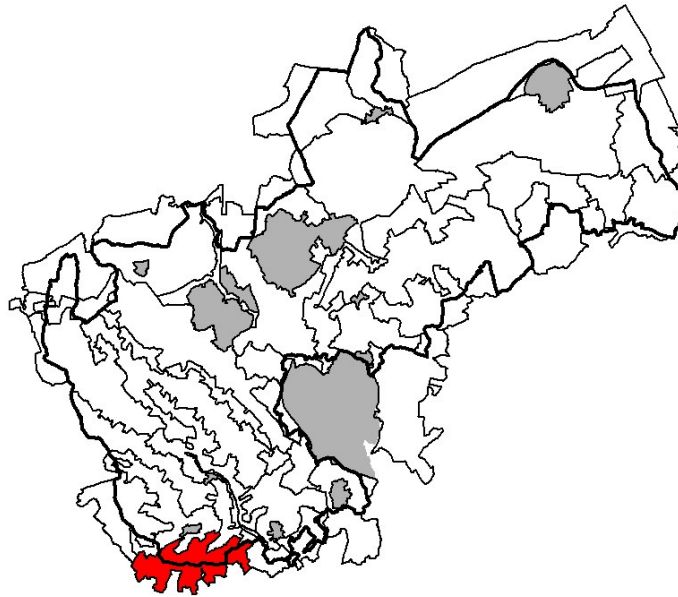


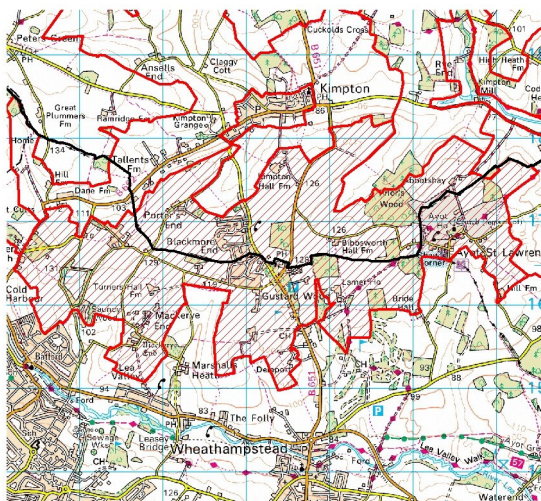
LOCATION



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

In the north this Character Area extends from the B652 Harpenden to Kimpton Road and the Kimpton to Codicote Bottom Road. The southern boundary extends beyond the District boundary to the edge of the Lea valley.



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Elevated plateau landscape. Land use is mainly large arable fields. (Character Area has a higher density of settlement in the west than the east). However, the Character Area has a comparatively remote and tranquil atmosphere.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Elevated plateau landform
- Large arable field pattern
- Small parcels of grazing land on sub-urban fringes
- Smaller pockets of woodland in the west, one large woodland block in the east
- Remote quiet aspects with few detracting features
- 20th century housing development at Blackmore End, well screened on the fringes by woodland

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

Fringes of Ayot House parkland

ASSESSMENT**PHYSICAL INFLUENCES****Geology and Soils**

Soils are fine silty lying over clay soils with slowly permeable subsoils. There are also some well drained clay soils over chalk and variable amounts of flint. The underlying geology is plateau drift and clay with flints. Pockets of chalk are also found on the surface.

Topography

The plateau extends across the area from east to west with spurs, defined by incised dry valleys, extending to the north and south (particularly south of the District boundary).

Degree of Slope

The plateau appears to be flat. The actual degree of slope is typically less than 1:250.

Altitude Range

120m to 130m.

Hydrology

There are no significant water courses. Valleys are dry, however, there are a number of small ponds associated with settlements.

Land cover and land use

Arable farming is the predominant land use. On the fringes of the settlements there are smaller areas of pasture. A high proportion of the grazing land is given over to use for horse paddocks. Scattered woodland cover occurs in the west particularly on the fringes of the settlements. Many of the woods have been replanted with alien conifers. The parkland north of Ayot House lies mainly outside the District boundary, however, a small fragment falls within North Hertfordshire.

Vegetation and wildlife

Prior's Wood is classified as an ancient woodland, the main species being oak, hornbeam with some beech where the Chalk is closer to the surface. Understorey species include hawthorn and holly. Gustard Common and heath is remnant heather acid grassland with juniper, which is rare in Hertfordshire. Ayot St Lawrence is important for pipistrelle and long-eared bats.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Ayot St Lawrence on the eastern boundary and just outside of the District boundary dates back to Saxon origins. The village is connected with George Bernard Shaw who lived there for almost 50 years. Many of his works were written here and the village retains strong connections with its rich cultural heritage. The footpath network extends northwards from the settlement connecting the eastern part of the area with the heart of the village.

Field Pattern

Loss of field boundaries due to the amalgamation of fields in the north and east has resulted in a pattern of large irregular fields. Fields are slightly smaller in the west due to the irregular distribution of settlements, local lanes and blocks of woodland.

Transport Pattern

There is a higher proportion of roads and lanes in the western part of the area compared to the east.

Settlement and Built Form

The western side of the area supports a dispersed settlement pattern with a concentration of more modern, 20th century properties at Blackmore End. The eastern side of the area is open and has very little evidence of settlement.

EVALUATION**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The Character Area is only locally visible from the surrounding area due to the elevated level of the land form. The western side has a greater sense of cohesive landscape character. The eastern part has lost a high proportion of its original field pattern consequently suggesting a downgraded landscape character. There is a general tranquil atmosphere.

Rarity and Distinctiveness

The landscape type is frequent in the county.

VISUAL IMPACT

To the west Blackmore End contains the largest settlement. The development is well screened by blocks of woodland cover.

ACCESSIBILITY

The western part is well served by a network of roads and local lanes. To the east a number of small lanes and footpaths radiate out from the centre of Ayot St Lawrence (outside of the District boundary). The settlement is a popular tourist attraction during the summer.

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

LC3 Landscape Conservation Area
GD 1902 Ayot Park

EVALUATION

CONDITION

Land cover change:	Widespread
Age structure of tree cover:	Mature or young
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	Scattered
Management of semi-natural habitat:	Good
Survival of cultural pattern:	Interrupted
Impact of built development:	Low
Impact of land-use change:	High

Matrix Score: **Moderate**

ROBUSTNESS

Impact of landform:	Apparent
Impact of land cover:	Prominent
Impact of historic pattern:	Apparent
Visibility from outside:	Locally visible
Sense of enclosure:	Partial
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

- Blackmore End is the largest settlement within the Character Area and the only significant settlement within the North Hertfordshire part of Blackmore End Plateau. The settlement is largely 20th century in origin and less historic than Ayot St Lawrence, which is located largely outside North Hertfordshire but would be sensitive to inappropriate or unsympathetic development and any form of development not in scale with the village
- Small to medium blocks of woodland are characteristic of the Blackmore End Character Area. These include former hornbeam coppice woodland with a bluebell understorey and would all be sensitive to removal, incursion and lack of or inappropriate management
- The character area includes a significant presence of horsiculture, particularly in the centre of the Plateau. Such areas are characterised by post and rail or white wire fences and the removal of boundary vegetation. This practice is detrimental to the landscape character and Blackmore End Plateau is vulnerable to further horsiculture activity and any associated removal of boundary vegetation
- Hedgerow removal has created very large arable fields at the centre of the Character Area. The landscape is sensitive to further removal of hedges
- Minor roads through the Character Area are narrow and enclosed by vegetation or hedge banks. They would be sensitive to widening or alterations
- Ayot House parkland, although not a registered park or garden, falls within this Character Area and could be at risk from development pressure and inconsistent management. The northern edge of the parkland falls within North Hertfordshire

Overall Blackmore End Plateau is considered to be of **moderate to low sensitivity**. The more historic elements of the Character Area are generally outside North Hertfordshire and the core of the area has lost many of the characteristic elements present in the east and west of the Blackmore End Plateau.

Visual Sensitivities

- Within the Character Area as a whole roads are generally enclosed by woodland and hedgerows or sunken, restricting views across the plateau. This is less the case within the part of North Hertfordshire between Ayot St Lawrence and Blackmore End where fields are larger and more open allowing more expansive views
- The elevated plateau landform ensures that views into the Character Area from adjacent areas are localised. This is the case for areas to the north of the North Hertfordshire parts of the Character Area

In visual terms, Blackmore End Plateau is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. Views within the Character Area are relatively enclosed but would be sensitive to the removal of hedgerows and woodland, as has occurred within eastern parts of the North Hertfordshire areas of the Blackmore End Plateau.

LANDSCAPE VALUE

Overall Blackmore End Plateau is considered to be of **moderate low landscape value**. Although there is a lack of incongruous elements and a perceived distance from larger settlements, the landscape and landform is not particularly memorable and there is limited time depth and local distinctiveness.

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 nature. It would introduce elements that would alter the character and affect the existing key characteristics such as the relative absence of detractors and the tranquil atmosphere.

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. Some small scale expansion of Blackmore, carefully designed and in keeping with the existing character of the village, could possibly be accommodated. Any proposed expansion should seek to create more of a village centre character.

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

Major transport developments/improvements

This type of development would generally not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to the largely rural character of most routes at present. Upgrading of existing roads and 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.

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, if not carefully located, would be visible across much of the Character Area.

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

Large scale open storage

This type of large scale development is unlikely to be appropriate in this Character Area as there are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. Extensive development would also disrupt the open landscape and elevated plateau landform.

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 linear development. 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 Blackmore End Plateau. If minerals 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 capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were agricultural or vernacular in form and style and in keeping with the rural character. However, large buildings, if not carefully located, could erode the rural and undeveloped character of the Character Area.

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 very few of detractors in the area. Utilities developments or elements such as masts or wind turbines are likely to have a major impact on the rural character of Blackmore End Plateau. 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

STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE

Strategy: Improve and Conserve

NB. Guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire.

Landscape management guidelines

- Promote management of ancient woodland to encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Encourage diverse woodland management practice
- 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
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network
- Promote the management of old ponds and the creation of new ponds

Built development guidelines

- Maintain the tranquil quality of the landscape whilst encouraging access for visitors to neighbouring focal attractions e.g. Shaw’s Corner
- Protect from further extensive residential development
- Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow winding lanes and associated hedge banks, sunken lanes, verges and hedges
- Retain the rural character of Blackmore End Plateau, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the Character Area
- Avoid the continued spread of new development and large detached properties around the periphery of Blackmore End
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing scarce woodland blocks or hedgerows
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area
- Conserve and enhance Ayot House parkland