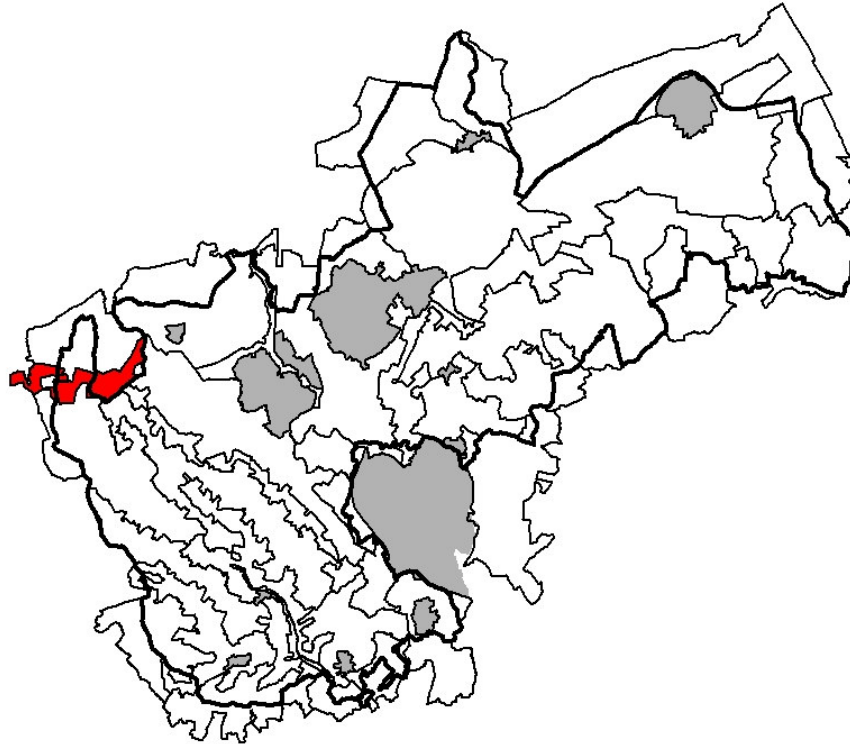


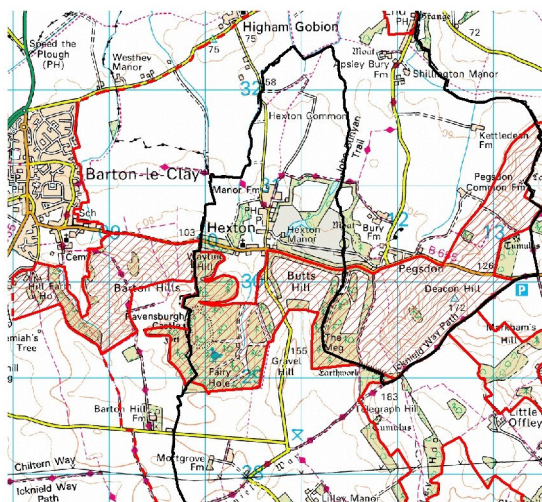
LOCATION



© Crown Copyright. All rights reserved North Hertfordshire District Council LA078794, 2004

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

The Character Area extends in an arc between Barton-le-Clay and Pirton lying partly within and partly outside the District boundary.



© Crown Copyright. All rights reserved North Hertfordshire District Council LA078794, 2004

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Steeply sloping chalk scarp. Arable land along the upper reaches with high proportion of sheep grazing land on the lower slopes. Field sizes vary in scale with sheep grazing areas enclosed by post and barbed wire. Character Area is generally well wooded interspersed with pockets of regenerating scrubland on the lower slopes. Part of the scarp is managed as a chalk grassland SSSI.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Steeply sloping chalk scarp
- Generally well wooded
- Mixed arable and grazing use

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Pegsdon Hill chalk grassland SSSI (Bedfordshire)
- Historic earthworks (Ravensburgh Castle)
- Icknield Way long distance footpath

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

Shallow rendzina soils over Chalk.

Topography

Steeply sloping chalk scarp, gradually becomes shallower further south.

Degree of slope

Typically 1:4.

Altitude range

85m to 175m.

Hydrology

Although the scarp face has been incised by watercourses there are none present other than from chalk springs in the valley south of Hexton.

Land cover and land use

Mixed use arable, grazing and woodland cover.

Vegetation and wildlife

Species-rich chalk grassland and downland on steep-sided escarpments are a key ecological feature. The chalk grassland centred on Hexton, Pirton and Great Offley have been identified as being high biodiversity areas within the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan, and partially represented within this Character Area by the Hexton chalk grasslands. Some parts have been subject to conifer planting and reversion to chalkscrub 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. Good examples of characteristic chalk grassland communities can be found at Devil's Ditch and Hexton Chalk Pit.

Fragments of ancient semi-natural oak/hornbeam woodland occur within this Character Area, such as Burleighcroft Wood.

Wide range of chalk grassland specialist species for example, insects like chalkhill blue and plants such as horseshoe vetch, purple milk vetch, field fleawort, pasque flower and fly orchid in some scrub areas. Area is important for farmland birds. Hexton is important for a variety of bats.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

On the western end of a ridge situated to the southeast of Barton-le-Clay lies the well preserved Iron Age hillfort of Ravensburgh Castle. To the east lies a Bowl Barrow (SAM 20419) at Knocking Knoll.

Field pattern

The historic agricultural landscape comprises a mixture of prairie fields with relict elements within, improved rough pasture, 19th-20th century plantation and prairie fields with post-1950s boundary loss.

Transport pattern

The Character Area is crossed by one road to the west and the B655 forms the northern boundary.

Settlements and built form

The Character Area is too steep for settlement.

EVALUATION**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The scarp affords a vantage point, often being the highest point in the locality for panoramic views over surrounding landscape.

Rarity & distinctiveness

Scarp face is not a common feature and as such has a distinctive character. It also supports a diverse chalk grassland, often classified as SSSI.

VISUAL IMPACT

Generally unspoilt by development.

ACCESSIBILITY

Numerous rights of way. The Icknield Way long distance path crosses the northern part.

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
SSSI	Barton Hills (Beds)
SSSI	Deacon Hill (Beds)
SSSI	Knocking Hoe (Beds)
SAM 8	Ravensburgh Castle: Hexton
SAM 20419	Bowl Barrow at Knocking Knoll 640m E of Pegsdon Common Farm (Beds)

EVALUATION

CONDITION

Land cover change:	Localised
Age structure of tree cover:	Mixed
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	Scattered
Management of semi-natural habitat:	Good
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:	Apparent
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

- Large woodland blocks and areas of hanging woodland are an important feature of the North Hertfordshire part of the Chilterns Scarp and would be vulnerable to lowering water tables, lack of management or removal
- Mature tree belts are present along the limited number of roads within the Character Area. These would be sensitive to removal or road widening schemes
- Arable areas are large scale with limited vegetation and hedgerows. These would be vulnerable to changes in landuse or introduction of extensive new vegetation
- The smoothly undulating and prominent landform highlights the bleached chalky soils would also be highly vulnerable to change
- The predominantly unsettled character of the area would be vulnerable to change
- Areas of surviving chalk grassland on steep side slopes and road verges are vulnerable to further loss
- Limited public access, particularly in North Hertfordshire, with the Icknield Way, the John Bunyan Trail and the Chiltern Way all located outside of North Hertfordshire
- The Iron Age hillfort of Ravensburgh Castle could be at risk from inconsistent management
- The Character Area as a whole falls within the Chilterns AONB

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

Visual Sensitivities

- Open sweeping views and panoramic views along the scarp are an important feature in the eastern part of the Character Area
- Views within the western part of the Character Area, outside North Hertfordshire, are generally contained by vegetation and landform
- A strong visual relationship with Pirton Lowlands, which forms the visual setting to the Chilterns Scarp
- Wooded skylines are an important feature of the Chilterns Scarp and would be sensitive to vegetation removal
- Views within the Character Area are limited as a result of constrained public access

In visual terms, Chilterns Scarp is considered to be of **moderate to high sensitivity**. Views towards the rising scarp slopes from the north across the Pirton Lowlands and across the open areas of the scarp are particularly sensitive to development.

LANDSCAPE VALUE

Overall Chilterns Scarp is considered to be of **high landscape value**. Aspects of particular value within Chilterns Scarp are the distinctive sense of place, the striking landform, the relationship between landform and vegetation, memorable views, 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 Chilterns 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 towards the scarp slope. The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered to be low.

Major transport developments/improvements

This type of development would not generally be appropriate within this Character Area, due to the largely rural character of most routes at present. 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.

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 is very limited capacity for sympathetically located and designed individual large buildings, if they were of an agricultural nature or vernacular in form and style and in keeping with the rural character. Large buildings, if not carefully located, could erode the rural and undeveloped character of the Chilterns Scarp.

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

Large scale open storage

The landform within Chilterns 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, woodland blocks and sloping 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 undisturbed and rural in appearance. Mineral extraction or waste disposal would not be in keeping. The characteristic landform, woodland and vegetation pattern would also be adversely affected if mineral extraction were to occur. There would also be major visual impacts.

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 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 nature or vernacular in form and style 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 wooded character of Chilterns Scarp.

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

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

There are no existing structures that act as detractors within this Character Area at present. New utilities developments would have a significant impact on the rural character and panoramic views towards the Chilterns Scarp.

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

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

STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE

Strategy: Conserve and Strengthen

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
- Encourage policies for the safeguarding of existing hedgerows and the creation of new boundaries at appropriate locations, consistent with agricultural management practices
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network
- Encourage the management and restoration of species rich chalk grasslands

Built development guidelines

- Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow winding lanes and associated hedge banks, sunken lanes, verges and hedges
- Retain the rural character of the Chilterns Scarp, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to Chilterns Scarp
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or copses
- 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