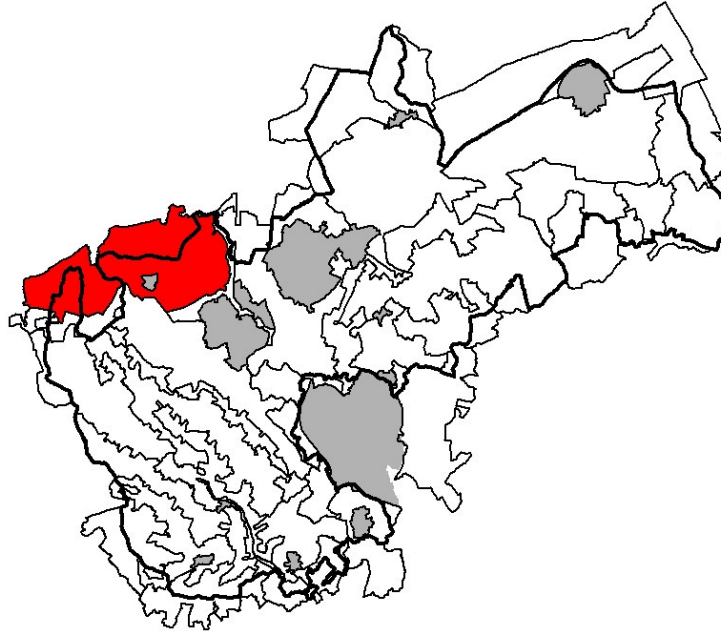


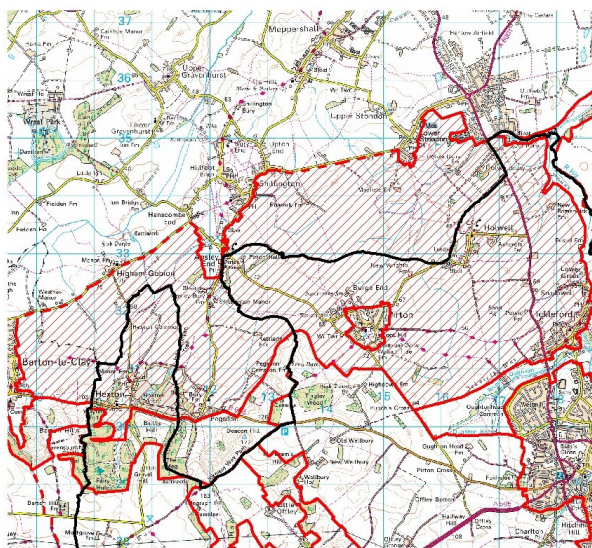
LOCATION



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

Lowland area to the north of the Chiltern scarp, extends from Barton le Clay in the west to the Purwell Valley in the east. Approximately half is outside the District boundary.



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Large scale open, flat farming landscape given over predominantly to arable production. Long distance views of features such as water towers, churches and the chalk scarp. Remnant hedges, gappy and predominantly hawthorn but with occasional mature trees. Hedges generally well trimmed. Very little woodland cover except adjacent to settlements. Settlement pattern is nucleated with older settlements maintaining the use of local vernacular materials. Occasional farmsteads are less well integrated in terms of materials and general scale of farm buildings. Additionally the A600, Bedford Road, is quite prominent in the east.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Large scale open flat farmland landscape
- Arable production
- Remnant hedgerows
- Woodland shelter around settlements

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Hexton Manor and Gardens
- A600 Bedford Road

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

Free draining, loaming brown soils over Chalk and Chalk Marl below the scarp merge into the Gault Clay plain of Bedfordshire.

Topography

Flat, low lying but with a gentle fall to the north.

Degree of slope

Imperceptible.

Altitude range

55m to 65m.

Hydrology

A number of local streams at Hexton and Pirton rising from the foot of the Chalk scarp to the south run northwards across the Character Area feeding minor tributaries of the river Ivel. Spring fed moats and ponds occurs at Pirton, Holwell and Hexton.

Land cover and land use

The land use is given over predominantly to arable production. Very little woodland cover except that associated with local settlements, eg plantations of beech and sycamore at Hexton and Pirton Grange. Occasional pasture on fringes of settlements.

Vegetation and wildlife

Remnant hedgerows include ash, willow and poplar trees. Hedges mainly hawthorn. Other roadside trees include ash, sycamore and occasional oak. White willows mark watercourses.

This is a predominantly arable Character Area on flat ground. Arable plants such as pansies and cornsalads have become increasingly rare as agricultural practices have intensified, however, they can still be found at a few locations within the Character Area. Mature trees and the standing or fallen deadwood associated with them are very valuable from an ecological perspective supporting communities of saprophytic invertebrates and saproxylic animals in decline in the wider countryside. Hexton Manor Park has some of this wood pasture habitat.

White clawed cray fish have been recorded in watercourses near Hexton and otters to the north.

Hexton and Toot Hill are very important for bats (Natterers, Daubentons, pipistrelle and brown long-eared) and great crested newts.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The Domesday Survey records that Pirton was assessed at 10 hides and of these 2 hides were in demesne. At the village of Pirton itself there is a preserved motte and bailey castle (Toot Hill) and the 12th century parish church of St. Mary. An Anglo-Saxon cemetery is documented and to the northeast at Rectory Farm is a medieval moated site, and a Scheduled Ancient Monument. In the 13th century the manor of Ickleford was held by the lords of Pirton as a quarter of the knight's fee by the family of Foliot. A medieval settlement site lies on the northwest perimeter of Ickleford and contains the 12th century church of St. Katherine. Prehistoric and Romano-British sites represented by ring ditches, occupation material and burials are located between Pirton and Ickleford. The village of Hexton is recorded in the Domesday Book as Hegestanestone and contains a 13th century church of St. Faith. Cropmarks of a rectangular enclosure are situated to the west and a medieval moated lies to the south of Shillington.

Field patterns

The historic agricultural landscape comprises a mixture of prairie fields with relict elements within, prairie fields with post-1950s boundary loss and post-1950s enclosure. 18th century and later enclosure is concentrated to the northeast of Pirton and pre-18th century enclosure and informal medieval parkland to the south of Shillington. Today there are patchy unmanaged hedges, few hedgerow trees and large-scale remnant field pattern.

Transport pattern

Roads follow the older pattern of winding lanes but with more recent straight roads cutting across the area. The A600 Bedford Road is visible in the surrounding landscape.

Settlements and built form

The historic settlement pattern is characterised by villages, estates and farms. Some more recent ribbon development at Holwell and the A600 Bedford Road. There are large scale farmstead developments. Many fine traditional buildings occur particularly in and around the nucleated settlement of Pirton. Examples here date from the 16th century and include a range of types and materials. The stone built Rectory Farm was apparently once the manor house of the rectory manor and has attached barns

ASSESSMENT

including a tithe barn of 16th century origin. Other examples include Old Hall which is built of flint with brick quoins and stone dressings, Hammonds Farm of timber and brick, c.1600 and the moated courtyard house of Pirton Grange is also dated to c.1600. An exception in the use of building materials can be found at the moated manor house of Old Ramerick, Ickleford which has a 17th century wing built of clunch with brick quoins.

EVALUATION

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

Bland, featureless, vast scale landscape with remnant hedges. Farmsteads tend to be large scale and dominant features not integrated in to the landscape. Vehicles on the A600 prominent in the landscape.

Rarity & distinctiveness

This landscape type is not common in this part of the District. It is, however a common feature of the lowlands landscape to the north.

VISUAL IMPACT

Local farmsteads in modern materials are a prominent feature in the landscape. Vehicles on the A600.

ACCESSIBILITY

A number of footpaths radiate out from Pirton village across the surrounding landscape. The area is generally well served by public rights of way.

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 11568	Pirton Grange moated enclosure and associated settling pond: Pirton
SAM 13612	Toot Hill motte and bailey castle and shrunken medieval village: Pirton
SAM 20648	Moated site and associated enclosure at Rectory Farm: Pirton
GD 1907	Hexton Manor

EVALUATION

CONDITION

Land cover change:	Widespread
Age structure of tree cover:	Mixed
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	Relic
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:	Poor
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ROBUSTNESS

Impact of landform:	Apparent
Impact of land cover:	Prominent
Impact of historic pattern:	Prominent
Visibility from outside:	Widely visible
Sense of enclosure:	Open
Visual unity:	Coherent
Distinctiveness/rarity:	Frequent

Matrix Score:	Weak
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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 low lying, flat, large scale rural character area, approximately half of which is outside the district boundary
- Settlements are generally small and nucleated in pattern, characterised by vernacular materials. The character area would be vulnerable to inappropriate or unsympathetic development and any proposals that are not in scale with the existing settlements
- There is very little woodland cover except shelterbelts adjacent to settlements, which create a balance in the landscape for the built form. The area would be vulnerable to the removal of the shelterbelts
- The character area consists mainly of large-scale arable fields with fragmented remnant hedgerows as boundary vegetation. Many hedgerows have been removed and this has degraded the landscape. The area would be vulnerable to the removal of hedgerows and boundary vegetation
- Farmsteads and isolated settlements are generally large and less well integrated into the landscape. The scale of the farm buildings should be balanced with shelterbelts. Pirton Lowlands character would be further diluted if any existing shelterbelts were removed
- The older rural roads are quiet and winding. They were traditionally enclosed by hedgerows. However some hedgerows have been removed and other include dead elm. The character area would be sensitive to improvements/upgrading of the rural roads or further removal of associated vegetation
- The larger roads such as the A600 are detractors in the area, which are associated with linear developments. These features dilute the character of the area
- Watercourses cross the character area and have associated vegetation. Removal of these would be detrimental to the character of the area.
- Shillington Manor and Hexton Manor create a parkland character in areas within Pirton Lowlands, typically with specimen trees. These areas could be at risk from development pressure and unsympathetic management
- Horsiculture paddocks are also present and associated with settlements. Hedgerows are have been replaced by post and rail fencing. The area is vulnerable to the further loss of hedgerow boundary treatment
- The character area includes some historic features such as a preserved Motte and Bailey castle at Toot Hill, a medieval moated site and scheduled ancient monuments. These features could be at risk from development pressure and inconsistent management
- Pirton Lowlands characteristics creates a strong contrasting relationship with the neighbouring scarp slope, which should be preserved
- Relatively good public access through several rights of way including the John Bunyan Trail and the Icknield Way
- A small part of the area is within the Chilterns AONB

Overall Pirton Lowlands are considered to be of **moderate to low sensitivity**. The low lying, flat large arable fields, vegetated water courses and areas of parkland character create a quiet rural character. However there has been some degradation due to loss of hedgerows and field patterns and the busy main roads.

**Suggested Draft text to add to Evaluation and Guidelines sections
of Landscape Character Areas of North Herts LCA**

The Landscape Partnership March 2011

location	assessment	evaluation	guidelines	PIRTON LOWLANDS	Area 218
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EVALUATION

Visual Sensitivities

- Expansive views are possible throughout the character area
- The character area consists of significant views towards the neighbouring chalk scarp
- The small shelterbelts break up the views across the landscape and create a sense of enclosure around the settlements
- Shillington and Hexton Manor form local landmarks

In visual terms, Pirton Lowlands is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. Views within the character area and towards the neighbouring chalk scarp are relatively open and would be sensitive to the introduction of urbanizing features.

LANDSCAPE VALUE

Overall Pirton Lowlands is considered to be of **low landscape value**. Aspects of particular value within Pirton Lowlands are the relative lack of incongruous elements and remote character with expansive views. However, the influence of human activity is very noticeable within the Character Area and there is a lack of a distinctive sense of place.

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location	assessment	evaluation	guidelines	PIRTON LOWLANDS	Area 218
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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 and undeveloped character. It would be of an inappropriate scale and would introduce elements that would urbanise the landscape, altering the character and removing the existing key characteristics. Increased housing development would be likely to affect the existing rural roads, which could erode the character of the landscape.

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

Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)

This type of development would not be suitable for the Character Area, due to its rural character.

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

Major transport developments/improvements

This type of development would only be appropriate for improvements of the existing A600 within this Character Area. However it would be imperative that associated hedgerows and shelterbelts were maintained or replaced. Upgrading of existing rural roads 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 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. Any upgrading of the existing network would cause damage to the landscape character.

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 to reflect the existing character of the area.

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

Large scale open storage

The rural character of Pirton Lowlands would make it difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses without significant impact. 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 minor roads are unlikely to have capacity to accommodate development or would need considerable upgrading to be able to accept larger volumes of traffic and/or HGVs, which would further dilute the landscape character.

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

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location	assessment	evaluation	guidelines	PIRTON LOWLANDS	Area 218
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EVALUATION

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 open character of Pirton Lowlands. The minor roads would need considerable 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 may be some capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were vernacular in style and form and in keeping with the rural character. In addition, carefully planned small scale expansion or infilling of the existing settlements could be appropriate. However, due to the existing open and undeveloped character any proposals would need clear justification to avoid the potential erosion of the rural character of Pirton Lowlands.

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

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

There are very few urbanising elements within this Character Area at present. There are currently few detractors in the areas. New utilities developments or structures such as masts or wind turbines would have a major impact on the rural character of Pirton Lowlands. Large scale developments, tall elements such as these would be highly visible within the Character Area, as well as potentially visible in surrounding Character Areas.

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

**Suggested Draft text to add to Evaluation and Guidelines sections
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The Landscape Partnership March 2011

location	assessment	evaluation	guidelines	PIRTON LOWLANDS	Area 218
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GUIDELINES

Nb. These guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire

STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE

Strategy: Reconstruct

Landscape management guidelines

- Promote planting of new woodland to encourage a diverse woodland flora especially in relation to sub-urban fringe areas
- For existing woodlands, encourage diverse woodland management practice and replanting of conifer plantations with new deciduous woodlands
- Promote the creation of buffer zones between areas of 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 fields hedges in place of post and wire fencing to new grazing areas
- Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow winding lanes and associated hedgerows and verges
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network
- Encourage the development of unimproved species-rich grassland habitats
- Promote the creation of new ponds and the retention of existing ponds for wildlife
- Encourage the planting of shelter belts
- Encourage the planting of trees and other appropriate vegetation along watercourses
- Recognise and conserve the visual foreground relationship to the prominent chalk scarp
- Maintain the distinctiveness of river corridors from adjacent arable land
- Manage areas of new paddocks and promote appropriate enclosures with hedges rather than wire fencing

Built development guidelines

- Conserve the traditional character of the settlements, ensuring that any development located on the edge of or within the villages uses appropriate vernacular materials and features to avoid inappropriate visual intrusion
- Protect and preserve the pattern of rural lanes and associated hedgerows
- Encourage the planting of appropriate broadleaved woodland and vegetation to screen new development that could intrude in panoramic rural views
- Retain the rural character of Pirton Lowlands, 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
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or the loss of surviving species-rich grassland habitats and ancient hedgerows
- Ensure that lighting associated with new development does not create additional urbanising influences on the character Area
- Conserve the open chalk landscape with its expansive views protecting the landscape from inappropriate land uses, structures and built development which would conflict with openness