LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

The Character Area of Steeple Morden lies to the north of Ashwell village. It is bounded by the River Rhee to the west and extends beyond the District boundary to the east of Steeple Morden village. South of Steeple Morden fields are large (greater than 8 hectares), whilst to the east of Ashwell fields are medium to large. Northfield Road to the north of Ashwell, runs on a slight rise across the landscape. The land falls away gently on each side of the road. Vast acreage of arable land on both side of the road only interrupted by the recent tree planting along the road. Area is very exposed. Absence of settlements adds to the lack of variety and homogeneity of the landscape.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Medium to large arable fields
- Spring line feeds streams which flow northwards
- Flat, low lying to west
- Gently rolling landform to east
- Open, exposed character
- Geometric pattern of rectilinear fields and roads

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Bounded to north by Steeple Morden settlement
- (Lower) Icknield Way long distance footpath
- Lack of settlement in the west with pattern of nucleated settlements to the east, beyond the boundary to the Character Area
PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology & soils
Soils tend to be partially waterlogged calcareous clays overlying Chalk Marl.

Topography
Very shallow crossfall over area to north of Ashwell rising to gently undulating further east.

Degree of slope
Typically 1:100 in the west rising to 1:30 in the east but with pockets of more level ground. Area falling gently from south to north.

Altitude range
35m to 55m.

Hydrology
Kirby Manor farmland drained by two broadly parallel streams running to east and west (river Rhee) of Northfield Road. The Cheney Water, which runs to the east of Steeple Morden, rises at Upper Gatley and flows through a series of weirs and ponds. Cheney Water is a characteristic chalk spring rising from the bottom of the scarp and draining northwards into the River Cam catchment.

Land cover and land use
Dominated by arable, large sized fields to the west, medium sized fields to the east adjacent to Steeple Morden.

Vegetation and wildlife
The Character Area, which falls partly outside the county boundary, contains no wildlife sites and is of notably low ecological interest. It is dominated by large arable field systems, with semi-natural vegetation restricted to watercourses, occasional shelter belts and neutral/calcareous grassland remnants on road verges and old field banks, eg Shiver Baulk and Ashwell Street. The white willow lined eutrophic watercourses have some value for wildlife. Golden plover frequent the open fields in winter, whilst water voles inhabit some streams.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

In the centre of the Character Area, a cropmark of a prehistoric ring ditch is known from an aerial photograph. Earthworks of a probable medieval moated site, a Roman Villa and Romano-British occupation material lies to the south. A medieval moated site of two concentric moats lie at Mobbs Hole in the north.

Field Pattern
The historic agricultural landscape pattern is comprised of post 1950s enclosure, prairie fields with post 1950s boundary loss, prairie fields with relict elements within, post 1950s enclosure and 18th century and later enclosure. Informal Medieval parkland lies to the south with small pockets of 19th – 20th century plantation in the centre.

Transport Pattern
Northfield Road runs on a slight rise along the west and Ashwell Road runs parallel to it through the east of the Character Area.

Settlements and Built Form
The historic settlement pattern is characterised by sparse settlement consisting mainly of farmsteads.
EVALUATION

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

Vast scale open landscape in the west with dispersed farmsteads. Long distance views, long straight roads. More settlement pattern obvious to the east providing smaller scale landscape.

Rarity & distinctiveness
This landscape type is comparatively uncommon within the District.

VISUAL IMPACT

Local pockets of linear development at Steeple Morden and Guilden Morden.

ACCESSIBILITY

Area to the west has limited rights of way access. Steeple Morden and Guilden Morden have extensive road and rights of way coverage.

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 20616 Highley Hill Bowl Barrow: Ashwell
### EVALUATION

#### CONDITION

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<tr>
<td>Survival of cultural pattern</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact of built development</td>
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<td>Impact of land-use change</td>
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**Matrix Score:** Poor

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<td>Impact of historic pattern</td>
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**Matrix Score:** Moderate

### ACTION PLAN

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<td>Improve and reinforce</td>
<td>Improve and conserve</td>
<td>Conserve and restore</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconstruct</td>
<td>Improve and restore</td>
<td>Restore condition to maintain character</td>
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</table>

### CONSIDERATIONS

- **Strengthen and reinforce**
- **Conserve and strengthen**
- **Safeguard and manage**
- **Improve and reinforce**
- **Improve and conserve**
- **Conserve and restore**
- **Reconstruct**
- **Improve and restore**
- **Restore condition to maintain character**
STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE:

Improve and Restore

- Promote creation of new woodland and for existing woodlands encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Promote the creation of buffer zones between areas of intensive arable production and areas of semi-natural habitat and the creation of links between habitat areas
- Promote hedgerow restoration to create visual links between existing woodland areas
- Promote the use of traditional field hedges in place of post and wire fencing to new grazing areas
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network
- Encourage the development of unimproved species-rich grassland habitats
- Promote the creation of new ponds and the retention of existing ponds for wildlife
- Encourage the planting of shelter belts
- Encourage the planting of trees and other appropriate vegetation along watercourses
**LOCATION**

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA**

Odsey lies just outside the District adjacent to Ashwell and Morden Station. The area extends in a band north of and parallel to the A505 and continues eastwards past Royston. Only small parts (south of Odsey and adjacent to Royston) fall within the District. Southeast of Royston the Character Area extends into the chalk scarp landscape as a local valley feature which is occupied by the Wardington Bottom Drain. The northern boundary is to be determined by further studies undertaken by South Cambridgeshire District Council.

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

Gently rolling landform with localised chalk knolls (outliers). Large scale arable fields set out in an ordered pattern of rectilinear fields and lanes with straight boundaries. Extensive plantations around Ashwell and Morden otherwise linear tree belts along field boundaries. Remnant field boundaries.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- Gently rolling chalk landform with chalk knolls
- Strong pattern of rectilinear fields
- Dominance of arable
- Linear tree belts
- Sparse settlement pattern
- Long distance views along straight roads

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- A505 dual carriageway runs along southern boundary
- Baldock to Royston railway running parallel to A505
- Abuts suburban boundary to Royston
- (Lower) Icknield Way (Ashwell Street track) runs along northern boundary
ASSESSMENT

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology & soils
Chalk overlain by free draining loamy brown soils.

Topography
Low lying, gently rolling landform.

Degree of slope
Typically 1:60 but with localised undulations.

Altitude range
50m to 80m.

Hydrology
Network of local ditches draining generally northwards.

Land cover and land use
Predominantly arable.

Vegetation and wildlife
No ecological data is available for the area within North Hertfordshire.

Remnants of chalk grassland on the A505 (Icknield Way) known to support purple milk vetch a rare chalk grassland species, are being lost to scrub. Road banks of the Royston Bypass include some secondary calcareous grassland and there are remnants of rough calcareous grassland on the edge of Royston with associated common lizard.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

A number of archaeological sites have been revealed by aerial photographs to the west near Royston. A Bell Barrow lies 500m south of Morden Grange plantation in the southwest.

Field Pattern
The historic agricultural landscape pattern is comprised of 18th century and later enclosure and post 1950s enclosure. A 20th century stud farm lies to the southeast of the area.

Transport Pattern
The A505 dual carriageway runs along the southern boundary and the Lower Icknield Way runs along the northern boundary.

Settlements and Built Form
The historic settlement pattern is characterised by sparse settlement consisting mainly of farmsteads.