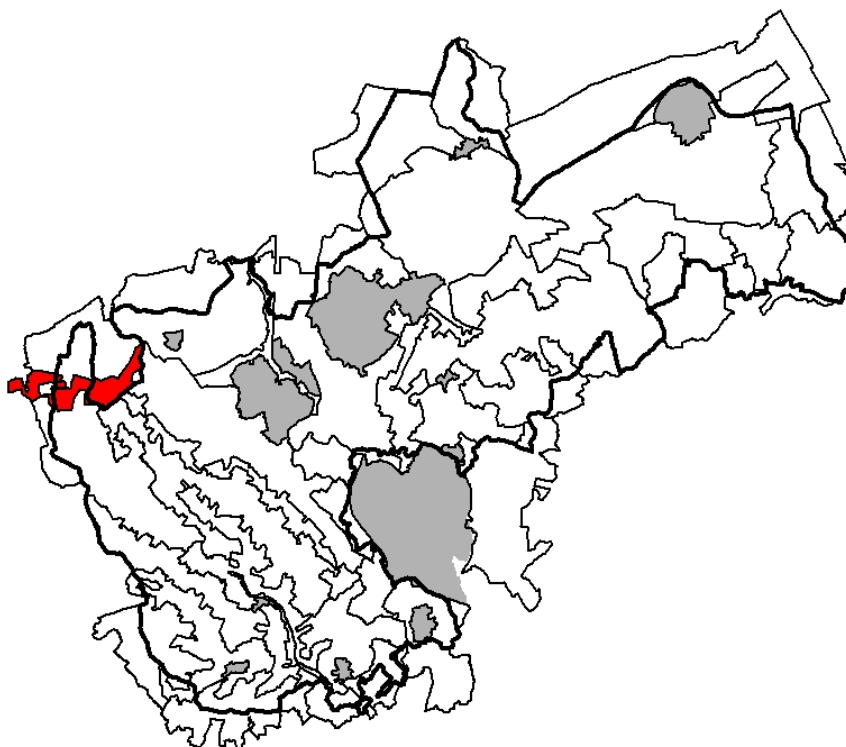


LOCATION

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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

The Character Area extends in an arc between Barton-le-Clay and Pirton lying partly within and partly outside the District boundary.



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Steeply sloping chalk scarp. Arable land along the upper reaches with high proportion of sheep grazing land on the lower slopes. Field sizes vary in scale with sheep grazing areas enclosed by post and barbed wire. Character Area is generally well wooded interspersed with pockets of regenerating scrubland on the lower slopes. Part of the scarp is managed as a chalk grassland SSSI.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Steeply sloping chalk scarp
- Generally well wooded
- Mixed arable and grazing use

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Pegsdon Hill chalk grassland SSSI (Bedfordshire)
- Historic earthworks (Ravensburgh Castle)
- Icknield Way long distance footpath

ASSESSMENT**PHYSICAL INFLUENCES****Geology & soils**

Shallow rendzina soils over Chalk.

Topography

Steeply sloping chalk scarp, gradually becomes shallower further south.

Degree of slope

Typically 1:4.

Altitude range

85m to 175m.

Hydrology

Although the scarp face has been incised by watercourses there are none present other than from chalk springs in the valley south of Hexton.

Land cover and land use

Mixed use arable, grazing and woodland cover.

Vegetation and wildlife

Species-rich chalk grassland and downland on steep-sided escarpments are a key ecological feature. The chalk grassland centred on Hexton, Pirton and Great Offley have been identified as being high biodiversity areas within the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan, and partially represented within this Character Area by the Hexton chalk grasslands. Some parts have been subject to conifer planting and reversion to chalkscrub and secondary woodland occurs to varying degrees throughout. Old chalk workings, pits and quarries expose the chalky substrate and lend themselves to dry, ecologically 'stressed' habitats that result in botanically diverse communities.

Some ecologically interesting chalk grassland communities also occur on road verges. The ancient route of the Icknield Way has its own association of calcareous grassland species and old hedgerow communities. Good examples of characteristic chalk grassland communities can be found at Devil's Ditch and Hexton Chalk Pit.

Fragments of ancient semi-natural oak/hornbeam woodland occur within this Character Area, such as Burleighcroft Wood.

Wide range of chalk grassland specialist species for example, insects like chalkhill blue and plants such as horseshoe vetch, purple milk vetch, field fleawort, pasque flower and fly orchid in some scrub areas.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

On the western end of a ridge situated to the southeast of Barton-le-Clay lies the well preserved Iron Age hillfort of Ravensburgh Castle. To the east lies a Bowl Barrow (SAM 20419) at Knocking Knoll.

Field pattern

The historic agricultural landscape comprises a mixture of prairie fields with relict elements within, improved rough pasture, 19th-20th century plantation and prairie fields with post-1950s boundary loss.

Transport pattern

The Character Area is crossed by one road to the west and the B655 forms the northern boundary.

Settlements and built form

The Character Area is too steep for settlement.

EVALUATION

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

The scarp affords a vantage point, often being the highest point in the locality for panoramic views over surrounding landscape.

Rarity & distinctiveness

Scarp face is not a common feature and as such has a distinctive character. It also supports a diverse chalk grassland, often classified as SSSI.

VISUAL IMPACT

Generally unspoilt by development.

ACCESSIBILITY

Numerous rights of way. The Icknield Way long distance path crosses the northern part.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) have undertaken Tier B (Community of Place) consultations. Views of the local community have been sought and contributor's responses to each of the Character Areas will be analysed and a summary of the responses provided by HCC.

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

AONB	The Chilterns
LC1	Landscape Conservation Area
GD 1169	Knebworth
SSSI	Barton Hills (Beds)
SSSI	Deacon Hill (Beds)
SSSI	Knocking Hoe (Beds)
SAM 8	Ravensburgh Castle: Hexton
SAM 20419	Bowl Barrow at Knocking Knoll 640m E of Pegsdon Common Farm (Beds)

EVALUATION

CONDITION

Land cover change:	Localised
Age structure of tree cover:	Mixed
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	Scattered
Management of semi-natural habitat:	Good
Survival of cultural pattern:	Declining/Relic
Impact of built development:	Low
Impact of land-use change:	Low
Matrix Score:	Good

ROBUSTNESS

Impact of landform:	Prominent
Impact of land cover:	Apparent
Impact of historic pattern:	Apparent
Visibility from outside:	Widely visible
Sense of enclosure:	Open
Visual unity:	Coherent
Distinctiveness/rarity:	Unusual
Matrix Score:	Moderate

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
ROBUSTNESS				

GUIDELINES

STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE:

Conserve and Strengthen

- Promote management of ancient woodland to encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and areas of semi-natural habitat and the creation of links between habitat areas
- Encourage policies for the safeguarding of existing hedges and the creation of new boundaries at appropriate locations, consistent with agricultural management practices
- Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow winding lanes and associated hedge banks, sunken lanes, verges and hedges
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network
- Encourage the management of species rich chalk grasslands