

County map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA



LOCATION

Potters Bar Parkland borders the northern side of Potters Bar and encloses the distinctively shaped linear settlement of Brookmans Park that stretches between the railway in the west and the Great North Road in the east. The area includes the relic parkland of the Brookmans and Gobions Estates. Part of the Royal Veterinary College accommodates Bolton's Park farm and uses the surrounding facilities and pasture for the treatment of dairy cattle. The area includes the small settlements of Bell Bar and Swanley Bar that lie close to the Great North Road in the east.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

A strong historical and cultural pattern is evident in the landscape and parkland features are common throughout, although the landscape has evolved to accommodate modern urban fringe uses, such as recreation. This is a fragmented landscape, with a strong urban influence. The area has a more rural character further north, along Bulls Lane, where it is relatively open with good access and long views. There are relic parkland features at Gobions Park within the public open space and nature reserve, while the more informal estate farmland with parkland trees is used for dairy farming associated with the veterinary college. The Brookmans Park golf course contains historic parkland trees. Fenced and walled estate boundaries can still be found and the ornamental garden planting can still be seen in the linear wood called The Legg, west of Bell Bar.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- relic estate planting and landscape features
- relic estate architecture
- extensive areas of recreation
- urban edge influences
- ridgelines and valleys
- open views
- mixed farming

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- evidence of estate boundaries
- Gobions Folly arch
- Repton landscape at Brookman's Park
- historic settlement at Bell Bar
- swallowholes

Brookmans Park golf club, •
Repton planting (E. Staveley)



PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. The area is a part of the gently undulating South Hertfordshire plateau, a sub-section of the North Thames basin. While the narrow uplands are calcareous clay-with-flints, the localised ridges and shallow valleys are typical of glacial drift, overlying a layer of chalk that gives rise to the swallowhole formations in Deep Bottom and Gobions Woods. The soils are generally base-poor overlain with fine loamy soils and some calcareous clays (Windsor series).

Topography. Minor ridgelines cross the area in an east-west direction, forming a series of parallel dips and slopes that create contained spaces.

Degree of slope. 1 in 15 to 1 in 30

Altitude range. The historic mansions of Gobions, Brookmans and Bolton were all located at the high points, between 110m and 125m. The land drops to 85m in the dips between.

Hydrology. Intermittent small ponds are scattered through the area. Much of the land is drained by field ditches and there is remnant wetland vegetation along the stream courses. A number of large, ornamental ponds are present in the area, relics of the 18th-century pleasure grounds.

Land cover and land use. Parkland is the dominant land cover around the north of Potters Bar and has provided the framework for a variety of recreational pursuits.

Intermittent mixed woodlands provide a mature setting for settlement and recreation. Two extensive golf courses make use of the historic landscape structure. Other land uses include the public open space of Gobions Park, low intensity farming around White Lodge Farm and dairy farming comprising fenced pasture around the dairy farm at the Royal Veterinary College.

Vegetation and wildlife. Elm is a common hedgerow species, with ash, hawthorn, bramble, blackthorn and dog rose locally significant. Field oak trees are also common in the area and the parkland trees at Brookmans Park continue to be an important landscape feature. Oak, Corsican pine and field maple trees are apparent in the discrete woodlands. Gobions Wood is species-rich along the stream course and contains relic 17th-century gardens. Mature vegetation borders the watercourses and osier beds can be found around the water at Gobions open space. Neutral to acid grassland is also a local feature, with saw-wort a characteristic plant.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL INFLUENCE

The influence of London on the history and culture of the area is significant. Land boundaries have been marked by estate architecture (lodges, walls and fences), distinctive vegetation types (species and pattern) and noticeable changes in land cover. The Gobions and Brookmans Park mansions have both disappeared; although elements of their parkland landscapes are still clearly evident. Repton worked on the grounds of Brookmans Park, part of which survives as a golf course. Gobions Park was built in the 16th century for the family of Sir Thomas More. In 1740 it was enlarged for Sir Jeremy Sambroke and a guidebook to England published in 1762 noted that the place had been made '*one of the most remarkable curiosities in England*'. The parkland included features such as a grotto, temple, canal, statues and bowling green. Once the most visited park in the area, the grounds are now an important public open space and wildlife reserve although the house has been demolished. It is now marked only by a red-brick 'Folly Arch', a very early example of a medieval revival and the last remnant of the 16th-century estate.

Field pattern. Irregular field shapes are predominantly enclosed by fences, particularly on the land used for dairy cattle around the veterinary college and paddocks along Bulls Lane. Field sizes are generally small to medium in size. A cluster of small fields to the north of Bulls Lane is associated with the smallholdings and nurseries. Hedgerows without trees and tree lines also define field pattern.

Transport pattern. The railway line that generally defines the western boundary of the area is lined by vegetation that has established along the slopes of the cutting. The sinuous route of the A1000, also known as the Great North Road, marks the eastern boundary and settlement from Brookmans Park has spread along its length. Hawkshead Lane runs along the ridge from Bolton's Park. Bulls Lane in the north of the area is a winding, partially sunken lane with mature hedgerow verges arching over it.

Settlements and built form. Historically the country houses were built on the elevated ground with a southern aspect. The modern settlement of Brookmans Park spreads down the slope and stops at the railway line. The small settlements of Swanley Bar and Bell Bar originated from the tollhouses along the Great North Road and have retained their pre-20th century character. Many of the houses in these settlements date back to the Tudor and Georgian periods and are of locally traditional construction, such as half-timber and red brick.

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

Topography and vegetation limit visibility in the shallow valleys, while long-distance views are good from the higher land. Discrete woodland belts along the dips divide the landscape, separating Brookmans Park Village from the settlements to the north and south. The sound of the trains and road traffic either side of the area increase the impact of these transport corridors on the character area.

Rarity and distinctiveness. This area is rather typical of the impact of development on the former parkland areas of the county. Distinctive elements of the former parklands are discrete elements within the predominantly 20th-century landscape.

VISUAL IMPACT

Potters Bar presents a major impact on the south of the area. Brookmans Park has a localised, but significant impact on the historic parkland to the north and south of it. The transmitting stations to the east can be seen throughout the area. The parkland features of Brookman's park have a very localised impact.

ACCESSIBILITY

Access is generally good but public access to the countryside for informal recreation is limited to Gobions open space and the public footpaths. Two extensive golf courses utilise the historic parkland setting that is exclusively used by their members.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

The distinctiveness of this area, and in particular the Gobions site, is highly valued (B).

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

Public Open Space.

CONDITION

Land cover change: **widespread**
Age structure of tree cover: **mature**
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival: **fragmented**
Management of semi-natural habitat: **not obvious**
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: **interrupted**
Visibility from outside: **variable**
Sense of enclosure: **partial**
Visual unity: **incoherent**
Distinctiveness/rarity: **unusual**

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|------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| 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

- in existing woodlands encourage the replacement of softwoods with indigenous native deciduous communities, hedgebank management and management to encourage the re-establishment of a species-rich ground flora
- improve public access arrangements to woodlands, with attention to car park design and safety
- use ancient hedge and field boundaries to select the most appropriate location for woodland expansion
- encourage the reversal of habitat fragmentation and the creation and improvement of habitat links to create eco-corridors
- replant hedges along former hedge lines, especially where they can replace fencing, as a means of building up eco-corridors
- when replanting woodlands use indigenous stock of local provenance wherever possible.
- ensure new planting is encouraged to maintain age diversity. Ensure landscape improvements respect the historic context of existing features and the form and character of parklands and gardens. Ornamental species should only be used to replace damaged or over-mature specimens, where appropriate
- encourage the establishment of buffer strips of semi-natural vegetation along all watercourses, to prevent pesticide, herbicide and fertiliser run-off and provide habitat for wildlife, avoiding potential conflict with recreational use and linking in to ecological corridors within the wider landscape where possible
- encourage landowners and developers to retain and increase ponds and wetland areas to enhance their visual and wildlife functions.
- improve the management of old meadows and pastures by ceasing fertiliser and herbicide application and introducing sensitive grassland management such as late hay cutting or low-density livestock grazing
- ensure that the surroundings of converted and new buildings are designed and maintained to be in keeping with their agricultural surroundings by ensuring that 'garden' details are screened from view where possible and native species are used for hedging and tree planting around the perimeter. Exotic/ornamental species should only be used in close proximity to the dwelling
- encourage effective management of planting along transport corridors to ensure thinning, selective felling and replanting is undertaken to achieve a varied age structure and a species mix that reflects local landscape character.
- provide public interpretation of the complex landscape history and evolution of the area and more informal public access



• Gobions Park folly arch (E. Staveley)