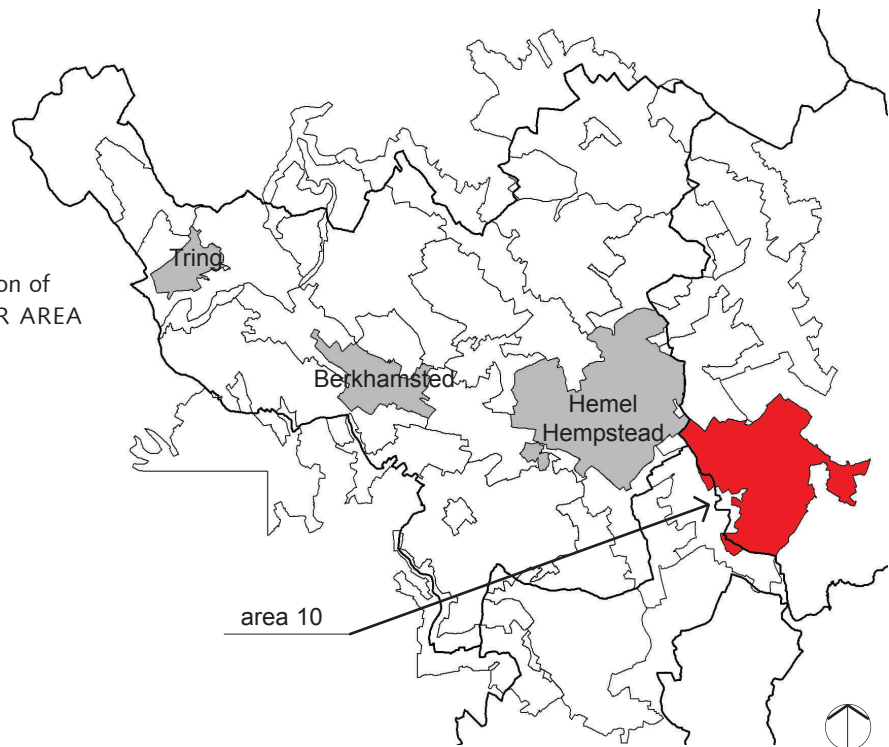


District Map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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LOCATION

This area is located between St Albans, Watford and Hemel Hempstead. It is dissected by the M1, M25 and M10 motorways.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

A working farmed landscape of predominantly open arable fields which slopes from north-west to south-east. To the north several large mixed woodlands create a local sense of enclosure. Elsewhere hedgerows are sparse with few individual field trees. The settlement pattern is dispersed, connected by a series of narrow winding lanes. The historic land-use pattern is overlaid by a strong network of motorways and junctions. Wooded horizons are common to the north, west and south, whilst to the east the built edge of St Albans and Chiswell Green is prominent.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- undulating plateau to north, gently sloping to south east
- medium/large open arable fields throughout
- visually interlocking mixed woodlands to north
- significant extent of motorways and interchanges with associated earthworks, lights and traffic
- narrow winding lanes with sparse clipped hedgerows
- built edge of urban settlements to east
- dispersed settlement with scattered farmsteads

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Gardens of the Rose - Bone Hill
- recycling plant at Longfield Spring

Wooded farmland from •
Bedmond Lane
(E. Anderson)



PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. To the north the plateau drift and clay-with-flints geology is overlaid by well-drained fine silty over clayey soils, often very flinty (Carstens series). On the southern slopes the geology is a flinty and chalky drift over chalk. The soils comprise well-drained flinty fine soils in valley bottoms and calcareous fine silty soils on the valley sides (Charity 2 series).

Topography. The wooded plateau area to the north undulates gently. To the south east there are a number of secondary valleys with steeper gradients which give a stronger landform. These valleys eventually run either side of Chiswell Green.

Degree of slope. On the plateau the slopes are less than 1 in 100, while on the south-east slopes they are typically 1 in 15.

Altitude range. 100-140m on the northern plateau and 82-100m on the southern slopes.

Hydrology. Surface water is rare, particularly on the limestone slopes. A number of small ponds are present on the higher ground, generally in association with the farmsteads.

Land cover and land use. The pattern of land cover is the prominent feature of the landscape. This is characterised by extensive areas of arable cropping, particularly to the south, with few low or relic hedges. The proportion of arable reduces on the plateau areas to the north where historically it has been more heavily wooded. There is a good mix of deciduous and conifer plantations defining the open arable fields. Small areas of pasture are located either around farmsteads, e.g. Potters Crouch, or on urban edges, e.g. Chiswell Green, where other suburban uses are present, including recreation grounds and allotments.

Vegetation and wildlife. Woodlands are a combination of ancient woodlands, e.g. Birch Wood and Park Wood, and plantations, e.g. Potters Crouch Plantation. The main indigenous woodland community is acidic oak/hornbeam. Many woods were replanted in the 20th century with a high proportion of softwoods, including pine and larch, in the core, while the historic deciduous edges comprising birch, ash, oak and holly are generally retained. Old pollard beech and hornbeam are found at Park Wood and on other historic hedgebank boundaries. Hedgerow species comprise a wide mix including field maple, beech, hazel, holly, hawthorn and dog rose. Hedges are generally in a state of decline with some only relic. The visual effect of boundary loss is less marked to the north due to the presence of the woodland blocks. Hedgerow trees are mainly oak with occasional ash, but many are mature and over-mature. A number of isolated oak tree rows within fields ghost the line of removed hedgerows.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Adjacent to the northern boundary of the area lies Prae Wood, an ancient woodland, within which is an important Late Iron Age (c.15BC to AD60) settlement.

Field pattern. The network of lanes, settlement and field patterns exhibits an organic pattern with pre-18th century origins. However, this pattern has been subject to considerable field amalgamation with the removal of hedgerows creating some large featureless prairie fields.

Transport pattern. There is a dual pattern of roads in the area. The historic lanes, which are relatively intact, are narrow and winding. Overlying, but distinct, are the major network of motorways including the M1, M10 and M25 and a large interchange.

Settlements and built form. The settlement pattern comprises a number of dispersed farmsteads throughout the area. There is one cluster of dwellings at Potters Crouch, but otherwise the area is sparsely settled up to the well-defined urban areas to the eastern and north-western boundaries. Most farmsteads are modest in scale and are of typical vernacular materials including brick, white render, weatherboard and claytile. A few examples of thatching are to be found near Park Wood. Holt Farm is a medieval timber-framed and moated farm.

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

The area is widely visible from outside, including open views from the urban areas to the east. The scale of the landscape is medium to large. From within the area there are extensive views from the motorways, particularly the M1 and M10, but also from some of the narrow lanes on the arable landscape to the south. To the north the woodland provides a stronger sense of enclosure. The noise of the motorways is relentless and discordant.

Rarity and distinctiveness. This landscape type is relatively common in the county. The most distinctive feature is the wooded farmland to the north on the plateau.

VISUAL IMPACT

The motorways present a strong built element in the landscape. The M1 is generally poorly integrated with little in the way of screen planting and a locally dominant influence of vehicles and lighting gantries. The M25 and the interchange with the M1 are better integrated. Despite their size, considerable earthworks and new planting reduce the scale of the feature and its visual impact. There has been some localised movement towards new recreational uses, such as the golf course at Potters Crouch west of the M1, although steep perimeter bunding to the M1 has done little to integrate the change of land use. The raw built edges of Chiswell Green and How Wood represent significant suburban impact.

ACCESSIBILITY

There are limited opportunities for recreation within the area. Rights of way often pass through large arable fields. Open views to the motorways and the associated noise detract. Specific features of interest are the Gardens of the Rose at Bone Hill, the new golf course at Potters Green, Chiswell Green equestrian centre and public access to Blackwater Wood.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

An area of some contrast. The landscape near the M1/M25 interchange seems to be of little regard, whereas the distinctive conifer plantations around Potterscrouch and West Furze field are valued by the community (D).

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

Watling Chase Community Forest (east of the M1).

CONDITION

<i>Land cover change:</i>	widespread
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	mature
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	fragmented
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	variable
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	declining
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	high
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	moderate

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	apparent
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	prominent
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	relic
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	widely visible
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	open
<i>Visual unity:</i>	coherent
<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 REINFORCE**

- support the Watling Chase Community Forest in the realisation of its objectives for the area
- 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
- promote the creation of a network of new woodlands in the open arable landscape, particularly with a view to visually integrating the intrusive motorways and existing urban fringe development. Develop a mix of medium to large woods near the motorways and urban areas (developing the existing pattern to the north) and also smaller copses linking with hedgerow restoration on the open arable areas, emphasising topographical variation
- promote appropriate woodland management for existing plantation woodlands, including encouraging the replacement of softwoods with indigenous native deciduous communities, hedgebank management and re-establishing a rich ground flora
- improve public access arrangements to woodlands with attention to car park design and safety
- promote crop diversification and the restoration of mixed livestock/arable farming where possible. Include equestrian uses where feasible
- broaden the range of recreational opportunities
- ensure all existing and proposed recreational land uses include appropriate measures to manage and enhance the existing landscape setting and historical and ecological value. Particular attention should be given to ensure earthwork proposals complement natural landform patterns



- Open views towards the M1 (E. Staveley)