

County map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA



**LOCATION**

This area runs from Cromerhyde in the north, southwards across Hatfield Aerodrome and up to the grounds of Oaklands College on the edge of St Albans.

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

An area dominated and unified by the level topography yet with a diverse mix of uses and an incoherent pattern. To the north, arable cropping dominates, with open views, very few hedges or trees and only isolated farms. To the centre, the disused Hatfield aerodrome and the new business park have visually dominant structures, together with areas of existing and redundant mineral extraction. To the south there is a mix of extraction, urban fringe development and Oaklands College, which has a disjointed and mixed character. There is generally poor access within and to the area.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- an extensive level plain
- large open arable landscape to the north on high quality agricultural land
- disused Hatfield aerodrome with associated industrial and commercial development and aeronautical structures
- parkland and horticultural landscape of Oaklands College
- existing and restored mineral workings
- urban-fringe development and glasshouses
- incoherent and jumbled landscape, particularly to the south and centre

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- Oaklands College house
- restored arable fields
- mineral extraction plant



De Havilland Plain • (HCC Landscape Unit)

### PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

**Geology and soils.** The geology of the plain comprises Aeolian silty drift and till. To the centre of the area around the former airfield the soils are stoneless slowly permeable, coarse loamy and silty over clay (Gresham series).

Elsewhere the soils are deep stoneless well-drained silty soils over gravel (Hamble 2 series).

**Topography.** The plain is virtually flat and represents a subtle watershed between the Colne and the Lea. Levels vary by as little as 2-3m over 6km. The land rises locally to the west and the south.

**Degree of slope.** Falls are often at less than 1 in 1000.

**Altitude range.** Typically around the 80m contour but falling to 70m at Ellenbrook and rising to 100m within the undulating grounds of Oaklands College on the edge of St Albans.

**Hydrology.** The area is drained by a number of streams: Astwick Manor Ditch, Nast (culverted), Ellen Brook and Butterwick Brook. These flow slowly to the east to connect with the River Colne in the south or the River Lea in the north east. Groundwater locally affects the soils and there are a few ponds within the agricultural landscape or the woods, e.g. Home Covert. Mineral extraction has led to the creation of a number of larger waterbodies, some with wildlife interest.

**Land cover and land use.** The major land cover to the north is arable cropping. There are active areas of sand and gravel extraction, e.g. Astwick Manor, together with areas that have been restored to pasture and arable. The airfield site has extensive areas of grassland and considerable built development. Oaklands College has a mix of land uses, including a small area of parkland.

**Vegetation and wildlife.** There is very limited woodland cover. Home Wood within Oaklands College is ancient natural oak/hornbeam woodland, with ash, sycamore and lime standards and some hazel. Some of the other woods support ancient woodland indicator species, e.g. Home Covert and Oak Wood. There are some younger plantings associated with mineral restoration sites which usually comprise willow and poplars. The modest parkland grounds of Oaklands have some mature specimen trees including lime, oak and copper beech.

Some of the former mineral workings support a mix of flooded gravel pits, scrub and marshland habitats, e.g. Oaklands gravel pit, and have a diverse flora including the southern marsh orchid. There are few hedgerows except to some of the roads, where they have often grown out and include hawthorn and elm. There are very few isolated field trees and these are generally over-mature. The open field pattern to the north is an important site for wintering golden plover.

### HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

**Field pattern.** The area only contains small parcels of remaining pre-18th century enclosure. The vast majority of the land has been disturbed over the last century. To the north the extensive prairie fields are the result of agricultural intensification post-1950. To the south the enclosure pattern has been altered, either following or as a result of extraction and restoration, although some of the mineral sites have been successfully restored to arable. Field sizes are irregular and large to very large in size.

**Transport pattern.** The area is crossed by a modest number of sinuous secondary roads. Improved roads have been built to service the Hatfield Business Park.

**Settlements and built form.** There is a very dispersed estate settlement pattern with a small number of isolated farmsteads, e.g. Cromerhyde Farm in the north and Beech Farm in the south. Astwick Manor is a medieval moated site. The area is as empty as it is flat. To the south Oaklands College is centred on the Victorian house (1888) and modest parkland and now has a range of ancillary buildings. To the east the area is defined by the western edge of Hatfield, including the large aircraft hangers and residential areas including Hatfield Garden Village, Stanborough and Ellenbrook. Following the closure of the airfield, the Hatfield Business Park has established. Retail, horticultural and industrial premises dominate to the south of Oaklands. The major landmark to the north is Lemsford parish church of St John the Evangelist.

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

This is largely an open and exposed landscape which nonetheless has a private and remote feel in places. It is clearly visible from a number of more elevated locations outside the area. Within the area there are views of the arable landscape from the local roads, including Coopers Green Lane and Green Lane. To the middle, tall hedges, crude earth bunds and modern built development restrict or frame views of this rather incoherent landscape. Within Oaklands many of the views are contained.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** The area is most unusual due to its flatness and open character.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

The major intrusive built elements within the area are the Hatfield Business Park warehouses. Other significant features are to the eastern fringes and include the former De Havilland flight sheds and control tower. Localised items are the batching plant on Oaklands Lane, glasshouses and nurseries. Over much of the area there is a sense of semi-dereliction or poor management. There has been extensive land-use change and little of the original pattern remains. Changes have been from arable to mineral and also from mineral to arable and pasture. Some of the workings are poorly screened.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

There are few rights of way across the area, partly due to aviation uses in the past.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

There is insignificant evidence from the MORI survey that this area is widely valued as a distinctive landscape. However, the area includes some features of value to the local community. A previous more detailed landscape character study of this area identified these to be associated with the history of aviation land use, hence the area name (D).

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

The area north west of Coopers Green Lane is a Landscape Conservation Area.

**CONDITION**

*Land cover change:* **widespread**  
*Age structure of tree cover:* **over-mature**  
*Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:* **relic**  
*Management of semi-natural habitat:* **poor**  
*Survival of cultural pattern:* **declining**  
*Impact of built development:* **high**  
*Impact of land-use change:* **moderate**

**ROBUSTNESS**

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

<b>CONDITION</b>	<b>GOOD</b>	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	<b>MODERATE</b>	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	<b>POOR</b>	Reconstruct	<b>Improve and restore</b>	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 RESTORE**

(It should be noted that part of this area is now subject to agreed extensive redevelopment proposals which will influence the achievement of the following landscape-led guidelines)

- support the Watling Chase Community Forest in the realisation of its objectives for the area
- retain the characteristic large-scale openness to the north of the area (which is most unusual for the southern part of the county) but with a restored structure of hedges, ditches and woodland blocks
- retain long views where possible to appreciate the flat landform
- promote hedgerow restoration and creation throughout the area to provide visual and ecological links between existing and proposed woodlands. Pattern to follow historic field boundaries where possible. Hedges to include standard trees
- promote the appropriate management of existing woodland in order to maintain a rich ground flora and the distinction between different management systems, such as high forest and coppice-with-standards
- promote the planting of new small to medium woodlands, particularly on areas of restored mineral extraction to the centre and south
- promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and important semi-natural habitats and the creation of links between semi-natural habitats
- promote crop diversification and the restoration of mixed livestock/arable farming where possible
- encourage the restoration of ditches and discourage the enclosure of existing open drainage systems
- provide new uncropped or grass field margins to link areas of wildlife importance and/or existing and proposed rights of way
- promote the creation of buffer strips along watercourses to prevent pesticide, herbicide and fertilizer run-off and provide habitat for wildlife; encourage their linkage to eco-corridors within the wider landscape
- promote both the creation of new ponds and the retention/enhancement for wildlife of existing ponds
- develop a new landscape character in the disturbed and incoherent areas to the south
- screen/soften the visually intrusive built features on the perimeter and within the area including the Hatfield Business Park and the Hatfield aerodrome
- improve the poor existing network of rights of way over the area and develop opportunities for rights of way linkages alongside hedges, streams, water features, arable areas, airfield land and restored mineral workings
- develop a strategy to enhance the parkland setting of Oaklands College within the context of the existing horticultural uses. Remove urbanising features and inappropriate planting, e.g. Leyland cypress.
- improve the treatment of screen bunding to the perimeter of and within mineral sites by more sympathetic profiles, heights and the use of green mulches. Provide advanced planting where appropriate to provide a permanent contribution to the landscape framework
- focus attention to screen plant within minerals areas
- improve the restoration of past mineral sites
- develop appropriate management strategies to maintain and improve the mosaic of wildlife habitats areas, including wetland and semi-improved grassland, in association with former mineral extraction sites. Include the continued use of grazing and management by wildlife organisations



• Disused Hatfield aerodrome (J. Billingsley)