Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessement











THE LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP LTD

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A practice registered with The Landscape Institute and Royal Town Planning Institute and a member of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment.

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Following the adoption of the general principle of the Landscape Character Approach within the Hertfordshire Structure Plan (1991-2011) a more detailed landscape character assessment was commissioned by Hertfordshire County Council for southern Hertfordshire in 2000. While this study covered the majority of Welwyn Hatfield District in order to complete a district-wide landscape character assessment a small extension study was commissioned in 2002 by both authorities. In both studies, however, the work was carried out using the same methodology and by the same consultants, The Landscape Partnership Ltd.

This document brings together for the first time the results of the two studies into a single volume. This technical document will serve in support of Policy RA10 Landscape Regions and Character Areas within the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan April 2005

While most of the material is as previously published, it should be noted that this document does include a few minor changes, typically matters of fact or typography. It thus supersedes all previously dated work.

Both the 2000 and 2002 studies included consultation processes based on best practice and planning policy guidance, Details of these are set out more fully in the Introduction and on the County Council website, where fuller information about all aspects of the methodology may be found. The extent and coverage of the district wide study also formed part of the public consultation carried out during the preparation for and at the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan Inquiry held in 2003.

It should be noted that a complementary landscape character assessment was also carried out for North Hertfordshire Council between 2002-2004 using a similar methodology. Some Landscape Character Areas straddle the district boundary between North Hertfordshire and Welwyn Hatfield (Areas 34, 37, 132 and 133 a and 133b). For the avoidance of doubt, when considering landscape character for planning control purposes reference should always be made to that version of the character assessment published by the determining District.

At the time the studies were being prepared, the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan adopted in 1998, contained designated 'Landscape Conservation Areas'. This approach however was proposed to be replaced in the Revised Deposit version of the review of the District Plan 2002 by Landscape Character Assessment. This was accepted by the Inspector at the Local Plan Inquiry and adopted by the Council in the final version Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005. The character statements explain exactly what features of an area are key to its character, and thus worthy of conservation, and the strategy and guidelines sections within each area statement give a fuller explanation of those measures which will help develop the landscape's potential to contribute to sustainable development.

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1.1 Background

1.1 Background

In February 2000 Hertfordshire County Council commissioned The Landscape Partnership to undertake the preparation of a 'local authority scale' landscape character assessment and evaluation of the southern part of the county in accordance with the most current version of national guidance, with stakeholder input, and co-ordinated with existing landscape characterisations. The characterisation work was to enable a definitive classification of all landscape types and boundaries encountered to be made, for the purposes of

- advising on development control and policy development for future development plans, and
- providing a framework for other landscape planning, regulation, conservation and management activities in the county.

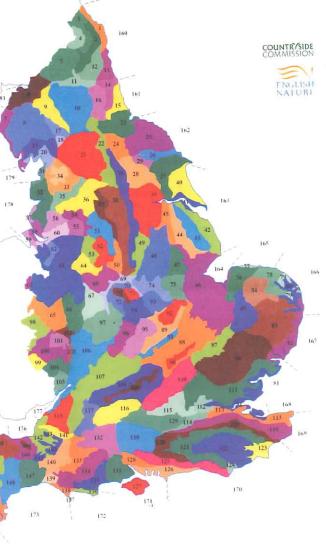
In 2001 an extension to the above Landscape Character Assessment was carried out to give full coverage within St. Albans District. In 2002 further extensions were agreed to provide complete coverage of Dacorum Borough and Welwyn Hatfield District. This volume brings together for the first time, all the Landscape Character Area Assessments within Welwyn Hatfield District providing a complete district wide assessment.

1.2 Context

The process of landscape characterisation and assessment has been spearheaded in England by the work of the Countryside Agency (formerly Countryside Commission) and is currently enshrined as a major planning tool in PPS7. In tandem with English Nature, parallel approaches were formulated and tested 18 during 1995-97 to derive, on the one hand, a series of Natural Area profiles for the whole of England and, on the other, the Countryside Character profiles. While the Natural Area profiles highlighted the distinctive ecology of rural areas, the Countryside Character profiles analysed landscape character in fairly broad-brush terms via the assessment of physical influences, historic and cultural influences, buildings and settlement, land cover and changes in the landscape. Through this process 120 Natural Areas and 181 character areas were formulated and a joint map published, called 'The Character of England: landscape, wildlife and natural features' (see Figure 01). This map defines the county of Hertfordshire as lying within six Character Areas:

- Area 86 South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland
- Area 87 East Anglian Chalk
- Area 88 Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands
- · Area 110 Chilterns
- Area 111 Northern Thames Basin
- Area 115 Thames Valley

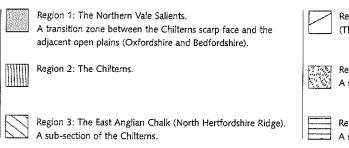
 Figure 01
 The Character of England
 © Countryside Commission/ English Nature



The Hertfordshire County Structure Plan adopted in April
1998 embraced the concept of landscape character
assessment. They refer to Volume 1 of A Landscape
Strategy for Hertfordshire, which was published as
background information in 1998. This first document
identifies six regions within Hertfordshire. The present
document for Welwyn Hatfield District (Volume 3 Part 4)
falls within the following regions:

Region 2: The Chitterns
Region 5: The Central River Valleys
Region 6: The South Hertfordshire Plateau

These three regions also correspond to Areas 110 and 111
from the Character Map of England.



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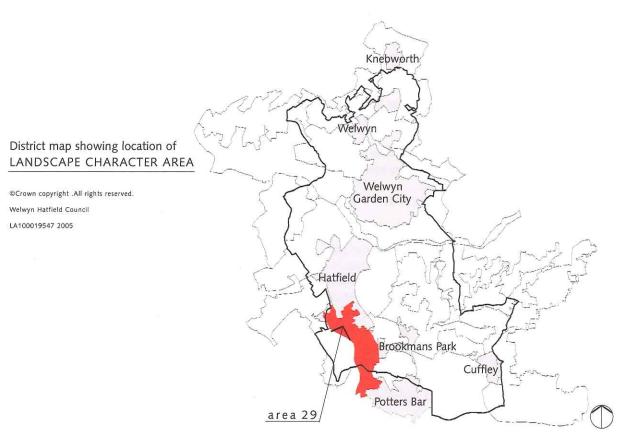
Within these broad categories there are physical and cultural features that serve to distinguish sub-divisions within each area. Some of these divisions are not immediately obvious and require analysis of the basic landscape components and their relationship to each other. A single character area may contain different landscape types that combine to give it a unique character. Recent change within a landscape area may suggest a difference of character that is in fact superficial. Logical and consistent observation and analysis was therefore used to derive 30 Landscape Character Areas, as described in this report. Each character area is distinct. One of the intentions of this study is to highlight, conserve and reinforce this distinctiveness.

Region 4: The East Hertfordshire Plateau.
(The South Suffolk and North Essex Clay Lands).

Region 5: The Central River Valleys.
A sub-section of the Northern Thames Basin.

Region 6: The South Hertfordshire Plateau.
A sub-section of the Northern Thames Basin.

This study revisits the general landscape features of the county covered in the first volume of the Strategy before providing a detailed description, assessment and evaluation of each Landscape Character Area covered by the scope of this study.



LOCATION

Mimmshall valley runs in a north/south direction around Welham Green. The area is confined in the east and west by major transport corridors (the A1(M) and the railway line) and higher ground. The settlements of Hatfield and Potters Bar form the north and south boundaries respectively.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Mimmshall Brook valley slopes and floor have a wooded farmland character, with rectangular field compartments along the valley slopes. It is strongly influenced by the major transport routes and the surrounding settlement, which give it an urban-edge rather than a rural character. The Royal Veterinary College is located centrally and has a local impact. The roads down the slopes coincide with a series of high points and the meandering streams that feed the brook also mark the shallow valleys between.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- · organic field pattern of small woodland blocks and fenced pasture
- · mixed farming
- · major transport corridor
- · water related features
- · valley slopes and floor
- · urban influence

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES:

- · Potterells Spew gravel slopes
- swallowholes
- · Royal Veterinary College



Swallowholes in Brush Wood • (E. Staveley)

summary

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. The area lies within the central river valleys, part of the northern Thames basin. The slowly permeable clayey soils mostly have brown subsoils and lie over Tertiary clays, giving rise to seasonal waterlogging (Windsor series). There are local areas of slight seasonal water logging on the slopes. Springs issue from a distinctive spew gravel bank at Potterells.

Topography. A string of high points runs centrally along the area and the land falls slightly away to the east at the boundary of the Hatfield estate.

Degree of slope. The average gradient is 1:30. Altitude range. 80m to 110m

Hydrology. Water End swallowholes (SSSI) are major sinkholes in chalk and a permanent landscape feature. The site, which is the largest in England, consists of a group of more than 15 sinkholes where two streams drain from the London clay and sink very close to the boundary of a chalk outcrop. During heavy rainfall a lake accumulates in the basin but is only temporary. This flow is the spring source for Chadwell at Ware (New River), and overflows westwards into the Colne (the Mimmshall Brook at Water End). Ponds at Welham Green are connected underground. A number of small ponds on the higher ground are associated with the farms and woodlands.

Land cover and land use. Wooded farmland is prominent throughout the area. The farmland is predominantly arable, with small fields of pasture with fenced boundaries edging the settlement and surrounding the Vet College. The area is well used for informal recreation.

Vegetation and wildlife. The willow carr/swamp community adjacent to the Water End swallowholes is of biological importance, with stands of wetland species. Field boundaries are generally treed hedgerows, with hedgebanks locally. Hawthorn is a common hedge species throughout the area, with elder and elm also frequent. Other species include ash, dogwood, field maple and blackthorn. Woodland blocks are relatively small and unconnected, generally an oak/ash mix with wetland species associated with watercourses. Hornbeam, field maple and the occasional beech can also be found. Bush Wood at Welham Green is a significant hornbeam woodland. Some remnant acid grassland can be found in association with the oak/hornbeam woodland. Immature woodland planting mixes edge the A1(M) corridor.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Historically, the woods were used for a supply of timber for brick kiln furnaces. A moat is sited to the west of Welham Green. The transport corridors and regular configuration of lanes that cross the area have strongly influenced the landscape character and evolution of the settlements and have obliterated the historic/cultural pattern. For example, any links with North Mymms Park have been severed by the motorway corridor. Relics of the historic field pattern can be found further up the slopes away from the A1(M). Field pattern. Small regular

Transport pattern. The A1(M) and the railway define this area to east and west

Settlements and built form. Linear 20th-century settlement borders Hawkshead Lane and the historic village of Water End follows the Mimmshall brook. Some infill development has occurred adjacent to the A1(M) corridor. Isolated houses and farms are scattered throughout the area. Mimms Hall is located close to Potters Bar and has a flint and red-brick lodge house, which is unusual in the

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

English Nature SSSI notification.

pg

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

In general, dense hedgerows and woodland restrict visibility. Longer views are generally associated with the larger fields on the high ground. Vegetation and landform confine views within the Mimmshall Brook valley.

Rarity and distinctiveness. The geological SSSI in this area, Water End swallowholes, is the best example of its type in England.

VISUAL IMPACT

The site and sound of the A1(M), railway line and the surrounding settlements of Potters Bar and Hatfield cause a significant impact on the character of the entire area, while the Vet College has a localised impact. The pig farm only presents a very localised impact and is well screened by vegetation. At the southern end of the area views are marred by the leisure centre and Cranborne Industrial Estate, offset by the Furzefield Local Nature Reserve.

ACCESSIBILITY

Access is good and the landscape is well used by the local residents. Parking access is difficult for most of the footpaths in the area. Motorcycling, walking and riding recreational activities also occur.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

Elements in this landscape are regarded as distinctive (D). The Potterell's slopes are perceived as being particularly significant: 'A pleasant walking area with many paths' (Potters Bar Society). The Furzefield Local Nature reserve is valued by local residents.

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

Mimmshall is recognised within the county Biodiversity Action Plan as a High Biodiversity area (HBA) for its

Geological SSSI: Water End swallowholes.

CONDITION

Land cover change:

Age structure of tree cover:

Extent of semi-natural habitat survival: fragmented

Management of semi-natural habitat:

Survival of cultural pattern:

Impact of built development:

Impact of land-use change:

localised

mixed

poor

interrupted

moderate

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

Impact of landform:

Impact of land cover:

apparent prominent

Impact of historic pattern: relic

Visibility from outside:

locally visible

Sense of enclosure:

Visual unity:

0005

MODERATE

partial/mixed

Distinctiveness/rarity:

incoherent frequent (with SSSis)

CONDITION

Strengthen and reinforce

Conserve and strengthen Safeguard manage

Improve and reinforce

Improve and conserve

Conserve and restore

Reconstruct

Improve and restore

Restore condition to maintain

STRONG

WEAK MODERATE

> STRENGTH OF **CHARACTER**

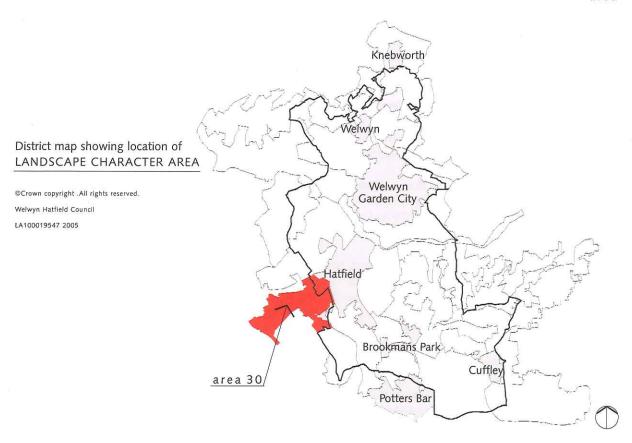
summary

STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING

CHANGE: IMPROVE AND CONSERVE

- · encourage the reversal of habitat fragmentation and the establishment and improvement of habitat links to create eco-corridors
- · promote the expansion of woodland, especially where this will enhance the distinctiveness of the area and help in creating habitat links
- · encourage the planting of new woodlands to screen features that detract from the historic landscape character of this area, such as urban edges and roads
- ensure that only indigenous species of local provenance are used for new woodlands and hedges
- · encourage the retention and replanting of hedges as field boundaries, rather than fences
- ensure that any change to horse rather than cattle/sheep grazing does not lead to a degradation of local landscape character via inappropriate fencing, structures and buildings
- · protect wetland habitats of significant nature conservation value
- · resist the targeting of redundant or derelict pasture for development
- · resist development that could lower the water table within valleys and affect wetland habitats
- · promote the creation of buffer strips along watercourses to prevent pesticide, herbicide and fertilizer run-off and to provide habitat for wildlife; encourage their linkage to eco-corridors within the wider landscape
- · encourage the maintenance and retention of all ponds
- · encourage the provision of small, informal car parks at access points along public footpaths
- promote woodland management to ensure age diversity and the retention of species-rich ground flora

pg



LOCATION

This area is located between London Colney and St Albans in the west and Hatfield in the east. The A414 and Colney Heath mark the southern boundary and Hatfield aerodrome the northern limit.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

A medium-scale landscape contained by adjacent urban areas and transport routes. There is a good network of hedges, field trees and tree belts to the urban areas that visually contain the largely arable character. Mineral extraction has created a number of disturbed and new landscapes that are still young. Areas of heath and seminatural grassland are locally important at Colney Heath and Smallford gravel pits.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- · medium-scale arable farmland
- · subtle gently undulating landforms
- · severance by transport corridors, past and present
- · areas of semi-natural restored mineral workings
- · heath habitat at Colney Heath
- · urban development contains area physically but visually largely concealed

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- · Smallford gravel pits
- · Alban Way



Colney Heath • (J. Billingsley)

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. To the east the geology comprises Aeolian silty drift and till. The soils are deep stoneless welldrained silty soils over gravel (Hamble 2 series). The gravels were laid down in glacial lakes during the Ice Age by the 'proto-Thames'. To the west around Tyttenhanger the soils overlie a chalky till geology with calcareous subsoils in places. Soils are deep, fine, loamy and clayey, with slow permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging (Hornbeam 3 series).

Topography. This is a subtle landform. To the west there are gentle undulations. To the east the landform is a continuation of the De Havilland Plain and the land is virtually flat. The past mineral workings have produced some minor local variations in landform.

Degree of slope. Typically less than 1 in 50 to the west, but locally up to 1 in 25. Virtually flat to the east, c.1 in 500. Altitude range. 75-86m to the west and 70 to 74 in the

Hydrology. The young and seasonal River Colne flows into the south of the area at Colney Heath, where it has been artificially channelled across the common since the early 20th century. There are also a number of seepage lines and spring lines in the heathy woodland. The agricultural land to the north is drained by a series of field ditches and then into Butterwick Brook and Ellenbrook, both of which flow into the Colne within Tyttenhanger Park. There are a number of waterbodies associated with the former mineral workings, e.g. at Smallford gravel pits, and elsewhere there are scattered small ponds.

Land cover and land use. The primary land use is arable farming with a pattern of treed farmland. There is a significant area of disturbed land, within which restoration has been variable in its extent and quality. Pasture is limited in extent and confined to the edge of settlements.

Vegetation and wildlife. Woodlands are discrete and comprise oak, ash and hornbeam. There are two ancient woods at Coppice Wood and Knight Wood that are a natural oak/hazel mix. Either side of the A414 is a dramatic avenue of hybrid poplars. On the north-west edge adjacent to St Albans there are a number of tree belts that conceal the extent of development behind, e.g. at the former Cell Barnes Hospital. Some mineral restoration sites have lakes and new plantation areas, often willows and poplars. Hedge species include hawthorn, elm and some holly. Field trees are mainly oaks.

· Colney Heath is an open area of common with both acidic woodland and acidic/neutral grassland communities. Species include hawthorn, gorse, bracken, foxgloves and oak, with alders lining the Coine.

- · At Smallford gravel pits an interesting and valuable mosaic of semi-improved grassland, scrub, ephemeral ponds and pockets of undisturbed species-rich acidic/neutral grassland has developed on old mineral working sites that were 'poorly' restored with rubble. These areas have been grazed by gypsy horses to create an interesting 'common'. The ponds contain great crested newts, (BAP species).
- At Sleapshyde, where the pits have not been filled there is good marsh vegetation. There are also areas of naturally occurring bog communities.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The open unenclosed heath of Colney Heath is the last remnant of the old manorial lands of Tyttenhanger, owned by the abbey until the dissolution of the monasteries. The heath lay just outside the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Police and was the haunt of highwaymen and the location of cockfights and prize fights. The inns around the heath were all connected by a series of footpaths.

Field pattern. The field pattern is mainly pre-18th century organic enclosure which has largely been retained in areas that have not been extracted. To the north of Colney Heath there is more evidence of parliamentary enclosure. In contrast to the adjacent character areas of the Vale of St Albans and the De Havilland Plain, fields are medium in size and irregular in shape. In areas that have not been subject to mineral extraction, hedgerows are medium to tall, particularly north of the A414, which creates a sense of enclosure from the adjacent urban areas and road corridors. The extracted area north east of Colney Heath is more open in character.

Transport pattern. The historic road pattern is of narrow winding lanes within the farmed landscape. This has been largely retained, although the area is divided by the linear A414 dual carriageway. The Smallford Trail follows the line of a disused railway and is also a valuable wildlife corridor. Settlements and built form. The traditional pattern is of dispersed settlement. There are a number of clusters, including the older settlements of Tyttenhanger, Wilkins Green, Sleapshyde and Colney Heath. These have been added to and, together with ribbon development and expansion from the adjacent urban areas, there is a sense of urban pressure. There are a number of traditional buildings, using weatherboard, render and brick alongside 20th-century materials.

area 30

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

Views both from outside and within the area are generally well screened by roadside vegetation along both the narrow lanes and the dual carriageways. The A414 and A1(M) provide a major source of noise and disruption.

Rarity and distinctiveness. The landscape type is frequent with the heathy habitats being the most distinct features.

VISUAL IMPACT

The extent of built development within and on the perimeter of the area is generally well concealed by vegetation. Exceptions are some of the large industrial units and glasshouses at Smallford and the A414. There is some localised fly-tipping which is visually detrimental.

ACCESSIBILITY

There is open public access to Colney Heath and a good network of footpaths and the Albans Way/Smallford Trail within the area. Public access to Smallford gravel pits is present but not well signed. There is angling at Smallford gravel pits.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

The heathland landscapes are valued for their distinctiveness amidst an otherwise unremarked-upon setting (D).

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

Watling Chase Community Forest. LNR: Colney Heath Common.

CONDITION

Land cover change:

Age structure of tree cover:

Extent of semi-natural habitat survival: fragmented Management of semi-natural habitat:

Survival of cultural pattern:

Impact of built development:

Impact of land-use change:

localised mature or young

good

interrupted moderate moderate

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

Impact of landform: apparent apparent

Impact of land cover:

Impact of historic pattern: interrupted Visibility from outside: locally visible

Sense of enclosure:

Visual unity:

contained incoherent

Distinctiveness/rarity: frequent

Strengthen Conserve Safeguard 0005 and and and reinforce strengthen manage CONDITION MODERATE Improve Improve Conserve and and reinforce conserve restore Restore Improve condition Reconstruct and to maintain restore character WEAK MODERATE STRONG

> STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

summary

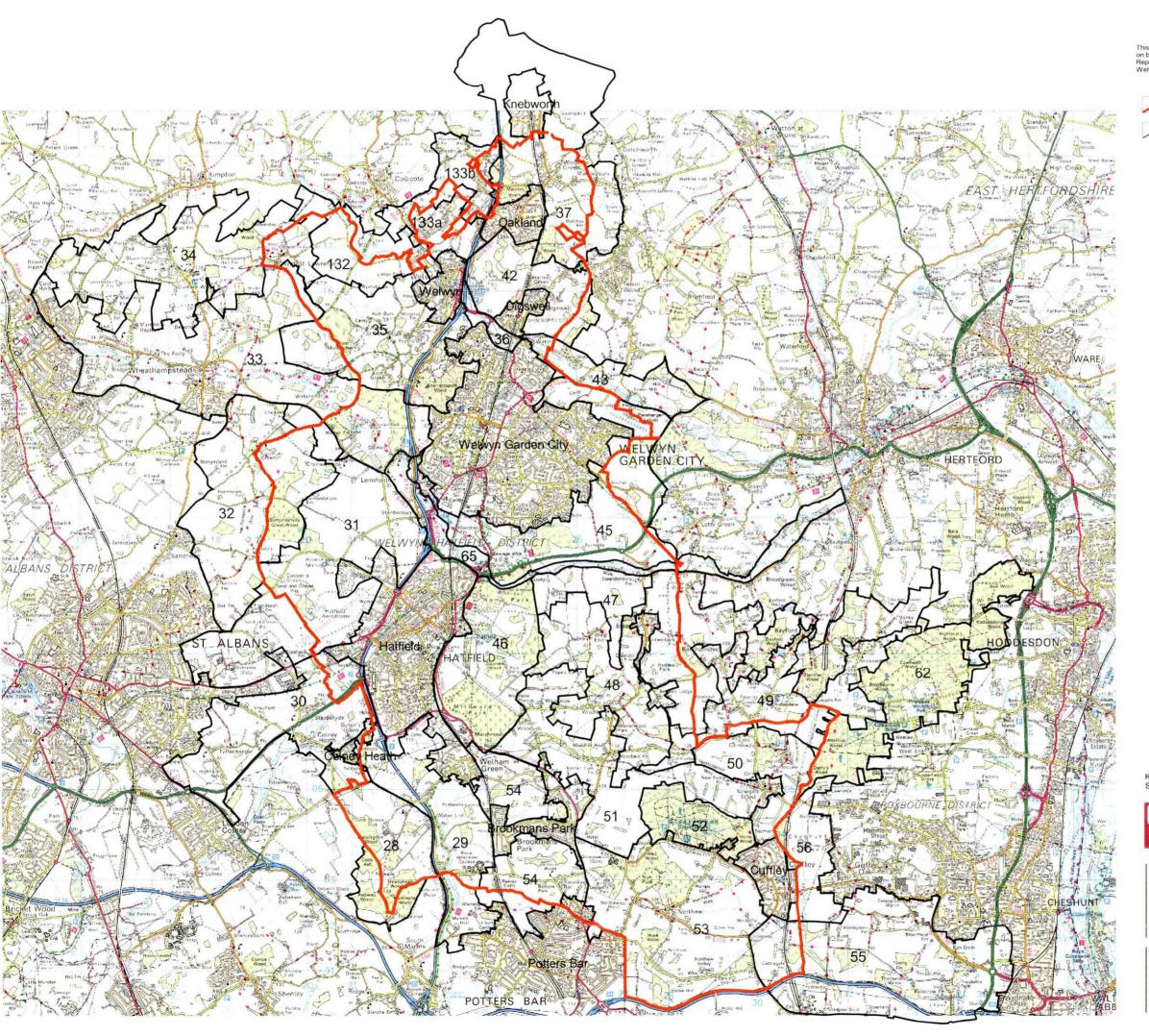
STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING **CHANGE: IMPROVE AND CONSERVE**

- · support the Watling Chase Community Forest in the realisation of its objectives for the area
- · promote the appropriate management of ancient woodland, including Knights Wood, in order to maintain a rich ground flora and the distinction between different management systems, such as high forest, coppice and coppice-with-standards
- · use ancient hedge and field boundaries to identify the most appropriate location for woodland restoration and expansion
- · promote new woodland planting to maintain and improve visual separation from the adjacent urban uses and transport corridors, including A414 and A1(M). Scale of planting to typically comprise small woods, copses and shelterbelts
- encourage effective landscape management along transport corridors to ensure thinning, selective felling and replanting is undertaken to achieve a varied age structure and locally indigenous species
- · reduce the visual impact of adjacent built areas, e.g. Smallford
- · improve public access and signing to areas of interest including the Alban Way (Smallford Trail) and Smallford gravel pits. Provide stopping places along the Alban Way for sitting and picnicking
- · encourage maintenance of the existing pattern and scale of hedgerows and field trees that provide enclosure
- · 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
- · encourage planting of new hedges adjacent to rights of
- · support the retention and management of heath habitats including Colney Heath. Encourage opportunities of extending this habitat

- · develop appropriate management strategies to maintain and improve the mosaic of wildlife habitats areas including wetland and semi-improved grassland, in association with former mineral extraction sites. Include the continued use of grazing and management by wildlife organisations
- promote the creation of valuable new nature conservation sites, the restoration of degraded sites associated with mineral extraction and addressing areas of fly-tipping
- · 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 crop diversification and the restoration of mixed livestock/arable farming where possible
- · encourage the restoration of ditches and discourage the enclosure of existing open drainage systems
- · provide new uncropped or grass field margins to link areas of wildlife importance and/or existing and proposed
- · promote both the creation of new ponds and the retention/enhancement of existing ponds for wildlife
- where ancient lanes and their associated hedgerows fall within or abut a proposed development ensure that developers retain, protect, enhance and integrate such features into the new development with due regard to their historic, ecological and landscape value
- where hedgerow removal is deemed to be unavoidable, replacement planting should use locally native species of local provenance to maintain local distinctiveness



From Tyttenhanger towards St Albans (J. Billingsley)



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District Boundary

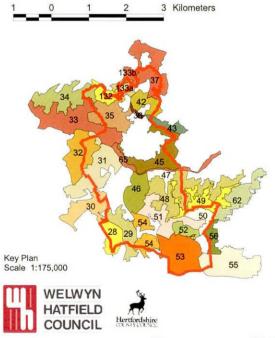


Character Area Boundaries

- North Mymms Park and Redwell Woods
- Mimmshall Valley
 Colney Haeth Farmland 29
- De Havilland Plain
- 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 42 43 45 46 47 48 Symondshyde Ridge
- Upper Lea Valley Blackmore End Plateau

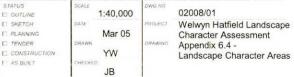
- Blackmore End Plateau
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 Upper Mimram Valley
 Datchworth Settled Slopes
 Tewin, Dawley and Lockley Estate Farmland
 Mimram Valley Parklands
 Welwyn Fringes
 Hatfield Park
 Essendon Brickendon Farmed Slopes
 West End Brickendon Wooded Slopes
 Little Berkhamsted Settled Plateau
 Ponsbourne and Tolmers Parkland Estates
 North Mymms Common and

- 51 North Mymms Common and
 - Newgate Street Farmed Plateau
- 52 Northaw Great Wood
- 53 54 55 Northaw Common Parkland
- Potters Bar Parkland
- Theobalds Estate 56 Cheshunt Common
- Broxbourne Woods Complex
- Middle Lea Valley West
- 132 Codicote Bottom Arable Valley
- 133a Danesbury Settled Slopes
- 133b Rableyheath Settled Upland













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COVER PHOTOS

BACK FACE

top

View of Lockleys Farm from Lockley Wood (P Shears)

middle

Sherrardspark Wood (HCC Landscape Unit)

bottom

Sawmill Pool (HCC Landscape Unit)

FRONT FACE

top

North Mymms parkland (J.Billingsley)

middle

Mimram Valley aerial view from Digswell Viaduct (HCC Landscape Unit)

bottom

Tewin Meadows bridge (HCC Landscape Unit)