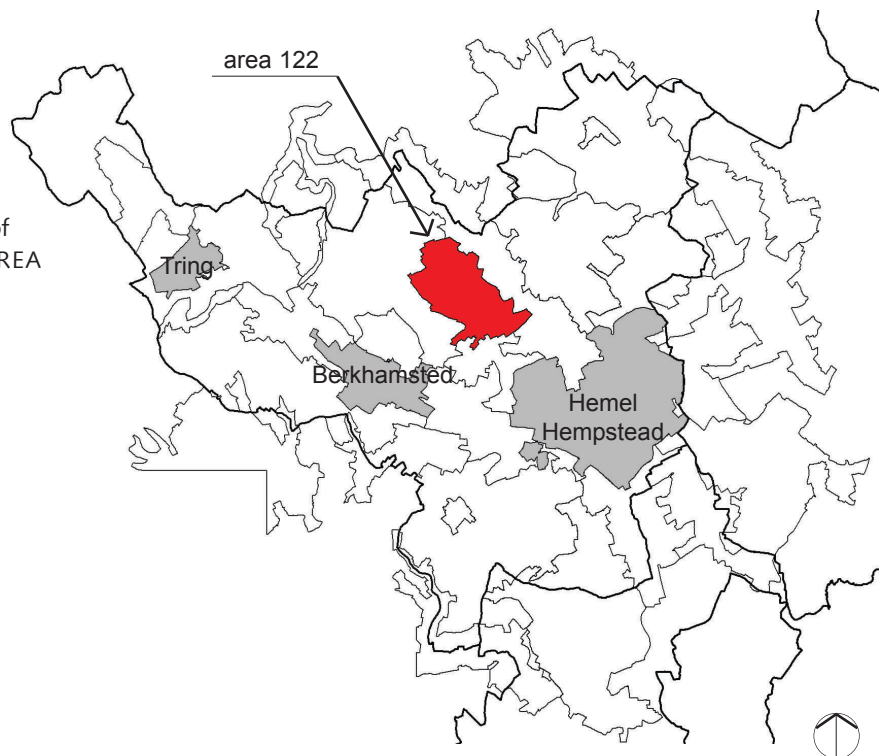


District Map showing location of
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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LOCATION

The area covers a series of parallel ridges and dry valleys that start to the east of Ashridge college, close to Little Gaddesden and stretch down to join the High Gade Valley to the south east. The hamlet of Nettleden nestles in the central dry valley.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The character area is defined by the strongly undulating topography and the cover of extensive arable fields and relict parkland features. The ridge and valley complex extends westwards beyond the character boundary and into the Ashridge Estate (Area 121), where the designed estate landscape becomes dominant. The settlement of Nettleden provides a visual and cultural focus to the area. It is a small hamlet of traditional built styles including some newly converted residential properties hidden away in the folds of the arable landscape. The area is strongly linked with Ashridge and evidence of its former inclusion within the

historic estate is widely apparent. The planned 'gatepost' woodlands that frame the dry valley at Water End, the woodland roundels and scattered veteran trees and the sunken road at Nettleden were all part of the historic approach to the manor.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- rolling topography
- long views from ridge tops along valleys to the south
- very large arable fields
- sparse settlement with scattered farms
- relict parkland
- woodland copses
- designed landscape
- transport routes following the lie of the land
- lack of field hedgerows and ecological links
- poor landscape management on St. Margaret's ridge
- planned woodland blocks

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- flint and brick faced sunken 'Spooky Lane', Nettleden
- reservoir
- viewpoint at Frithview Farm of both Wyatt Houses (Ashridge College and Gaddesden Place)
- designed woodlands and earthworks marking the historic approach to the Ashridge Estate
- distinctive paraged house and ice house in Frithsden
- Buddhist Temple at St. Margaret's and monastic remains
- Hudnall Park
- distinctive paraged house and ice house in Frithsden
- Spooky Lane (A.Tempany)



PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. The bedrock geology is Upper Chalk with a superficial geology of acidic clay-with-flints on the ridges and areas of exposed chalk drift within parts of the upper and middle valleys. The soils are stagnogleyic paleo-agricultural brown earths. They comprise fine silty over clayey and fine loamy over clayey soils, with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging, (Charity 2 association).

Topography. The area lies on a series of north west, south east dry valleys draining down the Chiltern dip slope. The landform is strongly undulating and contains a narrow dry valley within the character area, between Nettleden and Frithsden.

Degree of slope. Average gradient along the ridges is 1 in 70 with the valley slopes typically 1 in 8.

Altitude range. From 110m at Crossways Farm up to 175m at Lady Grove.

Hydrology. There is little water apparent, although standing water is evident in places, together with a number of small ponds around St. Margaret's.

Land cover and land use. Land cover and land use are predominantly devoted to agriculture, primarily arable but with a proportion of pasture, particularly on the Nettleden side in the former extents of Ashridge Park. Significant secondary land cover comprises broadleaf semi natural woodland. In terms of changes in land use and land cover, these are chiefly marked by loss of the eastern most extents of the park to pasture, and possibly of woodland to arable. There is a vineyard at Frithsden.

Vegetation and wildlife. Woodland is characterised by oak, sweet chestnut, beech and holly, with cherry particularly evident at the margins. Stands of plantation species such as larch and Scots pine are also common place. Semi-natural woodland survives especially at Highpark Wood, which is unusual in the area as it is essentially beech/ash woodland on chalk, but has been subject to partial replanting. More acidic oak/beech woodland occurs at Heizdins Wood and Pulridge Wood.

Old grasslands are limited, but there are areas of calcareous/neutral grasslands of moderate diversity at Hudnall Park and Corner Farm.

Hedgerow vegetation is similarly species rich. Field maple (both in the hedgerow and as a tree), cherry, holly, lime (hedgerow tree), hawthorn, hazel, elder, blackthorn and clematis were all recorded.

The slopes of the principal ridge between Nettleden and Frithsden are grazed with both sheep and cattle on the Nettleden side, while apparent badger and rabbit activity are evident in the hedgerows. In the fields immediately north west of Frithsden, at Frithsden gardens, rare breeds such as long horn cattle are grazed.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

With its close links to Ashridge (Area121) and the fact that it once formed part of the estate, the area is culturally and historically strong. At 'Spooky Lane' (after the ghost of an Ashridge Monk seen at the spot), there are clear signs of a designed landscape. This is due to the Bridgewater's

decision, in the early 19th century, to sink the original straight medieval route (also locally called the 'roman' road) into a deep cutting with revetted flint retaining walls and run a driveway across, complete with a Tudor style bridge. This was in order to avoid contact with the villagers of Nettleden and Frithsden. The 19th century driveway approach to Ashridge began on the Nettleden Road leading from the Gade valley and heralded by two large sentinel woodlands on the adjoining ridges. At the bridge over 'Spooky Lane' the drive afforded a vista of Ashridge House before sweeping through Golden Valley into the park. Fragments of the park's original extent can be seen in this area with several large field trees.

Other aspects which recall the area's historic and cultural continuity are the picturesque Nettleden Lodge House, and the scant remains of a Benedictine Nunnery at St. Margaret's, whose site is now partly occupied by a Buddhist temple. Nettleden has been described as once being a valley of nettles.

Field Patterns. The field pattern is essentially irregular with sinuous field boundaries common to a number of fields. Elsewhere the enclosure is generally post 1960. There is a localized area of prairie fields on the south facing slopes below High Park Wood. Field sizes are generally medium to large and the area includes reputedly the largest field in Hertfordshire (due to boundary removal/erosion). Near Nettleden and Frithsden there are a number of smaller paddocks enclosed by post and rail timber fences.

Transport pattern. This is characterised by a variety of roads, including a number of B roads. The transport pattern is however predominantly defined by tracks and lanes, generally winding or sinuous, some of which are deeply sunken as at 'Spooky Lane'.

Settlements and built form. There are few areas of settlement. The Ashridge estate villages of Nettleden and Frithsden are within the area. Both are small, essentially medieval and largely unspoiled hamlets, with a good range of vernacular buildings using local flint and weatherboarding. The 'Little Manor' at Frithsden is an interesting 17th century house with a pargeted façade bearing the arms of Adelbert, Earl Brownlow, as do many of the houses in the area, recalling the connection to Ashridge.

There are many other half timber with brick houses, and at Nettleden also, where the characteristic Brownlow vernacular of red brick with Totternhoe stone detailing, steep roofs and intricate gabling may be seen at Nettleden House. At St Margaret's, a number of relatively recent and untidy properties contribute to the general air of neglect evident in this part of the character area, although some early medieval houses survive.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Pevsner N: Buildings of England - Hertfordshire

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

As the character area is defined by a partially enclosed dry valley system, contained by woodlands the area is only locally visible from outside. Within the area the scale of landscape elements is large in terms of field size, however there is still a relatively intimate scale due to the containment by topography and vegetation which frames and defines views. To the pastoral slopes with traces of the former extent of Ashridge Park, the landscape displays a clear visual unity, and is relatively tranquil.

Rarity and distinctiveness. In terms of historical pattern and its implications for manipulation of this landscape, the character area is unusual. The bridge and revetted flint work retaining wall to conceal 'Spooky Lane' from Ashridge park are highly unusual features, and the traces of former parkland in this area, with roundels and groups of trees among the pasture mark the area as distinctive.

VISUAL IMPACT

The area is characterized by a number of built and designed features and transitions in land use/land cover. In terms of features, both Gaddesden Place and Ashridge College can be viewed from the same point at the top of the sunken lane. The parklands and associated ornamental plantings of Ashridge are also clearly visible, in particular the Wellingtonia avenue.

ACCESSIBILITY

Access to the area is more difficult than the neighbouring Ashridge Estate (Area 121). There is no common land and most of the paths follow the boundaries of large fields.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

This area includes some distinctive elements (D).

Respondent 2160 writes of this area and the associated Upper Gade "We know this area as being very picturesque with lovely views from the hills and attractive villages along the dales. There is also a lovely bluebell wood."

"[Nettleden] is beautifully situated at the foot of a wooded hill." HW Tompkins "Hertfordshire" Methuen 1903. "Pipers Hill is a typical Hertfordshire lane, and in autumn the hedgerows are rich with blackberries. The way goes steeply up still more steeply down towards Nettleden. After one passes the crest of the hill some grand old beech trees add beauty to the scene and distant cornfields are visible through their branches." D A Prince in "Visit to Nettleden" Hertfordshire Countryside v.20 No.79 Aug/Sept 1965.

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

AONB (except south east)

Conservation Areas: Nettleden and Frithsden

Areas of Archaeological Significance: Nettleden and St. Margarets Farm

CONDITION

<i>Land cover change:</i>	widespread
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	mature/young
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	scattered
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	not obvious
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	intact
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	low
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	high

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	dominant
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	prominent
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	apparent
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	locally visible
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	contained
<i>Visual unity:</i>	unified
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	unusual

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
	STRENGTH OF CHARACTER			
		WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG

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

- 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 or within the AONB
- 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
- 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 area into the adjacent Ashridge landscape character area
- utilise ancient hedge and field boundaries for the most appropriate location for woodland restoration and expansion
- promote the multiple uses of ancient woodland through education and access
- encourage the reversal of habitat fragmentation and the creation and improvement of habitat links to create eco-corridors
- survey and manage parkland and veteran trees for biodiversity value
- ensure new planting is encouraged to maintain age diversity. 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, where appropriate
- encourage reversion from arable uses to pasture and chalk grassland. All areas of existing unimproved chalk grassland should be managed for nature conservation and landscape interest
- encourage the establishment of heathland communities where possible to add ecological and landscape interest into the area and establish links with other heathland habitats in the neighbouring landscape character area of Ashridge
- promote the establishment of open and wooded common land restore a mix of habitat types and a balance between agriculture and wildlife and public access Promote local initiatives for traditional management techniques
- promote the restoration and creation of hedgerows and ditches as characteristic field boundary patterns (target landscape improvement grants for 500m of hedgerow to area of land north of the Nettleden Road)
- encourage a co-ordinated approach to the provision of access and recreation opportunities, car parking, land management, and site interpretation
- encourage the restoration and conservation of the relict Ashridge Parkland, considering the revival of the former entrance drive and interpretation of the historical significance of the landscape design
- promote crop diversification and the restoration of mixed livestock/ arable farming where possible
- to provide new uncropped or grass field margins within arable areas to link semi-natural habitats and areas of wildlife importance and/or existing and proposed rights of way
- ensure that the siting and landscaping of new agricultural development is done so that the buildings integrate into the landscape and contribute to views rather than detract from them.
- quiet enjoyment of the landscape should be encouraged but should not be allowed to undermine the character and quality of the landscape. A balance needs to be achieved between the needs of the visitors and conserving the landscape.
- identify and record features of heritage value, including ancient countryside
- 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
- Ridge and valley from Nettleden Road (J.Billingsley)

