

County map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA



**LOCATION**

The area is defined by the urban areas of Bushey to the east, Carpenters Park to the west and Hatch End and Harrow Weald Common to the south.

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

The area consists of the eastern and undeveloped slopes of Bushey Hill, a distinctive east-west ridge extending from Merry Hill to Caldecote Hill. Despite being enclosed on the majority of its perimeter by built development, the area maintains a comparatively rural and tranquil atmosphere. The majority of the land use is grazing, with considerable new areas of planting encouraged by the Watling Chase Community Forest and the Woodland Trust. A good number of mature oak trees make a strong contribution to the character of the area.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- strong rising slopes up towards Merry Hill
- extensive grazing and equestrian activity
- considerable new planting
- surprisingly rural and panoramic views to the west
- parkland areas at Haydon Hill
- golf courses (3 no.)
- strong containment by urban settlement although generally visually well screened

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- parkland railings at Haydon Hill
- Grimms Ditch
- distant views as far as Windsor
- groups of horses grazing by ponds
- radio masts on horizon over Harrow Weald Wood
- railway cutting severs open landscape corridor
- pylons to south west



Haydon Hill Parkland • (J. Billingsley)

## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

**Geology and soils.** The underlying geology comprises Tertiary clay overlaid by the slowly permeable and seasonally waterlogged soils with some brown subsoils (Windsor series). There are locally areas of fine loamy and silty soils over the clays.

**Topography.** Landform is the prominent feature of the eastern section of this area. The ground rises up to Merry Hill and, south of the area, to Harrow Weald Common. West of the A4008 the ground levels continue to fall more gently to Pinnerwood Farm.

**Degree of slope.** Slopes to the hill vary between 1 in 11 to 1 in 20. West of the A4008 levels fall to c.1 in 75.

**Altitude range.** 133m at Merry Hill, 137m at Harrow Weald Common and 68m at Pinnerwood Farm.

**Hydrology.** A number of small streams rise on the impermeable clay soils and flow west and then north west to join the River Colne. Within the area there are a number of small ponds on the heavy clay soils. These provide watering holes for the local horse population.

**Land cover and land use.** The pattern of land cover is a prominent feature of the landscape, characterised by a mosaic of small to medium grass ley and pastoral fields. Recreational uses, including three golf courses, allotments and an equestrian centre, are found throughout the area, and to the north there are small areas of parkland at Haydon Hill and Oxhey Grange.

**Vegetation and wildlife.** The natural woodland type in this area is oak/hazel. Mature woodland cover in the area comprises isolated and discrete woodlands. There is only one ancient woodland within the area, at Sherwood Wood. However, the presence of a number of visually prominent woods outside the area (particularly to the south on the ridge of Harrow Weald Common) and the numbers of mature field trees, including those within the golf course landscapes, help to create a well-treed appearance.

Extensive new plantings of hedges and copses encouraged by the Watling Chase Community Forest and Woodland Trust are among the most widespread seen in the county. Ornamental trees associated with the residential properties at Merry Hill are significant on the higher ground and include cedars and horse chestnuts.

Hedgerow species comprise a mix of hawthorn, blackthorn and elm. Hedgerow trees are mainly oak with occasional ash. Hedgerows and trees are significant but in a state of decline, with new boundaries, particularly to equestrian activities, formed from fencing. Most of the grasslands are neutral with some acidic on Merry Hill. Haydon Hill is an old area of south Hertfordshire cattle pasture and here there is a mix of mature oaks, common and Midland hawthorn, with crack willow in the wetter hollows. To the south of the area the Bagshot sands are exposed around the Hertsbourne golf course, creating one of few locations for heathy grasslands in the south of the county.

## HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The southern boundary of the area is marked by part of the Grimms Ditch earthwork.

**Field pattern.** The pastoral area has largely retained a pre-18th century organic enclosure pattern with its irregular shaped and medium-sized fields with evidence of medieval ridge and furrow ploughing on Attenborough fields.

Conversion to arable in the 20th century has resulted in the loss of many hedges and damage to the field trees. The arable has now reverted to pasture. The historic landscape pattern has been disrupted by the three golf courses and the other recreational uses.

**Transport pattern.** The area is relatively unaffected by roads. The A4008 separates the western extension of the area, which is also severed by the Euston railway line.

**Settlements and built form.** The settlement pattern comprises a few widely dispersed farmsteads, including Carpenters Park Farm, Oxheylane Farm and Pinnerwood Farm. Otherwise the area is sparsely settled up to the well-defined urban areas which mark the western, northern and eastern boundaries. Large individual houses sit in mature treed grounds on Merry Hill while to the north Haydon Hill House, with its distinctive chimneys (Victorian-Italian), faces both walled grounds and an area of parkland. Most farmsteads are modest in scale.

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The area is only locally visible from outside, being restricted by the surrounding built development. Within the area there are a number of good viewpoints, e.g. south of Merry Hill House. There are also good views out of the area, particularly to the west, to a remarkably wooded horizon including Oxhey Woods, Pinnerswood and Harrow Weald Wood.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** The area is relatively unusual in the county. The main distinctive quality is the maintenance of rural and pastoral character within a wider urban context.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

Equestrian buildings and some quasi-agricultural industrial buildings are jarring features in the landscape.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

There are both good public access and waymarked routes to the north of the area throughout the Woodland Trust land and over Haydon Hill. Access over the golf courses is restricted. To the west of the A4008 pedestrian links are poor, partly due to the railway cutting.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

Within this landscape area, Haydon Hill and Merry Hill (also known as Attenborough Fields) are highly valued by the local community for their distinctiveness, although less value is attached to the area to the west of Oxhey Lane. Previous community consultation has highlighted the distinctive long-distance views that can be obtained from the hills (B).

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

Watling Chase Community Forest (east of the A4008)

**CONDITION**

*Land cover change:* **widespread**  
*Age structure of tree cover:* **mature or young**  
*Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:* **fragmented**  
*Management of semi-natural habitat:* **not obvious**  
*Survival of cultural pattern:* **declining**  
*Impact of built development:* **moderate**  
*Impact of land-use change:* **high**

**ROBUSTNESS**

*Impact of landform:* **prominent**  
*Impact of land cover:* **apparent**  
*Impact of historic pattern:* **relic**  
*Visibility from outside:* **locally visible**  
*Sense of enclosure:* **open**  
*Visual unity:* **coherent**  
*Distinctiveness/rarity:* **unusual**

<b>CONDITION</b>	<b>GOOD</b>	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	<b>MODERATE</b>	Improve and reinforce	<b>Improve and conserve</b>	Conserve and restore
	<b>POOR</b>	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		<b>WEAK</b>	<b>MODERATE</b>	<b>STRONG</b>
<b>STRENGTH OF CHARACTER</b>				

### STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE: IMPROVE AND CONSERVE

- support the Watling Chase Community Forest in the realisation of its objectives for the area
- promote the management of existing woodlands to establish a rich ground flora and a range of different woodland habitats
- promote the expansion of woodland beyond ancient woodland boundaries, especially where this will help in creating habitat links
- use ancient hedge and field boundaries to determine the most appropriate location for wood restoration and further expansion
- promote the continued establishment of the network of new woodlands planted by the Woodland Trust
- expand the network of new tree planting to the west of the A4008 to soften the surrounding residential areas
- promote through education and access the multiple uses of the landscape and seek to resolve conflicts arising from competing uses and activities
- survey and manage parkland and veteran trees at Haydon Hill for biodiversity value and public safety. Undertake the planting of new parkland trees to develop a diverse age structure. Trees to have metal railings to match existing estate fencing
- resist the ploughing-up of grasslands
- 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
- promote both the creation of new ponds and the retention/enhancement for wildlife of existing ponds
- promote the creation of new orchards, with community involvement, using traditional varieties of fruit and minimal use of herbicides and pesticides
- encourage the re-use of existing agricultural buildings for equestrian activity
- promote the use of traditional hedge or metal parkland railings as field enclosure for equestrian pasture in place of timber fencing
- promote planting schemes that soften the visual impact of unsightly agricultural and industrial buildings
- conserve unimproved, semi-improved and heathland grassland communities in order to maintain their nature conservation value
- for areas of semi-improved acidic and neutral grassland avoid over-grazing, heavy public pressure, damage from vehicles etc
- consider the use of low-density stock grazing as an alternative to over-grazing by horses
- maintain and enhance public access to and over the entire area
- ensure that the distinctive long-distance views are framed and not lost by emerging woodland areas
- where new development adjoins the character area ensure areas of local native tree and hedge species are planted to ensure there is minimal impact on the rural character
- ensure all existing and proposed recreational land uses including golf courses are managed to enhance the existing landscape setting and ecological value



• Harrow Weald from Merry Hill (J. Billingsley)