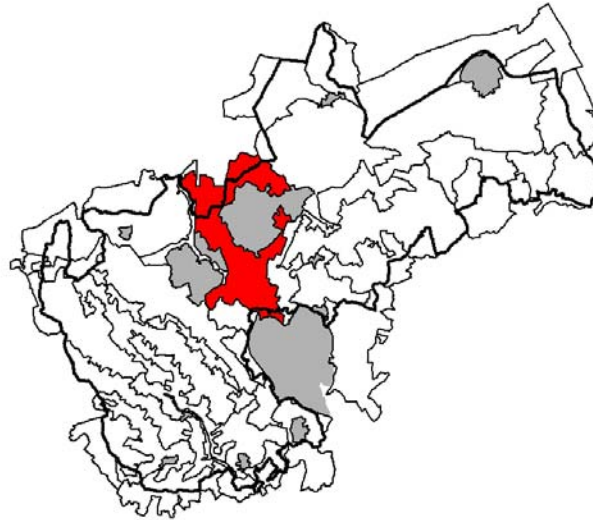


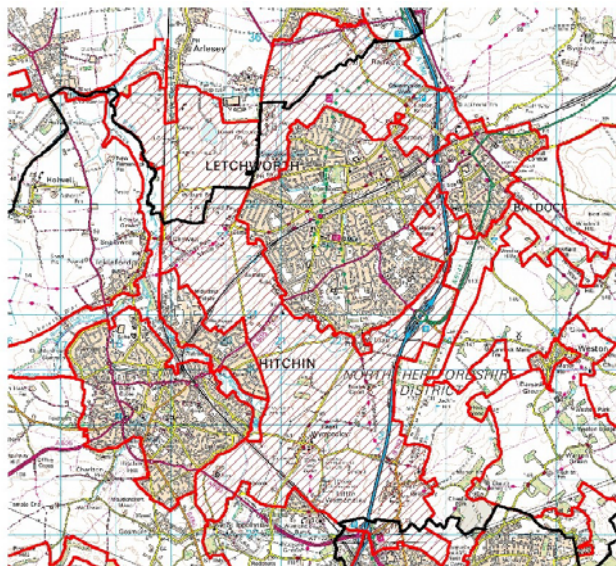
LOCATION



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

The Character Area encloses Letchworth on its southern, western and northern sides. Part to the north is outside of the District boundary. The northeastern corner includes a short length of the River Ivel.



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

To the south the rolling landform in a fold running north-south gradually merges into the gently undulating to low lying landform to the north.

There is a gradual change in character between the enclosed historic landscape in the south and the large scale open, exposed arable landscape in the north. Southern section is characterised by scattered small plantations and copses whilst to the north there are very few hedges and trees but linear shelter belts feature. The River Ivel corridor has a mature woodland setting and has been partly developed for recreational purposes.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Large flat expansive arable landscape in the north
- Rolling arable landscape of large scale fields and with relatively few trees in the south
- Core defined by the urban development of Letchworth and Hitchin

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Well wooded valley landscape of the Ivel valley
- Former mineral workings at Blue Lagoon (Bedfordshire)
- Golf course landscape at Letchworth Hall Hotel
- Historic settlements at Great Wymondley
- Sewage works at Pix Brook
- A1(M) runs parallel to eastern boundary
- Mill house and lake on River Ivel at Radwell

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

Free draining loamy brown soils over Chalk but locally acidic on glacial gravels in the centre and south, and thin rendzinas where Chalk reaches the surface.

Topography

Relatively low lying basin - flat to gently undulating in the north merging into rolling landform further south. Spur at Wilbury Hill.

Degree of slope

Varies between 1:50 in the north to 1:20 in the south.

Altitude range

50m to 90m.

Hydrology

A number of minor water courses flow towards the River Purwell (Hitchin) or the River Ivel, to the north of Letchworth. The chalk springs of the Ivel rise from Melbourne Rock north of Baldock. Ponds are restricted to Norton and Wymondley on Boulder Clay.

Land cover and land use

The dominant land use is arable with pockets of horse grazing on urban fringes. Localised pockets of amenity use eg. golf course & caravan parks.

Vegetation and wildlife

Woodlands are limited to a few rectangular shaped plantations. A few remaining gappy hedgerows include hornbeam, blackthorn and elm. Other roadside trees include poplar, sycamore, horse chestnut and ash. The course of the River Ivel has a greater variety of species including alder, ash, willow, sycamore, beech, dogwood, horse chestnut and extensive poplar plantations.

This Character Area has a sparse covering of recorded ecologically interesting sites.

The Wilbury Hills have a variety of soil types supporting unimproved acid, neutral and calcareous grasslands supporting the most westerly occurrence of Breckland type grasslands in Britain including the nationally scarce purple-stemmed cat's-tail grass. The underlying substrate is chalk capped with sand and glacial deposits of gravel. Some old meadows with interesting herbaceous species are present in the vicinity of

Rosehill Hospital. An area of unimproved neutral grassland occurs within the grounds of Letchworth Golf Course, along with scrub, copses and a stream.

The River Ivel has some ecologically interesting stretches of marginal and bankside vegetation in the very northeast otherwise wetland habitats are very limited but include marsh and fen along the Pix Brook, full herb fen and willow carr in the Ivel Springs area, spring-fed ponds at Wymondley Priory, reedbed north of Letchworth.

Species-rich road verges with flora typical of chalky substrates occur within the Character Area, eg at Norton Road. Ridge and furrow fields occur rarely, and are indicative of a long continuity of grassland cover. They frequently have a high diversity of plant species.

Kingfisher and wintering water rail may be seen on the Ivel along with grass snake generally rare in north Hertfordshire. Old allotments at Baldock are known for uncommon plants including the nationally scarce cornflower. Sulphur clover is recorded from the verge of Norton Road and several other localities.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The area to the north of Letchworth contains evidence of prehistoric, Roman and medieval activity. A prehistoric round barrow and ring ditch lie directly to the south of Radwell. There has been a manor (Radwell House) and mill at Radwell for over 1000 years. In close proximity to the northern perimeter of Letchworth are cropmarks of an enclosure and linear ditches and a medieval settlement containing earthworks and the 12th century church of St Nicholas. A settlement of unknown date lies within a complex of enclosures and linear ditches to the north of Baldock. To the northwest of Letchworth an area of earthworks describes well preserved ridge and furrow.

On the western margins of Letchworth a slight univallate hillfort is situated on Wilbury Hill. This feature is set within a complex of other prehistoric earthworks consisting of eleven ring ditches, Neolithic long barrow and large burial mound. Two bowl barrows lie to the southern end of the complex.

ASSESSMENT

Prehistoric sites to the south of Letchworth consist of two prehistoric ring ditches, three prehistoric ring ditches (east of Hitchin) and evidence for Iron Age occupation. A Roman villa lies on the eastern margin of Hitchin within a landscape containing two prehistoric ring ditches. Romano-British material is also documented at Great Wymondley.

There are several medieval sites in the south. During the reign of Edward the Confessor 8 hides in Great Wymondley were held by the church of St. Mary of Chatteris and by 1086 King William held 8 hides. On the southern periphery of Letchworth lies the remains of the 12th century church of All Saints belonging to the medieval settlement of Willian which is recorded in the Domesday Book as Wilie. This manor was held by Lewric, a house-carl, during the reign of Edward the Confessor and by 1086 was in the possession of Geoffrey de Bech. At the southern edge of the area lies Great Wymondley Castle which consists of motte and bailey, associated manorial enclosure and 12th century church of St. Mary. To the southwest are situated the remains of a medieval moated site, and a former hospital and Augustinian house – Wymondley Priory.

Field pattern

The historic agricultural landscape comprises a mixture of prairie fields with post-1950s boundary loss, 18th century and later enclosure, post-1950s enclosure, prairie fields with relict elements within, and 18th century irregular enclosure. Today few hedges remain and field sizes are generally large. Field pattern is regular, geometric often laid out at broadly 90 degrees to the straight road alignments.

Transport pattern

Roads in the north run in long straight sections across the landscape. In the south, adjacent to the historic settlement of Great Wymondley, the roads are winding lanes. The A1(M) cuts across the eastern part and there are a number of railway lines mainly on embankment.

Settlements and built form

The Character Area is confined between the urban fringes of Letchworth and Hitchin. To the south lies the historic settlement of Great Wymondley. The northern part generally sparsely settled with a number of modern farmsteads accessed off the road network. The historic settlement pattern is characterised by villages with a monastic centre to the south serving as a focus for medieval development. Traditional buildings date from the 17th century and include the early 17th century timber framed Wymondley Hall. Near the church at Willian is a small timber-framed cottage and Punchardon Hall (Guysfield Residential Home) a 17th century house of timber with an 18th century 7 bay brick façade.

EVALUATION

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

Large scale open landscape which provides views to the often poorly screened urban fringes of Letchworth, Hitchin and the A1(M).

Rarity & distinctiveness

This landscape type is not rare and is exhibiting typical pressures associated with urban fringe use.

VISUAL IMPACT

Urban fringe is prominent in numerous locations as is the impact of the A1(M). Other road and rail corridors are dominant features in the landscape. Sewage works to the north of Letchworth and northeast of Hitchin (disused).

ACCESSIBILITY

The Character Area is crossed by a network of footpaths mainly connecting urban areas and smaller settlements. The Icknield Way and the Hertfordshire Way long distance paths cross the Character Area.

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

- LC2 Landscape Conservation Area
- SAM 90 Roman villa: (Site of) 300m N or Nine Springs
- SAM 104 Settlement site: S of Baldock Farm
- SAM 20615 Barrow S of Radwell
- SAM 20636 2 bowl barrows: 500m S of Fearnhill School
- SAM 20637 Great Wymondley Castle a motte and bailey castle and associated manorial enclosure 20m east of St. Mary's Church: Wymondley
- SAM 27908 Radwell Roman villa: Radwell
- SAM 29387 Slight univallate hillfort at Wilbury Hill: Letchworth
- SAM HT11518 Wymondley Priory, barn, moat, associated earthworks, enclosures, platforms, Holloway and conduit head: Wymondley

EVALUATION

CONDITION

Land cover change: Localised
 Age structure of tree cover: Mixed
 Extent of semi-natural habitat survival: Scattered
 Management of semi-natural habitat: Not obvious
 Survival of cultural pattern: Declining/Relic
 Impact of built development: Moderate
 Impact of land-use change: Moderate

Matrix Score: Moderate

ROBUSTNESS

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

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:

Improve and Conserve

- Promote management of ancient woodlands 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
- Promote hedgerow restoration along the lines of historic field boundaries and for the creation of visual links between existing woodland areas
- Promote the use of traditional field hedges in place of post and wire enclosures to new grazing areas
- 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 and develop the diversity of tree planting along the River Ivel
- In the south encourage the development of species-rich calcareous grassland habitats
- Encourage woodland planting, in small copses, around the fringes of sub-urban settlements
- Encourage small blocks of woodland planting along the A1(M) corridor and especially around Junction 9