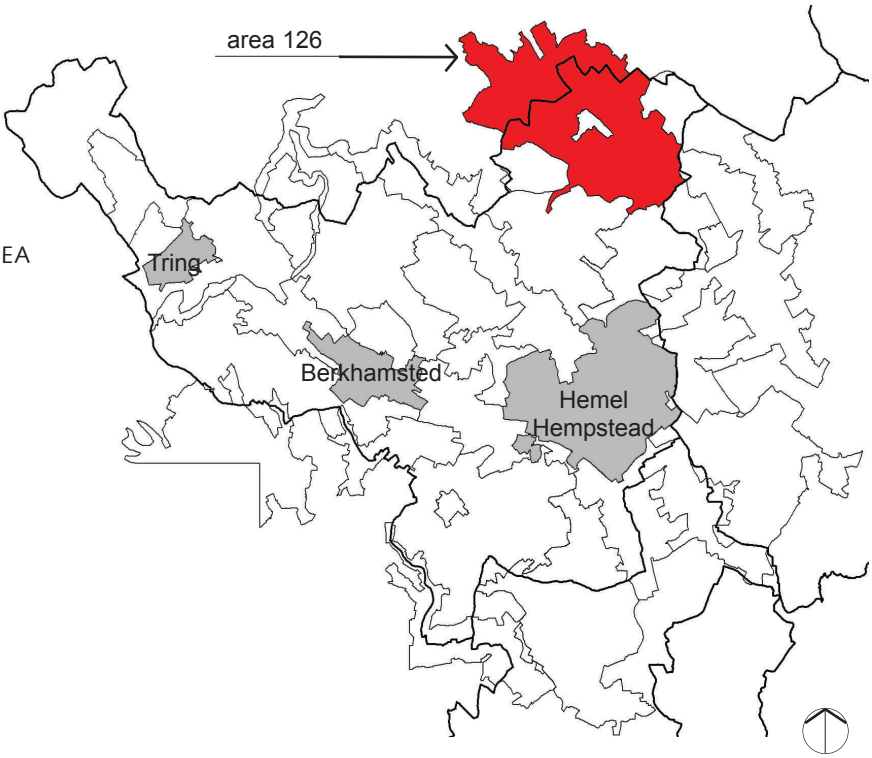
District Map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA



LOCATION

Centred around the village of Markyate and on the border with Bedfordshire the ridges and valleys run in a north west, south east direction. The area includes the upper reaches of the Ver Valley and the hamlets of Aley Green and Kensworth Common to the north, the parkland of Markyate Cell to the centre and the settlements of Trowley Bottom and Flamsted to the south. The area comprises two sub areas of 'ridges' and 'valleys'.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The area comprises a 'hand-shaped' pattern of narrow ridges and valleys, of predominantly mixed arable and pasture farmland with some common land, woodland and parkland, converging upon the M1 corridor to the east. The River Ver marks the central valley, although neither the watercourse or the associated vegetation read strongly in the landscape. Caddington Hall with its distinctive designed woodlands and exotic ornamentals and Markyate Cell with its large parkland trees and estate architecture both have a significant local influence on the character of the area. Woodland cover, where it occurs, is largely coniferous plantation, with semi natural edges/ margins. Views are framed by hawthorn hedgerows with large oak hedgerow trees. The landscape at the convergence of the valleys, near Junction 9 of the M1 is notably disturbed and the constant presence of large lorries and the influence of the transport system in this area is strong.

Relict common land at Kensworth and Caddington are valuable amenity resources and small ponds on the uplands are locally apparent.

- Sunken lane crossing ridge (A.Tempany)

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- narrow upland ridges and valleys
- gently undulating open arable land
- medium sized irregular shaped fields
- isolated settlements and farms
- open views across surrounding valleys
- ribbon development adjacent to A5/Ver valley
- sunken lanes and hedgebanks on valley slopes
- pockets of pasture in the valleys and close to settlement
- disturbed landscape in the east close to the M1

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- historic parklands at Markyate Cell and Caddington
- reservoir, water and sewage works
- common land
- Watling Street Roman Road - A5

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. On the higher ground, the Upper Chalk bedrock is capped with variable depths of free draining clay-with-flints and thin deposits of peri-glacial brick earth. In the valleys there are variable deposits of alluvium and fluvo-glacial gravels. The soils are predominantly fine silty and fine loamy over clayey soils with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging, (Batcombe association). To the main Ver valley the soils are well drained, calcareous fine silty soils, deep at the valley bottom and shallow to chalk on valley sides in places, with slight risk of water erosion, (Combe 1 association).

Topography. The area covers a series of narrow, gently undulating ridges, above the glacial dry valleys of Markyate that meet at Friars Wash in the upper Ver valley.

Degree of slope. The average gradient along the ridges is 1 in 78 however the land drops away steeply into the valleys at an average gradient of 1 in 15.

Altitude range. Varies from 185m at Kensworth Ridge to 107m at Junction 9 of the M1.

Hydrology. On the ridges, there is little standing water apparent apart from village ponds near Flamstead. Water becomes more visible on the valley floor and the course of the River Ver runs through the central valley in which the village of Markyate is sited. The River Ver is a characteristic chalk stream that has its historic source at Kensworth Lynch and which has reappeared in recent years. The river is also supplemented from chalk rock springs further downstream. In addition, the area is characterised by a number of springs and the ornamental ponds in the parklands of Markyate Cell, and Caddington Hall. A bund/dam is being built in Markyate Cell as a flood prevention measure.

Land cover and land use. Land cover is predominantly open arable farmland with isolated pockets of wooded pasture and ornamental parkland. Patches of light industrial development and lorry parks border Watling Street in the east. Patches of pasture and horticulture can be found close to residential settlements, predominantly on the ridges.

Vegetation and wildlife. There are substantial blocks of ancient mainly acidic oak/beech or oak/hornbeam woodland at Broomhill Leys, Friendless Wood, and especially Dedmansey Wood in Bedfordshire (although this is largely re-planted) and Limekiln Plantation (partly ancient). There are also old wooded hedgerows along Half Moon Lane. Calcareous, but rather poor beech/ash woodland occurs at Babies Wood. In the Ver valley the former calcareous valley floor meadows have almost entirely been ploughed, except for the vestiges at Friars Wash and the improved grasslands at Friars Gate Cell. No other semi-natural habitats of any note remain in the sub area. The River Ver has recently been established as a flowing stream through the area following reductions in abstraction but has very little remaining associated habitat. Old grassland is limited, but there are remnants of calcareous grassland at Jack's Dell, Flamstead, and old neutral grassland survives at Cheverells Green.

Although Kensworth Common has superficial clay-with-flints, the habitats are generally calcareous. Ancient woodland is limited, the largest being Slough Wood, supporting ash/hazel over Dog's Mercury; and Kensworth Gorse, with acidic oak. Degraded calcareous grassland remnants occur on road verges, and at Codling Bank near Kensworth, in Bedfordshire.

In terms of notable species in the area, the Chiltern Gentian occurred fairly recently at Jack's Dell.

- Markyate Cell Park (A.Tempany)

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

There is little evidence of a long settled cultural pattern in the area (Flamstead, despite its early origins, has been heavily infilled with a range of early twentieth century buildings). Other settlements also reflect this degraded character i.e. Trowley Bottom and Caddington (largely outside the county). The few exceptions are Markyate village and Markyate Cell.

Markyate Cell was originally an Augustinian Nunnery, whose buildings, grounds and farms were incorporated into a substantial country house by the Ferrers family after the dissolution of the monasteries. In the mid seventeenth century it was home to the notorious 'Wicked Lady', Katherine Ferrers, a highwaywoman shot down on nearby Nomansland Common. Markyate Cell was largely rebuilt in the 19th century. With its ancient parkland breaking up the essentially arable Ver Valley and its diversity of estate architecture, its influence is strong. Caddington Hall dated from 1804 and was built of light and dark chequer brickwork with seven bays. It was demolished in 1975.

Field Patterns. Fields are predominantly laid out in an irregular pattern throughout the valleys and ridges. The fields to the east of the area are predominantly of 20th century origin with some earlier organic forms. Further to the west, larger prairie fields have eroded the historic patterns. The field pattern is disturbed where the valleys and ridges converge, close to the M1 corridor in the east. There is a small pocket of fields in a regular pattern around Foxdell Farm in the north of the area.

Transport pattern. Watling Street (A5) is a fast and straight road that forms the spine of the character area, connecting Junction 9 of the M1 to Dunstable in the north west. 'B roads branch off this spine at right angles. Verges vary between wide along Watling Street to almost non-existent on the more minor roads. Luton road that links Markyate with Slip End is direct and straight, perpendicular to the ridges and valleys, therefore undulating significantly.

Settlements and built form. Settlement is somewhat isolated and irregular in its occurrence. Scattered farms and hamlets offer few examples of a vernacular building style, and are rarely of note or distinguishable.

The small coaching village of Markyate used to lie on the turnpike road but the centre is now bypassed by the A5. Flamstead lies on one of the ridges and the Parish church of St Leonard is a prominent landmark within the character area. The village also contains some 17th century brick almshouses.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Pevsner N: Buildings of England - Hertfordshire
English Heritage: Registered Park and Garden citation

- Flamstead (A.Tempany)

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

Due to the nature of the landform and the generally wooded boundaries, the area is essentially concealed from view from outside the character area. However, this varies around Flamstead ridge and Kensworth ridge and valley, although the area is no more than locally visible throughout. Within the area views are framed and filtered by landform and overgrown hedgerows and woodland belts, although this is again subject to variation, as views at Kensworth (outside the county) are extensive. Generally, the scale of landscape elements is medium to large, with a clear sense of enclosure in many parts. However again this is not consistent across the entire character area. For example the arable areas around Trowley Bottom, Kensworth and Flamstead are quite open.

Visual unity is coherent throughout the character area.

Noise from the A5 and the M1 is generally distant, with the exception of the Ver valley, in which Markyate is sited.

Rarity and distinctiveness. The rarity and distinctiveness needs to be considered in the context of the sub areas of which the character area is composed. At Markyate Cell, the landscape is strongly influenced by the historic parkland and the estate and, as such, is relatively unusual.

In the Trowley Bottom valley, the pattern of degraded commercial arable agriculture and the resultant near total erosion of historical and cultural integrity make this landscape more frequent in its occurrence.

At Kensworth, the influence of the strongly linear village, sited on the top of the ridge rather than the more normal valley floor makes the sub area sufficiently distinct as to be regarded unusual.

VISUAL IMPACT

This is subject to variation across the sub areas. In the Trowley Bottom Valley, the pylons are strong detracting features with a high visual impact. Built development, at the settlement fringes of Flamstead and Kensworth is characterized by modest late 20th century housing and, which generally has a low impact.

ACCESSIBILITY

Access to the countryside is possible through a number of footpaths, bridleways and minor roads. There are a number of public footpaths around Flamstead and linking other settlements. There is some common land at Caddington and a village green at Cheverells.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

Although data on community views (particular those of Luton residents) is limited, this area emerged from the MORI consultation as largely unremarkable (E).

"The town has nothing to boast of in outward appearance….but the vicinity is very respectable and enlivened by fertile scenery and ornamental residences" Pigot & Co's Directory of Bedfordshire 1839"[Trowley bottom is] in one of the most thoroughly rural districts in the county," H Tompkins "Hertfordshire" 1903

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

Area of Archaeological Significance: Markyate Cell,East of Hogtrough Wood- Flamstead, Hill and Coles Farm-Flamstead(cropmarks), Flamstead.

AONB: (part west of Markyate Cell)

Landscape Development Area (east of Markyate Cell)

Conservation Areas: Flamstead and Markyate Cell

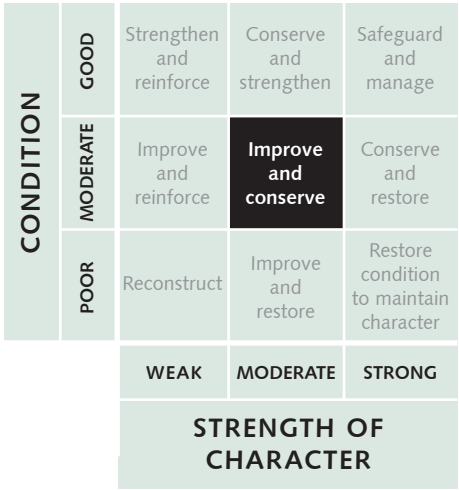
Registered Park and Garden: Markyate Cell (Grade 2)

CONDITION

Land cover change:	**localised**
Age structure of tree cover:	**over mature**
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	**scattered**
Management of semi-natural habitat:	**not obvious**
Survival of cultural pattern:	**interrupted**
Impact of built development:	**moderate**
Impact of land-use change:	**moderate**

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

Impact of landform:	**prominent**
Impact of land cover:	**prominent**
Impact of historic pattern:	**apparent**
Visibility from outside:	**locally visible**
Sense of enclosure:	**partial**
Visual unity:	**coherent**
Distinctiveness/rarity:	**unusual**



STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE: IMPROVE AND CONSERVE

- 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
- 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 motorways, roads and urban fringe development
- 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 appropriate management of coppice woodland in order to re-establish a rich ground flora and the distinction between different management systems, such as high forest, coppice, coppice with standards and wood pasture
- 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
- promote the expansion of woodland beyond ancient woodland boundaries, especially where this will help in creating habitat links
- promote the retention and restoration of existing orchards and the creation of new orchards
- 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
- 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
- promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and important semi-natural habitats and the creation of links between semi-natural habitats
- encourage reversion from arable uses to pasture and grassland
- restrict ploughing of grasslands within parklands
- 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 within the development proposals
- protect remaining river valley habitats of significant nature conservation interest, especially where they contribute to a suite of habitats, such as neutral grassland, running water, wet grassland, valley or floodplain woodland, grazing marsh, fens and swamp
- 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
- 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
- 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

• North Pond, Friar's Wash (A.Tempany)