

Tendring District Landscape Character Assessment

Volume One: Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Guidelines



Prepared for Tendring District Council by
Land Use Consultants





**LAND USE
CONSULTANTS**

ENVIRONMENTAL
PLANNING, DESIGN AND
MANAGEMENT

**Tendring District Landscape
Character Assessment
Volume 1: Baseline Report and
Landscape Guidelines**

**Prepared for Tendring District
Council
by
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7 HEATHLAND PLATEAUX

Introduction

The *Heathland Plateaux* are the large scale, flat agricultural plateaux, generally above 25m AOD, covering a large part of the western half of the Tendring District. Their extent is defined by the glacial loams and gravels that create acid soils giving them a heathy character and identifying them as separate landscape type from the *Clay Plateaux* to the east of the district.

Physical Influences

During the Ice Age, some 450,000 years ago, the Anglian ice sheet did not reach as far south as Tendring. However, glacial outwash deposited glacial loams, gravels and sands across much of the west of the district. These sandy deposits, which are found over the greater part of the higher ground as far as Tendring, have an influence on the soils and vegetation, resulting in remnant heathland communities in this area. The 1777 Chapman and Andre map illustrates the former distribution of heaths across this area. In contrast the deeper, loamy soils have been intensively cultivated.

There is one designation relating to the physical landscape:

Site Name	Character Area	Significance	Designation	Description
Ardleigh Gravel Pit	7A	National	SSSI	Exposed deposits belonging to the early Thames gravels containing rare plant macrofossils and evidence of an Early Middle Pleistocene age.

Human Influences

The deep, stoneless, coarse loamy soils of the *Heathland Plateaux* have been intensively cultivated. Saxon estates were major landholdings with control of large tracts of land. The introduction of the medieval manorial system with large areas of common land being enclosed by the lords of the manors caused a major change in the landscape. The manorial parks, of which the heaths formed part, are now gone, but some of the woods and boundaries have survived. This period also saw the growing influence of religious orders with many parishes containing monastic landholdings, for example St Osyth's Priory and Wix Abbey, both established in the 12th century. During the 16th century brick became fashionable, fired using the fine London Clays of Tendring. This period saw a flourish of rebuilding including many churches and halls.

Enclosure of the open medieval fields and common lands by the Enclosure Acts of the late 18th century brought the ancient system of common cultivation to an end. The introduction of crop rotation and the improvement of farm implements increased productivity. The latter half of the 18th century was a time of high opportunity for millers and there was a rapid increase in windmills on the windswept plateau. By this stage brick was in general use although timber boarding was used on domestic buildings as a cheaper alternative. Greenhouses, orchards, copses and shelter belts are features of the productive

landscape today and remnant heaths are now only identifiable by hedgerow vegetation and place names.

The landscape type includes the following Scheduled Ancient Monuments:

Site Name/ SM Number	Character Area	Significance	Designation	Description
133	7A	National	SAM	Settlement site NNE of Lawford House
194	7A	National	SAM	Site of Old St Mary's Church
199	7A	National	SAM	Crop mark site south of Ardleigh
32444	7A	National	SAM	World War 2 bombing decoy WRI Spinnels Farm
24	7B	National	SAM	St Osyth Priory (uninhabited portions) and gatehouse

Ecological Designations

Site Name	Character Area	Significance	Designation	Description
Bullock Wood	7A	National	SINC, SSSI	An ancient coppice-with-standards woodland is recognised for its nationally rare lowland hazel (<i>Corylus avellana</i>) - sessile oak (<i>Quercus patraea</i>) stand type.
Cockaynes Wood	7A	Regional	SINC	Containing sweet chestnut (<i>Castanea sativa</i>) and pedunculate oak (<i>Quercus robur</i>) and having a sparse ground flora, this site is a popular public recreation site
Paleagate Wood	7A	Regional	SINC	A woodland dominated by sweet chestnut (<i>Castanea sativa</i>), honeysuckle (<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>) and bluebell (<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>) are amongst the ground flora.
Park Wood	7A	Regional	SINC	A small fragment of neglected ancient oak and sweet chestnut coppice. Only a narrow strip of woodland remains after much removed for extension of an orchard
Money Wood	7A	Regional	SINC	An ancient woodland of coppice-with-standards. It has been extensively storm damaged.

Crestland Wood	7A	Regional	SINC	An ancient woodland site now containing both deciduous and coniferous species.
Hockley Wood	7A	Regional	SINC	A large semi natural coppice-with-standards ancient woodland mature standard trees include alder (<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>) and ash (<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>).
Little Bentleyhall Wood	7A	Regional	SINC	An ancient woodland dominated by pedunculate oak standards.
Crockleford Heath Special Roadside Verges	7A	Regional	SINC	Three linear grassland habitats of generally strong floristic and habitat interest.
Pyecats Corner Special Roadside Verges	7A	Regional	SINC	Grassland verges with interesting flora reflecting the acidic soil base.
Manor House Meadow	7A	Regional	SINC	An area of species-rich dry grassland rare within Tendring.
Riddles Wood	7B	National	SSSI	Best examples in Essex of chestnut coppice with rich and varied ground flora.
High Barn Wood	7B	Regional	SINC	An ancient woodland of sweet chestnut (<i>Castanea sativa</i>) and pedunculate oak (<i>Quercus robur</i>).
Shair Wood	7B	Regional	SINC	An ancient woodland dominated by sweet chestnut (<i>Castanea sativa</i>) coppice and pedunculate oak (<i>Quercus robur</i>) standards.
Milton Wood	7B	Regional	SINC	Severely storm damaged, the remaining canopy comprises pedunculate oak (<i>Quercus robur</i>) and sweet chestnut (<i>Castanea sativa</i>).
Stockets Grove	7B	Regional	SINC	A small woodland dominated by pedunculate oak (<i>Quercus robur</i>) and sweet chestnut (<i>Castanea sativa</i>).
Simplebirch and Bowshots Wood	7B	Regional	SINC	Adjoining woodlands comprising mainly pedunculate oak (<i>Quercus robur</i>) and sweet chestnut (<i>Castanea sativa</i>).

High Grove	7B	Regional	SINC	A small wood where sweet chestnut (<i>Castanea sativa</i>), ash (<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>), hornbeam (<i>Carpinus betulus</i>) and silver birch (<i>Betula pendula</i>) are dominant.
Maldon Wood	7B	Regional	SINC	An ancient woodland almost entirely dominated by sweet chestnut (<i>Castanea sativa</i>) and standards of pedunculate oak (<i>Quercus robur</i>).
Dines Farm Special Roadside Verge	7B	Regional	SINC	A grassland verge afforded special designation due to the floristic content, including nationally rare species.
Aingers Green Special Roadside Verges	7B	Regional	SINC	Grassland verges with interesting acidic-soil flora.
St Osyth Parkland	7B	Regional	SINC	A mosaic parkland of marshy and semi-improved neutral grassland, woodland, scrub and ponds.

Settlement Form and Pattern

The *Heathland Plateaux* are typically characterised by scattered halls/churches, rural farms and villages. The pattern of halls/churches indicates an ancient settlement pattern, and the feudal system. Agricultural barns are distinctive landscape features in this area and often form landmarks. Many villages evolved from the manors. Other villages developed as farmsteads settled on the edges of greens, commons and heaths. Subsequent loss of heaths and infilling of village greens has progressively altered the character of these settlements, but their names often give a clue as to the origin of the settlement.

Landscape Character Areas

7A Bromley Heaths

7B St Osyth/Great Bentley Heaths

7A BROMLEY HEATHS

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Exposed and windswept plateau corresponding to the highest part of the district.
- Deep, coarse, loamy and often stoneless brown soils which support a high grade agricultural land.
- Large scale productive arable fields divided by low, gappy hedgerows where hedgerow oaks stand out as silhouettes against the skyline.
- Apple orchards around Ardleigh, Elmstead and Frating are sheltered by belts of poplar or fast growing *Leylandii*.
- Former heaths largely converted to smallholdings or regenerating as woodland. Small areas of remnant heath survive.
- Neglected oak/sweet chestnut coppice with ground flora typical of acidic woodland soils.
- Low density, rural settlement pattern of scattered farms and halls, hamlets, villages and small market towns.
- Network of narrow lanes connects the scattered farms and villages and roadside verges often contain gorse and bracken.
- Dramatic, dominating skyline.

DESCRIPTION

The *Bromley Heaths* is an elevated plateau that extends from Colchester to Wix in the east and Thorrington in the south. It corresponds to the highest part of the district and is underlain by a solid geology of London Clay capped by a veneer of glacial loam and gravels. These glacial loams have given rise to deep, coarse, loamy and often stoneless brown soils which support a high grade agricultural land.

The large scale, open plateau is dominated by large scale, geometric fields indicative of late enclosure that provide a strong pattern in views, for example around Little Bentley. These productive arable fields are divided by low, gappy hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees, usually oaks, which stand out as features in the open arable 'prairies'. The colour and texture of the cultivated landscape changes with the seasons. Apple orchards flourish in the sandy soils around Ardleigh, Elmstead and Frating and are sheltered by belts of poplar or, increasingly, the fast growing *Leylandii*. Horticulture is also a feature of the area with glasshouses located particularly to the north-east of Ardleigh.

The underlying sands and gravels have influenced landcover. Heathland still survives at Mistley Heath and Furze Hill, and the Beth Chatto gardens are an example of gardens that have been created on gravel soils. Many of the former heaths have been converted to smallholdings or appear as areas of regenerated woodland that form a backdrop to the arable landscape. Green Island, south of Ardleigh, is one such example of woodland that was formerly Goldstons Heath. A large amount of ancient woodland has been lost to

cultivation. However, there are still some important woodland and copses, perhaps most notably Bentleyhall Wood, which is carpeted by bluebells in the spring. Many of these woodlands are neglected oak/sweet chestnut coppiced woodlands. They also contain ash, hazel and birch and the ground flora is typical of acidic woodland soil comprising species such as wood sage, foxglove, blue-bell and bracken. The sandy nature of the soil is apparent in the hedgerows and roadside verges which often contain gorse and bracken. Some roadside verges form important grassland habitats with flora indicative of the acidic soils. Those at Crockleford Heath and Pyecats Corner are identified as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC).

The present day settlement pattern and road infrastructure is based on the medieval system of farms and villages. It is a low density, rural settlement pattern of scattered farms and halls, hamlets, villages and small market towns such as Elmstead Market. The farmsteads are large and form visible clusters of agricultural buildings in the open landscape. The villages are traditionally focussed around a village green, heath or common although many of these have been infilled by inter-war and post-war smallholdings or more recent housing so that their structure is no longer visible. A network of narrow lanes connects the scattered farms and villages. Many of these are ancient, were previously grazed, and have important roadside trees or verges. By contrast, the A120(T) cuts across the landscape on embankment or in cutting.

This is an exposed and windswept plateau where the sky dominates in any view. As a result, landscape character is greatly affected by the state of the sky, and communication towers, pylons and other vertical structures stand out as prominent elements. The water tower at Horsley Cross is a prominent structure that now forms an important visual landmark in the open landscape. Church towers are also visible landmark features.

EVALUATION

Character: This area has strong field patterns, distinctive settlement character and supports areas of heathland, ancient woodland and apple orchards. However, the loss of landscape features such as heaths and commons, unimproved pastures, village greens, hedgerows and ancient woodlands as a result of agricultural intensification, development and Dutch elm disease means that landscape character of this area has been eroded. Overall, character is considered to be **moderate**.

Condition: This agricultural plateau landscape is intensively cultivated and well maintained, although the condition of the hedgerows and woodland has been declining through the loss of elm, reduction in need of stock proof field boundaries and lack of management of hedgerows and woodland. Important landscape features such as heathland have also been lost. Landscape condition is in **decline**.

Change

- Infilling of village greens and former heaths with built development leading to loss of settlement structure, communal areas and village focus.
- Loss of acid grassland and heath habitats.
- Introduction of dense coniferous shelter belts in place of poplar.

- Loss of ancient deciduous woodland, neglect of traditional management such as coppicing and general shrinking of the woodland resource.
- Hedgerow loss associated with expansion of fields and agricultural intensification.
- Urbanising impact of service facilities, including buildings and lighting, associated with the A120(T).
- Pressure for expansion of built development on the edges of Colchester and suburbanisation of the landscape.
- Pressure for large scale built development at major road junctions and some highly sensitive plateau edges – with potential for a very high visual impact.
- Pressure for communication masts on high ground, particularly on the edges of the plateau.
- Road improvements including signage, line painting and widening which threaten the intimate rural character of the historic lanes.
- Impact of light pollution on the landscape at night.

Sensitivity

The plateau landscape is visually sensitive as a result of its open and rural character and long views. The remaining heaths, village greens, ancient woodlands, hedgerow trees, historic lanes and unimproved grasslands/roadside verges are the features that are most sensitive to change. Areas of particular high sensitivity to built development are those on the edge of the plateau overlooking the *Stour Valley System (6A)*, the *Alresford Valley System (6C)* and the *Holland Valley System (6D)*.

STRATEGY

Condition	Good	Strengthen	Conserve & Strengthen	Conserve
	Declining	Strengthen & Enhance	Conserve & Enhance	Conserve & Restore
	Poor	Creation	Restore & Enhance	Restore
		Weak	Moderate	Strong
		Character		

Landscape Management Strategy

The landscape strategy for the *Bromley Heaths* landscape is to **conserve** the rural character and historic elements of the landscape and to **enhance** woodland cover, hedgerow condition and heathland character. The management strategy includes the following guidance:

- Consider opportunities for the restoration of heathland and acid grassland on former heathland areas.

- Conserve shelter belts of native species such as oak and poplar, resisting the use of *Leylandii* hedges or plastic sheeting in place of native windbreaks.
- Enhance the wooded character of the landscape by promoting the creation of new woodlands or extending existing ancient woodlands. Woodland creation should involve natural regeneration or use of species typical of the area including oak, sweet chestnut, ash, hazel and birch.
- Conserve all ancient woodland sites, and promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species and reintroduction coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.
- Promote management of hedgerows as coppice, particularly elm hedges which would be attacked by Dutch Elm Disease if left to grow, with oak and ash standards left to form future timber trees.
- Maintain the historic lanes with their ancient oaks and unimproved roadside verges. Resist road improvements or widening would threaten their rural character and biodiversity interest.
- Conserve the historic dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets and scattered farmsteads, and the identity of individual settlements. Concrete kerbs, bright upward lighting and ornamental landscape planting all have an urbanising impact on the rural landscape.
- Service facilities, factories or employment sites that use local materials and informal native planting are likely to have less impact on landscape character.
- Ensure expansion of built development does not intrude onto the highly sensitive crests of slopes where development would be conspicuous on the skyline or restrict important views.
- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements - these have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape. This also applies for large scale rural buildings e.g. for agriculture.
- Opportunities exist for creation of some innovative landscapes and architecture provided they fit with the scale of the landscape, utilise local materials and planting species and maintain the scattered rural settlement pattern.
- Use of full cut-off lights and sensitively designed lighting schemes can reduce the impact of light pollution on the rural environment and night skies.
- Conserve views to important landmarks such as manorial halls and church towers and conserve the setting of these features.