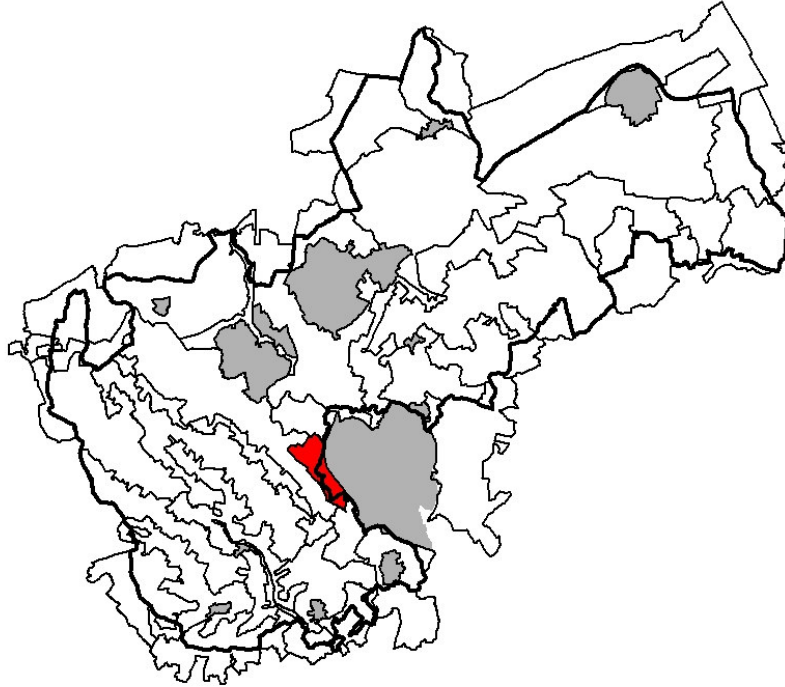


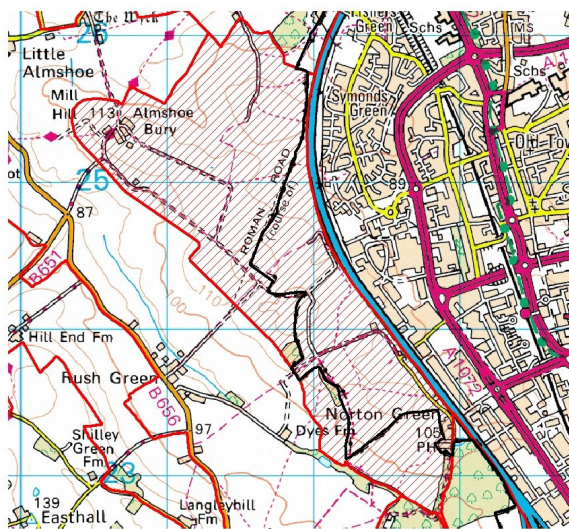
LOCATION



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

The area lies immediately to the west of Stevenage and the A1(M). It extends from Titmore Green in the north to Knebworth woodlands in the south.



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Gently undulating plateau. Open, exposed landscape with views out in all directions. Very large arable fields with localised remnant sections of hedgerow. Character Area includes small deciduous woodland copses. Almshoe Bury farmstead located on exposed promontory to north.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Upstanding open plateau landscape
- Large arable fields
- Small deciduous woodland copses

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Kitching Lane recreational route
- Landfill site to north of Norton Green
- Almshoe Bury Farm on local promontory

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

Free draining loamy brown soils over Chalk to north. Chalk overlain by Boulder clay to south.

Topography

Generally flat plateau dipping to north west and south.

Degree of slope

Generally 1:40.

Altitude range

112m to 122m.

Hydrology

There are no significant water courses, however, there are a number of small ponds within copses.

Land cover and land use

Predominantly arable land use with some land lying fallow. Small number of copses. Area to north of Norton Green is a former landfill site, which has not been restored to agricultural use.

Vegetation and wildlife

Remnant hedges include blackthorn, hawthorn and field maple. Woodland species include oak, ash and field maple.

A few ancient semi-natural broadleaved woodlands are present within this Character Area. They are typically dominated by hornbeam, which may be coppiced. A range of ancient woodland indicators is also present.

Green lanes such as Kitching Green Lane are ecologically interesting, as they frequently have unimproved or semi-improved grassland flora, scrub, old banks and ancient hedgerow communities. Some species rich and essentially unimproved meadows are located west of Norton Green. These meadows support plant communities typical of acidic conditions.

The open fields are of local value for farmland birds including grey partridge, lapwing, skylark, linnet, yellowhammer and corn bunting.

The woods, hedges and green lanes are important for bats.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Aerial photographs of the north of the Character Area demonstrate evidence for a circular enclosure with a single entrance and a prehistoric ring ditch.

At the time of the Domesday Survey The Bishop of Bayeux held 1 hide of land in Almshoe (Almshoe 1086). It is thought that Isabella, wife of Edward II, and her daughter hunted in the vicinity.

Field pattern

The historic agricultural landscape pattern consists of a mixture of pre-18th century irregular enclosure and prairie fields with both post-1950s boundary loss and with relict elements within the north of the Character Area. The central part is dominated by pre-18th century unenclosed common arable while the southeastern termination contains pre-18th century enclosure and commons with an open margin. To the east only smaller fragments of the field pattern remain. The western and northern fringes are open and unenclosed.

Transport pattern

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

Settlements and built form

The historic settlement pattern is sparse with no documented traditional buildings. Small group of comparatively recent houses at Norton Green. Almshoe Bury farmstead on local promontory to the northwest is listed Grade I. There is also an early 17th century barn listed Grade II.

EVALUATION**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The plateau landscape lies at an elevated level in the surrounding landscape and provides long distance views across the Langley valley to the west and towards the townscape of Stevenage to the east.

Rarity & distinctiveness

The landscape type is frequent in the county.

VISUAL IMPACT

There are a few low key detracting features, namely the landfill site north of Norton Green and the gypsy caravan site. Both features are close to the A1(M). Traffic on the motorway and the urban edge of Stevenage dominate the eastern edge of the Character Area.

ACCESSIBILITY

There are a number of footpaths and bridleways that cross the Character Area, however, access from the east is limited to bridges or underpasses crossing the motorway. Kitching Lane is now a leisure route, excluding vehicular access. Part of the Hertfordshire Way long distance path crosses the north of the Character Area.

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

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:	Low
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:	Widely visible
Sense of enclosure:	Open
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

- A gently undulating plateau, which is relatively open, exposed and of a rural character. The character area would be vulnerable to further urbanizing features
- Landuse is predominantly large arable fields, with remnant hedgerows. The hedgerows are generally grown out, fragmented and unmanaged. The area would be vulnerable to the removal of hedgerows and boundary vegetation
- Almshoe Plateau is characterised by groups of hedgerow trees and small copses. There is a significant quantity of evergreen species, including conifers and pines. Almshoe plateau would be sensitive to the removal of these features
- Paddocks are present in the character area. Such areas are characterised by post and rail fences and the removal of boundary vegetation. This practice is detrimental to the landscape character of Almshoe Plateau. The character area is vulnerable to further horsiculture activity and any associated removal of boundary vegetation
- No roads cross the character area. However the A1(M) defines the eastern boundary. A significant stretch of the A1(M) is screened, yet it is a significant detractor to Almshoe Plateau, diluting its character. The character area would be vulnerable to the loss of screen planting near the A1(M)
- There are further detractors in the area adjacent to the A1(M) including a former landfill site, a traveller site, small scale and masts and overhead electricity lines. The character area would be sensitive further detractors, which would dilute the character of Almshoe Plateau further
- The urban edge of Stevenage is a detractor, which abuts the east of Almshoe Plateau, east of the A1(M), further diluting the rural character

- There is very limited settlement in the character area. Almshoe Bury, a Grade I listed farmstead is the most significant property. There are also a few more modern properties at Norton Green. The rural character of Almshoe Plateau would be vulnerable to the pressure of development
- Good public access through numerous rights of way, including the Hertfordshire Way and Kitching Lane

Overall Almshoe Plateau is considered to be of **low sensitivity**. The gently undulating plateau and rural character have been degraded by a number of detractors to the east of the character area.

Visual Sensitivities

- Long distance views across the Langley Valley to the Langley Scarp are an important feature of the character area
- Views east are degraded by the A1 and the urban edge of Stevenage

In visual terms, Almshoe Plateau is considered to be of **moderate to low sensitivity**. Long distance views would be sensitive to the introduction of additional development or urbanizing features.

LANDSCAPE VALUE

Overall Almshoe Plateau is considered to be of **low landscape value**. The rural character and sense of remoteness are of particular value within Almshoe Plateau. However the landscape character has been degraded and diluted by a range of detractors, particularly in the east of the character area.

EVALUATION

CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT

Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)

This type of development would not be entirely appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural undeveloped character and long distance views. However the landscape has been degraded to a certain extent by the A1(M) and the proximity of Stevenage.

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

Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)

This type of development could be appropriate within this Character Area, due to the degraded character of the landscape and proximity of the A1(M) and Stevenage. However long distance views should be protected and any development mitigated with suitable landscape strategies and proposals.

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

Major transport developments/improvements

This type of development would only be appropriate for improvements of the existing A1(M), which abuts the Character Area. However it would be imperative that any work was mitigated through earthworks and the planting of shelterbelts.

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

Commercial/warehouse estates

There may be some capacity for this type of large scale development in this character area. The land adjacent to the A1(M) would be the most suitable area as it is more affected by detracting uses. However it would be imperative that any development was mitigated including the planting of shelter belts. The landscape capacity for commercial/warehouse estates is considered to be moderate to low.

Individual large/bulky buildings

There may be some 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 could be highly visible within the Character Area if not carefully located would erode the rural character of Almshoe Plateau.

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

Large scale open storage

Despite the presence of the A1(M), the rural character of Almshoe Plateau would make it difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses without significant impact. They would not be in keeping with the rural character of the area and likely to be open to view and introduce new elements that would conflict with the existing characteristics. However, if effective perimeter screening could be achieved it could be possible to identify areas to restrict visibility

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

EVALUATION

Mineral extraction/waste disposal

Some small scale mineral extraction could be accommodated with careful design and mitigation measures, larger scale extraction would be more prominent and not be in keeping with the rural character of the area. If proposals were consented, any restoration proposals 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 could be capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments, due to the relatively degraded character of the landscape and the proximity of the A1 and Stevenage. However long distance views should be protected and any development mitigated with suitable landscape strategies and proposals. Any proposals would need clear justification to avoid the erosion of the rural character of Almshoe Plateau.

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 existing small elements, such as these within this Character Area at present. New utilities developments or structures such as masts or wind turbines would have an impact on the rural character and long distance views of Almshoe Plateau. Large scale developments, including tall elements would be highly visible within the Character Area, as well as being potentially visible in 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 management of ancient woodland, particularly using techniques such as coppicing to encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Encourage the restoration of the landfill area (Stevenage) north of Norton Green
- Conserve and restore existing hilltop woodlands, copses, shelter belts and existing hedges by restocking to emphasise the prominent natural topography
- Enhance and extend areas of chalk grassland including roadside verges, field margins, rights of way and key access sites e.g. Therfield Heath. Promote reversion from arable to sheep pastures on steeper slopes
- Enhance features by removal of scrub vegetation to reinstate chalk grassland and rare indicator species e.g. juniper and pasque flower
- Restore known lost woods or portions of woods, or create and manage new small to medium sized woods, particularly on the plateau/plateau edges
- 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 restoration of traditional field hedges
- Protect and preserve the character and ecological diversity of Kitching Green Lane
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network

Built development guidelines

- Avoid the location of new development in visual intrusive locations where they would be visible on the skyline, particularly as seen from the west
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks, copses or ancient hedgerows
- Encourage the planting of appropriate broadleaved woodland and vegetation to screen new development that could intrude in long distance views
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area
- Ensure applications for communication infrastructure, utility infrastructure have minimal impact on the landscape character and visual quality of the area
- Use the opportunity of any developments to create new accessible green infrastructure
- Protect the setting of Almshoe Bury
- Ensure redundant agriculture buildings subject to applications for change of use are monitored to ensure that they reflect the local building style