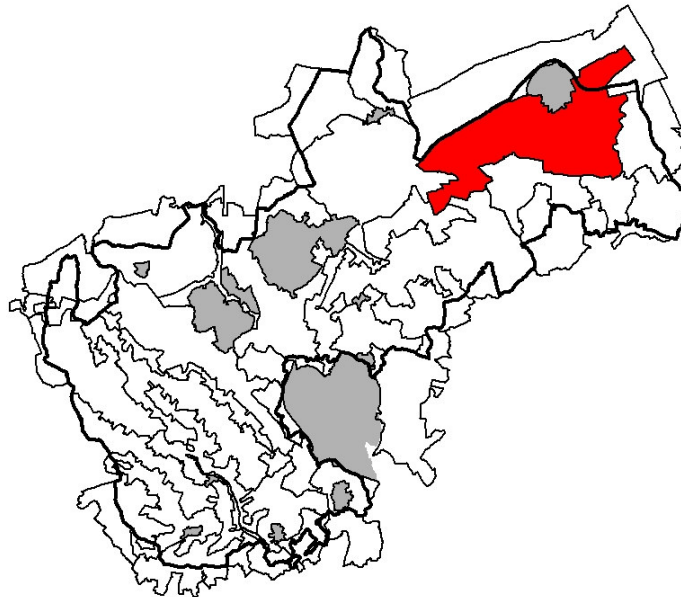


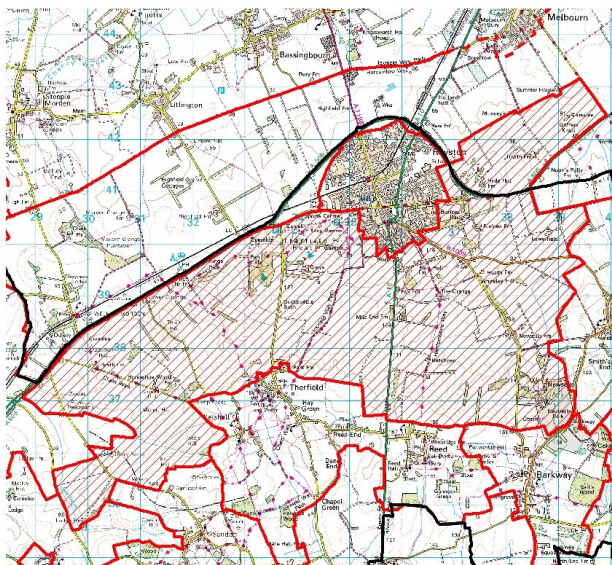
LOCATION



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

An extensive area running parallel and to the south of the A505. The scarp extends from the Cat Ditch Valley in the west to the Wardlington Bottom Drain in the east. The area extends southwards, rising to meet the break of slope with the plateau landscape. To the east of Royston a small chalk outlier extends northwards, ending at Goffers Knoll.



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Chalk scarp slope incised by dry water cut valleys. Undulating landform with steeper slopes towards the upper plateau edge. Large scale arable fields with ordered pattern of rectilinear field boundaries and lanes with straight boundaries. Occasional farmsteads. Small tree plantations set out in discrete coverts. Individual tree belts.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Incised chalk scarp slope
- Large scale pattern of rectilinear fields
- Long straight roads, open and without hedge boundaries, climbing the face of the scarp
- Absence of larger settlements
- Long distance views

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Area abuts suburban boundary to Royston
- Therfield Heath, to the southwest of Royston - an area of uncultivated land designated as a SSSI
- Coombe Road sits within a deeply incised valley
- The A10, Roman road
- Historic earthworks
- Newsells Park and associated Stud Farm.

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

Chalk overlain by shallow rendzina soils and calcareous loams. Some areas of glacial gravels notably at Wardington Bottom. The thin chalk soils give a white appearance to the land.

Topography

Sloping landform falls from chalk plateau to rolling lowland landscape to the north.

Degree of slope

Typically 1:10 but slightly shallower in places.

Altitude range

70m to 160m.

Hydrology

No discernable water courses other than localised drainage ditches.

Land cover and land use

Predominantly arable.

Vegetation and wildlife

The principal habitat of importance is chalk grassland. An area of high biodiversity is centred around Therfield Heath and Coombe Bottom (Coombe Road, south west of Thrift Hill). Therfield Heath, SSSI is the single largest area of unimproved chalk grassland in the county. It comprises coombes, downland and areas of mixed scrub home to an array of plants and invertebrates including pasque flower, perennial flax, bastard toadflax and burnt tip orchid and the largest colony of chalkhill blue in the county. Coombe Bottom is another key chalk grassland area occurring on steep scarp slopes. Woodland communities on these slopes are primarily broadleaved, with beech being a notably successful species. Other important sites occur at Deadman's Hill, Heath Farm, Barkway Road, Whiteley Hill and the A505 cutting at Burloes.

Unimproved calcareous grassland occupies only 0.25% of the land use of North Hertfordshire and supports a number of rare plants and invertebrates, including fragrant orchid, dropwort, great pignut, juniper as well as nationally uncommon butterfly species such as small blue, chalkhill blue and Duke of Burgandy. Semi-improved calcareous grassland occurs at Newsells Park.

The open fields of the Character Area are noted for breeding quail, stone curlews and grey partridge. Spring crops are important for declining farmland birds. Road verges are important for common lizard.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Numerous cropmarks, revealed by aerial photographs, of prehistoric ring ditches linear features and enclosures including a probably prehistoric or Romano-British field system cover a large part of the Character Area.

Ancient earthworks cut into the chalk are common, including chalk pits and lynchets.

The best surviving ancient landscape in the county lies in the northwest. Surviving elements include Neolithic long barrows, a Bronze Age barrow cemetery and an Iron Age boundary called 'The Mile Ditches'. A medieval moated site lies to the south of the Barrow Cemetery. Springfield style enclosure, three bowl barrows and two pond barrows on Whiteley Hill lie to the east of the area. A prehistoric barrow cemetery and Cross Dyke also occurs in Five Hill Field, 290m southwest of Heath Farm.

Recent landscape change occurs at Newsells Park with the creation of a Stud farm with massive tree and hedge planting resulting in a 'tidy' landscape in contrast to adjoining farmland.

Field Pattern

The historic agricultural landscape pattern is comprised of 18th century and later enclosure, post 1950s enclosure and prairie fields with post 1950s boundary loss. 20th century leisure use lies to the north with a 20th century stud farm and informal medieval parkland to the east. There are also pockets of 19th- 20th century plantation in the area.

Transport Pattern

Long straight roads open and without hedge boundaries, climbing the face of the scarp slope. The A10, Roman road cuts across the area.

Settlements and Built Form

The historic settlement pattern is characterised by occasional farmsteads. A small number of traditional buildings lie to the southeast in Newsells Park. Queen Ann House, burned in WWII, was replaced by a smaller NeoGeorgian house in 1954. 18th century outbuildings survive as part of Queen Ann House including stables, which are built of red brick with lantern and pediment archway. The timber framed and thatched Lodge was built in 1804. Newsells Bury lies to its west in the grounds, a small brick house of the late 17th century. To the north of Newsells Park lies a small hamlet of 17th century thatched estate cottages.

EVALUATION

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

Expansive open area with long distance views to the north.

Rarity & distinctiveness

The chalk scarp is a comparatively common feature in North Hertfordshire however the openness, lack of development (particularly in the west) and the history of this character area make it almost unique in the county.

VISUAL IMPACT

Scarp provides a vantage point for long distance views over Royston to the north.

ACCESSIBILITY

Pattern of roads and footpaths runs up and down the scarp face. Connections radiate out from Royston. Icknield Way and 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
SSSI	Therfield Heath
SAM 106	Triple ditches at Galley Hill: Sandon
SAM 20622	Gallows Hill Barrow: Kelshall
SAM 20630	Earls Hill Barrow part of the Round Barrow Cemetery on Therfield Heath: Therfield
SAM 20631	Two Bowl Barrows part of the Round Barrow Cemetery on Therfield Heath: Therfield
SAM 20632	Five Bowl Barrows part of the Round Barrow Cemetery on Therfield Heath: Therfield
SAM 20633	Bowl Barrow one or two Round Barrows on Penhills: Therfield
SAM 20634	Bowl Barrow one of two Round Barrows on Penhills: Therfield
SAM 20635	Long Barrow on Therfield Heath: Therfield
SAM 20640	Bell Barrow part of the Round Barrow Cemetery on Therfield Heath: Therfield
SAM 20641	Bowl Barrow part of the Round Barrow Cemetery on Therfield Heath: Therfield
SAM 20664	Bowl Barrow 1km south-west of Heath Farm: part of the Round Barrow Cemetery on Deadmans Hill: Sandon
SAM 29389/01 and 02	Springfield style enclosure tree bowl barrows and two pond barrows on Whiteley Hill: Barkway
SAM 33374	Prehistoric Barrow Cemetery and Cross Dyke in Five Hill Field, 290m SW of Heath Farm: Sandon
SAM HT 125	Mile Ditches: Therfield Heath

EVALUATION

CONDITION

Land cover change: Insignificant
 Age structure of tree cover: Over mature
 Extent of semi-natural habitat survival: Relic
 Management of semi-natural habitat: Poor
 Survival of cultural pattern: Declining/Relic
 Impact of built development: Moderate
 Impact of land-use change: Low

Matrix Score: **Poor**

ROBUSTNESS

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

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

- A largely rural character consisting significant variations. The area is predominantly arable but contains notable areas of grassland and woodland throughout the Character Area, with an absence of both development and other detractors
- An undulating landform with steeper slopes towards the upper plateau edge, incised by dry water cut valleys. The marked topography is emphasised by the predominantly open character of much of the area. The area would be very sensitive to change or degradation
- The area includes a large open topographic bowl feature to the north of Therfield. This landform would be vulnerable to any development
- Woodland habitat and shelterbelts are a prominent feature on the slopes, creating a sense of enclosure and on the skyline locally forming the horizon. However a number of the trees (most notably beech) are dying back particularly on the higher ground. The area would be vulnerable to further loss.
- The area consists of large scale undulating rectangular arable fields. Hedges are infrequent and where present provide clipped linear hedgerow boundaries. There is some new hedgerow planting at the boundaries. The character area would be vulnerable to the loss of the open character of the area.
- Areas of chalk grassland are of habitat importance with the highest value areas including Therfield Heath (SSSI) and Coombe Bottom. This habitat would be very sensitive to any degradation
- The character area contains Newsells Park Stud and Newsells Park between Barkway and Royston, which is associated with major shelterbelts and parkland. The area is vulnerable to the loss of shelterbelts or parkland features.
- The character area has an absence of large settlements. It is characterised by individual farmsteads and isolated

settlements, generally on south facing slopes enclosed by shelterbelts. The character area would be vulnerable to inappropriate or unsympathetic development and any form of development not in scale with the historic settlement patterns

- The character area consists of long straight roads, some of which are open. While others are bordered by clipped hedgerows. The historic roman road (A10) bisects through the area on a north-south axis. The area would be vulnerable to improvements/upgrading of the roads.
- The character area also provides recreation facilities including a golf courses and areas of common on Therfield Heath. The area would be vulnerable to removal of these facilities. However particular features of the e.g. raised green and tees on the golf course and car parks create a negative impact on the natural topography character of the area
- The character area overall is very much intact, with a good representation of typical character. The area is in a good state of repair, with varied texture, diversity with a complex pattern and form. The character area would be vulnerable to degradation of these characteristics
- Good public access through numerous rights of way, including the Ickniel Way and the Hertfordshire Way

Overall Scarp Slopes South of Royston is considered to be of **high sensitivity**. The pronounced undulating landform and mix of grassland and arable fields creates an open area with panoramic views, while the sections of wooded dip slopes create a sense of enclosure with limited urban influence.

EVALUATION

Visual Sensitivities

- Expansive open area with long distance and panoramic views particularly to the north
- Woodland and shelter belts form and break up the skyline
- Sweeping patterns of arable fields, with bleached horizons
- Clipped hedgerows create a soft line, ascending the scarp with small woodland copses at the corners of fields

In visual terms, Scarp Slopes South of Royston is considered to be of **high sensitivity**. Views to and from the scarp slopes including undeveloped and wooded skylines are relatively open and would be highly sensitive to the introduction of urbanizing features.

LANDSCAPE VALUE

Overall Scarp Slopes South of Royston is considered to be of **high landscape value**. Aspects of particular value within Scarp Slopes South of Royston are the recognisable sense of place, the striking landform, the visual interest, memorable uninterrupted views, the sense of openness 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 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. Visual impacts would also be high, due to the panoramic and open views currently experienced. Development could affect important habitat of chalk grassland, which would erode the character of the landscape. Extensive development could also disrupt the rights of way network and could reduce accessibility to the countryside.

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 entirely appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural and undeveloped character. Visual impacts could be high, due to the panoramic and open views currently experienced.

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 most routes at present. Upgrading of existing 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 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. There would also be restricted areas of level land for this type of development and substantial earthworks would be likely to be required. 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 could also disrupt the rights of way network and reduce accessibility to the countryside.

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 would erode the rural character.

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

Large scale open uses

The landform within Scarp Slopes South of Royston would make it difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses and likely to be very open to view and introduce new elements that would conflict with the existing characteristics. Minor roads would require upgrading to be able to accept larger volumes of traffic and/or HGVs, which would further dilute the landscape character. Extensive development could also disrupt the rights of way network and reduce accessibility to the countryside.

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

Mineral extraction/waste disposal

This Character Area is currently relatively undisturbed and rural in appearance. Whilst some small scale

mineral extraction could be accommodated with careful design and mitigation measures, larger scale extraction or waste disposal would not be in keeping with the character of Scarp Slopes South of Royston. The minor roads would need considerable upgrading to be able to accept larger HGVs, which could further dilute the landscape character. Larger scale extraction could also disrupt the rights of way network and reduce accessibility to the countryside. For any consented schemes, restoration could include sensitive reduced level proposals if following the natural landform and include for additional planting in character with existing patterns.

The landscape capacity for mineral extraction/waste disposal 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 very limited capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were of a vernacular style and in keeping with the rural character. Any development should incorporate mitigation with landform and shelterbelts. However, due to the existing open and undeveloped character any proposals would need clear justification to avoid the erosion of the rural character of Scarp Slopes South of Royston.

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

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 Scarp Slopes South of Royston. Large scale developments and tall elements would be highly visible within the Character Area, as well as being 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: Restore Condition to Maintain Character
Landscape management guidelines

- Maintain the general open character of the area in particular the long distance views over the lowland landscape to the north
- Promote management of woodland to encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Encourage the planting of small woodlands in discrete coverts
- 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 the use of traditional field hedges in place of post and wire enclosures 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
- Encourage the planting of beech woodlands on the steeper valley sides
- Encourage the development of new and improve the management of existing chalk grassland habitats

Built development guidelines

- Protect and preserve and enhance the pattern of straight roads and associated hedgerows
- Encourage the planting of appropriate broadleaved woodland and vegetation to mitigate new development that could intrude in panoramic rural views
- Retain the open rural character of Scarp Slope South of Royston, 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 isolated and visual intrusive locations, particularly where they would be visible on the skyline
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or the loss of surviving chalk grassland habitats and ancient hedgerows
- Conserve and enhance Therfield Heath and Coombe Bottom
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area