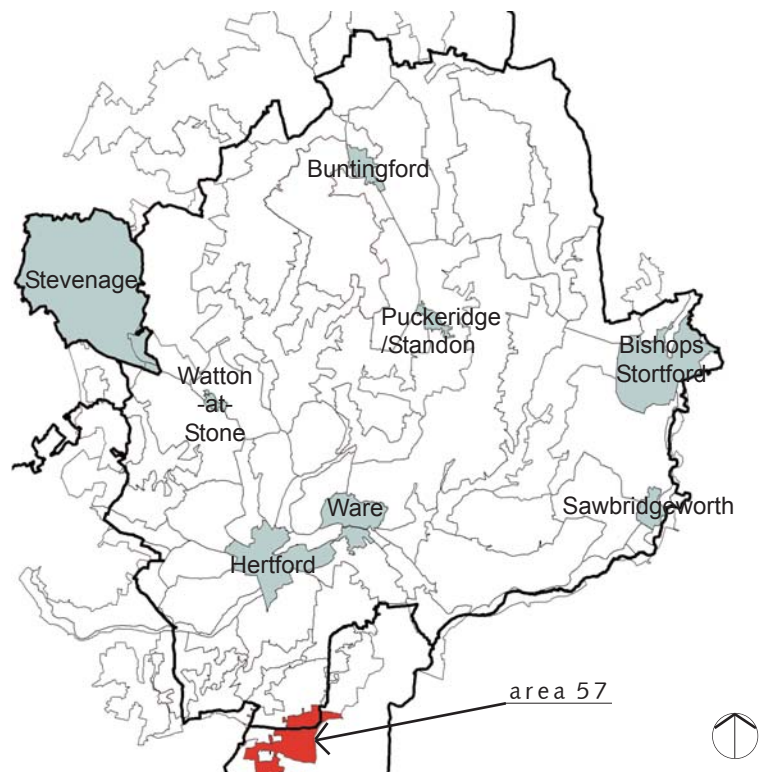


County map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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Hertfordshire County Council

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LOCATION

Northern edge of Hammond Street north to Wormley West End, bounded to west by Wormley Wood and to east by Park Lane Paradise. A relic area of similar character remains to the south, squeezed between the increasing housing development around Hammond Street and Goff's Oak.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Very rural area dominated by wave-like landform and opportunity for extensive long-range views. A small-scale mixture of woodland and pasture with limited 19th and 20th-century development. From the northern edge of Hammond Street a distinctive pattern of fields and strip woodland can be seen at Wormley West End. South of Hammond Street new housing development is rapidly obliterating a similar relic field pattern.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- small-scale co-axial field system within extensive woodland fringe
- distinction between pasture and woodland on the slopes and built development on the narrow flat ridges (20th century) or in the valley (pre-20th century)
- system of east-west narrow ridges with small streams in the narrow valley bottoms, echoed in the alignment of roads and fields
- linked blocks of ancient woodland
- small scale and very rural
- very limited views within area, except from ridges
- impact of built development on southern part of area

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- horsiculture, with very limited cattle grazing
- very extensive north-easterly views
- sharply right-angled narrow lanes with tall hedges
- older settlement in valley with several large 19th-century houses
- loss of former nurseries to housing

- View west of co-axial field system north of Hammond Street (Environmental Land Management Service (Rural Estates) HCC)

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. A mix of seasonally waterlogged poorly drained clay soils over Tertiary clay (Windsor series) or plateau and river terrace drift (Essendon series).

Topography. Strongly undulating series of east-west ridges and valleys

Degree of slope. 1 in 12

Altitude range. 50m to 95m

Hydrology. Rags Brook, Turnford Brook and Wormleybury Brook all flow eastwards towards the Lea valley

Land cover and land use. A distinctive mix of treed pasture and woodland in small parcels. These fields are grazed mainly by horses, but there are some cattle. There are also a few large glasshouses for nursery production, and significant housing development around Hammond Street. This area was formerly a focus of nursery production, most of which is now disused and derelict or given over to new housing.

Vegetation and wildlife. The woodland is entirely broadleaf ancient semi-natural oak/hornbeam and birch/bracken woodland, with nature reserves to the east and north west. The dominant woodland species are oak and ash, with field maple and elm. There are important networks of old hedges (hornbeam and blackthorn) and old lanes along the ancient boundaries. Field boundaries are most often very tall (elm) on the higher ground or medium height without standards, or overgrown, usually of hawthorn and field maple. Acid grassland - former cattle pasture - is found in the valleys to either side of the important stream complexes.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The pre-20th century landscape pattern of this area is widespread and apparent in the northern half, but is being eroded and engulfed in the southern half by housing development. It is likely that this co-axial landscape pattern is both extensive (to the north a similar pattern can be traced within the Wormleywood/Hoddesdonpark Wood complex) and ancient, dating possibly from the Iron Age.

Field pattern and field size. Each field forms a narrow north-south rectangle, its consistent pattern reinforced by the broad treed field boundaries, which are generally prominent but variable, consisting of treed hedgerows, medium to high hedgerows without trees, fences, and hedge banks with no verges. These lines of consistently equal fields are bounded to north and south by a series of parallel east-west lanes or brooks, forming a very distinctive small-scale regular but sinuous pattern.

Transport pattern. The road pattern is regular and unusual, consisting of east-west lines on the ridgetop or in the valley, linked by densely-hedged acutely right-angled lanes down the slopes. Park Lane Paradise/Holy Cross Hill marks the eastern boundary of this area, formed by that of a medieval deer park and therefore curved, while Bread and Cheese Lane is extremely angular, possibly denoting later enclosure. Verges, where present, are generally very narrow.

Settlements and built form. In this area settlements take the form of isolated farmhouses or linear bands of houses along the few lanes. Wormley West End is an old settlement with buildings in black weatherboard or brick and tile, now a 17th to 20th-century mix of farms and bungalows, plus several large 18th / 19th century houses in large gardens. Beaumont Road is a linear settlement of mainly 20th-century houses and some earlier/larger with extensive grounds. The relic area to the south was formerly home to an immigrant Italian community, allied to the nursery business, but most of this has been lost to housing development of the late 20th century.

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

From high points on roads and footpaths within the area it is extremely visible and extensive views north and east to Hoddeson are available. Within the valleys views are contained by the topography and vegetation. The scale of landscape elements is mixed, with small fields and large blocks of woodland combining to give a sense of coherent visual unity in the northern part of this area, which has been lost further south. There is a sense of enclosure within the valleys, while the ridges are open. There is little intrusion from traffic or aircraft and it is a tranquil area to the north, while to the south the accumulation of unrelated housing development is visually jarring. North of Hammond Street extensive views can be obtained over this area and the Lea valley to the north east.

Rarity and distinctiveness. The very distinctive northern half of this area is the only clearly visible example in southern Hertfordshire of a traditional co-axial field system. It is possible that this system is very old - there are examples elsewhere in the country that are known to be pre-Roman - and is of significant historic value, the more so because it is still in traditional use. It is probably unique in the county and most unusual nationally. It seems likely that the area to the south was very similar, but much of this has now been lost to housing.

VISUAL IMPACT

The most distinctive visual feature is the small field pattern carved out of the woodland and the shaws (linear tree belts) at Wormley West End. There is localised impact from built development on a significant scale. This links the southern part of the area to the very urban areas adjoining, and makes the rarity of the northern part more apparent. Pylons are visible within the area, matching the scale of the woodland. There is also localised impact from structures such as glasshouses for nursery production.

ACCESSIBILITY

Noted recreational land uses are riding and walking. There are several footpaths within the area, but fewer bridleways. However, the condition of the footpaths is poor - they tend to be narrow, muddy, of variable width and poorly maintained, with a mud or grass surface.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

This area has some distinctive aspects, particularly the more wooded northern end (D).

CONDITION

<i>Land cover change:</i>	localised
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	mature
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	widespread
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	good
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	declining
<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>	prominent
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	interrupted
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	locally visible
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	partial
<i>Visual unity:</i>	incoherent
<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: IMPROVE AND CONSERVE

- in this area the 'conserve' guideline should be applied to the northern half, while the 'improve' guideline should be applied to the southern half
- a programme of hedgerow management in this area would ensure that hedges did not fall into decline, become gappy or otherwise diminish the landscape character of this area
- woodland management should focus on the establishment and maintenance of mixed-age woodland with species-rich ground flora, with clear distinctions between the different types of management, all of which might be appropriate in different areas of woodland: high forest, coppice, coppice-with-standards and wood pasture
- resist the targeting of redundant or derelict pasture for development
- promote the retention of grassland and pasture in this area, where possible reverting to sheep or cattle grazing rather than horse pasture, for beneficial effects on ecological value
- encourage the maintenance of the historic field pattern and resist further development within the southern valley
- consider the possibility of maintaining the remaining fields within the southern half of this area as public open space, with an emphasis on the historic and ecological importance of the former field system/hedgerows and their retention or replanting
- ensure that derelict hedges and woodland are managed and replanted as necessary to maintain the existing field pattern
- promote the development of natural woodland around large blocks of Ancient Woodland and ensure that developers and landowners are aware of this objective
- where nursery production is in decline or no longer functional, consideration should be given to alternative development, such as allotments, production of trees of local provenance or organic farming. Care should be taken to retain the historic field pattern rather than allowing it to be destroyed by the pattern of new housing estates.
- seek to maintain open space between Hammond Street and Goff's Oak, especially around Rags Brook; possibly by the creation of a local country park or nature reserve
- seek to increase awareness of the age and historic importance of local landscape features, in particular the co-axial field pattern
- encourage the establishment of buffer strips along watercourses to give protection from pesticide, herbicide and fertiliser run-off and to provide a wildlife refuge. Ensure that this does not conflict with public access objectives.
- seek to expand the local footpath network, secure separate provision for pedestrians and equestrians and provide low-key small car parks at suitable access points.



• Thunderfield Ridge from Gammon Farm (HCC Landscape Unit)