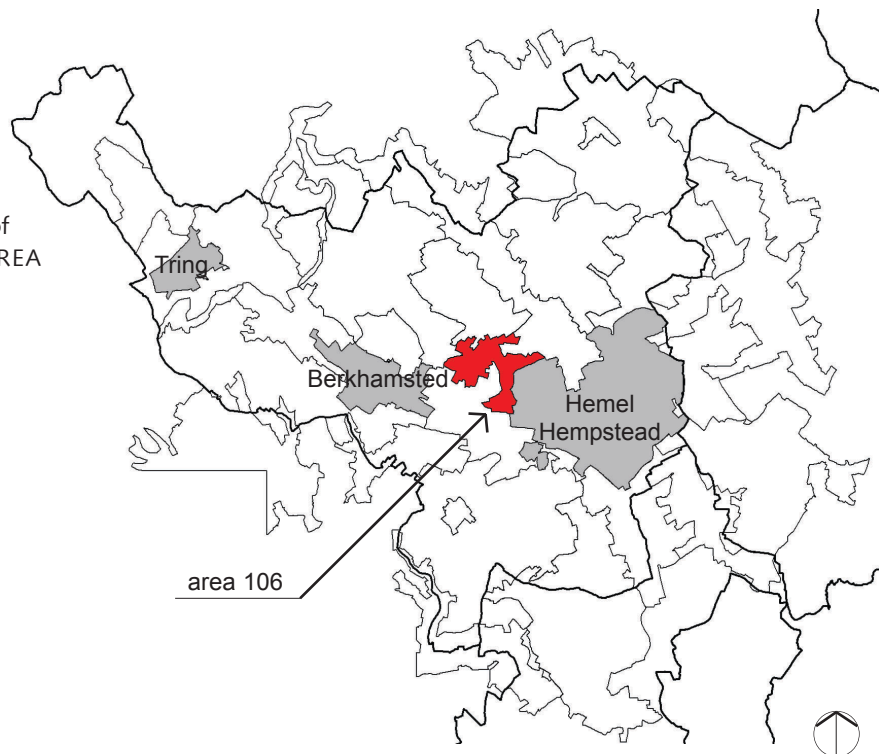


District Map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

©Crown copyright .All rights reserved
Dacorum Borough Council
100018935 2004



LOCATION

This character area covers part of the settled plateau to the west of the Gadebridge area of Hemel Hempstead. It includes the settlement of Potten End and lies to the east of the Ashridge Estate.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The character of this area is influenced by the residential fringes of Hemel Hempstead, creating an urban edge quality to the plateau. The land is predominantly farmed for arable crops with horse paddocks clustered around the farms and houses. The upland gently undulates and the irregular and sub regular field patterns are intermittently visible. The effect of the landscape management on the character of this area contrasts with the neighbouring Ashridge Estate to the west. For example there is evidence of the loss of field boundaries as fields have increased in size for the intensification of agricultural on the plateau. Little Heath to the south of Potten End is a remote part of

the Ashridge Estate. Here the character becomes more intimate with narrow country lanes and wooded dells.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- urban fringe influence
- arable farming
- isolated farms and pasture fields
- contained views

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- covered reservoir
- Bingham's Park and former rare breed centre
- late medieval cottages
- Little Heath Pit - geological SSSI



- Enclosed pasture
(A.Tempany)

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. The bedrock geology is Upper Chalk overlaid with plateau drift. Areas of the chalk bedrock are exposed at the head of the valleys and clay-with-flints elsewhere. The soils are stagnogleyic paleo agrillic brown earths. They comprise fine silty over clayey and fine loamy over clayey soils, with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging. There are some well drained clayey soils over chalk which are variably flinty and quite acidic, (Batcombe and Hornbeam 2 associations). Little Heath is a geological SSSI.

Topography. Generally, the topography is that of a gently undulating upland plateau, with some more pronounced undulations in the area of Little Heath Common which is punctuated by numerous small gravel dells.

Degree of slope. The average slope ratio is 1 in 38.

Altitude range. 125m towards Shrub Hill Common; 170m at Little Heath.

Hydrology. There is little surface water apparent, apart from ponds at Little Heath, and the ancient village pond - Martin's Pond - at Potten End.

Land cover and land use. Land cover was historically common land, although much of this has subsequently regenerated to secondary woodland. The remainder is now either mixed open farmland or occupied by Potten End village.

Vegetation and wildlife. Vegetation is largely secondary oak woodland, with remnant copses of oak, hornbeam and ash as well as the considerably more common place and characteristically silver birch. Old grasslands are few in the area, such as at Rumblers Farm and are generally species poor. Some large old hedges remain. There are no recorded species of note.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The woodlands at Little Heath are ancient common land, associated with the Ashridge Estate (managed by the National Trust) and now regenerating secondary woodland. Within these woodlands are 'dells' which were caused by gravel digging on the common. The former open heathland has reverted to birch wood with bracken and brambles. Geologists have dug in the dells and found that there is a deposit of rounded flint 'pebble gravels' above the chalk making this area a distinctive feature on the plateau.

Field Patterns. The field pattern is essentially irregular with a sinuous field boundaries to a number of fields. Elsewhere the enclosure is generally post 1950's and 60's prairie fields. The fields are small to medium in size and are generally clearly defined by hedgerow boundaries, or in the centre of the area around Little Heath, by blocks of woodland.

Transport pattern. The area is traversed by a number of B roads and minor lanes the latter being both sinuous and slightly sunken.

Settlements and built form. The village of Potten End, is indicative of a long established settlement, being relatively small in scale and characterised by low key expansion of large houses set behind tall hedges. The village of Potten End is centred around an ancient village green, with a large pond and some vernacular buildings. The church and primary school, although relatively modern early 20th century buildings, are interesting brick structures with a strong Dutch influence.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Pevsner N: Buildings of England - Hertfordshire

English Nature: SSSI notification

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

The area is only locally visible from outside due to its plateau location and being concealed by the woodlands of Ashridge and the commons / secondary woodland at Little Heath. The village of Potten End provides further enclosure. The village green and Martin's Pond provide an attractive focus to the area while Little Heath has a locally confined character.

Rarity and distinctiveness. This landscape character is not uncommon in Hertfordshire, however it is made more unusual by its distinctive features that include the SSSI of Little Heath Pit and remote pockets of the Ashridge Estate.

VISUAL IMPACT

The impact of the built development at Potten End in the centre of the area is evident although the development itself is low key. Despite the proximity and size of Gadebridge beyond the eastern boundary of the area, the impact of this built development is minimal due to the presence of mature hedgerows along its edge which provides seasonal and very effective screening.

ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility is good with paths connecting the residential settlement with the neighbouring countryside. Access to the SSSI and National Trust Land at Little Heath is good and the area is well used for recreation.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

This area is of some regard (D); "as a walker and dog walker I value the open spaces and green areas" (2169).

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

AONB (south west corner)

Landscape Conservation Area (Piccotts End- north east corner)

Landscape Conservation Area (Potten End-south west extent)

Geological SSSI: Little Heath

CONDITION

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

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	insignificant
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	apparent
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	apparent
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	locally visible
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	partial
<i>Visual unity:</i>	incoherent
<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**

- utilise ancient hedge and field boundaries for the most appropriate location for woodland restoration and expansion
- encourage the reversal of habitat fragmentation and the creation and improvement of habitat links to create eco-corridors
- 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 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. Restoration measures to include; coppicing, laying, replanting and gapping up
- promote crop diversification and the restoration of mixed livestock/arable farming where possible
- to provide new uncropped or grass field margins to link areas of wildlife importance and/or existing and proposed rights of way
- promote the use of traditional field enclosure where land is converted to equestrian pasture
- where hedgerow removal is deemed to be unavoidable, replacement planting should use locally native species of local provenance to maintain local distinctiveness
- ensure that the surroundings of converted and new buildings are designed and maintained to be in keeping with their agricultural surroundings by ensuring that 'Garden' details are be screened from view where possible and native species are used for hedging and tree planting to the perimeter
- hard detailing should be kept to a minimum, with an emphasis on the use of natural materials such as gravel for drives etc. rather than concrete or paviers
- promote the retention and restoration of existing orchards and the creation of new orchards. Encourage the use of traditional varieties of fruit and minimise the use of herbicides and pesticides
- 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 designed to reflect the traditional character of the area
- 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 and hedges
- the planting and pollarding of trees adjacent to highways should be encouraged
- promote awareness and consideration of the setting of the AONB, and views to and from it, when considering development and land use change proposals on sites adjacent to the AONB
- a co-ordinated approach to the provision of access and recreation opportunities, car parking, land management, site interpretation etc should be encouraged between neighbouring communities. To include Little Heath
- encourage the restoration of open heathland and heathland planting where possible on the plateau.
- where possible, areas of chalk grassland should be encouraged to coincide with the outcrops of chalk at the heads of the valleys
- support a strategy to limit built development within the area and the visual impact of development that may affect the area from outside, including Hemel Hempstead
- Martins Pond, Potten End (A.Tempany)

