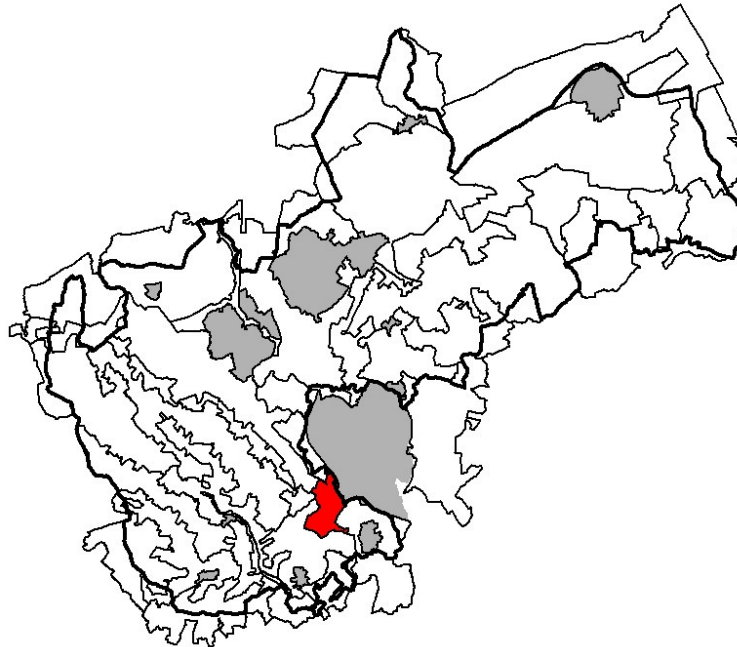


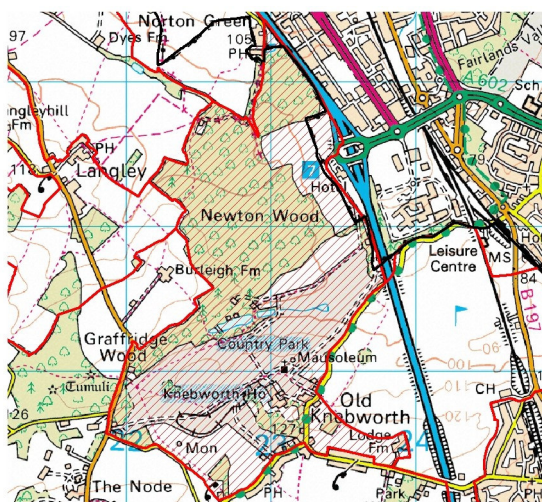
## LOCATION



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## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

The Character Area of Knebworth Parklands constitutes the woodlands, parkland and gardens of Knebworth House located southwest of Stevenage to the west side of the A1(M) adjacent to Junction 7.



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## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Mature woodland in the north consisting of ancient oak and some hornbeam coppice. The Character Area has developed from acid heathlands and includes pockets of some of the best wood pasture in the county and heath grasslands. To the south lies the main area of parkland which includes numerous mature individual trees. The woods and parkland also incorporate a number of springs, streams, ponds and bogland areas.

## KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Acid heath grasslands
- Mature oak woodland
- Parkland setting with mature trees
- Areas of wet and boggy ground

## DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Knebworth House
- Parkland and gardens

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

Poorly draining acidic soils over Boulder Clay.

**Topography**

Sloping valley side landform, cut by a local tributary. Transition from plateau landscape to Langley valley landscape.

**Degree of slope**

Shallow falls on plateau and valley bottom typically 1:200. Valley sides at 1:20.

**Altitude range**

90m to 130m.

**Hydrology**

Spring rises in Gaffridge Wood cutting down the valley side and crossing parkland, to disappear into Swallow Hole adjacent to Old Knebworth Lane. Springs also in Newton Wood in the north. Numerous ponds and marshy pockets of ground distributed over the Character Area.

**Land cover and land use**

Predominantly mixture of woodland and grazing in parkland setting. Smaller pockets of arable land.

**Vegetation and wildlife**

This Character Area supports a range of important and nationally declining habitats, notably those characteristics of acidic and heathy conditions. Watery Grove is a SSSI woodland located on just such poorly-draining acidic soils. It is predominantly composed of ancient oak and hornbeam coppice, with areas of mixed woodland and heathy rides. Knebworth Woods is another ancient woodland SSSI, which is dominated by oak and hornbeam coppice with frequent birch and aspen, along with wetter areas and wide rides supporting heathland communities. The Knebworth Woods complex is highlighted as being an area of high biodiversity within the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan. It is important for its areas of wood pasture habitat, which are associated with hornbeam pollards exceeding 250 years old.

Knebworth Park has some valuable species-rich heath grassland communities, as well as important stands of old parkland trees, boggy areas, streams and a lake. Areas of heathland are now a very scarce resource within Hertfordshire, and the small fragments that remain are considered to be of high ecological value.

Knebworth Park and lake are very important for bats (pipistrelle, serotine, noctule, Daubenton's)

The only site in Hertfordshire of the nationally scarce great broomrape is found near Knebworth Woods.

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

Knebworth is a medieval settlement and contains the 12th century parish church of St. Mary, earthworks and a medieval water mill.

**Field Pattern**

This Character Area is dominated by ancient woodland and informal 17th century parkland (Knebworth Country Park designated a Historic Park and Garden) with pockets of pre-18th century irregular enclosure, 19th-20th century plantation and commons with an open margin.

**Transport Pattern**

Area is not crossed by any roads, however the A1(M) forms the eastern boundary.

**Settlements and Built Form**

The historic settlement pattern is characterised by traditional buildings at Knebworth House, which retains one range of a two-storeyed courtyard house dating to c.1500 with later modifications and buildings dating to c.1815-20 and c.1840-45.

**EVALUATION****VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

Woodland, parkland and gardens contained visually by mature tree setting. Views into the parkland where gaps in peripheral vegetation allow.

**Rarity & distinctiveness**

Woodland to the north locally distinctive feature but visually not uncommon. Parkland and gardens locally important.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

Area generally visually contained however some commercial development has local impact.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

Road network contains the Character Area on eastern, southern and western boundaries. Parkland and grounds to the house crossed by local footpath network.

**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**

LC1	Landscape Conservation Area
GD 1169	Knebworth
SSSI	Knebworth Woods

**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

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**Matrix Score:** **Moderate**

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**ROBUSTNESS**

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

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**Matrix Score:** **Strong**

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<b>CONDITION</b>	<b>GOOD</b>	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	<b>MODERATE</b>	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	<b>POOR</b>	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		<b>WEAK</b>	<b>MODERATE</b>	<b>STRONG</b>
<b>ROBUSTNESS</b>				

## EVALUATION

### INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

#### Landscape Character Sensitivities

- The character area constitutes the woodlands, parkland and historic gardens of Knebworth. The character area would be vulnerable to urbanizing features or lack of management
- Mature ancient deciduous woodland blocks some of which are ancient Oak and others coppiced hornbeam. Including Watery Grove and Knebworth woods, both of which are SSSI. The woodland is vulnerable to lack of management or to removal
- The south of Knebworth is of parkland landscape character. Features include mature specimen trees, avenues of trees, deer fencing and ornamental shrub planting in the woodland. This character could be at risk from development pressure and inconsistent management
- Knebworth is also characterised by a significant number of pollarded hornbeam. The character area would be vulnerable to the loss or removal these features
- The landscape is a transition from plateau to the Langley Valley landscape, which results in the parkland having a number of springs, streams, ponds and bogland areas. The character area would be vulnerable to loss or lack of management of these natural features
- Features associated with horsiculture, e.g. post and rail fences and the removal of boundary vegetation, are detrimental to the landscape character of Knebworth. The area is vulnerable to further horsiculture activity and the associated removal of boundary vegetation
- Old Knebworth is the only settlement within the character area other than Knebworth House itself. It is a small linear settlement of generally large detached properties of rural character. Significant features of the properties include black weatherboarding, red brick and large chimneys set in large plots. The character area would be vulnerable to pressure for further development, particularly where it is out of character
- Knebworth House and a number of

associated historic Lodges and Gatehouses include elaborate architectural features. The character area would be vulnerable to loss or lack of management of these buildings or from development that would impact on their setting

- Knebworth is a tranquil area, with the only one public road cutting through the character area. Old Knebworth Lane is a rural road enclosed by a shelterbelt, which screens Knebworth Park. The area would be vulnerable to improvements/upgrading of the road
- Within the character area exists pockets of acid heath grassland habitats, which are vulnerable to loss
- Within Knebworth there are distinctive areas of wet and boggy ground, which would be vulnerable to impacts on drainage patterns
- There is public access through Knebworth Park through numerous rights of way
- The character area provides recreational facilities including a cricket ground and play opportunities. The character area would be vulnerable to inappropriate management or development of these facilities

Overall Knebworth is considered to be of **moderate to high sensitivity**. The parkland landscape, grand buildings, ancient woodlands and water features create a historic character with limited urban influence.

### **Visual Sensitivities**

- Vistas created by avenues of trees
- Open views within the private parkland, which is accessible by public rights of way or paid entrance
- Views from outside the parkland are which are generally enclosed by woodland blocks and shelter belts

In visual terms, Knebworth is considered to be of **moderate to high sensitivity**. Views within the parkland are open or designed through vistas. Whereas outside the parkland views are limited as the area is enclosed by woodland blocks. The area would be sensitive to the introduction of urbanizing features.

### **LANDSCAPE VALUE**

Overall Knebworth is considered to be of **moderate high landscape value**. Aspects of particular value within Knebworth are the intactness of the parkland landscape, the general lack of incongruous elements, the presence of large areas of ancient woodland, and the historic character, all of which create a recognisable sense of place.

**EVALUATION****CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT****Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)**

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to its historic and undeveloped character. The area includes a registered park and garden and SSSI woodlands. Development would be of an inappropriate scale and would introduce elements that would urbanise the landscape, altering the character and removing the existing key characteristics. Visual impacts would also be high. Increased housing development would be likely to affect the existing rural roads, which could erode the character of the landscape.

The landscape capacity for large urban extensions or new settlements is considered to be low.

**Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)**

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural and undeveloped character. Visual impacts would be high.

The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered to be low.

**Major transport developments/improvements**

This type of development would only be appropriate for improvements of the existing A1, which abuts the Character Area. However it would be imperative that any work respected designated features and was mitigated through earthworks and the planting of shelterbelts. Upgrading of existing rural roads could erode the character of the landscape. Additional traffic would also affect the peace and tranquillity of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for major transport developments/improvements is considered to be low to moderate.

**Commercial/warehouse estates**

This type of large scale development would not be appropriate in this character area. There are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. Existing minor roads would be inappropriate for any significant larger volumes of traffic and/or HGVs. Any upgrading of the existing network would cause damage to the landscape character.

The landscape capacity for commercial/warehouse estates is considered to be low.

**Individual large/bulky buildings**

There is limited capacity for individual large/bulky buildings within the character area. Such buildings could be highly visible within Knebworth and would erode the rural and historic character of the area.

The landscape capacity for individual large/bulky buildings is considered to be low.

**Large scale open storage**

Despite the presence of the A1, the rural and historic character of Knebworth would make it difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses without significant impact. This would not be in keeping with the rural or historic character of the area and likely to be very open to view and introduce new elements that would conflict with the existing characteristics.

The landscape capacity for large scale 'open' uses is considered to be low.

**Mineral extraction/waste disposal**

This Character Area is currently relatively undisturbed. Mineral extraction would not be in keeping with the character of the area and would cause permanent loss of historic parkland and woodlands.

The landscape capacity for mineral extraction is considered to be low. Waste disposal would be a problem in all character areas due to the presence of aquifers.

**EVALUATION**

**Incremental small scale development**

There may be some very limited capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were within Old Knebworth and of vernacular and rural character. However, due to the existing landscape character any proposals would need clear justification to avoid the erosion of the rural and historic character of Knebworth.

The landscape capacity for incremental small scale developments is considered to be low to moderate.

**Utilities developments e.g. masts, pylons, wind turbines**

Excluding the proximity of the A1, there are currently few detractors in the areas. New utilities developments or structures such as masts or wind turbines would have a major impact on the rural and historic character of Knebworth. Large scale structures would be highly visible within the Character Area, as well as potentially visible in surrounding Character Areas.

The landscape capacity for utilities developments is considered to be low.



**GUIDELINES**

Nb. These guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire

**STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE**
**Strategy: Conserve and Restore**
**Landscape management guidelines**

- Promote management of ancient woodland, particularly using techniques such as coppicing to encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Conserve and enhance ancient woods as distinct historic landscape features within their original shapes and boundaries
- Promote other woodland planting and where historically appropriate, link up small remnants of ancient woodland
- Restore known lost woods or portions of woods, or create and manage new small to medium sized woods, particularly on the plateau/plateau edges
- Manage Willow plantations to enhance woodland character and encourage appropriate tree planting and wet woodland, avoiding areas of valley floor unimproved pasture
- 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 or horsiculture areas
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network
- Encourage the management and development of acid heathland
- Encourage the management of Oak and Hornbeam coppice
- Encourage the management of traditional wood pasture
- Where appropriate promote the creation of new ponds, area of marshland and other water bodies

**Built development guidelines**

- Retain the rural and historic character of Knebworth, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the Character Area using vernacular materials
- Avoid the location of new development in visual intrusive locations where they would be visible on the skyline
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or the loss of acid heath grassland habitats and ancient hedgerows
- Protect and preserve the pattern of the rural lanes and associated hedge banks, verges and hedges
- Encourage the planting of appropriate broadleaved woodland and vegetation to mitigate new development
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area
- Ensure applications for replacement dwellings, communication infrastructure, utility infrastructure have minimal impact on the landscape character and visual quality of the area
- Ensure redundant agriculture buildings subject to applications for change of use are monitored to ensure that they reflect the local building style, resist suburbanisation and do not contribute to incremental new development in the open countryside