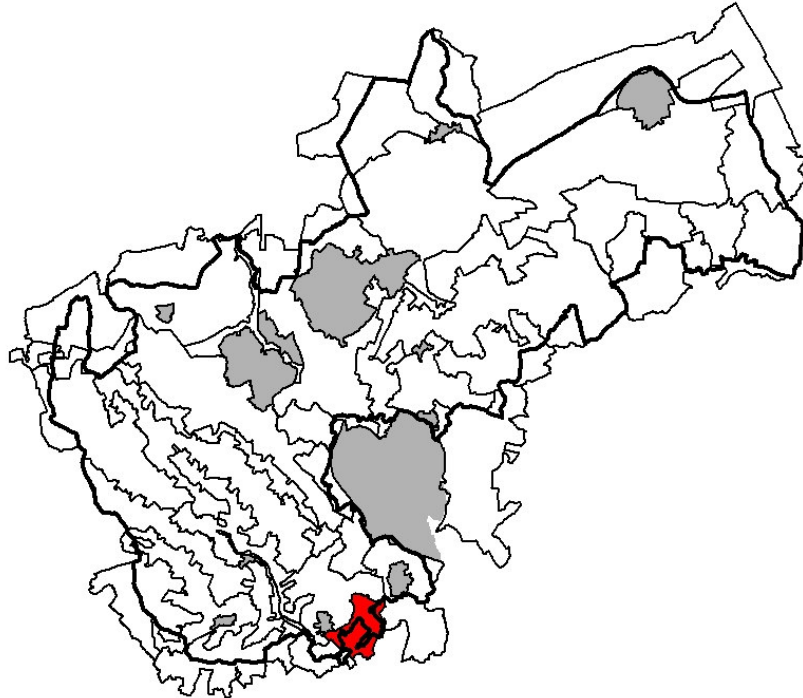
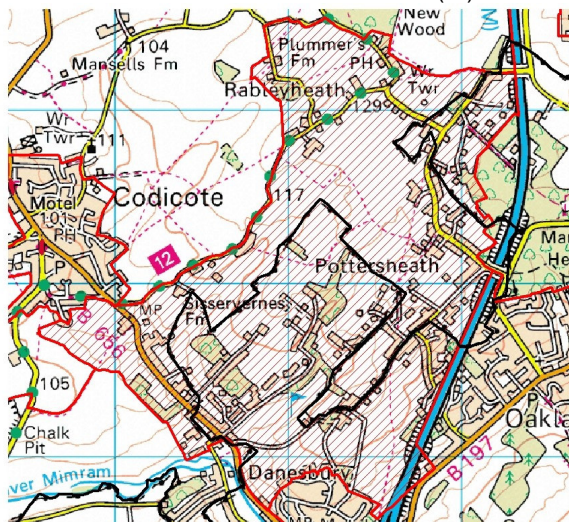


**LOCATION**

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**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA**

The area lies in a broad band extending north of Welwyn and the River Mimram. The area lies east of Codicote and to the west of the A1(M).



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**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

Extensive area of heathland which has been developed and settled. Complex pattern of large plots with ribbon development following network of local lanes. Only part of this settlement lies within the district boundary. Linear blocks of woodland associated with local development.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- Gently rolling upland plateau landscape
- Extensive settlement generously dispersed over the south

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- A1(M) follows eastern boundary
- Linear woodland blocks

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

Soils are free draining acid loamy brown soils over glacial deposits above Chalk.

**Topography**

Plateau landscape.

**Degree of slope**

Varies between 1:30 to 1:10 within incised valleys.

**Altitude range**

75m to 125m.

**Hydrology**

No discernable watercourses. Small number of local ponds adjacent to settlements

**Land cover and land use**

Arable landcover in the north. Smaller paddocks, gardens and development in the south.

**Vegetation and wildlife**

Danesbury Park is an important ecological resource within this Character Area. The park supports a diverse selection of habitat types, the most important of which are areas of old, species-rich neutral/acidic grassland that are regarded as being of county ecological importance. Some species indicative of old grasslands are present within the parkland, such as Adder's Tongue Fern. Ancient parkland trees are present and are a highly valuable ecological resource for fungi and invertebrates. Standing deadwood, such as that associated with veteran and senescent trees is a key ecological habitat that has suffered a national decline due largely to an excessive 'cleaning up' of our countryside. Deadwood habitats are essential for the survival of a range of species, many of which are nationally scarce. Ancient oak/hornbeam woodlands such as Catchpole and Longston Woods are present within this Character Area as are some areas of unimproved neutral marshy grassland. Woodlands are important for bat species (pipistrelle) and noctule has been recorded in the past. The vast majority of grassland within the UK are subject to some form of agricultural 'improvement'. Traditionally managed grasslands with their array of associated plants and animals are an increasingly rare sight.

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

Finds of Romano-British coins, pottery and building materials suggest that a Romano-British settlement lies to the west of the Character Area. To the far west cropmarks of an enclosure of unknown date and function are known from aerial photographs.

**Field Pattern**

The historic agricultural landscape is composed mainly of post 1950's enclosure. Pre 18<sup>th</sup> century and later enclosure lies to the north and pre 18<sup>th</sup> century 'irregular' enclosure, 20<sup>th</sup> century leisure and prairie fields – post 1950's boundary loss lie to the south. In the centre occur prairie fields with relict elements and pre 18<sup>th</sup> century 'irregular sinuous' enclosure. There are pockets of 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> century plantation throughout the area.

**Transport Pattern**

The A1(M) runs along the eastern boundary. There is a pattern of winding lanes.

**Settlements and Built Form**

The historic settlement pattern is composed of farmsteads and villages. The traditional buildings of the Character Area survive from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Plummers Farmhouse is a large 16<sup>th</sup> century timber framed farmhouse with 17<sup>th</sup> century additions.

**EVALUATION**

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

Historic and mature landscape character interspersed with extensive but widely dispersed settlement patterns. Linear woodland features help to provide a mature setting to the Character Area.

**Rarity & distinctiveness**

The integrity and mature character are not compromised by widespread settlement.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

Development is small scale and fits well into the mature setting. Some commercial outlets (nurseries) located within the Character Area. Small water towers at Rabley Heath.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

Character Area well served by the network of small winding lanes 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**

None.

**EVALUATION**

**CONDITION**

Land cover change: Localised  
 Age structure of tree cover: Mature  
 Extent of semi-natural habitat survival: Scattered  
 Management of semi-natural habitat: Good  
 Survival of cultural pattern: Declining/Relic  
 Impact of built development: Moderate  
 Impact of land-use change: Moderate

**Matrix Score: Moderate**

**ROBUSTNESS**

Impact of landform: Apparent  
 Impact of land cover: Prominent  
 Impact of historic pattern: Apparent  
 Visibility from outside: Locally visible  
 Sense of enclosure: Partial  
 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		

**EVALUATION**

**INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY**

**Landscape Character Sensitivities**

- The distinctive settlement pattern within the Character Area as a whole is characterised by dispersed ribbon development in large plots, which would be sensitive to inappropriate, unsympathetic or high density development and any form of development not in scale with the dispersed pattern
- Much of the development within Danesbury-Rabley Heath, both within North Hertfordshire and the Character Area as a whole, is relatively modern development and not of a vernacular style. It is, however, sympathetic to the local settlement pattern
- Linear woodland blocks and tree belts are located along many roads, creating a shaded, enclosed feel and a mature setting to development. This would be sensitive to removal or incursion of further development
- Roads through the Character Area are generally very minor and some have a private road feel to them. They would be sensitive to upgrading or improvement schemes
- Parts of the Character Area, including small areas within North Hertfordshire, have a parkland character due to the presence of mown grass lawns and mature individual trees. These would be sensitive to lack of management and removal of trees
- Although the Character Area as a whole is a gently rolling upland plateau, intimate dry valleys form an important element of the landscape, some of which are found within the North Hertfordshire part of Danesbury-Rabley Heath. These valleys could be susceptible to inappropriate development or erosion of their intimate feel.
- Field patterns within the Character Area are generally small scale and vary between geometric and organic in form. Hedgerows remain well maintained in many locations but have been removed in others and would be vulnerable to further loss. This is

particularly the case within the north eastern part of Danesbury-Rabley Heath, within North Hertfordshire.

- The transport corridor of the A1(M) has been imposed on the landscape at the eastern edge of the Character Area, but has been well screened by dense vegetation and has little visual impact on Danesbury-Rabley Heath.

Overall Danesbury-Rabley Heath is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. The Character Area contains distinctive dispersed settlement but elements of the wider landscape, such as hedgerows and tree belts have already been partly eroded.

**Visual Sensitivities**

- Glimpsed cross valley views are an important feature of the Character Area
- Dense vegetation within the Character Area limits the extent of many views
- Residential properties are generally set back from roads and screened by tree belts or tall hedges
- Within North Hertfordshire, views are generally more open in the north of the Character Area, where arable farmland and grazing are the predominant land use

In visual terms, Danesbury-Rabley Heath is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. Views within the Character Area are relatively enclosed. However, some important cross valley views to the south are also possible.

**LANDSCAPE VALUE**

Overall Danesbury-Rabley Heath is considered to be of **low landscape value**. The area is heavily influenced by human activity, there is limited visible evidence of the historic landscape and the landscape and landform is not particularly memorable.

**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 small scale character, dispersed settlement pattern and mature woodland setting. It would introduce elements that could engulf the existing ribbon and dispersed development pattern. Increased housing development would be likely to affect the existing minor 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 entirely appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural character and dispersed settlement pattern. Some small scale expansion within North Hertfordshire of Pottersheath, Rabley Heath or Oaklands, carefully designed and in keeping with the existing character, could possibly be accommodated. However, any proposals would need clear justification to avoid the erosion of the mature woodland belts that characterise Danesbury-Rabley Heath. The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered to be moderate to low.

**Major transport developments/improvements**

This type of development would generally not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to the largely rural character of most routes at present. Upgrading of existing roads and lanes could erode the character of the landscape. Some upgrading of the A1(M) may be possible but would require careful mitigated through earthworks and the retention or replacement of existing woodland and shelterbelts. 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 may require upgrading to accommodate 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 vernacular in form and style and in keeping with the rural character. However, large buildings, if not carefully located, would erode the enclosed character of much of Danesbury-Rabley Heath. The landscape capacity for individual large/bulky buildings is considered to be low to moderate.

**Large scale open storage**

The intimate scale of much of Danesbury-Rabley Heath would make it more difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses without potential loss of woodland blocks. This would not be in keeping with the wooded character of the area and could lead to the erosion of the dispersed settlement pattern and unobtrusive road network that characterise much of Danesbury-Rabley Heath. The landscape capacity for large scale 'open' uses is considered to be low.

**EVALUATION**

**Mineral extraction/waste disposal**

This Character Area is currently relatively rural in appearance with small scale dispersed development. Whilst some small scale mineral extraction could be accommodated with careful design and mitigation measures, larger scale extraction or waste disposal would not be in keeping with the character of much of Danesbury-Rabley Heath and would be difficult to accommodate between ribbon developments. The minor roads may 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 low. Waste disposal would be a problem in all character areas due to the presence of aquifers.

**Incremental small scale development**

There would some capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were in keeping with the mature wooded character and unobtrusive. However, any proposals would need to retain and enhance existing woodland belts and retain key cross valley views to the south.

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

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

There are currently very few detractors in Danesbury-Rabley Heath. Utilities developments or structures such as masts or wind turbines could have a major impact on the Character Area, particularly if they were to cause loss of woodland features. Although much of the Character Area is enclosed, large scale tall elements such as these would be highly visible within much of the North Hertfordshire part of the Character Area, as well as in surrounding Character Areas.

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

**GUIDELINES**

**STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE**

**Strategy: Improve and Conserve**

NB. Guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire.

**Landscape management guidelines**

- Promote management of ancient woodland to encourage a diverse woodland flora
- 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
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network
- Encourage the conservation of species-rich neutral/acidic grasslands
- Encourage a policy of “standing deadwood” habitats within the ageing tree population
- Promote appropriate management of habitats
- Badger survey maybe required
- Retain and restore the small scale field pattern

**Built development guidelines**

- Retain existing cross and along valley views, including those from gaps in dense roadside vegetation
- Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow winding lanes and associated hedge banks, sunken lanes, verges and hedges
- Encourage the planting of appropriate broadleaved woodland and vegetation to mitigate new development, particularly along the frontage of new development to retain the wooded character and mature setting
- Retain the wooded but settled character of Danesbury-Rabley Heath, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, density, form and style fitting to the Character Area
- Avoid the location of new development in visual intrusive locations, such as at the tops of valleys or the edges of the plateau where it would be visible on the currently largely undeveloped skyline
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or hedgerows
- Ensure that lighting associated with new development does not create additional urbanising influences on the character Area