

County map showing location of
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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Hertfordshire County Council
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LOCATION

Plateau area incorporating the sub-areas of the Bramfield Woods complex, Burnham Green, Bulls Green and Datchworth, and the settlement of Tewin Wood.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

A densely wooded upland area, gently undulating, with settlements of different ages either grouped around village greens or carefully planned within wooded areas. Although woodland is a dominant feature, arable production is also characteristic and prominent, with very little pasture even around the villages. It divides into three sub-areas. The Bramfield Woods area is unsettled and consists of a dense complex of plateau woodlands, with mixed deciduous and conifer plantations, surrounded by large-scale arable fields. Bull's Green and Burnham Green, like Datchworth, are old settlements clustered around extensive village greens. Tewin Wood, on the south-western part of the plateau, shares the woodland character of Bramfield Woods but contains a 20th-century settlement of some 600 plots.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- gently undulating upland plateau
- extensively wooded arable farmland
- several linked settlements of varying ages
- tall mixed hedgerows around settlements screening views out, with no verges
- lack of hedges or hedgerow trees within arable farmland

- intimate blend of settled, forestry and agricultural land use
- mainly tranquil but with heavy road traffic at peak hours
- tight road network of sharply winding enclosed lanes
- quite remote, with filtered views of Stevenage in distance to north west
- frequently gloomy due to density of vegetation
- different ages of settlements

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- village greens, some with formal recreational facilities
- Tewin Wood planned settlement
- arable production extends to settlement edge
- extensive views out; very limited views within, due to extensive woodland and tall hedgerows
- water tower

Bramfield Woods (HCC Landscape Unit) •



PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. Deep fine loamy and clayey soils with slowly permeable subsoils, over chalky till (glacial drift) (Hornbeam 3 series). Reading gravels on the plateau.

Topography. Gently undulating upland

Degree of slope. Level, locally 1 in 190

Altitude range. 110m-122m

Hydrology. There are a few ponds locally, but no watercourses

Land cover and land use. This area is predominantly a mix of ancient woodland/plantation and small settlements edging out on the plateau spurs (c. 60% of total area), with significant arable farmland interlocking with the woodland. There is a little pasture around the settlements, but this is not typical, and a few local nurseries on the edge of settlements. Local variation in land cover defines the sub-areas. Bramfield Woods has no settlements but a strongly defined mix of woodland and arable cultivation. Tewin Wood is densely settled within extensive woodland, with little farmland. Datchworth has no woodland and the village is surrounded by extensive arable cultivation, from which it is separated by tall, dense hedges within and around the edge of the village, which gives it a rather wooded character.

Vegetation and wildlife. The woodland cover is extensive and interlocking, with different species in the different coupes of the Forestry Commission managed woodland. The dominant species are oak/hornbeam/bracken (*Quercus robur* and *Q. rubra*) with elm, sycamore and holly, with some conifers (Corsican pine) in Bramfield Wood and willow, hawthorn and a little beech elsewhere. A significant local feature is the presence of very tall mixed hedges without verges, typically of holly and hawthorn with some hornbeam, within and on the edge of the settlements. Elsewhere, the medium height hedges are generally fragmented, with occasional new planting, or have declined into tree rows through lack of management. Typical species are hawthorn, field maple and holly, with hornbeam locally. At Bulls Green the acidic grassland tends to heath and this is one of the few locations in the county of alder buckthorn.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

There is an apparent and widespread pre-20th century pattern throughout this area, exemplified by the pattern of ancient woodland and small medieval settlements, which are usually centred around an extensive village green (Datchworth Green, Burnham Green, Bulls Green).

Datchworth Green now has a suburban character due to 20th-century development. The purely 20th-century settlement of Tewin Wood is unified by its evenly-sized plots within mature woodland.

Field pattern. The field pattern and scale of the arable land is now consistently medium to large regular, with discontinuous field boundaries and arable cultivation right up to the settlements.

Transport pattern. The road pattern is sinuous and linear, linking the settlements, except to the north of Datchworth, where it is more intricate. Within Bramfield Wood the lanes are winding and sunken.

Settlements and built form. The various 'green' settlements have medieval origins, with a variety of building styles and ages.

- Datchworth has a small flint church, originally 13th century, formerly enclosed by a moat, which included the original Bury. It is the focus of a scattered parish of a number of 'greens' and a convergence of several green lanes. There is a Roman road on the south side of the green, with fine oaks and ashes. Hoppers Hall is a timber frame and plastered gabled 17th-century building.
- Queen Hoo is a small early Elizabethan brick hunting lodge at the southern edge of the plateau, with extensive views over the Mimram valley. It is described in Munby as '*an impressive Elizabethan brick hunting lodge set in a tangled Saxon landscape*'.
- Tewin Wood, originally planted up for shooting, was sold by Lord Desborough in 1925 to Homeland Garden Estates Ltd, who divided it into individual building plots 200 by 600 ft in area. Development continued slowly during the 1940s, and in the 1960s the remaining plots were sold on and developed in smaller units.
- Sally Rainbow's Dell commemorates a local 'witch' who was fed and placated by local farmers to prevent her casting spells to blight their crops.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Munby, L., *The Landscape of Hertfordshire*, Hodder and Stoughton (1977).

Pevsner, N., rev. Cherry, B., *Hertfordshire*, Penguin (2000). Public exhibition on the history of Tewin in the village hall, 5th July 2000.

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

From the outside this area is widely visible as a wooded ridge above an area of gently sloping arable farmland, within which the settlements are screened from outside view. Views within the area are very limited, due to the presence of extensive woodland blocks and tall hedges throughout, which often give a gloomy cast and sense of confinement to the area. The scale of landscape elements is medium, with some large woodland blocks, while the settlements are compact within this. There is a coherent quality to the character of this area, despite the different ages of the settlements, due to the dominance of woodland as a major landscape element. It is a tranquil area, except during rush hour, when the winding, narrow road network is heavily used by commuters.

Rarity and distinctiveness. Unusual combination of settlements within woodland

VISUAL IMPACT

As there are so few views out from this area, the impact of built development elsewhere is insignificant. Similarly, the settlement within the area is screened from the wider landscape by woodland. There is a sense of being high and contained locally, with extensive open areas on the perimeter. The usual transition zone from pasture around settlements to arable within the wider landscape is absent in this area, and arable cultivation encroaches right up to the settlements.

ACCESSIBILITY

Noted recreational land uses: walking, hiking, horseriding. Almost non-existent footpaths in northern part but good in south; widespread in woodland. Condition: fair except where trampled by horses, but generally unsurfaced.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

The wooded and settled landscape area of Tewin Wood is valued for its distinctiveness (C), as is the mixed woodland landscape of Bramfield Wood (C). Some aspects of the Datchworth landscape are also valued for distinctiveness, but not as highly (D).

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

Landscape Conservation Area.
Bramfield Woods is recognised as a High Biodiversity Area (HBA) for its woodlands.

CONDITION	
<i>Land cover change:</i>	insignificant
<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>	moderate
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	low

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER	
<i>Impact of landform:</i>	apparent
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	prominent
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	interrupted
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	widely visible
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	contained
<i>Visual unity:</i>	coherent
<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: CONSERVE AND STRENGTHEN

- encourage planting of locally indigenous species within plantation coupes
- where new development on plateau is deemed appropriate, ensure that it both respects the existing settlement pattern and is well screened from outside views, possibly with new woodland belts on the plateau edge
- encourage the Forestry Commission to publicise its red oak plantation in autumn - it must be magnificent - and to take the opportunity to provide information on the importance of ancient woodland and plantations
- manage the woodland to achieve age diversity of locally indigenous species and to maintain a species-rich ground flora, as well as expressing different forms of management, such as high forest, coppice and coppice-with-standards
- encourage the creation of rides and glades in the woodland to increase biodiversity and improve public access
- encourage the creation of eco-corridors, such as hedges, beetle banks and wide field margins, within the arable farmland to link more diverse areas, such as the woods
- encourage the development and maintenance of wide verges along roadsides, to encourage arable wildflowers; do not plant hedges in these locations



• Woodland along Bramfield Road (HCC Landscape Unit)