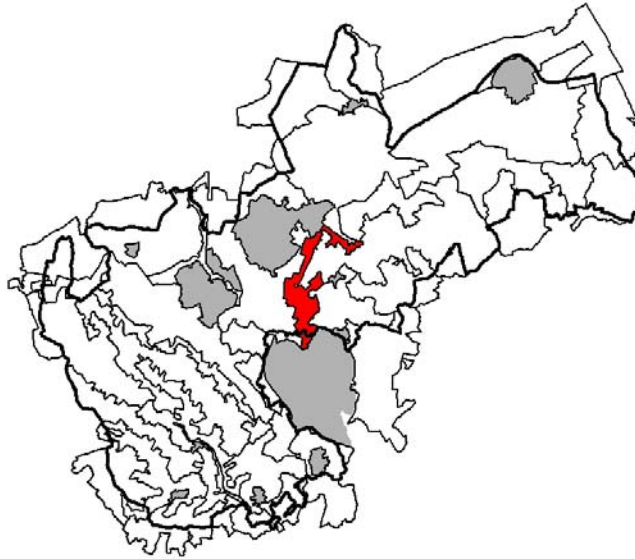


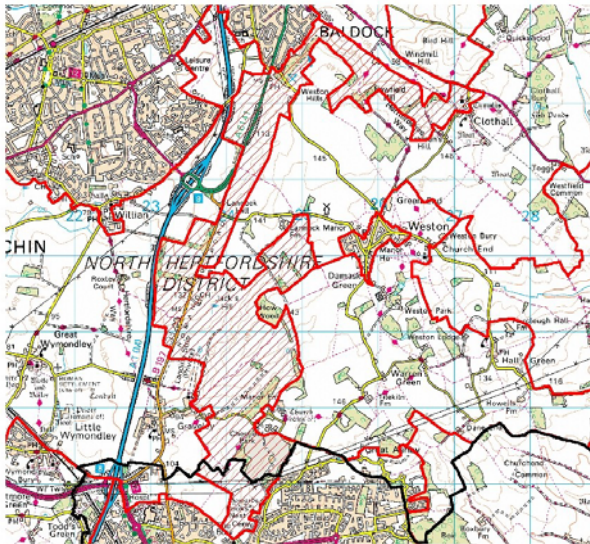
LOCATION



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

Located to the east of the A1(M), stretching in a narrow band from the north of Stevenage to a point southeast of Baldock, where the scarp turns through 90° and runs in a southeasterly direction.



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Steeply sloping chalk scarp, eroded by local valleys, mostly dry, to form an undulating landform. Two deeply incised valleys southwest of Weston still carry streams, which feed a number of water features. Extensive arable fields of cereals with occasional patches of pasture land. Sparse woodland cover. General lack of development.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Undulating chalk scarp with local steep sided valleys
- Large arable fields
- Small, occasional plantations, or shelter belts
- Small sunken lanes and footpaths climbing up the slope

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- B197 Roman road cuts across the contours
- Abuts suburban edge to Baldock in the north and Stevenage in the south
- Small reservoirs and telecommunications masts
- Caravan park to north of Graveley
- Rooks Nest House (Setting for Howards End), is identified with an area known as Forster Country

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

Chalk overlain by shallow rendzina and calcareous loam soils.

Topography

Steeply sloping scarp face.

Degree of slope

Generally varies between 1:5 to 1:20.

Altitude range

100m to 135m.

Hydrology

Generally dry except for two local valleys which have been eroded in the scarp face. These rise on the western side of Weston Village, running in parallel steep sided valleys towards Graveley. The streams feed a series of water features.

Land cover and land use

Predominantly arable land with occasional pockets of pasture land. Small plantations. Southern part falls within Chesfield Park.

Vegetation and wildlife

Scarp slope with associated calcareous grassland communities, which can be of significant wildlife value. Scrub and broadleaved semi-natural woodland also occur. Old beech plantations occur at Weston Hills at Ledgerside/Chesfield Park.

Chalk grassland was historically widespread. Important remaining sites include New Field Hill Nature Reserve and Ledgeside Downs, with vestiges on road verges. Chalk grassland remnants include species such as autumn gentian, common valerian, eyebright and orchids, notably the southern marsh orchid at its only extant dry chalk site in Hertfordshire at Weston Hills. Witebeam at Ledgerside is the most easterly native site in the county. Unimproved calcareous grassland is an uncommon habitat present as only 0.25% of land cover in North Hertfordshire. It is a notably species-rich habitat which is home to an array of invertebrate and plant species, many of which are becoming increasingly uncommon in a local and national context.

The expanse of Chesfield Park is improved grassland.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Clothall was a medieval village and lies at the northeastern edge of the Character Area. The parish church of St Mary, Clothall, dates to the 12th century. To the south of the church lies Clothall House, the former rectory with a tithe barn and cottage within the grounds. Iron Age occupation straddles part of the Roman road, which runs through the western part of the area. Cropmarks of a double ditch lie towards the north of the area.

Rooks Nest House is best known as the childhood home of novelist E M Forster, author of *Howards End*, who was brought to the house by his mother in 1883.

Field Pattern

The historic agricultural landscape pattern consists of a mixture of post 1950s enclosure, prairie fields with 1950s boundary loss, 18th century and later enclosure, informal medieval parkland, prairie fields with relict elements within, 19th – 20th century plantation and pre-18th century irregular enclosure. Ancient woodland lies to the north and there are two water reservoirs, one to the north and one in the southwest.

Transport Pattern

Small sunken lanes and footpaths climbing up the slope. The Roman road cuts across the contours.

Settlement and Built Form

The historic settlement pattern is characterised by sparse settlement consisting of farmsteads and part of the historic settlement of Clothall. Traditional buildings are therefore scarce but an example can be found at Clothall House, a five bay, two storey Georgian brick house which was formerly the rectory.

EVALUATION

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

Extensive views from the scarp over the lowland landscape to the north and south.

Rarity & distinctiveness

Distinctive scarp edge, relatively common in North Hertfordshire.

VISUAL IMPACT

Area comparatively undisturbed with localised infrastructure and water pumping station.

ACCESSIBILITY

Area to north crossed by road and footpath network. Area to south more remote but crossed by footpaths and bridleways.

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

EVALUATION

CONDITION

Land cover change: Localised
 Age structure of tree cover: Mixed
 Extent of semi-natural habitat survival: Widespread
 Management of semi-natural habitat: Good
 Survival of cultural pattern: Interrupted
 Impact of built development: Low
 Impact of land-use change: Moderate

Matrix Score: **Good**

ROBUSTNESS

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

Matrix Score: **Weak**

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:****Strengthen and Reinforce**

- Promote management of ancient woodlands to encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Encourage development of chalk grassland habitat
- 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