

County map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA



LOCATION

Discrete woodland on north-western edge of Cuffley

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Extensive broadleaf woodland managed for recreation and nature conservation.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- ancient woodland with plantations to north-west and east
- strong boundary to arable fields to north
- strongly undulating terrain
- tranquil
- east-facing slope with eastward flowing streams

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- gravel soils apparent underfoot
- swallowholes in northern part of woodland
- good signage and information boards



Northaw Great Wood • (HCC Landscape Unit)

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. London clay. Slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged clay soils over Tertiary clay (Windsor series)

Topography. Strongly undulating with slight eastwards slope, forming two valleys dissecting the London clay plateau.

Degree of slope. 1 in 36

Altitude range. 63m to 129m

Hydrology. Grimes Brook runs eastwards towards the river Lea, with another stream to the north, where there are swallowholes. These are caused by water percolating through gravel to reach the chalk beneath and arise from seasonal streams in the woodland.

Land cover and land use. This is an area of ancient woodland used as a country park, with occasional glades and a low-key infrastructure associated with extensive recreational opportunities. Part of the woodland was replanted in the early 19th century, cleared in 1930 and allowed to go to scrub - this is now the area of public open space. There are no field boundaries, but an extensive network of well-signed tracks through the woodland.

Vegetation and wildlife. All the habitats associated with Northaw Common are derived from wood pasture. Great Wood and Well Wood (see Area 53: Northaw Common Parkland) together comprise one of the county's most extensive area of ancient hornbeam-dominated woodland. Northaw Great Wood is a SSSI for its oak/hornbeam community, wood pasture, heathland and swallowholes. It is managed as coppice-with-standards with some pollards and contains at least three veteran trees. Other species include oak, silver birch, sweet chestnut, aspen, beech and ash, with rowan, hawthorn, holly and hazel. Hook Wood is also hornbeam pollard. Blackthorn occurs locally in dense thickets and there is a good varied ground flora, with abundant bluebells, heather and other heathy relic species. Some exotic species (conifers and rhododendron) occur on the southern edge, presumably relic parkland estate planting. Home Wood on the eastern edge is plantation dating from before 1880, while Broombarns Wood and Coldharbour Plantation date from before 1950.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

There is a strong historic pattern to this area, given the maintenance of the ancient woodland of Great Wood, albeit with a modern use as a country park. Historically it relates to Northaw Common, part of the belt of common or heathland which divided the hunting grounds of Hatfield Park and Theobalds. This is an area of natural mineral springs and wells - Cuffley became briefly a fashionable spa, but the waters are now only visible as bournes after flashfloods.

Field pattern. Not applicable

Transport pattern. The B157 fringes the wood on its southern edge while Carbone Hill divides Great Wood and Home Wood, without altering the overall character of the area.

Settlements and built form. The small linear settlement between Great Wood and Home Wood is not part of this area but relates rather to Cuffley. The only buildings are those associated with the country park, which are low-key in style and tend to be of timber construction where practicable.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

English Nature SSSI notification.

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

The woodland is visible from Newgate Street and from the linear settlement along the B157. Within the area views are very limited by thick woodland. The scale of the woodland is very large and it is very unified. Apart from an infrequent aircraft, there is no sound to disturb the woodland tranquillity and the birdsong.

Rarity and distinctiveness. Although less extensive than the Broxbourne Woods complex, this tract of woodland is one of the county's most extensive areas of ancient hornbeam-dominated woodland. Public access to large areas of woodland offers an unusually large scale of recreational opportunity to many people, in this case close to significant urban populations.

VISUAL IMPACT

There is a slight impact from the country park building and associated car parks, but this is low-key and designed to be in keeping, therefore insignificant.

ACCESSIBILITY

Noted recreational land uses: rambling, walking, picnicking
There is a widespread network of footpaths throughout the woodland, clearly signed.

Condition: fair, wide; muddy in places, suggesting problems with combined pedestrian/equestrian use in wet weather.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

This is one of the most highly valued landscapes in the county for its distinctiveness (A).

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

SSSI: Northaw Great Wood.
Country Park.

CONDITION

Land cover change: **insignificant**
Age structure of tree cover: **mixed**
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: **low**

ROBUSTNESS

Impact of landform: **apparent**
Impact of land cover: **prominent**
Impact of historic pattern: **continuous**
Visibility from outside: **widely visible**
Sense of enclosure: **contained**
Visual unity: **unified**
Distinctiveness/rarity: **unusual**

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: SAFEGUARD AND MANAGE

- promote an understanding of the appropriate management of coppice woodland to create a rich ground flora and the distinction between different management systems, such as high forest, coppice, coppice-with-standards and wood pasture.
- promote the establishment of markets for woodland products, training to provide a skilled work force and adequate protection from damage
- support the establishment of deer management groups
- ancient hedge and field boundaries are often associated with ancient woodland. Where woodland restoration and expansion are considered appropriate, use them to assist in the most appropriate location for such initiatives
- promote through education and access the multiple uses of ancient woodland
- promote the expansion of woodland beyond ancient woodland boundaries, especially where this will help in creating habitat links
- promote the use of only native species of local provenance for all planting schemes
- support the Hertfordshire Woodland Strategy objectives
- encourage the dissemination of information about the historic importance and appropriate management of woodland features such as banks and ditches
- seek to resolve conflicts arising from competing uses and activities in woodland
- promote sympathetic management for dormouse (BAP species)
- give consideration to separate provision for pedestrians and equestrians, on alternative surfacing materials, to ensure that footpaths remain accessible throughout the year.



- Distinctive switchbacks by Northaw Great Wood (HCC Landscape Unit)