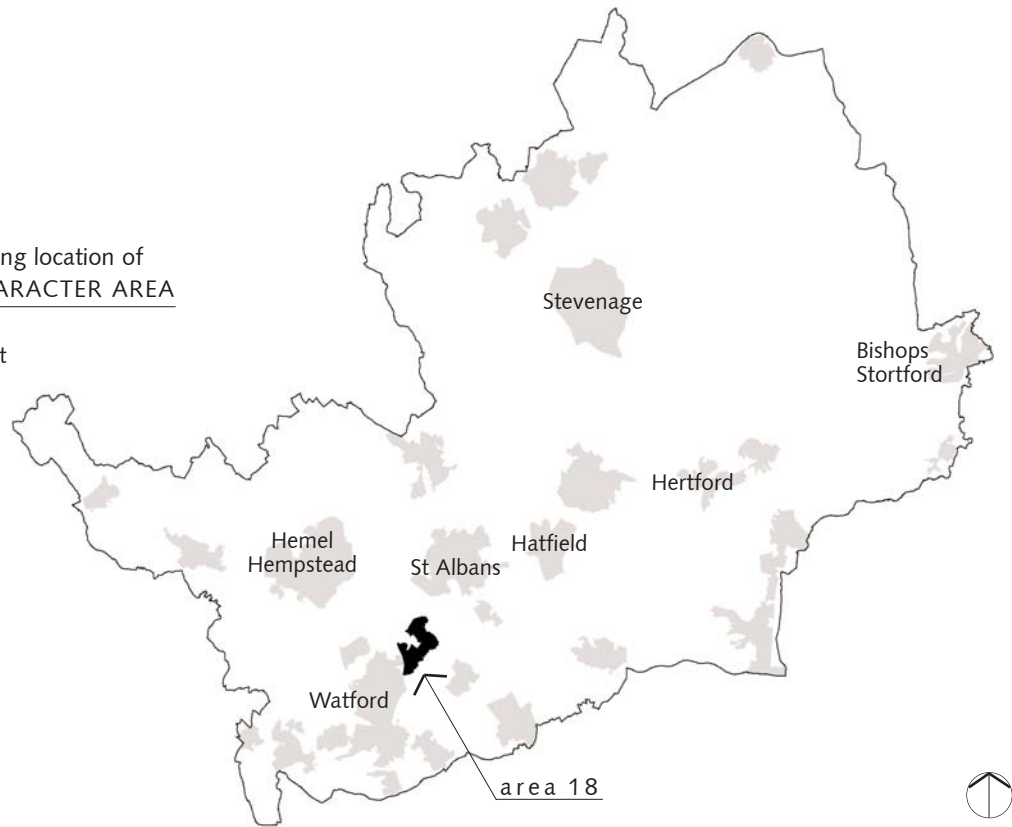


County map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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LOCATION

Between Bricket Wood, How Wood and the River Ver/Colne Valley.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

An area of mixed land uses and transitional character, including considerable woodland, unrestored mineral workings, educational, industrial, horticultural and arable land. The area has undergone significant change in the 20th century and is impinged upon by settlement at Bricket Wood and How Wood, together with a marked severance by the M25. The historic pattern is well preserved in Bricket Wood Common, but eroded in many other locations, showing poor management and some dereliction.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- a number of ancient woodlands
- poorly or partly restored mineral workings
- strong severance by the M25 and railway line
- secretive and secluded character of Bricket Wood Common
- tall and poorly-managed hedgerows with significant dieback
- scattered industrial and residential properties

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- ornamental grounds of HSBC College and associated sports centre
- wells and ponds at Bricket Wood Common

Hornbeam coppice •
at Bricket Wood Common
(HCC Landscape Unit)



PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. The geology comprises Aeolian silty drift and till. The soils are stoneless, slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged coarse loamy soils and silty over clayey soils (Gresham series). Bricket Wood Common is located on acidic boulder clay which leads to a wet heath habitat. Moor Mill Quarry SSSI is a site of gravels, silts and chalky till which helps trace the diversion of the proto-Thames.

Topography. The area is a gently undulating plateau except at the eastern fringes, adjoining minor tributary valleys next to the River Colne.

Degree of slope. Typically 1 in 80. Up to 1 in 12 on secondary valleys to Colne.

Altitude range. 83 - 75m.

Hydrology. Drainage on Bricket Wood Common is poor, particularly to the east of the railway. There are a number of small waterbodies and ponds scattered through the area, associated with either the Common, old farmsteads, old gravel workings or more ornamental lakes linked to the HSBC College. Minor streams flow along some of the local depressions.

Land cover and land use. Land cover can be broadly split between woodland, arable and disused minerals sites. Arable land, although present throughout the area, is not visually prominent due to the presence of tall though poorly-managed hedgerows. There are a few pasture fields remaining, associated with the settled fringe of Bricket Wood Common and adjacent settlement edges. Former mineral workings degrade the area, particularly adjacent to the M25, which itself is flanked by substantial earth bunds, thereby containing the area visually. A former minerals site on Lye Lane is to be restored for golf use.

Vegetation and wildlife. Bricket Wood Common (SSSI) is an important example of lowland heath. Part of the site is ancient oak/hornbeam woodland but much has regenerated from the former open, wet, acidic heath to scrub woodland, including birch and oak. The Common merited three separate field studies in J.G. Dony's *Flora of Hertfordshire*. Significant areas of hornbeam coppice have developed into a series of eerie anthropomorphic forms. Active management maintains the mix of woodland habitats. Other tree species include hazel, aspen, alder buckthorn and sessile oak. The main elements of heathland flora still survive due to recent management and include heather, heath grass, heath milkwort and heath spotted orchid. The Common also contains the largest colony of violet helleborine in the county.

Many of the other woodlands, including Blackgreen Wood, Nottlers Wood and Mutchetts Wood are ancient, though poorly managed. Woodland edges are marked by deep ditches, banks and hornbeam coppice. The woods are relatively drier than the Common and species include hornbeam, beech, oak and ash. Hedgerow species include elm, hawthorn, hazel and holly, although much of the elm is dying back. There are some local areas of dry heath associated with areas of gravel capping.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The traditional cohesion of the area has been disorientated by the extent of built development in the 20th century together with mineral extraction. The Common was historically managed by a combination of grazing, coppicing and burning.

Field pattern. Substantial areas of ancient woodland and common survive although much of the original field pattern has been affected by subsequent non-agricultural land use. Where present, fields are small/medium in size and irregular in form.

Transport pattern. The majority of original local roads are narrow sinuous lanes with no verges. The St Pancras railway line dissects the area, most noticeably on the Common. The M25 severs the area and the M1 lies to the west.

Settlements and built form. The traditional pattern of dispersed properties and small hamlets adjacent to the commons can still be locally seen, e.g. at Smug Oak. However, these are invariably submerged by 20th-century development, including the Building Research Establishment (at Garston), which seems to have infiltrated the area in both open and woodland habitats. The main residential areas of Bricket Wood commenced in the 1930s. The exception is at Bricket Wood Common, where a small hamlet including the Old Fox pub nestles at the end of a sinuous narrow lane through the wood. The HSBC College has an institutional character with strongly ornamental grounds. This was initially the American Ambassador College, founded in 1959 and planned around a stuccoed villa.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

English Nature SSSI notification.

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

Views are relatively contained both from outside and within the area. The jewel of the area is the Common, where there is a strong sense of seclusion and separation.

Although certain areas, notably the Common, are well maintained, elsewhere the area has a feeling of neglect and transition. Fly-tipping is a common detractor. Unrestored mineral workings are clearly visible from public roads, e.g. Smug Oak Lane and Lye Lane, and many of the residential properties display defensive boundary details.

Rarity and distinctiveness. Although much of the landscape type is frequent, the Bricket Wood Common is unique within the county. The extensive wet acidic heath is a rare habitat and the area is classified as a High Biodiversity Area in the BAP.

VISUAL IMPACT

The M25 is a major built feature through the area, although it is in cutting for most of its length. At Blackgreen Wood extensive new planting has been undertaken to create a new woodland edge.

ACCESSIBILITY

There is an access land agreement over the extensive Bricket Wood Common. East of the railway line the Common can be very wet, which seasonally restricts access. There is limited parking available along School Lane. Although known to the local population the area is not well signed. Elsewhere there are localised footpaths and bridleways. Horse riding is a noted use, although some of the lanes are rat runs and potentially dangerous.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

The wooded landscape has some value for distinctiveness, including those for whom woodland is not their primary interest (D).

Re Bricket Wood Common: *'a most fascinating backwoods region. Here are morasses, thick undergrowth, rare orchids and trees of many types'* ('Elstree and the Colne Valley', *Hertfordshire Countryside* Vol.20, No.83, March 1966).

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

Watling Chase Community Forest (All).

SSSI: Moor Mill Quarry (geological interest).

SSSI: Bricket Wood Common.

CONDITION

<i>Land cover change:</i>	localised
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	mixed
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	widespread
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	good
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	interrupted
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	low
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	moderate

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

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

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
STRENGTH OF CHARACTER				

STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE: SAFEGUARD AND MANAGE

- support the Watling Chase Community Forest in the realisation of its objectives for the area
- continue the management of the Common to benefit restoration of wet heathland flora
- promote management on the Common to benefit restoration of coppice woodland
- promote the re-establishment of low-density stock grazing and management by rotational cutting, turf stripping and/or controlled burning as appropriate
- establish realistic and attractive countryside management schemes for all sites with heathland and acid grassland/scrub community potential. Create a mix of habitat types with a balance between wildlife and public access. Promote local initiatives for traditional management
- promote the creation of additional woodlands, particularly with a view to visually integrating the intrusive motorways, urban fringe development and former mineral sites
- improve public access arrangements to heaths and woodlands with attention to car park design and public safety
- promote the appropriate management of coppice woodland in order to maintain a rich ground flora and the distinction between different management systems, such as high forest, coppice, coppice-with-standards and wood pasture
- use ancient hedge and field boundaries to identify the most appropriate location for wood restoration and expansion
- 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 crop diversification and the restoration of mixed livestock/arable farming where possible
- promote both the creation of new ponds and the retention/enhancement for wildlife of existing ponds
- promote hedgerow restoration through locally appropriate measures including coppicing, laying and replanting/gapping-up
- ensure that ancient lanes and their associated hedgerows, ditches and hedgebanks are retained, protected, enhanced and integrated into new development with due regard to their historic, ecological and landscape value
- traffic-calming measures, where considered necessary, must be of a scale and design that relates to the local landscape character of the settlement
- promote a clear strategy for the visual and noise mitigation of all motorways to positively integrate these corridors into the local landscape character
- 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



- Clearing in woodland at Bricket Wood Common (HCC Landscape Unit)