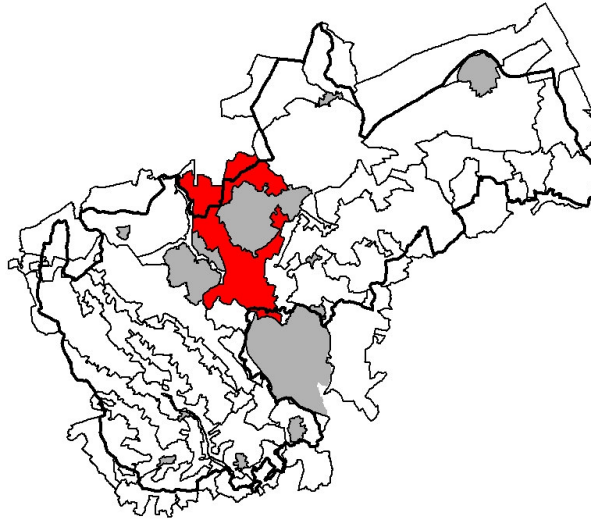


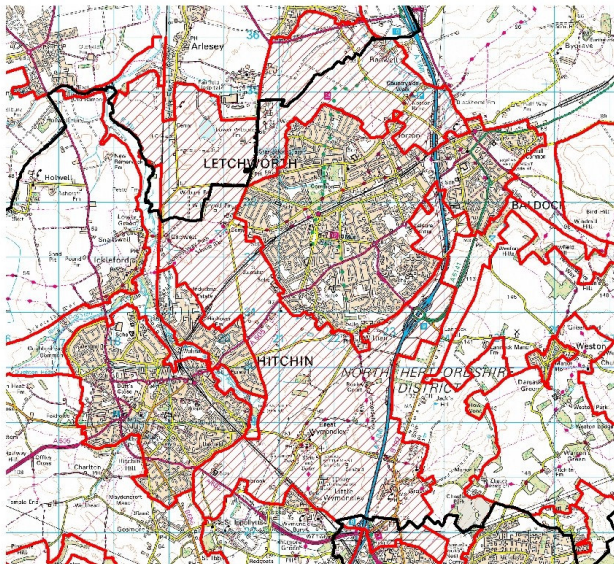
LOCATION



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

The Character Area encloses Letchworth on its southern, western and northern sides. Part to the north is outside of the District boundary. The northeastern corner includes a short length of the River Ivel.



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

To the south the rolling landform in a fold running north-south gradually merges into the gently undulating to low lying landform to the north.

There is a gradual change in character between the enclosed historic landscape in the south and the large scale open, exposed arable landscape in the north. Southern section is characterised by scattered small plantations and copses whilst to the north there are very few hedges and trees but linear shelter belts feature. The River Ivel corridor has a mature woodland setting and has been partly developed for recreational purposes.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Large flat expansive arable landscape in the north
- Rolling arable landscape of large scale fields and with relatively few trees in the south
- Core defined by the urban development of Letchworth and Hitchin

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Well wooded valley landscape of the Ivel valley
- Former mineral workings at Blue Lagoon (Bedfordshire)
- Golf course landscape at Letchworth Hall Hotel
- Historic settlements at Great Wymondley
- Sewage works at Pix Brook
- A1(M) runs parallel to eastern boundary
- Mill house and lake on River Ivel at Radwell

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

Free draining loamy brown soils over Chalk but locally acidic on glacial gravels in the centre and south, and thin rendzinas where Chalk reaches the surface.

Topography

Relatively low lying basin - flat to gently undulating in the north merging into rolling landform further south. Spur at Wilbury Hill.

Degree of slope

Varies between 1:50 in the north to 1:20 in the south.

Altitude range

50m to 90m.

Hydrology

A number of minor water courses flow towards the River Purwell (Hitchin) or the River Ivel, to the north of Letchworth. The chalk springs of the Ivel rise from Melbourne Rock north of Baldock. Ponds are restricted to Norton and Wymondley on Boulder Clay.

Land cover and land use

The dominant land use is arable with pockets of horse grazing on urban fringes. Localised pockets of amenity use eg. golf course & caravan parks.

Vegetation and wildlife

Woodlands are limited to a few rectangular shaped plantations. A few remaining gappy hedgerows include hornbeam, blackthorn and elm. Other roadside trees include poplar, sycamore, horse chestnut and ash. The course of the River Ivel has a greater variety of species including alder, ash, willow, sycamore, beech, dogwood, horse chestnut and extensive poplar plantations.

This Character Area has a sparse covering of recorded ecologically interesting sites.

The Wilbury Hills have a variety of soil types supporting unimproved acid, neutral and calcareous grasslands supporting the most westerly occurrence of Breckland type grasslands in Britain including the nationally scarce purple-stemmed cat's-tail grass. The underlying substrate is chalk capped with sand and glacial deposits of gravel. Some old meadows with interesting herbaceous species are present in the vicinity of Rosehill Hospital. An area of unimproved neutral grassland occurs within the grounds of Letchworth Golf Course, along with scrub, copses and a

stream.

The River Ivel has some ecologically interesting stretches of marginal and bankside vegetation in the very northeast otherwise wetland habitats are very limited but include marsh and fen along the Pix Brook, full herb fen and willow carr in the Ivel Springs area, spring-fed ponds at Wymondley Priory, reedbed north of Letchworth.

Species-rich road verges with flora typical of chalky substrates occur within the Character Area, eg at Norton Road. Ridge and furrow fields occur rarely, and are indicative of a long continuity of grassland cover. They frequently have a high diversity of plant species.

Kingfisher and wintering water rail may be seen on the Ivel along with grass snake generally rare in north Hertfordshire. Old allotments at Baldock are known for uncommon plants including the nationally scarce cornflower. Sulphur clover is recorded from the verge of Norton Road and several other localities.

Willian is important for pipistrelle, serotine and brown long-eared bats. Norton Pond is important for great crested newts. Wilbury Hills is important for common lizards. Radwell meadows are important grassland for birds, bats and water voles.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The area to the north of Letchworth contains evidence of prehistoric, Roman and medieval activity. A prehistoric round barrow and ring ditch lie directly to the south of Radwell. There has been a manor (Radwell House) and mill at Radwell for over 1000 years. In close proximity to the northern perimeter of Letchworth are cropmarks of an enclosure and linear ditches and a medieval settlement containing earthworks and the 12th century church of St Nicholas. A settlement of unknown date lies within a complex of enclosures and linear ditches to the north of Baldock. To the northwest of Letchworth an area of earthworks describes well preserved ridge and furrow.

On the western margins of Letchworth a slight univallate hillfort is situated on Wilbury Hill. This feature is set within a complex of other prehistoric earthworks consisting of eleven ring ditches, Neolithic long barrow and large burial mound. Two bowl barrows lie to the southern end of the complex.

ASSESSMENT

Prehistoric sites to the south of Letchworth consist of two prehistoric ring ditches, three prehistoric ring ditches (east of Hitchin) and evidence for Iron Age occupation. A Roman villa lies on the eastern margin of Hitchin within a landscape containing two prehistoric ring ditches. Romano-British material is also documented at Great Wymondley.

There are several medieval sites in the south. During the reign of Edward the Confessor 8 hides in Great Wymondley were held by the church of St. Mary of Chatteris and by 1086 King William held 8 hides. On the southern periphery of Letchworth lies the remains of the 12th century church of All Saints belonging to the medieval settlement of Willian which is recorded in the Domesday Book as Willie. This manor was held by Lewric, a house-carl, during the reign of Edward the Confessor and by 1086 was in the possession of Geoffrey de Bech. At the southern edge of the area lies Great Wymondley Castle which consists of motte and bailey, associated manorial enclosure and 12th century church of St. Mary. To the southwest are situated the remains of a medieval moated site, and a former hospital and Augustinian house – Wymondley Priory.

Field pattern

The historic agricultural landscape comprises a mixture of prairie fields with post-1950s boundary loss, 18th century and later enclosure, post-1950s enclosure, prairie fields with relict elements within, and 18th century irregular enclosure. Today few hedges remain and field sizes are generally large. Field pattern is regular, geometric often laid out at broadly 90 degrees to the straight road alignments.

Tansport pattern

Roads in the north run in long straight sections across the landscape. In the south, adjacent to the historic settlement of Great Wymondley, the roads are winding lanes. The A1(M) cuts across the eastern part and there are a number of railway lines mainly on embankment.

Settlements and built form

The Character Area is confined between the urban fringes of Letchworth and Hitchin. To the south lies the historic settlement of Great Wymondley. The northern part generally sparsely settled with a number of modern farmsteads accessed off the road network. The historic settlement pattern is characterised by villages with a monastic centre to the south serving as a focus for medieval development. Traditional buildings date from the 17th century and include the early 17th century timber framed Wymondley Hall. Near the church at Willian is a small timber-framed cottage and Punchardon Hall (Guysfield Residential Home) a 17th century house of timber with an 18th century 7 bay brick façade. In the north is Radwell House dating from the 17th century with 19th century alterations and Radwell Mill, 19th century with major alterations by Geoffrey Lucas in 1907.

EVALUATION

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

Large scale open landscape which provides views to the often poorly screened urban fringes of Letchworth, Hitchin and the A1(M).

Rarity & distinctiveness

This landscape type is not rare and is exhibiting typical pressures associated with urban fringe use.

VISUAL IMPACT

Urban fringe is prominent in numerous locations as is the impact of the A1(M). Other road and rail corridors are dominant features in the landscape. Sewage works to the north of Letchworth and northeast of Hitchin (disused).

ACCESSIBILITY

The Character Area is crossed by a network of footpaths mainly connecting urban areas and smaller settlements. The Icknield Way and the Hertfordshire Way long distance paths cross 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

- LC2 Landscape Conservation Area
- SAM 90 Roman villa: (Site of) 300m N or Nine Springs
- SAM 104 Settlement site: S of Baldock Farm
- SAM 20615 Barrow S of Radwell
- SAM 20636 2 bowl barrows: 500m S of Fearnhill School
- SAM 20637 Great Wymondley Castle a motte and bailey castle and associated manorial enclosure 20m east of St. Mary's Church: Wymondley
- SAM 27908 Radwell Roman villa: Radwell
- SAM 29387 Slight univallate hillfort at Wilbury Hill: Letchworth
- SAM HT11518 Wymondley Priory, barn, moat, associated earthworks, enclosures, platforms, Holloway and conduit head: Wymondley

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: Moderate
 Impact of land-use change: Moderate

Matrix Score: Moderate

ROBUSTNESS

Impact of landform: Apparent
 Impact of land cover: Apparent
 Impact of historic pattern: Prominent
 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

- The character area is largely rural but is influenced by the pressures of urban areas and significant infrastructure systems. The core of the area is defined by the extents of Hitchin and Letchworth and would be vulnerable to development pressure. However the area should be retained as a green wedge between the two towns.
- There is a gradual change in landform and character from historic enclosed rolling arable landscape of the south to flat expansive arable fields in the north, creating a fragmented landscape character. The south of the character area would be vulnerable to loss of its historic character
- The character area has large arable fields with geometric regular patterns. The majority of boundary hedgerows to the north have been removed. The character area would be vulnerable to further removal of any existing field boundaries
- Smaller paddocks and horsiculture fields are found in close proximity to the settlements and would be vulnerable to development
- The southern area is characterised by the limited woodland of the character area. Generally in the form of small copses associated with isolated settlements. The woodland is vulnerable to lack of management or removal
- The southern area is also characterised by winding lanes with tall hedgerows and some hedge banks, particularly adjacent to the historic settlement of Great Wymondley. The area would be vulnerable to improvements or upgrading of the minor roads or any removal of the hedgerows
- The River Ivel crosses the north east of the character area. It is a well vegetated corridor including Alder, Ash, Willow, Sycamore and Beech. The removal or inconsistent management of these corridors would be detrimental to the character area.
- Recreation facilities in the area such as Letchworth Golf course add to the

urbanised characteristics. The character area is vulnerable to further conversion of natural elements into recreational facilities

- Electricity pylons stride through the character area in the south and Pix Brook sewage works in the north are existing detractors to the character of the area.
- The transport infrastructure is also a detractor. The A1 Borders the character area to the east and the area is crossed by a number of further busy roads. The railway also cuts through the character area. The area is vulnerable to further degradation from the removal of any existing screening
- There is generally limited public access through rights of way. However it does include sections of the Icknield Way, the Hertfordshire Way and Letchworth Garden City Greenway.

Overall Arlesey – Great Wymondley is considered to be of **low sensitivity**. There is significant urban influence and numerous landscape detractors.

Visual Sensitivities

- Views of the countryside from the settlements are an important feature of the Character Area
- The small woodland copses and hedgerows to the south maintain the more enclosed historic character of the area
- Expansive views from higher ground create a sense of space and openness. However the views are not always high quality
- However existing urban edges are often raw, with scope for mitigation through screening with treebelts

In visual terms, Arlesey – Great Wymondley is considered to be of **low to moderate sensitivity**. Views are relatively open and would be sensitive to the introduction of further urbanizing features or elements, which detract from the character.

EVALUATION

LANDSCAPE VALUE

Overall Arlesey – Great Wymondley is considered to be of **low landscape value**. Adverse aspects within Arlesey – Great Wymondley are the large number of roads and transport routes and the presence of significant settlement to the fringes.

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 character and the role of the land in separation Hitchin and Letchworth. It would be of an inappropriate scale and would introduce elements that would further urbanise the landscape, altering the character and removing the existing key characteristics.

The landscape capacity for major urban extensions or new settlements is considered to be low.

Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)

This type of development could be appropriate within this Character Area, adjacent to the existing settlements of Hitchin and Letchworth. Some small scale expansion should be carefully designed and in keeping with the existing character of the area while still retaining the importance of the separation between settlements.

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

Major transport developments/improvements

This type of development would only be appropriate for improvements of the existing infrastructure such as the A1 and railway lines. However it would be imperative that the existing shelterbelts were maintained or replaced. Upgrading of existing rural roads could erode the character of the landscape. Additional traffic would also further affect the tranquillity of the more rural sections of the Character Area. The landscape capacity for major transport developments/improvements is considered to be 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.

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 should be balanced by shelterbelts and hedgerows.

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

Large scale open uses

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

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

Mineral extraction/waste disposal

Whilst some small scale mineral extraction could be accommodated with careful design and mitigation measures, larger scale extraction would not be in keeping with the character of Arlesey – Great Wymondley. The minor roads may need 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 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 within the Character

Area, particularly if they were in keeping with the existing character and incorporated into existing settlements. However any proposals would need clear justification to avoid the erosion of the open gap between Hitchin and Letchworth and the rural character, particularly in the south of the character area. The landscape capacity for incremental small scale developments is considered to be moderate.

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

There are existing urbanising elements within this Character Area at present. The existing busy infrastructure system and electricity pylons are currently detractors in the area. New utilities developments would have an impact on the more intimate scale and rural character associated with the south of the character area, particularly adjacent to Great Wymondley. 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

Nb. These guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire

STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE
Strategy: Conserve and Restore
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
- Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow winding lanes and associated hedge banks, sunken lanes, verges and hedges
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network
- Encourage and develop the diversity of tree planting along the River Ivel
- In the south encourage the development of species-rich calcareous grassland habitats
- Encourage woodland planting, in small copses, around the fringes of sub-urban settlements
- Encourage small blocks of woodland planting along the A1 corridor and especially around Junction 9
- Manage areas of paddocks and promote appropriate enclosures with hedges rather than wire fences
- Encourage the management of Oak and Hornbeam coppice

Built development guidelines

- Conserve the traditional character of Great Wymondley and Graveley villages, ensuring that any development located on the edge of the village uses appropriate vernacular materials and features to avoid inappropriate visual intrusion
- Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow winding lanes and associated hedge banks, sunken lanes, verges and hedges where present
- Encourage the retention of vegetation along infrastructure routes to ensure that it remains screened
- Encourage the planting of appropriate broadleaved woodland and vegetation to screen any new development that could intrude in panoramic rural views
- Avoid the location of new development in visual intrusive locations.
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or hedgerows
- Ensure that where appropriate new development provides mitigation for itself and where possible existing intrusive features in the vicinity
- Ensure that lighting associated with new development does not create additional urbanising influences on the character Area
- Use the opportunity of any developments to create new accessible green infrastructure