

County Map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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 Hertfordshire County Council  
 LA076678



**LOCATION**

The area is located to the west of the Colne valley floodplain and south of Chorleywood and Rickmansworth. To the south and west the county boundary marks the approximate extent of the area.

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

An area of strong east-facing slopes that ease down towards the level valley of the River Colne. A series of dry tributary valleys extend westwards into the plateau area of the Chilterns dip slope. Large open arable fields characterise the area. The impact of 20th-century development at Maple Cross and other adjacent areas is a significant impact on the otherwise open landscape.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- strong east-facing slopes with snaking dry valleys pushing westwards
- large arable fields east of the M25 with minimal hedgerows
- visually prominent urban development on lower slopes and along the A412
- woodland areas concentrated on the slopes of the narrow dry valleys to the west
- M25 major feature on the skyline to the west
- views from the upper slopes to the east across the Colne valley

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- orchards
- sunken lanes on the steeper tributary valley slopes



Dry valley, West Hyde Lane • (J. Billingsley)

**PHYSICAL INFLUENCES**

**Geology and soils.** There are two contrasting geology and soil types within the area. The more steeply-sloping ground to the south and west comprises a mix of chalk and chalky drift geology overlaid by well-drained calcareous and fine silty soils, locally deep in valley bottoms and more shallow on valley sides (Coombe 1 association). To the north east the geology comprises glaciofluvial and Aeolian drift, which is overlaid by deep, well-drained coarse loamy often stoneless soils (Wick 3 series) known as colluvium.

**Topography.** Landform is a prominent feature of the landscape in this area. The slopes drop down from the edge of the plateau in the west to the edge of the Colne Valley floodplain. Across the main slopes run the strong landforms of dry valleys which twist up into the plateau. Closer to the Colne and along the A412 corridor the land levels out to less than 1 in 80.

**Degree of slope.** Slopes are typically between 1 in 20 to 1 in 25, yet locally are up to 1 in 10 on the main east-facing slopes. Side slopes in the dry valleys can reach 1 in 7.

**Altitude range.** 95m in west to 40m by Colne floodplain.

**Hydrology.** There are no watercourses on the valley sides due to the well-drained calcareous soils and chalky geology. There is a slight risk of water erosion on the valley sides.

**Land cover and land use.** The land cover pattern varies from east to west. To the east there is a dominance of large arable fields and a limited amount of grazing, e.g. at Woodoaks Farm and Bullsland Farm. West of the M25 there is a pastoral wooded farmland pattern which still includes arable but with more pasture. Significant blocks of woodland occupy some of the steeper slopes, creating pronounced features on the horizon.

**Vegetation and wildlife.** To the east there are a few relic clipped hedgerows and isolated trees. The most significant tree planting follows the A412 and includes a young lime avenue.

To the west the calcareous woodlands, e.g. Ladywalk Wood and Bottom Wood, are principally beech/oak/ash, although other species include field maple, native cherry and holly. Hedges on the slopes and along the narrow lanes include hawthorn, hazel and beech. There are vestiges of rare species in hedgerows and verges. There are few unimproved grassland communities on the clay-with-flints over chalk. Where present they include common bent, red fescue and sweet vernal grass. Orchards were historically present but now only two remain with the one at Woodoaks Farm now derelict.

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

**Field pattern.** To the north of the area and adjacent to the M25 much of the farmland has been altered in the 20th century to form new enclosures. Field sizes are large and irregular in shape. Within the centre and west of Maple Cross some of the pre-18th century field enclosures remain. Within the heads of the dry valleys there are some smaller field units.

**Transport pattern.** The original pattern of winding lanes and narrow verges connects the plateau area to the west with the Colne valley. They are locally sunken, exposing the underlying chalk where they climb the steeper tributary valleys. To the east the A412 is a prominent feature while the M25 and the A142 link are now major features through the area on the upper slopes.

**Settlements and built form.** Historic settlement on the slopes included only a few isolated farms and the village of Maple Cross (whose name is thought to arise from maypole dancing). There are few vernacular buildings remaining except for the 17th-century Cross Inn. Twentieth-century development has been much more extensive particularly at Maple Cross, Money Hill and Mill End along the A412, formerly the North London Orbital Route.

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

This is a very open area to the east with extensive views across and along from local and major roads. The Colne valley and contrasting wooded side slopes to the east are clearly seen. The M25 is both visually and audibly a major feature. To the west the landscape becomes more intimate and enclosed, with blocks of woodland and steeply rising and twisting landforms providing containment.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** The landscape type is frequent in the county, but uncommon in this part. The extensive arable landscape is notable for its lack of features. The narrow chalk valleys are the most distinctive elements.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

Twentieth-century development has a considerable and visually intrusive impact on the landscape character of this area. There has been a widespread change from agriculture to urban and a shift towards arable from pasture.

Residential areas at Maple Cross, Mill End and Money Hill present raw, exposed and incongruous edges to the adjacent arable areas. At Maple Cross along the A412 there are a number of large commercial buildings, including the Nissan offices that are highly visible from the approach from the M25. There is a considerable amount of indiscriminate fly-tipping along a number of the minor roads, which is a local eyesore. The M25 is a major feature along the upper slopes. While the road is partly screened by earthworks, the presence of lorries, pylons and radio masts is significant.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

There are a number of recreational rights of way through the area, particularly from east to west. The Old Shire Lane Circular Walk follows the county boundary to the south and west. The routes are considerably affected by the open character and noise from the M25. To the west a number of footpaths pass through the woodland areas. Within Maple Cross there is public open space at Beechen Wood and Franklin's Spring.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

This landscape is generally unremarkable but some aspects are valued for their distinctiveness (D).

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

Colne Valley Regional Park (majority).

**CONDITION**

<i>Land cover change:</i>	<b>widespread</b>
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	<b>over-mature</b>
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	<b>fragmented</b>
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	<b>poor</b>
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	<b>declining</b>
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	<b>high</b>
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	<b>moderate</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>relic</b>
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	<b>widely visible</b>
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	<b>open</b>
<i>Visual unity:</i>	<b>incoherent</b>
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	<b>frequent</b>

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

**STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING****CHANGE: RECONSTRUCT**

- promote the creation of a network of new shelterbelts and woodlands in the open arable landscape, particularly on the higher slopes in the vicinity of the M25 and the raw built edges of Maple Cross and Mill End, with a view to visually integrating the intrusive motorways and urban fringe development
- utilise existing woodlands, ancient hedge and field boundaries to identify the most appropriate location for woodland restoration and expansion
- promote the appropriate management of existing woodland in order to establish a rich ground flora and the distinction between different management systems, such as high forest and coppice-with-standards
- encourage the reversal of habitat fragmentation and the creation and improvement of habitat links to create eco-corridors
- promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and important semi-natural habitats and the creation of links between semi-natural habitats
- promote hedgerow restoration and creation throughout the area to provide visual and ecological links. Pattern to follow minor roads, rights of way, green lanes, county boundaries, e.g. Old Shires Lane, or historic field boundaries
- promote crop diversification and the restoration of mixed livestock/arable farming where possible
- promote the restoration of hedges and planting to provide new uncropped or grass field margins to link areas of wildlife importance and/or existing and proposed rights of way
- encourage the conservation of existing orchards and support for new orchards, including traditional varieties of fruit
- conserve unimproved and semi-improved grassland wherever possible, avoiding agricultural improvements to reduce their calcareous nature, in order to maintain their nature conservation value
- maintain and enhance the traditional pattern of roadside verges as a local feature and a wildlife resource
- promote a clear strategy for the visual and noise mitigation of the M25 and A412 and positively integrate these corridors into the local landscape
- encourage effective management along transport corridors to ensure thinning, selective felling and replanting is undertaken to achieve a varied age structure and locally indigenous species mix
- support the control of fly-tipping



- Extensive arable fields, Tilehouse Lane (J. Billingsley)