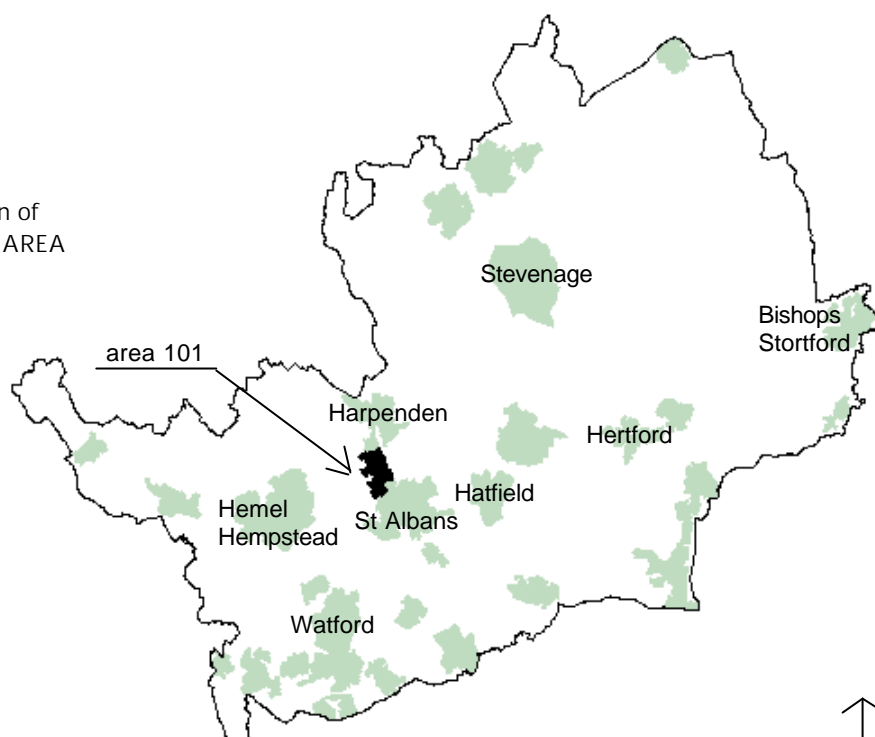


County Map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

©Crown copyright . All rights reserved.

Hertfordshire County Council

LA076678 2001



LOCATION

This area is situated between St Albans to the south, Harpenden to the north, the A1081 to the east and the Ver valley to the west.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

There is a marked estate feel to this plateau landscape.

To the north it has a more open character with fields mainly to pasture/grassland and a stud farm at Childwick Hall, with a combination of traditional metal fences and clipped hedges with intermittent field trees. In the centre a traditional parkland landscape cocoons the secluded Childwick Bury. The busy A1081 Harpenden Road lies to the east, but otherwise there is a private estate character with limited public access.

To the south there are more urban influences, including the golf club, country club and night club at Batchwood Hall. Residential areas at New Green and the associated schools and playing fields have local influence but are generally visually contained.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- strong plateau character with largely contained views
- formal estate character with common architectural detailing
- mature parkland and plantation woodlands concentrated around Childwick Bury and Batchwood Hall
- mixed species including conifers create varied skylines
- impact of adjacent urban areas generally well screened or integrated
- Childwick, particularly the stud and Childwick Bury, have strong private feel

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Childwick Bury village green
- ornamental water tower
- ornamental lodges on Harpenden Road
- rare breed livestock at Childwick Bury
- Batchwood Hall country club and golf course

Estate cottage at
Childwick Green
(HCC Landscape Unit)



PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. The chalk bedrock geology is predominantly overlaid with a clay-with-flints drift, with areas of undifferentiated solid rock at the edges of the plateau area and chalk at the surface at the south-east end. The acidic clays loams are stagnogleyic paleo-argillic brown earths, fine silty and loamy over clayey soils with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging. Some well drained clayey soils over chalk, variably flinty (Batcombe association).

Topography. This area lies on the elevated plateau east of the Ver Valley. The area is mainly flat with some minor local variations in landform caused by the brick and chalk pits in the parkland. At Batchwood Hall, slopes form the head of a dry valley which is part of the Ver Valley system.

Degree of slope. The dry valley in the north east is very shallow, with average slopes of 1 in 57. The dry valley in the southern section has steeper slopes, averaging 1 in 24. The rest of the area is mainly flat.

Altitude range. 130m in the centre; 95m in the north east.

Hydrology. There is little standing water in this area of high ground - a pond east of Ladygrove Wood, a well at Childwick Green and small pond in the south of the area at Batchwood golf course. A local habitat of note is the wood of Kilmart's Spring, indicating a rising spring.

Land cover and land use. The primary land cover is grassland with the main land use being pasture on either parkland or within fields- there is an equestrian stud at Childwick. To the south the parkland landscape combines with woodland, ornamental grounds and recreational uses, including a golf course at Batchwood and playing fields to the north of St. Albans. There is a limited amount of arable in the extreme north.

Vegetation and wildlife. There are a number of small to medium sized woods in the centre and south of the area, giving an interlocking character to the Childwick Bury parkland. There are some ancient woodlands, e.g. Batch Wood and Ladies Grove. Species in the south comprise an oak/ash/beech mix with hazel and cherry. Throughout the parklands there are more ornamental species and features, including a lime avenue and specimen sweet chestnut and cedar. Rhododendrons have been introduced to the understorey at Green Wood. In the north the mix is oak/hornbeam/elm with some modern introductions of linear belts of conifers by Childwick Stud. Hedges are typically clipped and a mix of hawthorn, black-thorn and elm, however within the estate pasture to the north many of the hedges are predominantly hawthorn with few hedgerow trees. There is virtually no semi-natural grassland except where locally present within hedgerows. Locally important rare species include the Greater Butterfly Orchid and Solomon's Seal. There are several rare fungi and bryophytes in Batch Wood.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

A Roman villa lies on the edge of the plateau a short distance west of Bush wood, overlooking the Ver Valley, but otherwise prehistoric and Roman settlement in the area seems to have been sparse. By the later middle ages the

pattern of dispersed farms and hamlets characteristic of much of the plateau areas in the district had emerged. Childwick appears to have been one such small hamlet. The site of the medieval moated manor of Batch Wood or Childwicksay, now a Scheduled Ancient Monument, lies to the north east of Batchwood Hall. In later centuries the estates have exerted a strong influence on the cultural pattern. Childwick Bury's manorial history dates back to Saxon times and it was the property of St. Albans Abbey until the Dissolution. Its significant gardens and parkland are shown on maps of 1766. By 1881 the manor consisted of 14,000 acres of farms, woodland and parks. The Prince of Wales entertained guests at the mansion and in the late 20th century the estate was owned by Stanley Kubrick, creator of such films as *2001 A Space Odyssey* and *Clockwork Orange*. Childwick Stud was introduced by Sir John Blundell in the late 19th century and was expanded from 1903 by the diamond millionaire Jack Joel, who bred many great horses. Lord Grimthorpe (1816-1903), responsible for the clock mechanism for Big Ben, also restored St. Albans Abbey, which he could view from his home at Batchwood Hall.

Field pattern. Most of the area to the south is informal fenced parkland. To the north there is a mix of regular fields around Childwick Hall and Childwick Stud with a pattern of pre 18th-century irregular enclosure and isolated prairie fields towards the upper slopes of the Ver valley. Throughout the Childwick Estate traditional metal railing fences provide enclosure.

Transport pattern. The area is firmly marked to the east by the A1081 Harpenden Road. Elsewhere there are only private estate tracks and narrow minor roads with minimal verges.

Settlements and built form. This dispersed pattern of settlement has concentrations around the Halls and estate farms. Clusters of distinctive 19th-century brick-built estate cottages add character at Beesonend and Childwick Green. The latter, with the domestic scaled St Mary's church by Gilbert Scott and a miniature Jacobean house, forms a picturesque hamlet grouped around an enclosed village green and well. Flint is used locally in boundary walls. Childwick Bury is a large late 17th-century mansion, probably built by Joshua Lomax and altered in the 18th century, 1854 and 1900. On the Harpenden Road the ornamental iron gate of a distinctive elaborately detailed red brick and terracotta lodge (1897) matches those at the entrance to the mansion within the parkland. The stables associated with Childwick Stud make a positive contribution to the locality.

Batchwood Hall was built by Lord Grimthorpe in a neo-Georgian style in the late 19th century. Remains of parts of its Victorian garden are of note.

Other sources of area specific information. "Childwick Bury- A dream of loveliness" Daphne Hutchins, *Herts Countryside* Vol.34 No.239 1979 March p22-3

Conservation Area Character Statement

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

To the south the interlocking character of the woodland, particularly on the fringes of the area, helps to create a strong sense of containment and privacy from the surrounding areas, including the New Greens estate at St. Albans. This is a medium scale and coherent landscape with limited intrusion from adjacent noises except for the A1081. To the north where the enclosure is limited there are open views to the Ver valley, e.g. from Beesonend Lane. **Rarity and distinctiveness.** The parklands and estate landscapes are relatively unusual in this part of the county. The retention of the livestock grazing, including some rare breeds within the parkland, is a distinctive feature.

VISUAL IMPACT

The only significant impacts on the area are from adjacent built development. These include Hatching Green to the north, where there are some incongruous ornamental trees in rear gardens and to the south at New Greens estate with its associated secondary school. However, in the latter boundary hedges and woodland are relatively strong features of the landscape. Within the area the current uses at Batchwood Hall comprise some visually intrusive structures and poorly maintained parking areas.

ACCESSIBILITY

Two bridleways cross the area and Beesonend Lane drops down to the ford at Redbournbury on the Ver. Otherwise there is limited access and much of the Childwickbury estate is noticeably marked as 'private'. The main hall is concealed from the adjacent bridleway by dense planting, possibly a function of the former owner's reclusive personality.

Total length of Public Rights of Way - 6,807m

Total length of Other Public Access - 1,345m

Total length of Designated Cycle Routes - 1,345m

Total length of all public access - 9,497m

Area of LCA in square metres - 4,751,569

Length to area ratio -1:500

COMMUNITY VIEWS

This area is widely recognised for its distinctiveness.

"Childwick in daffodil time, with the wild cherry blossom in the woods beyond, is a dream of loveliness to which those who have once seen it make a yearly pilgrimage".

Constance Toulmin in 'Happy Memories', Faith Press 1960. p.11.

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

Greenbelt

Landscape Conservation Area (except north of Childwick Stud and playing fields and school at New Green)

Childwickbury Conservation Area (covers much of the estate)

Scheduled Ancient Monument- Batch Wood moated manorial site

CONDITION

Land cover change:

localised

Age structure of tree cover:

mixed

Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:

fragmented

Management of semi-natural habitat:

not obvious

Survival of cultural pattern:

interrupted

Impact of built development:

low

Impact of land-use change:

low

ROBUSTNESS

Impact of landform:

apparent

Impact of land cover:

prominent

Impact of historic pattern:

interrupted

Visibility from outside:

concealed

Sense of enclosure:

contained

Visual unity:

coherent

Distinctiveness/rarity:

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
		ROBUSTNESS		

STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING**CHANGE: CONSERVE AND RESTORE**

- ensure landscape improvements respect the historic context of existing features and the form and character of parkland and gardens. Ornamental species should only be used to replace damaged or over-mature specimens. New planting is encouraged to maintain age diversity and the removal of inappropriate planting should be encouraged
- survey and manage parkland and veteran trees for biodiversity value
- within the historic estates of Childwick and Batchwood hard landscaping details such as gates, metal railings, steps and balustrades, should be conserved. Lodges, follies, obelisks, terraces and boundary walls should contribute to the planned landscape and its setting. Replacement, renovated or new features should be architect designed and in keeping with their original setting
- restrict ploughing of grasslands within parklands and encourage reversion from arable uses to pasture and grassland
- improve public access arrangements across whole area, providing circular walks from adjacent residential areas and access to woodlands
- 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 and coppice-with standards.
- promote the expansion of existing woodland, especially where this will help in creating habitat links and develop a sense of visual containment to the north and north west of the area
- use native indigenous species and wherever possible stock of local provenance. Prevent the spread of invasive species such as *Rhododendron ponticum*
- promote hedgerow restoration and creation to the north of the area to provide visual and ecological links. Pattern to follow historic field boundaries where possible. Hedges to the south to be maintained high and strengthened to restrict the visual impact of adjacent residential areas
- promote both the creation of new ponds and the retention/enhancement for wildlife of existing ponds
- provide new uncropped or grass field margins to link areas of wildlife importance and /or existing and proposed rights of way
- encourage the retention of existing stables for equestrian activity
- promote the use of traditional field enclosure by metal fencing or hedges where land is converted to equestrian pasture
- ensure that new development, conversions and their surroundings within estates are designed and maintained to be in keeping with their historic settings. Car parks should be sensitively sited and use appropriate materials.
- where new development is permitted native tree species only should be planted on boundaries, with exotic/ornamental species only in close proximity to the dwellings
- golf courses should only be permitted within historic parklands where the original layout and features of the grounds are retained, all existing trees are retained and adequate provision is made for their maintenance and management. Particular attention should be given to ensure earthworks proposals complement the natural landform patterns
- an appropriate buffer zone can be created around any historic artefacts, such as mansions, lodges, walls, etc., to protect their historic integrity
- ensure all existing and proposed recreational land uses include appropriate measures to manage and enhance the existing landscape setting and historical and ecological value. To include golf courses and playing fields
- maintain and manage the verges of existing roads for nature conservation interest.



• Childwick Bury parkland
(J. Billingsley)