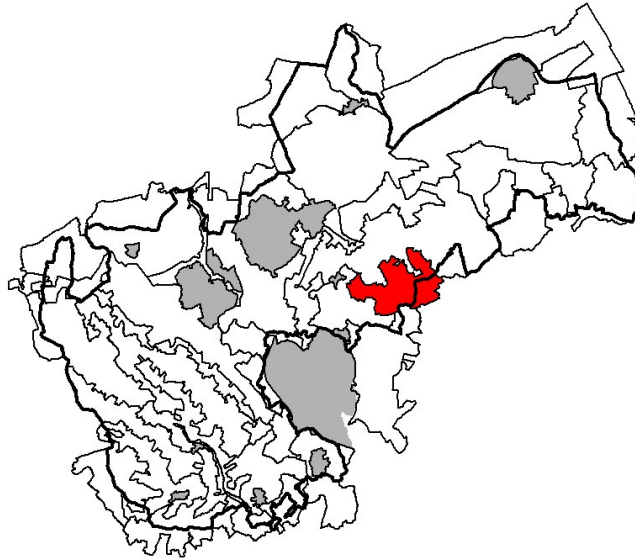


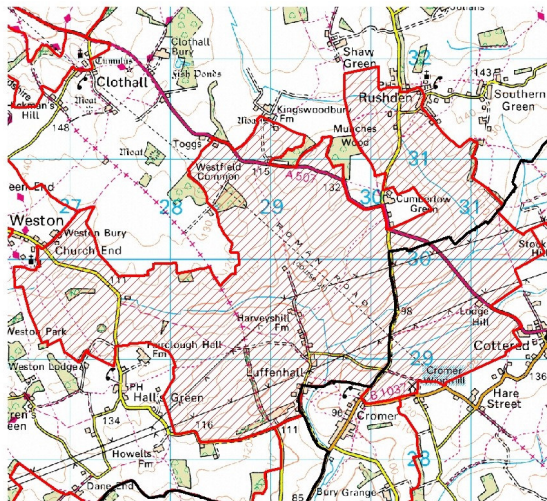
LOCATION



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

The Character Area comprises the upper headwaters of the River Beane which continues to the south of the District within a previously identified Character Area – The Middle Beane Valley (Character Area 39). The Upper Beane Valley Tributaries are mainly the three upper arms of the valley that rise at Rushden village, Kingswoodbury and Church End to the east of Weston. All three tributaries join the main valley at Luffenhall. There is also a smaller local catchment to the west of Walkern (within Character Area 39) which extends to the east of Stevenage. Part of this Character Area lies outside the District.



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Incised chalk landscape with water courses. Predominantly arable land use, organic enclosure pattern associated with an irregular network of winding lanes to the north and west of Luffenhall. The Beane valley to the north and west has regular rectilinear field boundaries often curving, set within an earlier organic pattern of boundaries.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Bowl like landform comprising steeply sloping chalk valley sides incised by a network of water courses
- Arable land use
- Irregular pattern, of medium to large sized fields
- Scattered hedgerows and waterside trees
- Small blocks of relict ancient woodland on the upper slopes
- Sparse settlement

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Extensive areas of former common land
- Pylon lines cut across the valley

ASSESSMENT

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES**Geology & soils**

Chalk overlain by Boulder Clay and generally free draining loamy brown soils.

Topography

Chalk valley incised into plateau landscape.

Degree of slope

Typically between 1:10 – 1:20.

Altitude range

125m at head of valley. Valley continues to fall well past district boundary.

Hydrology

Numerous incised streams and tributaries. Main catchment is the valley of the River Beane. Ponds are rare.

Land cover and land use

Predominantly arable.

Vegetation and wildlife

Moat at Cottered is important for great crested newts. Open field system is important for brown hares and woodland is important for fallow deer. Spring cereal crops and grazed grassland is important for skylarks, lapwings, quail and corn bunting.

Lolleywood Green Lane contains neutral grassland and an ancient species-rich hedgerow, part of a network of ancient hedge lined lanes.

Limited woodland includes Southern Green Copse and Chalk Pit comprising ancient semi-natural woodland coppice with a disused chalk pit.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

No recorded archaeology. Cropmarks of ditches and enclosures of unknown date and function are known from aerial photographs and lie towards the west. At Luffenhall, to the east, finds of Romano-British cremations indicate that a cemetery may be present.

While the present day settlement pattern has medieval origins there is evidence that the landscape has been exploited since the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age. This includes cropmarks, visible on aerial photographs, of field systems and enclosures of varying date and function, and of possible plough-raised burial mounds of Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date. There are also records of a Late Bronze Age hoard from Cumberlow Green (the name means 'burial mound of the Welsh'), of a Romano-British settlement and cremation cemetery south of Kingswoodbury, and Roman finds from all of these

parishes. By the late Iron Age and Roman periods the area was crossed by the Roman road that linked Baldock and Braughing.

Field Pattern

The historic agricultural landscape pattern consists of a mixture of pre-18th century irregular enclosure, prairie fields with 1950s boundary loss and pre 18th century unenclosed common arable. Post 1950s enclosure lies to the south and 20th century leisure to the east. There are pockets of 19th – 20th century plantation.

The field systems of the area originally mainly comprised unenclosed common arable fields, such as Luffenhall Common and Kipple Field, and smaller 'irregular' enclosure fields, both systems being established before the 18th century. An extensive block of these irregular fields has survived west of Cumberlow Green, together with an area of informal parkland once associated with Cumberlow Manor. 'Irregularly' enclosed fields also survive north of Luffenhall Common. The remainder, primarily areas north of Cromer, around Hall's Green and south of Rushden, is now 20th century 'prairie' fields. There is little pasture or woodland in the area and it is evident that woodland cover was already slight by the later 19th century, due to the long term use of the area for arable cultivation.

Transport Pattern

The Character Area is bounded by narrow winding lanes to the north and west but is not crossed by any roads.

Settlements and Built Form

There are no significant present day settlement nuclei within the area, since the larger villages, Cottered and Weston (including Church End), lie outside its boundary towards the heads of the open valleys that form the area, and the village of Rushden, partly within it, is little more than a hamlet. All of these settlements predate the Norman Conquest, and Anglo-Saxon occupation in the area is also evidenced by several distinctive place-names.

While the current network of dispersed farmsteads and houses reflects a settlement pattern established in the medieval period, there is also evidence of settlement shift and decline. Rydals Wood contains an abandoned moated site, Cumberlow Green is the site of a manorial settlement and manor house, and there is evidence of medieval occupation spanning the 12th – 15th centuries south of Church End, Weston.

EVALUATION

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

Expansive open areas of arable farmland which are relatively tranquil.

Rarity & distinctiveness

Landscape type not uncommon.

VISUAL IMPACT

Area generally has little development. Edge of Stevenage well screened by woodland. Luffenhall on the Character Area boundary – locally prominent development.

Cromer Windmill just outside the Character Area to the southwest is a prominent landmark.

ACCESSIBILITY

Well served by local network of winding lanes, tracks and 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

LC2 Landscape Conservation Area

EVALUATION

CONDITION

Land cover change: Localised
 Age structure of tree cover: Mixed
 Extent of semi-natural habitat survival: Scattered
 Management of semi-natural habitat: Poor
 Survival of cultural pattern: Interrupted
 Impact of built development: Low
 Impact of land-use change: Low

Matrix Score: **Good**

ROBUSTNESS

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

Matrix Score: **Weak**

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

- With a largely rural, quiet and remote character throughout the Upper Beane Valley Tributaries would be vulnerable to the addition of urbanizing features
- The character area is a bowl shaped, incised chalk landscape. The tributaries branch from three arms of the valley that join the main valley at Luffenhall. The tributaries are significant features of the area and the loss of character or lack of management would be detrimental to the area
- The landuse is predominantly large arable fields, in an organic field pattern. Hedgerows are the traditional boundary treatment although a number of hedges have been lost. The area is vulnerable to the loss of hedgerow boundary treatment
- The area is characterised by vegetation following the lines of the watercourses. The loss of this characteristic would be detrimental to the area
- There are conifers and belts of poplars surrounding isolated properties and farmsteads. The character area is sensitive to the loss of associated vegetation, which balances the built form
- The area is tranquil with very limited roads. The A505 passes through but its still follows a largely unimproved alignment. Other roads that are present are winding rural lanes with hedge banks and hedgerows. However some of these are gappy or have been removed. The character area is vulnerable to further loss of these features
- Upper Beane Valley Tributaries has limited woodland. However the woodland, which is present is predominantly small blocks of relict ancient deciduous woodland. Removal or poor management of these habitats would be detrimental to the character of the area
- There is little development in the area, with generally isolated properties found on the lower ground. The largest settlement in the character area is Luffenhall, which is only a hamlet of rural character, with typically

large detached dwellings with white rendered walls and steeply pitched tiled roofs or black weatherboard barn structures set in large plots. The character area is vulnerable to inappropriate or unsympathetic development and any form of development not in scale with the area

- Electricity pylons stride through the character area and are an existing detractor to Upper Beane Valley Tributaries
- Sewage works are present in the character area to the east of Weston Village and are an existing detractor
- Some boundary vegetation has been replaced by palisade fences. The character area would be vulnerable to this practice as it is detrimental to the character of Upper Beane Valley Tributaries
- The course of a Roman road cuts through the centre of the character area. Historic features such as these are vulnerable to loss
- There is relatively limited public access through Upper Beane Valley Tributaries

Overall Upper Beane Valley Tributaries is considered to be of **moderate to low sensitivity**. The largely rural character area is quiet and tranquil. However the electricity pylons are detractors to the open Upper Beane Valley Tributaries.

Visual Sensitivities

- The bowl shaped landform and wooded horizons create an enclosed character area. However on a human scale the large arable fields and loss of boundaries create open views across Upper Beane Valley Tributaries
- The small woodland patches and shelterbelts create a wooded horizon
- The tributaries and incised landscape create an undulating characteristic. When at the bottom of the valleys, the landform presents an undeveloped horizon
- The Cromer Windmill to the south of the area is a local landmark on higher ground

In visual terms, Upper Beane Valley Tributaries is considered to be of **moderate to low sensitivity**. Views within the rural character area would be sensitive to the introduction of any urbanizing features.

LANDSCAPE VALUE

Overall Upper Beane Valley Tributaries is considered to be of **moderate low landscape value**. Aspects of particular value within Upper Beane Valley Tributaries are the relative sense of remoteness and the openness of the landscape. However detractors in the area include the electricity pylons and sewage works.

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 narrow lanes, 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 appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural and undeveloped character.

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

Major transport developments/improvements

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to the largely rural character of the transport routes at present. Upgrading of existing winding 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. 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 could be highly visible within the Character Area if not carefully located and would erode the rural and intimate character. Any large buildings should be balanced by woodland blocks, 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 uses

Upper Beane Valley Tributaries would not 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 views in the bowl landform 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.

EVALUATION

Mineral extraction/waste disposal

This Character Area is currently relatively undisturbed and rural in appearance. Mineral extraction would not be in keeping with the character of Upper Beane Valley Tributaries. The minor roads would need considerable upgrading to be able to accept larger HGVs, which could further dilute the landscape character. If schemes were consented, 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 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 or individual properties within the Character Area, particularly if they were in keeping with the rural character. This could include very modest and carefully planned expansion or infilling at Luffenhall. However any proposals would need clear justification to avoid the potential erosion of the rural character of Upper Beane Valley Tributaries.

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 urbanising elements within this Character Area at present. The electricity pylons are currently detractors in the area. New utilities developments would have a further impact on the rural character of Upper Beane Valley Tributaries. Large scale developments, tall elements would be highly visible within the open 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: Strengthen and Reinforce
Landscape management guidelines

- Promote the management of ancient woodland and other woodland planting and where historically appropriate, link up small remnants of ancient woodland
- Promote the management of ancient woodlands to encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Bring areas of ancient woodland back into active management particularly using techniques such as coppicing
- Encourage the development of neutral, species rich grassland
- 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
- Enhance ditches through clearance and planting to provide opportunities for storm water retention
- Retain, manage, reinstate and extend flood meadow and grazing pasture within and along the valley floor to provide connectivity and reduce nutrient leaching from arable to watercourses
- Manage and restore patterns of natural watercourses and associated habitats including secondary streams to valley sides, braided watercourses, cut offs
- Conserve, monitor and enhance river margin habitats for protected species
- Promote arable reversion to grassland to

improve mosaic of habitats and to aid water quality and recharge of aquifer

- Maintain and extend the rights of way network

Built development guidelines

- Conserve the traditional character of Luffenhall, ensuring that any development located within or on the edge of the settlement uses appropriate vernacular materials and features
- Protect and preserve the pattern of winding lanes and associated hedgerows and hedge banks
- Encourage the planting of appropriate broadleaved woodland and vegetation to screen new development that could intrude in rural views
- Retain the rural character of Upper Beane Valley Tributaries, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the Character Area
- Planting should reflect existing patterns, with hedges following field and road boundaries and strategic isolated copses to mitigate buildings
- Avoid the location of new development in visual intrusive locations
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or the loss of ancient hedgerows
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area