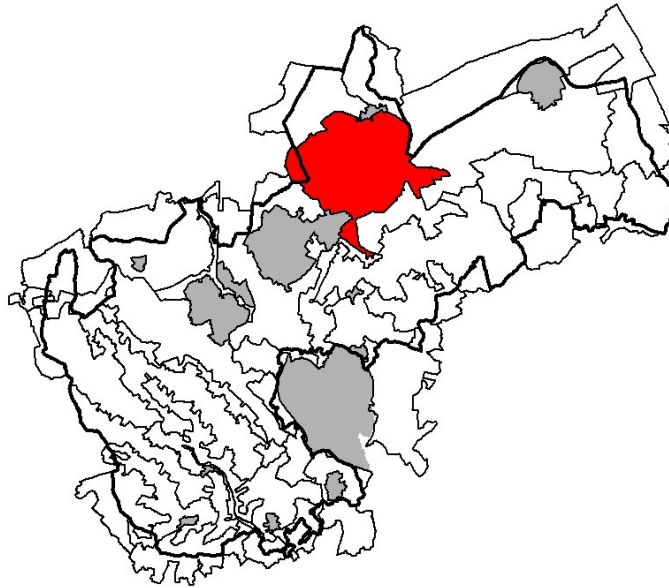
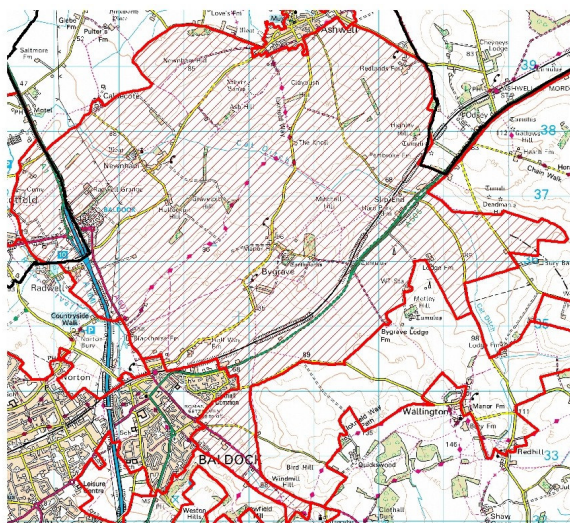


LOCATION

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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

A large area to the northeast of Baldock, lying mainly to the east of the A1(M) but with a small parcel extending west to the River Ivel. (To the north east of Radwell village this lies outside of the District). The Character Area stretches southeast as far as the chalk scarp face and northwards to the villages of Caldecote and Ashwell.



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Rolling chalk landform, eroded by a complex network of shallow dry valleys. Small rounded chalk knolls common. Large scale arable fields often with remnant field boundaries, mainly well trimmed hawthorn hedges. The core has a pattern of regular rectilinear fields often with curving boundaries. Boundaries often based on older more organic pattern of lanes and primary boundaries. To the east of the Ashwell to Slip End Road and west of Newnham field patterns become more regular with stronger patterns of more rectilinear fields.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Rolling chalk landform
- Small rounded chalk knolls
- Large rectilinear fields in arable
- Large - medium regular geometric plantations
- Nucleated settlements

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- A1(M), A505, railway
- Telecommunications masts (Lodge Farm)
- Lower Icknield Way
- Abuts suburban edge of Baldock
- Pylons crossing the western edge
- Valley and moat at Newnham
- Ivel valley

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

Chalk overlain by free draining calcareous to neutral loamy brown soils. Thin drift deposits of Boulder Clay and glacial gravel on upper slopes.

Topography

Undulating – rolling plateau landform with small but distinctive chalk knolls. Land generally is falling in a north westerly direction.

Degree of slope

Varies 1:10 to 1:30.

Altitude range

50m to 100m.

Hydrology

Area is drained by a limited network of local streams and ditches. The only watercourse is the seasonal Cat Ditch. Springs and ponds are a distinctive local feature and moats at Bygrave.

Land cover and land use

Arable of very long standing having formerly been corn field strips with occasional plantations and tree belts.

Vegetation and wildlife

Character Area contains species-rich neutral grassland, such as Parkwood Meadow and ponds, which are notably uncommon in North Hertfordshire (0.29% of area). Old pastures and meadows with their diverse flora have largely disappeared since the 1940's and are now regarded as some of the most threatened habitats in the UK.

The most important semi-natural vegetation comprises vestiges of ancient grassland on road verges and some field banks, known to be of great age, such as Bygrave Road, Wallington Road and Newnham Hill. Remnants of more neutral grass pastures occur at Bygrave. Where underlying calcareous soil has been exposed, some important ecological communities have developed. Ashwell Quarry is an old chalk pit and a key calcareous grassland site within the county. Species present include horseshoe vetch, fragrant orchid and one of the county's largest colonies of pyramidal orchid.

Important area for declining farmland birds.

Open fields are important for corn bunting, brown hare and occasionally quail whilst in winter, passing golden plover and lapwings may be seen. Woodlands are secondary, eg Park Wood at Bygrave and plantations at Newnham. Spring-fed ponds at Bygrave are locally important for aquatic life.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

In the northwest lies the medieval settlement of Newnham. The church of St Vincent, Newnham, dates to the 12th century and a moated site at Newnham Manor lies to the west of the church. The Medieval village of Caldecote lies to the north of Newnham. The church of St Mary Magdalene, Caldecote, dates to the 15th century.

The Character Area seems to have been well occupied in later prehistory with numerous enclosures, prehistoric ring ditches and linear ditches. Highley Hill Bowl Barrow lies to the northeast and two bowl barrows lie at Bygrave. Prehistoric ring ditches, enclosures, trackways Romano-British cemeteries and earthworks lie to the south. Arbury Banks Iron Age Hillfort lies to the south of Ashwell. Its internal features include hut circles, visible on aerial photographs.

Bygrave is one of the few parishes in Hertfordshire which was never enclosed therefore the landscape is essentially Saxon or earlier in origin. The medieval settlement of Bygrave dates from the 10th century. The church of St Margaret's, Bygrave, dates from the 12th century. Earthworks of a moated site manorial enclosure lie to the south of the village. Radwell Roman Villa lies towards the southwest of the area. Radwell itself is a medieval settlement. The Church of All Saints, Radwell, dates from the 13th century, added to and changed through the Middle Ages.

Baldock is a major historic centre, at least of medieval date. Archaeological remains of Late Iron Age and Roman date attest to the favoured location of Baldock for settlement. The parish church of St Mary, Baldock, dates from the 13th century.

ASSESSMENT

The medieval settlement of Ashwell lies to the north of the area. The parish church of St Mary, Ashwell, dates to the 14th century. Finds date from the Anglo-Saxon period to the 14th century. To the south of Ashwell lie Prehistoric, Roman and Medieval earthworks.

Field Pattern

The historic agricultural landscape is composed of a mixture of 18th century and later enclosure, prairie fields with post-1950s boundary loss, pre-18th century unenclosed common arable, post-1950s enclosure, prairie fields with relict elements, ancient woodland, orchard and 19th-20th century plantation. Today the core area has a pattern of regular rectilinear fields often with curving boundaries. To the east of Ashwell to Slip End Road and west of Newnham the field patterns become more regular with stronger patterns of more rectilinear field boundaries & lines.

Transport Pattern

The Character Area is crossed by major transport corridors – A1(M) to the west and the A505 from southwest to northwest, parallel to railway.

Settlement and Built Form

The historic settlement pattern is characterised by nucleated settlements with a low level of dispersal. There are many fine traditional buildings particularly in and around the nucleated settlement of Ashwell. This village has more architecturally worthwhile houses than many others in the county. Nearly all are timber framed or gabled brick type and some are of medieval origin. The Domesday Survey records fourteen burgesses within the settlement. The British Queen Inn, a timber framed house with thatched roof, dates to the 15th century and was altered in the 17th century.

Traditional buildings can also be found in the villages of Radwell, Baldock, Caldecote and Newnham for example, Radwell Grange, 16th-17th century, with some brick mullioned windows and diagonally set chimneys.

EVALUATION

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

Large scale open landscapes with dispersed farmsteads. Long distance views from local vantage points. Overlooked from the scarp to the south.

Rarity & distinctiveness

This landscape type is relatively unusual in the district.

VISUAL IMPACT

Western side accommodates major road infrastructure and electricity pylons. To the south the railway runs across the open landscape. Telecommunications masts at Lodge Farm

ACCESSIBILITY

Crossed by two major transport corridors A1(M) to the west and the A505 Road and Rail corridor. The core area is accessed by a network of local roads radiating out from Ashwell. Extensive rights of way coverage.

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 105 Ring ditches and enclosure at Slip End: Ashwell
- SAM 106 Triple ditches at Galley Hill
- SAM 108 Ring ditch and enclosure: Newham
- SAM 20616 Highley Hill Bowl Barrow: Ashwell
- SAM 20643 Two bowl barrows at Bygrave 65m east parkwood: Bygrave
- SAM 20759 Arbury Banks Iron Age Hillfort: Ashwell
- SAM 27908 Radwell Roman villa: Radwell
- SAM 27913 Romano-British small town and Late Age settlement at Baldock: Baldock

EVALUATION

CONDITION

Land cover change: Widespread
 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: Moderate

Matrix Score: **Moderate**

ROBUSTNESS

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

Matrix Score: **Strong**

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 large scale open arable fields in combination with the rolling chalk landform are the most characteristic feature of the North Baldock Chalk Uplands and would be vulnerable to change.
- Hedgerows and woodland are limited within the North Baldock Chalk Uplands. The introduction of extensive planting or large numbers of new hedgerows would be uncharacteristic.
- Traditional materials of black weatherboarding, painted render or pargeting and thatch are distinctive features in buildings within villages within the Character Area.
- The southern edge of Ashwell is well contained and would be sensitive to further development.
- Settlement within the Character Area is generally small scale, with settlements isolated and nucleated.
- Baldock Services is one of the largest developments within the Character Area. Landform and planting have been used to integrate it into the landscape when viewed from most directions.
- Minor roads through the Character Area are generally open, with occasional rows or avenues of trees.
- Transport corridors such as the A1(M), A505 and the Baldock to Royston railway line have been imposed on the landscape, with limited vegetation screening in many locations.
- Electricity pylons stride through the western edge of the character area on a north – south axis and are an existing detractor to the character of the area.
- Telecommunications masts form prominent if incongruous elements in isolated locations within the Character Area, such as lodge Farm.

Overall North Baldock Chalk Uplands is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. The relatively intact landscape has been

influenced by built development around the edges of the Character Area but retains a largely rural character.

Visual Sensitivities

- Extensive views across the large scale open rolling landform
- Long distance views from localised high points
- Open views from most roads and lanes throughout the North Baldock Chalk Uplands
- Overlooked by scarp slope to the south, creating a strong visual relationship with the Baldock Gap and Wallington Scarp Slope Character Areas
- Open skylines would be sensitive to the introduction of prominent structures and incongruous elements
- St Mary's church in Ashwell forms a landmark feature in many views within the Character Area
- The built eastern edge of Baldock is prominent and intrusive and would benefit from additional mitigation. Piecemeal development on the edge of Baldock has had an adverse urbanising influence on the Character Area.

In visual terms, North Baldock Chalk Uplands is considered to be of **moderate to high sensitivity**. Open views and skylines throughout the Character Area are particularly sensitive to development.

LANDSCAPE VALUE

Overall North Baldock Chalk Uplands is considered to be of **moderate landscape value**. Aspects of particular value are the intactness of the landscape, the visual interest, the aesthetic qualities of the landscape, the sense of openness, the relative tranquillity and 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 much of this Character Area, due to its rural character in all areas, except potentially to the eastern fringes of Baldock. It would introduce elements that would reduce the openness of the North Baldock Chalk Uplands. Increased housing development would be likely to affect the existing minor roads, which could erode the character of the landscape. The landscape capacity for major urban extensions or new settlements overall is considered to be low.

Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)

This type of development would not be appropriate within much of this Character Area, due to its rural character in all areas, except potentially to the eastern fringes of Baldock. It would introduce elements that would reduce the openness of the North Baldock Chalk Uplands in all other locations, including the fringes of Ashwell. Increased housing development would be likely to affect the existing minor roads, which could erode the character of the landscape. Some expansion of Baldock, could possibly be accommodated but careful consideration of the landscape treatment to the edges of the development would be required in order to provide a more robust boundary than at present. The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered to be low to moderate.

Major transport developments/improvements

This type of development would only be appropriate for improvements of the existing A1(M), A505 and the Baldock to Royston railway line within this Character Area. Improvements to these transport links could present the opportunity to improve their fit within the landscape and soften their appearance. Upgrading of existing minor 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 to 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. Extensive development would also disrupt the openness of the North Baldock Chalk Uplands. 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 a vernacular form and style and in keeping with the rural character. However, large buildings, if not carefully located, would erode the rural character and openness of the Character Area. The landscape capacity for individual large/bulky buildings is considered to be moderate to low.

Large scale open uses

The openness of the North Baldock Chalk Uplands would make it more difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses without significant visual impacts. This would not be in keeping with the rural character of the area and could introduce new elements that would conflict with the current open sweeping views. The landscape capacity for large scale 'open' uses is considered to be low.

EVALUATION

Mineral extraction/waste disposal

This Character Area is currently relatively rural in appearance with small scale nucleated development. Whilst some small scale mineral extraction could be accommodated with careful design and mitigation measures, larger scale extraction or waste disposal would be likely to be highly visible within the North Baldock Chalk Uplands and from adjacent Character Areas. The minor roads would need considerable upgrading to be able to accept larger HGVs, which could further dilute the landscape character. For any consented schemes, restoration proposals should be mainly at grade and include for some limited planting in character with existing patterns.

The landscape capacity for mineral extraction is considered to be low to 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 of an agricultural nature and in keeping with the rural character. However, due to the existing openness any proposals would need clear justification to avoid the erosion of the character of the North Baldock Chalk Uplands.

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 currently a small number of detractors in the areas. These include existing telecommunications masts, which are visible in isolated locations. Further utilities developments or elements such as masts or wind turbines are likely to have a major impact on the rural character of North Baldock Chalk Uplands. Large scale tall elements such as these would be highly visible within the Character Area, as well as in 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 creation of new woodland and for existing woodlands 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 to create visual links between existing woodland areas
- Promote the use of traditional field hedges in place of post and wire fencing to new grazing areas
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network

Built development guidelines

- Maintain the open character of North Baldock Chalk Uplands
- Retain the rural character of Character Area ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the Character Area
- Planting mitigation should be appropriate to local character and not necessarily fully enclose development
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or hedgerows
- Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow open lanes and occasional rows or avenues of trees
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area
- Conserve the traditional character of Ashwell, particularly the approaches to the village from the south and west, ensuring that any development within or located on the edge of the village uses appropriate vernacular materials and features