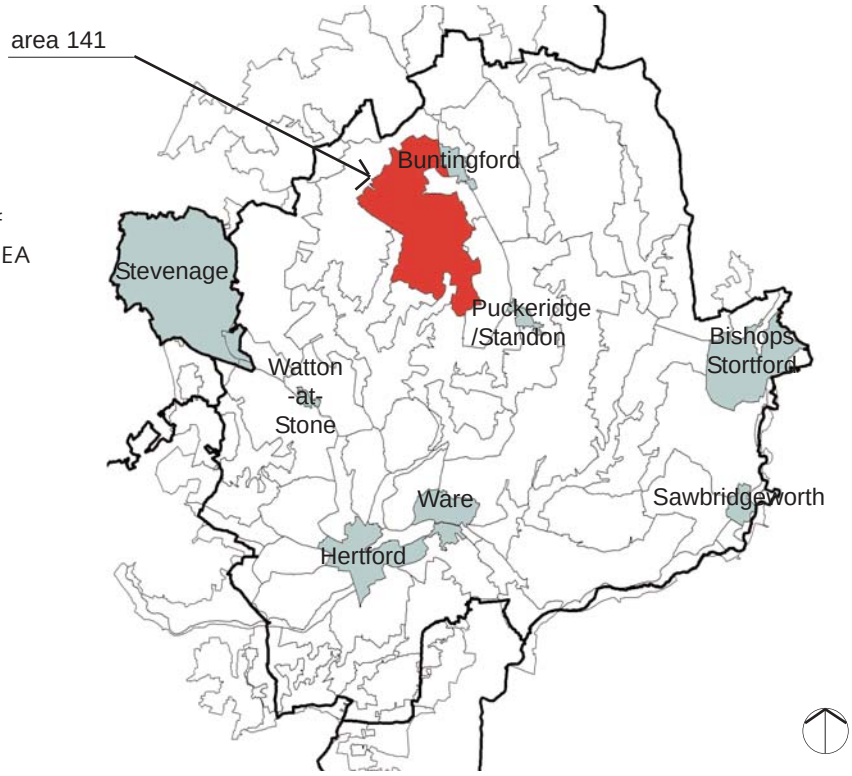



County Map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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100019606 2004

## LOCATION

The area is located on the elevated plateau between the valley of the River Rib to the east and the more settled plateau to the west. It stretches from Throcking in the north to Nasty in the south.

## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The area is principally an open arable landscape with extensive views over a gently undulating plateau. The area retains a historic ambiance through the winding lanes, however many of the features have been eroded or disappeared completely including a deserted medieval village. Settlement comprises isolated farms and the occasional cottage. There are few features of note within the area with the most prominent landmarks being outside the area.

## KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- open arable plateau with some very large field units
- minimal settlement, restricted to individual farmhouses
- remote and isolated feel
- minimal woodland cover
- degraded landscape pattern with few hedgerows and associated trees
- organic winding lanes with few direct connections across the plateau, ( except for A507)
- water towers, LV electricity cables and aerial masts locally prominent features due to open landscape
- open views across plateau and to valley of the Rib

## DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- deserted medieval village of Wakeley
- Sainsbury's distribution depot (outside area)
- Throcking Church (outside area)



- Great Munden Church (HCC Landscape Unit)

## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

***Geology and soils.*** The geology of the area comprises a chalky till boulder clay overlying the solid chalk of the escarpment dip slope. The soils are almost entirely dominated by calcareous boulder clay, except for minor areas of peri-glacial sand or gravel at the heads of minor valleys draining the area. Chalk also tends to outcrop in these areas. Soils are slowly permeable with a slight risk of water erosion, (Hanslope association).

***Topography.*** The plateau gently undulates from north to south. There is a more marked break of slope to the east where the plateau meets with the High Rib Valley and to the south where it meets a number of the tributaries of the River Beane.

***Degree of slope.*** The main plateau falls by about I in 300, but there are local undulations in the plateau, typically up to about 1 in 20. These are most noticeable in the upper tributaries that flow into the Rib Valley to the east.

***Altitude range.*** The dip slope plateau slowly falls from about 141m in the north at Buttermilk Farm to 124m in the south at Mently Lane.

***Hydrology.*** The clay tends to be poorly-drained, and so there are clusters of old ponds such as at Cherry Green, Wakeley and Westmill Green. Others are scattered at farmsteads and field corners. The only flowing water is in seasonal drainage ditches, particularly the upper tributary of the Old Bourne, Aspenden Brook and Thistley Vale Brook. Some minor spring-fed streams arise above Westmill.

***Land cover and land use.*** The dominant land cover and land use is open large scale arable agriculture. There are a number of small woods, but these are discrete and isolated. There is minimal pasture.

***Vegetation and wildlife.*** Now mostly arable, the area formerly had extensive old, damp neutral pastures, but these are now very limited, with remnants at Westmill Green, Wakeley and Cherry Green. The most extensive remnants of unimproved grassland now tend to occur on road verges and green lanes, such as at Cherry Green, although even some of these have suffered badly from severe management. Ancient semi-natural woodland is limited, but includes Graves Wood, Thrift Wood, Berkesdon Green Spring and Wakeley Spring, all of which are primarily ash/maple woodlands, sometimes with frequent field elm. The limited ponds in the area tend to be eutrophic and neglected.

## HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

There is limited evidence in the form of cropmarks and chance finds for settlement activity on the plateau since the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods, and the area may have supported a network of small dispersed settlements and farmsteads similar to those of today since the Roman, and certainly since the medieval period. A substantial Roman site, possibly a villa, is known on the plateau edge west of Westmill. Historically the Parishes of Aspenden, Westmill and Great Munden have always included parts of the valley of the River Rib to the east (see Area 142), where occupation, including the villages of Aspenden and Westmill, has been attracted to the valley slopes, close to Roman Ermine Street (the A10). The plateau itself is sparsely populated, with small hamlets and isolated farms and houses. While many perpetuate a longstanding settlement pattern, other sites have shifted or declined during the medieval and post-medieval periods. Whilst the deserted settlement earthworks at Great Munden and Wakeley are adjacent to existing settlements; many other examples are now isolated, such as the former settlements at Berkesdon Green, Westmill Green and Throcking, and the moated manorial sites near Gardners, Tannis Court, Mill Farm, Rush Green and Stockalls.

At Cherry Green, 'Buttonsnap' a picture book thatched cottage was inherited by Charles Lamb in 1812, but sold three years later for £50.

***Field Patterns.*** The field pattern, was originally one of unenclosed common arable fields and lesser areas of irregular enclosure, probably formed before the 18th century. It is now dominated by large 'prairie' fields. These have succeeded interim stages of gradual 18th and 19th century enclosure, and later, piecemeal 20th century enclosure and amalgamations creating large expansive prairie field units. Hedged field boundaries have been mainly removed. There are a few small areas where these smaller pre-18th century irregular fields survive, east of Nasty, around Cherry Green and Wakeley, and west of Berkesdon Green. There is little pasture or woodland in the area and it is evident that woodland cover was already slight by the later 19th century, due the long term use of the area for arable cultivation.

***Transport pattern.*** With the exception of the A507 Baldock Road which passes through the north of the area there are no direct routes across the area making it remote and isolated in character. The dispersed farmsteads are served by various narrow sinuous winding lanes and tracks. Most of the roads, including the A507, are locally sunken in the undulations and to the plateau edge. They are partially bounded by mixed native hedges but invariably are more open in character. The trackway Back Lane, follows the line of the Roman road that linked Baldock and Braughing, and it has been the historic boundary between the parishes of Westmill and Great Munden since at least the medieval period.

***Settlements and built form.*** Settlement within the area is sparse and limited to isolated farmsteads often at the end of long tracks and a few small hamlets such as Cherry Green. There are a few vernacular buildings including barn conversions however a number of the buildings and farmsteads are architecturally poor and add little to the locality.

## OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

English Heritage: Schedule entry

Pevsner, N., rev. Cherry, B., Hertfordshire, Penguin (2000)

### VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

The plateau landscape is visible from both the neighbouring plateaux and the upper slopes of the Rib Valley. There are extensive views within the area and the scale of the area is large with exposed views. As a result it is visually sensitive to changes in built form. The area mainly has a quiet and remote feel apart from where locally closer to the A507 and the A10 corridor.

***Rarity and distinctiveness.*** The landscape is a fairly frequent landscape type within the county with no major distinctive characteristics.

### VISUAL IMPACT

The major visual impact on the area comes from the perimeter of Buntingford with significant impact arising from both industrial and residential developments on the upper slopes of the Rib Valley. The widest reaching single impact is caused by the Sainsbury's warehouses, which are major structures on the skyline to the east.

### ACCESSIBILITY

There is an moderate to sparse network of rights of ways in the area, including byways such as Back Lane, footpaths and bridleways. A number of these provide links between the Rib valley and the Ardeley/Cottered Settled Plateau.

### COMMUNITY VIEWS

Although data is limited this area appears to be regarded as very distinctive [B]

"Greater beauty lies…where the rolling hills between Stevenage and Buntingford extend in an unbroken vista. The wayfarer will see that mere height is a less important feature of a countryside than generous contours and rich colouring. Here too are the great cornfields to cheer the eye, with narrow paths traversing them." H. Shelton 'Lovely Britain' Ed by SPB Mains & Tom Stephenson. Odhams. No date

### LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

Landscape Conservation Area (small are south west of Cherry Green)

SAM: Site of St Giles Church and medieval Village - Wakeley Farm

Areas of Archaeological Significance ( to higher ground to east)

### CONDITION

| | |
|---|---|
| *Land cover change:* | **insignificant** |
| *Age structure of tree cover:* | **mature** |
| *Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:* | **relic** |
| *Management of semi-natural habitat:* | **poor** |
| *Survival of cultural pattern:* | **declining** |
| *Impact of built development:* | **moderate** |
| *Impact of land-use change:* | **low** |

### STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

| | |
|---|---|
| *Impact of landform:* | **prominent** |
| *Impact of land cover:* | **dominant** |
| *Impact of historic pattern:* | **apparent** |
| *Visibility from outside:* | **locally visible** |
| *Sense of enclosure:* | **exposed** |
| *Visual unity:* | **coherent** |
| *Distinctiveness/rarity:* | **frequent** |

| CONDITION | WEAK | MODERATE | STRONG |
|---|---|---|---|
| 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** |

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

**STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE:** IMPROVE AND RESTORE

- promote the appropriate management of coppice woodland in order to re-establish a rich ground flora and the distinction between different management systems, such as high forest and coppice with standards
- promote the creation of new small to medium scale native broadleaved woods throughout the area to reduce the scale of the open arable areas, using ancient hedge and field boundaries to locate 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 the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production as important semi-natural habitats and the creation of links between semi-natural habitats. Buffers also to target rights of way where possible
- promote selected 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 and/or rights of way where possible
- ensure that the surroundings of converted and new buildings are designed and maintained to be in keeping with their agricultural surroundings by ensuring that hard landscape and 'Garden' details are be screened from view where possible and native species are used for hedging and tree planting to the perimeter
- promote a strategy for reducing the visual impact of development on the upper slopes of Buntingford including the Sainsbury's warehouses
- maintain and develop the traditional pattern of roadside verges as a local feature and a wildlife resource. Where development is likely to affect verges and damage is unavoidable, development should include details of protection of the remaining verge and replacement of its nature conservation value within the proposed scheme. This is particularly important where verges include hedgebanks, sunken lanes, ditches, hedges and hedgerow trees



- Arable plateau near Wakeley (J.Billingsley)