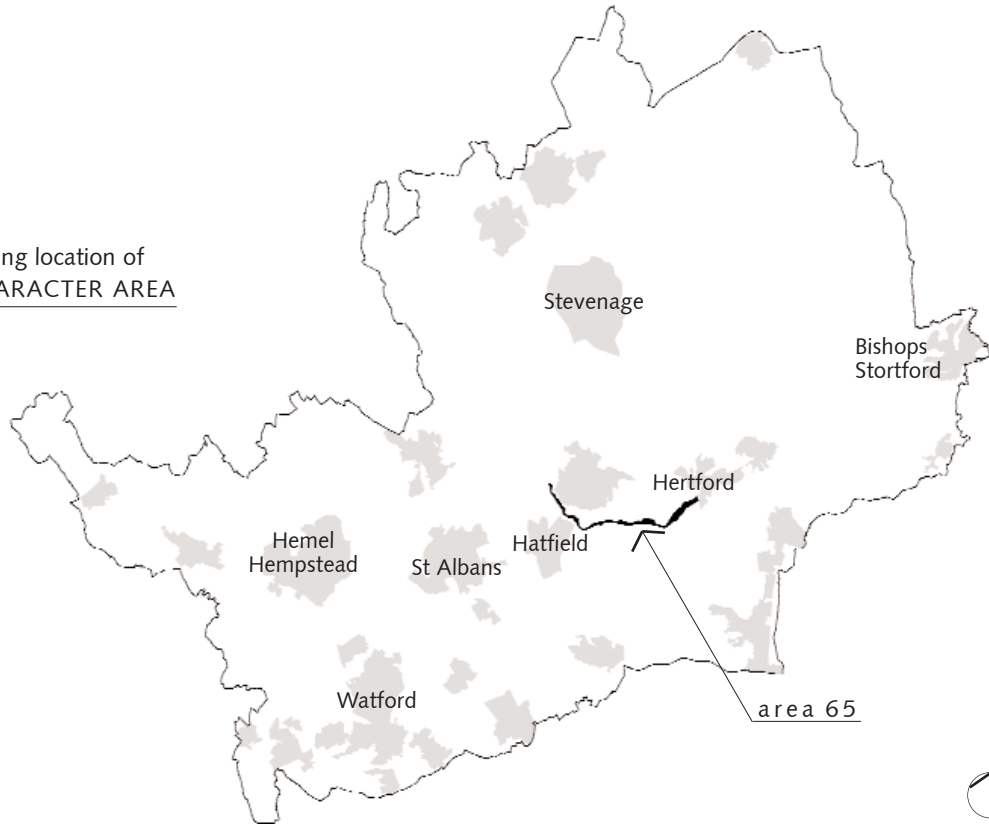


County map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA



LOCATION

Linear east-west area between the A1(M) in the west (Lemsford) and the western urban edge of Hertford

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Pastoral farmland within a flat valley landform. Grazing marshes along both banks of the river (which is not a prominent feature) and parkland which is well integrated and locally prominent. Mineral extraction tends to be on the valley side rather than in the valley bottom, so there are few extensive waterbodies except at the western end between Hatfield and Hatfield Hyde.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- flat pastoral valley of the river Lea, with derelict meadows, scrub and trees.
- open in parts; in others masked by wetland vegetation.
- parkland is a dominant local feature.
- the river is not a dominant landscape feature.
- shallow valley slopes are screened by wetland and associated vegetation

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- floodplain marked to south by parallel hedged road, which screens views in
- mansion and parkland at Woolmer's Park, parkland at Holwell Court
- Cecil Saw Mill
- Stanborough Lakes

North bank, River Lea, near Water Hall Farm (HCC Landscape Unit)



PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. In the valley floor the soils are stoneless mainly calcareous clay soils over river alluvium, with deep, well-drained fine loamy and sandy soils, locally flinty, over glaciofluvial drift on the shallow slopes (Ludford series)

Topography. Flat valley floor

Degree of slope. 1 in 400 fall along the river between Stanborough and Hertford

Altitude range. 45m to 70m along length

Hydrology. Valley of river Lea. In this area the river valley consists of a broad suite of habitats, within which agricultural improvements to floodplain meadows and gravel extraction have had a significant impact, although some gravel pits now provide a significant habitat in their own right. The physical habitat of the Lea between Welwyn and Hertford is good, with medium to fast water flow over a gravel riverbed. It supports 15 coarse fish species, including barbel (*Barbus barbus*), which is a noted species within the EC Habitats Directive. Stanborough Lake, to the south of Welwyn Garden City, is a 14-acre stillwater lake much used for fishing. It is now home to the zander, an illegally introduced predatory fish.

Land cover and land use. Pastoral farmland and parkland, with limited mineral extraction, some of which has been restored to fishing lakes (viz. Stanborough Lake). Derelict meadows are a feature of the area, with scrub and trees giving it a well-vegetated appearance.

Vegetation and wildlife. Consists of discrete woodlands, mainly oak and ash with some willow and poplar, and treed thorn hedgerows where the valley has been enclosed. Wetland species, such as willow, poplar and alder, can be found around those minerals sites restored to wetland use, either planted as part of the restoration or developing in the new habitat. The Lemsford-Stanborough and Water Hall-Hertford stretches of the river are of reasonable water quality and support a good flora, while at Stanborough the reedswamp derived from old cress beds adjacent to the Lea and the old willow carr associated with it are noted in the Biodiversity Action Plan for Hertfordshire. Most of the floodplain grasslands of this area have been lost to mineral extraction or have been 'improved' and are therefore of reduced biodiversity.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The main influences on this area are the parklands on both north and south-facing slopes which were established to take advantage of the river valley landform and views. It is an area with a long history of settlement, viz. the moated site at Roxford (SAM), which is within the present floodplain.

Field pattern. The field pattern in this area is not obvious because much of the grazing marsh is not confined by hedgerows. Around the parkland the field pattern is more distinctive; elsewhere it is screened by vegetation or disturbed by mineral extraction. Where the field pattern is evident the field sizes are large.

Transport pattern. The few river crossings are over unobtrusive brick bridges. This area is bounded to the west by the A414 along its northern edge and to the east by the B158 along its southern edge. Elsewhere there are no roads, although the Lea Valley Walk continues the line of the B158 west of Essendon. The road to the south lies on the edge of the floodplain and is used as a commuter route. It is narrow, twisting and well hedged, permitting few views over the valley, and has no verges. The A414 lies above the floodplain.

Settlements and built form. The settlement pattern in this area is of isolated houses or farms and parkland, with the associated mansion on higher ground to the north. The building style is vernacular and dates from at least the 17th century. It consists mainly of brick-and-tile and some timber-framed buildings (Water Hall). Bridges across the river Lea are generally of yellow brick of late 19th or 20th century nondescript design. At the western end of this area, towards the boundary with Hatfield Park, there is a Victorian brick sawmill.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Pevsner, N., rev. Cherry, B., *Hertfordshire*, Penguin (2000).
Biodiversity Action Plan for Hertfordshire (p.54).
 English Heritage *List of Scheduled Ancient Monuments*.

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

This area is widely visible from the valley slopes to either side. Within the area views are filtered by trees within the river valley. This is a small-scale landscape contained by the landform of the opposing valley slopes and the vegetation. It has a unified character. It is not, however, completely tranquil due to the noise of traffic on the B158 and the A414.

Rarity and distinctiveness. This is not a unique landscape but the historic interest of the parklands and the ecological value of the river corridor should be conserved and improved where possible.

VISUAL IMPACT

There is little visual impact upon this area except from traffic on the A414 at its western end and this has only a localised impact. Within the river valley there appears to be little mineral extraction, which has taken place on the lower slopes of the areas to either side and is occasionally visible from within the area. The distinctive features of this area are the lack of development and the occasional large houses such as Woolmer's Park and Water Hall.

ACCESSIBILITY

No recreational land uses were noted although there are footpaths and waymarked routes along part of the river. Their condition is fair with narrow footpaths and poor surfacing and maintenance.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

This stretch of the Lea or Lee Valley appears not to be valued as a distinctive landscape (E).

CONDITION

<i>Land cover change:</i>	localised
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	mature
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	relic
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	not obvious
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	declining
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	low
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	high

ROBUSTNESS

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	apparent
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	prominent
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	interrupted
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	widely visible
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	partial
<i>Visual unity:</i>	unified
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	unusual

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: IMPROVE AND CONSERVE

- support the Environment Agency's initiative in encouraging a partnership approach to habitat management in the Lea at Bayfordbury
- encourage habitat protection within the Upper Lee to safeguard the survival and dispersal of notable species, including the barbel
- ensure that any proposals for development within this area pay due regard to safeguarding its important associated historic and ecological features
- promote the use of low-density stock grazing as a management technique
- ensure that any further proposals for mineral extraction in this or adjoining areas avoid areas of historic or ecological importance and are adequately screened from view
- encourage the development of best-practice guidelines to safeguard existing nature conservation interest in working mineral extraction sites to create suitable conditions for maximising nature conservation potential and to minimise management needs within restored sites
- ensure that all landowners and developers are aware of the BAP objective of creating a 'necklace' of inter-connected wetland habitats along the river valleys
- resist the targeting of redundant or derelict pasture for development
- resist development that could lower the water table within river valleys and affect wetland habitats



• Woolmer's Park
(HCC Landscape Unit)