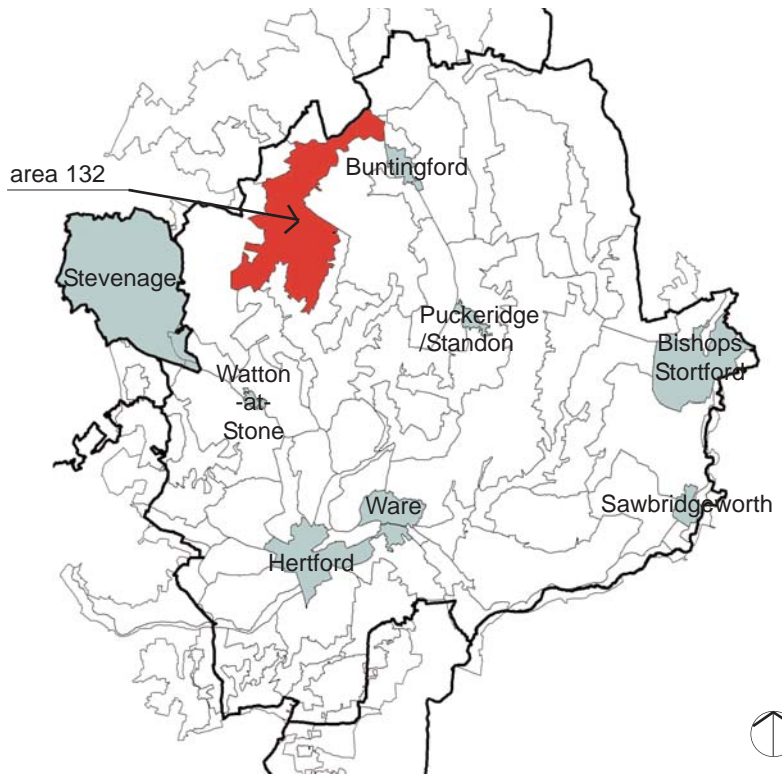


County Map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

©Crown copyright .All rights reserved.
Hertfordshire County Council
100019606 2004



LOCATION

The area is located on the elevated plateau between the valleys of the River Beane to the west and the more open arable plateau to the east. It stretches from Cottered in the north to Wood End and Walkern Hall in the south.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The character area comprises a settled plateau landscape with a strong sense of historic continuity, demonstrated in the relatively complete field patterns, mixed agriculture and the dispersed and widespread settlement. There is a good intact network of mixed species hedged field boundaries with numerous field trees. Woodlands are generally small but are dispersed throughout the area helping to reduce the overall scale. There is a good range of vernacular buildings within villages, hamlets and as isolated individual properties. Small commons and parklands also add to the varied pattern and richness of the landscape. This is a tranquil and traditional landscape with few detractors.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- dispersed settlement pattern
- strong sense of historic continuity in structure
- range of field sizes including many smaller fields around settlements
- strong hedgerow pattern including mature trees
- mixed land use with arable and range of pasture for horses, sheep and cattle
- organic winding lanes with few direct connections across the plateau, (except for A507)
- village greens/commons
- wide range of vernacular domestic buildings
- moderate woodland cover, particularly to west
- widespread rights of way network
- tranquil area
- minimal visual detractors

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Ardeley Green - model estate cottages to the village green
- Ardeley Bury Hall and park
- ponds associated with settlements
- Moor Green
- Back Lane - linear ancient Roman Road and trackway
- parish churches at Ardeley and Cottered
- Cromer Windmill
- Throcking water tower

- Moor Green (HCC Landscape Unit)

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. The plateau is dominated by calcareous boulder clay overlying the solid chalk of the escarpment dip slope. However around Ardeley and Cottered the underlying clay-with-flints and some peri-glacial gravels and chalk appear at the surface. Chalk also outcrops west of Bassus Green, and east of Wood End. The soils are typically slowly permeable and a mix of calcareous clayey and non-calcareous clayey with a slight risk of water erosion, (Hanslope association). Locally the peri-glacial gravels are more freely-drained.

Topography. The plateau gently undulates from north to south. There is a marked break of slope to the south and west where the plateau meets with the Beane valley and its associated tributaries.

Degree of slope. The main plateau falls by about 1 in 400, but there are local undulations in the plateau, typically up to about 1 in 20.

Altitude range. The dip slope plateau slowly falls from about 151m in the north at Throcking to 128m in the south at Wood End.

Hydrology. To the south the area is drained by often spring-fed streams, which rise e.g. at Moor Hall (feeding the Old Bourne), Gardners, and Walkern Park etc. Old pond complexes occur around the settlements e.g. at Munchers Green, Moor Hall, and Wood End etc., and there is an ornamental lake at Ardeley Bury. To the north there are fewer ponds except at Cottered and Throcking Hall. In the north minor ditches drain the area to the River Rib in the east, the River Beane in the west, and to the Old Bourne towards the south.

Land cover and land use. There is a pattern of treed farmland and mixed agriculture throughout the area. The main land use is arable but there many smaller pockets of pasture, with mixed livestock and horses associated with the widespread smaller settlements and the smaller pattern of fields e.g. around Cottered. There are also areas of mixed woodland cover particularly to the south between Bassus Green and Wood End. Small parks are a feature such as at Ardeley Bury and Walkern Hall. There are a number of village greens and commons within the area, some of which are largely enclosed e.g. at Cottered while others are still more open e.g. at Moor End and Throcking.

Vegetation and wildlife. Ecologically there is a contrast between the Ardeley Plateau to the south and the Cottered Plateau to the north. The Ardeley Plateau is noted for the overall complex of wet, ancient semi-natural woodlands (partially ash/maple and partially hornbeam), and old green lanes with often wooded hedges. Associated with these are a series of highly important, usually wet neutral/calcareous grasslands, such as at Moor Hall SSSI, Moor Green, Munchers Green and Parkers Green, with some remaining adjoining pastures. Broad, damp road verges are also important, especially around Clay End and Bassus Green, where road salting is rare. The old grassland and parkland trees at Ardeley Bury Park are also important, including for scarce invertebrates of old trees. The most important semi-natural woodlands are St John's/Lord's Woods, partially very old secondary woodland; but other

important woods occur at Moor Hall Great Wood and the remnants of Witnesses Wood in the south. Wetlands of importance include especially spring-fed mires at Moor Hall and Bury Mead, and the old ponds around Munchers Green. Back Lane (Roman Road) forms a highly important wooded corridor along the north-east boundary of the area, linking a number of individual sites. In general this complex forms one of the most important, ecologically intact complexes of habitat in the County, although it has suffered recently from severe management in places.

The Ardeley Plateau holds some of the last high quality wet meadows in the County, with rare species, such as Dense-flowered Fragrant Orchid, Frog Orchid, Marsh Helleborine, Green-winged Orchid, and the County's last known site for Bog Cotton in its rare fen habitat type. Wet meadows at Moor Hall still occasionally have Snipe in summer. Wide road verges near Bassus Green harbour nationally rare invertebrates, notably the Scarlet Malachite Beetle at one of its last known sites in the UK. Ardeley Bury Park is known to harbour rare invertebrates of old trees. The area also has dormouse, and there are occasional sightings of roe deer, which is rare in Hertfordshire, as well as Harvest Mouse and Yellow-necked Mouse in its woodlands. Great Crested Newts are a feature of ponds at Moor Hall.

The Cottered Plateau to the north is more dominated by intensive arable, however there are some semi-improved neutral grassland remains at Cottered and Throcking Hall, especially the damp grasslands at Little Osbournes and Flanders Green. Woodlands are fewer and mainly hornbeam, the most sizeable fragment being Drinkwater Wood by Back Lane in the south. Green lanes are important, particularly the complex around Brook End and Flanders Green, and linking with Back Lane to the south.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

There is some evidence, mainly in the form of cropmarks, for prehistoric and Roman occupation in the area, and considerable evidence for a widespread pattern of dispersed medieval settlement. The area retains a network of small settlements and farmsteads and their associated greens, trackways and field systems, reflecting both the topography and more ancient settlement patterns. These include the villages of Cottered and Ardeley, the many small Greens and Ends of the area, and several medieval moated sites. The most notable of these are the high status moated manorial sites of Ardeley Bury and Moor Hall, and the ringwork of a probable adulterine castle at Walkern Bury Farm, near Bassus Green. Other, now deserted sites, such as Munches Green and the shrunken village earthworks near Middle Farm, Throcking, indicate that that settlements have also shifted or declined during the medieval and post-medieval periods. At The Garden House, Cottered is a Grade II* early 20th century garden in the Japanese Style. Developed between 1905-37 by a wealthy china merchant, Herbert Goode, there are a range of features including stone lanterns, waterfalls, bridges, arches and ceremonial tea drinking pavilion. Ardeley Bury is of medieval origins but the existing house and park mainly dates from 1820 and is the fanciful gothic creation of John Murray, complete

with turrets, baronial hall and Tudor boathouse. To the south west is Walkern Hall an early 19th century House in the classical style with a Doric porch.

Field Patterns. The field pattern of the area remains varied, with medium and large fields resulting from 18th century and more recent enclosure mixed with extensive areas of pre-18th century 'irregularly' enclosed fields, and small areas of enclosed meadow pasture, ancient woodland, parkland and surviving commons. These smaller irregular fields survive particularly well around Cottered, Ardeley, and Wood End, and reflect the ancient settlement pattern. Field enclosures are principally mixed species hedges including field trees. Fences are locally present where there is equestrian activity. Both Walkern Bury and Ardeley Bury had deerparks in the medieval period, and the informal parkland surrounding the latter is a small remnant of its medieval extent. The earliest record of a deer park at Walkern Park is 1360; it is still in existence, albeit in modified form.

Transport pattern. With the exception of the A507 Baldock Road, which passes through the north of the area, the transport pattern comprises a widespread network of sinuous and winding lanes and tracks. These features create a slow pace to the area in keeping with the ancient dispersed and settled character. The lanes are locally sunken in the undulations in the plateau and generally enclosed by mixed native hedges with variable width verges. Back Lane is a trackway which follows the line of the Roman road that linked Baldock and Braughing, and it has been the historic boundary between the parishes of Ardeley and Cottered and Aspenden since at least the medieval period.

Settlements and built form. There is a widespread pattern of traditional settlement. Cottered is the largest village in the area, centred around a wide tree lined verges, with some of the buildings set well below road level of the A507 that passes through. There is a range of vernacular materials and historic periods represented. Within the village The Lordship claims to be one of the oldest inhabited houses in Hertfordshire. The parish church of St

John the Baptist is embedded within the core of the village. At The Green, Ardeley there is a distinctive cluster of white washed thatched cottages dating from 1917. The restored Cromer Windmill, is a distinctive landmark, particularly when seen from Character Area 221. The village of Throcking was largely deserted in the later Middle Ages.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

English Nature: SSSI notification

EHDC: Historic Parks and Gardens in East Hertfordshire (SPG)

English Heritage: Schedule entries

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

- Back Lane (J.Billingsley)



VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

Views of the plateau landscape are relatively concealed from the outside. The area has a coherent character with the unifying features being the small to medium scale of the fields, the widespread distribution of settlement including traditional buildings and the relatively intact field and hedgerow patterns. The area mainly has a quiet and remote feel with a strong sense of historic continuity. The only evidence of decline is within some of the arable areas between the settlements, where the field units have been enlarged.

Rarity and distinctiveness. The area is unusual within Hertfordshire.

VISUAL IMPACT

There is minimal visual impact from built development in the area. This due to both the relatively contained nature and scale of the landscape and the minimal presence of modern development or lack of intrusive features. The A507 is contained within Cottered village although it is more locally prominent to the east as are the 20th century houses on the edge of the village. Throcking water tower is a prominent local feature.

ACCESSIBILITY

There is an extensive network of rights of ways in the area, including waymarked routes, such as Chain Walk and various byways, e.g. Back Lane, footpaths and bridleways.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

Although data is limited this area appears to be regarded of significant value [C]

"A stroll around Ardeley and Ardeley Bury leads the visitor into some of the quietest spots to be found in the county. The windmill on the hill above Cromer, near by, is useful as a landmark when threading the many winding lanes in the neighbourhood." H Tompkins 'Hertfordshire' 1903

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

SSSI: Moor Hall Meadows
 Register of Parks and Gardens: The Garden House , Cottered (Grade II*)
 Landscape Conservation Area (except for east of Throcking)
 SAMs: Ardeley Bury, The island and Moor Hall moated sites, Walkern Bury ringwork.

CONDITION

<i>Land cover change:</i>	localised
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	mixed
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	linked
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	not obvious
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	intact
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	low
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	low

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	apparent
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	apparent
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	prominent
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	concealed
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	partial
<i>Visual unity:</i>	coherent
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	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 CONSERVE

- encourage landowners to safeguard existing hedges, increase hedged field boundaries, create permanent grass strips around field margins and prevent spray drift, using financial incentives as available, with a particular view to enhancing the quality of habitats adjacent to existing high-quality habitats in the Beane valley
- consider the possibilities of creating circular footpath routes in the area, especially from the re-opened railway station in Watton-at-Stone (adjoining area), to take advantage of views over the sculptural landform•
- focus hedging opportunities on internal field boundaries, not those along roads and footpaths which could interrupt views over this area
- encourage the conservation of the existing settlement pattern and resist any extensive development which would significantly affect this
- consider the retention/replanting of trees along the watercourse to reflect its location. Care should be taken to select species that will reflect local distinctiveness and a quasi-waterside location but that can survive without a permanent water source
- continue to manage both the established and young woodlands to the western boundary with Stevenage to minimise the visual impact of the settlement on the landscape to the east
- encourage traditional woodland management measures including coppicing



- Hedged plateau - Gardners End (J.Billingsley)