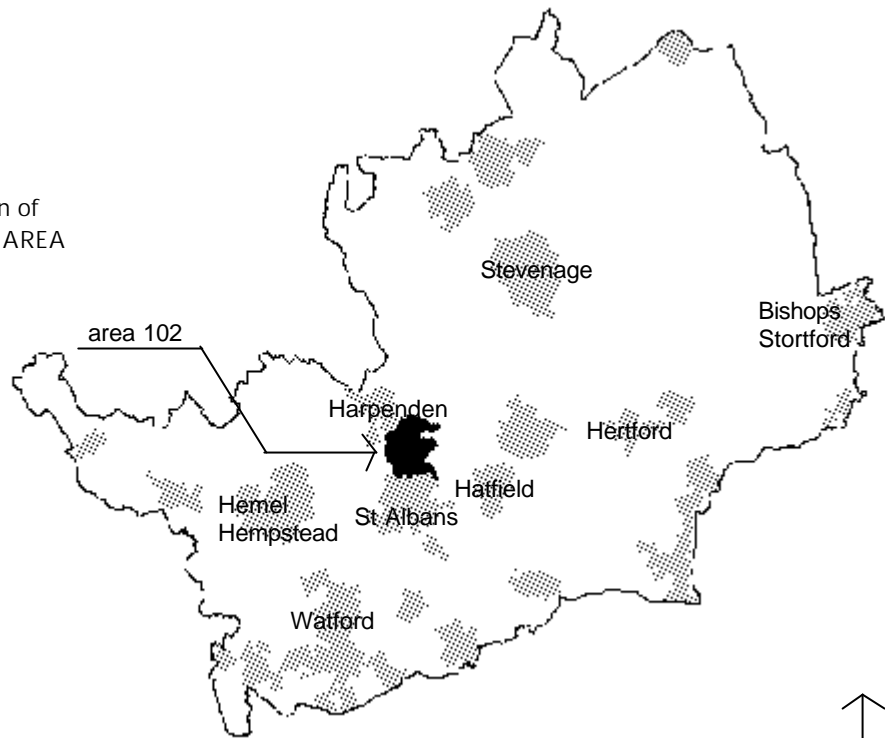


County Map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

©Crown copyright . All rights reserved.  
Hertfordshire County Council  
LA076678 2001

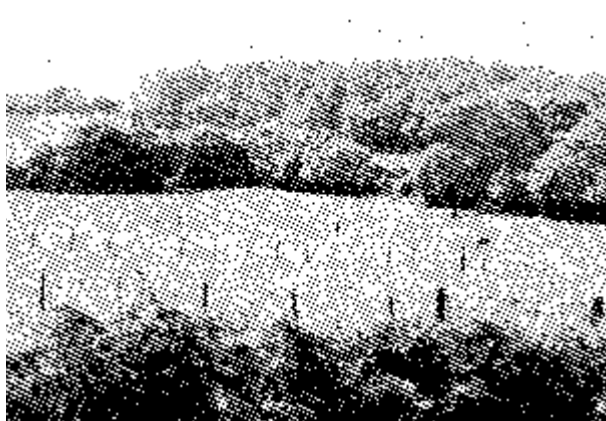


**LOCATION**

This area is bounded by the A1081 to the west, Harpenden and Wheathampstead to the north and Sandridge and St. Albans to the east and south. The area is split into two unequal parts by the linear settlement of Sandridge along the B651.

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

A network of dry interconnecting valleys with a sense of rural seclusion despite the close proximity of settlements on the higher ground to the rear of the smaller plateau areas on the fringes of this area. The visual containment is aided by the prominent small and medium sized woods located on the upper reaches of the valley sides. Narrow lanes and equestrian activities create a relatively relaxed feel. The plateau areas are more open, with large arable fields and intermittent clipped hedgerows. On the fringes of the adjacent urban settlements there is a greater emphasis on recreational activities, including playing fields, equestrian activity, golf and community woodland.



**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- open dry valleys overlooked by smaller areas of plateau on the fringes
- quiet area with few visual detractors except the A1081 and mainline railway to the west
- small woods on the upper slopes emphasize the valleys
- area served by narrow, winding roads lined by dense mixed hedgerows
- mixed arable, pasture and recreational land uses
- number of equestrian establishments associated with small country houses, including The Grove and Sandridgebury
- locally prominent built edges to adjacent settlements
- isolated properties or small clusters of dwellings, generally with strong vernacular architecture

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- new playing fields for St Albans School and Old Albanians at Cheapside Farm off A1081
- Ayres End Green
- St Pancras- Sheffield mainline railway and gantries
- new golf course at Long Acre Farm
- Jersey Farm woodland park, St Albans
- St. Leonards Church, Sandridge, with flint and shingle tower
- enclosed high sided hedgerow north of Sandridge on B651

Paddocks off Pipers Lane  
( J.Billingsley)

**PHYSICAL INFLUENCES**

**Geology and soils.** The chalk bedrock geology is overlaid by clay-with-flints on the higher/plateau areas and by undifferentiated chalky drift on the slopes. The valleys contain sand and gravels while on the plateau area the acidic clay loams are stagnogleyic paleo-argillic brown earths with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging with some well drained clayey soils over chalk, variably flinty (Batcombe association). In the valley bottoms and lower slopes between Harpenden and St Albans there are typical argillic brown earths, well drained fine silty soils, locally very flinty, some shallow over flint gravel (Charity 2 association). These dry valleys also contain river terrace gravels and areas of sandy soils between St. Albans and Nomansland Common. (See also Area 103).

**Topography.** This markedly undulating landscape of plateau areas and dry valleys separates St. Albans and Harpenden. A small section in the south is cut off from the rest of the area by Sandridge, which is on a subtle ridge. Slopes are slightly steeper in the northern half of the area, where the landscape is more rolling. In comparison the southern half comprises a plateau area with a south-east facing slope.

**Degree of slope.** To the north the slopes average 1 in 32 while from the central plateau to the south east they are typically 1 in 20.

**Altitude range.** 85m in the south east; 125m in the plateau areas of the north, north west and centre.

**Hydrology.** Standing water is rare in this area of high ground and dry valleys. Local wood names suggest springs, wells or wet areas, e.g. Long Spring, Pismire Spring, Pudler's Wood and Secret Spring. There is a pond at Cheapside Farm, a well at Green Cottages and a pond and wet drain near the playground at Jersey Farm. Nearby House Lane is susceptible to flooding north of the roundabout, as is the B651 north of Sandridge.

**Land cover and land use.** The primary land use is arable cropping. However there is also a good proportion of equestrian pasture, including sites at Sandridgebury and Pipers Lane. Around the perimeter of the area and adjacent to the settlements of Harpenden and St. Albans there is a range of leisure-related land uses, including extensive new playing fields for the St Albans School and Old Albanians on the A1081, the pay and play golf course at Long Acre Farm and the Jersey Farm Woodland Park north of St. Albans. There is a small orchard at Cheapside Farm

**Vegetation and wildlife.** The area contains a number of small to medium sized discrete woods, some of which are ancient, e.g. Thames Wood, Langley Wood, Pudler's Wood, Clappers Wood and Eight Acre Wood. The main species mix is oak/hornbeam with variable amounts of elm. There are also a number of later plantations, e.g. Pismire Spring, where species include cherry, ash and larch. The main hedgerow species are hawthorn/blackthorn and elm with smaller amounts of hazel, holly and field maple. Hedgerow trees are mainly oak, holly and ash. Sunken lanes and tall overgrown hedges are common on the steeper slopes, e.g. Pipers Lane. Mud Lane is a notable green lane with

interesting ground flora including bluebell. On the arable plateau areas the hedges are tightly clipped and the landscape more open, however there has been tree planting around Cheapside Farm. Remnant natural grasslands e.g. Ayres End Meadows are dominated by Creeping Soft Grass, Bents and Red Fescue. Locally important rare species include Creeping Formentii (*Potentilla angelica*) at Ayre's End and the Natterer's Bat.

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

On the east of the area a finger of sandy soils from the north-eastern outskirts of St Albans, through Sandridge to Nomansland Common, led to early exploitation. Remains of burial mounds dating to the 2nd millennium BC lie west of Sandridge. On the southern edge of the area, adjacent to St. Albans, is a short length of the Beech Bottom dyke which dates from the early 1st century AD. It has been suggested that the pronounced hedgebank on the west side of the B 651 between Sandridge and Wheathampstead, which marks the line of the medieval parish boundary, also marks a prehistoric boundary between Beech Bottom Dyke and the Devils Dyke in Wheathampstead. The most notable historic feature of the landscape, first mentioned in the late Saxon period, is a long, curving boundary, marked by fields and tracks, from the western end of Nomansland Common to northwest of Cheapside farm. There is a manorial site within Thames Wood.

**Field pattern.** Field patterns derive mainly from the pre 18th-century irregular enclosure. There was some later parliamentary enclosure, but the significant impact has been the creation of large prairie fields in the later part of the 20th century, particularly to the south of the area. To the north of Nomansland are a few former unenclosed common arable fields. Field sizes are medium to the north while to the south west and south east they are larger and more regular in shape. Locally there are some reasonably intact portions of hedgerow networks, e.g. at Cross Farm immediately south of Harpenden. Smaller paddocks have been created by sub-dividing larger fields with temporary fencing to serve local equestrian activity, e.g. along Pipers Lane and Sandridgebury.

**Transport pattern.** Narrow winding lanes with narrow verges are typical and where they rise up the steeper slopes to the plateau there are some pronounced sunken lanes. The exceptions to this pattern are the busy A1081 to the west of the area and the B651 which runs between St. Albans and Wheathampstead. The London to Sheffield main line railway is mainly in cutting as it crosses from north to south.

**Settlements and built form.**

There is a dispersed settlement pattern with small hamlets e.g. Amwell and Ayres End, isolated farms and occasional white rendered cottages. Traditional building materials such as clay tile and brick are prevalent. Cross Farm, originally a Saxon hall, has a 17th-century gable brick front. An impressive range of brick, weatherboard and clay tile barns can be seen from Cross Lane. The parish church of St. Leonard is a distinctive feature in the landscape with its flint tower and chamfered shingle spire.

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The area is generally both visually contained and coherent. Despite the close proximity of a number of towns the distant and enclosing views are largely formed and framed by vegetation or landform. This a peaceful area with few detractors, particularly in the central core. The harmonious blend of dwellings using traditional materials adds to the appeal of the area. The central ridge between Cheapside Farm and Hillend Farm is more exposed. The most significant noise source is from the main line railway.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** The landscape type is frequent within the county.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

Locally there are some relatively raw built edges to the open countryside, e.g. along Cross Lane, Harpenden, to the southern boundary of Wheathampstead and from parts of Sandridge. However, the wider countryside is protected from the full impact of the more extensive residential areas, which are either set back from the ridgelines or screened by belts of trees, which in some cases include a relatively high proportion of conifers, e.g. north of Amwell. While the new playing fields on the A1081 represent a substantial development in the open countryside, the planting proposals include a number of copses, small woods and new hedges which respect the local pattern and native species mixes. Recreational land uses on the edge of St. Albans, e.g. Jersey Farm Woodland Park, include significant areas of new woodland. Within the equestrian areas the use of temporary fencing is discordant with the traditional pattern of hedgerows. The overhead gantries, associated earthworks and structures along the main line

railway are only locally intrusive features, as much of the route is in cutting.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

- Total length of Public Rights of Way - 16,094m
- Total length of Other Public Access - n/a
- Total length of Designated Cycle Routes - 5,184m
- Total length of all public access - 21,278
- Area of LCA in square metres - 11,125,144
- Length to area ratio - 1:523

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

This area is widely regarded for its distinctive landscapes, particularly as a setting to Nomansland Common (and some would not see such a marked boundary between the two character areas), but also for locations in the north and west of the area. The impact of more recent changes in and around the area, however, has the occasional critic: "Sandridge- Subtopian clutter in a village that has ribboned out to join St. Albans....Opposite the church, Pound Farm, mellow and ivy-smothered, is guarded by four grotesquely truncated oaks" R. M. Healey in "Hertfordshire, A Shell Guide" Faber & Faber 1982.

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

- Greenbelt
- Landscape Conservation Area (north of Cheapside Farm and Hillend Farm)
- Amwell Conservation Area
- Childwickbury Conservation area (north-west corner)
- Sandridge Conservation Area

**CONDITION**

- Land cover change: **localized**
- Age structure of tree cover: **mixed**
- Extent of semi-natural habitat survival: **fragmented**
- Management of semi-natural habitat: **not obvious**
- Survival of cultural pattern: **declining**
- Impact of built development: **low**
- Impact of land-use change: **moderate**

**ROBUSTNESS**

- Impact of landform: **prominent**
- Impact of land cover: **apparent**
- Impact of historic pattern: **interrupted**
- Visibility from outside: **locally visible**
- Sense of enclosure: **contained**
- Visual unity: **coherent**
- Distinctiveness/rarity: **frequent**

<b>CONDITION</b>	<b>GOOD</b>	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	<b>MODERATE</b>	Improve and reinforce	<b>Improve and conserve</b>	Conserve and restore
	<b>POOR</b>	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		<b>WEAK</b>	<b>MODERATE</b>	<b>STRONG</b>
<b>ROBUSTNESS</b>				

**STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING**

**CHANGE: IMPROVE AND CONSERVE**

- 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 and coppice-with-standards
- utilize ancient hedge, field and woodland boundaries to establish the most appropriate location for wood restoration and expansion and creating eco-corridors. Build on the pattern of woodland on the upper slopes of the valley sides
- use indigenous species and native stock of local provenance wherever possible
- promote hedgerow restoration and creation throughout the area, particularly in the south, to provide visual and ecological links between existing and proposed woodland areas. Pattern to follow historic field boundaries where possible
- promote both the creation of new ponds and the retention/enhancement for wildlife of existing ponds
- improve public access arrangements including the scope for circular walks from adjacent settlements and access to woodlands
- provide new uncropped or grass field margins to link areas of wildlife importance and/or existing and proposed rights of way
- promote the retention and restoration of existing orchards and the creation of new orchards
- encourage the reuse of existing agricultural buildings for equestrian activity and introduce native planting schemes to integrate them into the landscape
- promote the use of traditional field enclosure where land is converted to equestrian pasture. Introduce new copses within areas of pasture e.g. Sandridgebury and Pipers Lane
- conserve unimproved and semi-improved grassland, e.g. at Ayres End, wherever possible, avoiding agricultural improvements, so as to maintain their nature conservation value
- avoid over-grazing and heavy public pressure on areas of semi-improved grassland
- ensure that ancient lanes and their associated hedgerows

- are retained, protected, enhanced and integrated into any new development with due regard to their historic, ecological and landscape value
- ensure that the surroundings of converted and new buildings are designed and maintained to be in keeping with their agricultural surroundings. 'Garden' details are to be screened from view where possible and native species used for hedging and tree planting on the perimeter
- within golf courses a high proportion of the total area shall be dedicated to and maintained as wildlife habitat, building upon established areas of wildlife interest already present. Landscape management plans to be an integral part of the planning consent and maintenance
- new buildings and structures to be in keeping with the local vernacular and remaining historic character of the site.
- ensure all existing and proposed recreational land uses include appropriate measures to manage and enhance the existing landscape setting and historical and ecological value. Developments on the urban edge to be integrated by the use of native woodland, copses and hedgerows.
- promote planting schemes that will reduce the impact of existing urban development on the landscape of adjacent areas
- promote planting to screen the impact of the mainline railway and A1081
- maintain and develop the traditional pattern of roadside verges as a local feature and a wildlife resource Where development is likely to affect verges and damage is unavoidable, development should include details of protection of the remaining verge and replacement of its nature conservation value within the proposed scheme. This is particularly important where verges include hedgebanks, sunken lanes, ditches and hedges.

- Ayres End (E. Anderson)

