

County map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA



**LOCATION**

The area lies between Shenley Ridge to the north, Borehamwood to the south west and the A1/M25 to the south east.

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

An undulating series of close ridges and valleys. The ridges have a well-treed character due to a combination of woodland blocks, scattered trees and tall hedges. Individual houses, farms and small settlements occupy the narrow fingers of plateau overlooking the surrounding slopes of both arable and pastoral landscapes, which often have a contained character.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- a series of narrow settled ridges of sinuous form
- slopes to the south east comprise mainly medium to large arable fields and more open character
- slopes to the west and north east comprise a more intact landscape of small/medium pasture and numerous field oaks
- woodland blocks and copses scattered throughout the area, both around houses and more extensively to the west where they combine with mature parkland landscapes at the edge of Shenley Park and Porters Park golf course
- prominent built edge to Borehamwood and associated pylons dilute the rural character
- good range and use of local building materials

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- exposures of Hertfordshire 'puddingstone' (2 RIGS sites)
- Rabley Park



• Holmshill Lane (HCC Landscape Unit)

### PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

**Geology and soils.** The underlying geology of the slopes is Tertiary clay overlaid by slowly permeable and seasonally waterlogged soils with some brown subsoils (Windsor series). Locally, there are areas of fine loamy and silty soils over the clays. On the narrow plateau areas the geology is plateau and river-terrace drift. This is overlaid by slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged coarse loamy, fine loamy and fine silty over clayey soils (Essendon association).

**Topography.** The narrow and sinuous plateau is almost level. Side slopes and narrow intervening valleys vary in steepness.

**Degree of slope.** Side slopes typically 1 in 20 but locally 1 in 15. Plateau less than 1 in 150.

**Altitude range.** Ridge range 125-132m. Slopes fall to 80m at Harper Lane in the north-west and 100m in south-east at the A1.

**Hydrology.** The clay soils support numerous ponds on the plateau area, e.g. Wood Hall Farm, Kitwells Farm and High Canons. There are also a series of wells in association with these pond features. A number of streams rise on the clay and follow the series of valleys and slopes radiating from the areas in all directions to join the tributaries of the Colne or Mimms Hall Brook. These include Catherine Bourne to the north-east, which is dammed at Rabley Park to create various ornamental water features.

**Land cover and land use.** The predominant land use is pastoral, particularly on the plateau areas and the western slopes. Pasture is primarily for horses, and often associated with stud farms, e.g. Wood Hall Farm. Arable land use is stronger on the slopes, particularly to the south east and south running down to the Arkley Plain. Although not extensive, woodland is often visually interlocking and serves to emphasise the narrow ridges. Areas of informal parkland strengthen the landscape character between the larger houses on the ridges and within the recreational land uses to the north west, including Porters Park golf course.

**Vegetation and wildlife.** Natural woodland communities comprise an oak/hazel mix on the higher and wetter ground, with an oak/hornbeam mix where the ground is locally drier. Other local species of note are aspen in the valleys, and ash. There are both ancient woodlands, e.g. Hound's Wood, Big Pursley and Little Pursley Wood, and more recent plantation woodlands where softwood species are predominant, e.g. The Gorse. Hedgerows are generally mixed and along the ridge areas. Species include field maple, hazel, hornbeam, hawthorn, elm and lime. Standard and hedgerow trees, mainly oak, are a particular feature of the area, e.g. south-west of Shenley. The London clay supports a number of species-rich neutral and neutral to acidic grasslands, e.g. at Lyndhurst and High Canons, with species including Ragged Robin.

### HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Areas of informal medieval parkland survive, e.g. at High Canons and Wood Hall where the parks roll over ridges and valleys.

**Field pattern.** Much of the area to the west still retains its pre-18th century organic enclosure pattern with medium/small field sizes. Fields are often regular in form. Although in decline, the historic network of hedges and hedgerow trees is a strong feature, with rows of mature oak trees often retained although the hedge has been removed. To the south east the pattern has been partially eroded with the creation of some 'prairie' fields, where the combination of the loss of hedgerows, hedgerow trees, and lack of new planting makes the landscape more open and visually degraded.

**Transport pattern.** The pattern of narrow local sinuous lanes and roads has been largely retained with few 20th-century distractions. Verges are generally narrow but there are some locally wide verges on Silver Hill.

**Settlements and built form.** The majority of settlement is located on the ridges and plateau areas in the form of villages, e.g. Ridge and Shenley, or isolated houses and farms. The exception is Rabley Park, where the settlement pattern lies in the valley. Buildings utilise a wide range of vernacular materials including brick, clay tile, knapped flint, whitewash, black weatherboard and some thatch. These include a number of sympathetic modern conversions. The buildings are generally well assimilated into the treed landscape. Orchard Mead is a group of almshouses by George Gilbert Scott at Ridge.

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The slopes and wooded skyline of the area are widely visible from outside. Locally the area has a strong sense of enclosure, both within the settled, well treed plateau and in some of the more intimate valleys. To the south east there is a more open and exposed character. The area has a strong sense of cohesion and is relatively peaceful.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** The landscape type is relatively frequent in the county. The most distinctive elements are the treed and settled ridges.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

The core of the area has suffered little from incursion of modern built development. There are a number of features on the perimeter. The northern edge of Borehamwood and the associated pylons represent a raw edge to the rural landscape. Institutional developments on the ridge are prominent from the south. Shenley Hospital water tower, although outside the area, is also a strong local landmark.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

There is a good network of footpaths through the area and no disruption from 20th-century roads. Horse riding is a major activity with frequent use of some bridleway routes, e.g. Packhorse Lane. This is likely to create seasonal problems for pedestrians on the heavy soils. Porters Park golf course lies to the north west.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

The greenbelt farm and parkland landscapes to the east and south of Shenley are valued for their distinctiveness (C). Otherwise, generally unremarked upon, this area includes some aspects valued for distinctiveness (D).

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

Watling Chase Community Forest.  
Landscape Conservation Area (south of Radlett Lane and north of Buckettsland Lane).

<b>CONDITION</b>	
<i>Land cover change:</i>	<b>widespread</b>
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	<b>mature or young</b>
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	<b>fragmented</b>
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	<b>variable</b>
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	<b>interrupted</b>
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	<b>high</b>
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	<b>high</b>

<b>ROBUSTNESS</b>	
<i>Impact of landform:</i>	<b>prominent</b>
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	<b>apparent</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	<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
- reinforce and emphasise the topography and pattern of woodland and tree cover to the fingered ridgeline by new planting. Encourage extending planting along the ridges to the east and the provision of habitat linkage between isolated woodlands
- create woodland copses adjacent to intrusive features including the A1 and the built edge of Borehamwood. Proposals should not emphasise the linear nature of the existing boundaries but make use of field corners to give a natural character
- improve public access arrangements to woodlands and links with rights of way
- promote the appropriate management of coppice woodland in order to maintain a rich ground flora and the distinction between different management systems such as high forest and coppice-with-standards
- within historic informal parklands encourage reversion from arable use to pasture and grassland, e.g. north of High Canons
- ensure new planting is encouraged to maintain age diversity. Ensure landscape improvements 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
- resist ploughing of grasslands within parklands
- promote the creation of buffer strips along watercourses to prevent pesticide, herbicide and fertilizer run-off and to provide habitat for wildlife; encourage their linkage to eco-corridors within the wider landscape
- promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and important semi-natural habitats and the creation of links between semi-natural habitats
- encourage the establishment of wet native woodland species along watercourses to emphasize the features and improve biodiversity. Use locally indigenous species including aspen
- 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 and to reconnect rows of isolated field trees
- 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
- encourage the re-use of existing agricultural buildings for equestrian activity
- promote the use of traditional hedged field enclosure where land is converted to equestrian pasture or where fences have been introduced
- conserve unimproved and semi-improved neutral to acidic grassland wherever possible, avoiding agricultural improvements and overgrazing to maintain their nature conservation value
- traffic-calming measures, where considered necessary, must be of a scale and design that relates to the local landscape character of the settlement
- promote the development and implementation of a landscape management plan for Porters Park golf course and other recreational areas. A high proportion of the total area should be dedicated to and maintained as wildlife habitat, building upon established areas of wildlife interest already present



• View north from Strangeways Farm (HCC Landscape Unit)