

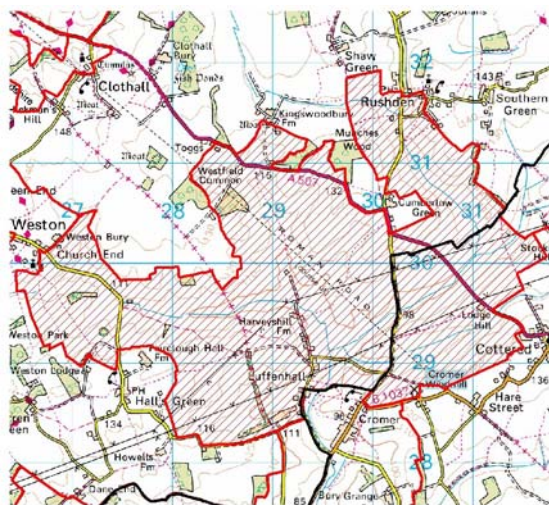
LOCATION



© Crown Copyright. All rights reserved North Hertfordshire District Council LA078794, 2004

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

The Character Area comprises the upper headwaters of the River Beane which continues to the south of the District within a previously identified Character Area – The Middle Beane Valley (Character Area 39). The Upper Beane Valley Tributaries are mainly the three upper arms of the valley that rise at Rushton village, Kingswoodbury and Church End to the east of Weston. All three tributaries join the main valley at Luffenhall. There is also a smaller local catchment to the west of Walkern (within Character Area 39) which extends to the east of Stevenage. Part of this Character Area lies outside the District.



© Crown Copyright. All rights reserved North Hertfordshire District Council LA078794, 2004

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Incised chalk landscape with water courses. Predominantly arable land use, organic enclosure pattern associated with an irregular network of winding lanes to the north and west of Luffenhall. The Beane valley to the north and west has regular rectilinear field boundaries often curving, set within an earlier organic pattern of boundaries.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Bowl like landform comprising steeply sloping chalk valley sides incised by a network of water courses
- Arable land use
- Irregular pattern, of medium to large sized fields
- Scattered hedgerows and waterside trees
- Small blocks of relict ancient woodland on the upper slopes
- Narrow winding lanes
- Sparse settlement

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Extensive areas of former common land
- Pylon lines cut across the valley

ASSESSMENT
PHYSICAL INFLUENCES
Geology & soils

Chalk overlain by Boulder Clay and generally free draining loamy brown soils.

Topography

Chalk valley incised into plateau landscape.

Degree of slope

Typically between 1:10 – 1:20.

Altitude range

125m at head of valley. Valley continues to fall well past district boundary.

Hydrology

Numerous incised streams and tributaries. Main catchment is the valley of the River Beane. Ponds are rare.

Land cover and land use

Predominantly arable.

Vegetation and wildlife

Very little ecological information is available. Lolleywood Green Lane contains neutral grassland and an ancient species-rich hedgerow, part of a network of ancient hedge lined lanes.

Limited woodland includes Southern Green Copse and Chalk Pit comprising ancient semi-natural woodland coppice with a disused chalk pit.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

No recorded archaeology. Cropmarks of ditches and enclosures of unknown date and function are known from aerial photographs and lie towards the west. At Luffenhall, to the east, finds of Romano-British cremations indicate that a cemetery may be present.

While the present day settlement pattern has medieval origins there is evidence that the landscape has been exploited since the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age. This includes cropmarks, visible on aerial photographs, of field systems and enclosures of varying date and function, and of possible plough-raised burial mounds of Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date. There are also records of a Late Bronze Age hoard from Cumberlow Green (the name means 'burial mound of the Welsh'), of a Romano-British settlement and cremation cemetery south of Kingswoodbury, and Roman finds from all of these parishes. By the late Iron Age and Roman periods the area was crossed by the Roman road that linked

Baldock and Braughing.

Field Pattern

The historic agricultural landscape pattern consists of a mixture of pre-18th century irregular enclosure, prairie fields with 1950s boundary loss and pre 18th century unenclosed common arable. Post 1950s enclosure lies to the south and 20th century leisure to the east. There are pockets of 19th – 20th century plantation.

The field systems of the area originally mainly comprised unenclosed common arable fields, such as Luffenhall Common and Kipple Field, and smaller 'irregular' enclosure fields, both systems being established before the 18th century. An extensive block of these irregular fields has survived west of Cumberlow Green, together with an area of informal parkland once associated with Cumberlow Manor. 'Irregularly' enclosed fields also survive north of Luffenhall Common. The remainder, primarily areas north of Cromer, around Hall's Green and south of Rushden, is now 20th century 'prairie' fields. There is little pasture or woodland in the area and it is evident that woodland cover was already slight by the later 19th century, due to the long term use of the area for arable cultivation.

Transport Pattern

The Character Area is bounded by narrow winding lanes to the north and west but is not crossed by any roads.

Settlements and Built Form

There are no significant present day settlement nuclei within the area, since the larger villages, Cottered and Weston (including Church End), lie outside its boundary towards the heads of the open valleys that form the area, and the village of Rushden, partly within it, is little more than a hamlet. All of these settlements predate the Norman Conquest, and Anglo-Saxon occupation in the area is also evidenced by several distinctive place-names.

While the current network of dispersed farmsteads and houses reflects a settlement pattern established in the medieval period, there is also evidence of settlement shift and decline. Rydals Wood contains an abandoned moated site, Cumberlow Green is the site of a manorial settlement and manor house, and there is evidence of medieval occupation spanning the 12th – 15th centuries south of Church End, Weston.

EVALUATION

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

Expansive open areas of arable farmland.

Rarity & distinctiveness

Landscape type not uncommon.

VISUAL IMPACT

Area generally has little development. Edge of Stevenage well screened by woodland. Luffenhall on the Character Area boundary – locally prominent development.

Cromer Windmill just outside the Character Area to the southwest is a prominent landmark.

ACCESSIBILITY

Well served by local network of winding lanes, tracks and rights of way.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) have undertaken Tier B (Community of Place) consultations. Views of the local community have been sought and contributor's responses to each of the Character Areas will be analysed and a summary of the responses provided by HCC.

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

LC2 Landscape Conservation Area

EVALUATION

CONDITION

Land cover change:	Localised
Age structure of tree cover:	Mixed
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	Scattered
Management of semi-natural habitat:	Poor
Survival of cultural pattern:	Interrupted
Impact of built development:	Low
Impact of land-use change:	Low

Matrix Score:	Good
----------------------	-------------

ROBUSTNESS

Impact of landform:	Prominent
Impact of land cover:	Prominent
Impact of historic pattern:	Insignificant
Visibility from outside:	Locally visible
Sense of enclosure:	Open
Visual unity:	Coherent
Distinctiveness/rarity:	Frequent

Matrix Score:	Weak
----------------------	-------------

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
ROBUSTNESS				

GUIDELINES

STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE:

Strengthen and Reinforce

- Promote management of ancient woodlands to encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Encourage the development of neutral, species-rich grasslands
- Promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and areas of semi-natural habitat and the creation of links between habitat areas
- Promote hedgerow restoration along the lines of historic field boundaries and for the creation of visual links between existing woodland areas
- Promote the use of traditional field hedges in place of post and wire enclosures to new grazing areas
- Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow winding lanes and associated hedge banks, sunken lanes, verges and hedges
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network