

County map showing location of
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA



LOCATION

Narrow curved area extending from north-eastern edge of Hatfield Park southwards to Bell Bar then eastwards to Newgate Street, including the farmland around the northern and western edges of Great Wood.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Flat-topped, open narrow arable ridge above steeply undulating wooded valleys to the north, and arable slopes with dense hedgerows to the south, with linear 19th and 20th-century settlement. Generally small to medium-scale farmland, with arable and pasture (horses) and some small, late parkland influence. Frequent long-distance views. Contrast between small scale of ridge-end settlement and medium-scale open arable fields.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- very narrow flat ridge above strongly undulating slopes
- open and settled, surrounded by well-treed arable fields, with pasture around settlements
- less settled and more farmed than northern plateau
- more parkland than northern plateau, usually associated with southern edge of Hatfield Park, but less parkland than area to the south

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- focus of development is at extreme end of the ridge, with narrow lanes plunging down the slopes into woodland
- large private houses in extensive grounds (Woodside)
- heavily treed field boundaries, with views beneath canopy
- transmitting station and water tower in southwestern quadrant
- pylons

Plateau arable farmland and woods •
(HCC Landscape Unit)



PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. Gleyed (poorly draining) soils over till (glacial drift).

Topography. Gently undulating.

Degree of slope. 1 in 270.

Altitude range. 116m to 129m.

Hydrology. Small stream flowing westwards into Mimms Hall Brook and bournes contributing to the swallow holes in Northaw Great Wood.

Land cover and land use. This area is mainly treed arable farmland with some pasture and isolated farmhouses or small parklands. Newgate Street is the only settlement.

Vegetation and wildlife. The arable farmland has medium elm hedgerows with standard oaks, ditches and medium verges. Some hedgerows are unmanaged and overgrown, now treed, with low-level views beneath the canopy but blocked long views. Other hedges are low and in poor condition. There are a few small woodlands but most of the vegetation in this area is to be found in the hedges and around the parklands. Species found locally are hawthorn, field maple and blackthorn hedges with ash and oak standards and relic hornbeam. Holly and gorse are also found in small patches. Ponsfall Farm Pastures at Newgate Street is a key acid grassland site.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The New Gate was on the edge of the Hatfield Estate. Popes Farm had a deer park before 1645, while that at Wood Hall was first recorded in 1577. New Park Farm indicates the former New Park, north of Great Wood, which was enclosed from North Mymms Common c.1790. The former parkland is now mainly in arable cultivation, with some remnant damp acid grassland.

Field pattern. Much of this area was former common land between the two great parks of Hatfield and Theobalds. Parliamentary enclosure resulted in the current rectilinear field pattern with pre-dating woodland scraps over much of the area. The scale is generally small to medium, occasionally larger.

Transport pattern. The verged lanes which wind along the plateau suddenly plunge off the edge in straight densely hedged lanes. On the plateau the lanes are densely hedged or treed, with a confined aspect.

Settlements and built form. There are few settlements in this area, rather large farmhouses and small private parklands or large private houses with extensive gardens, all of which are well-wooded on their boundaries, to prevent views in. Newgate Street is a 19th/20th-century linear settlement with older buildings at its hub. It is surrounded by small farms, mainly equine, often with extensive views over the surrounding landscape from the rear of houses.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

A Biodiversity Action Plan for Hertfordshire, p.82.

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

This area is largely concealed from outside view by both the vegetation within it and the extensive woodland on the slopes below. From within there are occasional extensive long-range views, but they are more often filtered by vegetation. It is a nonetheless a high and open landscape, contained at a distance by large woodland blocks and closer-to by small discrete woodlands and hedges. It is a medium scale landscape, tranquil and coherent.

Rarity and distinctiveness. This is not a notably unusual landscape. The landform suggests that significant development would be difficult to achieve unless arable land were to be taken out of production. The current balance between farmland and built form should be retained if possible, due to its contribution to the coherence and scale of the landscape.

VISUAL IMPACT

The settlement makes an important contribution to the landscape locally, although it is not visible over a wide area. The change from pastoral to arable cultivation is marked here by a widespread deterioration in the condition of hedges. In the south-western part of this area pylons are locally prominent and there is a transmitting station and water tower, which are quite well concealed by woodland.

ACCESSIBILITY

Noted recreational land uses are footpaths and a bridleway (used by a horse and trap). Both are in good condition being wide and sometimes well surfaced, with aggregate on some tracks.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

North of Queenswood this is a hardly remarked upon landscape (E).

CONDITION

<i>Land cover change:</i>	insignificant
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	mature
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	fragmented
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	poor
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	intact
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	low
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	low

ROBUSTNESS

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	prominent
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	prominent
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	continuous
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	concealed
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	open but contained
<i>Visual unity:</i>	coherent
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	frequent

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
		STRENGTH OF CHARACTER		

STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING

CHANGE: CONSERVE AND RESTORE

- encourage landowners to safeguard existing hedges, increase hedged field boundaries, create permanent grass strips around field margins and prevent spray drift, using financial incentives as available
- promote crop diversification and the restoration of mixed livestock/arable farming
- promote the creation of links between semi-natural habitats in this area by ensuring that hedges and field margins are in good condition
- encourage woodland planting on poor-quality agricultural land, especially where this is on the site of former woodland or can provide a link to other woodlands or habitat; be aware that large woodlands would be inappropriate in this landscape area
- encourage the reversion of arable land and secondary woodland on common edges to grassland/heath. This could help redress the loss of heathland within the county, maintain the distinctiveness of local landscape character and provide firewood for local inhabitants. Consideration should be given to management of these reclaimed grasslands - grazing would be appropriate, but issues of animal welfare and safety would need to be addressed near highways
- manage existing woodland to encourage good age diversity and a species-rich ground flora; encourage management as coppice or coppice-with-standards
- encourage the planting of new woodland around existing, to increase biodiversity and provide links to other woodlands, without changing the scale of this area



- Pasture and woodland near Newgate Street (HCC Landscape Unit)