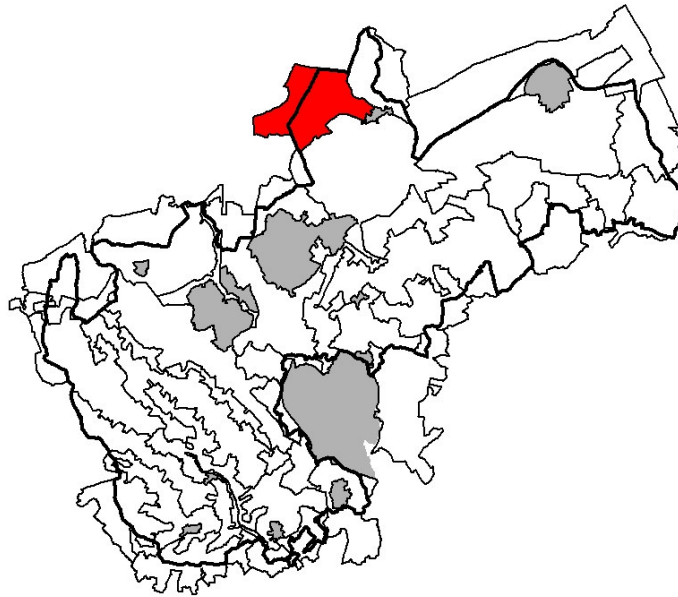


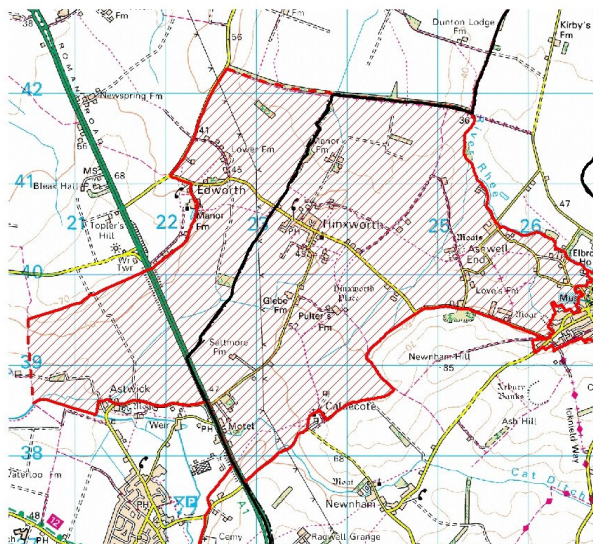
LOCATION



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

A broad band extending from the River Ivel in the south to the valley of the River Cam in the north straddling the District/County boundary north of Hinxworth.



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Very gently rolling landform with predominantly large scale arable fields but with smaller paddocks and grazing land adjacent to settlements or watercourses. Small shelter belts and tree groups frequent. Settlements of Ashwell and Hinxworth on higher ground. In the south the field pattern is characteristically made up of rectilinear fields often with curving boundaries based on an earlier organic pattern of lanes and primary boundaries. To the north of the District/County boundary, the field pattern changes to an ordered layout of rectilinear fields and lanes with straight boundaries.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Low lying, gently undulating landform
- Large arable fields with smaller parcels of grazing land adjacent to settlements
- Shelter belts
- Network of ditches and streams
- Winding lanes in the south, straight roads in the north

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- A1M runs along western boundary
- Pylons cross the area (West of Hinxworth)

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

The clays underlie the chalk and appear in the north. Soils vary between sandy brown soils in the south to poorly draining gley soils in the north.

Topography

Gently undulating landform but with a gradual fall from south to north.

Degree of slope

Shallow falls typically 1:60.

Altitude range

50m in the south to 35m in the north.

Hydrology

Drained by a network of streams and ditches rising in the south and generally flowing in a northerly direction. River Rhee skirts the eastern boundary. The River Ivel abuts the south and furthermore the Character Area extends to the catchment of River Cam in the northeast. Local ponds and moats also common.

Land cover and land use

Predominantly arable land use but with small pockets of grazing land. Shelter belts frequent.

Vegetation and wildlife

Typified by large arable fields with little or no ecological interest. An old ridge-and-furrow grassland in the vicinity of Hinxworth is a rare example of species-rich unimproved neutral grassland, and is symptomatic of the scarcity of such habitats within North Hertfordshire as a whole. Loves Farm Moat is another site with unimproved neutral grassland, in association with a moat. It is believed to be one of the only unimproved grasslands occurring on a chalk marl substrate in the county. Elsewhere traces of species rich calcareous grassland may be found along field banks, eg Ridge Way track and Green Lane.

Ashwell Springs SSSI tributaries form the source of the River Rhee a major source of the River Cam. It is scheduled primarily for its cold-water community of invertebrates. The moats at Ashwell End and Hinxworth are locally valuable for aquatic wildlife. White willows are a conspicuous feature along water courses, corn buntings can be numerous. The open fields are used by wintering golden plover and lapwing, also brown hare.

Important area for declining farmland birds. Grazing associated with Bluegate Dairy is an important feature.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The medieval settlement of Hinxworth lies in the north. The parish church of St Nicholas, Hinxworth, dates from the 14th century. Evidence of Roman occupation lies to the northwest of the village. A medieval moated site, enclosures and linear feature of unknown date and function lie to the southeast of Hinxworth. Roman tile and other occupation debris have been found in the vicinity of one of the enclosures. Hinxworth Roman Fortlet with Romano British settlement and foundations of buildings lies to the east of Hinxworth.

Three Medieval moated sites and cropmarks of three prehistoric ring ditches lie to the northwest of Ashwell. Burials dating from the Bronze Age to the Roman period have been located to the south of the area.

Ashwell Bury historic park and gardens.

Field Pattern

The historic agricultural landscape pattern comprises a mixture of prairie fields with relict elements within, prairie fields with post 1950s boundary loss, 18th century and later enclosure and post 1950s enclosure. Pre-18th century irregular enclosure and informal medieval parkland lie to the east, north of Ashwell.

Transport Pattern

The A1(M) runs along the western boundary with a pattern of winding lanes to the south and straight roads in the north.

Settlement and Built Form

The historic settlement pattern is characterised by nucleated settlement and farmsteads. There are a number of fine traditional buildings in and around Hinxworth. Examples here date from the 16th century. Hinxworth Place is one of the best-preserved 15th-16th century stone manor houses of Hertfordshire. Other examples include two 16th century farmhouses, Ashwell End and Bluegates Farm.

EVALUATION**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

Vast scale open landscape with linear shelterbelts and dispersed farmsteads. Long distance views, long straight roads.

Rarity & distinctiveness

This landscape type is comparatively uncommon within the District but more typical of south Bedfordshire and south Cambridgeshire.

VISUAL IMPACT

Ashwell Church and Hinxworth Church tower are local landmarks. Water tower at Topler's Hill. A1 crosses the Character Area.

ACCESSIBILITY

Road network better developed in the south, less so in the north. Extensive rights of way coverage but not to the north of Hinxworth.

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 |
| GD 1901 | Ashwell Bury |
| SAM HT11558/1 | Moated enclosures east and west of Love Lane: Ashwell |
| SAM HT11558/2 | Moated enclosures east and west of Love Lane: Ashwell |
| SAM 27902 | Hinxworth Roman Fortlet: Hinxworth |

EVALUATION

CONDITION

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Land cover change: | Widespread |
| Age structure of tree cover: | Mixed |
| Extent of semi-natural habitat survival: | Relic |
| Management of semi-natural habitat: | Poor |
| Survival of cultural pattern: | Interrupted |
| Impact of built development: | Moderate |
| Impact of land-use change: | High |
| Matrix Score: | Poor |

ROBUSTNESS

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| Impact of landform: | Apparent |
| Impact of land cover: | Prominent |
| Impact of historic pattern: | Apparent |
| Visibility from outside: | Locally visible |
| Sense of enclosure: | Open |
| Visual unity: | Coherent |
| Distinctiveness/rarity: | Unusual |
| 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 | | | | |

EVALUATION

INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

Landscape Character Sensitivities

- A gently undulating, low lying rural character area, with the main development being the village of Hinxworth
- The village of Hinxworth, which lies on the higher ground. The village would be vulnerable to inappropriate or unsympathetic development and any proposals that are not in scale with the existing settlement
- The A1 cuts through the west of the character area but is screened relatively well by the associated shelterbelts.
- Electricity pylons stride through the centre of the character area on a north – south axis and are an existing detractor to the character of the area.
- The character area consists mainly of large-scale arable fields but with small paddocks and grazing land with fragmented vegetation adjacent to settlements and watercourses. The area would be vulnerable to the removal of hedgerows and boundary vegetation.
- Enclosed farms and isolated settlements would be vulnerable to development.
- Rural roads enclosed by hedgerows, which feed into the A1 would be vulnerable to improvements/upgrading.
- Tributaries of the River Rhee cross the character area and have associated fragmented tree groups. Removal of these would be detrimental to the character of the area.
- Small copses of woodland, provide vertical elements in the gently undulating landscape, as do rows of Poplars. Both elements are sensitive to removal
- Relatively good public access through several rights of way including links between Hinxworth and Ashwell
- Ashwell Bury historic parkland is a registered garden that falls partly within this Character Area, which could be at risk from development pressure and unsympathetic management

Overall Hinxworth Lowlands are considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. The gently undulating arable farmland, with smaller scale field patterns around settlements, is influenced by a small number of detractors.

Visual Sensitivities

- Long distance views are possible throughout the character area
- The small woodland copses, shelterbelts and hedgerows break up the views across the landscape and create a sense of enclosure in and around the settlements
- Ashwell Church and Hinxworth Church form local landmarks

In visual terms, Hinxworth Lowlands is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. Views within the character area and towards the undeveloped horizon are relatively open and would be sensitive to the introduction of urbanizing features.

LANDSCAPE VALUE

Overall Hinxworth Lowlands is considered to be of **moderate low landscape value**. Aspects of particular value within Hinxworth Lowlands are the relative sense of remoteness and perceived distance from major settlement, the uninterrupted tracts of land with few built features and the relative tranquillity.

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 rural and undeveloped character. It would be of an inappropriate scale and would introduce elements that would urbanise the landscape, altering the character and removing the existing key characteristics. Increased housing development would be likely to affect the existing rural roads, which could erode the character of the landscape.

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

Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)

This type of development would not be suitable for the Character Area, due to its rural character.

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 within this Character Area. However it would be imperative that the existing shelterbelts were maintained or replaced. 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 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 may be some limited capacity for sympathetically located and designed individual large buildings, particularly if they were of an agricultural character and in keeping with the rural character. However, large buildings should be balanced by shelterbelts and hedgerows to reflect the existing character of the area.

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

Large scale open uses

Despite the presence of the A1, the rural character of Hinxworth Lowlands would make it difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses without significant impact. This would not be in keeping with the rural character of the area and likely to be very open to view and introduce new elements that would conflict with the existing characteristics. The minor roads are unlikely to have capacity to accommodate development or would need considerable upgrading to be able to accept larger volumes of traffic and/or HGVs, which would further dilute the landscape character.

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

EVALUATION**Mineral extraction/waste disposal**

Whilst some small scale mineral extraction could be accommodated with careful design and mitigation measures, larger scale extraction would not be in keeping with the character of Hinxworth Lowlands. The minor roads would need considerable upgrading to be able to accept larger HGVs, which could further dilute the landscape character. Restoration proposals for any consented schemes should be mainly at grade and include for additional planting in character with existing patterns.

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

Incremental small scale development

There may be some capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were of a vernacular form and in keeping with the rural character. This could include carefully planned expansion and infilling of Hinxworth or the development of isolated properties strategically located. However, due to the existing open and undeveloped character any proposals would need clear justification to avoid the potential erosion of the rural character of Hinxworth Lowlands.

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

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

There are existing urbanising elements within this Character Area at present. The electricity pylons are currently detractors in the area. New utilities developments would have an impact on the rural character of Hinxworth Lowlands. Large scale developments, tall elements would be highly visible within the Character Area, as well as potentially visible from surrounding Character Areas.

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

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| GUIDELINES | Nb. These guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire |
|-------------------|--|

STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE

Strategy: Improve and Restore

Landscape management guidelines

- Promote creation of new woodland and for existing woodlands encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Promote the creation of buffer zones between areas of intensive arable production and areas of semi-natural habitat and the creation of links between habitat areas
- Promote hedgerow restoration to create visual links between existing woodland areas
- Promote the use of traditional fields hedges in place of post and wire fencing to new grazing areas
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network
- Encourage the development of unimproved species-rich grassland habitats
- Promote the creation of new ponds and the retention of existing ponds for wildlife
- Encourage the planting of shelter belts
- Encourage the planting of trees and other appropriate vegetation along watercourses

Built development guidelines

- Conserve the traditional character of Hinxworth village, ensuring that any development located on the edge of the village uses appropriate vernacular materials and features to avoid inappropriate visual intrusion
- Protect and preserve the pattern of rural lanes and associated hedgerows
- Encourage the retention of vegetation along the A1 to ensure that it remains screened
- Encourage the planting of appropriate broadleaved woodland and vegetation to screen new development that could intrude in panoramic rural views
- Retain the rural character of Hinxworth Lowlands, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the Character Area
- Avoid the location of new development in visually intrusive locations
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or the loss of surviving species-rich grassland habitats and ancient hedgerows
- Conserve and enhance Ashwell Bury
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area