

North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment



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Landscape Character Assessment**

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Plan - Landscape Character Areas

1.1 Background

In April 2002 North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) and Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) commissioned Babbie Group to undertake the landscape character assessment of the District and the rural parts of Stevenage in accordance with current national guidance. The assessment process also required consultation with stakeholder groups.

It is proposed that the assessment be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance. Once the landscape character areas have been determined the information will be used for:

- Advising on development control matters for both NHDC and SBC
- Policy development for future development plans
- Providing a framework for other landscape planning
- Countryside conservation and management activities, access and recreation projects and support to grant applications

1.2 NHDC Policy

The context for Landscape Character Assessment is set out in PPG7 which states that the character approach 'should help in accommodating necessary change without sacrificing local character. It can help ensure that development respects or enhances the distinctive character of the land and the built environment'.

North Herts District Local Plan no. 2 with Alterations recognises the importance of using distinctiveness in landscape character. Policy 12 – Landscape Conservation, Improvement and Creation requires development to fit into the landscape and to add to the character of North Hertfordshire's landscapes.

Stevenage Borough Local Plan policy EN23 – Landscape Conservation Areas refers to the Hertfordshire Landscape Strategy and the need to maintain and enhance landscape features.

1.3 Context

The Countryside Agency in conjunction with English Nature has published a document called *The Character of England – Landscape, Wildlife and Natural Features* (1996). The assessment divided England into 181 areas of landscape of broadly consistent character linked to natural areas of distinctive wildlife value (see Figure 1).

The physical influences assessed included geological, topographical and soil base factors. The effects of human activity, namely the cultural and historical influences, which affect the appearance of the landscape, were also considered. In particular data was obtained from English Nature and English Heritage and contributing significantly to the assessment process. Further relevant background information can be obtained from the document published by Hertfordshire County Council – *A Landscape Strategy for Hertfordshire, Volume 1*.

North Hertfordshire District comprises two nationally recognised Character Areas.

- 87 East Anglian Chalk – the eastern part of the District
- 110 Chilterns – the area west of Stevenage

In addition small fragments of the following Character Areas are also represented:

- 86 South Suffolk and North Essex Claylands – occurring in the vicinity of the southern District boundary to the east of Stevenage.
- 88 Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands – a small salient in the north
- 111 North Thames Basin – in the Knebworth area



Figure 1
The Character of England

The transition between the two main areas occurs along a line running broadly between Letchworth and Stevenage following the valley through the Chilterns escarpment commonly referred to as the Stevenage Gap.

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) has recognised that the level of detail provided by the nationally based assessment was inappropriate for the evolution of County and District level policy and guidance. In recent years a more detailed landscape character assessment has been undertaken in southern Hertfordshire. The work undertaken by Babbie Group for NHDC and SBC now extends the coverage to the north of the county.