



District map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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 Welwyn Hatfield Council
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LOCATION

Curving belt between Welwyn and Hatfield, bounded by the A1(M) to the west, the River Lea valley to the south beyond Hatfield and the Mimram valley parklands and Coles Green to the east.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

An urban fringe belt around the eastern flanks of Welwyn, with a wide range of land uses, from recreation through arable cultivation to mineral extraction. While the western end of this area, squeezed between Welwyn and Hatfield, has very obvious urban-fringe land uses, the area to the east is more rural, with arable cultivation and some blocks of woodland.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- mainly gently undulating land on the northern valley slopes of the river Lea
- proximity of large settlements very obvious, via transport network and land uses
- open, with large woodland blocks
- disturbed or restored mineral extraction sites

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- railway, pylons and major road transport network: A1(M), A414, A1000, A6129
- fly-tipping



Fishing lake from former mineral workings • at Holwell Court Farm (P. Shears)

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. Mainly deep, well-drained fine loamy and sandy soils, locally flinty, over glaciofluvial drift (Ludford series), with deep fine loamy over clay soils over chalky till to the east (Hornbeam 3 series).

Topography. Gently undulating with localised mounding. Flat around Panshanger aerodrome.

Degree of slope. 1 in 70

Altitude range. 65m to 80m

Hydrology. There is some drainage into the river Lea, not significant enough to be named, and many ponds and lakes associated with former mineral workings.

Land cover and land use. Mainly arable cultivation and recreation, with a small aerodrome, golf course, fishing lake, sewage works, woodland and small areas of pasture. Part of The Commons is a local nature reserve, but there appears to be no public access to the remainder of the woodland. The extensive mineral extraction site at Holwell Hyde has been restored to pasture, arable and a well-used fishing lake. The surrounding land is in large-scale arable cultivation.

Vegetation and wildlife. The south-western part of this area was formerly alluvial floodplain pasture with alder woodland, with arable cultivation on the upper slopes, but is now an area of mainly urban fringe development. The Commons is a unique area of totally secondary woodland, of elm and sycamore, with very mixed plantation flora. The Holwell Park estate supports ancient semi-natural hornbeam woodlands with an associated spring system. In addition to the woodland blocks the southern edge of Welwyn (Hatfield Hyde) is well screened by mature trees and the local network of lanes is well hedged, with tall thorn hedges and many medium hedges with ash or hornbeam standards, as well as individual mature oaks. Other species found in this area are hazel and blackthorn, while Great Captain's Wood is hornbeam with silver birch and cherry. Some former field boundaries have been planted with poplar and white poplar.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Much of the historic alluvial floodplain and estate pattern of this landscape has been disturbed or lost, to development, mineral extraction or WWII disturbance. In 1919 Ebenezer Howard bought 1,458 acres of the Panshanger Estate, which became the first part of Welwyn Garden City. The relics of WWII depots and army camps are still visible at the western end of this area and the aerodrome at Panshanger was used as an RAF training field. Starting in the 1930s, a vast artificial plateau was created at Holwell Hyde, using London waste to infill a massive gravel extraction complex. It has since been returned to secondary grassland and arable use. There are no settlements within the area.

Holwell Court Farm, Holwell Manor, Holwellpark Wood and Holwell Hyde Farm indicate a formerly extensive estate. (A 'hyde' is a Saxon land measurement (120 acres) used as part of the process of assarting, that is, enlarging the area of cultivated land around the edge of a manorial settlement).

Field pattern. The remaining field pattern is large-scale and regular.

Transport pattern. The few lanes are sinous and level, while the major road transport pattern (A1000, A6129, A414) is modern.

Settlements and built form. There are no settlements within the area and very few isolated dwellings and farm buildings. The aircraft hangars at Panshanger aerodrome are quite well concealed by woodland.

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

This is a rather bleak and seemingly forgotten area, useful for hiding utilities necessary to the nearby urban centres and providing low-key recreation on former minerals sites. It is rather large in scale, with large individual elements such as the aerodrome, the minerals sites, etc. and the areas of woodland, but lacks coherence due to the variety of land uses. On the southern edge of Welwyn Garden City an area bounded by the A6129 and the A1000 now has so many urban-edge land uses as to have lost any rural character. **Rarity and distinctiveness.** The Commons is regarded as a unique area ecologically, although the local landscape could not be described as distinctive.

VISUAL IMPACT

The southern edge of Welwyn is well screened by vegetation and the main visual impacts are from utilities and transport, with busy traffic on the A414 and pylons overhead.

ACCESSIBILITY

The Lea Valley Walk/Cole Green Way and chain cycle track links Welwyn and Hertford. There is a byway (farm track) between Holwell Hyde Farm and Hertford Road (A414), with a link across disused workings to the Lea Valley Chain Walk; also a circular walk within and to the east of the Panshanger part of Welwyn Garden City.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

This area includes a significant range of elements valued for their distinctiveness (C) (possibly due to their proximity to large settlements).

CONDITION

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

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	apparent
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	apparent
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	relic
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	widely visible
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	open
<i>Visual unity:</i>	incoherent
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	frequent

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 RESTORE**

- encourage landowners to safeguard existing hedges, increase hedged field boundaries, create permanent grass strips around field margins and prevent spray drift, using financial incentives as available.
- where further mineral extraction is proposed, ensure that restoration proposals conform to existing landform and land use; if restoration to arable cultivation is proposed, especial care of topsoil will be essential
- encourage the use of low-density grazing as a management technique and maintain unimproved pasture wherever possible
- restore distinctive rural features where possible, especially along the cycle track. This could include new hedge and tree planting (where historically appropriate), using locally distinctive species of local provenance, and restoration to pasture in the floodplain.
- encourage the reversal of habitat fragmentation and the creation and improvement of habitat links to create eco-corridors. This could be particularly appropriate along the southern edge of this area, where new golf courses could be managed to provide semi-natural habitat and a link between riverside and woodland habitats.
- promote the expansion of woodland beyond ancient woodland boundaries, especially where this will help in creating habitat links and could assist in providing vertical elements to balance the large-scale horizontal elements in this landscape area.
- promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and important semi-natural habitats
- encourage woodland planting of native species local to the Character Area on poor quality agricultural land, where this is in keeping with local landscape character, is on the site of former woodland or can provide an ecological link to other woodlands or habitats.



- Poplars Green. Boundary with Mimram Valley parklands (HCC Landscape Unit)