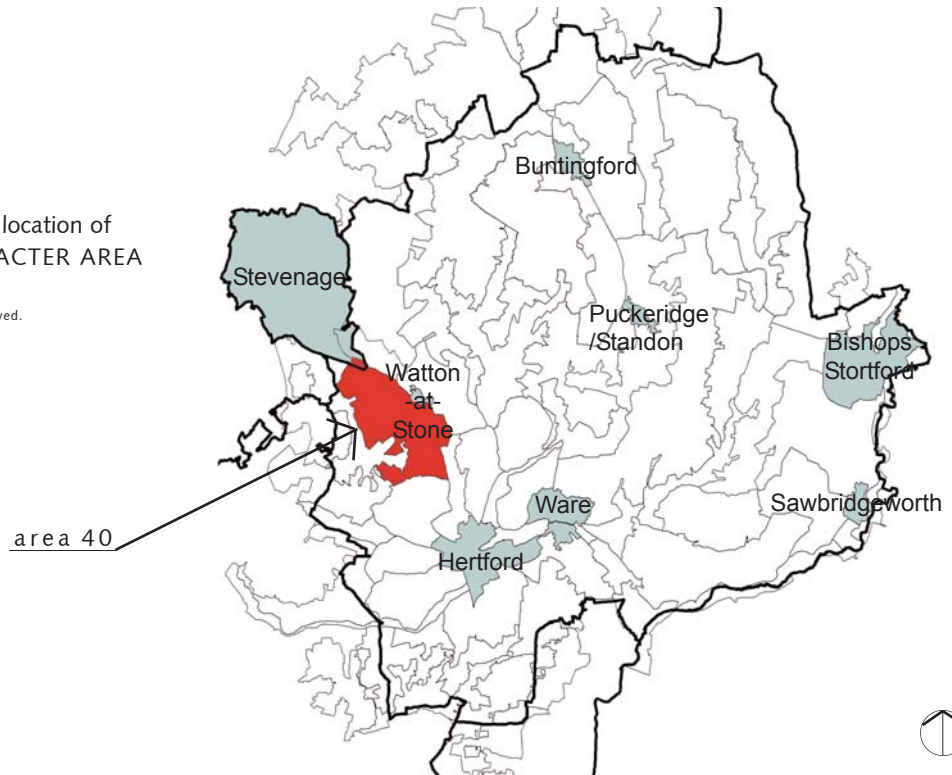


County map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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100019606 2004



LOCATION

To the south east of Stevenage, between the Datchworth plateau and the upper Beane valley to the east; bounded to the west by Knebworth and to the south by Bramfield Plain.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Undulating and gently sloping large-scale arable farmland with no settlements. Discrete medium to large blocks of woodland frame views over large fields with few hedges, but are insufficient in scale to create strong vertical elements. A long cultivated landscape, lacking variety.

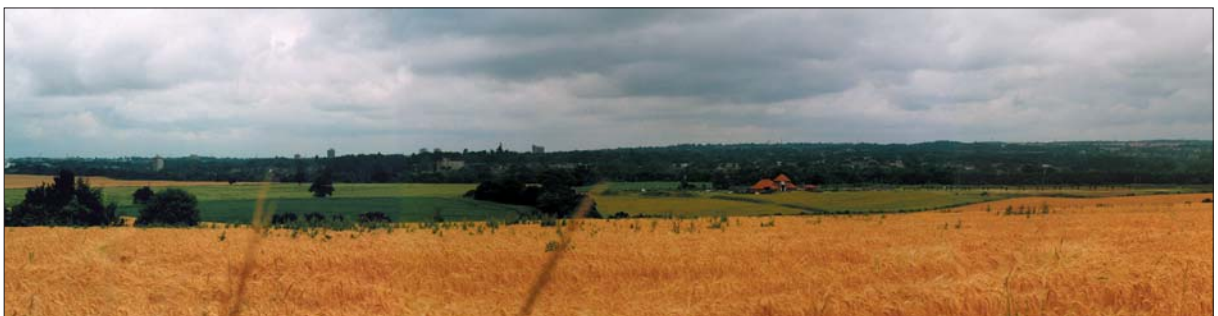
KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- sloping intermediate area
- extensive views up to plateau woodland and out over distant valley landform
- isolated farms; no settlements
- open, large-scale arable farmland with discrete woodland blocks

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- sinuous open lanes (including Roman road)
- woodland is almost all deciduous ancient woodland
- extensive views towards Stevenage
- arable cropping right up to road edge, with a few good wildflowers
- modern crematorium outside urban edge of Stevenage

Bragbury Lane and edge of Stevenage •
(P. Shears)



PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. Slowly permeable calcareous clayey soils over chalky till (Hanslope series).

Topography. East-facing slope.

Degree of slope. 1 in 60.

Altitude range. 75m to 122m.

Hydrology. The north-eastern edge of this area is marked by the Stevenage Brook, a tributary of the river Beane, which delineates the eastern edge of this area. Stevenage Brook is the main tributary of the Beane and helps maintain fish species, despite recent problems associated with low water flows, high temperatures and algal blooms.

Land cover and land use. The dominant land use in this area is arable cultivation, with several areas of woodland linked to the more prominent woodland on the plateau above. There are several chalk pits in the area.

Vegetation and wildlife. Most of the woodland in this area is ancient hornbeam woodland with bluebells, with a linked group just north of the Roman road. There are very few hedges. Field boundaries abut roads without any intervention, although there are a few medium-width verges of considerable wildflower interest. Bramfield Park Wood contains aspen, hornbeam, silver birch, hawthorn, ash, oak, *Viburnum opulus* and sycamore. There is some neutral grassland with cowslips but most tends to be acidic, except where chalk is found at the surface.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

This is historically an area of large arable fields. The area's significance in Roman times is marked by the Roman road; there are also moated enclosures in Well Wood and Chapel Wood, both Scheduled Ancient Monuments. Bramfield Park is shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey, but not earlier.

Field pattern. Large regular and irregular fields, with a distinct radial pattern out from the plateau, narrower in the west, bearing the marks of post-18th century enclosure.

Transport pattern. The roads also follow this radial pattern and, although sinuous, are markedly straighter than those on the plateau, and open. Even the Roman road, linking Welwyn and Watton-at-Stone, although apparently straight on the map is undulating and sinuous, mainly open but partly edged with ragged hedges, small woodland belts or hedgerow trees.

Settlements and built form. There are no settlements in this area, only isolated farms of some antiquity (Great and Little Gobions) and Bramfield Park, which has a well-wooded enclosed park. The crematorium on the south-eastern edge of Stevenage, outside the urban envelope, is an anomaly.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

HCC information on historic parks and gardens.

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

This area is widely visible, both from the Datchworth plateau and from the lower areas on both sides of the river Beane. Similarly, extensive views can be obtained from within the area. It is a large-scale, unified, rather exposed landscape, somewhat monotonous and lacking vertical elements. It is quite tranquil, with occasional distant noise from road traffic.

Rarity and distinctiveness. The radial field pattern of this area is unusual, but not directly distinguishable as a visual landscape feature. The area is perhaps unusual in its unity and lack of variety.

VISUAL IMPACT

The crematorium on the southern edge of Stevenage has a stronger visual impact within this area than the urban area itself. It stands outside the urban envelope, in open arable farmland within which there are few other structures, and is of an unusual design with little obvious attempt at integration, making it a distinctive feature within this area.

ACCESSIBILITY

There are no noted recreational land uses within the area and footpaths and bridleways are almost non-existent..

COMMUNITY VIEWS

There is little evidence that this area is valued for its distinctiveness, although the Roman Road was highlighted. (D).

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

Landscape Conservation Area.

CONDITION

<i>Land cover change:</i>	localised
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	mature
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	fragmented/relic
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	not obvious
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	intact
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	high
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	low

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	prominent
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	apparent
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	interrupted
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	widely visible
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	open
<i>Visual unity:</i>	unified
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	unusual

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: IMPROVE AND CONSERVE

- encourage the management of existing and the replacement of former hedges, to assist in creating wildlife corridors. Concentrate efforts on creating linkages between the discrete woodlands
- do not plant hedges along roadsides - in this area wide open views are very characteristic
- encourage the creation of new woodlands related to existing woods, where possible on historic woodland sites and/or linking woodland together. The scale of new woodland should be in scale with the surrounding landscape
- encourage the management of verges to maximise their nature conservation potential, especially with regard to arable weeds and other wildflowers
- landowners and tenant farmers should be encouraged to create and manage verges for their biodiversity and wildlife interest. Similarly, where the reinstatement of former hedges is held to be inappropriate, consideration could be given to the creation of beetle banks, nature conservation headlands and other biodiversity initiatives. Advice and possible grant aid may be available
- support the establishment of agri-environmental schemes in Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) and Countryside Heritage Areas (CHAs)
- although the crematorium is a very intrusive element in this area, it might be possible to screen it in the long term by creating a new woodland belt to the south. This would have to be of considerable size to blend with the overall scale of the area.