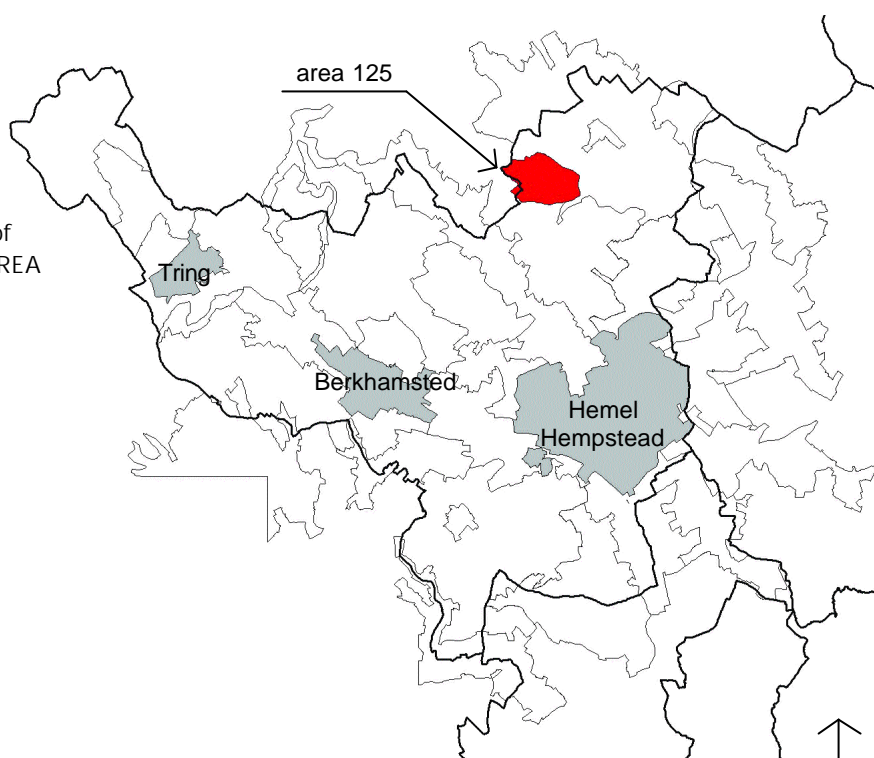


District Map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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Hertfordshire County Council

LA076678 2003



LOCATION

The character area is located to the south west of Markyate village, incorporating Beechwood Park school and estate and the outlying/associated farms.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The landscape character is essentially influenced by the Beechwood Park Estate, formerly home to the Sebright family and now housing a preparatory school. Beechwood House, a late 18th century seven bay red brick mansion with flanking domestic wings, occupies a prominent position in its undulating parkland. The park is largely composed of grazing pasture with mature to senescent parkland trees. Exotic trees such as Cedar of Lebanon and black pine make up the greater part of the parkland planting. The boundaries of the estate are marked by deteriorating estate fencing, with later barbed wire and stockproof additions, together with characteristic architecture including the lodge/gatehouse. A number of

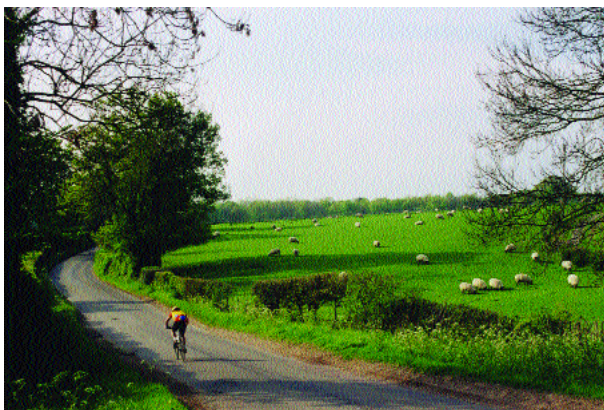
former estate farms are also included within the character area, together with plantation woodlands and pasture.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- undulating historic parkland with mature to over mature parkland trees
- meadows and sheep pasture
- timber and stock proof fencing
- estate buildings and architecture
- mixed and recreational land uses serving the school
- extensive mixed woodlands
- farm buildings

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Beechwood House and associated service buildings
- lodge and gates
- individual parkland trees
- pasture fields at Beechwood Farm
- school traffic and conspicuous car parks in front of the main house



- Parkland from Babies Wood (HCC Landscape Unit)

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. Through the centre of the area is a shallow valley exposing the Upper Chalk bedrock geology, while the deeper valley along the north side reveals the Middle Chalk. The superficial geology is predominantly clay-with-flints dominating the plateau to the west of the area, overlain by superficial Pleistocene brick earth deposits in places. The soils are fine silty and fine loamy over clayey soils with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging. Some well drained clayey soils over chalk (Batcombe Association).

Topography. The area forms part of the generally gently undulating Chiltern dip slope with a shallow valley in the area leading up to the front of the house from the eastern main entrance. A deeper valley borders the northern edge of the area in an east to west alignment.

Degree of slope. The average gradient of the valley is 1 in 40 and the plateau is 1 in 80.

Altitude range. From 175-180m at Great Bradwin's Wood to 120-130m in the Beechwood House dry valley.

Hydrology. The landform and generally free draining geology has resulted in little standing water. The clay at Beechwood Farm is deep enough to support some small ponds, but there is no running water.

Land cover and land use. The land cover is primarily relict parkland and estate farmland and the land use is mixed farming. The area's secondary land use becomes apparent towards the main house where land is set aside for parking and playing fields for the private school that now occupies the buildings. Land use change from pasture to arable is a feature.

Vegetation and wildlife. The semi-natural woodland was formerly largely acid oak/beechness, with calcareous beech/ash on slopes. Most of this has been destroyed by replanting with conifers etc. Former acid and calcareous grasslands in Beechwood Park have also largely been ploughed. Remnant areas exist along the south side of the park near Dean Lane, where some fragment oak/beechness woodland survives, including some old pollarded oaks.

Wild daffodils are notable and is a feature by Dean Lane and elsewhere in the park, but is not common.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

This landscape has a strong cultural and historical integrity which defines its extent. It is dominated by the house and parkland of Beechwood House, the former home of the Sebright family and now a preparatory school. It is an early 18th century (1702) seven bay Georgian mansion of red brick with slate roof, dressed stone coining and frieze details and a pedimented façade. The house occupies the site of the former medieval monastery of St Giles in the Wood and the design incorporates some of the earlier sixteenth century house. The estate architecture (including the Victorian gate house) and estate fencing permeate the character area throughout.

A large part of the parkland, designed in the 1750's by Capability Brown, is put to cattle grazing but still retains much of its original parkland planting although a large part is now over mature, including oaks and dying cedars.

There is, however, some evidence of restoration, with a good avenue of semi mature beech leading up the main drive. The influence of the estate is visually and physically extensive, with a series of former estate farms and coniferous plantations with broadleaf margins.

Field Patterns. A sub regular field pattern is apparent throughout the estate with a linear belt of regular fields following the valley formation to the north of the area. Fields are generally medium to large and part of an informal parkland structure.

Transport pattern. With the exception of a short length of Clements End Lane to the south west the area is not crossed by any public roads. The oval shaped estate is crossed by a simple network of access tracks and parkland tracks and surrounded by minor roads. Verges are variable in width and are often open allowing views from and to the lanes and drives within the estate.

Settlements and built form. Settlement is restricted to Beechwood House and the associated estate farms.

Other sources of area-specific information

Pevsner N: Buildings of England - Hertfordshire

- Beechwood House (A.Tempany)



VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

The character area is locally visible from outside, being contained by estate boundaries and woodlands, although views within the area, across the parklands, are extensive. Generally it is quite an open landscape, with large scale landscape elements including grazing pasture with parkland planting. As a largely intact parkland and estate landscape, it has a clear and coherent visual unity, and is essentially tranquil however it is in poor condition and in need of restoration.

Rarity and distinctiveness. As a result of its extensive and distinct estate character, together with attached farms and woodlands, it is unusual both within the district and the county.

VISUAL IMPACT

In terms of built development, visual impact is negligible, this being largely estate architecture and farms. The exception is the extensive early 18th century mansion of the estate, Beechwood House, which is widely visible, being situated at the highest point of its site.

ACCESSIBILITY

Access to the estate is limited to two public footpaths, however one allows visitors to pass across the front of Beechwood House. A second footpath allows access through the extensive Great Bradwin's Wood and Gravelpit Wood west of the parkland.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

Although data on community views is limited, evidence suggests that Beechwood is valued (D). As respondent 2136 writes: "An area of natural history coupled with long history. Old buildings and farms. Wildlife everywhere. Good walks. An area where countryside traditions have not been lost to modern sways."

"Rarely seen finer trees than at...Beechwood: It has the name in strict propriety, for the number of stately beeches is great; but the soil agrees with all sorts of trees; the cedars are immense; the oaks very large; the ash straight and beautiful; the larch spruce and Scots fir equally fine, but the beech uncommon" A Young in "General View of the Agriculture of Hertfordshire," 1804.

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

AONB

CONDITION

Land cover change:	widespread
Age structure of tree cover:	over mature
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	scattered
Management of semi-natural habitat:	poor
Survival of cultural pattern:	intact
Impact of built development:	low
Impact of land-use change:	moderate

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

Impact of landform:	prominent
Impact of land cover:	apparent
Impact of historic pattern:	apparent
Visibility from outside:	locally visible
Sense of enclosure:	partial
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
		STRENGTH OF CHARACTER		

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

- restore the estate character of the landscape as far as practically possible
- encourage reversion from arable uses to pasture and grassland
- restrict ploughing of grasslands within parklands
- for existing woodlands, including encouraging the replacement of softwoods with indigenous native deciduous communities
- explore improved public access arrangements to the parkland and woodlands with attention to car park design and safety
- 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
- utilise ancient hedge and field boundaries for the most appropriate location for woodland restoration and expansion
- 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
- encourage the reversal of habitat fragmentation and the creation and improvement of habitat links to create eco-corridors
- promote the expansion of woodland beyond ancient woodland boundaries, especially where this will help in creating habitat links
- survey and manage parkland and veteran trees for biodiversity 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
- hard landscaping details such as steps, balustrades, pond copings, statuary and urns should be conserved. Replacements should be in facsimile and in natural materials. Terraces, ha-has, estate fencing, gates and gate piers etc. 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
- consider ways of assimilating the impact of parking and educational activities at Beechwood House that are sympathetic to the historic parkland setting
- conserve unimproved and semi-improved grassland wherever possible, avoiding agricultural improvements to reduce their acid or calcareous nature, in order to maintain their nature conservation value
- promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and important semi-natural habitats and the creation of links between semi-natural habitats
- promote hedgerow restoration and creation where appropriate to the historic context, 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
- 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

- Parkland (HCC Landscape Unit)

