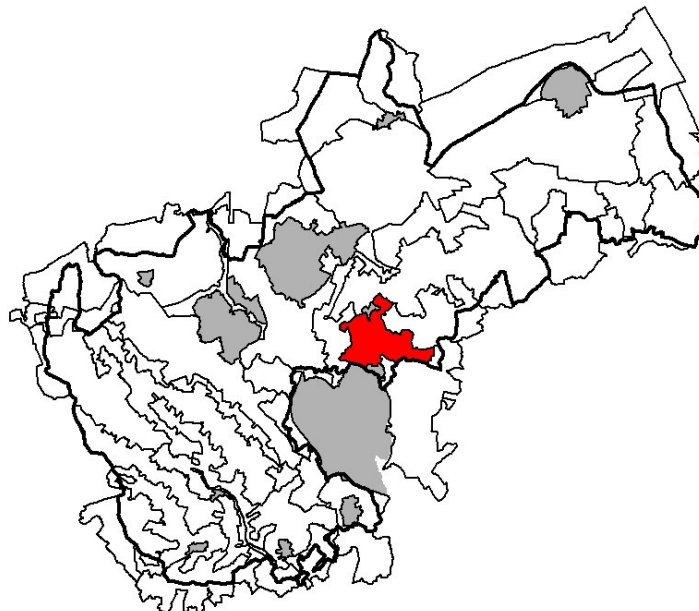
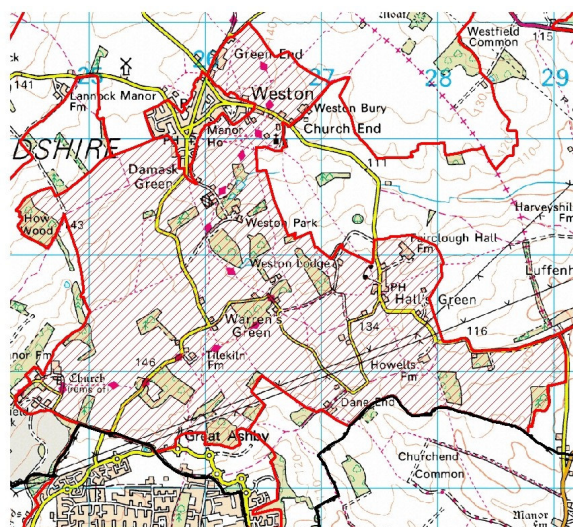


LOCATION

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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

Weston Park lies directly to the south of Weston village. The Character Area however extends from the Baldock Gap scarp to the west, the suburban edge of Stevenage to the south and the valley of the Weston Tributary in the east (which flows into the River Beane). The Character Area also takes in a section of parkland at Chesfield Park to the southwest.



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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Gently sloping chalk plateau overlain by clay soils. Predominantly arable land use but with pockets of grazing adjacent to Weston Park to southeast of village. Character Area is well wooded – predominantly ancient deciduous woodlands. Density of woodland cover creates a sense of enclosure and is key to the character of the landscape. There is a network of winding lanes, sometimes open and affording views over the plateau.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Plateau landform
- Arable land use
- Extensive mature woodland cover
- Interlocking pattern of fields, lanes and curvilinear boundaries
- Scattered farmsteads
- Winding lanes
- Mature field and hedgerow trees

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Weston Park
- Pylon on southern boundary
- Abuts northern edge of Stevenage

location	assessment	evaluation	guidelines	WESTON PLATEAU PARKLANDS	Area 220
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ASSESSMENT

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology & soils

Glacial drift (Boulder Clay and some Clay-with-Flints) overlying Chalk. Clay soils (pelosols) and locally moderately free draining brown earths.

Topography

Plateau landscape, gently falling in a southeasterly direction.

Degree of slope

Gentle cross fall of approximately 1:100.

Altitude range

135m to 145m.

Hydrology

No noted water courses. However, there is a wide distribution of lakes and ponds across the Weston parkland area, spring fed old fish ponds at Fairclough Hall and several other ponds.

Land cover and land use

Predominantly arable use with pockets of grazing adjacent to settlements and woodland.

Vegetation and wildlife

A number of important wildlife sites support neutral grassland habitats and ancient semi-natural woodlands. Weston Meadows is a potential SSSI comprising unimproved neutral grassland on boulder clay. It is described as one of the best extant examples of species-rich ancient wild flower meadows in the county, with a long continuity of grazing and over 140 recorded plant species.

How Wood and Sloggars Wood near Luffenhall are examples of numerous ancient oak/hornbeam woodlands occurring in the county. Ancient ash/maple woodlands occur less frequently, but include Harbourclose Wood. Hazel is abundant in hedgerows and oak and ash standards are common.

Old grassland at Weston includes dropwort, and ivy broomrape occurs at Weston Churchyard, one of only a few sites in the county.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Chesfield Church, a Scheduled Monument, lies in the southwest. Ruins of the 14th century church of St Ethelreda lie to the north of Chesfield Church and this is all that remains of a deserted medieval village. A medieval moated site lies at Fairclough Hall, to the east of the area. Earthworks to the south west of the Hall represent a medieval farmstead and associated ponds.

Weston to the north, is a medieval settlement recorded in Domesday book as Westone. A medieval moated site lies at Darnalls Hall. To the south of Weston there is 12th century evidence of a medieval manorial site and Romano- British burials.

Field Pattern

The historic agricultural landscape pattern consists of a mixture of post 1950s enclosure, prairie fields with post 1950s boundary loss, 18th century and later enclosure, informal medieval parkland, ancient woodland, 19th – 20th century plantation and pre-18th century 'irregular' enclosure. A 20th century stud farm lies to the west.

Transport Pattern

The Character Area is crossed by a network of winding lanes.

Settlements and Built Form

The historic settlement pattern is characterised by sparse settlement consisting of estates and scattered farmsteads. There are a number of fine traditional buildings in and around Weston. Examples here date from the 18th century and include the brick built, six bay, Town Farmhouse and a 19th century brick tower windmill. Chesfield Manor House, now a farmhouse, lies east of St Etheldreda and has a 17th century wing with steeply hipped roof.

EVALUATION

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

A mixture of smaller more intimate enclosures defined by woodland cover with open areas affording views over the plateau.

Rarity & distinctiveness

This landscape type is not frequent within North Hertfordshire. Mature setting of Weston Park and Chesfield Park provides local distinctiveness.

VISUAL IMPACT

Suburban edge of Stevenage locally prominent.

ACCESSIBILITY

Character Area crossed by network of winding lanes and footpaths.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) have undertaken Tier B (Community of Place) consultations. Views of the local community have been sought and contributor's responses to each of the Character Areas will be analysed and a summary of the responses provided by HCC.

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

LC2	Landscape Conservation Area
SAM HT12	Chesfield Church: Graveley

EVALUATION

CONDITION

Land cover change:	Localised
Age structure of tree cover:	Mature
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	Widespread
Management of semi-natural habitat:	Good
Survival of cultural pattern:	Interrupted
Impact of built development:	Low
Impact of land-use change:	Moderate

Matrix Score: **Moderate**

ROBUSTNESS

Impact of landform:	Insignificant
Impact of land cover:	Prominent
Impact of historic pattern:	Apparent
Visibility from outside:	Locally visible
Sense of enclosure:	Contained
Visual unity:	Coherent
Distinctiveness/rarity:	Unusual

Matrix Score: **Moderate**

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
		ROBUSTNESS		

EVALUATION

INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

Landscape Character Sensitivities

- A largely rural, quiet and remote character throughout Weston Park, which would be vulnerable to the addition of further built or urbanizing features
- Weston Park is a well wooded character area, with predominantly ancient deciduous woodland. Removal or poor management of these would be detrimental to the character of the area
- Weston Park consists of organic, interlocking fields patterns. The removal of or impact on this pattern would be detrimental to the character area
- The narrow lanes crossing the plateau are generally open, however there are some existing hedge banks. The character area would be vulnerable to improvements or upgrading of the roads and the removal of any existing hedgerows
- The traditional character of Weston village would be vulnerable to inappropriate or unsympathetic development and any development not in scale with the village
- The parkland associated with Weston Park to the south of Weston Village is characterised by large parkland field oaks, metal estate hurdles and large grazing fields. However some parkland fields have been converted into arable fields. The parkland could be at risk from future loss of pasture, development pressure and inconsistent management
- Part of Chesfield Park also falls into the character area to the south west. The parkland could be at risk from development pressure and inconsistent management
- Electricity pylons stride through the south of the character area and are an existing detractor to the character of the area
- The north of Stevenage abuts the Weston Park to the south. It is an intrusive factor, which is a detractor to the character area. Weston Park would be vulnerable to the expansion of Stevenage and any development would require appropriate

mitigation methods, primarily through woodland screening

- Relatively good public access through numerous rights of way, including the Hertfordshire Way

Overall Weston Park is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. The gently sloping plateau, parkland landscape and woodland patches create an enclosed, quiet character area. However the northern edge of Stevenage and the electricity pylons are detractors to Weston Park in that part of the character area.

Visual Sensitivities

- Relatively flat plateau creates open views punctuated or framed by woodland
- The small woodlands, shelterbelts and hedge banks break up the views across the landscape and create a sense of enclosure in and around the settlements
- The parkland characteristics are visually sensitive

In visual terms, Weston Park is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. Views within the character area across the parkland landscape would be sensitive to the introduction of built or urbanizing features.

LANDSCAPE VALUE

Overall Weston Park is considered to be of **moderate landscape value**. Aspects of particular value within Weston Park are the relative intactness of the parkland landscape, the condition and extent of the woodland blocks and other landscape elements that create a sense of place, the relatively few rural lanes and perceived distance from significant habitation except the northern edge of Stevenage. Part of the area forms the 'Howard's End' cultural landscape associated with the writing of E. M. Forster.

EVALUATION

CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT

Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural and undeveloped character. It would be of an inappropriate scale and would introduce elements that would urbanise the landscape, altering the character and removing the existing key characteristics. Visual impacts would also be high where open views are currently experienced. Development would be likely to affect the existing narrow lanes, which could erode the character of the landscape.

The landscape capacity for large urban extensions or new settlements is considered to be low.

Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)

This scale of development could introduce elements that would urbanise the landscape, altering the character and removing the existing key characteristics. Visual impacts could also be high where open views are currently experienced. Some small scale development could be accommodated on the edge of Stevenage, extending recent development at Great Ashby, provided containment is provided by appropriately located woodland belts.

The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered to be moderate to low.

Major transport developments/improvements

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to the largely rural character the transport routes at present. Upgrading of existing narrow lanes could erode the character of the landscape. Additional traffic would also affect the peace and tranquillity of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for major transport developments/improvements is considered to be low.

Commercial/warehouse estates

This type of large scale development would not be appropriate in this character area. There are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. Existing minor roads would be inappropriate for any significant larger volumes of traffic and/or HGVs. Any 'improvements' to the existing network would cause damage to the landscape character.

The landscape capacity for commercial/warehouse estates is considered to be low.

Individual large/bulky buildings

There may be some very limited capacity for sympathetically located and designed individual large buildings, particularly if they were of an agricultural character and in keeping with the rural character. However, large buildings could be highly visible within the Character Area if not carefully located and would erode the rural and intimate character of Weston Park. Any large buildings should be balanced by woodland blocks, shelterbelts and hedgerows to reflect the existing character of the area.

The landscape capacity for individual large/bulky buildings is considered to be low to moderate.

Large scale open storage

Weston Park would not accommodate large scale 'open' uses without significant impact. This would not be in keeping with the rural character of the area and likely to be very open to view and introduce new elements that would conflict with the existing characteristics. Upgrading local roads would further dilute the landscape character.

The landscape capacity for large scale 'open' uses is considered to be low.

EVALUATION

Mineral extraction/waste disposal

This Character Area is currently relatively undisturbed and rural in appearance. Whilst some small scale mineral extraction could be accommodated with careful design and mitigation measures, larger scale extraction or waste disposal would not be in keeping with the character of Weston Park, particularly if there was an impact on the pattern of woodlands. The minor roads may need upgrading to be able to accept larger HGVs, which could further dilute the landscape character. Restoration proposals for any consented schemes should be mainly at grade and include for additional planting in character with existing patterns.

The landscape capacity for mineral extraction is considered to be low to moderate. Waste disposal would be a problem in all character areas due to the presence of aquifers.

Incremental small scale development

There may be some limited capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were of an agricultural or vernacular design and in keeping with the rural character. This could include carefully planned sites at Weston. However any proposals would need clear justification to avoid the potential erosion of the rural character of Weston Park.

The landscape capacity for incremental small scale developments is considered to be low to moderate.

Utilities developments e.g. masts, pylons, wind turbines

There are existing urbanising elements within this Character Area at present. The electricity pylons are currently detractors in the area. New utilities developments would have an impact on the rural character of Weston Park. Large scale structures would be locally highly visible within the Character Area, as well as potentially visible from surrounding Character Areas.

The landscape capacity for utilities developments is considered to be low to moderate.

GUIDELINES

STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE

Strategy: Improve and Conserve

Landscape management guidelines

- Promote the restoration of ancient woodland and other woodland planting and where historically appropriate, link up small remnants of ancient woodland
- Bring areas of ancient woodland back into active management particularly using techniques such as coppicing
- Encourage appropriate tree planting using local native species to help maintain the traditional wooded appearance and character of the clay plateau
- Restore important characteristic field boundary patterns such as pre-enclosure and parish boundaries
- Promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and areas of semi-natural habitat and the creation of links between habitat areas
- Promote hedgerow restoration along the lines of historic field boundaries and for the creation of visual links between existing woodland areas
- Restore gappy hedges, reinstate lost ones or create new features using indigenous mixes and increased number of hedgerow trees
- Promote the use of traditional field hedges in place of post and wire enclosures to new grazing areas
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Manage areas of new paddocks and promote appropriate enclosures with hedges rather than wire fences
- Maintain and extend the rights of way network

Built development guidelines

- Conserve the traditional character of Weston, ensuring that any development located on the edge of the village uses appropriate layout, mass, vernacular materials and features to avoid inappropriate visual intrusion
- Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow lanes and associated hedge banks
- Encourage the planting of appropriate broadleaved woodland and vegetation to screen new development that could intrude in panoramic and framed rural views
- Retain the rural character of Weston Park and Chesfield Park, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the parkland setting
- Planting should reflect existing patterns, with hedges following field and road boundaries and strategic copses to mitigate buildings
- Avoid the location of new development in visual intrusive locations
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or the loss of ancient hedgerows
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area
- Use the opportunity of any new developments to create new accessible green infrastructure