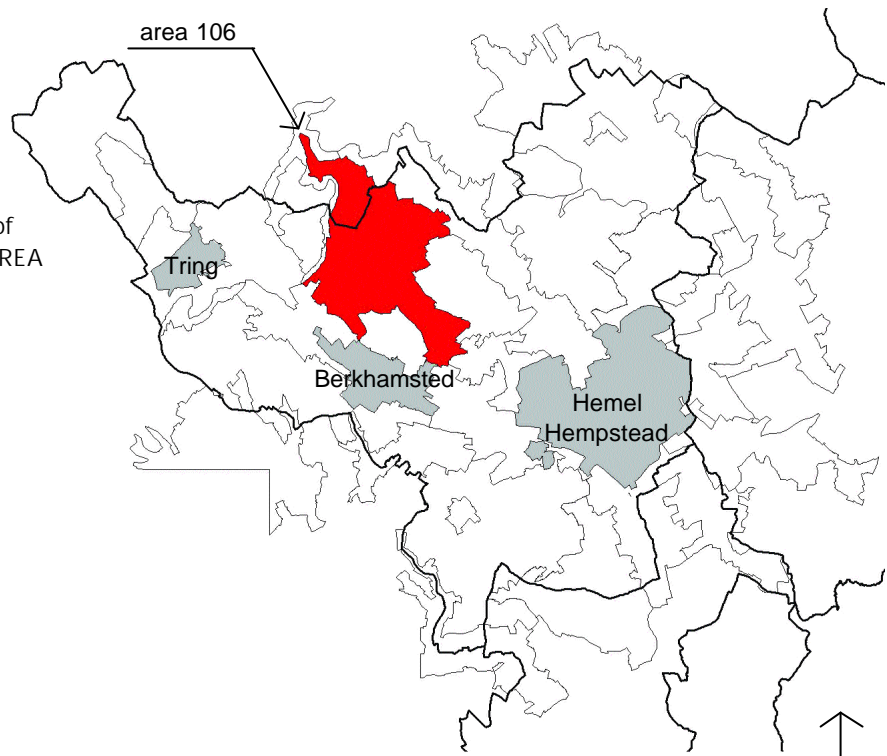


District Map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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**LOCATION**

The Ashridge estate is located to the northeast of the ancient market town of Berkhamsted. It is bordered by the village of Aldbury to the west, Great Gaddesden to the east and stretches approximately 6km north to Ivinghoe Beacon.

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

The estate covers a gently undulating plateau with some dry valleys, particularly to the east, which run in a parallel formation. A number of sub areas, illustrate a diversity of landscape elements including; ancient semi natural woodland, wood pasture, chalk grassland and downland, common, secondary woodland, plantations and the historic parklands of Ashridge College. Apart from localized areas of medium scale arable farming, land use is essentially recreational, the majority of the estate and parkland being devoted to public open space, with extensive and discreet, informal access.

There is a marked estate and managed feel throughout. The formal parklands of Ashridge College, including the

wellingtonia avenue and the Princes Riding driveway to the Bridgewater monument, are a strong visual feature, as is the estate architecture including the mansion and lodge houses. Other settlement includes an interesting range of vernacular styles, including limestone and flint chequerboard, pargeting and half timbering with brick. Much of the estate is owned and managed by the National Trust.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- semi natural woodlands and grazed wood pasture
- extensive open grasslands
- historic parkland and estate features
- extensive informal public access
- recreational facilities - golf courses and café
- common land and secondary woodland
- deer grazing
- dry valleys in a gently undulating plateau

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- Ashridge College - formerly Ashridge House, and associated lodge houses
- the wellingtonia arboretum, Bridgewater Monument and Princes Riding
- Golden Valley
- Little Gaddesden estate village architecture
- Frithsden Beeches - ancient pollarded beeches and wood pasture
- Northchurch and Berkhamsted Commons (heathland at Berkhamsted Common)
- Ancient beech pollards Frithsden (A.Tempany)



### PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

**Geology and soils.** The bedrock geology is comprised of Upper Chalk overlaid with plateau clay-with-flints drift. There are chalk outcrops along the lower valley slopes, especially at Golden Valley and at Frithsden. The majority of the soils are quite deep, acidic, stagnogleyic paleo agrillic brown earths with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging with some well drained clayey soils over chalk. The soils are variably flinty (Batcombe and Charity 2 associations).

**Topography.** The estate is largely a gently undulating plateau approximately 6km in length stretching in a north-west/ south-east direction. It includes some parallel dry valleys to the east of Frithsden Beeches, as well as scarp slopes to the west, overlooking Aldbury village (Area 116).

**Degree of slope.** The average slope is 1 in 40.

**Altitude range.** From 249m in the north at Crawley Wood to 124m in the south east at Frithsden.

**Hydrology.** The deep clay over the main areas of the Ashridge Plateau results in frequent ponds and wet seepages, such as at Little Gaddesden Common and in the woodlands adjoining Ashridge Golf Course, together with ornamental ponds in the gardens of Ashridge College, which also has an artesian well. Standing water is also evident at Frithsden Beeches, which may be linked to underlying geology, however there is no running water.

**Land cover and land use.** The primary land cover is a mix of extensive areas of woodland, both semi natural and plantation and grassland/pasture. Arable farmland and parkland are secondary. Land uses are largely for amenity and recreation including; walking, rambling, riding and two golf courses.

**Vegetation and wildlife.** The most important habitat in the area is the variable (interlocking/extensive) acidic woodland cover, the former wood-pasture woodlands of the commons of Aldbury, Northchurch and Berkhamsted. These form the largest area of old wood-pasture in Hertfordshire and are nationally significant. The woodlands include beech with birch and oak, oak with hawthorn, and some areas of ash, sycamore, sweet chestnut and Scots pine, with cherry frequently in evidence at the margins. Secondary birch woodland is visible to the north of Northchurch Common. Similar important wood pasture beech at Frithsden is partly calcareous beech woodland. Around 70 ancient pollarded beeches still survive at Frithsden Beeches. Woodlands in Ashridge Park are similar to the acidic woodlands on the commons, except that at Cromer Wood which is calcareous beech/ash. Remnants of heath at the south end of Berkhamsted Common form the largest remaining tract of heather heath in the county.

Ornamental and parkland trees are associated with Ashridge College including the Princes Riding which leads to the Bridgewater Monument. These include Lebanon and Atlas Cedars, pines and wellingtonias.

Hedgerow species include hawthorn, blackthorn, field maple, with localised occurrences of sycamore, dogwood, elm and clematis. Woodland floor species include Dog's Mercury, Yellow Archangel and Cranesbill, together with

bluebells at Thunderdell Wood and Purple Helleborine and Lords and Ladies at Frithsden Beeches. In terms of fauna, Fallow and Muntjack deer are common throughout the estate. Frithsden Beeches woodland is rich in saproxylic invertebrates.

Calcareous grasslands in the character area are limited by geology, but some fragments occur at Golden Valley, on banks at Northchurch Common and especially as a site known as 'Alpine Meadow' south of Coldharbour farm. Unimproved acidic grassland is widespread in Ashridge Park and occurs as vestiges with secondary grassland on some of the commons. Semi-improved neutral grassland occurs at Little Gaddesden and near Coldharbour Farm.

Old ponds on the commons and in Ashridge Park tend to have a nutrient poor mildly acidic water and as a result support specialised aquatic flora and fauna.

The Ashridge woodlands have until recently been important areas for woodland birds, such as Tree Pipit, Wood Warbler, Woodcock and Redstart, although this interest has declined possible due to disturbance. They remain important for some mammals, especially the county's largest herds of Fallow deer as well as the naturalised Fat Dormouse. Bats are important including one of the only known sites for the Barbastelle. The old pollarded oaks and beeches are especially important nationally for a range of insects of dead wood and for fungi.

Important flora in the area includes heather, Heath Grass and Trailing Tormentil as well as Fragrant Orchid and Large Thyme on the remnant chalk lands. Wild daffodils are especially noteworthy around Little Gaddesden.

- Little Gaddesden Green (A.Tempany)



### HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The Ashridge plateau contains the bulk of a Late Iron Age and Roman landscape which includes a Romano-British settlement and earthworks on Berkhamsted Common. Ashridge College (formerly Ashridge House, the seat of the Bridgewater and later the Brownlow family) was constructed between 1803 - 20 to a design by James Wyatt with later work by his nephew Jeffrey Wyattville. Comparing it to Wyatt's other great work, the now destroyed Fonthill Abbey, Pevsner describes it as the "largest of the romantic palaces near London...a spectacular composition". The north front is nearly 300 metres in length, being dominated by the heavy castellated stairwell tower and the elegant chapel spire, as well as the three storey entrance porch. The house is built around a central cloister in an interpretation of the perpendicular style, with a five bay loggia to the east front. An orangery wing projects at angle to the north front. It occupies the site of the former College of Bonhommes, an Augustinian Abbey (whose footprint concurs with the central portion of the present house, and which was largely demolished for the construction of the same), of which the undercroft and barn survive.

The formal gardens are by Repton and Wyattville, together with work attributed to Capability Brown at Golden Valley. The Princes Riding leads to the landmark Bridgewater Monument (1832) a tall doric column with urn built to commemorate the pioneer work by the Third Duke of Bridgewater on english canals. Together with the ancient wood pasture at Frithsden, these make the estate of great historical and cultural significance.

**Field Patterns.** The core of the area is common, 20th century leisure and informal parkland however towards the edges of the plateau, the field patterns become more distinctive including both pre 18th century irregular/sinuous and post 18th century sub-regular patterns characteristic of the parliamentary enclosures act. The fields are of medium size, defined by blocks of woodland, hedgerows and ditches.

**Transport pattern.** The estate is crossed by a number of largely straight rural roads including the B4056. In addition there are local minor routes including a toll road that runs

through the centre of the estate between Ashridge College and Little Gaddesden passing through Golden Valley. There are no main roads within the area.

**Settlements and built form.** Settlement is generally dispersed and isolated across the plateau. The imposing Ashridge College is built from Totternhoe and Portland stone. The estate lodges are distinctive and varied displaying knapped flint and stone chequering, while Old Park Lodge, is in 17th century brick. Little Gaddesden is the main estate village and contains a number of fine examples of vernacular architecture set to one side of a broad elongated green. Notable properties include John of Gaddesden's House and Manor House. The predominantly 19th century estate farms and cottages are generally of brown/ red brick with slate roof tiles and some timber framing. St Peter and St Paul's parish church lies isolated to the north east of the village. Other large, prestigious houses set in the woods are predominantly 20th century.

#### **Other sources of area-specific information**

Saneki, K: Ashridge, A Living History (Philimore, 1996)  
 Pevsner N: Buildings of England - Hertfordshire  
 National Trust: Biological Evaluation Survey and Management Plan for the Ashridge Estate  
 English Nature: SSSI notification  
 English Heritage: Registered Park and Garden citation  
 English Heritage: Schedule entries

- Princes's Riding (A.Tempany)



**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The plateau landform means that apart from the fringing woodlands the area is largely concealed from the outside. The scale of the landscape elements is large with vast open tracts of publicly accessible common land and woodland however there is a contained and at times confined character within the woodland and parklands. The beauty of the estate is heightened at times of seasonal change including autumn and perhaps most spectacularly in May when many of the woodlands are covered in a dense carpet of shimmering bluebells e.g. Dockney Wood and Furze field Wood.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** The area is rare due to it being both an intact working estate and the rich variety of landscape character types: ancient broadleaf woodland, plantation, commons, chalk grassland, secondary woodland and chalk downland scrub. The ecological value is also high.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

Key visual features include the tower and spires of Ashridge College, the Wellingtonia avenue and the Bridgewater Monument. While field size is only small to medium, the scale of the landscape elements, such as the commons and woodlands is large, creating a significant visual impact. There are few visual detractors in the landscape.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

This is good throughout with a high density of public footpaths linking common land and open woodlands with much of the land made accessible by The National Trust. Disabled access to the countryside is generally good although the paths are inaccessible to wheelchairs in places,

particularly in the winter.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

This and the associated scarp slopes forms certainly one of and possibly the most distinctive and highly regarded areas of landscape in the county (A). "Very beautiful countryside for walking and cycling. Managed excellently by the National Trust" (2039) "Wonderful open spaces ...unique for its deer herd and wildlife, especially birds" (2047) "I like the variety provided by the woods throughout the year. The bluebells in spring, and the sweet chestnuts in autumn are an attraction – for different reasons There is ample parking, discretely located" (2051) "The fallen trees are havens for a vast number of creatures and host a fantastic collection of fungi" (2055). This area also figured significantly in a previous MORI study in Hertfordshire which required respondents to identify their favourite area.

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

AONB ( majority)  
 SSSI's: Albury Common, Berkhamsted Common, Northchurch Common and Frithsden Beeches  
 Conservation Areas: Little Gaddesden and Ringshall  
 Registered Park and Garden - Ashridge (Grade 2\*)  
 SM: Grimms ditch-Potten End, Berkhamstead Common and Nettleden Lodge Bowl Barrows(2no.)  
 Areas of Archaeological Significance: Ashridge, Northchurch Common (2 sites), Frithsden, Brick Kiln Cottage-Berkamsted Common, Potten End and Little Gaddesden Church

**CONDITION**

<i>Land cover change:</i>	<b>localised</b>
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	<b>mixed</b>
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	<b>widespread</b>
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	<b>good</b>
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	<b>intact</b>
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	<b>low</b>
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	<b>moderate</b>

**STRENGTH OF CHARACTER**

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	<b>prominent</b>
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	<b>prominent</b>
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	<b>prominent</b>
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	<b>concealed</b>
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	<b>contained</b>
<i>Visual unity:</i>	<b>unified</b>
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	<b>rare</b>

<b>CONDITION</b>	<b>GOOD</b>	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	<b>Safeguard and manage</b>
	<b>MODERATE</b>	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	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>STRENGTH OF CHARACTER</b>				

**STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING****CHANGE: SAFEGUARD AND MANAGE**

- encourage suitable management for wildlife sites not already subject to a statutory designation or legal agreement. Involve the community where possible
- promote the multiple uses of ancient woodland through education and access
- survey and manage parkland and veteran trees for biodiversity and landscape value
- ensure new planting is encouraged to maintain age diversity. 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, where appropriate
- encourage reversion from arable uses to pasture and chalk grassland.
- promote awareness and consideration of the setting of the AONB, and views to and from it, when considering development and land use change proposals on sites adjacent to or within the AONB
- manage the area to encourage locally identified rare species such as the Woodcock and Wood Warbler
- ensure that design proposals for minor roads fit the grain of the local landscape both horizontally and vertically. It should not be axiomatic to enclose any new road with dense hedging on both sides – due reference should be made to local character and roads should be left open where appropriate
- continue the conservation and management of the heathland habitat, including acid grassland, glade and ride management (Berkhamsted Common)
- the wooded character of the landscape should be maintained and as far as practically possible, beech to be retained as the dominant Chilterns species. However some woodland will also need to evolve to a mix of other broad leaved species, including wild cherry and ash
- using the Countryside stewardship scheme and other appropriate mechanisms, existing chalk grassland should be protected and managed to prevent scrub encroachment and other undesirable changes, and new chalk grassland should be created on valley sides
- conserve and enhance the distinctive character of traditional settlements and individual buildings by promoting the conservation of important buildings and high standards of new building or alterations to existing properties, all with the consistent use of locally traditional materials and designed to reflect the traditional character of the area
- resist any development, reclamation or drainage of heathland areas and areas adjacent to them
- promote the re-establishment of low-density stock grazing and management by rotational cutting, turf stripping and/or controlled burning as appropriate
- establish and support realistic and attractive countryside management schemes for all sites with heathland and acid grassland/scrub communities
- promote management plans to all commons to restore a mix of habitat types and a balance between wildlife and public access. Promote local initiatives for traditional management
- promote both the creation of new ponds and the retention /enhancement for wildlife of existing ponds
- promote hedgerow restoration through locally appropriate measures including; coppicing, laying and replanting/gapping up
- maintain integrity of parkland and designed landscape at Ashridge by maintaining the vistas, preventing scrub encroachment and replanting specific trees and copses
- on areas of unimproved and semi-improved calcareous grassland avoid over-grazing, heavy public pressure, damage from vehicles and pollution
- promote the use of traditional field enclosure where land is converted to equestrian pasture
- require landscape management plans with planning applications where significant impact is identified. Adhere to plans rigorously. To ensure deliverability of the landscape proposals, liaison groups can be useful in steering management plans over time, to deal with changing circumstances, via regular meetings of interested parties
- ensure all existing and proposed recreational land uses include appropriate measures to manage and enhance the existing landscape setting and historical and ecological value. Particular attention should be given to ensure earthwork proposals complement the natural landform patterns
- quiet enjoyment of the landscape should be encouraged but should not be allowed to undermine the character and quality of the landscape. A balance needs to be achieved between the needs of the visitors and conserving the landscape. special consideration should be given to the effects of increased car parking and traffic as the result of any new proposals in the Chilterns landscape
- encourage a co-ordinated approach to the provision of access and recreation opportunities, car parking, land management, and site interpretation
- Bluebells in Rail Copse (J.Billingsley)

