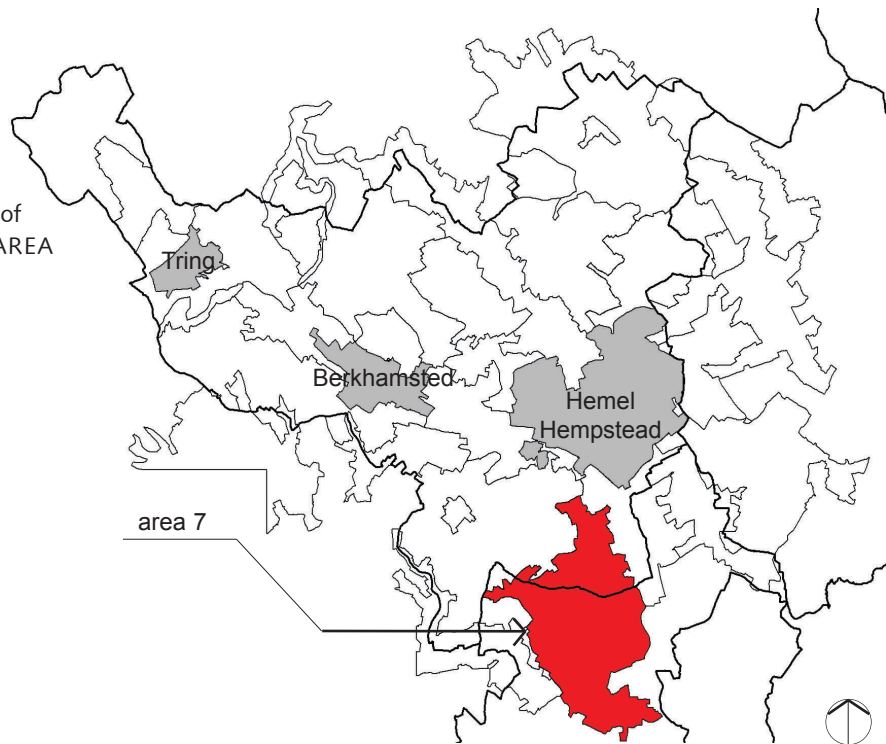


District Map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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100018935 2004



LOCATION

This area is located between the valleys of the River Chess to the west and the River Gade to the east. Chipperfield marks the northern limit and Croxley Green the southern.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

A gently undulating plateau area locally divided by steep-sided narrow chalk valleys. The area has a mature settled appearance with a number of traditional farm buildings, parklands and a predominantly pastoral land use. There is minimal impact from intrusive 20th-century development. Chipperfield Common and Commonwood Common are sites of importance for nature conservation and recreation.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- extensive level plateau with considerable pastoral and equestrian land use
- narrow twisting steep-sided valleys dissecting the plateau
- mix of woodlands throughout the area including ancient, plantation and parkland shelterbelts
- coherent settled pattern of farms and historic villages set around greens and commons
- arable planned estate area to the east
- parkland areas, some in educational and institutional uses
- M25 and associated features severing the area but in partial cutting
- Chipperfield and Commonwood commons
- few detracting features

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Sarratt Green
- beech woods to slope edges in chalk valleys
- Westwood quarry by M25
- range of vernacular buildings

Deadmans Ash Lane to Bottom Lane dry valley •
(HCC Landscape Unit)



PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. To the north the soils are characterised by a mix of well-drained fine loamy over clayey soils and coarse and fine loamy over clayey soils with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging (Marlow and Hornbeam 2 associations). Some soils are very flinty. The underlying geology is a combination of plateau and river-terrace drift. To the south of the M25 the soils comprise well-drained flinty coarse loamy and sandy soils over plateau gravel and river-terrace drift (Sonning 1 association). In the narrow valleys, chalk forms the underlying geology. Westwood Quarry SSSI is a key site for an understanding of the early history of the Thames, with deposits of bedded sands and gravels.

Topography. The plateau is a gently undulating area. A distinct feature within the plateau is a steep-sided dry valley system.

Degree of slope. Across the plateau slopes are generally less than 1 in 30. However, in the narrow chalk valleys slopes are often as steep as 1 in 6.

Altitude range. From 133m in the north-east down to 85m in the south towards the Colne Valley.

Hydrology. There are no significant streams; however, there are a number of ponds associated with parklands, farmsteads or field corners.

Land cover and land use. The land-use pattern is wooded farmland. To the west and around the village edges equestrian and livestock pasture predominates, while to the east and in the open tracts between settlements land use is typically larger arable units.

Vegetation and wildlife. The plateau is a transitional area for the natural woodland species mix. To the north oak/ash/beech predominates while to the south, on the more acidic ground, the mix is oak/hornbeam. The woodland pattern is one of discrete blocks, with a number of conifers in the plantations. In the steep-sided valleys there is an interlocking pattern along and at the edges, particularly in the south where beech is the dominant species on calcareous loams. Hedges are occasionally tall, particularly along roads and with mixed species including holly. Field trees are mainly oak.

Parkland trees are locally important and include cedar, pine and avenues of lime, e.g. Redheath School. The two main commons have largely reverted to secondary woodland. Commonwood Common sits on the edge of the chalk valley. The higher part of the site is on very acidic clay-with-flints while the lower part is on pure chalk. Chipperfield Common is a distinctive area of wet acidic common with some gravels and heathy conditions. There are also a number of veteran limes, oak and sweet chestnut.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Individual features of interest include 'Apostles Pool' (a monastic fish pool) on Chipperfield Common and the earthwork at Marginia Wick at Sarratt.

Field pattern. The field pattern is largely pre-18th century in origin with both organic and irregular sinuous enclosures. These traditional patterns are still relatively intact around the villages, particularly at Bucks Hill which has an ancient feel. There has been field enlargement for arable cropping throughout the area, but the presence of woodland and hedgerows with field trees contain this impact. The exception to this general pattern is in the east, where there has been more extensive post-18th century parliamentary enclosure. Some of this followed the 'disparking' of the former medieval deer park around Langley Lodge (see also Upper Gade character area) between 1558 and the 18th century, where large rectangular fields were created.

Further parliamentary enclosure followed. Now there is an open estate feel, with isolated farms, e.g. Model Farm. Current field shapes are typically irregular and medium in scale apart from in the east, where there is a move to larger geometric units. Post-and-wire fences provide some enclosure in the narrow chalk valleys.

Transport pattern. The pattern of roads comprises a number of secondary and minor roads that are typically sinuous in form and locally sunken on the steeper slopes. Verges are variable, some wide with bracken and others non-existent on the steeper slopes. The M25 and A41 sever the area, but they are mainly located in cuttings.

Settlements and built form. The area has a planned and settled appearance with a number of dispersed farmsteads, particularly to the south and west. There are a number of traditional settlements with wayside properties located around greens or fronting commons, e.g. Croxley Green and Chipperfield. Sarratt, located on a drovers' route, with its three ponds, wide green and five inns, provided an ideal stopover. There is a good range of traditional buildings in the area using brick, flint, timber frame, weatherboard, render, clay tile and 'puddingstone' (in the foundations of Sarratt church). Most of the large houses are set in small parkland areas, e.g. Micklefield Hall, Great Westwood Farm and Redheath School, while some are within the villages, e.g. the Manor at Chipperfield. There is little 20th-century development that adversely affects the area.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

English Heritage: Schedule entry

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

The area generally has a strong sense of historical continuity due to the intact field patterns and groupings of traditional architectural styles within the settlements. It feels relatively remote despite the close proximity to the M25. Views of the area from outside are generally restricted by vegetation and the elevated landform. Views within the area are generally filtered by woodland and contained by hedgerows along narrow roads. The area has a coherent and unified character with mature trees having a strong influence. It is medium in scale, being relatively wooded and well treed which helps to create a visually contained and coherent landscape. Along the narrow Bottom Lane the meandering landform creates very strong enclosure.

Rarity and distinctiveness. A frequent landscape type. Distinctive features are the commons and dry chalk valley.

VISUAL IMPACT

The M25 and its associated pylons and radio masts are the major detracting features in the area. The A41 is generally well integrated. Localised fly-tipping is a problem on some of the minor roads. Pylons along Bottom Lane detract from its enclosed character. Inappropriate use of conifers on Oldhouse Lane locally detracts from the area. The Westwood quarry is a large area of disturbed and unrestored ground concealed from the local minor roads but highly visible from the M25. There has been considerable land-use change from pasture to arable with loss of field boundaries, particularly around the M25.

ACCESSIBILITY

There is a good network of footpaths and bridleways, including routes through some of the parklands. There are a few car parks, e.g. Chipperfield Common, which has an adjacent cricket pitch, and Commonwood Common and an equestrian centre at Coltspring School of Riding. The attractive and contained character of the landscape adds to the enjoyment of the recreational facilities.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

Much of this area is hardly remarked upon by the community (E) with the notable exception of Chipperfield Common (D).

Re Chipperfield: *'more thickly wooded'; 'fine trees on the edge of this lovely common'. 'Opposite the manor house gates one can walk into the woods to see some exceptionally fine old trees. One is a Spanish chestnut said to be over 300 yrs old'.*

(*'Common Heritage' Herts Countryside* Vol. 19, No. 77 April/May 1965, pp 214-5.)

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

AONB: (part-north of Sarratt)

Landscape Conservation Area (majority)

SM: two barrow sites on Chipperfield Common

SSSI: Westwood Quarry (geological interest).

Area of Archaeological Significance: Chipperfield Common

CONDITION

<i>Land cover change:</i>	localised
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	mature or young
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	fragmented
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	variable
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	interrupted
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	low
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	moderate

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	apparent
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	apparent
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	interrupted
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	locally visible
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	partial
<i>Visual unity:</i>	coherent (locally unified)
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	frequent

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
		STRENGTH OF CHARACTER		

STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING**CHANGE: IMPROVE AND CONSERVE**

- promote the creation of new woodlands in the open arable landscape to provide mitigation for the M25
- in existing woodland plantations, encourage the replacement of softwoods with indigenous native deciduous communities
- promote the appropriate management of woodland in order to re-establish a rich ground flora and the distinction between different management systems, such as high forest and coppice with standards
- use ancient hedge and field boundaries to determine the most appropriate location for woodland restoration and expansion
- establish realistic and attractive countryside management schemes for all sites with heathland and acid grassland/scrub communities, including Chipperfield Common and Commonwood Common. Maintain a balance between developing a rich variety of habitats and safe public access. Promote local initiatives for traditional management
- encourage landowners and developers to retain and increase ponds and wetland areas to enhance their visual and wildlife functions. Where their loss cannot be avoided, new ponds and wetland areas will be required.
- promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and important semi-natural habitats and the creation of links between semi-natural habitats
- promote the use of reservoirs for water storage and nature conservation interest, rather than groundwater abstraction. Ensure that reservoirs are designed to avoid impact on the character of the local landscape
- 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. Management to involve locally appropriate measures, including coppicing, laying and replanting/gapping-up
- promote crop diversification and the restoration of mixed livestock/arable farming where possible
- promote hedge improvement and planting adjacent to rights of way, green lanes and along parish boundaries
- encourage the re-use of existing agricultural buildings for uses such as equestrian activity and tourism
- promote the use of locally traditional field enclosure where land is converted to equestrian pasture
- within parklands ensure new planting is encouraged to maintain age diversity. Landscape improvements should respect the historic context and the form and character of parkland and gardens. Ornamental species should only be used to replace damaged or over-mature specimens, where appropriate
- within parklands encourage reversion from arable uses to pasture and grassland and resist ploughing of grasslands
- ensure that the surroundings of converted buildings are designed and maintained to be in keeping with their agricultural surroundings by ensuring that 'garden' details are screened from view where possible and native species are used on site boundaries
- traffic-calming measures, where considered necessary, must be of a scale and design that relates to the landscape character of the settlement
- implement a scheme for the restoration of Westwood quarry to a mix of woodland and grassland with landforms to blend with the local landscape
- conserve and enhance the distinctive character of traditional settlements and individual buildings by promoting the conservation of important buildings and high standards of new building or alterations to existing properties, all with the consistent use of locally traditional materials and design to reflect the traditional character of the area



• Chipperfield Common
(J. Billingsley)