

PUBLISHED LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENTS

1. This appendix presents a summary of the relevant published assessments relating to the site and surrounding area. These wider character assessments are then used to provide the context for the local scale landscape assessment for the application site, which is based on additional desk-based analysis and fieldwork.

National Character Areas

2. The application site lies within National Character Area NCA 111 – Northern Thames Basin, “a diverse area which extends from Hertfordshire in the west to the Essex coast in the east.” It has the following key characteristics:
 - *The landform is varied with a wide plateau divided by river valleys. The prominent hills and ridges of the ‘Bagshot Hills’ are notable to the northwest and extensive tracts of flat land are found in the south.*
 - *Characteristic of the area is a layer of thick clay producing heavy, acidic soils, resulting in retention of considerable areas of ancient woodland.*
 - *Areas capped by glacial sands and gravels have resulted in nutrient-poor, free-draining soils which support remnant lowland heathlands, although these are now small. Areas that have alluvial deposits present are well drained and fertile.*
 - *The water bearing underlying Chalk beds are a main source of recharge for the principal London Basin Chalk aquifer.*
 - *A diverse landscape with a series of broad valleys containing the major rivers Ver, Colne and Lea, and slightly steeper valleys of the rivers Stour, Colne and Roman. Numerous springs rise at the base of the Bagshot Beds and several reservoirs are dotted throughout the area*
 - *The pattern of woodlands is varied across the area and includes considerable ancient semi-natural woodland. Hertfordshire is heavily wooded in some areas as are parts of Essex, while other areas within Essex are more open in character. Significant areas of wood pasture and pollarded veteran trees are also present.*
 - *The field pattern is very varied across the basin reflecting historical activity. Informal patterns of 18th-century or earlier enclosure reflect medieval colonisation of the heaths. Regular planned enclosures dating from the Romano-British period are a subtle but nationally important feature on the flat land to the south-east of the area. In the Essex heathlands 18th- and 19th-century enclosure of heathlands and commons followed by extensive 20th-century field enlargement is dominant.*
 - *Mixed farming, with arable land predominating in the Hertfordshire plateaux, parts of the London Clay lowlands and Essex heathlands. Grasslands are characteristic of the river valleys throughout. Horticulture and market gardening are found on the light, sandy soils of former heaths in Essex, particularly around Colchester, along with orchards, meadow pasture and leys following numerous narrow rivers and streams.*
 - *The diverse range of semi-natural habitats include ancient woodland, lowland heath and floodplain grazing marsh and provide important*

habitats for a wide range of species including great crested newt, water vole, dormouse and otter.

- *Rich archaeology including sites related to Roman occupation, with the Roman capital at Colchester and City of St Albans (Verulamium) and links to London. Landscape parklands surrounding 16th- and 17th-century rural estates and country houses built for London merchants are a particular feature in Hertfordshire.*
- *The medieval pattern of small villages and dispersed farming settlement remains central to the character of parts of Hertfordshire and Essex. Market towns have expanded over time as have the London suburbs and commuter settlements, with the creation of new settlements such as the pioneering garden city at Welwyn and the planned town at Basildon.*
- *Brick-built dwellings are characteristic from the late 17th century onwards. Prior to this dwellings and farm buildings tended to be timber built with weatherboarding, now mainly painted white but traditionally black or tarred, and whitewashed plaster walls*

Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment (Hertfordshire Landscape Strategy)

3. The Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment (Hertfordshire Landscape Strategy) was published by Welwyn Hatfield Council and Hertfordshire Council (prepared by The Landscape Partnership Ltd) in April 2005). This document is more recent than the Hertfordshire Landscape Strategy volumes 1 & 2, 1997 and 2001 and Landscape Character Assessment, evaluation and guidelines for Southern Hertfordshire. Supplementary report on the suitability of landscape character areas for mineral extraction by the Landscape Partnership, October 2001 and has therefore been used for this study.
4. It describes the application site as located within “Area 31 De Havilland Plain”, which extends from Cromerhyde in the north, southwards across Hatfield Aerodrome and up to the ground of Oaklands College on the edge of St Albans. The key characteristics described in the document are as follows:
 - *An extensive level plain;*
 - *Large open arable landscape to the north on high quality agricultural land*
 - *Disused Hatfield aerodrome with associated industrial and commercial development and aeronautical structures*
 - *Parkland and horticultural landscape of Oaklands College*
 - *Existing and restored mineral workings*
 - *Urban-fringe development and glasshouses*
 - *Incoherent and jumbled landscape, particularly to the south and centre*
5. Distinctive features of Area 31 De Havilland Plain include “Oaklands College house, restored arable fields and mineral extraction plant.”

Landscape Attributes of the Existing Site and Immediate Surroundings

6. The landscape attributes of the application site and the immediate surroundings have been examined below. A detailed site description is provided in Chapter 2 of the ES.

Natural Characteristics

7. The existing topography within the application site falls very gently from northwest to southeast as illustrated on Drawing HF 2/3 and described below:
- ground elevations are at their lowest between 74m AOD and 76m AOD adjacent to the A1057 at the southern edge of the application site;
 - levels rise to between 77mAOD and 78mAOD in the northwest and northeast corners of the application site; and
 - ground elevations are approximately 75mAOD to 76mAOD adjacent to the southwest side of Home Covert.
8. The broader area is also typically flat to gently sloping; “Area 31 De Havilland Plain”, describes how it *“represents a subtle watershed between the Colne and the Lea. Levels vary by as little as 2-3m over 6km. The land rises locally to the west and south”*. The altitude range is described as *“Typically around the 80m contour but falling to 70m at Ellenbrook and rising to 100m within the undulating grounds of Oakland College on the edge of St Albans.”*
9. The Ellen Brook runs in a north to south direction approximately 300m east of the proposed mineral extraction area. The River Nast currently runs in a culvert across the application site.
10. The application site comprises a broadly rectangular area of unoccupied land that is partly used as an informal public open space and partly for grazing. There are some remnant hedgerows that cross the site although the current field pattern is less defined than shown on more historic maps (such as 1888). There is also naturally regenerating scrub over much of the site, with a number of small ponds.
11. A number of earth bunds and banks are present on site from the earlier aerodrome. There is also a concrete roadway that extends from east to west into the centre of the application site from Albatross Way and a number of other tracks also cross the application site.
12. The application site is bounded by the A1057 (Hatfield Road) to the south, the boundary of which is characterised by a mature hedgerow. To the north lies CEMEX’s Hatfield Quarry, and more specifically a set of silt lagoons. “Area 31 De Havilland Plain”, describes how it *“Mineral extraction has lead to the creation of a number of larger waterbodies, some with wildlife interest.”*
13. To the west the boundary is predominantly formed by a mature hedgerow, particularly in the vicinity of the garden centre and nursery, with the northern section being more open in aspect. At the north eastern corner is Home

Covert, a small area of broadleaf woodland. The eastern boundary cuts across the former aerodrome to join up with the University sports pitches located at the south eastern corner of the application site.

14. There are other blocks of woodland to the north including Cut Field Wood and Ball's Covert and areas of ancient woodland within 5km of the application site: Symondshyde Great Wood; Home Wood; Oak Wood; Hazel Grove; and Hooks Wood and also a Local Nature Reserve at Colney Heath.
15. "Area 31 De Havilland Plain", describes how there is very limited woodland cover, few hedgerows (except to some of the roads) and few isolated trees. The vast majority of the land has been disturbed over the last century. Some of the former mineral workings support a mix of flooded gravel pits, scrub and marshland habitats.
16. The application site is located within the Watling Chase Community Forest, one of 12 Community Forests in England. The WCCF covers an area of 18,840 ha² (72 square miles) in south Hertfordshire and north London. The aims of the Watling Chase Community Forest, as set out in the Watling Chase Community Forest Plan 1995 and the 2001 review, are to achieve major environmental improvements around towns and cities through the creation of a mosaic of wooded landscapes, leisure enterprises, areas for nature and public open spaces and for much of the area to be under positive and appropriate management by 2025. This will include a substantial increase in trees and woodland, achieved through management of existing woodlands and new planting.

Cultural and Social Aspects

17. The application site is located on the north-western edge of Hatfield and to the east of St Albans on informal recreational land known locally as "Ellenbrook Fields" associated with the former Hatfield Aerodrome (western part).
18. In the document produced by Goodmans, titled "Welcome to Ellenbrook Fields" it describes *"A series of linking permissive footpaths, suitable for walkers and cyclists have been created through the areas of open grassland and cattle grazing"* and includes a plan of the area and additional historical information; *"The aerodrome was closed in 1993 and the land and industrial buildings lay abandoned...Goodman began the process of clearing and making safe the land for use by the public and its management as a natural resource in 2009."*
19. The old taxiway remains in areas and new footpaths formed. Natural regeneration has been left as wildlife habitat and parts of the site are grazed, with other parts cut as hay crop.
20. The application site lies within an area bounded by the A1057 (Hatfield Road/St Albans Road) to the south, Oaklands Lane to the west, Coopers Green Lane to the north and the western fringe of Hatfield to the east.
21. To the south of the application site the area is interspersed with small settlements, areas of woodland and the highway network; clusters of housing

can be found fronting the highway network, often being developing around road junctions. An area of industrial development lies to the south of the A1057, west of Station Road (in the vicinity of Smallford). To the southwest of the application site are a garden centre, a public house, a petrol station, some large glass houses (nurseries) and a small residential area.

22. Immediately to the north are a series of lagoons associated with an existing mineral working (Hatfield Quarry, operated by CEMEX); the processing plant lies to the northwest of the application site, having its access off Oaklands Lane and a conveyor transports mineral from the working area located further north. Analysis of relatively recent aerial photography has identified that much of the mineral extraction areas have been replaced by restored areas over the past 10 years.
23. To the east of the application site is the urban area of Hatfield, with an industrial/distribution estate, residential development and the University of Hertfordshire campus. The remainder of the former aerodrome, surface water drainage infrastructure (an open drain and series of lagoons, known as Ellenbrook Linear Park) and some sports pitches and associated pavilion. Lie between the application site and Hatfield.
24. The nearest property to the application site is Popefield Farm, which fronts the northern side of the A1057. Further to the south is Wilkinsgreen Farm, beyond which is a small cluster of properties.
25. To the southwest are a number of properties on the south side of Hatfield Road and east of Station Road, with a further small row of properties located off Oaklands Lane to the west of the application site.
26. A small residential area lies to the southeast of the application site centred on Poplars Close, Poplar Avenue and Bramble Road (known as Ellenbrook). Other residential properties front the northern side of Wilkins Green Lane to the south of this area. A larger residential area can be found on the western edge of Hatfield, with the nearest properties being on Nimrod Drive, Flamingo Close and Walker Grove (all off Cunningham Avenue).
27. There are several listed buildings in the vicinity of the Site, with the closest (being a cluster of three) located at Popefield Farm on the southern boundary. Two more are located close to the southwestern corner of the application site including the Milepost approximately 70 metres east north east of the Three Horseshoes public house and Three Horseshoes Public House. Seven more listed buildings are located along Wilkins Green Lane.
28. In addition to the permissive access described above, a public right of way crosses the western part of the application site. There are other rights of way in the surrounding area and the Alban Way and Watling Chase Trails c0.5km to the south.

Aesthetic and Perceptual Aspects

29. The aesthetic qualities of the application site and local area are summarised in Table 1, being divided into the main categories identified within recognised guidance¹.
30. In summary the following application site is large scale and open, generally simple, textured and flat. The muted colours of the grassland dominate, but are broken by the former aerodrome trackways and new footpaths, which are white/grey in colour and this mixture of remnant gappy hedgerows, scattered scrub and more modern straight hardstanding is unbalanced.
31. This is similar to the published description of “Area 31 De Havilland Plain” as a whole, which is an extensive plain, with a diverse mixture of uses (including open arable, few woodlands, sparse settlement), with an incoherent pattern.

¹ Landscape Character Assessment – Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2002) – Paragraph 5.12

Table 1
Aesthetic Attributes of Application Site and Study Area

Generic Aesthetic Attributes Scale	Description of Attributes for Site and Study Area
Scale	The application site is medium to large scale, being part of a former aerodrome. As described in "Area 31 De Havilland Plain", the surrounding areas are typically characterised by an extensive level plain and large open arable landscape, especially to the north, with a mixture elsewhere including areas of sand and gravel extraction, pasture and parkland. There is a dispersed estate settlement pattern with a number of isolated farmsteads, although to the east the area is defined by the western edge of Hatfield including the large aircraft hangars.
Enclosure	The grassland cover of the application site results in a generally open character, with localised enclosure provided by remnant hedgerows and scattered scrub, especially associated with vegetation around its perimeters. As described in "Area 31 De Havilland Plain", the surrounding areas include arable cropping with open views in the north and generally very limited woodland cover (although Home Covert is immediately adjacent to the site). The presence of built development such as Hertfordshire University, Ellenbrook, Hatfield Business Park and new development at Smallford result in an urban fringe character to the application site.
Diversity	The application site is generally quite simple and "Area 31 De Havilland Plain" as a whole is described as being " <i>..as empty as it is flat</i> ". However it does have a diverse mix of uses, such as sand and gravel extraction (introduce areas of diversity, with a mix of restored habitats) amongst the farmland, crossed by a modest number of sinuous secondary roads and dispersed settlement pattern, albeit between built up areas of Hatfield and St Albans.
Texture	The mainly grassland cover of the application site is textured, with some roughness provided by vegetation or hardstanding. The arable farmland in the surrounding area will be smooth, but with textural woodland blocks, hedgerow vegetation and waterbodies associated with restored mineral workings.
Form and Line	The application is mainly flat with straight road/trackways and remnant hedgerows. As described in "Area 31 De Havilland Plain", the surrounding area is also flat, with few hedgerows, but with sinuous secondary roads. The limited woodland cover is nevertheless typically in blocks with a regular form and line. Waterbodies associated with restored mineral workings are more irregular. Mineral extraction plant and the Hatfield Business Park is rectangular buildings and serviced by improved roads. The conveyor at Hatfield Quarry to the north is long and straight.
Colour	The application site has muted colours of the grassland, but broken by the former aerodrome trackways or new footpaths, which are white/grey in colour. Traffic on the road network and the built up areas and mineral extraction plant provides more colourful elements in this landscape.
Balance	The application site unbalanced, being a mixture of remnant gappy hedgerows and more modern trackways of the former aerodrome (partly removed). Although unified by the level topography "Area 31 De Havilland Plain" is considered to be an " <i>incoherent and jumbled landscape, particularly to the south and centre.</i> "
Movement	The disused former aerodrome is generally still, albeit with movement from visitors to the Ellenbrook Fields greenspace, grazing cattle or occasional machinery carrying out maintenance. The surrounding landscape varies from dispersed settlements with poor access and quiet, but with busier urban-edge settlement to the east. The nearby road network of the A1057

Generic Aesthetic Attributes	Description of Attributes for Site and Study Area
Pattern	<p>to the south is busy with regular vehicle movements, as are the mineral extraction areas, during working hours.</p> <p>The application site does not have a recognisable pattern, being a mixture of remnant hedgerows, scattered / naturally regenerating scrub and more regular trackways of the former aerodrome (again partly removed) and footpaths. The “Area 31 De Havilland Plain” is considered to have an “<i>incoherent pattern.</i>”</p>

Classification of the Existing Site and Immediate Surroundings

32. The analysis of existing landscape attributes has concluded that the study area is generally consistent with the published key characteristics for “Area 31 De Havilland Plain” as described in The Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment (*op cit*).
33. At a local level, the application site can be classified as “medium to large-scale greenspace plain/former aerodrome”.