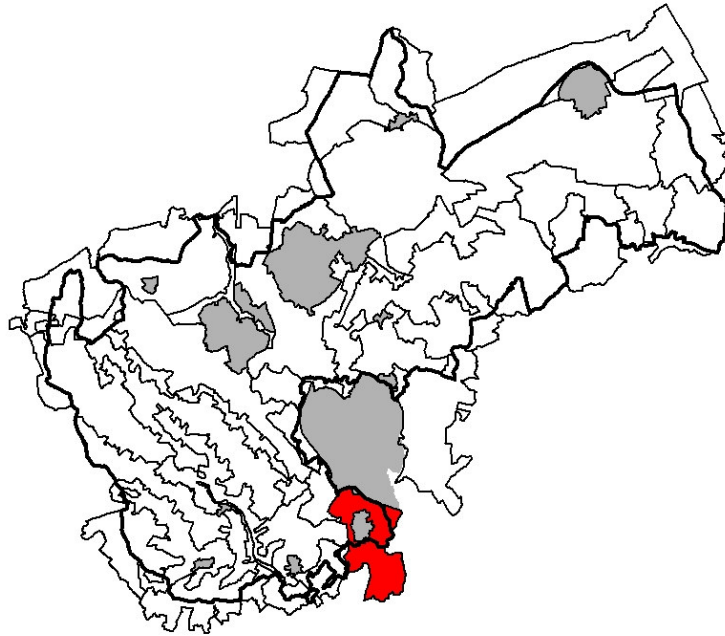


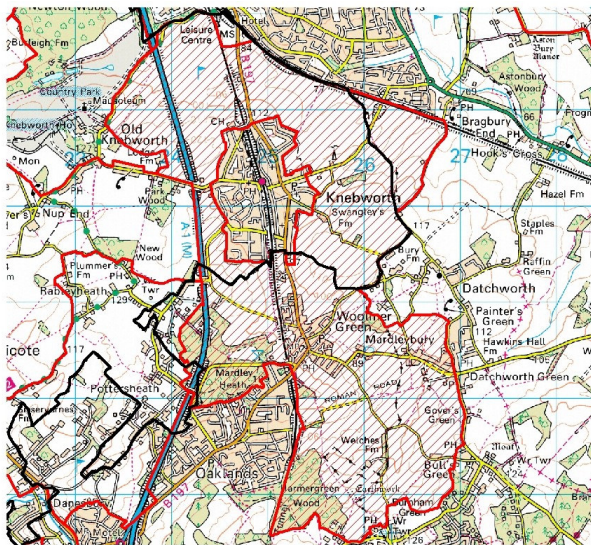
## LOCATION



© Crown Copyright. All rights reserved North Hertfordshire District Council LA078794, 2004

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA**

The Character Area lies to the east of the A1(M) and south of Stevenage. Half lies outside of the District. The main area of interest is that surrounding the settlement of Knebworth with a smaller triangle of this land lying to the west of the motorway.



© Crown Copyright. All rights reserved North Hertfordshire District Council LA078794, 2004

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

Gently undulating landform enclosing the settlement of Knebworth. Open and mainly arable farmland. Parkland to the north given over to use as golf course. Character Area abuts the railway in the north which encloses the southern end of Stevenage. Open views to edges of Knebworth settlement.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- Large scale open arable farmland
- Parkland in the north
- Edges of Knebworth settlement
- Prominent in the landscape

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- Crossed by A1(M)
- Crossed by mainline railway
- Telecommunication towers and water pumping stations

**ASSESSMENT**

**PHYSICAL INFLUENCES**

**Geology & soils**

Deep fine loam and clay over slowly permeable clay subsoils, over plateau drift (Hornbeam 3 series). Superficial deposits of Clay-with-flints at Woolmer Green.

**Topography**

Undulating west-facing slope with local variations - slight valley formation running north-south and now containing a railway, often in tunnel.

**Degree of slope**

1 in 50.

**Altitude range**

85m to 120m.

**Hydrology**

There is little water in this Character Area; one ditch drains westwards to Hempstall Spinney but the local topography discourages any northwards drainage into Stevenage Brook. There are some springs. Mardleybury Pond is one of the few waterbodies in this area.

**Land cover and land use**

Open arable farmland and woodland.

**Vegetation and wildlife**

No ecological information was available for this Character Area, but it would be anticipated to show some characteristic acidic communities such as those found within the Knebworth Character Area.

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

The Scheduled Monument of Deards End Bridge, over the railway, lies north of Knebworth.

**Field Pattern**

The historic agricultural landscape is composed of a mixture of prairie fields with relict elements within 18th century and later enclosure, ancient woodland, pre 18th century 'irregular' enclosure, 19th - 20th century plantation, post-1950s enclosure and prairie fields with post-1950s boundary loss. A small pocket of commons with an open margin lies to the south and pre 18th century 'irregular sinuous' enclosure lies to the west.

**Transport Pattern**

There is a strong network of winding lanes linking the villages to the larger plateau settlements. The B197 runs parallel to the railway on the western edge between Mardley Heath and Knebworth, through Woolmer Green. The Roman road between Welwyn and Watton has dwindled here to a lane and a footpath.

**Settlements and Built Form**

There are several buildings of note in the vicinity of Knebworth designed by Lutyens including the red brick church of St. Martin, the Golf Club House (1908) and Homewood (1900).

**EVALUATION**

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The part within the District is comparatively open in character. The rolling landform helps to create enclosure and separation. The Character Area is crossed and enclosed by transport corridors adding to the general development pressure on the Character Area.

**Rarity & distinctiveness**

No distinctive features but Park Wood ancient woodland (hornbeam coppice) abuts southwest boundary.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

Urban impact of Stevenage and Knebworth. The motorway and railway corridors contribute to the sense of encroachment.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

Roads radiate out from Knebworth, crossing the area. Little footpath provision. Bridleway connection between Knebworth and Stevenage.

**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**

LC1	Landscape Conservation Area
SAM HT81	Deards End Bridge over railway: Knebworth

**EVALUATION**

**CONDITION**

Land cover change:	Localised
Age structure of tree cover:	Mature
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	Scattered
Management of semi-natural habitat:	Not obvious
Survival of cultural pattern:	Declining
Impact of built development:	High
Impact of land-use change:	Low

**Matrix Score:** **Moderate**

**ROBUSTNESS**

Impact of landform:	Prominent
Impact of land cover:	Prominent
Impact of historic pattern:	Insignificant
Visibility from outside:	Locally visible
Sense of enclosure:	Contained
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 Character Area as a whole has a gently undulating landform, although the fringes of Stevenage within North Hertfordshire are slightly flatter
- Hedgerow removal has created large arable fields in parts of the Character Area and left hedge banks without their hedges. The landscape is sensitive to further removal of hedges
- Individual trees are present in a few locations along roads and field boundaries. These are often over mature and would be vulnerable to loss and lack of a replacement programme
- Large woodland blocks are present within the wider Character Area. Within North Hertfordshire there are a limited number of relatively small woodland blocks which would be sensitive to encroachment of development or removal
- Within the Character Area there is a strong network of winding lanes, which are often cut into the landscape. These routes would be vulnerable to 'improvement' schemes and removal of the banks that remain from former hedge banks
- The A1(M) and the railway lines have disturbed and fragmented the parts of the Character Area within North Hertfordshire, particularly where the elevated sections create physical barriers to the rest of the Character Area. These elements require more careful integration.
- A number of incongruous elements have been introduced into the Character Area, including telecommunication masts, which currently act as detractors

Overall Datchworth Settled Slopes is considered to be of **low sensitivity**. The largely open Character Area is heavily influenced by the settlements of Stevenage and Knebworth, as well as the major transport corridors.

**Visual Sensitivities**

- Views across the Character Area are generally open and expansive due to a lack of hedgerows and vegetation
- Skylines when looking out of Datchworth Settled Slopes are generally wooded, with the woodland located outside the Character Area. Built development in Stevenage or Knebworth occasionally breaks these skylines
- The settlements of Stevenage and Knebworth look out over the Character Area
- Elevated views from railway lines and the A1(M) where they are on embankment.
- Roads throughout the Character Area are generally open, allowing views across the Character Area.

In visual terms, Datchworth Settled Slopes is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. Views within the Character Area are relatively open. However, areas of settlement and transport corridors have impinged on views into the Character Area, including the close proximity of Stevenage.

**LANDSCAPE VALUE**

Overall Datchworth Settled Slopes is considered to be of **low landscape value**. The area is heavily influenced by human activity, the landform is not particularly memorable and little remains of any semi-natural vegetation or habitats.

**EVALUATION**

**CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT**

**Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)**

This type of development would not be entirely appropriate within this Character Area, as it could cause coalescence of the settlements of Stevenage and Knebworth. Visual impacts could also be high, due to the openness of Datchworth Settled Slopes. Increased housing development would be likely to affect the existing narrow lanes that remain in the Character Area, which could remove aspects of the remaining character of the landscape. Any development that does proceed should be well contained by vegetation to minimise the extent of visual intrusion into the Datchworth Settled Slopes.

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

**Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)**

This type of development would not be entirely appropriate within this Character Area, due to the possibility of coalescence of the settlements of Stevenage and Knebworth. There may be some scope for small scale expansion of Stevenage and Knebworth, carefully designed and in keeping with the existing character. However, expansion of Stevenage would extend beyond the natural boundary of the railway. Mitigation planting would also need to be given careful consideration, to ensure that there is not visual intrusion into the wider Character Area.

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

**Major transport developments/improvements**

This type of development could be relatively appropriate within this Character Area, due to the presence of both the A1(M) and the railway lines at present. Improvements to these transport links could present the opportunity to improve their fit within the landscape and soften their appearance and the effect on the setting of Stevenage and Knebworth.

The landscape capacity for major transport developments/improvements is considered to be moderate.

**Commercial/warehouse estates**

This type of large scale development could be in keeping with the existing land uses adjacent to some parts of this character area, including larger settlements. Careful consideration of the landscape treatment to the edges of any consented development would be required, to ensure that there is not visual intrusion into the wider Character Area.

The landscape capacity for commercial/warehouse estates is considered to be moderate to 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 or vernacular form. However, large buildings, if not carefully located, would visually intrude on the largely open Datchworth Settled Slopes.

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

**Large scale open storage**

The openness of much of the Datchworth Settled Slopes would make it difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses without significant visual impacts. Careful consideration of the landscape treatment to the edges of any consented development would be required, to ensure that there is not visual intrusion into the wider Character Area.

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

## **EVALUATION**

### **Mineral extraction/waste disposal**

Mineral extraction is unlikely to be appropriate in Datchworth Settled Slopes due to the close proximity to built up areas and existing open aspects.

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 is likely to 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 open nature any proposals would need clear justification or carefully designed mitigation to avoid visual intrusion into the Datchworth Settled Slopes.

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 number of detractors in the area. These include existing telecommunications masts, which are visible throughout the Character Area. Further utilities developments or elements such as masts or wind turbines are likely to have a major impact on the open character of Datchworth Settled Slopes. Large scale tall elements such as these would be highly visible within the Character Area, as well as in surrounding Character Areas and from Knebworth and Stevenage.

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

**GUIDELINES**

**STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE**

**Strategy: Conserve and Restore**

NB. Guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire.

**Landscape management guidelines**

- Encourage restoration of historic hedgerows and management of relic hedges
- Consider the possibilities of creating footpath routes in the area
- Consider opportunities for woodland planting

**Built development guidelines**

- Strict control of development around the setting of Old Knebworth and Knebworth Park is a priority
- Encourage the use of woodland planting to screen new development and to provide ecological diversity
- Encourage diverse woodland planting along the A1(M) corridor
- Ensure that any new development on the edge of Stevenage is well contained by vegetation to improve the extent of visual intrusion from the major urban area into the Character Area
- Ensure that new development does not lead to coalescence of the settlements of Stevenage and Knebworth
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or hedgerows
- Ensure that lighting associated with new development does not create additional urbanising influences on the Character Area
- Encourage the integration of transport corridors into the Character Area through carefully designed earthworks and planting schemes
- Use the opportunity of any new developments to create new accessible green infrastructure for the local population