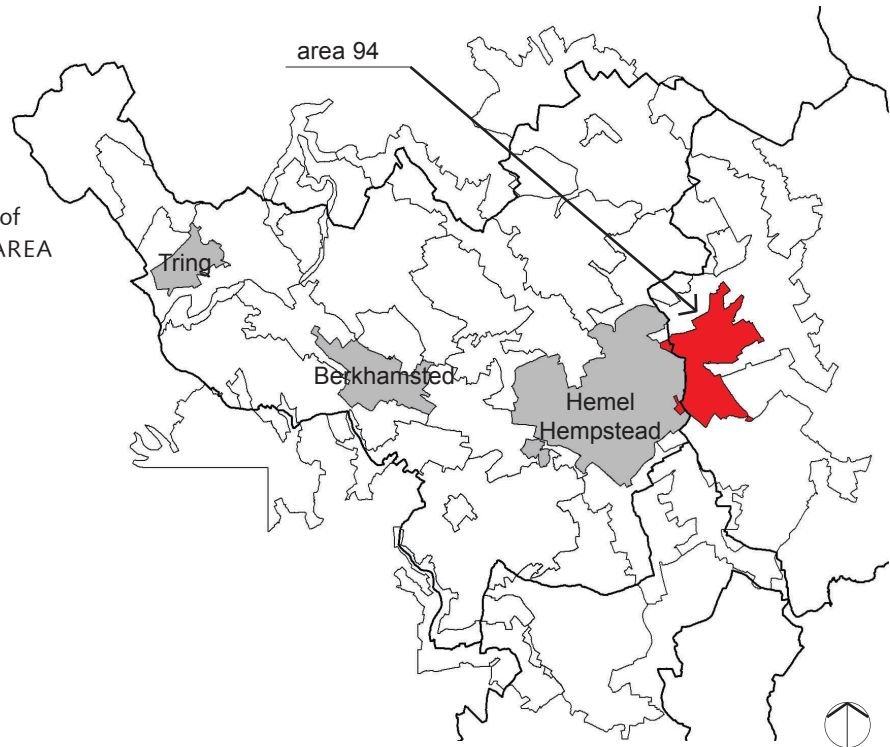


District Map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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LOCATION

This area lies on the eastern fringes of Hemel Hempstead, stretching from Westwick Row in the south and following the route of the M1 up to the dry valley between Redbourn and Hemel Hempstead to the north.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

An extensive, linear, undulating plateau confined to the west by the urban settlement of Hemel Hempstead. The M1 motorway dominates the plateau's length and the industrial urban edge also strongly influences the character of the area. The plateau is crossed by dry valleys, creating an undulating topography. Much of the cultural pattern has been lost or interrupted by the motorway. The industrial sector of Hemel Hempstead is clearly visible from the higher open ground.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- arable farmland
- upland and dry valleys
- M1 transport corridor
- discontinuous cultural and field patterns
- commercial and industrial urban fringe influence
- long views
- narrow lanes and isolated properties

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Buncefield industrial development
- oil depot
- overhead power lines



Buncefield Oil storage Depo. Hemel Hempstead (HCC Landscape Unit)

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. The bedrock geology is chalk which is overlaid by clay-with-flints drift on the plateau areas with undifferentiated solid rock on the dry valley slopes. Soils are stagnogleyic paleo-argillic brown earths which are fine silty and oamy over clayey soils with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging (Batcombe association). Some are well drained clayey soils over chalk, variably flinty. The dry valley slopes in the very south of the area are typical paleo-argillic brown earths which are well drained fine silty and clayey soils, often very flinty (Carstens association).

Topography. This is a mainly flat area of high ground between Hemel Hempstead and the Ver Valley. To the south there is the dry valley which runs on eastwards through Gorhambury Estate to the Ver Valley. There is a similar, less marked feature in the centre of the area. The edges of the plateau fall away to form the upper slopes of secondary valleys associated with the Ver Valley and the Ver Valley itself. To the west it is bounded by the edges of Hemel Hempstead.

Degree of slope. In the north east where the land slopes down towards the Ver Valley the gradient averages 1 in 90. In the southern dry valley the slopes average 1 in 25. The rest of the area could be described as flat.

Altitude range. 135m on two of the highest plateau areas - one west of Gorhambury Estate and the other to the east of Hemel Hempstead Industrial Estate.; 95m in the very south east of the area where the dry valley crosses into Gorhambury Estate

Hydrology. There is little natural standing water on this area of high ground, however, there are a number of reservoirs/balancing ponds associated with the oil depot and industrial areas on the fringes of Hemel Hempstead. There are drainage ditches associated with the M1 and a number of small ponds associated with farmsteads.

Land cover and land use. Open farmland is the dominant land cover with arable farming the dominant land use. Around the settlements there are small pockets of pasture, mainly for horses, e.g. at Westwick Farm. There is very little woodland on the plateau and the few trees that remain are concentrated around the settlements.

Vegetation and wildlife. The plateau has no significant areas of woodland. The woodlands should be a mix of oak, ash, beech and cherry with bluebell on the woodland floors. The remaining treed hedgerows are dominated by hazel, elm and hawthorn with some elder and are most noticeable immediately east of Hemel Hempstead around Cherry Tree Lane and Punch Bowl Lane. The hedgerow trees are oak, ash and field maple. There is almost no natural grassland remaining and hedgerow verges are narrow. Grassland species such as Common Bent and Sweet Vernal Grass should be growing in the area, however the grassland remnants are dominated by False Oatgrass.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The strongest cultural influence is the M1 motorway (the UK's first official motorway) and the development of a sprawling industrial area along the fringes of Hemel Hempstead. Historically the area was sparsely settled and therefore the historical influence is not noticeable in the light of the existing influences.

Field pattern. Over much of the area the original field pattern was the relatively rare pre 18th-century co-axial system. There are some areas where this has survived, however most has been removed by the late 20th-century field enlargements. To the south of the plateau, fields around Westwick Row Farm are regular and rectangular and here the nature of the topography makes this pattern more apparent. Much of the historic field pattern has also been disrupted along the route of the M1. A more sub-regular pattern re-emerges in the north of the area with increasing distance from the M1 corridor.

Transport pattern. The M1 runs north/south across the plateau and becomes elevated where it crosses the dry valleys. Minor straight lanes cross the M1 such as Punch Bowl Lane and Hoggs End Lane, which tend to follow minor valleys.

Settlements and built form. The area was relatively sparsely settled in the prehistoric period, though there is evidence of a Roman villa close to the junction of the M1. Isolated farms are scattered over the plateau e.g. Westwick Hall. In the medieval period, Westwick Row, in the south of the area, developed as one of the small hamlets characteristic of the plateau areas in the district. There are also buildings associated with the M1 corridor e.g. the depot at Junction 8.

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

The area is only locally visible because of its plateau location and the views within the area are extensive across the open arable land. It is a medium to large scale landscape bordered by settlement to the west and with a sense of openness caused by the combination of flat topography and the lack of vegetation and hedgebanks. The dry valley of Westwick Row feels slightly less open, however the M1 still has a major impact on this sub area. The motorway is elevated across the dry valleys, which without vegetation screening increases its dominance. The area generally has an inhospitable and neglected image, dominated by the major adjacent industrial influences, the ever present drone of the motorway traffic and the unsightly incidences of fly tipping on the minor lanes. **Rarity and distinctiveness.** The plateau landscape is common in Hertfordshire as is the interruption of character areas by major transport routes and settlement.

VISUAL IMPACT

The M1 and its attendant traffic is visible throughout the plateau area. More visually dominant than the motorway however is the industrial development along the eastern periphery of Hemel Hempstead. Breakspear's Park buildings also have a major impact on the landscape and can be seen from many viewpoints.

ACCESSIBILITY

Total length of Public Rights of Way - 11,732m
 Total length of Other Public Access - n/a
 Total length of Designated Cycle Routes - 3,402m
 Total length of all public access - 15,134m
 Area of LCA in square metres - 7,134,549
 Length to area ratio - 1:471

COMMUNITY VIEWS

This area is not regarded as a distinctive landscape (E)

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

CONDITION

Land cover change: **widespread**
Age structure of tree cover: **mature**
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival: **relic**
Management of semi-natural habitat: **not obvious**
Survival of cultural pattern: **declining**
Impact of built development: **high**
Impact of land-use change: **high**

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

Impact of landform: **prominent**
Impact of land cover: **prominent**
Impact of historic pattern: **interrupted**
Visibility from outside: **locally visible**
Sense of enclosure: **open**
Visual unity: **incoherent**
Distinctiveness/rarity: **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: RESTORE CONDITION TO MAINTAIN CHARACTER

- promote the creation of a network of new medium to large woodlands in the open arable landscape, particularly with a view to visually integrating the intrusive motorways and urban fringe development
- within existing woodlands, encourage the replacement of softwoods with indigenous native deciduous communities, provide hedgebank management and re-establish a species-rich ground flora
- utilise ancient hedge and field boundaries to establish the most appropriate location for wood restoration and expansion
- encourage the reversal of habitat fragmentation and the creation and improvement of habitat links to create eco-corridors
- 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 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.
- promote crop diversification and the restoration of mixed livestock/arable farming where possible
- provide new uncropped or grass field margins to link areas of wildlife importance and/or existing and proposed rights of way
- restore arable land to permanent pasture and meadow. Priority will be given to land which buffers or links sites of existing wildlife importance
- native tree species only should be planted on boundaries, with exotic/ornamental species only in close proximity to development
- ensure that landscape proposals for the context of roads and other developments fit the grain of the local landscape both horizontally and vertically; avoid significant impact on the local field pattern and use only locally native tree and shrub species for associated planting. It should not be axiomatic to enclose any new road with dense hedging on both sides – due reference should be made to local character and roads should be left open where appropriate
- promote a clear strategy for the visual and noise mitigation of all motorways, trunk roads and to positively integrate these corridors into the local landscape character
- 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
- encourage the replacement of existing poor quality field gates and fencing with gates and fencing of a material and style that reflects the rural character of the locality
- promote measures to reduce the incidences of unsightly fly tipping along minor roads.



• Plateau view
(HCC Landscape Unit)