

County map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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**LOCATION**

This area is located between Radlett and Watford. The valley of the Colne lies to the north-west and the Borehamwood plateau to the south-east.

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

An area of predominantly gently undulating arable farmland interspersed with a number of distinctive villages clustered around greens and with a good mix of vernacular buildings. Areas of grazing are prevalent in association with modest parklands on the edge of the settlements. Medium to tall hedgerows and sunken lanes help to enclose the open arable fields and retain a rural and tranquil character which only changes at the approaches to the noisy M1/A41 corridor.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- gently undulating landform
- large tenanted estates with arable dominant and some secondary grazing
- small organic clustered villages around village greens
- declining pattern of hedgerows within arable areas
- limited woodland except to M1

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- Aldenham church
- high proportion of elm in hedges



Hill Farm •  
(J. Billingsley)

### PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

**Geology and soils.** To the north the underlying geology is a combination of plateau and river terrace drift. The soils are well-drained flinty coarse loamy and sandy over some gravels (Sonning 1 association). To the south, including Letchmore Heath, the geology is Eocene and Jurassic loam and clay with fine deep and coarse loamy soils with slowly permeable subsoils and seasonal waterlogging (Bursledon association).

**Topography.** Within this undulating plateau area the highest ground is to the east and centre around Kemprow and the edge of Radlett. Most of the central plateau areas have minimal falls while to the edges the landform becomes more strongly undulating, e.g. at Hill north of Radlett. There are a number of sunken lanes in the core of the area.

**Degree of slope.** Across the plateau, slopes are typically less than 1 in 50, but on the slopes can be up to 1 in 25.

**Altitude range.** 70 to 100m.

**Hydrology.** The clay soils support a number of streams that flow off the plateau towards the Colne. There are also a number of ponds associated with farmsteads, woodlands, village greens or larger houses.

**Land cover and land use.** The primary land use is arable. Areas of grazing are mixed with the arable fields or found closer to individual farms, e.g. Hill Farm. These fields are often enclosed with fencing. Woodland cover is not generally significant. Aldenham golf course occupies the north-west corner of the area.

**Vegetation and wildlife.** Woodlands are few, being discrete and linear in character. Species include oak, hazel, ash and sycamore. In some locations Leyland cypress and poplars have been introduced as shelterbelts, but they are not in harmony with the landscape pattern. The only major woodlands are close to the M1 within the Aldenham Country Club golf course grounds. These include oak/hazel, e.g. Berrygrove, which reflects the acidic and relatively wet ground conditions, although these ancient woods now also contain areas of conifers. Where present, hedges are tall and prominent features in the landscape, with mixed species including hawthorn, blackthorn, field maple and hazel. Elm is locally very significant in this area, however many of the elms are suffering from Dutch elm disease. Field trees are locally important, particularly around and within areas of pasture which are often, but not exclusively, linked to the modest areas of parkland close to the clustered villages, e.g. Patchetts Green, Batlers Green and Edge Grove. There are a few acidic to neutral buttercup pastures remaining, e.g. Batlers Green.

### HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Aldenham is recorded in the Domesday Book. Letchmore Heath was not recorded before the 16th century, but its name comes from the Old English word meaning 'dirty pond'.

**Field pattern.** The historic field pattern is one of pre-18th century organic enclosure. This pattern is largely intact, except to the north where there has been considerable 20th-century enclosure and field enlargement. Despite the continuity of the field pattern there has been considerable hedge removal in the arable areas. The hedges are best retained along the local minor roads.

**Transport pattern.** The historic pattern of narrow winding lanes is partly retained between the villages. The lanes are often sunken where they run down locally steeper slopes. The 'improved' B462 between Radlett and Bushey skirts the villages, but is unsympathetically planted with a mix of 100% hawthorn. Much of the area is only served by farm tracks.

**Settlements and built form.** In the estate farmlands the settlement is sparse and dispersed. However, the small historic villages are one of the key features of the area. Building materials include brick, clay tile and flint. Letchmore Heath is a picturesque village centred around a village green, pond and groupings of 16th and 17th-century cottages. Aldenham is centred around a leafy village green and church. The tower and buttresses of the parish church are unique, being made of Hertfordshire 'puddingstone', a hard conglomerate rock.

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The relatively elevated level nature of the land and the enclosing vegetation means it is only locally visible from the surrounding areas. There are some long views from the area to the north as far as St Albans cathedral. The area is generally quiet except where close to the M1. The localised decline in hedges in the arable areas opens up views to some urbanising elements.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** This landscape type is frequent. The distinctive features are the small villages clustered around greens.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

The M1/A41 corridor and the associated urbanising elements are well contained by the adjacent woodland and the road cutting. The sewage works on Oakridge Lane are well screened, their presence given away by the concrete access road. Two rows of pylons cross the area and detract from the rural character. Built development on the edges is generally well absorbed although there are exceptions, e.g. suburban housing in Patchets Green, the northern edge of Radlett and views to tower blocks in Watford. There has been a move from pasture to arable and to recreation at Aldenham Country Park, where the tree planting style and species are out of keeping with the traditional pattern.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

There are a number of footpaths in the area. However, the links between the small villages are limited and often rely on walking down the narrow sunken lanes, which can be dangerous. Aldenham golf course lies to the north west. Batlers Green Farm Shop complex is just outside Radlett.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

The greens and village landscapes in this area are significantly valued for their distinctiveness, including respondents for whom villages are not their favourite feature in the environment (C).

Re. Letchmore Heath: *'It is a suprisingly beautiful little place in view of the fact that "much of the building seems to have been around 1872"'* (Hertfordshire Countryside Vol.20, No.83, March 1966).

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

Watling Chase Community Forest.

**CONDITION**

|   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| <i>Land cover change:</i>                       | <b>widespread</b> |
| <i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>             | <b>mixed</b>      |
| <i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i> | <b>relic</b>      |
| <i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>      | <b>variable</b>   |
| <i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>            | <b>declining</b>  |
| <i>Impact of built development:</i>             | <b>moderate</b>   |
| <i>Impact of land-use change:</i>               | <b>high</b>       |

**STRENGTH OF CHARACTER**

|                                    |                        |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Impact of landform:</i>         | <b>apparent</b>        |
| <i>Impact of land cover:</i>       | <b>prominent</b>       |
| <i>Impact of historic pattern:</i> | <b>interrupted</b>     |
| <i>Visibility from outside:</i>    | <b>locally visible</b> |
| <i>Sense of enclosure:</i>         | <b>partial</b>         |
| <i>Visual unity:</i>               | <b>coherent</b>        |
| <i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>     | <b>frequent</b>        |

|                              |                 |                          |                            |   |
|------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| <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

- support Watling Chase Community Forest in the realisation of its objectives for the area
- promote the creation of new woods within the area. Planting to focus on screening harsh built edges of settlements and providing access for local population, e.g. Radlett
- promote the appropriate management of existing semi-natural woodland in order to maintain a species-rich ground flora and the distinction between different management systems, such as high forest, coppice, coppice-with-standards. Ensure that management does not reduce the screening of the M1
- use ancient hedge and field boundaries to locate wood restoration and expansion
- woodlands should cater for public access, conservation and economic productivity
- promote enhanced habitat and visual linkage through a substantially improved and restored network of hedges and hedgerow trees
- 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
- promote both the creation of new ponds and the retention/enhancement for wildlife of existing ponds
- promote hedgerow restoration through locally appropriate measures, including coppicing, laying and replanting/gapping-up
- promote the creation of new orchards, the use of traditional varieties of fruit and reduced use of herbicides and pesticides
- maintain and enhance framed views to Aldenham parish
- protect the setting and character of the local villages and resist further development
- improve rights of way and create new routes between villages and to the adjacent towns to avoid the use of narrow or congested roads
- retain and enhance parkland areas, e.g. Edge Grove. Ensure new planting is encouraged to maintain age diversity. Landscape improvements should respect the historic context of existing features and the form and character of parkland and gardens. Ornamental species should only be used to replace damaged or over-mature specimens where appropriate
- encourage reversion from arable uses to pasture and grassland
- restrict ploughing of grasslands within parklands
- encourage the re-use of existing agricultural buildings for equestrian activity
- promote the use of traditional field enclosure where land is converted to equestrian pasture
- develop a strategy for tree planting, grassland management and wildlife enhancement within Aldenham golf course
- discourage the use of non-native trees in shelterbelts and recreational areas
- ensure that ancient lanes and their associated hedgerows are retained
- ensure that the surroundings of new and converted buildings are designed and maintained to be in keeping with their agricultural surroundings. 'Garden' details are to be screened from view where possible and locally indigenous hedging and trees should be used in preference to fencing or exotics. Car parking to be screened, e.g. Batlers Green shopping village
- traffic-calming measures, where considered necessary, must be of a scale and design that relates to the local landscape character of the settlement



- Aerial view of Batlers Green (Environmental Land Management Service (Rural Estates) HCC)