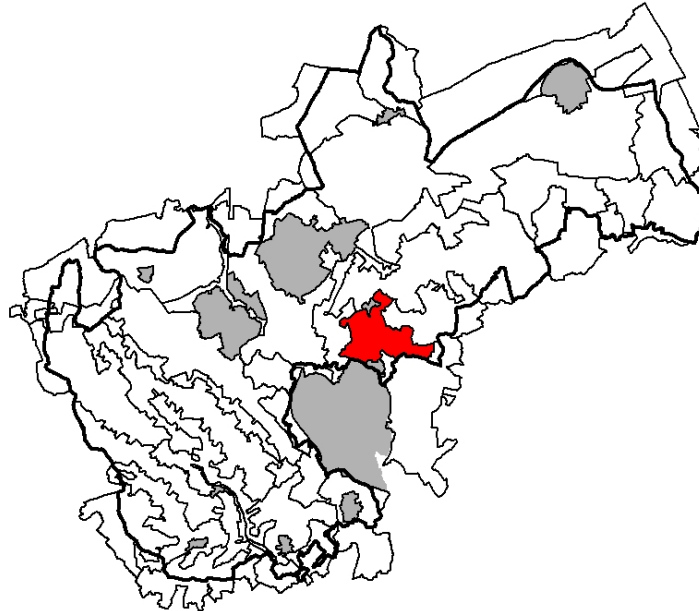


LOCATION



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

Weston Park lies directly to the south of Weston village. The Character Area however extends from the Baldock Gap scarp to the west, the suburban edge of Stevenage to the south and the valley of the Weston Tributary in the east (which flows into the River Beane) The Character Area also takes in a section of parkland at Chesfield Park to the southwest.



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Gently sloping chalk plateau overlain by clay soils. Predominantly arable land use but with pockets of grazing adjacent to Weston Park to southeast of village. Character Area is well wooded – predominantly ancient deciduous woodlands. Density of woodland cover creates a sense of enclosure and enhances the character of the landscape. There is a network of winding lanes, generally open and affording views over the plateau.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Plateau landform
- Arable land use
- Extensive mature woodland cover
- Interlocking pattern of fields, lanes and curvilinear boundaries
- Scattered farmsteads

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Weston Park
- Pylon on southern boundary
- Abuts northern edge of Stevenage

ASSESSMENT**PHYSICAL INFLUENCES****Geology & soils**

Glacial drift (Boulder Clay and some Clay-with-Flints) overlying Chalk. Clay soils (pelosols) and locally moderately free draining brown earths.

Topography

Plateau landscape, gently falling in a southeasterly direction.

Degree of slope

Gentle cross fall of approximately 1:100.

Altitude range

135m to 145m.

Hydrology

No noted water courses. However, there is a wide distribution of lakes and ponds across the Weston parkland area, spring fed old fish ponds at Fairclough Hall and several other ponds.

Land cover and land use

Predominantly arable use with pockets of grazing adjacent to settlements and woodland.

Vegetation and wildlife

A number of important wildlife sites support neutral grassland habitats and ancient semi-natural woodlands. Weston Meadows is a potential SSSI comprising unimproved neutral grassland on boulder clay. It is described as one of the best extant examples of species-rich ancient wild flower meadows in the county, with a long continuity of grazing and over 140 recorded plant species.

How Wood and Sloggars Wood near Luffenhall are examples of numerous ancient oak/hornbeam woodlands occurring in the county. Ancient ash/maple woodlands occur less frequently, but include Harbourclose Wood.

Old grassland at Weston includes dropwort, and ivy broomrape occurs at Weston Churchyard, one of only a few sites in the county.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Chesfield Church, a Scheduled Monument, lies in the southwest. Ruins of the 14th century church of St Ethelreda lie to the north of Chesfield Church and this is all that remains of a deserted medieval village. A medieval moated site lies at Fairclough Hall, to the east of the area. Earthworks to the south west of the Hall represent a medieval farmstead and associated ponds.

Weston to the north, is a medieval settlement recorded in Domesday book as Westone. A medieval moated site lies at Darnalls Hall. To the south of Weston there is 12th century evidence of a medieval manorial site and Romano- British burials.

Field Pattern

The historic agricultural landscape pattern consists of a mixture of post 1950s enclosure, prairie fields with post 1950s boundary loss, 18th century and later enclosure, informal medieval parkland, ancient woodland, 19th – 20th century plantation and pre-18th century 'irregular' enclosure. A 20th century stud farm lies to the west.

Transport Pattern

The Character Area is crossed by a network of winding lanes.

Settlements and Built Form

The historic settlement pattern is characterised by sparse settlement consisting of estates and scattered farmsteads. There are a number of fine traditional buildings in and around Weston. Examples here date from the 18th century and include the brick built, six bay, Town Farmhouse and a 19th century brick tower windmill. Chesfield Manor House, now a farmhouse, lies east of St Etheldreda and has a 17th century wing with steeply hipped roof.

EVALUATION

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

A mixture of smaller more intimate enclosures defined by woodland cover with open areas affording views over the plateau.

Rarity & distinctiveness

This landscape type is not frequent within North Hertfordshire. Mature setting of Weston Park and Chesfield Park provides local distinctiveness.

VISUAL IMPACT

Suburban edge of Stevenage locally prominent.

ACCESSIBILITY

Character Area crossed by network of winding lanes and footpaths.

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
SAM HT12	Chesfield Church: Graveley

EVALUATION

CONDITION

Land cover change:	Localised
Age structure of tree cover:	Mature
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	Widespread
Management of semi-natural habitat:	Good
Survival of cultural pattern:	Interrupted
Impact of built development:	Low
Impact of land-use change:	Moderate
Matrix Score:	Moderate

ROBUSTNESS

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

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:****Improve and Conserve**

- Promote management of ancient woodland to encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Encourage diverse woodland management practice
- 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
- Encourage the planting of small copses around the northern fringe of Stevenage
- Encourage the development and implementation of landscape management proposals for the parkland at Weston and Chesfield
- Encourage the development and management of species-rich wild flower meadows