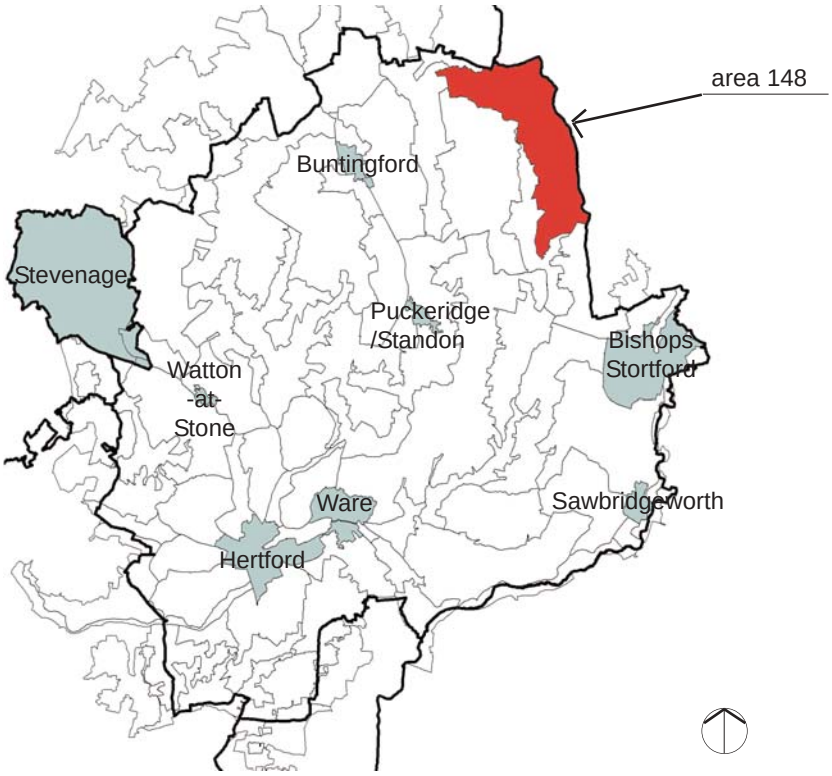

County Map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

LOCATION

Located to the east of the River Ash valley and extends north towards the Nuthampstead Plateau. Incorporates the villages of Anstey, Meesden, Brent Pelham, Stocking Pelham and Gravesend. The area generally forms an extended, high ridge separating Hertfordshire from Essex. Its natural boundaries extend into Essex.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The area is an extensive plateau bounded by the valleys of the Rivers Quin and Ash to the west and the River Stort to the east. The area could also be described as the Essex Marches, sharing similar characteristics with the landscape to the east. An organic, ancient landscape with frequent settlements containing a high proportion of vernacular properties. The plateau is gently undulating and is predominantly used for arable farming other than around settlements where the landuse is often pasture. The area has a strong rural character with many village pubs, flint churches, a good rights of way network and prominent scattered blocks of woodland. An electricity transformer station at Stocking Pelham and the associated high voltage power lines which stride across the landscape are a major eyesore in an otherwise mature landscape where cultural patterns are generally intact.

• Patmore Heath (J.Billingsley)

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- undulating plateau area
- tranquil, rural area
- medium scale arable farmland enclosed by mixed species hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees
- scattered small woodland blocks
- frequent villages with strong vernacular architecture
- small to medium pockets of pastoral fields around and within villages
- slightly sunken lanes

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- many pubs and brightly coloured houses
- pollarded oaks
- Patmore Heath - a scarce example of grass heath habitat with ponds
- common land with ponds in the village of Meesden
- electricity transformer station

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. Slowly permeable Pleistocene Anglian boulder clay dominates the landscape, with chalk at depth and calcareous clayey soils (Hanslope series). At the plateau edges soils change to mix of deep well drained fine loamy over clayey, coarse loamy over clayey and fine loamy soils. Around Patmore Heath small area of sands and gravels with slowly permeable subsoils over Eocene and Jurassic loam and clay (Bursledon series) result in acidic soils with seasonal waterlogging.

Topography. A gently undulating plateau with smooth slopes, predominantly to the west, towards the adjacent river valley of the River Ash and its tributaries. Locally, slopes are more pronounced e.g. around Anstey where a broad shallow valley runs east-west along an upper tributary to the River Quin.

Degree of slope. Slopes are typically 1 in 30 within the plateau. Around Anstey and Meesden, the slopes increase to between 1 in 14 and 1 in 20.

Altitude range. Levels typically range between 100m and 125m. A local high point of 140m is reached at Manor Farm in Meesden.

Hydrology. The plateau acts as a major watershed between the Stort and Ash basins, with many minor streams flowing west towards the Ash on the Hertfordshire side of the boundary. Small upland ponds some which may have derived in part from peri-glacial ice-hollows occur regularly throughout the area with a particularly large number in Meesden and on Patmore Heath. The ponds at Patmore Heath are of County significance, being acidic and oligotrophic.

Land cover and land use. The plateau is gently undulating and is predominantly used for arable farming other than around settlements where the land use is often pasture. Significant woodland blocks (both deciduous and mixed deciduous/conifer) are scattered throughout the area particularly around Meesden and Brent Pelham. Some of the woodlands and arable land are used for bird shooting and belts of cover crops such as maize are relatively common. The electricity transformer station at Crabb's Green occupies a substantial area of land near Stocking Pelham.

Vegetation and wildlife. The calcareous boulder clay generally dictates the nature of habitats, and much of the area is now open arable. There are some woodlands in which ash, maple and hazel predominate, almost entirely ancient semi-natural coppice-with-standards such as at Northey Wood, Beeches Wood, Hall Wood and Oxbury Wood. Field elm is a frequent feature in many of these, and of remaining old hedges. Unimproved neutral or moderately calcareous grassland was formerly a feature around villages, but is now rare, with important remnants at Meesden Green, Crabbs Green and The Hale at Anstey. Wetland habitats are scarce, but include the important ponds around Meesden and Crabbs Green. New excavations associated with the electricity transformer station have added to the latter. Some important old green lanes exist, such as those east of Brent Pelham, and road verge grassland can be locally important.

Some woodlands have important flora, such as Herb Paris, Thin-spiked Wood Sedge and Greater Butterfly Orchid around Anstey and Brent Pelham. The ponds at Meesden and Crabbs Green hold Great Crested Newts, as well as a range of aquatic invertebrates, while the old grassland at Meesden Green is well-known for its flowers, including orchids and Hay Rattle etc.

Patmore Heath is an almost unique enclave of acidic grass-heath in an otherwise more usual Hertfordshire arable farmland landscape, although clearings in Patmore Hall Wood (see Area 150) nearby, are similar ecologically. Patmore Heath holds a large number of scarce species, including Marsh Violet at its site in the County, as well as Heath Rush, Bird's-foot, Star Sedge, Southern Marsh Orchid, Mat Grass, Purple Moor-grass, Marsh Willowherb etc. It formerly held the last remaining plants of Cross-leaved Heath in the County, but this is now probably extinct. The dominant bramble on the Heath, Rubus proiectus, is almost restricted to this site in the County. The ponds on the Heath have an important invertebrate fauna, including Black Darter dragonfly, as well as having one of the few County colonies of Palmate Newt. Wild Daffodils are especially notable around in woods around Patmore Hall, while the calcareous grassland at Upwick Wood has local plants like Rockrose and Clustered Bellflower.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

There is some evidence, mainly in the form of cropmarks of ring ditches (plough-razed burial mounds) and enclosures, for earlier prehistoric occupation in the area and substantial evidence for occupation throughout the Late Iron Age, Roman and later periods. The Roman road from from Braughing to Great Chesterford runs through Brent Pelham and Meesden and Roman occupation material has been recorded at several points close to its route.

In addition to its villages, the area retains a network of small settlements and farmsteads and greens, trackways and field systems, mainly of medieval origin. These include the small Greens and Ends of the area, numerous medieval moated sites, and several sites indicating former settlement which has shifted or declined. At Anstey Hall the moated site is the successor to the medieval motte and bailey castle there, but examples have survived adjacent to the manorial sites of Meesden Bury and Stocking Pelham and at less high-status sites such as Crabbs Green Farm. Totally abandoned moats also survive, with 'Shonk's Moat' and Chamberlains in Brent Pelham being fine examples.

The Domesday Book shows that Anstey (known then as Anestige) already existed as a village when Count Eustace of Boulogne came into possession of the manor. It is likely that he was responsible for construction of the castle in the village which was destroyed during Henry III's reign. There is a local myth that anyone entering the passage that connects a chalk pit with the castle dungeons will never come out again alive. It is said that one such individual who

took this route, known as Blind George the Fiddle, was indeed never seen again. St George's church, Anstey, is large and impressive with a Norman tower and traditional Hertfordshire spike.

The villages of Meesden, Brent Pelham and Stocking Pelham all have attractive village churches. In Meesden the church is set away from the village and is basically 12th century but was rebuilt in 1877 by the Victorians. It has an unusual 16th century brick porch and a rare mosaic of glazed tiles thought to be fourteenth century.

The church in Brent Pelham is 14th century with a 15th century tower and Hertfordshire spike. It contains an unusual 13th century monument to a local resident called Piers Shonks who is reputed to have killed a local dragon. It is believed that Brent Pelham gained its name as a result of a fire in the early twelfth century hence the term 'Brent' originating from 'Burnt'.

Field Patterns. The field pattern of the area originally comprised widespread small and medium sized 'irregular' enclosure field systems, areas of unenclosed common arable fields e.g. south of Brent Pelham and west of Stocking Pelham, and areas of commons with open margins, informal parkland, and small blocks of ancient woodland, all established before the 18th century. While at least half of this this pattern has been superseded, by 18th century and later enclosure, and 'prairie' fields, these pre-18th century systems largely survive to a greater extent e.g. in Anstey, and around Brent Pelham village, Dawes Green, Patmore Heath and Hall, and Upwick Green.

Transport pattern. The area is served by a network of winding minor roads and lanes which connect the various small settlements throughout the area. Some roads are slightly sunken and most have narrow verges and are enclosed with mature hedges. Hedgebanks and wet ditches are present along some of the lanes. There are noticeably few links to the east towards Essex.

Settlements and built form. Villages and hamlets are scattered throughout the area including Meesden, Anstey, and Brent and Stocking Pelham. These are mainly medieval in origin and have further developed in a linear form along the minor roads and lanes which connect the different settlements. For example, the road between Barleycroft End and Stocking Pelham is bordered by settlement for most of its length. More nucleated settlements are found at Patmore Heath and Brent Pelham. Most of the settlements contain a large number of attractive, vernacular properties including timber framed and thatched properties. The use of bright-coloured renders on many of these properties is a distinctive feature in this area. Traditional country pubs are also a feature of most of the villages providing an attractive feature and important focus for the local communities.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

English Nature SSSI notification

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

- Towards Meesden (HCC Landscape Unit)

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

There are few views of the area from the adjacent areas of the valleys of the River Ash, River Quin and River Stort due to its plateau character. Within the area, mature hedgerows and woodland blocks provide a sense of containment and filter or screen long distance views. Short and medium distance views are frequent. The area is generally tranquil and has a coherent rural character.

Rarity and distinctiveness. The area has a distinctive rural character which is a fairly frequent landscape type within the county.

VISUAL IMPACT

The electricity transformer station at Crabb's Green (south of Stocking Pelham) and the associated high voltage cable lines which cut across the landscape are visually intrusive and highly visible from a wide area. There are few other intrusive features within the area.

ACCESSIBILITY

There is a good network of public footpaths and bridleways within the area providing good accessibility through most of the area.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

The area is of regard and currently the subject of a community campaign to be designated as an AONB . Most notably it contains the highly valued site of Patmore Heath [B]

"I have no respect for those topographers who would have us believe that every place they visit is of ideal beauty…between Lydia and the confines of Freud Pelham I have seen little to attract the eye" M Tompkins 'Highways & Byways in Hertfordshire' 1902

Re Pat more Heath: "An area of natural beauty" (0876); "A rare example of acid heath land" (0986); "It is really vital to keep these natural unspoilt areas" (3384) Re Stocking Pelham sub station: "This is an eyesore" (0853)

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

Landscape Conservation Area

Areas of Archaeological Significance - including Stocking Pelham Hall, area around Maiden village, area between Maiden Bury and Maiden Hall

Other Sites of Ecological, Geological and Geomorphological Importance or Interest - Hall Wood (Stocking Pelham), East Wood, Northery Wood, Hale Hill, Five Acre Wood, Meesden Green, White Hill, Smaley Wood, Oxbury Wood, Shaw Wood and Beeches Wood.

SSSI's - Pit and Patmore Heath

Conservation Areas - Anstey village, Crabb's Green and Brent Pelham village

SAMs - Moated mound near Hale Farm, Pain's End moated site, Anstey motte and bailey castle, Moated mound at Cole Green near Brent Pelham, Shonk's moat enclosure and fishpond and Chamberlain's Moat

CONDITION

Land cover change:	**localised**
Age structure of tree cover:	**mature/young**
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	**scattered**
Management of semi-natural habitat:	**not obvious**
Survival of cultural pattern:	**interrupted**
Impact of built development:	**low**
Impact of land-use change:	**low**

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

Impact of landform:	**apparent**
Impact of land cover:	**dominant/prominent**
Impact of historic pattern:	**dominant/prominent**
Visibility from outside:	**concealed**
Sense of enclosure:	**partial**
Visual unity:	**unified**
Distinctiveness/rarity:	**frequent**

CONDITION	WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
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**

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE: CONSERVE AND RESTORE

- for existing woodlands, encourage the replacement of softwoods with indigenous native deciduous communities, hedgebank management and re-establishing a rich ground flora
- improve public access arrangements to 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 woodpasture
- plant belt of native planting around perimeter of Crabb's Green electricity transformer station to reduce impact on views from the surrounding area
- utilize ancient hedge and field boundaries to locate the most appropriate location for wood restoration and expansion
- restoration of arable land to permanent pasture and meadow. Priority should be given to land which buffers or links sites of existing wildlife importance
- 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
- encourage the dissemination of information about the historic importance and appropriate management of woodland features such as banks and ditches
- seek to resolve conflicts arising from competing uses and activities in woodland
- promote crop diversification, buffer zones between intensive arable production and important semi-natural habitats and the restoration of mixed livestock/ arable farming where possible
- 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.
- ensure new planting in historic parklands 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
- in historic parklands encourage reversion from arable uses to pasture and grassland
- ensure that the surroundings of converted and new buildings are designed and maintained to be in keeping with their agricultural surroundings by ensuring that 'Garden' details are be screened from view where possible and native species are used for hedging and tree planting to the perimeter
- promote hedgerow restoration and creation throughout the area to provide visual and ecological links between existing and proposed woodland areas. Pattern to follow historic field boundaries where possible and use native local provenance stock where possible
- promote both the creation of new ponds and the retention / enhancement of ponds and open ditches for wildlife
- resist any development, reclamation or drainage of Patmore Heath and areas adjacent to it
- establish realistic and attractive countryside management schemes for Patmore Heath

- Towards Meesden and Scales Park (HCC Landscape Unit)