

County map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA



**LOCATION**

This area is located between Bushey Heath in the west and the southern edge of Borehamwood in the east.

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

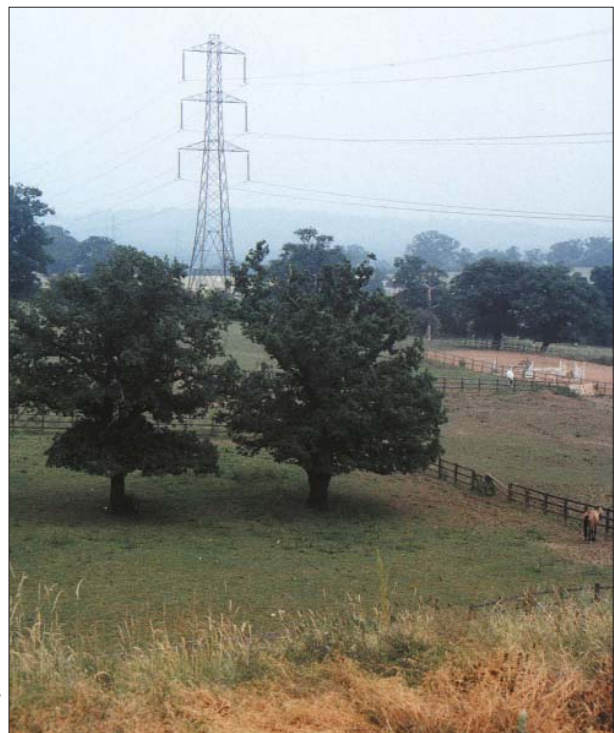
An area never very far from the impact or presence of built development even though it is generally contained behind and among vegetation. A marked and well-treed ridge forms the spine of the area. Pasture, with some over-grazing and poor fencing, dominates the side slopes. The noisy M1 corridor passes through, with many of the slopes visually screened by planting.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- prominent ridgeline that runs east/west
- built development to much of the ridge
- wooded and treed skyline
- considerable equestrian pasture
- attractive views to north over Borehamwood Plateau
- increasing impact of horse grazing and golf courses
- deterioration of many hedges and hedgerow trees
- M1/A41 corridor creates major impact

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- Elstree parish church
- Scratchwood Local Nature Reserve



Edgwarebury equestrian land use • (J. Billingsley)

### PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

**Geology and soils.** The underlying geology of the majority of the area comprises 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 higher ground around Elstree the geology is plateau and river terrace drift. This is overlaid by slowly permeable and seasonally waterlogged coarse loamy, fine loamy and fine silty over clayey soils (Essendon association).

**Topography.** The core of the area is a ridgeline that runs from west to east apart from a break where the M1 and A41 pass in a valley.

**Degree of slope.** Side slopes are typically 1 in 12 but can locally be as steep as 1 in 7, eg in Scratchwood.

**Altitude range.** The ridgeline varies between 139 - 147m. Side slopes drop to 90m.

**Hydrology.** The ridge marks a watershed between the River Colne catchment to the north and the River Brent to the east. A number of streams radiate outwards flowing off the slopes, some of which are marked by hedges. There are a number of small ponds on the higher ground.

**Land cover and land use.** The primary land use is pasture, and exclusively for horses. Some of the paddocks seem to be suffering from over-grazing. There are two golf courses in the area. Woodland is the secondary land use and includes the ancient woodlands of Scratchwood and Thistle Wood, which are located on the steep south-facing side slopes. There are limited areas of arable land and a considerable amount of built development including Elstree.

**Vegetation and wildlife.** The natural woodland type is oak/hornbeam, which reflects the presence of some gravels and better-drained soils. Other species include ash, sycamore, poplar and horse chestnut. Hedge species include hawthorn, blackthorn and elm. To the south east at Scratchwood Local Nature Reserve there is a mosaic of habitats with considerable ecological interest. There are isolated remnants of acidic grassland but much of the grassland is improved or over-grazed.

### HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

**Field pattern.** The historic pattern is a mix of pre-18th century organic enclosure, parliamentary enclosure and later 20th-century enclosure. Fields are small to medium in size and irregular in shape. Hedgerow enclosure is important but many hedges are in a declining condition. Fencing is generally being used to replace poor and gappy hedges, but is not always of good quality.

**Transport pattern.** There is an intersection of roads in the area. The main arterial roads from London, i.e. the A1, M1, A5, A5183 and A41 all pass to the north. A secondary network of roads run east/west along the ridge, including the A411 which follows the crest of the ridge from Elstree to the A1. The main St Pancras line also passes through (mainly in a tunnel) under the ridge.

**Settlements and built form.** Much of the area is developed. The village of Elstree occupies a ridge location. There are many large individual houses in mature grounds occupying the higher ground, some of which are now hotels. East of the M1 corridor there are a number of hospitals and institutional uses.

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The wooded horizon to the ridge is widely visible outside the area and from the M1 and other main roads. Within the area the views are restricted along most of the roads on the ridgeline by built development and other areas of vegetation. There are a few distant views, particularly to the north over the Borehamwood Plateau. The M1, A1, A5183, A41 and the main line railway make this a very noisy area.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** This landscape type is frequent in the county. The wooded skyline is the most distinctive element.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

The motorways and major roads are the main built features. Pylons follow the line of the M1 including the Scratchwood service area. At Elstree the new Centennial Business Park occupies the site of the former Aldenham bus garage works. Land-use change has mainly been from pasture to built development. There are two golf courses in the area; these have brought change to the landscape, particularly through the new landform and structures, including driving ranges, clubhouses and earthworks.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

Public access across the area is moderate. The London Loop recreational footpath crosses the area between Scratchwood and Deacons Hill, however much of it is along roads. Otherwise, there are limited views and rights of way. The two exceptions are to the north west of Elstree, where there is access to the edge of Aldenham Park, and to the south east at Scratchwood Local Nature Reserve, where there are car parks and picnic sites. There are two golf courses.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

An area of little distinction, although perceived to be of increasing value from Deacons Hill towards Scratchwood (D).

**LANDSCAPE AND ECOLOGICAL DESIGNATIONS**

Watling Chase Community Forest.

<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>poor</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>moderate</b>

<b>ROBUSTNESS</b>	
<i>Impact of landform:</i>	<b>prominent</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>widely visible</b>
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	<b>partial</b>
<i>Visual unity:</i>	<b>incoherent</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	<b>Conserve and restore</b>
	<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: CONSERVE AND RESTORE**

- support the Watling Chase Community Forest in the realisation of its objectives for the area
- promote the extension of existing woodlands, particularly with a view to visually integrating the intrusive motorways and urban fringe development
- improve public access arrangements to woodlands with attention to car park design and safety
- support the continued management of existing woodland in order to maintain a rich ground flora and the distinction between different woodland habitats such as high forest, coppice and scrub. Support public access to the woods
- use ancient hedge and field boundaries to identify the most appropriate location for wood restoration and expansion
- 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, replanting/gapping-up and replacement of over-mature hedgerow trees
- promote the restoration of hedges adjacent to rights of way, green lanes and along parish boundaries
- promote the maintenance and retention of the traditional hedged field enclosure. Where fences have been introduced promote reversion to hedges
- conserve unimproved and semi-improved neutral to acidic grassland wherever possible, avoiding agricultural improvements and over-grazing to maintain their nature conservation value
- support the reversion of arable to pasture and the planting of small stands of trees in former parkland
- improve the management of old meadows and pastures by ceasing fertiliser and herbicide application and introducing sensitive grassland management such as late hay cutting or low-density grazing
- resist the targeting of redundant or derelict pasture for development or cropping
- ensure that ancient lanes and their associated hedgerows are retained, protected, enhanced and integrated into new development with due regard to their historic, ecological and landscape value
- promote the development and implementation of a landscape management plan for all golf courses. 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 and building in a strong landscape framework that reflects the historic landscape pattern. Specific attention should be paid to new earthworks
- seek opportunities to improve the network of rights of way and provide links to London Loop footpath and areas of existing access land, e.g. Scratchwood Open Space. Consider alternative routes for horses and pedestrians
- encourage effective management along transport corridors to ensure thinning, selective felling and replanting is undertaken to achieve a varied age structure and locally indigenous species mix



• Wooded skyline at Elstree  
(J. Billingsley)