

## County map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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Hertfordshire County Council

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### LOCATION

Sacombe Park and associated estate farmland, south to include Tonwell, south-east to the river Rib/B158, excluding Sacombe village.

### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Strongly undulating wooded arable farmland and parkland. Rural, remote and tranquil. The parkland and farmland are unified by the consistency of architectural style and the presence of many mature hedgerow oaks and parkland trees. Sacombe House is discreetly concealed within its parkland, which is set tightly around the house, with the estate farmland spread out to the south and more visible.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- undulating landform
- unifying architectural style of estate farm buildings and lodges throughout area
- well wooded, with exotic tree species within parkland
- parkland influence of ornamental trees and boundary tree belts; estate influence of many mature hedgerow oaks
- parkland character overrides topography

### DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- moat at Bengoe Temple Farm and other earthworks
- water tower at Tonwell
- Sacombe House mansion
- permanent pasture with mature oaks in parkland
- heron and English partridge; skylarks
- B158 forms boundary with Rib floodplain



Sacombe Park farmland •  
(HCC Landscape Unit)

## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

**Geology and soils.** Sacombe has slowly permeable calcareous clay soils over chalky till (Hanslope series).

**Topography.** Undulating upland, sloping gently south-eastwards towards the Rib.

**Degree of slope.** 1 in 20

**Altitude range.** 50m to 103m

**Hydrology.** Several streams flow through the Sacombe estate into the Rib, including Chelsings Tributary and The Bourne.

**Land cover and land use.** This wooded farmland consists of estate farmland and parkland and is in mainly arable cultivation with significant amounts of pasture and extensive woodland.

**Vegetation and wildlife.** Woodland species include oak, hazel, holly, field maple, elder, ash, and hawthorn. Field boundaries tend to be modern medium-height hawthorn. The permanent pasture contains many mature oaks, indicative of wood pasture origins, with many notable large oaks within the Sacombe parkland in particular and poplar plantations associated with the water meadows. There is some relic calcareous and neutral grassland. Sacombe is a key parkland site in the Biodiversity Action Plan for Hertfordshire

## HISTORIC AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

There is a strong historic pattern in this area, deriving from the continuous land use and style of land management. There is a moat hidden in woodland near Bengoe Temple Farm, and a deer park is recorded at Sacombe in 1360 and 1676. Sacombe House was built in the early 19th century and is discreetly concealed. Its main significance lies in the early 18th-century landscape. Vanbrugh and then Gibbs were commissioned to design a house and garden. The garden was completed by Bridgeman: *'a magnificent vista with a parterre and formal basin leading through blocks of woodland to a long canal, and with lateral vistas radiating into the woodland to rond-points and cascades. The result bore a strong resemblance to Blenheim and also to Mollet's C17 French garden at Hampton Court.'* (Bisgrove) The house, however, was either never started or early destroyed (some authorities state that the outlines of a house by Vanbrugh are identifiable under the turf). The Bridgeman garden probably now lies beneath the trees below the house. There are avenues, earthworks, an amphitheatre, canals and ponds, and lots of yew. The presence of mature hedgerow oaks and a unified architectural style for farm buildings, estate cottages and lodges is very apparent

**Field pattern.** Field sizes are large and regular.

**Transport pattern.** There is only one road within this area, dividing this estate from Woodhall Park. There are several footpaths within the area, often at right angles to the A602.

### Settlements and built form.

- Tonwell is the only settlement in this area, and has a strong estate character due to the uniformity of building style and materials. Like the estate lodges and farms within the wider landscape of this area, they are yellow or red Victorian brick with steeply pitched clay tile roofs. There is also much mid 20th-century housing within the village and a water tower on its outskirts
- Sacombe Park is an example of the Greek revival, built c.1802-08 in yellow brick, with two storeys and nine bays with a four-column portico. It replaced the old house and Vanbrugh's walled garden, which were demolished c. 1780
- Chelsing Temple
- There is no church at Tonwell and Sacombe church stands on its own, apart from both the village and the house

## OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Pevsner, N., rev. Cherry, B., *Hertfordshire*, Penguin (2000).  
The Hertfordshire Gardens Trust and Richard Bisgrove, *Hertfordshire Gardens on Ermine Street* (1996), p.11  
HCC list of parks and gardens of historic interest

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

From the outside this area is concealed by woodland from the north and by topography from the south. Views within the area are extensive, occasionally blocked locally by woodland. This is a medium-scale, contained landscape, visually unified and tranquil. Although there has been some change from parkland to arable, the overall character is retained. The unity of the estate parkland and woodland extends southwards and is exemplified as far as Tonwell.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** Sacombe Park is listed by HCC but not currently by English Heritage.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

There is little impact from built development in this area, with recent development within Tonwell contained within the village envelope.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

Frequency/density of footpaths limited and occasionally unmarked. Localised. Some along farm tracks, some lost

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

The parkland of Sacombe is regarded as distinctive (C)

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

HBA

**CONDITION**

<i>Land cover change:</i>	<b>insignificant</b>
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	<b>mature</b>
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	<b>widespread</b>
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	<b>good</b>
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	<b>intact</b>
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	<b>low</b>
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	<b>low</b>

**STRENGTH OF CHARACTER**

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	<b>prominent</b>
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	<b>prominent</b>
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	<b>continuous</b>
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	<b>concealed</b>
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	<b>open</b>
<i>Visual unity:</i>	<b>unified</b>
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	<b>rare</b>

CONDITION	GOOD	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	<b>Safeguard and manage</b>
	MODERATE	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	POOR	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
		STRENGTH OF CHARACTER		

**STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING****CHANGE: SAFEGUARD AND MANAGE**

- resist any development proposals that would affect the integrity and historic value of this landscape area
- encourage the dissemination of information about the value of parkland and veteran trees
- encourage the reversion of arable to pasture, especially within the parkland
- promote crop diversification and the restoration of mixed livestock/arable farming
- promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and semi-natural habitats, i.e. along the stream courses, to prevent pesticide, herbicide and fertiliser run-off and to provide additional habitat. Where possible, link these buffer zones to the wider landscape via ecological corridors such as hedges and woodlands, to increase biodiversity
- encourage the establishment and management of wet native woodland along watercourses, such as willow and black poplar
- encourage woodland planting around or adjacent to existing woodlands, using only locally indigenous species of local provenance
- establish realistic and attractive management schemes for all sites with heathland and grassland communities
- promote the management of woodland to maintain a distinction between different systems: high forest, coppice, coppice-with-standards, wood pasture; establish a good age-spread through the woodland; establish a species-rich ground flora
- encourage an increase in the local footpath network, with links from the river valley up the tributaries. Small low-key car parks at access points would increase the accessibility of the area



- View south from near Sacombe church (HCC Landscape Unit)