LOCATION
This area runs from the Lea Valley east of Wheathampstead, southwards to St Albans.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER
An undulating north/south ridge with dominant arable land cover. To the north and east both extensive ancient and discrete plantation woodlands create a contained and coherent landscape. To the west and south the landscape is much more open with extensive and distant views to and from the area. There is a quiet and detached feel. The sparse farmsteads, narrow twisting lanes with hedgebanks and the wooded enclosure of Coleman Green add to the relaxed character.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS
• extensive woodland areas on eastern slopes
• small settlements and individual properties well assimilated into the landscape
• large arable fields with relic hedgerows
• narrow lanes (some sunken) with hedgebanks
• distant views to south east, west and north

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES
• wireless station masts on ridge to south
• massive Iron Age ditches (including Devil’s Dyke)
• chalk pits
• pick-your-own-fruit farm
PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. The local geology is a chalky till, with deep fine loamy over clayey and clayey soils with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging (Hornbeam 3 series). Calcareous subsoils exist in places.

Topography. The area comprises a moderate ridge 4km in length from north to south and 2km from east to west. The landform gently undulates with some stronger valley features to the north. There are a number of chalk pits, e.g. Chalk Dell Farm.

Degree of slope. 1 in 25 to 1 in 40 on the slopes and less than 1 in 100 along the ridge.

Altitude range. 81-96m on the perimeter and 111-119m on the ridgeline.

Hydrology. A few springs rise on the slopes, e.g. Dogsheart Spring and Pearman’s Spring. Local woods also suggest springs rising, e.g. Long Spring Grove and Wet Grove. To the south east of the ‘Belgic Oppidum’ a series of linear ponds follow a shallow valley to the north and then part of the manmade earthworks at ‘The Slad’. There are some ponds and wells associated with farmsteads.

Land cover and land use. The primary land use is arable farming on both the slopes and the narrow plateau. Woodland is the major secondary land use to the eastern and northern slopes. Small areas of pasture for cattle and horses remain in association with farmsteads, e.g. Fairfold’s Farm and Symondshyde Farm. Poor hedges have often been replaced by fencing, which gives a temporary feel.

Vegetation and wildlife. Extensive woods include Symondshyde, Furze Field, Chalk Dell and Titnol’s Woods, many of them ancient with a natural acidic oak/hornbeam/birch mix. Sessile oak is also a feature of the woods, planted by the Gascoigne-Cecil Estate. Ash and oak form wood banks to the edges. Coppice is a feature to the north west of the area. At Symondshyde areas of botanically rich remnant heath survive in the rides. Plantations have also been added to either connect with the ancient woods or as discrete areas, e.g. David’s Dingle. There is a large proportion of softwoods (both larch and pine) throughout and these are actively managed. The fine mature lime avenue from Brocket Hall terminates at Benstead’s Wood.

At Coleman Green there are areas of heathy grassland, but much of the area has reverted to semi-natural woodland. The hedges are variable, being locally prominent on hedgebanks with the underlying gravels often visible in some of the lanes. In contrast there has been extensive hedge removal in the fields, and those that do exist are relic and in a state of decline. Hedgerow species are mixed and include hornbeam, field maple, holly, elm and some bracken to the small plateau area. Hedgerow trees include oak, ash and holly.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Just outside Wheathampstead are massive late Iron Age ditches including Devils Dyke. Symondshyde derives its name in part from a ‘hyde’, a 120-acre Saxon free tenement. John Bunyan is recorded to have visited a cottage at Coleman Green.

Field pattern. The historic field pattern varies. To the north and east the mainly pre-18th century organic enclosure pattern is largely intact, although hedgerow loss makes the area seem more open. Field units are generally irregular in shape and medium to large in size. There has been some limited enlargement to prairie fields. To the south and east there is an historic pattern of parliamentary enclosure, which has subsequently been extensively altered by both 20th-century enclosure and a loss of former boundaries from post-1950 enlargements.

Transport pattern. The transport pattern comprises narrow winding lanes twisting slowly across the landform.

Settlements and built form. The settlement pattern is sparse and scattered. There is one small hamlet at Coleman’s Green which with its now regenerated wooded common has a secluded feel. There is a mix of building materials, including red and gault brick, timber frame and clay tile. There are no notable large houses and most are well integrated into the wooded arable landscape.
VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION
This moderately elevated area is visible from the surrounding landscape with the woods forming a key feature from the east. The more open farmland to the south is particularly visible from the edge of St Albans. Within the area the views are framed and generally contained by hedgerows, woodland and the undulating landform. From the south of the area near Nashe's Farm there are distant views across the Vale of St Albans and as far as the Shenley Ridge.

Rarity and distinctiveness. This landscape type is frequent. Its most distinctive feature is the quiet relaxed character.

VISUAL IMPACT
There has been a widespread shift from pasture to arable, but there are very few detracting elements in the landscape. The exceptions are the radio masts to the south, temporary earth bunding at Sutton's Farm and the built edge of St Albans to the south. Areas of fly-tipping at Symondshyde detract from the woods. Chalk Dell Fruit Farm off Marford Road has a strong visual impact with its ordered narrow plots contrasting with the surrounding arable areas.

ACCESSIBILITY
There is a moderate network of rights of way, particularly to the east. The Hertfordshire Way passes through the area. Symondshyde Woods, run by Countryside Management Services provide informal recreation opportunities including parking and picnic facilities.

COMMUNITY VIEWS
This area generally appears not to be valued for its distinctiveness, except for the wooded landscapes around Symonshyde (C).

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS
Landscape Conservation Area (part).
SAM: Wheathampstead earthwork (including Devil's Dyke and The Slad).

CONDITION
Land cover change: widespread
Age structure of tree cover: mature or young
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival: fragmented
Management of semi-natural habitat: good
Survival of cultural pattern: declining
Impact of built development: moderate
Impact of land-use change: high

ROBUSTNESS
Impact of landform: prominent
Impact of land cover: prominent
Impact of historic pattern: interrupted
Visibility from outside: locally visible
Sense of enclosure: partial
Visual unity: coherent
Distinctiveness/rarity: frequent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONDITION</th>
<th>GOOD</th>
<th>MODERATE</th>
<th>POOR</th>
<th>WEAK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strength and reinforce</td>
<td>Improve and conserve</td>
<td>Improve and restore</td>
<td>Restore condition to maintain character</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safeguard and manage</td>
<td>Conserve and strengthen</td>
<td>Conserve and restore</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WEAK | MODERATE | STRONG
STRENGTH OF CHARACTER
STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE: IMPROVE AND CONSERVE

- extend the network of woodlands to the south and west of the area, including plantations to screen the built edge of St Albans, reduce the impact of masts and mitigate the impact of mineral extraction
- within existing woodlands encourage the replacement of softwoods with indigenous native deciduous communities
- maintain and extend public access arrangements to woodlands with improvements 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
- encourage heath habitats within woodlands by creating glades and maintaining open rides
- promote the expansion of woodland beyond ancient woodland boundaries, especially where this will help in creating habitat links
- promote management plans for Coleman Green to maintain a balance between wildlife and public access. Promote local initiatives for traditional management to create areas of acidic heath
- 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 between existing and proposed woodland areas. Pattern to follow historic field boundaries and/or rights of way and to include additional hedgerow trees
- 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 the use of traditional hedged field enclosure in place of timber or wire fencing where land is converted to pasture
- protect the traditional pattern of local lanes, hedgebanks, verges and hedges as a local feature and wildlife resource
- maintain the peaceful qualities of the area and protect it from active recreation and development