

County map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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Hertfordshire
County Council
LA076678



LOCATION

This area is located between Bushey, west Watford and the M1.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

A swathe of land strongly influenced by the surrounding urban settlements, with minimal natural or historic features retained. Land use is dominated by schools, playing fields, recreational and typical urban-fringe uses, including a golf course and cemetery. The M1 and A41 lie to the east with a mix of hotels, kennels and poorly-managed land uses.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- large number and range of schools with large grounds and tree belts
- recreational facilities, both public and private
- residential development backing onto and fronting area
- arterial roads running into Watford with mature street trees
- Bushey Hall golf course with parkland trees and woodlands
- two parallel major roads with adjacent derelict and commercial uses
- defensive character to many land uses, with fencing common

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Jewish cemetery
- Lincolnsfield Centre with range of commercial and recreational uses in former parkland
- Fishers Field Nature Reserve
- Former Royal Masonic School buildings

Disused school playing field • (J. Billingsley)



PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. The geology of this area is Tertiary clay, overlaid by the Windsor series of slowly permeable and seasonally waterlogged soils with some brown subsoils.

Topography. A gently undulating area of ground, generally falling slowly from the south-east to the north-west into the Colne Valley.

Degree of slope. Typically modest, between 1 in 30 and 1 in 80. Locally up to 1 in 10, e.g. Scotts Wood within Bushey Hall.

Altitude range. 60m to 80m.

Hydrology. There are few watercourses of note, in part due to the urbanized character of the land.

Land cover and land use. The dominant land cover is recreational grassland for golf courses and playing fields. A number of the playing fields, e.g. Park Avenue, are currently disused. There are private sports facilities, including Bushey Hall golf club, David Lloyd racket club and the Metropolitan Police sports fields. The area would seem vulnerable to further development pressure, particularly from recreation. The Bushey Leisure Centre is under construction on the B464 and within the Lincolnsfield Centre there is a range of more low-key occupiers, including 'Animal World', 'Animal Encounter' and 'Activity World'. The Jewish cemetery occupies an extensive and densely utilised site by the A41. The major roads and associated infrastructure, including hotels, are a major feature to the east. Much of the land in this sector is derelict, vacant or marginal agricultural land.

Vegetation and wildlife. The dominant vegetation of this area is close-mown grassland for recreation. There are smaller areas of rough grassland and scrub, e.g. Fishers Field Nature Reserve, and on areas of vacant land near the main roads. The limited woodland cover is mainly associated with Bushey Hall golf course, where oak is the principal species. There are significant numbers of perimeter tree belts to the edges of school playing fields, within the golf course, along old lanes or as younger planting along the M1. Species are mixed and include oak, beech and hornbeam with some evergreens and ornamentals, which add to the urban character. Avenue planting of lime, chestnut and maple in the verges is a prominent feature, together with remnant parkland trees around Lincolnsfield. Few native original hedges remain. These are often poorly managed and comprise dying elm and hawthorn. Ornamental clipped hedges are common fronting playing fields and the cemetery.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

A large part of the central area, including most of the schools and Bushey Hall, was informal parkland in 1820. The ornamental specimens and some of the woods survive from this period.

Field pattern. The historic field pattern has largely been removed, with most of the small remnant fields to the east being of 20th-century enclosure.

Transport pattern. The area is strongly influenced by local and major roads. The B462 runs from the A41 into Watford and is urban in character, with many of the schools and recreational facilities accessed off the road. The straight A41 and the M1 run to the east. The combination of the two major roads and the associated development mark the limit of greater Watford.

Settlements and built form. Although defined as outside the built-up area, there are a number of institutional buildings of significant size and visual importance. The most striking is the brick-built former Royal Masonic School (1902) on The Avenue, with its prominent Gothic-style tower. Other schools include Bushey Hall School (1926-29) and the Purcell School. There are a number of modern state schools and recreational establishments of limited visual merit. At Lincolnsfield there is a motley collection of buildings that are probably of WWII vintage. On the perimeter of the area, particularly on Park Road and The Avenue, there are a number of distinctive early 20th-century large detached houses overlooking the former playing fields. Other residential areas are less distinguished, but are also often softened by perimeter vegetation.

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

This area is only locally visible from outside due to the encircling residential areas and combination of small woods and perimeter belts. The woods at Bushey Hall are relatively prominent from the Colne valley to the west. Within each of the playing fields and particularly within the golf course there is a contained sense of enclosure. Defensive fencing, buildings and vegetation all combine to limit and frame views within the area. The scale of the area is generally small to medium but appears larger in the urban context from some of the more open sterile playing fields. The 'schools' landscape is fairly coherent, while towards the A41 and M1 there is a more disjointed and incoherent feel. Much of the area feels private and protected, which in combination with a fairly noisy environment seems relatively hostile.

Rarity and distinctiveness. The large number of schools is unusual. The Edwardian schools and houses are the most distinctive features.

VISUAL IMPACT

There is a widespread influence from built development. This is particularly from a number of the late 20th-century recreational and school buildings. The A41 and M1 are only locally visible, being screened by vegetation and earthworks. However many of the associated land uses, including a caravan park and semi-derelict farms, create a locally low-quality environment. The extensive areas of built development on the margins are locally apparent and of moderate impact, with generally the better examples being visible. A major series of pylons are visually harmful to the north of the area. The Jewish cemetery is well maintained

yet the high density of white gravestones stands out from a few viewpoints.

ACCESSIBILITY

A feature of the area is the small number of public rights of way and publicly accessible land, despite the extent of open land and the proximity to residential areas. This has led to trespassing in a number of cases. One area of locally accessible land is at Fishers Field, however this is poorly signed. There is one footpath to the west of the golf course and a further one through the police playing fields and cemetery.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

There is little current evidence that this area is valued as distinctive (E).

Re. View from Bushey Heath to St.Albans: *'all the spaces between and further beyond, it looked indeed like a garden ... a grand parterre, the thick planted hedgerows like a wilderness or labyrinth, divided in espaliers'* (Daniel Defoe, 1724).

CONDITION	
Land cover change:	widespread
Age structure of tree cover:	mature or young
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	relic
Management of semi-natural habitat:	poor
Survival of cultural pattern:	declining
Impact of built development:	high
Impact of land-use change:	high

ROBUSTNESS	
Impact of landform:	apparent
Impact of land cover:	prominent
Impact of historic pattern:	relic
Visibility from outside:	locally visible
Sense of enclosure:	contained
Visual unity:	coherent
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: IMPROVE AND RESTORE**

- strengthen and develop the woodland planting within school/recreational grounds, remaining areas of agriculture and along the M1/A41 corridor. Planting should reduce the visual impact of settlements, including the north-east of Bushey
- promote the appropriate management of existing woodlands in order to establish a rich ground flora and the distinction between different woodland management systems
- encourage the reversal of habitat fragmentation and the creation and improvement of habitat links to create eco-corridors
- ensure new planting is encouraged within grounds of schools and other institutions to maintain age diversity. Ensure landscape improvements respect the historic context of existing features and the form and character of grounds and gardens. However, in the urban context there is scope for improvements to be more innovative in design and choice of species
- improve the management of old meadows and pastures to the north east of the area by ceasing fertiliser and herbicide application and by introducing sensitive grassland management such as late hay cutting or low-density livestock grazing. Promote the use of low-density stock grazing as a management technique
- promote hedgerow restoration and creation in the north east of the area to provide visual and ecological links between existing and proposed woodland areas. Pattern to follow historic field boundaries where possible
- promote the restoration of hedge improvement and planting adjacent to rights of way, green lanes and along parish boundaries
- encourage the creation of new orchards and the use of traditional varieties of fruit with minimal use of herbicides and pesticides
- discourage overgrazing and promote the use of traditional hedged field enclosure in place of fencing, where land is converted to pasture.
- encourage the development of landscape management plans for all playing fields and recreational facilities, with a view to enhancing the ecological value of grasslands, woodlands and scrub habitats
- ensure that ancient lanes and their associated hedgerows are retained, protected and enhanced
- within 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
- ensure all existing and proposed recreational land uses include appropriate measures to manage and enhance the existing landscape setting and historical and ecological value. Particular attention should be given to ensure earthwork proposals complement the natural landform patterns
- seek to increase opportunities for enhanced public access and use of redundant playing fields
- promote a clear strategy for the visual and noise mitigation of the M1 and A41 and to positively integrate these corridors into the local landscape



• Jewish Cemetery
(J. Billingsley)