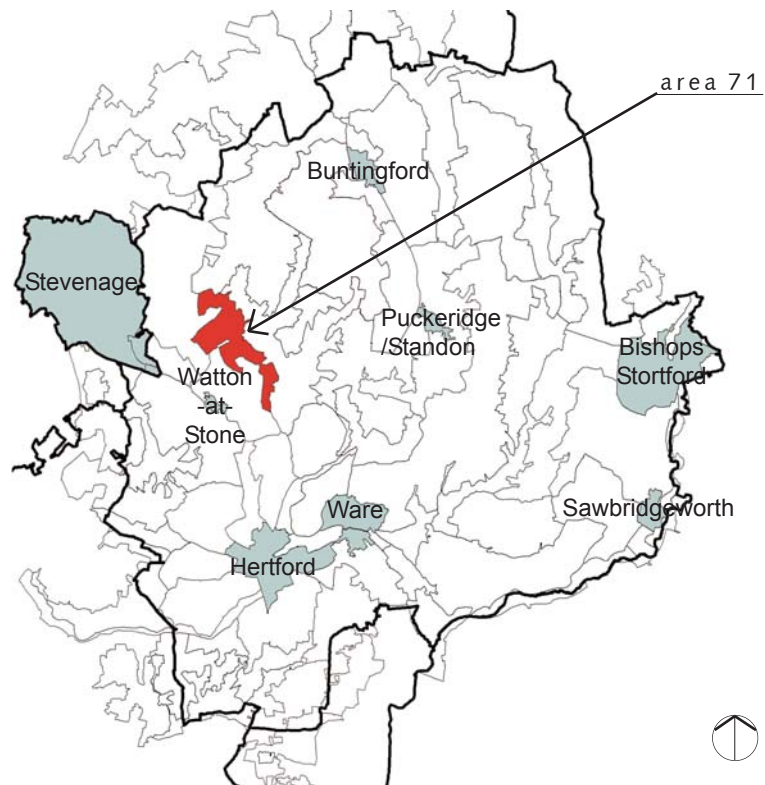County map showing location of
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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Hertfordshire County Council

100019606 2004

area 71

Buntingford

Stevenage

Puckeridge
/Standon

Bishops
Stortford

Watton
-at-
Stone

Ware

Sawbridgeworth

Hertford

LOCATION
Narrow interfluve between Beane and Upper Bourne
valleys, north from Woodhall Park and expanding into
larger area.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER
An area of ancient countryside with small woods, winding
green lanes and numerous stream-eroded valleys. It consists
of a narrow, gently undulating settled plateau, with a
continuous ribbon of development along its length from
Benington southwards. Although predominantly in
agricultural production, this is also a more populated area,
with a slight commuter character derived from the
substantial houses in large plots and a variance in character
through the different linked villages.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS
• narrow undulating plateau
• chalk visible on the surface
• settled, with ribbon development
• small woodlands set among large unhedged fields

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES
• chalk flora: beech as prominent tree, with scabious, wild
  hops and clematis in field banks

Benington, view towards church •
(P. Shears)

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. Slowly permeable calcareous clayey soils over chalky till (Hanslope series). In this area the chalk content is visible at the surface and directly influences the native flora.

Topography. Very narrow north/south ridge, sloping gently southwards.

Degree of slope. 1 in 160 between Benington and the northern edge of Woodhall Park; 1 in 44 across the plateau, with minor local variations.

Altitude range. 90m to 120m.

Hydrology. Between the northern edge of Woodhall Park and Benington village this narrow ridge forms the interfluve between the valleys of the upper Beane and the Old Bourne, a tributary of the Beane. There are many field ponds in the area.

Land cover and land use. This is a more domesticated area than most, primarily due to the ribbon development along Whemstead Road, which occupies most of this narrow plateau. The settlements appear to form one linear development, beyond which there is arable cultivation of the large fields and generally small blocks of grouped woodlands. Around Burns Green there is also some light industrial development.

Vegetation and wildlife. To the south of Benington there are very few hedges, merely the odd hawthorn cut tightly into a block by the roadside. Within the woodlands common species are oak, hazel, field maple, ash and sycamore, with beech dominant. In general the woodland is transitional between oak/hornbeam and ash/hazel/field maple, with dogwood and dog's mercury in the understorey. This area also contains one of the county's most important complexes of neutral grassland - old cattle pasture - where cuckoo flower and cowslips flower in the spring. Cowslips can also be found elsewhere throughout the area in pasture remnants.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The ancient, settled character of this area is exemplified by Benington and its surroundings. There was a castle here, but it was pulled down in 1212; Benington was one of only three deer parks listed at Domesday. Benington Lordship was built in the late 17th century adjacent to the remains of the castle, and with the church of St Peter also in the grounds. The main features in the gardens date from the early years of the 20th century, but the open parkland and agricultural land beyond to the west, with scattered mature trees, date from before 1822.

Field pattern. This is an area of large unhedged fields, with a consequent loss of field pattern except around the settlements, where the scale is more medium and regular to geometric. Fields generally lack hedges; some have hedge banks (without the hedge) but several have a wide field margin rather than a verge.

Transport pattern. The transport pattern in this area is dominated by Whemstead (sic) Road, which follows the narrow plateau top and along which all the settlement has developed.

Settlements and built form. Benington is a medieval settlement with a 14th-century flint church and an '*almost perfect*' (Pevsner, p.94) village green, with individual cottages scattered around it, timber-framed, pargetted, with overhangs and gables, and with views through its perimeter trees to the church. Throughout the village there is a scattering of larger houses of interest. These range from 16th-century timber frame (The Old House) to Georgian neo-Gothic fantasy (The Lordship), designed in 1832 to match the remains of the keep of Benington Castle. The village has two distinct parts: the ancient, picture-postcard area around the green, and the more suburban, recent ribbon development linking to Burns Green and Hebing End, with its scattering of light industrial uses.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Bisgrove, R., *The Gardens of Britain* (1978), p.33.

Pevsner, N., rev. Cherry, B., *Hertfordshire,* Penguin (2000).

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

The location of this area on a narrow ridge provides extensive views out over the surrounding countryside and within it, while it remains largely unseen from the outside. It has an atmosphere of remoteness in the northern part of the area which diminishes as ribbon development increases further south. Any sense of unity is belied by the different ages of development along Whemstead (*sic*) Road - there is a strong contrast between the village green in Benington and the light industrial uses around Burn's Green, despite their proximity.

Rarity and distinctiveness. Benington village is unusual in Hertfordshire for being quite so 'picture postcard' and is more gentrified than the surrounding villages within the valleys. Benington Lordship is listed in the English Heritage List of Parks and Gardens and the gardens are frequently open to the public.

VISUAL IMPACT

The different ages of development along Whemstead (*sic*) Road lack unity, while the light industrial uses at Burn's Green distract from the predominantly agricultural land use of the area.

ACCESSIBILITY

Few footpaths; Chain Walk along western edge of plateau, linking to Burn's Green

COMMUNITY VIEWS

Insufficient data was available from the community exercise to provide a rating. It has therefore been estimated as (D)

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

The Cottered/Ardeley/Benington area is recognised in the BAP as a High Biodiversity Area (HBA) for its oak-hornbeam and ash-maple woodlands and meadows.
Benington Lordship is English Heritage Grade II listed.

CONDITION

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

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

Impact of landform:	**prominent**
Impact of land cover:	**apparent**
Impact of historic pattern:	**continuous**
Visibility from outside:	**concealed**
Sense of enclosure:	**contained**
Visual unity:	**coherent**
Distinctiveness/rarity:	**unusual**

CONDITION		WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
	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 RESTORE

• support the creation of targeted agri-environmental
schemes within Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs)
and Countryside Heritage Areas (CHAs)

• support and encourage the reinstatement of hedges
along historic boundary lines, while retaining open views
from roads and footpaths

• promote and support initiatives to encourage local
distinctiveness and a visual separation between the
different settlements along the ridge

• promote the appropriate management of coppice
woodland in order to re-establish a rich ground flora and
the distinction between different management systems,
such as high forest, coppice, coppice-with-standards and
wood pasture

• promote the establishment of markets for woodland
products, training to provide a skilled work force and
adequate protection from damage

• support the establishment of deer management groups

• ancient hedge and field boundaries are often associated
with ancient woodland. Where woodland restoration and
expansion are considered appropriate, use them to define
the most appropriate location for such initiatives

• encourage the reversal of habitat fragmentation within
arable landscapes and the creation and improvement of
habitat links to create eco-corridors (but see hedgerow
guideline above)

• within the arable farmland encourage the establishment
of wild field margins, beetle banks, etc, to increase
biodiversity and establish eco-corridors where hedges
would be inappropriate

• Benington gardens
spreading onto green
(P. Shears)