

LOCATION

Extensive plateau south of Reed extending east to Barkway and the B1368 and west towards Green End and Mill End. Incorporates the villages of Buckland and Chipping.

- Buckland Bottom belt of vegetation adjacent to the River Rib
- Capons Wood on the south-eastern edge
- Ermine Street roman road (now the A10)

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Large, open and elevated plateau with the village of Buckland in the centre and bisected in the middle by the roman road, Ermine Street (now the A10). Quiet area with few features, dominated by large arable fields with no hedgerows giving an unusual prairie-like character to the area. There are extensive views within and across the plateau. The spire of Buckland church is a prominent feature at the highest point in the centre of the plateau. Small pockets of pasture exist within and around Buckland and Chipping. The River Rib runs through the western side of the area but is rarely noticeable other than at Buckland Bottom where a dense belt of tree and shrub vegetation creates a strong feature and valuable ecological habitat. A mature lime avenue extends between Buckland and west of Hodenhoe Manor and several new avenues of lime trees have been planted in the area.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- gently undulating elevated plateau
- open arable landscape with large fields
- very few hedgerows or defining boundaries
- small pockets of pasture within and around the villages of Buckland and Chipping
- cluster of farms in the village of Buckland but few elsewhere
- lime avenues

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Buckland church spire
- mature lime avenue between Buckland and west of Hodenhoe Manor

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology & Soils

Anglian boulder clay overlying chalk dominates most of the plateau and the soils are typically slowly permeable calcareous clays (Hanslope series). A small area on the eastern side has loamy soils over chalky till (Melford series). At Biggin Moor and west of Buckland, post-glacial erosion has exposed underlying Clay-with-Flints, which gives a more neutral or mildly acidic soil type, while Chalk is also exposed in these areas. At Chipping and Biggin Manor there are also glacial sands and gravels in small areas. Narrow deposits of alluvium also exist along the course of the River Rib at Buckland Bottom and in the headwaters of the River Quin at Biggin Manor. Biggin Moor springs arise from the Chalk and form a unique peat dome deposit.

Topography

A gently undulating elevated plateau including a shallow valley around the upper reaches of the River Rib on the west side and shallow valleys around upper tributaries of the River Quin on the east side. The highest point of the plateau is marked by the village of Buckland.

Degree of slope

Slopes are typically between 1 in 20 and 1 in 30. Around Mill Hill (west of Chipping) they increase to 1 in 10 and around Reed Wood and Southfield Grove they reduce to around 1 in 70.

Altitude Range

The altitude varies from a high point of 140m in Buckland to a low point of 100m south of Chipping. Other high points include Capons Wood at 136m and Mill Hill at 125m.

Hydrology

The plateau is drained by a series of small ditches. The east side of the plateau drains into the River Quin and the west side drains into the upper reaches of the River Rib. The ditches and streams are rarely marked by vegetation and are therefore often difficult to identify from a distance. The River Rib is heavily affected by arable run-off, and the area has few ponds, except for Daws Lane Common pond at Buckland, and woodland

pools of probably great age in the remnant of Capons Wood, Dades's Wood and Brandish Wood.

Land Cover and Land Use

The plateau is dominated by large open, arable fields with few hedgerows resulting in an open prairie-like landscape. This pattern of land use, together with the cropmark evidence of cultivation from the Late Iron Age or Roman period onwards, suggests that woodland has not been a significant component in the landscape from a very early date. Mature vegetation is therefore scarce other than Capons Wood to the south and three other smaller woods: Dades's Wood, Burhill Wood and Brandish Wood and a tree belt adjacent to the River Rib at Buckland Bottom. Small areas of pasture are present within the village of Buckland, and hedgerows (particularly hawthorn) are also more common within the village.

Vegetation and Wildlife

Semi-natural vegetation is severely limited, most of the area being intensive, very open arable farmland. There were formerly extensive plateau woodlands south of Buckland, but the only remnant is a small part of Capons Wood, which is wet ash/maple former coppice-with-standards woodland. Remnant woodland flora persists in some hedgebanks and some old tracksides. There are also remnant fragments of ash/maple woodland at Brandish and Burhill Woods, also remnants of formerly larger woods, as well as beside the Rib at Buckland Bottom. Biggin Moor springs, although somewhat degraded, remain a unique peat fen, with some alder woodland, damp scrub and rough tall fen. Neutral grassland remains only at Buckland churchyard and Daws Lane Common. Its pond is of some local interest.

Biggin Moor retains locally rare plants, such as Marsh Valerian, Purple Moor-grass, Blunt-flowered Rush and Marsh Pennywort. Thin-spiked Wood Sedge and Great Bellflower survived the felling of woodland at Buckland. The open arable fields however can support uncommon bird species, such as Yellow Wagtails in rape fields.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

While the present day settlement pattern is medieval in origins there are indications of late Neolithic or early Bronze Age occupation activity, the plateau is bisected by the Roman road Ermine Street (the A10), and there is evidence for Late Iron Age and Romano-British exploitation of the landscape. While the evidence for habitation is limited, there is cropmarks indicate early field systems of Late Iron Age or Romano-British, and medieval dates, particularly in the central and southern part of the area.

The major present day settlements within the area are Buckland and Chipping, both situated on Ermine Street, and both pre-Conquest in origin. Chipping is an interesting example of a failed market settlement. The name is an Anglo-Saxon word for 'market', and its market status is documented in the mid-13th century. By 1360, following crop failures and the Black Death, the site was 'vacant' and the market was formally transferred to Buntingford. The remainder of the area contains a sparse network of dispersed farmsteads and houses which again reflects a settlement pattern established in the medieval period, and provides some evidence of settlement shift and decline. Medieval moated sites are known at Hodenhoe Manor, north of Burhill Wood, and at Buckland (Bull Moat, north of the village, and south of the church). St Andrews in Buckland is a good example of a fourteenth century church.

Field Pattern

Fields units are typically large, a fact that is visually emphasised by the lack of hedgerows and other enclosing features. The field systems of the area were originally mainly pre-18th century unenclosed common arable fields, and smaller 'irregular' enclosure fields, though some field blocks north and east of Capons Wood, and west of Buckland Bottom, display a more mixed origin. Small areas of these 'irregular' enclosure field systems survive to the west and east of Buckland and at the northern end of the area, but the most of these pre-18th century field systems have been superseded by 18th century and later enclosure, and the greater part of the plateau is now primarily 20th century 'prairie' fields

some of which are enormous. Former extensive pastures at Buckland were destroyed in the 1970's.

Transport Pattern

The roman road, Ermine Street (now the A10), is the dominant road within the area and passes across the middle of the plateau in a north-south direction. This is a busy trunk road but is relatively narrow and undulating despite its importance. Road traffic produces a continual background noise which is audible from much of the surrounding area. Elsewhere on the plateau, roads are quiet and infrequent. A narrow, minor road on the east side provides a route between Barkway and Buckland and a further minor road on the west side provides a winding route between Buckland and Sandon or Hay Green. Road verges throughout the area are generally narrow.

Settlement and the Build Form

The area contains the two ancient villages of Buckland and Chipping both of which are situated on the roman road of Ermine Street. Buckland which distinctively stands on a hill was listed in the Domesday Book as 'Bochelande'. Both settlements now contain a mix of vernacular and twentieth century buildings. Buckland has an attractive fourteenth century church and a fine early Georgian house of chequered brick known as Buckland House. Unusually, the village of Buckland contains a concentration of farms located around a central area of pasture. The settlement of Chipping is smaller and more linear in form with housing either side of Ermine Street.

Other Sources of Area Specific Information

Pevsner, N., rev. Cherry, B., Hertfordshire, Penguin (2000)

Rook, T, A History of Hertfordshire, Phillimore and Co Ltd (1997)

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

The area has a remote and prairie-like character. It is a large-scale landscape, often feeling exposed and bare. Long distance views across the plateau are frequent with the spire of Buckland church forming a prominent and attractive feature in many views. Capons Wood (to the south of the area) also forms a significant feature on the horizon in views to the south. Along and adjacent to the A10, road traffic generates a continual background noise. However, elsewhere, the area is very quiet

Rarity and Distinctiveness

Within Hertfordshire the remote and prairie-like character of the area is both distinctive and rare

VISUAL IMPACT

Traffic on the A10 creates a significant visual impact locally. However generally, the plateau has a notable absence of features.

ACCESSIBILITY

Several footpath routes cross the plateau most of which radiate from Buckland or Chipping. This network of paths provides good access across the plateau for walkers. Access by bridlepath is much poorer with only one significant stretch of bridlepath in the area (between Mill Hill and Capons Wood).

COMMUNITY VIEWS

This area has some distinctive aspects [D]

"Good for farmland birds" (Respondent 3134)

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

Areas of Archaeological Significance – including Buckland village and large area to the east of Chipping
 Other Sites of Ecological, Geological and Geomorphological importance or interest – including Hilly Wood and Burhill Wood

CONDITION	
Land cover change	Localised
Age Structure of Tree cover	Mixed
Extent of Semi-natural habitat survival	Scattered
Management of Semi-natural habitat	Not obvious
Survival of Cultural pattern	Interrupted
Impact of built development	Low
Impact of land use change	Low
STRENGTH OF CHARACTER	
Impact of land form	Dominant
Impact of land cover	Dominant
Impact of historic pattern	Apparent
Visibility from outside	Widely visible
Sense of enclosure	Open / exposed
Visual unity	Unified
Distinctiveness / Rarity	Rare

Strengthen and Reinforce	Conserve and Strengthen	Safeguard and Manage
Improve and Reinforce	Improve and Conserve	Conserve and Restore
Reconstruction	Improve and Restore	Restore Condition to Maintain Character

EVALUATION

INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

Landscape Character Sensitivities

- Whilst the wider Character Area of Buckland Plateau contains the villages of Buckland and Chipping, both of which contain a mix of vernacular and 20th century buildings, the parcels of land within North Hertfordshire are predominantly unsettled and would be vulnerable to change
- Small blocks of woodland are characteristic of the wider Buckland Plateau Character Area. The smaller number of these within North Hertfordshire would be particularly sensitive to removal.
- The limited number of hedgerows within the Buckland Plateau would be vulnerable to further removals and inappropriate management techniques
- Mature trees and avenues, within the wider Character Area and within North Hertfordshire, would be vulnerable to removal. Avenue planting is more difficult to establish than woodland belts due to the exposed nature of the plateau
- The limited vegetation along the River Rib, particularly within North Hertfordshire, would be vulnerable to further removal
- Minor roads through the Character Area are narrow and generally open. They would be sensitive to widening or alterations
- The linear alignment of Ermine Street Roman Road (the A10)

Overall Buckland Plateau is considered to be of **moderate to low sensitivity**. The rural nature of the Character Area would be sensitive to the introduction of unsympathetic elements, particularly in the open landscape, but there is currently a noticeable absence of specific features.

Visual Sensitivities

- Open sweeping views and panoramic views throughout the Character Area
- Woodland blocks in surrounding Character Areas form important wooded skylines
- Vegetation provides an increased sense of enclosure in the south of the Character Area, outside North Hertfordshire
- The A10 is not contained by vegetation, giving views across the Character Area for road users but also views of traffic from throughout the Character Area

In visual terms, Buckland Plateau is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. Views across the Character Area would be sensitive to the introduction of incongruous features.

LANDSCAPE VALUE

Overall Buckland Plateau is considered to be of **moderate landscape value**. Aspects of particular value within Buckland Plateau are the lack of incongruous elements, the sense of remoteness and openness, and the presence of vernacular settlement that contributes to a distinctive sense of place (outside North Hertfordshire).

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 nature. It would introduce elements that would alter the character and affect the existing key characteristics such as the open arable landscape and gently undulating plateau feature. Increased housing development could affect the existing minor roads or alter the historic alignment of the A10 Roman Road, which would 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 could be high, due to the open nature of the landscape.

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

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 or affect the historic alignment of the A10. However, some upgrading of the A10 may be possible subject to archaeological excavations and would provide the opportunity for better integration into the Character Area. 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.

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, if not carefully located, would be visible across much of the Character Area.

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

Large scale open storage

This type of large scale development is unlikely to be appropriate in this Character Area as there are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. Extensive development would also disrupt the open views and gently undulating landform.

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 linear 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 Buckland Plateau. 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 to 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 vernacular in form and style and in keeping with the rural character. However, large buildings, if not carefully located, could erode the rural and undeveloped character of the Character Area.

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

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

There are currently very few of detractors in the area. Utilities developments or structures such as masts or wind turbines are likely to have a major impact on the rural character of Buckland Plateau. Large scale tall elements such as these would be highly visible within the Character Area, as well as in surrounding Character Areas.

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

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

NB. Guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire.

Landscape management guidelines

- Encourage the reversal of habitat fragmentation and the creation and improvement of habitat links to create eco-corridors.
- Protect remaining river valley habitats of significant nature conservation interest along the River Rib.
- Encourage the establishment of wet native woodland along the River Rib including black poplar and pollarded willow.
- Promote the restoration of hedge improvement and planting adjacent to rights of way, green lanes and along parish boundaries.
- Ensure new planting is encouraged within the area particularly in and around the villages of Buckland and Chipping. Ensure landscape improvements respect the historic context of existing features. Ornamental species should only be used to replace damaged or over-mature specimens.
- Promote both the creation of new ponds and the retention / enhancement for wildlife of existing ponds.

Built development guidelines

- Retain the rural character of Buckland Plateau, 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, such as on 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 scarce woodland blocks or hedgerows
- Ensure that design proposals for minor roads fit the grain of the local landscape both horizontally and vertically; avoid significant impact on the local field pattern and use indigenous native tree and shrub species. However, it should not be axiomatic to enclose any new or existing road with dense hedging on both sides – due reference should be made to local character and roads should be left open where appropriate.
- Develop a strategy for the planting and management of the A10 corridor through the area that respects the historic setting and is in keeping with local character but minimizes the visual impact.
- Ensure that the surroundings of converted and new buildings are designed and maintained to be in keeping with their surroundings by ensuring that hard landscape and 'Garden' details are screened from view where possible and native species are used for hedging and tree planting to the perimeter.
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area