote Bottom Arable Valley. Large scale developments, tall elements such as these would be highly visible within the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for utilities developments is considered to be low.

## GUIDELINES

### STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE

#### Strategy: Restore Condition to Maintain Character

NB. Guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire.

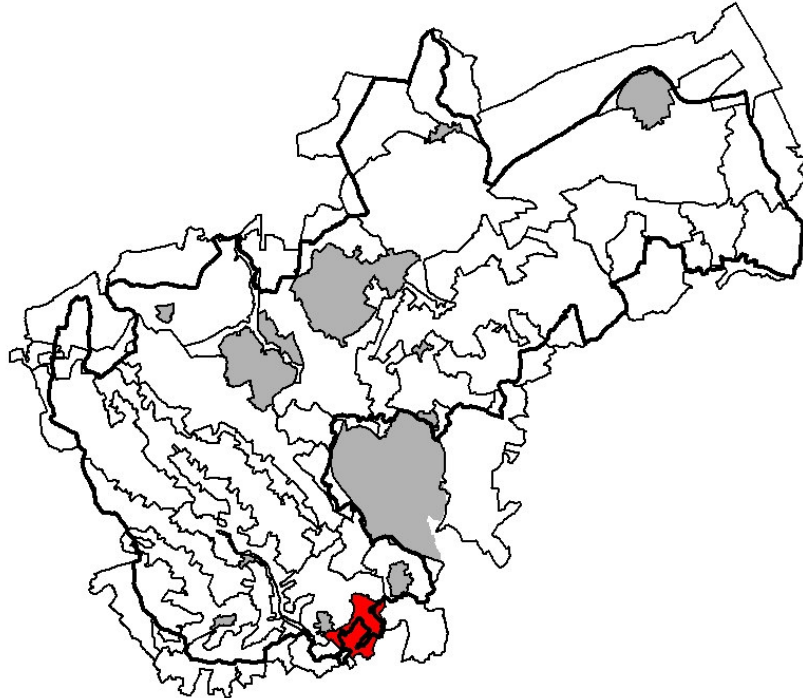
##### Landscape management guidelines

- Promote the creation of a network of new medium to large woodlands in the open arable landscape, particularly with a view to visually integrating the intrusive elements.
- Utilise ancient hedge and field boundaries to locate the most appropriate location for wood restoration and expansion
- Encourage the reversal of habitat fragmentation and the creation and improvement of habitat links to create eco-corridors.
- Encourage reversion from arable uses to pasture and grassland along the valley floor to link Singler's Marsh with other areas of pasture to the west.
- Encourage the eradication of invasive non-native species.
- Promote hedgerow restoration and creation throughout the area to provide visual and ecological links between existing and proposed woodland areas. Pattern to follow historic field boundaries where possible.
- Maintain and develop the traditional pattern of roadside verges as a local feature and a wildlife resource.
- Restore arable land to permanent pasture and meadow. Priority will be given to land which buffers or links sites of existing wildlife importance.
- Protect remaining river valley habitats of significant nature conservation interest.
- Promote the use of low-density stock grazing as a management technique.
- Promote the re-introduction of permanent pasture and flooding regimes as normal agricultural practices, to increase landscape and habitat diversity.
- Promote the creation of buffer strips along watercourses to prevent pesticide, herbicide and fertilizer run-off and provide habitat for wildlife; encourage their linkage to eco-corridors within the wider landscape.

- Enhancement and creation of wetland landscape features such as reedbeds, ponds, scrapes and pollarded willows.
- For areas of semi-improved acid grassland avoid over-grazing, heavy public pressure, damage from vehicles, pollution and invasion by alien species.
- Promote the creation of uncropped or grass field margins to link between intensive arable production and important semi-natural habitats and along rights of way.
- Encourage the establishment of wet native woodland along watercourses, including black poplar and pollarded willow.

##### Built development guidelines

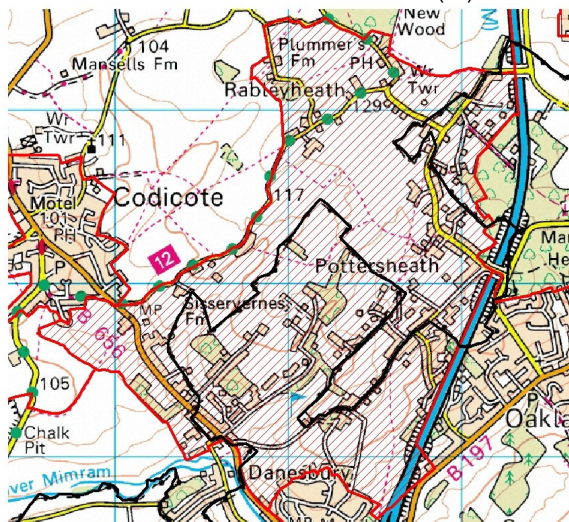
- Retain the rural character of Codicote Bottom Arable Valley, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the Character Area
- Resist the targeting of redundant or derelict pasture for development.
- Resist development that could lower the water table within river valleys and affect wetland habitats.
- Ensure that the surroundings of converted and new buildings are designed and maintained to be in keeping with their agricultural surroundings. Ensure that 'garden' details are screened from view where possible and native species are used for hedging/tree planting to the perimeter.
- Hard detailing should be kept to a minimum, with an emphasis on the use of natural materials
- Avoid the location of new development in visually intrusive locations, such as higher ground or where it would be visible on the skyline
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area

**LOCATION**

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**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA**

The area lies in a broad band extending north of Welwyn and the River Mimram. The area lies east of Codicote and to the west of the A1(M).



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**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

Extensive area of heathland which has been developed and settled. Complex pattern of large plots with ribbon development following network of local lanes. Only part of this settlement lies within the district boundary. Linear blocks of woodland associated with local development.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- Gently rolling upland plateau landscape
- Extensive settlement generously dispersed over the south

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- A1(M) follows eastern boundary
- Linear woodland blocks



**ASSESSMENT****PHYSICAL INFLUENCES****Geology & soils**

Soils are free draining acid loamy brown soils over glacial deposits above Chalk.

**Topography**

Plateau landscape.

**Degree of slope**

Varies between 1:30 to 1:10 within incised valleys.

**Altitude range**

75m to 125m.

**Hydrology**

No discernable watercourses. Small number of local ponds adjacent to settlements

**Land cover and land use**

Arable landcover in the north. Smaller paddocks, gardens and development in the south.

**Vegetation and wildlife**

Danesbury Park is an important ecological resource within this Character Area. The park supports a diverse selection of habitat types, the most important of which are areas of old, species-rich neutral/acidic grassland that are regarded as being of county ecological importance. Some species indicative of old grasslands are present within the parkland, such as Adder's Tongue Fern. Ancient parkland trees are present and are a highly valuable ecological resource for fungi and invertebrates. Standing deadwood, such as that associated with veteran and senescent trees is a key ecological habitat that has suffered a national decline due largely to an excessive 'cleaning up' of our countryside. Deadwood habitats are essential for the survival of a range of species, many of which are nationally scarce. Ancient oak/hornbeam woodlands such as Catchpole and Longston Woods are present within this Character Area as are some areas of unimproved neutral marshy grassland. Woodlands are important for bat species (pipistrelle) and noctule has been recorded in the past. The vast majority of grassland within the UK are subject to some form of agricultural 'improvement'. Traditionally managed grasslands with their array of associated plants and animals are an increasingly rare sight.

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

Finds of Romano-British coins, pottery and building materials suggest that a Romano-British settlement lies to the west of the Character Area. To the far west cropmarks of an enclosure of unknown date and function are known from aerial photographs.

**Field Pattern**

The historic agricultural landscape is composed mainly of post 1950's enclosure. Pre 18<sup>th</sup> century and later enclosure lies to the north and pre 18<sup>th</sup> century 'irregular' enclosure, 20<sup>th</sup> century leisure and prairie fields – post 1950's boundary loss lie to the south. In the centre occur prairie fields with relict elements and pre 18<sup>th</sup> century 'irregular sinuous' enclosure. There are pockets of 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> century plantation throughout the area.

**Transport Pattern**

The A1(M) runs along the eastern boundary. There is a pattern of winding lanes.

**Settlements and Built Form**

The historic settlement pattern is composed of farmsteads and villages. The traditional buildings of the Character Area survive from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Plummers Farmhouse is a large 16<sup>th</sup> century timber framed farmhouse with 17<sup>th</sup> century additions.

**EVALUATION**

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

Historic and mature landscape character interspersed with extensive but widely dispersed settlement patterns. Linear woodland features help to provide a mature setting to the Character Area.

**Rarity & distinctiveness**

The integrity and mature character are not compromised by widespread settlement.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

Development is small scale and fits well into the mature setting. Some commercial outlets (nurseries) located within the Character Area. Small water towers at Rabley Heath.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

Character Area well served by the network of small winding lanes and rights of way.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

(Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) have undertaken Tier B (Community of Place) consultations. Views of the local community have been sought and contributor's responses to each of the Character Areas will be analysed and a summary of the responses provided by HCC.

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

None.

**EVALUATION**

**CONDITION**

Land cover change: Localised  
 Age structure of tree cover: Mature  
 Extent of semi-natural habitat survival: Scattered  
 Management of semi-natural habitat: Good  
 Survival of cultural pattern: Declining/Relic  
 Impact of built development: Moderate  
 Impact of land-use change: Moderate

**Matrix Score: Moderate**

**ROBUSTNESS**

Impact of landform: Apparent  
 Impact of land cover: Prominent  
 Impact of historic pattern: Apparent  
 Visibility from outside: Locally visible  
 Sense of enclosure: Partial  
 Visual unity: Coherent  
 Distinctiveness/rarity: Frequent

**Matrix Score: Moderate**

CONDITION	GOOD	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	MODERATE	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	POOR	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
ROBUSTNESS				

## EVALUATION

### INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

#### Landscape Character Sensitivities

- The distinctive settlement pattern within the Character Area as a whole is characterised by dispersed ribbon development in large plots, which would be sensitive to inappropriate, unsympathetic or high density development and any form of development not in scale with the dispersed pattern
- Much of the development within Danesbury-Rabley Heath, both within North Hertfordshire and the Character Area as a whole, is relatively modern development and not of a vernacular style. It is, however, sympathetic to the local settlement pattern
- Linear woodland blocks and tree belts are located along many roads, creating a shaded, enclosed feel and a mature setting to development. This would be sensitive to removal or incursion of further development
- Roads through the Character Area are generally very minor and some have a private road feel to them. They would be sensitive to upgrading or improvement schemes
- Parts of the Character Area, including small areas within North Hertfordshire, have a parkland character due to the presence of mown grass lawns and mature individual trees. These would be sensitive to lack of management and removal of trees
- Although the Character Area as a whole is a gently rolling upland plateau, intimate dry valleys form an important element of the landscape, some of which are found within the North Hertfordshire part of Danesbury-Rabley Heath. These valleys could be susceptible to inappropriate development or erosion of their intimate feel.
- Field patterns within the Character Area are generally small scale and vary between geometric and organic in form. Hedgerows remain well maintained in many locations but have been removed in others and would be vulnerable to further loss. This is

particularly the case within the north eastern part of Danesbury-Rabley Heath, within North Hertfordshire.

- The transport corridor of the A1(M) has been imposed on the landscape at the eastern edge of the Character Area, but has been well screened by dense vegetation and has little visual impact on Danesbury-Rabley Heath.

Overall Danesbury-Rabley Heath is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. The Character Area contains distinctive dispersed settlement but elements of the wider landscape, such as hedgerows and tree belts have already been partly eroded.

#### Visual Sensitivities

- Glimpsed cross valley views are an important feature of the Character Area
- Dense vegetation within the Character Area limits the extent of many views
- Residential properties are generally set back from roads and screened by tree belts or tall hedges
- Within North Hertfordshire, views are generally more open in the north of the Character Area, where arable farmland and grazing are the predominant land use

In visual terms, Danesbury-Rabley Heath is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. Views within the Character Area are relatively enclosed. However, some important cross valley views to the south are also possible.

#### LANDSCAPE VALUE

Overall Danesbury-Rabley Heath is considered to be of **low landscape value**. The area is heavily influenced by human activity, there is limited visible evidence of the historic landscape and the landscape and landform is not particularly memorable.

**EVALUATION**

**CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT**

**Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)**

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to its small scale character, dispersed settlement pattern and mature woodland setting. It would introduce elements that could engulf the existing ribbon and dispersed development pattern. Increased housing development would be likely to affect the existing minor roads, which could erode the character of the landscape. The landscape capacity for major urban extensions or new settlements is considered to be low.

**Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)**

This type of development would not be entirely appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural character and dispersed settlement pattern. Some small scale expansion within North Hertfordshire of Pottersheath, Rabley Heath or Oaklands, carefully designed and in keeping with the existing character, could possibly be accommodated. However, any proposals would need clear justification to avoid the erosion of the mature woodland belts that characterise Danesbury-Rabley Heath. The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered to be moderate to low.

**Major transport developments/improvements**

This type of development would generally not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to the largely rural character of most routes at present. Upgrading of existing roads and lanes could erode the character of the landscape. Some upgrading of the A1(M) may be possible but would require careful mitigated through earthworks and the retention or replacement of existing woodland and shelterbelts. Additional traffic would also affect the peace and tranquillity of the Character Area. The landscape capacity for major transport developments/improvements is considered to be low to moderate.

**Commercial/warehouse estates**

This type of large scale development would not be appropriate in this character area. There are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. Existing minor roads may require upgrading to accommodate any significant larger volumes of traffic and/or HGVs. Any upgrading of the existing network would cause damage to the landscape character. The landscape capacity for commercial/warehouse estates is considered to be low.

**Individual large/bulky buildings**

There may be some limited capacity for sympathetically located and designed individual large buildings, particularly if they were vernacular in form and style and in keeping with the rural character. However, large buildings, if not carefully located, would erode the enclosed character of much of Danesbury-Rabley Heath. The landscape capacity for individual large/bulky buildings is considered to be low to moderate.

**Large scale open storage**

The intimate scale of much of Danesbury-Rabley Heath would make it more difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses without potential loss of woodland blocks. This would not be in keeping with the wooded character of the area and could lead to the erosion of the dispersed settlement pattern and unobtrusive road network that characterise much of Danesbury-Rabley Heath. The landscape capacity for large scale 'open' uses is considered to be low.

**EVALUATION**

**Mineral extraction/waste disposal**

This Character Area is currently relatively rural in appearance with small scale dispersed development. Whilst some small scale mineral extraction could be accommodated with careful design and mitigation measures, larger scale extraction or waste disposal would not be in keeping with the character of much of Danesbury-Rabley Heath and would be difficult to accommodate between ribbon developments. The minor roads may need considerable upgrading to be able to accept larger HGVs, which could further dilute the landscape character. Restoration proposals for any consented schemes should be mainly at grade and include for additional planting in character with existing patterns.

The landscape capacity for mineral extraction is considered to be low. Waste disposal would be a problem in all character areas due to the presence of aquifers.

**Incremental small scale development**

There would some capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were in keeping with the mature wooded character and unobtrusive. However, any proposals would need to retain and enhance existing woodland belts and retain key cross valley views to the south.

The landscape capacity for incremental small scale developments is considered to be moderate.

**Utilities developments e.g. masts, pylons, wind turbines**

There are currently very few detractors in Danesbury-Rabley Heath. Utilities developments or structures such as masts or wind turbines could have a major impact on the Character Area, particularly if they were to cause loss of woodland features. Although much of the Character Area is enclosed, large scale tall elements such as these would be highly visible within much of the North Hertfordshire part of the Character Area, as well as in surrounding Character Areas.

The landscape capacity for utilities developments is considered to be low.

## GUIDELINES

### STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE

#### Strategy: Improve and Conserve

NB. Guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire.

#### Landscape management guidelines

- Promote management of ancient woodland to encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and areas of semi-natural habitat and the creation of links between habitat areas
- Promote hedgerow restoration along the lines of historic field boundaries and for the creation of visual links between existing woodland areas
- Promote the use of traditional field hedges in place of post and wire enclosures to new grazing areas
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network
- Encourage the conservation of species-rich neutral/acidic grasslands
- Encourage a policy of "standing deadwood" habitats within the ageing tree population
- Promote appropriate management of habitats
- Badger survey maybe required
- Retain and restore the small scale field pattern

#### Built development guidelines

- Retain existing cross and along valley views, including those from gaps in dense roadside vegetation
- Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow winding lanes and associated hedge banks, sunken lanes, verges and hedges
- Encourage the planting of appropriate broadleaved woodland and vegetation to mitigate new development, particularly along the frontage of new development to retain the wooded character and mature setting
- Retain the wooded but settled character of Danesbury-Rabley Heath, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, density, form and style fitting to the Character Area
- Avoid the location of new development in visual intrusive locations, such as at the tops of valleys or the edges of the plateau where it would be visible on the currently largely undeveloped skyline
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or hedgerows
- Ensure that lighting associated with new development does not create additional urbanising influences on the character Area

**LOCATION**

Extensive plateau south of Reed extending east to Barkway and the B1368 and west towards Green End and Mill End. Incorporates the villages of Buckland and Chipping.

- Buckland Bottom belt of vegetation adjacent to the River Rib
- Capons Wood on the south-eastern edge
- Ermine Street roman road (now the A10)

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

Large, open and elevated plateau with the village of Buckland in the centre and bisected in the middle by the roman road, Ermine Street (now the A10). Quiet area with few features, dominated by large arable fields with no hedgerows giving an unusual prairie-like character to the area. There are extensive views within and across the plateau. The spire of Buckland church is a prominent feature at the highest point in the centre of the plateau. Small pockets of pasture exist within and around Buckland and Chipping. The River Rib runs through the western side of the area but is rarely noticeable other than at Buckland Bottom where a dense belt of tree and shrub vegetation creates a strong feature and valuable ecological habitat. A mature lime avenue extends between Buckland and west of Hodenhoe Manor and several new avenues of lime trees have been planted in the area.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- gently undulating elevated plateau
- open arable landscape with large fields
- very few hedgerows or defining boundaries
- small pockets of pasture within and around the villages of Buckland and Chipping
- cluster of farms in the village of Buckland but few elsewhere
- lime avenues

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- Buckland church spire
- mature lime avenue between Buckland and west of Hodenhoe Manor



## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

### Geology & Soils

Anglian boulder clay overlying chalk dominates most of the plateau and the soils are typically slowly permeable calcareous clays (Hanslope series). A small area on the eastern side has loamy soils over chalky till (Melford series). At Biggin Moor and west of Buckland, post-glacial erosion has exposed underlying Clay-with-Flints, which gives a more neutral or mildly acidic soil type, while Chalk is also exposed in these areas. At Chipping and Biggin Manor there are also glacial sands and gravels in small areas. Narrow deposits of alluvium also exist along the course of the River Rib at Buckland Bottom and in the headwaters of the River Quin at Biggin Manor. Biggin Moor springs arise from the Chalk and form a unique peat dome deposit.

### Topography

A gently undulating elevated plateau including a shallow valley around the upper reaches of the River Rib on the west side and shallow valleys around upper tributaries of the River Quin on the east side. The highest point of the plateau is marked by the village of Buckland.

### Degree of slope

Slopes are typically between 1 in 20 and 1 in 30. Around Mill Hill (west of Chipping) they increase to 1 in 10 and around Reed Wood and Southfield Grove they reduce to around 1 in 70.

### Altitude Range

The altitude varies from a high point of 140m in Buckland to a low point of 100m south of Chipping. Other high points include Capons Wood at 136m and Mill Hill at 125m.

### Hydrology

The plateau is drained by a series of small ditches. The east side of the plateau drains into the River Quin and the west side drains into the upper reaches of the River Rib. The ditches and streams are rarely marked by vegetation and are therefore often difficult to identify from a distance. The River Rib is heavily affected by arable run-off, and the area has few ponds, except for Daws Lane Common pond at Buckland, and woodland

pools of probably great age in the remnant of Capons Wood, Dades's Wood and Brandish Wood.

### Land Cover and Land Use

The plateau is dominated by large open, arable fields with few hedgerows resulting in an open prairie-like landscape. This pattern of land use, together with the cropmark evidence of cultivation from the Late Iron Age or Roman period onwards, suggests that woodland has not been a significant component in the landscape from a very early date. Mature vegetation is therefore scarce other than Capons Wood to the south and three other smaller woods: Dades's Wood, Burhill Wood and Brandish Wood and a tree belt adjacent to the River Rib at Buckland Bottom. Small areas of pasture are present within the village of Buckland, and hedgerows (particularly hawthorn) are also more common within the village.

### Vegetation and Wildlife

Semi-natural vegetation is severely limited, most of the area being intensive, very open arable farmland. There were formerly extensive plateau woodlands south of Buckland, but the only remnant is a small part of Capons Wood, which is wet ash/maple former coppice-with-standards woodland. Remnant woodland flora persists in some hedgebanks and some old tracksides. There are also remnant fragments of ash/maple woodland at Brandish and Burhill Woods, also remnants of formerly larger woods, as well as beside the Rib at Buckland Bottom. Biggin Moor springs, although somewhat degraded, remain a unique peat fen, with some alder woodland, damp scrub and rough tall fen. Neutral grassland remains only at Buckland churchyard and Daws Lane Common. Its pond is of some local interest.

Biggin Moor retains locally rare plants, such as Marsh Valerian, Purple Moor-grass, Blunt-flowered Rush and Marsh Pennywort. Thin-spiked Wood Sedge and Great Bellflower survived the felling of woodland at Buckland. The open arable fields however can support uncommon bird species, such as Yellow Wagtails in rape fields.

## HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

While the present day settlement pattern is medieval in origins there are indications of late Neolithic or early Bronze Age occupation activity, the plateau is bisected by the Roman road Ermine Street (the A10), and there is evidence for Late Iron Age and Romano-British exploitation of the landscape. While the evidence for habitation is limited, there is cropmarks indicate early field systems of Late Iron Age or Romano-British, and medieval dates, particularly in the central and southern part of the area.

The major present day settlements within the area are Buckland and Chipping, both situated on Ermine Street, and both pre-Conquest in origin. Chipping is an interesting example of a failed market settlement. The name is an Anglo-Saxon word for 'market', and its market status is documented in the mid-13th century. By 1360, following crop failures and the Black Death, the site was 'vacant' and the market was formally transferred to Buntingford. The remainder of the area contains a sparse network of dispersed farmsteads and houses which again reflects a settlement pattern established in the medieval period, and provides some evidence of settlement shift and decline. Medieval moated sites are known at Hodenhoe Manor, north of Burhill Wood, and at Buckland (Bull Moat, north of the village, and south of the church). St Andrews in Buckland is a good example of a fourteenth century church.

### Field Pattern

Fields units are typically large, a fact that is visually emphasised by the lack of hedgerows and other enclosing features. The field systems of the area were originally mainly pre-18th century unenclosed common arable fields, and smaller 'irregular' enclosure fields, though some field blocks north and east of Capons Wood, and west of Buckland Bottom, display a more mixed origin. Small areas of these 'irregular' enclosure field systems survive to the west and east of Buckland and at the northern end of the area, but the most of these pre-18th century field systems have been superseded by 18th century and later enclosure, and the greater part of the plateau is now primarily 20th century 'prairie' fields

some of which are enormous. Former extensive pastures at Buckland were destroyed in the 1970's.

### Transport Pattern

The roman road, Ermine Street (now the A10), is the dominant road within the area and passes across the middle of the plateau in a north-south direction. This is a busy trunk road but is relatively narrow and undulating despite its importance. Road traffic produces a continual background noise which is audible from much of the surrounding area. Elsewhere on the plateau, roads are quiet and infrequent. A narrow, minor road on the east side provides a route between Barkway and Buckland and a further minor road on the west side provides a winding route between Buckland and Sandon or Hay Green. Road verges throughout the area are generally narrow.

### Settlement and the Build Form

The area contains the two ancient villages of Buckland and Chipping both of which are situated on the roman road of Ermine Street. Buckland which distinctively stands on a hill was listed in the Domesday Book as 'Bochelande'. Both settlements now contain a mix of vernacular and twentieth century buildings. Buckland has an attractive fourteenth century church and a fine early Georgian house of chequered brick known as Buckland House. Unusually, the village of Buckland contains a concentration of farms located around a central area of pasture. The settlement of Chipping is smaller and more linear in form with housing either side of Ermine Street.

### Other Sources of Area Specific Information

Pevsner, N., rev. Cherry, B., Hertfordshire, Penguin (2000)

Rook, T, A History of Hertfordshire, Phillimore and Co Ltd (1997)

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The area has a remote and prairie-like character. It is a large-scale landscape, often feeling exposed and bare. Long distance views across the plateau are frequent with the spire of Buckland church forming a prominent and attractive feature in many views. Capons Wood (to the south of the area) also forms a significant feature on the horizon in views to the south. Along and adjacent to the A10, road traffic generates a continual background noise. However, elsewhere, the area is very quiet

**Rarity and Distinctiveness**

Within Hertfordshire the remote and prairie-like character of the area is both distinctive and rare

**VISUAL IMPACT**

Traffic on the A10 creates a significant visual impact locally. However generally, the plateau has a notable absence of features.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

Several footpath routes cross the plateau most of which radiate from Buckland or Chipping. This network of paths provides good access across the plateau for walkers. Access by bridlepath is much poorer with only one significant stretch of bridlepath in the area (between Mill Hill and Capons Wood).

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

This area has some distinctive aspects [D]

"Good for farmland birds" (Respondent 3134)

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

Areas of Archaeological Significance – including Buckland village and large area to the east of Chipping  
 Other Sites of Ecological, Geological and Geomorphological importance or interest – including Hilly Wood and Burhill Wood

<b>CONDITION</b>	
Land cover change	Localised
Age Structure of Tree cover	Mixed
Extent of Semi-natural habitat survival	Scattered
Management of Semi-natural habitat	Not obvious
Survival of Cultural pattern	Interrupted
Impact of built development	Low
Impact of land use change	Low
<b>STRENGTH OF CHARACTER</b>	
Impact of land form	Dominant
Impact of land cover	Dominant
Impact of historic pattern	Apparent
Visibility from outside	Widely visible
Sense of enclosure	Open / exposed
Visual unity	Unified
Distinctiveness / Rarity	Rare

Strengthen and Reinforce	Conserve and Strengthen	Safeguard and Manage
Improve and Reinforce	Improve and Conserve	Conserve and Restore
Reconstruction	Improve and Restore	Restore Condition to Maintain Character

**EVALUATION**

**INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY**

**Landscape Character Sensitivities**

- Whilst the wider Character Area of Buckland Plateau contains the villages of Buckland and Chipping, both of which contain a mix of vernacular and 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings, the parcels of land within North Hertfordshire are predominantly unsettled and would be vulnerable to change
- Small blocks of woodland are characteristic of the wider Buckland Plateau Character Area. The smaller number of these within North Hertfordshire would be particularly sensitive to removal.
- The limited number of hedgerows within the Buckland Plateau would be vulnerable to further removals and inappropriate management techniques
- Mature trees and avenues, within the wider Character Area and within North Hertfordshire, would be vulnerable to removal. Avenue planting is more difficult to establish than woodland belts due to the exposed nature of the plateau
- The limited vegetation along the River Rib, particularly within North Hertfordshire, would be vulnerable to further removal
- Minor roads through the Character Area are narrow and generally open. They would be sensitive to widening or alterations
- The linear alignment of Ermine Street Roman Road (the A10)

Overall Buckland Plateau is considered to be of **moderate to low sensitivity**. The rural nature of the Character Area would be sensitive to the introduction of unsympathetic elements, particularly in the open landscape, but there is currently a noticeable absence of specific features.

**Visual Sensitivities**

- Open sweeping views and panoramic views throughout the Character Area
- Woodland blocks in surrounding Character Areas form important wooded skylines
- Vegetation provides an increased sense of enclosure in the south of the Character Area, outside North Hertfordshire
- The A10 is not contained by vegetation, giving views across the Character Area for road users but also views of traffic from throughout the Character Area

In visual terms, Buckland Plateau is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. Views across the Character Area would be sensitive to the introduction of incongruous features.

**LANDSCAPE VALUE**

Overall Buckland Plateau is considered to be of **moderate landscape value**. Aspects of particular value within Buckland Plateau are the lack of incongruous elements, the sense of remoteness and openness, and the presence of vernacular settlement that contributes to a distinctive sense of place (outside North Hertfordshire).

**EVALUATION**

**CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT**

**Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)**

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural nature. It would introduce elements that would alter the character and affect the existing key characteristics such as the open arable landscape and gently undulating plateau feature. Increased housing development could affect the existing minor roads or alter the historic alignment of the A10 Roman Road, which would erode the character of the landscape.

The landscape capacity for large urban extensions or new settlements is considered to be low.

**Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)**

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural and undeveloped character. Visual impacts could be high, due to the open nature of the landscape.

The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered to be low within North Hertfordshire.

**Major transport developments/improvements**

This type of development would generally not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to the largely rural character of most routes at present. Upgrading of existing roads and lanes could erode the character of the landscape or affect the historic alignment of the A10. However, some upgrading of the A10 may be possible subject to archaeological excavations and would provide the opportunity for better integration into the Character Area. Additional traffic would also affect the peace and tranquillity of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for major transport developments/improvements is considered to be low to moderate.

**Commercial/warehouse estates**

This type of large scale development would not be appropriate in this Character Area. There are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. Existing minor roads would be inappropriate for any significant larger volumes of traffic and/or HGVs.

The landscape capacity for commercial/warehouse estates is considered to be low.

**Individual large/bulky buildings**

There may be some limited capacity for sympathetically located and designed individual large buildings, particularly if they were of an agricultural character and in keeping with the rural character. However, large buildings, if not carefully located, would be visible across much of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for individual large/bulky buildings is considered to be low to moderate.

**Large scale open storage**

This type of large scale development is unlikely to be appropriate in this Character Area as there are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. Extensive development would also disrupt the open views and gently undulating landform.

The landscape capacity for large scale 'open' uses is considered to be low.

**EVALUATION**

**Mineral extraction/waste disposal**

This Character Area is currently relatively rural in appearance with small scale linear development. Whilst some small scale mineral extraction could be accommodated with careful design and mitigation measures, larger scale extraction or waste disposal would not be in keeping with the character of Buckland Plateau. Restoration proposals for any consented schemes should be mainly at grade and include for additional planting in character with existing patterns.

The landscape capacity for mineral extraction is considered to be low to moderate. Waste disposal would be a problem in all character areas due to the presence of aquifers.

**Incremental small scale development**

There may be some capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were vernacular in form and style and in keeping with the rural character. However, large buildings, if not carefully located, could erode the rural and undeveloped character of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for incremental small scale developments is considered to be low to moderate.

**Utilities developments e.g. masts, pylons, wind turbines**

There are currently very few of detractors in the area. Utilities developments or structures such as masts or wind turbines are likely to have a major impact on the rural character of Buckland Plateau. Large scale tall elements such as these would be highly visible within the Character Area, as well as in surrounding Character Areas.

The landscape capacity for utilities developments is considered to be low to moderate.

**GUIDELINES****STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE****Strategy: Conserve and Restore**

NB. Guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire.

**Landscape management guidelines**

- Encourage the reversal of habitat fragmentation and the creation and improvement of habitat links to create eco-corridors.
- Protect remaining river valley habitats of significant nature conservation interest along the River Rib.
- Encourage the establishment of wet native woodland along the River Rib including black poplar and pollarded willow.
- Promote the restoration of hedge improvement and planting adjacent to rights of way, green lanes and along parish boundaries.
- Ensure new planting is encouraged within the area particularly in and around the villages of Buckland and Chipping. Ensure landscape improvements respect the historic context of existing features. Ornamental species should only be used to replace damaged or over-mature specimens.
- Promote both the creation of new ponds and the retention / enhancement for wildlife of existing ponds.

**Built development guidelines**

- Retain the rural character of Buckland Plateau, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the Character Area
- Avoid the location of new development in visually intrusive locations, such as on the edges of the plateau, where it would be visible on the currently largely undeveloped skyline
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing scarce woodland blocks or hedgerows
- Ensure that design proposals for minor roads fit the grain of the local landscape both horizontally and vertically; avoid significant impact on the local field pattern and use indigenous native tree and shrub species. However, it should not be axiomatic to enclose any new or existing road with dense hedging on both sides – due reference should be made to local character and roads should be left open where appropriate.
- Develop a strategy for the planting and management of the A10 corridor through the area that respects the historic setting and is in keeping with local character but minimizes the visual impact.
- Ensure that the surroundings of converted and new buildings are designed and maintained to be in keeping with their surroundings by ensuring that hard landscape and 'Garden' details are screened from view where possible and native species are used for hedging and tree planting to the perimeter.
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area

**LOCATION**

Valley of the River Quin located to the north of Braughing and extending northwards along the B1368 to Biggin Bridge (south of Barkway). Incorporates the settlements of Hare Street and Great Hormead.

- village of Great Hormead with many vernacular buildings in enclosed tributary valley
- B1368 passing through the centre of area

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

A shallow valley around the River Quin with open arable farmland either side. A bland landscape with few treasures. The River Quin is poorly defined in many stretches with little or no streamside vegetation. Settlements and field patterns are focused on the B1368 which passes through the centre of the area. The area contains several twentieth century features which detract from the quality of the area including: high voltage electricity pylons, chalk pit, Silkmead Farm industrial area, telecom masts, grain silos by Mutfords Farm and a sewage treatment works. The valley is sparsely vegetated but includes a substantial area of ornamental conifers north of Hare Street which form a dominant but inappropriate feature in the valley. The area includes the historic settlement of Great Hormead within a short, steep-sided tributary valley.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- shallow valley with gently sloping sides
- open, arable farmland
- small settlements and individual properties scattered along the B1368
- fragmented hedges, some low and broken, others more substantial
- frequent extensive views along and across the valley
- absence of woodland and few mature trees

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- telecom masts on distant horizon



## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

### Geology & Soils

The area is dominated by fluvo-glacial deposits from the Anglian glaciation, over much of the underlying chalk, except in some areas east of the river. Boulder Clay occupies the upper valley slopes, and the valley floor has a narrow belt of recent alluvium. Soils are generally fertile, calcareous and well-drained due to the presence of sand. To the west side of valley soils are a mix of deep, fertile, well drained fine loamy, coarse loamy and fine loamy soils, (Melford series). To the east side of valley there are areas of shallow well drained calcareous silty soils over chalk (Upton 1series).

### Topography

A shallow valley around the River Quin with gently sloping sides. At the northern end, the valley divides into three small shallow valleys, each following upper tributaries of the River Quin. At the southern end of the area (north of Braughing), the valley becomes slightly narrower with steeper sides.

### Degree of slope

At the northern end of the valley the slopes are typically 1 in 20 and at the southern end slopes vary between 1 in 7 and 1 in 15.

### Altitude Range

Levels range between 73m in the valley bottom at Quinbury Farm (at the southern end of the valley) to 120m at the top of the valley sides (at the northern end of the valley).

### Hydrology

The River Quin which rises near Barkway (north of the area) is a small and insignificant watercourse, typically a winterbourne, especially north of Great Hormead. The watercourse is fed by a number of sources including springs from Biggin Moor, Great Hormead Brook, Little Hormead Brook and various field ditches. Within the area, riverside vegetation is often absent which means the river is barely distinguishable at many points.

### Land Cover and Land Use

The valley sides are dominated by open arable farmland in small to medium fields with some occasional large fields particularly at

the northern end. Hedgerows between fields and along roads are fragmented. Some are low and broken with significant gaps and others more substantial. The area contains virtually no woodland, and map evidence, together with the cropmark evidence of early cultivation, suggests that woodland has not been a significant component in the landscape from a very early date. However, a significant block of mixed vegetation including a substantial proportion of ornamental conifers is present around a former works site to the north of Hare Street. This is visually intrusive and detracts from the character of the valley. A small area of trees and shrubs has also recently been planted close to Quinbury Farm. The valley also contains a few non-agricultural land uses including an industrial area at Silkmead Farm and a sewage works between Hay Street and Dassels.

### Vegetation and Wildlife

Owing to its fertile, well-drained soils, the area is almost devoid of semi-natural vegetation. There are some remaining neutral grasslands of local interest at Dassels, and some secondary grasslands and scrub on former allotments at Hare Street. The road verges of the B1368, and a green lane at Beauchamps are probably the most important remaining grasslands. There are no woods, and no aquatic habitats of any note. The chalk quarry west of Anstey is of local importance for a limited chalk flora on spoil banks etc.

The chalk spoil banks at Anstey Pit hold a significant colony of Kidney Vetch, as well as occasional plants of Woolly Thistle, both scarce in Hertfordshire. Tall Broomrape also occurs. The local arable weed Shepherd's Needle is known from fields at Hare Street. Pepper Saxifrage and Meadow Cranesbill survive in grasslands at Dassels.

## HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The majority of its farmsteads and isolated houses are dispersed along the valley sides, with the settlements at Hare Street, Dassels and Great Hormead being sited on B1368, the road north from Braughing to Barkway, or on the B1038, the east-west road from Buntingford to Brent Pelham. These hamlets

and villages all have medieval origins, as do the majority of farms within the area. Quinbury, Mutfords and Biggin Manor Farm are all medieval sites; and Biggin Farm is also the site of a medieval hospital and chapel. While the present day settlement pattern has medieval or post-medieval origins there are indications of late Neolithic or early Bronze Age activity along the valley, including an extant barrow at Bummers Hill and cropmarks of ring ditches (plough-raised burial mounds) at Lincoln Hill, Anstey and at Mutford's. A Bronze Age axe has been found at the latter site. Cropmarks of linear ditches and enclosures also provide evidence of undated, but early occupation and exploitation of the landscape. The villages of Hare Street and Great Hormead were once prosperous settlements and contain several large properties including Hare Street House, (the country residence of Catholic Archbishops of Westminster) the Georgian-fronted Dane End Farm in Great Hormead and the Tudor Old Rectory in Great Hormead. Until recently Great Hormead was known for its two windmills but these no longer remain.

#### **Field Pattern**

Fields units are typically large in size, but locally there are some smaller units around settlements and properties. The field systems of the area were originally pre-18th century unenclosed common arable fields, and smaller 'irregular' enclosure fields, with the latter system predominating on the eastern side of the valley and at its southern end, close to and east of the river. Small areas of these 'irregular' enclosure field systems survive at Biggin Manor, Bandons, east of Hare Street and north east of Dassels, but nearly all the unenclosed common arable and irregularly enclosed field systems of pre-18th century date have been superseded. In the southern half of the area 20th century 'prairie' fields predominate, but substantial blocks of 18th century or later enclosure fields survive in the northern part of the area, north of the Hormead road. This contrasting survival appears to reflect the contour of the valley slope.

#### **Transport Pattern**

The B1368 runs through the area forming a locally important north-south route connecting the settlements of Barkway, Hare Street, Dassels, Braughing and Standon. At Hare Street the B1368 is crossed by the B1038

which is an east-west route providing routes to and from Buntingford. Several other minor roads connect with the B1368 and provide east-west connections across the valley. These are predominantly straight roads which join the B1368 at right angles.

#### **Settlement and the Built Form**

Settlement is concentrated along the B1368 on the west side of the River Quin in a series of small linear settlements: Hay Street, Dassels and Hare Street. These include a mixture of traditional vernacular buildings and a variety of more recent development. The area also includes the village of Great Hormead which is located in a small tributary valley on the east side of the River Quin. The village is an historic settlement focussed around a central linear road. Pevsner refers to the village street as 'uncommonly charming' and it contains a large proportion of vernacular buildings many of which are thatched properties with large overhanging roofs and exposed timbers. The Three Tuns public house is a traditional pub in the centre of the village.

#### **Other Sources of Area Specific Information**

Pevsner: Hertfordshire - The Buildings of England

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The area is widely visible from the edge of the adjacent plateaux and from within the arable areas. Views are generally open and extensive due to the absence of significant blocks of vegetation. However, from the B1368 views are more infrequent and are often filtered or screened as a result of roadside vegetation. The settlement of Great Hormead is also visually contained due to its location within a narrow and relatively steep-sided valley.

**Rarity and Distinctiveness**

The area is a bland landscape with few distinctive features

**VISUAL IMPACT**

There are a number of detracting features along the length of the valley which affect the visual quality of the area. Hare Street includes a mixture of twentieth century development much of which does not compliment the older vernacular buildings in the village. To the north of Hare Street, a former works site contains a large number of coniferous trees which are highly visible and detract from the character of the river valley. Other detracting features in the area include a large silo on Mutfords Farm, Anstey quarry, Silkmead Farm industrial area and two high voltage powerlines which cross the valley north of Hare Street.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

Footpaths and bridlepaths cross the valley at regular intervals within the area. This includes a short section of the waymarked Hertfordshire Way which diverts across the valley from Great Hormead to Hare Street before crossing back across the valley to Little Hormead. However, there are few paths or bridleways in a north-south direction adjacent to the River Quin.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

An area of modest general regard but particularly valued locally, as evidenced by a community campaign to have the area included within a new AONB [D]

River Quin: "Sometimes the tiny feeders which swell the larger stream, Will travel on the highway – a thing you'd scarcely dream; And as for fords and bridges, they everywhere abound, To lure the traveller onward where some goodly scene is found."

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

SAM - Bummers Hill: a bowl barrow 135m north-west of Mutford Cottages.  
Great Hormead Conservation Area  
Areas of Archaeological Significance

<b>CONDITION</b>	
Land cover change	Widespread
Age Structure of Tree cover	Mixed
Extent of Semi-natural habitat survival	Relic
Management of Semi-natural habitat	Not obvious
Survival of Cultural pattern	Interrupted
Impact of built development	Moderate
Impact of land use charge	Moderate
<b>STRENGTH OF CHARACTER</b>	
Impact of land form	Apparent
Impact of land cover	Apparent
Impact of historic pattern	Apparent
Visibility from outside	Widely visible
Sense of enclosure	Open / exposed
Visual unity	Coherent
Distinctiveness / Rarity	Frequent

Strengthen and Reinforce	Conserve and Strengthen	Safeguard and Manage
Improve and Reinforce	Improve and Conserve	Conserve and Restore
Reconstruction	Improve and Restore	Restore Condition to Maintain Character

**EVALUATION**

**INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY**

**Landscape Character Sensitivities**

- Vegetation associated with the River Quin is intermittent and generally located outside of North Hertfordshire
- The Character Area as a whole is a shallow valley, but within North Hertfordshire the landform is flatter and more open
- Within much of the Character Area hedgerows are present along the B1368, the main route through the area. Within North Hertfordshire these hedgerows are not present
- The settlement pattern within the Upper Quin Valley is ribbon development along the B1368, either dispersed or more concentrated such as in Hare Street. This is not the case within North Hertfordshire, where no built form is present
- Two lines of electricity pylons stride through the centre of the character area on an east – west axis and are an existing detractor to the character of the area. This is not the case within North Hertfordshire, where pylons are only visible in the distance
- Rights of way, including the Hertfordshire Way, cross the valley frequently in an east – west direction. However, there are no rights of way within the North Hertfordshire part of the Character Area
- The Character Area as a whole is generally smaller scale than some of those elsewhere in North Hertfordshire and land uses are more varied. However, the parcel of land within North Hertfordshire forms part of a medium to large arable field and is less characteristic

Overall Upper Quin Valley is considered to be of **moderate to low sensitivity**. The river is not a dominant feature within the Character Area and the single parcel of land within North Hertfordshire is not distinctive.

**Visual Sensitivities**

- Views within the Character Area as a whole are restricted by the sides of the shallow Quin valley, although this is not as obviously the case within North Hertfordshire
- Views along the valley are generally open due to a lack of significant blocks of vegetation within the wider Character Area
- The skyline from within the Character Area as a whole is varied, with some areas open and others wooded. From within North Hertfordshire the horizons are generally wooded, with woodland blocks occurring within Character Areas beyond the Upper Quin Valley

In visual terms, Upper Quin Valley is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. Views along the valley are relatively open but are more restricted when looking out of the valley.

**LANDSCAPE VALUE**

Overall Upper Quin Valley is considered to be of **low landscape value**. Although there are minimal incongruous elements and a sense of remoteness and tranquillity within Upper Quin Valley, the landscape and landform is not particularly memorable. This is particularly the case within the North Hertfordshire part of the Character Area.

**EVALUATION**

**CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT**

**Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)**

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural and small scale nature. Within North Hertfordshire there is only just over 5ha of land on which to locate a new settlement, although the small area of land within North Hertfordshire could form part of a larger area of land in the wider Character Area. A new settlement would introduce elements that would alter the character and affect existing key characteristics such as the small settlements and extensive views along the valley. Increased housing development would be likely to affect the existing minor roads, which could erode the character of the landscape.

The landscape capacity for large urban extensions or new settlements is considered to be low.

**Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)**

This type of development would not be entirely appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural, isolated and undeveloped character. Within North Hertfordshire there are no settlements that could be extended into this Character Area.

The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered to be low.

**Major transport developments/improvements**

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to the largely rural character of most routes at present. Upgrading of existing roads and lanes could erode the character of the landscape. Additional traffic would also affect the peace and tranquillity of the Character Area. There are limited opportunities within North Hertfordshire for transport improvements in this Character Area.

The landscape capacity for major transport developments/improvements is considered to be low.

**Commercial/warehouse estates**

This type of large scale development would not be appropriate in this character area. There are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. Existing minor roads would be inappropriate for any significant larger volumes of traffic and/or HGVs. There would be limited opportunities to develop large buildings within the North Hertfordshire part of this Character Area.

The landscape capacity for commercial/warehouse estates is considered to be low.

**Individual large/bulky buildings**

There may be some limited capacity for sympathetically located and designed individual large buildings, particularly if they were of an agricultural or vernacular character and in keeping with the rural character.

Large agricultural buildings are currently located along the B1368, interspersed with residential properties, but within the North Hertfordshire part of this Character Area there would be limited opportunities to develop large buildings.

The landscape capacity for individual large/bulky buildings is considered to be low to moderate, but low within North Hertfordshire.

**Large scale open storage**

The smaller scale of Upper Quin Valley would make it more difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses without potential loss of vegetation. There may also be potential impacts on the River Quin and its tributaries. This would not be in keeping with the rural character of the area and could introduce new elements that would conflict with the existing characteristics. The minor roads are unlikely to have capacity to accommodate this type of development and there would be limited opportunities to develop large open uses within the North Hertfordshire part of this Character Area.

The landscape capacity for large scale 'open' uses is considered to be low.

**EVALUATION**

**Mineral extraction/waste disposal**

This Character Area is currently rural in appearance with small scale linear development along the B1368. Whilst some small scale mineral extraction could be accommodated with careful design and mitigation measures, there would be limited opportunities to undertake mineral extraction in the North Hertfordshire part of the Character Area. There may also be a need to upgrade local roads, which could dilute the landscape character. If minerals schemes were consented, restoration proposals should be mainly at grade and include for additional planting in character with existing patterns.

The landscape capacity for mineral extraction is considered to be low. Waste disposal would be a problem in all character areas due to the presence of aquifers.

**Incremental small scale development**

There may be some capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were agricultural or vernacular in form and style and in keeping with the rural character. However, due to the limited extent of the Character Area within North Herefordshire any proposals would need clear justification.

The landscape capacity for incremental small scale developments is considered to be low to moderate, but low within North Hertfordshire.

**Utilities developments e.g. masts, pylons, wind turbines**

There are currently a small number of detractors within or visible from the Character Area, including telecommunications masts on the horizons. Further utilities developments or structures such as masts or wind turbines are likely to have a noticeable impact on the rural character of the Upper Quin Valley as a whole. Large scale tall elements such as these would be highly visible within the Character Area, as well as in surrounding Character Areas, and could only be located in a relatively exposed location in North Hertfordshire.

The landscape capacity for utilities developments is considered to be low to moderate.

**GUIDELINES****STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE****Strategy: Improve and Conserve**

NB. Guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire.

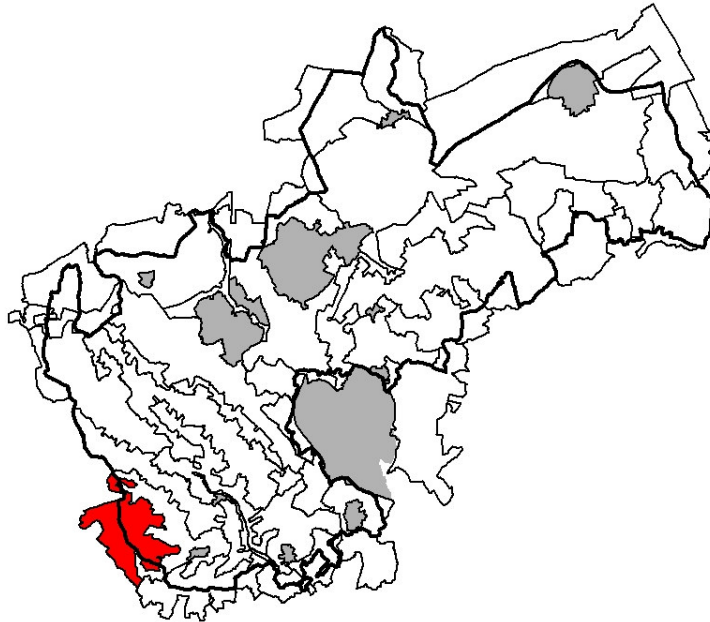
**Landscape management guidelines**

- Ensure new planting is encouraged within the area. Ensure landscape improvements respect the historic context of existing features and the form and character of parkland and gardens. Ornamental species should only be used to replace damaged or over-mature specimens
- Protect the remaining river valley habitats of nature conservation interest, especially where they contribute to a suite of habitats, such as neutral grassland, running water, wet grassland, valley or floodplain woodland and grazing marsh
- Promote the re-introduction of permanent pasture adjacent to the River Quin
- Promote the enhancement of the River Quin and its tributaries by the creation of wetland landscape features such as reedbeds, ponds, scrapes and pollarded willows
- Promote the management of existing riparian trees. Promote additional tree planting of native water loving species, willow, alder and poplar to emphasize the line of the watercourse
- Promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and important semi-natural habitats and the creation of links between semi-natural habitats
- Conserve unimproved and semi-improved grassland wherever possible, avoiding agricultural improvements to reduce their acid or calcareous nature, in order to maintain their nature conservation value
- Maintain and develop the traditional pattern of roadside verges as a local feature and a wildlife resource. Where development is likely to affect verges and damage is unavoidable, development should include details of protection of the remaining verge and replacement of its nature conservation value within the proposed scheme. This is particularly important where verges include hedgebanks, sunken lanes, ditches, hedges and hedgerow trees
- Encourage the development of an improved network of rights of way particularly along the valley giving enhanced recreational opportunities for residents

**Built development guidelines**

- Retain the rural character of the Upper Quin Valley, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the Character Area. Ideally this should follow the pattern of ribbon development along the B1368
- Avoid the location of new development in visual intrusive locations, such as on the edges of the valley where it would be visible on the currently largely undeveloped skyline
- Resist development that could lower the water table within river valleys and affect wetland habitats
- Traffic calming measures, where considered necessary, must be of a scale and design that relates to the local the landscape character of the settlement.
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area

## LOCATION



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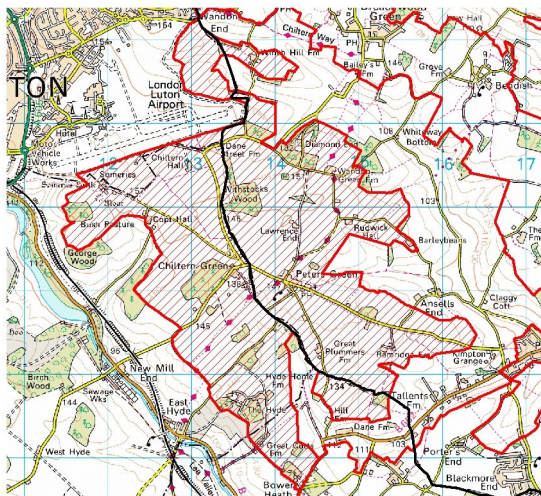
### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

Character Area extends from boundary of Luton Airport in the north to Kimpton valley in the south.

### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Gently rolling elevated landscape plateau defined by steep sided incised valleys to east, west and south.

Many large exposed arable fields with smaller pockets of grazing around settlements. Occasional scattered dwellings. Field pattern degraded with relatively few remaining hedgerows. Remnant mature hedgerow trees. Mixture of woodland types, some mature, well-established, deciduous woodland interspersed with more recent mixed woodland plantations. Character Area truncated by the man-made landscape features associated with Luton Airport.



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### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Elevated plateau
- Predominantly large scale arable use
- Smaller pastoral fields closer to settlements
- Large to medium sized mixed woodland plantations
- Historic houses and associated parkland

### DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Lawrence End parkland
- Man-made landscape at Luton Airport boundary
- Water-tower at Peters Green



**ASSESSMENT****PHYSICAL INFLUENCES****Geology & soils**

Soils are free-draining loamy acidic brown soils over glacial drift till.

**Topography**

The plateau covers a broadly rectangular area extending some 4km from north to south and 3km from east to west. The plateau appears flat to gently sloping to the southeast.

**Degree of slope**

Minimal, typically 1:200 across the plateau.

**Altitude range**

125m to 160m.

**Hydrology**

There are no significant water courses. There are, however, a number of small ponds associated with farms in the north.

**Land cover and land use**

The predominant land use is arable farming.

**Vegetation and wildlife**

Scattered woodland in discrete parcels including both ancient deciduous woodlands and more recent mixed plantations. Species include hornbeam coppice, oak and ash. Regenerating elm in hedgerows also some holly is common. Lime is the dominant parkland tree at Lawrence End Park which is largely improved grassland.

This Character Area contains a few ancient semi-natural woodlands, which are typically dominated by oak and coppiced hornbeam. Bluebells are frequently a feature of the groundflora, but other ancient woodland indicators are also present. Withstocks Wood, Bishey Wood and Burnt Wood are examples of ancient semi-natural oak and hornbeam woodland. These woods have been replanted with conifers to varying extents, but their seedbanks of ancient flora are retained, as denoted by the presence of ancient woodland indicator species. Occasional ancient, species-rich hedgerows are another feature of this Character Area. Woodlands are important for bats (piprelle, brown long-eared). Evidence of Buzzards in the area. The Character Area has generally a sparsity of ecologically interesting sites.

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

In the west are the remains of a chapel and Someries Castle.

**Field pattern**

The historic agricultural landscape pattern consists of a mixture of prairie fields with post-1950s boundary loss, pre-18th century irregular enclosure, 18th century and later enclosure and ancient woodland. Today there are predominantly large irregular fields with smaller parcels of grazing land around settlements.

**Transport pattern**

Winding sunken lanes complement the more direct connecting roads. To the north the pattern of roads and lanes are truncated by the development at Luton Airport.

**Settlements and built form**

The historic settlement pattern is characterised by farms and villages.

**EVALUATION****VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The Character Area is only locally visible from the surrounding areas due to its elevated land form. The Character Area is generally peaceful, however, in the north aircraft noise is a particularly notable element. The landscape has been de-valued by extensive arable production and has open and exposed aspects. The parkland to the north is a more discrete landscape with unified features and contained views.

**Rarity & distinctiveness**

This landscape type is frequent in the county.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

There are few built detractors.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

The local network of roads and public rights of way radiates out from the hub, which covers the Character Area between Peters Green to Chiltern Green. The Character Area is well served by footpaths and bridleways.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) have undertaken Tier B (Community of Place) consultations. Views of the local community have been sought and contributor's responses to each of the Character Areas will be analysed and a summary of the responses provided by HCC.

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

LC1 Landscape Conservation Area

**EVALUATION**

**CONDITION**

Land cover change:	Widespread
Age structure of tree cover:	Mixed
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	Relic
Management of semi-natural habitat:	Good
Survival of cultural pattern:	Declining/Relic
Impact of built development:	Low
Impact of land-use change:	Moderate

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**Matrix Score:** **Good**

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**ROBUSTNESS**

Impact of landform:	Apparent
Impact of land cover:	Prominent
Impact of historic pattern:	Insignificant
Visibility from outside:	Locally visible
Sense of enclosure:	Partial
Visual unity:	Coherent
Distinctiveness/rarity:	Frequent

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**Matrix Score:** **Moderate**

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<b>CONDITION</b>	<b>GOOD</b>	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	<b>MODERATE</b>	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	<b>POOR</b>	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		<b>WEAK</b>	<b>MODERATE</b>	<b>STRONG</b>
<b>ROBUSTNESS</b>				

**EVALUATION**

**INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY**

**Landscape Character Sensitivities**

- A gently rolling elevated landscape plateau, approximately half of which is outside of the district boundary. The plateau is incised at its margins by steep sided valleys and is of rural character. The character area would be vulnerable to further urbanizing features
- Variety of woodland blocks and smaller copses some of which are ancient with bluebell covered woodland floor and others more recent mixed plantations. The woodland is vulnerable to lack of management or to removal
- The character area includes Lawrence End Parkland and The Hyde, which create a parkland character in areas of Peters Green Plateau. This character could be at risk from development pressure and inconsistent management
- Peters Green Plateau is characterised by large scale, exposed arable fields. The field patterns are degraded, with many hedgerows having been removed. The area would be vulnerable to the further removal of hedgerows and boundary vegetation
- Small pockets of grazing land are present adjacent to settlements within Peters Green Plateau. The character area would be sensitive to the loss of this characteristic
- The roads within the character area are all minor but vary from more open linear routes with occasional trees, to rural, winding sunken lanes with hedgerows, hedge banks and occasional ditches. The character area would be vulnerable to improvements/upgrading of the roads
- Luton Airport abuts the north west of the character area and is a detractor to the character of Peters Green Plateau. The landscape is degraded and impacted by man made features, including the control tower and lighting. The movement and noise associated with incoming and departing aircraft reduce the tranquillity and rural character of Peters Green Plateau

- Good public access through rights of way, including Chiltern Way and quiet lanes

Overall Peters Green Plateau is considered to be of **moderate to low sensitivity**. The gently rolling elevated plateau, woodland blocks and copses and the winding lanes create a rural character. However Luton Airport and the associated man made elements are detractors to the area creating an urban influence, which juxtaposes with the character of Peters Green Plateau.

**Visual Sensitivities**

- In the parkland landscape area and areas of woodland the views are framed and contained creating a sense of enclosure.
- Open and exposed views within the character area, which has been degraded by extensive arable production.
- Views across the plateau are enclosed by wooded horizons
- Luton airport to the north is a visual detractor for the character area
- Views from Luton Hoo west of the River Lea

In visual terms, Peters Green Plateau is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. Views within the plateau are open towards the wooded horizon. The parkland and woodland areas frame views and create a sense of enclosure, which would be sensitive to the introduction of additional development or urbanizing features.

**LANDSCAPE VALUE**

Peters Green Plateau is considered to be of **moderate landscape value**. Aspects of particular value within Peters Green Plateau are the condition of the landscape elements, the relative sense of remoteness and the presence of locally distinctive settlements and landscapes. However Luton Airport introduces incongruous elements adjacent to the character area, which dilutes the value of Peters Green Plateau.

**EVALUATION**

**CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT**

**Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)**

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural character and lack of connectivity to Luton. It would be of an inappropriate scale and would introduce elements that would urbanise the landscape, altering the character and removing the existing key characteristics. Visual impacts would also be high, due to the open views currently experienced across the plateau. Increased housing development would be likely to affect the existing rural roads, which could erode the character of the landscape.

The landscape capacity for large urban extensions or new settlements is considered to be low.

**Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)**

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to its isolated and rural character. Visual impacts could be high, due to the open views currently experienced.

The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered to be to low.

**Major transport developments/improvements**

This type of development would not be appropriate for the Character Area. Upgrading of existing rural roads could erode the character of the landscape. Additional traffic would also affect the peace and tranquillity of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for major transport developments/improvements is considered to be low.

**Commercial/warehouse estates**

This type of large scale development would not be appropriate in this character area. There are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. Existing minor roads would be inappropriate for any significant larger volumes of traffic and/or HGVs. Any 'improvements' to the existing network would cause damage to the landscape character. The existing airport boundary forms a natural limit to such development to the south.

The landscape capacity for commercial/warehouse estates is considered to be low.

**Individual large/bulky buildings**

There may be some limited capacity for sympathetically located and designed individual large buildings, particularly if they were of an agricultural character and in keeping with the rural character. However, large buildings could be highly visible within the Character Area if not carefully located would erode the rural character of Peters Green Plateau. Any large or bulky buildings should be balanced and screened by the planting of woodland copses and shelterbelts in keeping with the character of Peters Green Plateau.

The landscape capacity for individual large/bulky buildings is considered to be low to moderate.

**Large scale open storage**

The rural character of Peters Green Plateau would make it difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses without significant impact in much of the area. This would not be in keeping with the character of the area and likely to be very open to view and introduce new elements that would conflict with the existing characteristics. There may be scope in locations with good visual enclosure, closer to the airport, subject to suitable mitigation.

The landscape capacity for large scale 'open' uses is considered to be low to moderate.

**EVALUATION**

**Mineral extraction/waste disposal**

This Character Area is currently relatively rural in appearance. Whilst some small scale mineral extraction could be accommodated with careful design and mitigation measures, larger scale extraction would be more prominent and not be in keeping with the character of the area. If proposals were consented, any restoration proposals should be mainly at grade and include for additional planting in character with existing patterns. Loss of parkland and woodland should be avoided.

The landscape capacity for mineral extraction is considered to be low to moderate. Waste disposal would be a problem in all character areas due to the presence of aquifers.

**Incremental small scale development**

There may be some capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were to the periphery of existing settlements and of rural character. However, due to the existing character any proposals would need clear justification to avoid the erosion of the rural character of Peters Green Plateau.

The landscape capacity for incremental small scale developments is considered to be low to moderate.

**Utilities developments e.g. masts, pylons, wind turbines**

Luton airport, which abuts the character area, includes such developments in close proximity of the character area and within views from Peters Green Plateau. New utilities developments or structures such as masts or wind turbines would have a further impact on the rural character of Peters Green Plateau. Large scale developments, including tall elements would be highly visible within the Character Area, as well as being potentially visible in surrounding Character Areas.

The landscape capacity for utilities developments is considered to be moderate.

<b>GUIDELINES</b>	Nb. These guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire
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## STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE

### Strategy: Conserve and Strengthen

#### Landscape management guidelines

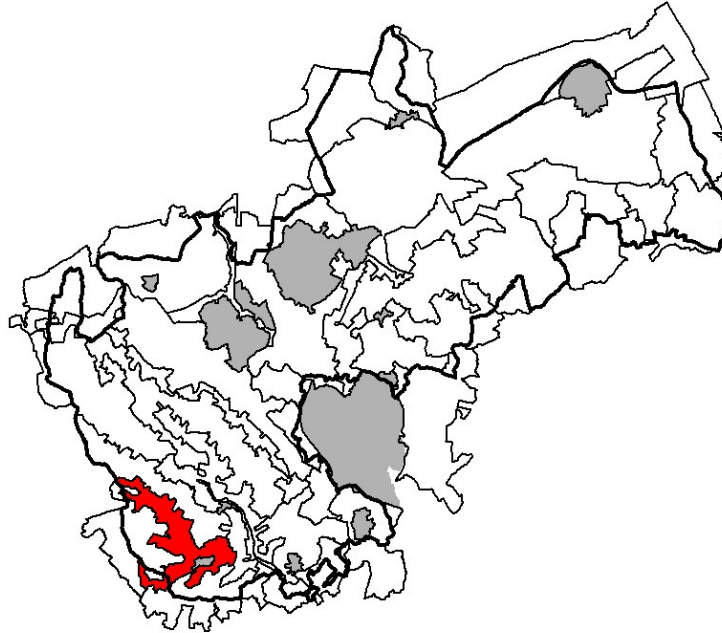
- Promote management of ancient woodland, particularly using techniques such as coppicing to encourage a diverse woodland flora and encourage the management of hornbeam, oak and ash coppice
- Conserve and enhance ancient woods as distinct historic landscape features within their original shapes and boundaries
- Promote other woodland planting and where historically appropriate, link up small remnants of ancient woodland
- Restore known lost woods or portions of woods, or create and manage new small to medium sized woods, particularly on the plateau/plateau edges
- Promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and areas of semi-natural habitat and the creation of links between habitat areas
- Maintain trees that provide features in the agricultural landscape such as hedgerow trees and pollards, small copses and scattering of ancient semi-natural woods, some hornbeam
- Encourage policies for safeguarding of existing hedges and the creation of new boundaries at appropriate locations, consistent with agricultural management practices, particularly restoration along the lines of historic field boundaries and for the creation of visual links between existing woodland areas
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Encourage the preparation and implementation of restoration and management plans for parkland landscapes including Lawrence End
- Ensure modern enclosure, often for horsiculture around settlements, does not change the character of the farmed landscape

- Maintain and extend the rights of way network

#### Built development guidelines

- Retain the rural character of Peters Green Plateau, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the Character Area
- Avoid the location of new development in visual intrusive locations where they would be visible on the skyline
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or ancient hedgerows
- Conserve the traditional character of Peters Green Plateau, ensuring that development uses appropriate vernacular materials and features to avoid inappropriate visual intrusion
- Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow winding lanes and associated hedge banks, sunken lanes, verges and hedges
- Encourage the planting of appropriate broadleaved woodland and vegetation to screen new development that could intrude in open rural views
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area
- Ensure applications for replacement dwellings, communication infrastructure, utility infrastructure have minimal impact on the landscape character and visual quality of the area
- Ensure redundant agricultural buildings subject to applications for change of use are monitored to ensure that they reflect the local building style
- Protect the dispersed settlement pattern – scattered farmsteads and small settlements in isolated hamlets with a road pattern that is winding
- Contain and minimise the effect of Luton Airport and any associated development on the wider Character Area

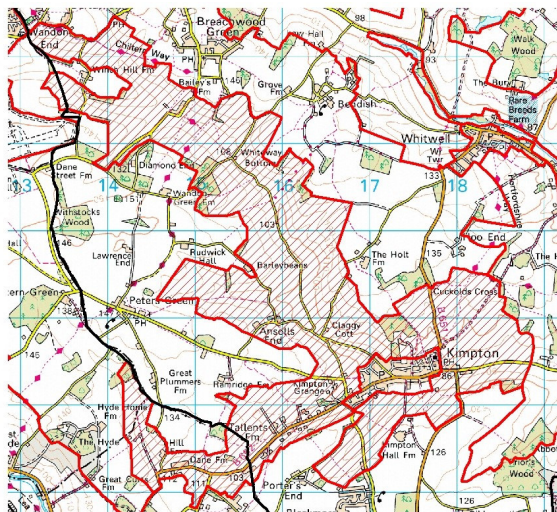
## LOCATION



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## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

The Whiteway valley extends from the eastern edge of Luton to a point west of Kimpton where the valley joins the Whitwell valley. Kimpton village lies at the confluence of the two valleys. The head of the Kimpton valley is located west of Plummers Lane, joining Kimpton Bottom Lane at Dane Farm.



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## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Steeply sided dry valleys with Whiteway Bottom Lane following the bottom of the valley and the B652 Kimpton Bottom Road to the south. To the north of Whiteways small winding lanes cross perpendicular to the line of the valley. Predominantly arable use. Whiteways Bottom is largely devoid of settlement whilst Kimpton Bottom has a linear settlement. Locally smaller field parcels on the more steeply sloping land. Scattered woodland parcels along the top edge of valley sides.

## KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Steep sided valley slope
- Dominant arable use
- Scattered woodland parcels

## DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Abuts Luton Airport runway



**ASSESSMENT****PHYSICAL INFLUENCES****Geology & soils**

Free draining loamy brown soils over Upper and Middle Chalk. Chalk is masked by overlying Clay-with-Flints and peri and post glacial coombe deposits.

**Topography**

Narrow valley in upper reaches gradually widening at confluence with other tributaries. The valley is approximately 1km wide east of Kimpton.

**Degree of slope**

Typically 1:10 slopes to valley sides.

**Altitude range**

Valley falls from 135m at suburban edge of Luton to 80m at Kimpton Mill. 125m at the head of the Kimpton valley.

**Hydrology**

Whiteway valley is a dry valley, but in time of high water table the historic river Kym can reappear at Kimpton Bottom. This can be influenced by Netherfield Spring. Drinking water aquifers lie under and adjacent to Luton Airport runway.

**Land cover and land use**

The predominant land use is arable farming.

**Vegetation and wildlife**

Limited woodland cover in the upper reaches of the valleys. Large woodland block to the north of Kimpton (Park Wood). Ancient semi-natural woodland is present on valley sides such as Hurst/Sewetts Wood, groves near Rowdalls Plantation and Hoo Park. Most of this woodland tends to be transitional between oak/hornbeam and ash/beechn, depending on the presence or absence of chalk near the surface. Cherry is also common.

Many of the woodlands have been replanted with alien conifers.

Fragments of calcareous grasslands remain along Kimpton Bottom and on road verges at Whiteway Bottom and north of Kimpton.

There are records of dormouse in Laysbury Dells. Kimpton is important for pipistrelle and brown long-eared bats.

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

In 1086 Kimpton was assessed for 4 hides and formed part of the possessions of Odo, Bishop of Bayeux. The village of Kimpton still retains its 12th century church of St Peter and St Paul. To the west of Kimpton lie ring ditches, linear ditches and enclosures of unknown origin

**Field pattern**

The historic agricultural landscape comprises a mixture of prairie fields with post-1950s boundary loss, pre-18th century irregular enclosure, pre-18th century irregular sinuous enclosure, 18th century and later enclosure and ancient woodland. Today a high proportion of hedges have been removed, there is predominantly large-scale field pattern but with smaller fields on some steeply sloping ground. Smaller field parcels associated with fringes of settlements and along Kimpton Bottom, west of Kimpton.

**Transport pattern**

A combination of primary routes following valley bottoms interconnected by small winding lanes often sunken and rising up the valley side.

**Settlements and built form**

The historic settlement pattern is characterised by outlying cottages, villages and farmsteads. The Character Area includes the larger settlement of Kimpton and incorporates some associated ribbon development. The scattered farmsteads are further up the valleys. Kimpton contains several 17th century houses and cottages.

**EVALUATION**

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The Character Area is a combination of undeveloped open landscapes, mainly in the upper valley reaches, with a feeling of remoteness, contrasting with the well settled, sub-urban character in the lower part of the valley.

**Rarity & distinctiveness**

Landscape type frequent in the west of the District.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

More recent ribbon development associated with Kimpton and Whitwell intrudes into the valley setting especially associated pony paddocks and stabling. Some narrower steeper sided valleys provide sense of visual containment. From certain vantage points, especially where there is little woodland cover, there are long distance views down the valley.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

Whereas the road network follows the valley bottoms, with feeder roads connecting to adjacent areas, the network of rights of way often cuts across the valleys.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) have undertaken Tier B (Community of Place) consultations. Views of the local community have been sought and contributor's responses to each of the Character Areas will be analysed and a summary of the responses provided by HCC.

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

LC1 Landscape Conservation Area  
GD 1909 Hoo

**EVALUATION**

**CONDITION**

Land cover change:	Widespread
Age structure of tree cover:	Mixed
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	Relic
Management of semi-natural habitat:	Not obvious
Survival of cultural pattern:	Relic
Impact of built development:	Low
Impact of land-use change:	Moderate

**Matrix Score:** **Poor**

**ROBUSTNESS**

Impact of landform:	Prominent
Impact of land cover:	Apparent
Impact of historic pattern:	Insignificant
Visibility from outside:	Locally visible
Sense of enclosure:	Contained
Visual unity:	Coherent
Distinctiveness/rarity:	Frequent

**Matrix Score:** **Moderate**

<b>CONDITION</b>	<b>GOOD</b>	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	<b>MODERATE</b>	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	<b>POOR</b>	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		<b>WEAK</b>	<b>MODERATE</b>	<b>STRONG</b>
		<b>ROBUSTNESS</b>		

## EVALUATION

## INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

## Landscape Character Sensitivities

- A largely rural character throughout Kimpton and Whiteway Bottom, which would be vulnerable to the addition of further urbanizing features
- The character area is a rolling and steeply incised dry valley system with side valleys feeding in. The valleys are significant features of the area and loss of character or lack of management to these would be detrimental to the area
- The landuse is predominantly arable fields, but with smaller fields on the steeper valley sides, where the land is used for grazing, cattle and sheep. Horsiculture paddocks are also present and associated with settlement fringes
- Hedgerows are the traditional boundary treatment but losses have occurred or they have become fragmented. The area would be vulnerable to further loss of hedgerows
- Scattered woodland blocks, generally along the top edge of the valley sides are a feature and loss of this characteristic would be highly detrimental to the area
- The area is tranquil with generally quiet minor roads. The roads that follow the valley bottoms include Whiteway Bottom Lane and the B652 Kimpton Bottom Road. These are crossed by smaller winding lanes. The roads are characterised by hedgerows and hedge banks, which are well trimmed. However some of these have been removed towards Luton Airport. The character area is vulnerable to further loss of these features
- There is limited settlement in the character area. Kimpton has linear ribbon development to the B651 with small estates behind. Whiteway Bottom is also characterised by isolated outlying cottages, villages and farmsteads, found further up the valleys. The character area is vulnerable to inappropriate or unsympathetic development and any form of development not in character or scale with the area
- Fragmented areas of surviving calcareous grassland are present in Kimpton and Whiteway Bottom. The character area would be vulnerable to loss or lack of management of this habitat
- Luton Airport abuts the west of the character area and is a visible and audible detractor to the character of Kimpton and Whiteway Bottom. The landscape is degraded to a degree by man made features, including the control tower and lighting. The flight path of overhead aircraft also reduces the tranquillity and rural character of Kimpton and Whiteway Bottom
- Good public access through numerous rights of way, particularly around Kimpton, including the Chiltern Way and the Hertfordshire Way

Overall Kimpton and Whiteway Bottom is considered to be of **moderate to low sensitivity**. The incised valley, arable landuse and winding lanes create a strong rural character. However Luton Airport and the associated man made elements to the north are detractors to the area creating an urban influence, which juxtaposes with the character of Kimpton and Whiteway Bottom

**EVALUATION**

**Visual Sensitivities**

- Views vary significantly between open and wooded horizons
- Views along and across the marked valley network are an important feature in the character area
- Long distance views from the higher vantage points are an important feature of the Character Area
- Luton airport is a visual detractor for the character area

In visual terms, Kimpton and Whiteway Bottom is considered to be of **moderate to low sensitivity**. Views along the valley and long distance views from vantage points would be sensitive to the introduction of additional urbanizing features.

**LANDSCAPE VALUE**

Overall Kimpton and Whiteway Bottom is considered to be of **moderate low landscape value**. Aspects of particular value within Kimpton and Whiteway Bottom are the incised valley which forms a striking landform, the relatively few rural lanes with associated hedge banks and hedgerows and the relative tranquillity. However Luton Airport introduces incongruous elements adjacent to the character area, which dilutes the rural character of Kimpton and Whiteway Bottom

**EVALUATION**

**CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT**

**Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)**

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural character. It would be of an inappropriate scale and would introduce elements that would urbanise the landscape, altering the character and removing the existing key characteristics. Visual impacts would also be high, due to the panoramic and cross valley views currently experienced. Increased housing development would be likely to affect the existing narrow, twisting lanes, which could erode the character of the landscape. Proximity to the Luton Airport flight path would affect residential amenity. The landscape capacity for major urban extensions or new settlements is considered to be low.

**Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)**

This type of development would not be entirely appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural and undeveloped character. Visual impacts could be high, due to the views along the valley and the long distance views currently experienced. Some small scale expansion at the periphery of Kimpton, carefully designed and in keeping with the existing character of the village, could possibly be accommodated. Proximity to the Luton Airport flight path would affect residential amenity. The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered to be moderate to low.

**Major transport developments/improvements**

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to the largely rural character of most routes at present. Upgrading of existing narrow lanes could erode the character of the landscape. The landscape capacity for major transport developments/improvements is considered to be low.

**Commercial/warehouse estates**

This type of large scale development would not be appropriate in this character area. There are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area, although there are some visual associations with Luton Airport to the north of the area. Existing minor roads would be inappropriate for any significant larger volumes of traffic and/or HGVs. Any 'improvements' to the existing network would cause damage to the landscape character. The landscape capacity for commercial/warehouse estates is considered to be low.

**Individual large/bulky buildings**

There may be some limited capacity for sympathetically located and designed individual large buildings, particularly if they were of an agricultural character and in keeping with the rural character. However, large buildings could be highly visible within the Character Area if not carefully located would erode the rural and intimate character of Kimpton and Whiteway Bottom. The landscape capacity for individual large/bulky buildings is considered to be low to moderate.

**Large scale open storage**

The rural character of Kimpton and Whiteway Bottom would make it difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses without significant impact. This would not be in keeping with the character of the area and likely to be very open to view on the sloping ground and introduce new elements that would conflict with the existing characteristics. The landscape capacity for large scale 'open' uses is considered to be low.

**EVALUATION**

**Mineral extraction/waste disposal**

This Character Area is currently relatively rural in appearance. It would be difficult to accommodate mineral extraction as it would be visually prominent and not be in keeping with the character of the area. If proposals were consented, any restoration proposals could include regarding but should include for additional planting in character with existing patterns.

The landscape capacity for mineral extraction is considered to be low to moderate. Waste disposal would be a problem in all character areas due to the presence of aquifers.

**Incremental small scale development**

There may be some capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were to the periphery of existing settlements and of rural character. However, due to the existing character any proposals would need clear justification to avoid the erosion of the rural character of Kimpton and Whiteway Bottom.

The landscape capacity for incremental small scale developments is considered to be low to moderate.

**Utilities developments e.g. masts, pylons, wind turbines**

Luton airport, which abuts the character area, includes such developments in close proximity of the character area and within views from Kimpton and Whiteway Bottom. New utilities developments or structures such as masts or wind turbines would have a further impact on the rural character of Kimpton and Whiteway Bottom. Large scale developments, including additional facilities for the airport and tall elements would be highly visible within the north of the Character Area, as well as being potentially visible in surrounding Character Areas to the east.

The landscape capacity for utilities developments is considered to be moderate to low.

**GUIDELINES**

Nb. These guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire

**STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE**
**Strategy: Improve and Restore**
**Landscape management guidelines**

- Promote management of ancient woodland to encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and areas of semi-natural habitat and the creation of links between habitat areas
- Promote hedgerow restoration along the lines of historic field boundaries and for the creation of visual links between existing woodland areas
- Promote the use of traditional field hedges in place of post and wire enclosures to new grazing areas
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Promote arable reversion to grassland to improve mosaic of habitats and to aid water quality and recharge of aquifer
- Conserve patterns of distinctive co-axial fields to valley slopes and retain and restore related enclosure
- Maintain a balanced pattern of land use within valleys
- Retain and manage sunken minor roads to valley sides with the high hedges and tunnels of vegetation and rich ground flora to verges
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network
- Encourage the development of new calcareous grassland habitats

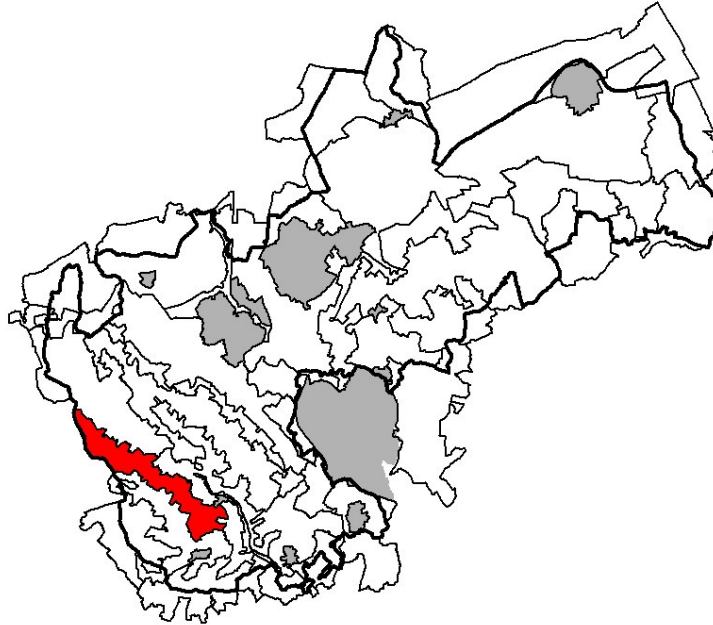
**Built development guidelines**

- Conserve the traditional character of Kimpton and Whiteway Bottom, ensuring that any development located on the edge of existing settlements uses appropriate vernacular materials and features to avoid inappropriate visual intrusion

- Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow winding lanes and associated hedge banks, sunken lanes, verges and hedges
- Protect the tranquil nature of Whiteway Bottom by ensuring that no adverse development is permitted
- Promote strong landscape enhancements in the countryside to the edge of any proposed development to settlement edges, to retain rural character of adjacent valley corridors. Consider recreation of former historic traditional woodland and hedges as pattern for enclosure
- Manage and enhance the valleys as corridors for green infrastructure proposals for the local population and habitat creation including both the wider main valleys and the secondary hidden narrow valleys
- Encourage the planting of appropriate broadleaved woodland and vegetation to screen new development that could intrude in panoramic rural views
- Retain the rural character of Kimpton and Whiteway Bottom ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the Character Area
- Avoid the location of new development in visual intrusive locations, such as on upper valley slopes or where they would be visible on the skyline
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or the loss of surviving calcareous grassland habitats and ancient hedgerows
- Ensure that lighting associated with new development does not create additional urbanising influences on the character Area
- Promote strategies for reducing the visual impact of the existing developments associated with Luton Airport
- Ensure any airport related development is visually contained from the wider Character Area



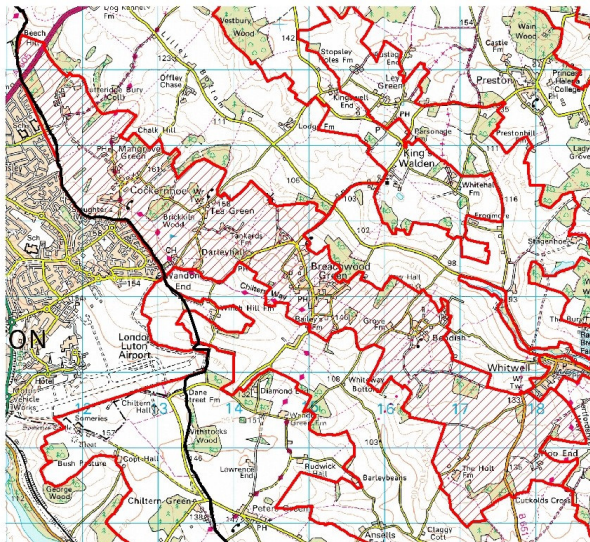
## LOCATION



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## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

Character Area extends from northeast of Luton (Putteridge Bury College) to Hoo End Farm (north of Kimpton). The area is long and narrow separating the Lilley Bottom Valley to the northeast and Whiteway Bottom Valley to the southwest.



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## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Gently rolling plateau ridge landscape. Mainly large arable fields with smaller pockets of grazing around settlements and occasional scattered dwellings. Field pattern degraded. Mature remnant trees, remaining hedgerows of diverse species. Woodlands old, established and some more modern mixed deciduous/evergreen plantations. Strong cultural pattern remains based on layout of lanes and older woodlands.

## KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Gently rolling plateau landform
- Large scale arable fields with scattered farmsteads and dwellings
- Woodland is a mixture of ancient deciduous and recent mixed plantations.
- Narrow often sunken lanes with passing places

## DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Water tower at Tea Green
- Telecommunications mast at Hoo Park
- Parkland at Putteridge Bury

**ASSESSMENT****PHYSICAL INFLUENCES****Geology & soils**

Chalk at depth. Generally free-draining loamy acidic brown soils over glacial drift till. Some brickearth and superficial gravels near Breachwood Green.

**Topography**

Gently rolling plateau with incised valley to north and south edges.

**Degree of slope**

Varies typically 1:100.

**Altitude range**

137m to 167m.

**Hydrology**

No discernable water courses. Local ponds at Breachwood Green, Tea Green and Mangrove Green.

**Land cover and land use**

Predominantly arable production with smaller pockets of grazing land adjacent to settlements and farmsteads.

**Vegetation and wildlife**

Mature remnant hedgerow trees. Remaining hedgerows of diverse species including hornbeam, field maple, oak, ash and some regenerating elm, also hawthorn, hazel and blackthorn.

Ancient woodland sites, such as Thieving Grove, Christmas Wood and Rose Grove, are present within this Character Area. These woodlands contain a variety of tree standards including oak, hornbeam, ash, beech, with areas of coppiced hazel, cherry, ash or maple. The remains of old gravel pits can be found in several of these woodlands. Ancient oak/hornbeam woodlands, partially replanted with conifers are the most frequent woodland type. Several of these woodlands have a ground flora dominated by bluebells in the spring, but other ancient woodland indicator species are also present. Green lanes, such as Long Lane, are also a feature of this Character Area linking the ancient woodlands and are typified by ancient hedgerow communities, which may be acidic in nature. Remnants of old acidic/neutral grassland remain at Mangrove Green, Tea Green and in paddocks at Breachwood Green and Bendish.

Tubular water dropwort is recorded from a pond at Breachwood Green and dormouse from some coppices.

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

In the north of the Character Area lie shrunken village earthworks of medieval date.

**Field pattern**

The historic agricultural landscape pattern consists of a mixture of pre-18th century irregular enclosure and prairie fields with both post-1950s boundary loss and relict elements. Patches of ancient woodland lie in the south and informal medieval parkland occurs in far north and far south. There are varying sizes of fields, however the pattern is locally degraded, especially where intensive arable production dominates.

**Transport pattern**

Winding lanes criss-cross the Character Area

**Settlements and built form**

The historic settlement pattern is sparse characterised by small villages and farms. There are larger settlements at Breachwood Green and Mangrove Green. There are a number of Listed Buildings in Breachwood Green village including two farmhouses of medieval origins, several dwellings and barns of 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century origin and an early 19<sup>th</sup> century windmill of brick construction is located on Breachwood Ridge. Generally dispersed scattered farmsteads and clusters of wayside dwellings.

**EVALUATION**

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

Woodland areas help to provide a cohesive visual integrity to some parts, however, arable areas are bland and featureless. Tranquillity improves further away from the urban fringe of Luton however aircraft noise is an issue.

**Rarity & distinctiveness**

Character is not uncommon and has many similarities to adjacent plateau landscapes.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

Luton Airport infrastructure visible from Tea Green, Breachwood Green and Darley Hall villages. Luton airport is also a source of light pollution. Luton urban fringe.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

The Character Area is well served by the local network of footpaths, tracks and public rights of way.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) have undertaken Tier B (Community of Place) consultations. Views of the local community have been sought and contributor's responses to each of the Character Areas will be analysed and a summary of the responses provided by HCC.

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

LC1 Landscape Conservation Area

**EVALUATION**

**CONDITION**

Land cover change: Widespread  
 Age structure of tree cover: Mature  
 Extent of semi-natural habitat survival: Relic  
 Management of semi-natural habitat: Not obvious  
 Survival of cultural pattern: Declining/Relic  
 Impact of built development: Moderate  
 Impact of land-use change: High

**Matrix Score:** **Poor**

**ROBUSTNESS**

Impact of landform: Apparent  
 Impact of land cover: Apparent  
 Impact of historic pattern: Insignificant  
 Visibility from outside: Locally visible  
 Sense of enclosure: Partial  
 Visual unity: Coherent  
 Distinctiveness/rarity: Frequent

**Matrix Score:** **Moderate**

CONDITION	GOOD	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	MODERATE	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	POOR	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
		ROBUSTNESS		

**EVALUATION**

**INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY**

**Landscape Character Sensitivities**

- The historic settlement pattern within the Character Area is characterised by dispersed villages, hamlets and scattered farmsteads on the highest ground in the northern half of Breachwood Green Ridge, which would be sensitive to unsympathetic development not in scale with the villages
- Village greens and other important open spaces are found in most villages and would be sensitive to development on or adjacent to
- The southern part of the Character Area has a largely rural character, with a general absence of built development, which would be vulnerable to the addition of urbanizing features
- Small woodland blocks are present throughout Breachwood Green Ridge, several of which are ancient and would be vulnerable to lack of management, encroachment of development or to removal
- The strong cultural pattern of narrow and twisting minor lanes and historic woodlands would be vulnerable to improvements to/upgrading of the roads and variations to the traditional relationships between the elements
- Hedgerow removal, partly due to the loss of elms, has created large arable fields in parts of the Character Area and left hedge banks without their hedges. The landscape is sensitive to further removal of hedges
- Areas of surviving acid/neutral grassland at Mangrove Green, Tea Green, Breachwood Green and Bendish are vulnerable to further loss
- Putteridge Bury historic parkland is a registered garden that falls partly within this Character Area, which could be at risk from development pressure and inconsistent management
- Good public access through numerous rights of way radiating from the villages, including the Chiltern Way

- A very small part of the Character Area, north west of the A505, falls within the Chilterns AONB
- Remnant mature trees in hedgerows and within fields would be sensitive to further removal

Overall Breachwood Green Ridge is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. The historic cultural pattern remains within large parts of the Character Area but has been influenced by hedgerow removals and the adjacent presence of Luton and its airport.

**Visual Sensitivities**

- Views up to the plateau edge are possible from adjacent Character Areas, particularly Lilley Bottom
- The urban edge of Luton is partially well contained by vegetation and landform. However, Luton Airport is more visually intrusive within the Character Area, particularly the control tower, planes and large buildings
- The presence of settlement and vegetation in the north of the Character Area contains wider views
- More extensive panoramic views are possible from the more open areas in the south of the Character Area
- Water towers at Tea Green and near Whitwell form landmarks in the Character Area

In visual terms, Breachwood Green Ridge is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. Breachwood Green Ridge is already visually influenced by Luton Airport, but less so by the built up areas of Luton. Woodland areas provide containment to views in the northern part of the Character Area.

**LANDSCAPE VALUE**

Overall Breachwood Green Ridge is considered to be of **moderate low landscape value**. Aspects of particular value within Breachwood Green Ridge include the sense of remoteness.

**EVALUATION**

**CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT**

**Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)**

This type of development would not be entirely appropriate within this Character Area, due to its strong cultural pattern of minor lanes and historic woodlands. It would be of an inappropriate scale and would be likely to result in the coalescence of Luton and the villages and hamlets within Breachwood Green Ridge. Visual impacts could also be high, due to the elevated position of the Character Area on a ridgeline plateau, particularly if near the plateau edge. Increased housing development would be likely to affect the existing narrow, twisting lanes, which could erode the character of the landscape. Extensive development could also disrupt the rights of way network and could reduce accessibility to the countryside.

The landscape capacity for major urban extensions or new settlements is considered to be low to moderate.

**Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)**

This type of development would not be entirely appropriate within this Character Area, due to the rural and undeveloped character of the fringe of Luton and the limited visual impact that the urban area currently has. Planting would need to be used to soften the visual impacts of any consented development. Proposed development should also be set back from the edges of the plateau to prevent visual intrusion into Lilley Bottom and the Chilterns AONB. Some small scale expansion of the villages, carefully designed and in keeping with the existing character, could possibly be accommodated.

The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered to be moderate.

**Major transport developments/improvements**

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to the largely rural character of most routes at present. Upgrading of existing narrow, twisting lanes could erode the character of the landscape. Additional traffic would also affect the peace and tranquillity of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for major transport developments/improvements is considered to be low.

**Commercial/warehouse estates**

This type of large scale development would not be appropriate in the majority of this character area. There are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. Large scale structures would be prominent on the plateau. The existing minor roads that form part of the strong cultural pattern could be affected by any proposed improvement schemes, which would erode an important element of this landscape. Extensive development could also disrupt the rights of way network and reduce accessibility to the countryside.

The landscape capacity for commercial/warehouse estates is considered to be low.

**Individual large/bulky buildings**

There may be some limited capacity for sympathetically located and designed individual large buildings, if they were in keeping with the rural character. However, large buildings could be highly visible on the plateau and from adjacent Character Areas, if not carefully located, and could erode the existing strong cultural pattern.

The landscape capacity for individual large/bulky buildings is considered to be low to moderate.

**EVALUATION**

**Large scale open storage**

The strong cultural pattern of winding minor roads and woodland blocks would make it difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses. This would not be in keeping with the rural character of the area and likely to be open to view. The existing minor roads could be affected by any proposed improvement schemes, which would erode an important element of this landscape. Extensive development could also disrupt the rights of way network and reduce accessibility to the countryside.

The landscape capacity for large scale 'open' uses is considered to be low to moderate.

**Mineral extraction/waste disposal**

This Character Area is currently relatively undisturbed and rural in appearance. Whilst some small scale mineral extraction could be accommodated with careful design and mitigation measures, larger scale extraction or waste disposal would not be in keeping with the character of Breachwood Green Ridge. The existing minor roads that form part of the strong cultural pattern could be affected by any proposed improvement schemes, which would erode an important element of this landscape. Larger scale extraction could also disrupt the rights of way network and reduce accessibility to the countryside. Restoration proposals for any consented schemes should be mainly at grade and include for additional planting in character with existing patterns.

The landscape capacity for mineral extraction is considered to be low. Waste disposal would be a problem in all character areas due to the presence of aquifers.

**Incremental small scale development**

There may be some capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were of a vernacular style and in keeping with the rural character. However, coalescence of settlements and visual intrusion into adjacent Character Areas should be avoided.

The landscape capacity for incremental small scale developments is considered to be moderate.

**Utilities developments e.g. masts, pylons, wind turbines**

Despite the close proximity to Luton, there are currently few urbanising elements within this Character Area. New utilities developments or structures such as masts or wind turbines would have an impact on the rural character of Breachwood Green Ridge. Large scale, tall structures such as these would be highly visible, particularly in surrounding Character Areas. There may also be concerns about proximity to Luton Airport and its flight path, which crosses the area.

The landscape capacity for utilities developments is considered to be low.

**GUIDELINES**

**STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE**

**Strategy: Improve and Restore**

**Landscape management guidelines**

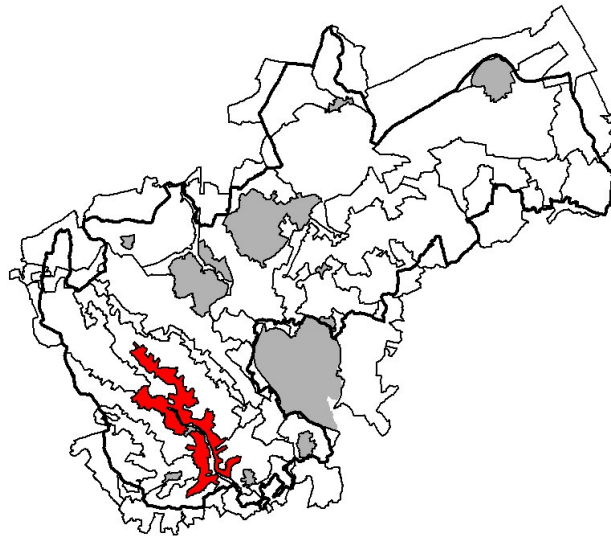
- Promote management of ancient woodland to encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and areas of semi-natural habitat and the creation of links between habitat areas
- Promote hedgerow restoration along the lines of historic field boundaries and for the creation of visual links between existing woodland areas
- Promote the use of traditional field hedges in place of post and wire enclosures to new grazing areas
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network
- Encourage policies for the planting of woodland along the sub-urban fringe of Luton
- Encourage preparation and implementation of restoration and management plans for parkland landscape at Putteridge Bury

**Built development guidelines**

- Conserve the traditional character of the villages and hamlets within Breachwood Green Ridge, ensuring that any development located on the edge of the village uses appropriate vernacular materials and features to avoid inappropriate visual intrusion
- Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow winding lanes and associated hedge banks, sunken lanes, verges and hedges
- Encourage the retention and enhancement of vegetation along the A505 to ensure that its visual impact on the landscape is minimised
- Avoid the location of new development on sensitive greens and open spaces and protect their settings from adjacent development
- Encourage the planting of appropriate broadleaved woodland and vegetation to screen new development that could intrude in panoramic rural views
- Retain the largely rural character of Breachwood Green Ridge, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the Character Area
- Avoid the location of new development in visual intrusive locations, such as on the edges of the plateau or where they would be visible on currently undeveloped skylines
- Retain the separate identity of the existing settlements and do not cause coalescence
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or the loss of surviving acidic/neutral grassland habitats
- Conserve and enhance the registered parkland at Putteridge Bury
- Ensure that lighting associated with new development does not create additional urbanising influences on the Character Area



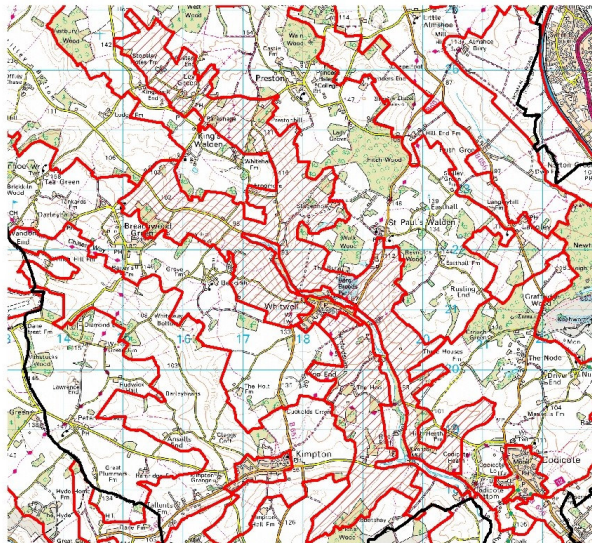
## LOCATION



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### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

The Whitwell valley comprises two arms that form a confluence north of Whitwell settlement. South of Whitwell the continuity of the valley can be sub-divided into two smaller units either side of the River Mimram sub-area. The northernmost reaches of the valley extend to the southeastern outskirts of Great Offley village. The western arm of the valley extends towards the pinch point at Kings Walden, north of which the valley widens to form Lilley Bottom (Character Area 212).



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### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Steeply incised valley sides in a chalk landscape plateau. The upper reaches of the valley are dry Water springs to the surface west of Stagenhoe Bottom Farm.

The valley gradually widens to the south as it incorporates an increasing number of tributaries (usually dry). The valley floor of the River Mimram sub-area is characterised by extensive flood meadows. The land is given over to rough grazing, mainly cattle with some horse grazing adjacent to houses. The field pattern is largely lost through grazing out of hedges. Mature trees are scattered throughout the area. In the Whitwell valley woodlands are scattered, irregular in shape and predominantly mixed deciduous and evergreen. The road network follows the valley bottoms with small winding roads connecting the valley sides. Field sizes are generally large and regular in shape, but with more irregular field parcels in the upper reaches north of Frogmore Bottom.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Steep sided valley
- Dominant arable land use
- Scattered woodland parcels of irregular shape
- Locally smaller field parcels on the upper reaches of the valley
- Smaller paddocks and horse grazing associated with local settlements
- Flood meadow vegetation screening views of the River Mimram

### DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Hoo Parkland
- Bridge over dry river bed at Hoo Park
- Various ford crossings
- Watercress at Whitwell

**ASSESSMENT****PHYSICAL INFLUENCES****Geology & soils**

Generally free draining calcareous or neutral loamy brown soils over Chalk. Valley slopes are overlain by coombe deposits and thin Clay-with-Flints. Poorly draining gleyed soils over alluvial drift underlain by chalk locally outcropping along the River Mimram.

**Topography**

Narrow valley in upper reaches gradually widening to the confluence with the Kimpton valley. Flat valley bottom in River Mimram sub-area.

**Degree of slope**

Typically 1:10 slopes to valley sides.

**Altitude range**

Valley corridor falls from 140m north of Stopsley Holes Farm to 75m to the west of Codicote.

**Hydrology**

The Whitwell valley contains the source of the River Mimram. The spring is located 0.5km to the west of Stagenhoe Bottom Farm. Side valleys that feed into the Whitwell valley are mainly dry. Over the lower reaches the Mimram is a comparatively fast flowing chalk stream.

**Land cover and land use**

The predominant land use is arable farming with mainly grazing on the valley floor but with extensive areas of wetland vegetation.

**Vegetation and wildlife**

Valley slope woodlands of beech occur at Watkins and Lords Wood and at a few remaining fringes and hedges, where the species are growing in conjunction with hazel and holly. Some less common species such as orchids and adders-tongue fern are present within Watkins//Lords Wood.

Remnants of old neutral alluvial grasslands occur at Stagenhoe Bottom and Valley Farm.

Hoo Park contains row of ancient sweet chestnuts, part of an old avenue of trees from the 17<sup>th</sup> century park landscape. Some 18<sup>th</sup> century trees, which were part of Brown's design, also survive.

A landscape park at Stagenhoe was created in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Within the River Mimram sub-area the predominant

semi-natural vegetation types are neutral alluvial grasslands, mixed tall herb fen and remnant alder/willow woodlands.

Ecological interest reflects the influence of the River Mimram. The Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan describes the river stretch between Kimpton Mill and Fulling Mill, as being of high biodiversity value. The calcareous springs of the Mimram are of some importance including the springs at Stagenhoe Bottom, the cress-bed springs at Nine Wells and the seasonal lake at Law Hall Farm.

An interesting wet woodland site occurs adjacent to the River Mimram in close proximity to Kimpton Hoo. Tall fen vegetation occurs beneath a mixed wood canopy that includes cricket bat willow, poplar plantation and hazel coppice. Species rich grasslands on alluvial soils are present by the River Mimram in the vicinity of Kimpton Mill and further along the riverbanks to Codicote Mill. Mimram Valley Marsh supports an array of wetland habitats, including sedge and reed beds, marshy grassland, derelict watercress beds, old plantations and some acidic grassland communities.

Fulling Mill Meadow incorporates wet and dry habitats ranging from swamp through to old unimproved grassland.

Wintering water rail, kingfisher and grey wagtail are associated with the springs and river at Kimpton Mill. River Mimram is very important for water voles

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

To the northeast of Whitwell lies St Paul's Walden a 12th century medieval settlement incorporating the parish church of All Saints. To the south lies a cluster of cropmarks including four prehistoric ring ditches, enclosures and linear ditches of unknown date and function. To the northwest of Whitwell lies a documented deserted medieval village; and to the south a medieval moated site, known as Bull Moat, situated within the historic park of Hoo.

**Field pattern**

The historic agricultural landscape comprises a mixture of prairie fields with post-1950s boundary loss, pre-18th century irregular enclosure, pre-18th century irregular sinuous

enclosure, 18th century and later enclosure and ancient woodland. Today there are a high proportion of removed hedges, a predominantly large scale field pattern but with smaller fields on some steeply sloping ground. Smaller field parcels are associated with settlement fringes.

The historic agricultural landscape pattern of the River Mimram sub-area consists of a mixture of post 1950s enclosure, prairie fields with 1950s boundary loss and pre-18th century irregular enclosure. Today there is no apparent field pattern, there are, however, post and wire fences to control grazing.

### **Transport pattern**

Combination of primary routes following valley bottoms interconnected by small winding lanes often sunken and rising up the valley side. A small number of local lanes ford the River Mimram.

### **Settlements and built form**

The historic settlement pattern is characterised by outlying cottages, villages and farmsteads. The Character Area includes the larger settlement of Whitwell and incorporates some associated ribbon development. The scattered farmsteads are further up the valleys. Traditional buildings date from the 17th century. Whitwell High Street contains a c.1700 red brick house of 3 bays and the timber framed Bull Inn.

The historic settlement pattern is sparse within the River Mimram sub-area with no documented traditional buildings.

The bridge at Hoo Park was part of the landscape designed by Capability Brown in the 1760's.

**EVALUATION****VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The valley is a combination of open, undeveloped landscape mainly in the upper valley reaches contrasting with the well settled, partly sub-urban character of the valley bottom. The upper valley sections have a greater sense of remoteness reinforced by the sparse distribution of development.

The tranquil character of the River Mimram sub – area is complemented by its pastoral quality. The verdant quality also being in stark contrast to the large scale enclosing arable landscape.

**Rarity & distinctiveness**

Landscape type comparatively frequent in the west of the District. However the River Mimram sub-area is unusual and the upper reaches of the valley tend to be dry.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

More recent ribbon development at Whitwell following the valley bottom and stretching out along the B651 intrudes into the valley setting. Of particular note are the associated pony paddocks and stabling facilities. Higher up the valley the narrower, steeper slopes provide a sense of visual containment. From higher vantage points long distance views are available down the valley.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

The valley bottom contains the road network with connecting roads following feeder valleys. The Rights of Way network often cuts across the valleys.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) have undertaken Tier B (Community of Place) consultations. Views of the local community have been sought and contributor's responses to each of the Character Areas will be analysed and a summary of the responses provided by HCC.

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

LC1	Landscape Conservation Area
GD 1909	Hoo
SAM HT 73	Bridge at Hoo Park

<b>EVALUATION</b>
-------------------

<b>CONDITION</b>	Whitwell Valley	River Mimram sub-area
Land cover change:	Widespread	Localised
Age structure of tree cover:	Mixed	Mature
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	Relic	Scattered
Management of semi-natural habitat:	Not obvious	Good
Survival of cultural pattern:	Declining/Relic	Declining/Relic
Impact of built development:	Low	Moderate
Impact of land-use change:	Moderate	Moderate
<b>Matrix Score:</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

<b>ROBUSTNESS</b>		
Impact of landform:	Apparent	Apparent
Impact of land cover:	Apparent	Prominent
Impact of historic pattern:	Apparent	Insignificant
Visibility from outside:	Widely visible	Locally visible
Sense of enclosure:	Open	Contained
Visual unity:	Coherent	Unified
Distinctiveness/rarity:	Frequent	Unusual
<b>Matrix Score:</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

<b>CONDITION</b>	<b>GOOD</b>	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	<b>MODERATE</b>	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	<b>POOR</b>	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		<b>WEAK</b>	<b>MODERATE</b>	<b>STRONG</b>
<b>ROBUSTNESS</b>				

## EVALUATION

## INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

## Landscape Character Sensitivities

- A largely rural, character throughout Whitwell Valley, which would be vulnerable to the addition of urbanizing features
- The character area is a steeply, incised valley stream in a chalk dip slope. The source of the River Mimram is located in Whitwell Valley. Side valleys which feed into the Whitwell Valley are mainly dry. The valleys are significant features of the area and the loss of character or lack of management would be detrimental
- The landuse is predominantly large, regular arable fields, but with smaller fields on the steeper ground and upper reaches of the valley, where the land is used for grazing, cattle and sheep. Horsiculture paddocks are also present and associated with settlements. Hedgerows are the traditional boundary treatment, but many have been lost. The area is vulnerable to the further loss of hedgerow boundary treatment
- The area is characterised by scattered woodland blocks of irregular shape and a mixture of deciduous and evergreen planting. The loss of this characteristic would be detrimental to the area
- Valley slope woodlands of beech are present in the character area and in some situations are growing in conjunction with Hazel and Holly. Removal or poor management of these habitats would be detrimental to the character of Whitwell Valley
- The area is tranquil with generally quiet roads. The primary roads follow the valley bottoms. These are interconnected by smaller winding roads. The roads are characterised by hedgerows, many of which are low and clipped. However some of these are gappy or have been removed. The character area is vulnerable to further loss of these features
- There is little development in the character area, with generally isolated properties and farmsteads, which are found higher up the valley. The settlement of Whitwell abuts the character area, in the bottom of the valley. Whitwell is a village of rural character but with a number of small estate developments set back from the through roads. Ribbon development stretching along the valley bottom from Whitwell intrudes on the valley setting. The character area is vulnerable to inappropriate or unsympathetic development and any form of development not in scale with the area
- To the south the character area includes The Hoo parkland, which comprises a significant area of parkland character, with individual specimen trees, grazing land and estate fencing. This character could be at risk from development pressure and inconsistent management
- The character area includes some historic features for example prehistoric ditches, deserted medieval villages and a medieval moated site found within the historic park of Hoo. These features could be at risk from development pressure and inconsistent management
- The flight path for Luton airport crosses the character area and is an existing detractor to Whitwell Valley
- There are a number of rights of way that run across the valley slopes, including the Hertfordshire Way

Overall Whitwell Valley is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. The largely rural character area is quiet and tranquil, with a historic parkland character in areas. However there has been some degradation due to loss of hedgerows and field patterns. The Luton flight path is a detractor to Whitwell Valley.

**EVALUATION****Visual Sensitivities**

- Cross valley views from the higher vantage points are an important feature of the Character Area
- Panoramic views are common from the higher valley slopes
- Views along the valley are an important feature in the character area

In visual terms, Whitwell Valley is considered to be of **moderate to high sensitivity**. Views across and along the valley would be sensitive to the introduction of further built or urbanizing features.

**LANDSCAPE VALUE**

Overall Whitwell Valley is considered to be of **moderate landscape value**. Aspects of particular value within Whitwell Valley are the relatively few incongruous elements, the striking landform, the visual interest, cross valley and along valley views and the perceived distance from settlement in the upper valley, the relative tranquillity and the historic feel to the landscape.

**EVALUATION**

**CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT**

**Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)**

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to its relatively remote, rural and undeveloped character. It would be of an inappropriate scale and would introduce elements that would urbanise the landscape, altering the character and removing the existing key characteristics. Visual impacts would also be high, due to the cross valley views currently experienced. Increased housing development would be likely to affect the existing rural lanes, which could erode the character of the landscape.

The landscape capacity for major urban extensions or new settlements is considered to be low.

**Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)**

This type of development would not be entirely appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural and undeveloped character. Visual impacts could be high, due to the cross valley views currently experienced. Some small scale expansion at the periphery of Whitwell, carefully designed and in keeping with the existing character of the village, could possibly be accommodated.

The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered to be moderate to low.

**Major transport developments/improvements**

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to the largely rural character of most routes at present. Upgrading of existing narrow, twisting lanes could erode the character of the landscape. Additional traffic would also affect the peace and tranquillity of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for major transport developments/improvements is considered to be low.

**Commercial/warehouse estates**

This type of large scale development would not be appropriate in this character area. There are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. There would also be restricted areas of level land for this type of development and substantial earthworks would be likely to be required. Existing minor roads would be inappropriate for any significant larger volumes of traffic and/or HGVs. Any upgrading of the existing network would cause damage to the landscape character.

The landscape capacity for commercial/warehouse estates is considered to be low.

**Individual large/bulky buildings**

There may be some limited capacity for sympathetically located and designed individual large buildings, particularly if they were of an agricultural character. However, large buildings could be highly visible within the Character Area if not carefully located would erode the rural and intimate character of Whitwell Valley.

The landscape capacity for individual large/bulky buildings is considered to be low to moderate.

**Large scale open storage**

The landform within Whitwell Valley would make it difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses without considerable visual impact in the valley landscape. This would not be in keeping with the rural character of the area and likely to be very open to view and introduce new elements that would conflict with the existing characteristics. The minor roads are unlikely to have capacity to accommodate development or would need considerable upgrading to be able to accept larger volumes of traffic and/or HGVs, which would further dilute the landscape character.

The landscape capacity for large scale 'open' uses is considered to be low.



**EVALUATION**

**Mineral extraction/waste disposal**

This Character Area is currently relatively undisturbed and rural in appearance. Whilst some small scale mineral extraction could be accommodated with careful design and mitigation measures, larger scale extraction or waste disposal would not be in keeping with the character of Whitwell Valley. The minor roads would need considerable upgrading to be able to accept larger HGVs, which could further dilute the landscape character. Restoration proposals for any consented schemes should be mainly at grade and include for additional planting in character with existing patterns.

The landscape capacity for mineral extraction is considered to be low to moderate. Waste disposal would be a problem in all character areas due to the presence of aquifers.

**Incremental small scale development**

There may be some very limited capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were of a vernacular style and form and in keeping with the rural character. However, due to the existing character any proposals would need clear justification to avoid the erosion of the rural and contained character of Whitwell Valley. Any development should in most cases be closely associated with existing settlements.

The landscape capacity for incremental small scale developments is considered to be low to moderate.

**Utilities developments e.g. masts, pylons, wind turbines**

There are very few urbanising elements within this Character Area at present. There are currently few detractors in the areas. New utilities developments or structures such as masts or wind turbines would have a major and overpowering impact on the rural character of Whitwell Valley. Large scale developments, tall elements such as these would be highly visible within the Character Area, as well as potentially visible in surrounding Character Areas.

The landscape capacity for utilities developments is considered to be low.

**GUIDELINES****STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE****Strategy: Improve and Restore****Landscape management guidelines**

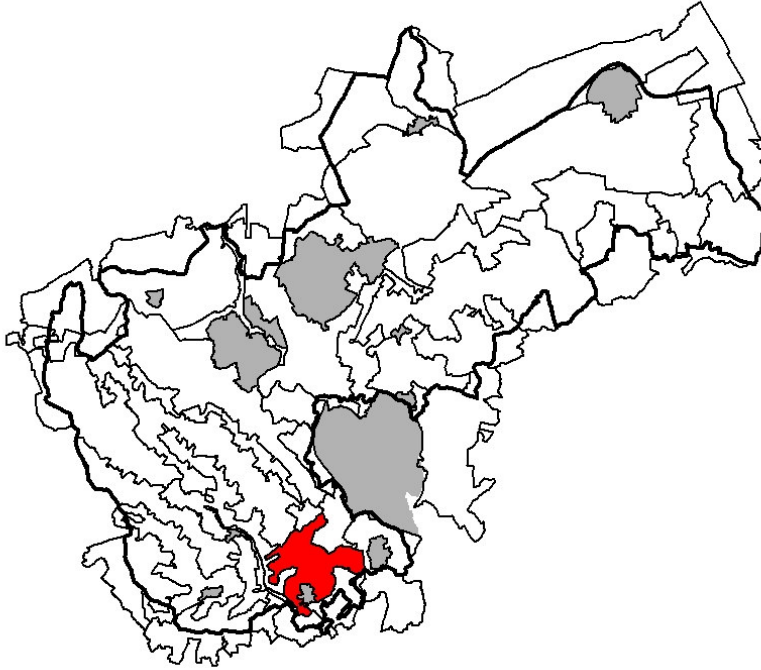
- Promote the management of ancient woodlands to encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Encourage the management of existing and planting of new beech woodland in strategic locations along the sloping valley sides
- Encourage diverse woodland management practice
- Promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and areas of semi-natural habitat and the creation of links between habitat areas
- Promote hedgerow restoration along the lines of historic field boundaries and for the creation of visual links between existing woodland areas
- Promote the use of traditional field hedges in place of post and wire enclosures to new grazing areas
- Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow winding lanes and associated hedge banks, sunken lanes, verges and hedges
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Retain, manage, reinstate and extend flood meadow and grazing pasture within and along the valley floor to provide connectivity and reduce nutrient leaching from arable to watercourses
- Manage and restore patterns of natural watercourses and associated habitats including secondary streams to valley sides, braided watercourses, cut offs
- Conserve, monitor and enhance river margin habitats for protected species
- Promote arable reversion to grassland to improve mosaic of habitats and to aid water quality and recharge of aquifer
- Encourage the preparation and implementation of restoration and management plans for the parkland landscape at The Hoo

- Maintain and extend the rights of way network

**Built development guidelines**

- Conserve the traditional character of Whitwell Valley, ensuring that any development located within the character area uses appropriate vernacular materials and features to avoid inappropriate visual intrusion
- Protect and preserve the pattern of winding lanes and associated hedgerows and hedge banks
- Retain the rural character of Whitwell Valley, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the Character Area
- Encourage the planting of appropriate broadleaved woodland and vegetation to screen new development that could intrude in rural views
- Planting should reflect existing patterns, with hedges following field and road boundaries and strategic isolated copses to mitigate any development
- Avoid the location of new development in visual intrusive locations
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or the loss of ancient hedgerows
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area
- Manage and enhance the valleys as corridors for green infrastructure proposals and habitat creation including both the main valley corridors and the more hidden narrow tranquil valleys

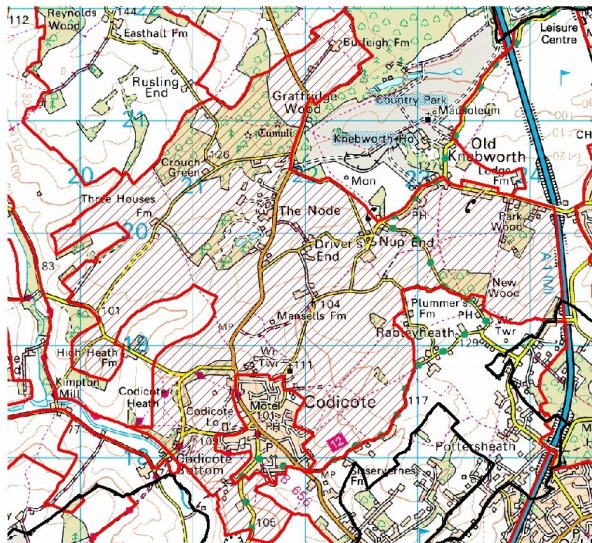
## LOCATION



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### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

The Character Area extends in a broad fan to the north of and including the settlement of Codicote.



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### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Gently rolling upland landscape plateau defined to the south and west by the River Mimram. To the north the area merges into the Knebworth Parkland. Plateau is incised by smaller valleys creating a locally undulating landform. Large sized regular shaped fields mainly used for arable production but with parcels of grazing land and paddocks adjacent to Codicote. Larger blocks of ancient woodland in the north adjacent to Knebworth, smaller copses further south. Localised pockets of acid heathland habitats.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Gently rolling upland plateau landscape
- Large arable parcels with grazing land adjacent to Codicote
- Varying sized blocks of woodland

### DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Codicote Heathland
- Tower at Node Court

**ASSESSMENT****PHYSICAL INFLUENCES****Geology & soils**

Generally glacial gravel and tills overlying the Clay-with-Flints producing generally acidic wet and dry soils. Elsewhere loamy brown soils over Chalk.

**Topography**

Incised plateau landscape.

**Degree of slope**

Typically 1:30 over plateau area and 1:10 slopes within incised valleys.

**Altitude range**

80m to 125m.

**Hydrology**

No discernable water courses. Small number of local ponds adjacent to settlements.

**Land cover and land use**

Predominantly arable farming with larger blocks of deciduous woodland in the north. Parcels of grazing land adjacent to settlements.

**Vegetation and wildlife**

Traditionally managed hay meadows and marshy grassland such as Crouch Green are a scarce commodity both within this Character Area and within North Hertfordshire as a whole. Some important heathland habitats occur within this Character Area. Codicote High Heath encompasses a gravel pit with associated remnant acidic heath flora, gorse scrub and wooded areas. Hertfordshire has lost approximately 97% of its heath habitats since 1940 (Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan) and hence these fragments of heath are of high ecological importance.

Ancient semi-natural broadleaved woodlands occur within this Character Area. Some, such as Crouch Green Woods are dominated by stands of ancient hornbeam coppice. Others, like Graffridge Wood have a climax community of oak and hornbeam. New Wood is notable for its acidic substrate and plant communities. Ancient woodland features such as pits and ditches are also present in several woodland areas. Hornbeam is an abundant component.

The area features woodland birds, rare aquatic plants and invertebrates in ponds such as water violet and five-leaved water drop-wort and scarce species, eg lousewort, petty white and snakeshead fritillary associated with old grassland and heath.

Codicote is important for pipistrelle and Natterer's bats

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

Codicote is a medieval settlement recorded in the Domesday Book as Codicot. The parish church of St Giles, Codicote, dates from the 12th century and lies in the edge of Codicote. A Roman barrow and Bronze Age bowl barrow are situated to the north at Gaffridge Wood.

**Field Pattern**

The historic agricultural landscape is composed of a mixture of 18th century and later enclosure, prairie fields with post-1950s boundary loss, pre-18th century irregular enclosure, prairie fields with relict elements within and post-1950s enclosure. There is a concentration of informal medieval parkland to the northeast of Coldicote (Homewood designated a Historic Park and Garden). There is also a high frequency of ancient woodland, particularly in the southeast. Today smaller more regular geometric field patterns are common especially on the fringes of sub-urban settlement. Less frequent are large scale arable fields.

**Transport Pattern**

The Character Area is well covered by a network of old winding and often sunken lanes.

**Settlements and Built Form**

The historic settlement pattern is composed of estates and villages. The traditional buildings of the Character Area survive from the 16th century. Red brick houses can be found at Codicote Bury (1655). The village centre of Codicote retains some timber framed and chequerwork brick houses.

**EVALUATION****VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

Historic and mature landscape character interspersed with areas of intensive arable production. Small interlocking blocks of woodland framing views.

**Rarity & distinctiveness**

The integrity and mature character have not been eroded by the intensification of arable production.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

Codicote suburban fringe dominates some of the local views. Particular features such as the water tower on the north side of the settlement have a local impact. Extensive mature grounds at Codicote Lodge.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

Character Area well served by the network of roads and rights of way which radiate out from Codicote

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) have undertaken Tier B (Community of Place) consultations. Views of the local community have been sought and contributor's responses to each of the Character Areas will be analysed and a summary of the responses provided by HCC.

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

LC1	Landscape Conservation Area
GD 1098	Homewood
SAM 27906	Roman Barrow and Bronze Age Bowl Barrow in Gaffridge Wood
SAM 27907	Bell Barrow in Gaffridge Wood

**EVALUATION**

**CONDITION**

Land cover change:	Localised
Age structure of tree cover:	Mature
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	Scattered
Management of semi-natural habitat:	Good
Survival of cultural pattern:	Interrupted
Impact of built development:	Moderate
Impact of land-use change:	Moderate

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**Matrix Score:** **Moderate**

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**ROBUSTNESS**

Impact of landform:	Apparent
Impact of land cover:	Apparent
Impact of historic pattern:	Apparent
Visibility from outside:	Locally visible
Sense of enclosure:	Partial
Visual unity:	Coherent
Distinctiveness/rarity:	Frequent

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**Matrix Score:** **Moderate**

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CONDITION	GOOD	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	MODERATE	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	POOR	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
ROBUSTNESS				

## EVALUATION

### INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

#### Landscape Character Sensitivities

- A gently rolling upland, landscape plateau, incised by smaller valleys and of rural character. The character area would be vulnerable to further urbanizing features
- Scattered deciduous woodland blocks some of which are historic including ancient coppiced hornbeam with bluebell covered woodland floor. The woodland is vulnerable to lack of management or to removal
- The character area merges into Knebworth to the north, which creates an extended area of significant parkland character in areas of Codicote Plateau for example the area surrounding The Node. This character could be at risk from development pressure and inconsistent management
- Codicote Plateau is characterised by large scale, regular shaped arable fields but with small paddocks and grazing land adjacent to settlements. The area would be vulnerable to the removal of hedgerows and boundary vegetation
- The character area includes a significant presence of horsiculture, including Laundry Cottage Stud. Such areas are characterised by post and rail fences and the removal of boundary vegetation. This practice is detrimental to the landscape character of Codicote Plateau. The character area is vulnerable to further horsiculture activity and any associated removal of boundary vegetation
- Apart from the B656 Codicote Plateau is a tranquil area, with the remaining roads being narrow and winding. These rural roads are enclosed by hedgerows and hedgebanks often with bluebells in the verges. However some of the hedgerows are becoming gappy, with over mature trees and grown out woodland

hedgebanks. They would be vulnerable to improvements/upgrading of the roads

- Existing pockets of acid heathland habitat are vulnerable to loss
- The A1 abuts the east of the character area and is a detractor to the character of Codicote Plateau.
- Good public access through numerous rights of way, particularly around Codicote

Overall Codicote Plateau is considered to be of **moderate to high sensitivity**. The gently rolling upland plateau, historic character and woodland blocks create a rural character with limited urban influence.

#### Visual Sensitivities

- Expansive views out of the character area, where there are limited woodland blocks or hedgerows
- In areas of woodland the views are framed and a sense of enclosure is created

In visual terms, Codicote Plateau is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. Views within the plateau and towards the adjacent countryside are relatively open, or framed by woodland, both of which would be sensitive to the introduction of additional development or urbanizing features.

#### LANDSCAPE VALUE

Overall Codicote Plateau is considered to be of **moderate landscape value**. Aspects of particular value within Codicote Plateau are the historic character, a recognisable sense of place, and the relatively tranquil character.

**EVALUATION****CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT****Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)**

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural and undeveloped character. It would be of an inappropriate scale and would introduce elements that would urbanise the landscape, altering the character and removing the existing key characteristics. Visual impacts would also be high, due to the expansive views currently experienced. Increased housing development would be likely to affect the existing rural roads, which could erode the character of the landscape.

The landscape capacity for large urban extensions or new settlements is considered to be low.

**Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)**

This type of development would not be entirely appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural and undeveloped character. Visual impacts could be high, due to the expansive views currently experienced.

The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered to be to low.

**Major transport developments/improvements**

This type of development would only be appropriate for improvements of the existing A1, which abuts the Character Area. However it would be imperative that any work was mitigated through earthworks and the planting of shelterbelts. Upgrading of existing rural roads could erode the character of the landscape. Additional traffic would also affect the peace and tranquillity of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for major transport developments/improvements is considered to be moderate.

**Commercial/warehouse estates**

This type of large scale development would not be appropriate in this character area. There are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. Existing minor roads would be inappropriate for any significant larger volumes of traffic and/or HGVs. Any upgrading of the existing network would cause damage to the landscape character.

The landscape capacity for commercial/warehouse estates is considered to be low.

**Individual large/bulky buildings**

There may be some limited capacity for sympathetically located and designed individual large buildings, particularly if they were of an agricultural character and in keeping with the rural character. However, large buildings could be highly visible within the Character Area if not carefully located would erode the rural and historic character of Codicote Plateau.

The landscape capacity for individual large/bulky buildings is considered to be low to moderate.

**Large scale open storage**

Despite the presence of the A1, the rural character of Codicote Plateau would make it difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses without significant impact. This would not be in keeping with the rural or historic character of the area and likely to be very open to view and introduce new elements that would conflict with the existing characteristics.

The landscape capacity for large scale 'open' uses is considered to be low.



**EVALUATION****Mineral extraction/waste disposal**

This Character Area is currently relatively undisturbed and rural in appearance. Whilst some small scale mineral extraction could be accommodated with careful design and mitigation measures, larger scale extraction would be more prominent and not be in keeping with the character of the area. If proposals were consented, any restoration proposals should be mainly at grade and include for additional planting in character with existing patterns.

The landscape capacity for mineral extraction is considered to be low to moderate. Waste disposal would be a problem in all character areas due to the presence of aquifers.

**Incremental small scale development**

There may be some limited capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were to the periphery of Codicote village and of rural character. However, due to the existing character any proposals would need clear justification to avoid the erosion of the rural and historic character of Codicote Plateau.

The landscape capacity for incremental small scale developments is considered to be low to moderate.

**Utilities developments e.g. masts, pylons, wind turbines**

There are very few urbanising elements, such as these within this Character Area at present. Excluding the proximity of the A1, there are currently few detractors in the areas. New utilities developments or structures such as masts or wind turbines would have a major impact on the rural and historic character of Codicote Plateau. Large scale developments, including tall elements would be highly visible within the Character Area, as well as being potentially visible in surrounding Character Areas.

The landscape capacity for utilities developments is considered to be low.

**GUIDELINES****STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE****Strategy: Improve and Conserve****Landscape management guidelines**

- Promote management of ancient woodland, particularly using techniques such as coppicing to encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Conserve and enhance ancient woods as distinct historic landscape features within their original shapes and boundaries
- Promote other woodland planting and where historically appropriate, link up small remnants of ancient woodland
- Restore known lost woods or portions of woods, or create and manage new small to medium sized woods, particularly on the plateau/plateau edges
- Promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and areas of semi-natural habitat and the creation of links between habitat areas
- Promote hedgerow restoration along the lines of historic field boundaries and for the creation of visual links between existing woodland areas
- Promote the use of traditional field hedges in place of post and wire enclosures to new grazing or horsiculture areas
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network
- Ensure modern enclosure, often for horsiculture around settlements, does not change the character of the farmed landscape
- Protect and encourage management of remnant acidic heathland

**Built development guidelines**

- Retain the rural and historic character of Codicote Plateau, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the Character Area
- Avoid the location of new development in visual intrusive locations where they would be visible on the skyline
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or the loss of acid heathland habitats and ancient hedgerows
- Conserve the traditional character of Codicote Plateau, ensuring that development uses appropriate vernacular materials and features to avoid inappropriate visual intrusion
- Protect and preserve the pattern of the rural lanes and associated hedge banks, verges and hedges
- Encourage the planting of appropriate broadleaved woodland and vegetation to screen new development that could intrude in expansive rural views
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area
- Ensure applications for replacement dwellings, communication infrastructure, utility infrastructure have minimal impact on the landscape character and visual quality of the area
- Use the opportunity of any developments to create new accessible green infrastructure
- Ensure redundant agriculture buildings subject to applications for change of use are monitored to ensure that they reflect the local building style
- Protect the dispersed settlement pattern – scattered farmsteads and small settlements in isolated hamlets with a road pattern that is winding, often with wide verges and strong hedgerows