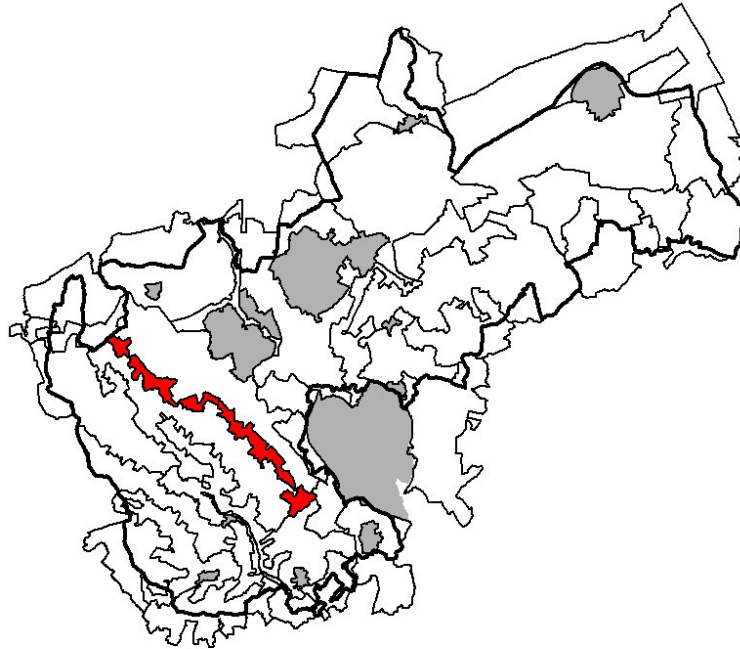


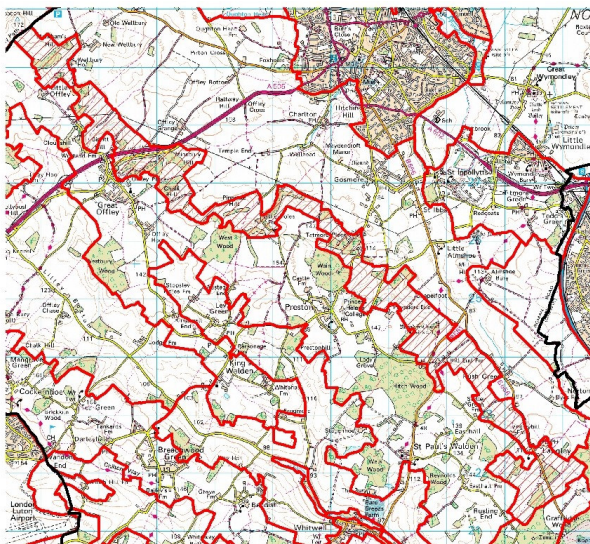
LOCATION



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

Extensive chalk scarp running from Deacon Hill in the north to Knebworth Park in the south



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Steeply sloping chalk landscape formed by a long narrow belt of land facing the Langley valley and in the south merging into the wooded landscape of Knebworth. Field sizes vary in size, but generally large. Field pattern varies between regular and irregular. Hawthorn hedges enclose fields. Character Area is well wooded along the top of the ridge, with mature deciduous woodland. Long distance views over the Langley valley to the east.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Steeply sloping chalk scarp
- Generally well wooded
- Irregular sized fields
- Small sunken lanes and tracks drop down the valley side

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Icknield Way long distance footpath crosses the northern end of the area

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

Shallow rendzina soils over Chalk

Topography

Steeply sloping chalk scarp gradually becoming shallower further south.

Degree of slope

Typically 1:4 but shallower to the south.

Altitude range

Varies between: 70m to 125m in the north
125m to 100m in the south

Hydrology

Scarp cut by numerous small dry valleys. Surface water is minimal drainage consisting of occasional ditches and drains following the valley profile.

Land cover and land use

Mixed use including arable land on gentle slopes and grazing and woodland cover on steeper ground.

Vegetation and wildlife

Species-rich chalk grassland and downland on steep-sided escarpments are a key ecological feature of this Character Area. Some parts have been subject to conifer planting and reversion to chalk scrub and secondary woodland occurs to varying degrees throughout. Old chalk workings, pits and quarries expose the chalky substrate and lend themselves to dry, ecologically 'stressed' habitats that result in botanically diverse communities. Some ecologically interesting chalk grassland communities also occur on road verges. The ancient route of the Icknield Way has its own association of calcareous grassland species and old hedgerow communities. Birkett Hill is the route of another green lane with a good assemblage of flora. Characteristic unimproved chalk grassland communities can be found at the chalk downland of Pinnacle Hill and at Offley Chalk Banks. Rare species include musk orchid. Evidence of buzzards around Great Offley.

Areas of ancient semi-natural woodland can be found within this Character Area, with their complement of ecologically sensitive indicator species. Examples include Wellbury Lower Wood groves at Offley Holes and near Offley Place. Ancient woodland remnants are calcareous ash/beechness, but much has been replanted, and some support fly orchid.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

To the east of Preston alongside the road from Whitwell to Hitchin is the ruined 14th century Minsden Chapel belonging to the order of St. Gilbert of Sempringham. Further to the southeast is the medieval settlement of Langley which is recorded in the Domesday Book as Langelei.

Field Pattern

The historic agricultural landscape in the north comprises a mixture of prairie fields with relict elements within, post-1950s enclosure, pre-18th century irregular enclosure and 19th-20th century plantation. Areas of ancient woodland and informal medieval parkland are concentrated to the north of Great Offley. In the southeast a mixture of pre-18th century, prairie fields with post-1950s boundary loss, and commons with an open margin to the west of Stevenage. Fragmented – remnant hedges often supplemented with post and barbed wire especially where land used for grazing.

Transport Pattern

Character Area crossed by numerous local lanes, which climb up the valley side. A505 crosses at Beech Hill.

Settlements and Built Form

The historic settlement pattern is characterised by sparse settlement consisting of estates and farmsteads. The Character Area is generally too steep for settlement. There are, however, a number of minor settlements or farmsteads southwest of Hitchin.

EVALUATION**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The scarp affords a vantage point for panoramic views over the Langley Valley to the east.

Rarity & distinctiveness

The chalk scarp is a relatively uncommon feature and as such has a distinctive character often also supporting a diverse chalk grassland habitat.

VISUAL IMPACT

Generally unspoilt by development. Long distance views are affected by the relationship to urban fringe areas, especially Stevenage.

ACCESSIBILITY

The Character Area is crossed by numerous roads, tracks and rights of way. The Icknield Way runs along the northern boundary, also crossed by the Hertfordshire Way long distance path, west of Stevenage.

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

| | |
|----------|-----------------------------|
| AONB | The Chilterns |
| LC1 | Landscape Conservation Area |
| SAM HT14 | Minsden Chapel: Langley |

| |
|-------------------|
| EVALUATION |
|-------------------|

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: | Declining/Relic |
| Impact of built development: | Low |
| Impact of land-use change: | Low |

Matrix Score: **Good**

ROBUSTNESS

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Impact of landform: | Prominent |
| Impact of land cover: | Apparent |
| Impact of historic pattern: | Insignificant |
| Visibility from outside: | Widely 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 large scale distinctive landscape with steeply sloping chalk scarp slope. It is rural in character, which would be vulnerable to the addition of built or urbanizing features
- Large scale irregular fields, arable on the gentle slopes and rough grazing on the steeper ground would be vulnerable to lack of management or removal
- A well wooded character area with ancient hanging woodlands along the sides of the scarp, which are vulnerable to lack of management or to removal
- The pattern of narrow, sunken lanes crossing Langley Scarp with associated hedgerows would be vulnerable to improvements to/ upgrading of the roads
- The traditional character of Langley village and the isolated farmsteads within Langley Scarp would be vulnerable to inappropriate or unsympathetic development and any form of development not in scale with the existing settlements
- Areas of surviving chalk grassland and ancient hedgerows, particularly along the rural lanes, are vulnerable to further loss
- Temple Dinsley historic parkland is a registered park and garden that falls partly within this Character Area, which could be at risk from development pressure and inconsistent management
- The A505 and electricity pylons both cross the character area and are detractors to the natural character of Langley Scarp
- Good public access through numerous rights of way, including the Icknield Way and the Hertfordshire Way
- Part of the Character Area falls within the Chilterns AONB

Overall Langley Scarp is considered to be of **moderate to high sensitivity**. The large scale steeply sloping chalk scarp and hanging woodlands create a dramatic landscape with limited urban influence.

Visual Sensitivities

- Open views along the scarp through gaps in vegetation are an important feature of the Character Area
- Panoramic views are common from vantage points over the Langley Valley
- Electricity pylons currently intrude on the skyline within the Character Area
- The edge of Stevenage to the east of the character area is visually intrusive in long distance views

In visual terms, Langley Scarp is considered to be of **moderate to high sensitivity**. Panoramic views from vantage points and views along the scarp are important features within the character area. These would be sensitive to the introduction of built and urbanizing features.

LANDSCAPE VALUE

Overall Langley Scarp is considered to be of **high landscape value**. Aspects of particular value within Langley Scarp are the recognisable sense of place, the striking landform, the visual interest and the visible expressions of the local geology.

EVALUATION

CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT

Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)

This type of development would not be appropriate within Langley Scarp, due to its rural and undeveloped nature. It would introduce a scale of development that would be entirely out of keeping with the Character Area. Large scale development could not be accommodated within Langley Scarp without a significant visual impact on the landscape. The steeply sloping landform would also make major development very difficult to accommodate.

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 largely unsettled character. Visual impacts could be high, due to the panoramic views experienced.

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

Major transport developments/improvements

This type of development would only be appropriate with improvements to the A505 within this Character Area. The majority of routes are rural in character. Upgrading of existing narrow, twisting lanes 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, as there are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. Extensive development would also disrupt the undeveloped scarp and skyline.

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, if they were of an agricultural purpose and in keeping with the rural character. Large buildings, if not carefully located, could erode the rural and undeveloped character of Langley Scarp.

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

Large scale open storage

The landform within Langley Scarp would make it difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses without considerable ground modelling. 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. Extensive development would also disrupt the open views and sloping landform.

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

Mineral extraction/waste disposal

This Character Area is currently relatively undisturbed and rural in appearance. Mineral extraction or waste disposal would not be in keeping. The characteristic landform would also be adversely affected if mineral extraction were to occur.

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 of an agricultural character and in keeping with the rural character. However, due to the existing open and undeveloped character any proposals would need clear justification to avoid the erosion of the rural and contained character of Langley Scarp.

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

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

There are existing urbanising elements within this Character Area at present. The existing electricity pylons are currently detractors in the area. New utilities developments would have a significant impact on the rural character and panoramic views experienced in Langley Scarp. Large scale developments and 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**STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE****Strategy: Conserve and Strengthen****Landscape management guidelines**

- Promote management of ancient woodland to encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Conserve and restore existing hilltop woodlands, copses, shelter belts and existing hedges by restocking to emphasise the prominent natural topography
- Conserve the visually sensitive skylines and rolling slopes from inappropriate land uses, structures and built development
- Recognise and conserve visual relationship with Lowland Village Farmlands
- Promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and areas of semi-natural habitat and the creation of links between habitat areas
- Encourage policies for the safeguarding of existing hedgerows and the creation of new boundaries at appropriate locations, consistent with agricultural management practices
- Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow winding lanes and associated hedge banks, sunken lanes, verges and hedges
- 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
- Encourage the management and development of species rich chalk grassland habitats
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network

Built development guidelines

- Retain the rural character of Langley Scarp, ensuring that the need for any new development is closely scrutinised, appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to Langley Scarp
- Maintain the open character and the long distance views from the Character Area
- 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
- Avoid the location of new development on visually exposed areas of the scarp slopes
- 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