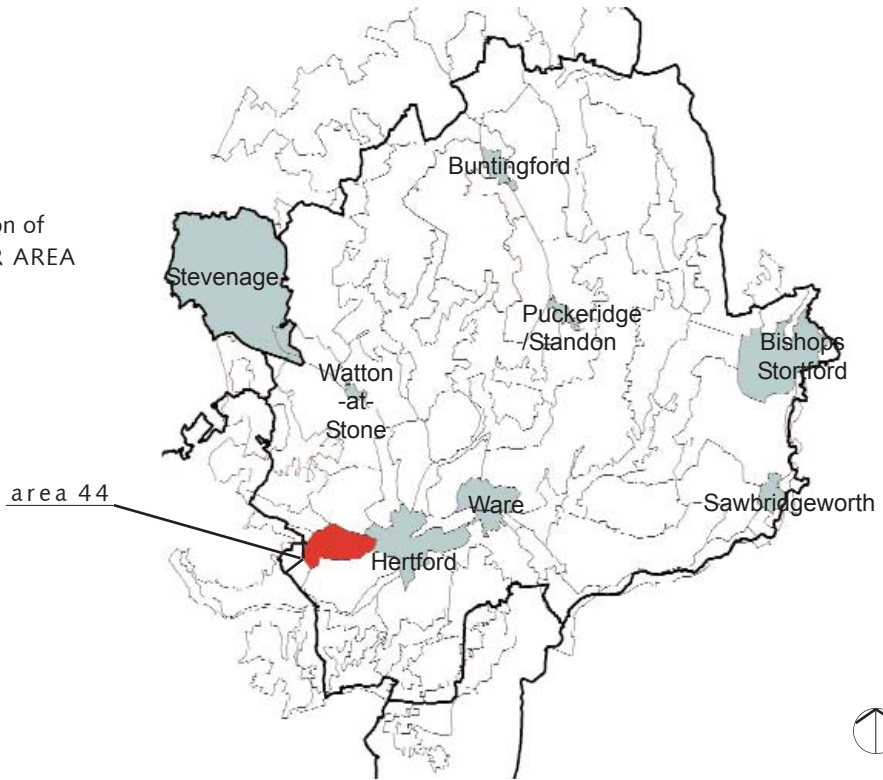


County map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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 Hertfordshire County Council  
 100019606 2004



**LOCATION**

From the western edge of Hertford westwards along the Mimram valley; circumscribed by the B1000 to the north and the A414 to the south.

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

Relic historic ornamental parkland with dense wooded boundaries and extensive mineral excavation, developed around the valley of the river Mimram. Little remains of the historic buildings within the park, but Repton's landscape design has not yet been completely obliterated, although screened from public view. The parkland character is of grazing pastures fringed with beech woods.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- focused on valley of river Mimram
- designed parkland
- dense boundary plantations
- many veteran trees
- extensive and important habitats

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- lack of views into the park
- destruction of most buildings within the park
- mix of historic deciduous and modern mixed-species amenity planting on boundaries
- potential heritage treasures screened from public view



Panshanger Park • floodplain and slope (P. Shears)

## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

**Geology and soils.** Deep well-drained fine loams and sands, locally flinty or over gravel, over glaciofluvial drift (Ludford series). The river Mimram has cut right through to the underlying chalk.

**Topography.** The local topography demonstrates the effect of a breakthrough from an interglacial lake, whose rapid drainage and draw-down led to erosion of the hanging valleys, of which Panshanger is the most obvious example in the county.

**Degree of slope.** 1 in 20 at the steepest point; more generally 1 in 26. The fall along the river Mimram through the parkland is 1 in 340.

**Altitude range.** 44m to 76m

**Hydrology.** The Mimram is a shallow, relatively fast-flowing, gravel-bedded chalk stream, with a wide range of characteristic species. The river bisects the park and broadens out into a lake in the north west. There is a series of springs along the eastern reaches of the river and three ponds.

**Land cover and land use.** The parkland farmland is mainly in arable cultivation and pasture, with significant water meadows along the Mimram and extensive woodland belts. The whole parkland, with the exception of a small area in the east, has consent for mineral extraction. There is no longer a grand house within the park and the focus of land use has changed accordingly.

**Vegetation and wildlife.** Extensive woodland, particularly along the boundaries. The Panshanger Oak, known to be over 500 years old and the largest maiden (i.e. non-pollarded) oak in Britain, stands in the former Pleasure Gardens. An engraving in George Strutt's *Sylva Britannica* of 1826 shows it at 19 feet circumference. It is now 42 feet in circumference at breast height. Panshanger was once designated SSSI for its wood pasture and parkland status, with many trees known to be about 1000 years old, over 500 veteran trees, mainly oak, and for its heathland and neutral grassland, which can be found in the areas of former lawns around the house. It has been important for invertebrates, with many notable species recorded; there are also records of protected birds and mammals within the site.

- Broadwater Meadow is the most important grassland, with at least 106 species of flowering plant recorded. It also supports a 3ha site of alder carr with associated flora and fauna. There are also areas of ancient oak-dominated woodland with bluebells and dog's mercury, but former stands of willow and osier have largely gone. Along the Mimram there are extensive, diverse marginal plant growth and stands of wetland tree species.

## HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Since 1720 the Cowpers had owned a large house at Cole Green. In 1756 Capability Brown was called in to landscape that estate (roughly the south-west quarter of the present Panshanger estate). In 1806 Repton was brought in to advise the 5th Earl, then the largest landowner in Hertfordshire, on the design and siting of a new house. Panshanger was constructed on the other side of the Mimram in the castellated Gothic style, of bricks made on site with a concrete coating, and incorporated an Elizabethan farmhouse already on the site, which was possibly within the deer park first recorded in 1749. It became a centre of culture and lavish entertaining '*full to the brim of vice and agreeableness [sic], foreignness and rues*'. In 1919 some 1458 acres of the estate was sold to Ebenezer Howard and became the first part of Welwyn Garden City. '*All that is left of Panshanger are remnants of the admirable landscape created after Humphry Repton's plan of 1799....The views from the N of the valley past the trees down to the series of lakes created by the widening of the river Mimram are still superb, one of Repton's most perfect schemes.*' (Pevsner, p. 269).

**Field pattern.** The whole estate is classified as informal parkland and it therefore lacks a field pattern. It is not known how divisions between arable and pasture are enforced. Originally the estate would have been grassland or wood pasture, therefore possibly common land during the medieval period and until it became part of the Cowper estates in the 17th century.

**Transport pattern.** The A414 was constructed in 1974 through the Mimram valley and has somewhat destroyed the integrity of the southern edge of Panshanger.

**Settlements and built form.** There are no settlements within Panshanger, and few buildings, most of them having been demolished. There is an 18th-century mill on the Mimram. The house was demolished in 1953 and the estate has been worked for sand and gravel since 1960. Now only the Orangery, walled nursery garden, the stables and some associated farmhouses, estate cottages and four lodges, of Victorian yellow brick, remain.

## OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Biodiversity Action Plan for Hertfordshire.

Pevsner, N., rev. Cherry, B., *Hertfordshire*, Penguin (2000).

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

It is not possible to provide an assessment of this area because of difficulties in gaining access.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** This was a unique landscape, and traces of its former beauty apparently remain (see Pevsner quote above). It remains to be seen what the post-extraction restoration will bring.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

There are very limited views into the parkland, which is particularly well screened by historic and modern boundary planting. The extensive but localised mineral extraction is therefore generally well screened but the change of use and disturbance of the historic fabric can be detected. Modern mixed tree plantings have been used to reinforce the historic, more limited range of tree species in the boundary plantings and new site entrances have been created which do not reflect the historic land use.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

There is a Chain Walk through the parkland south of the Mimram, and a short public footpath across the north-eastern edge of the parkland adjacent to the western edge of Hertford. There are no other public footpaths within the parkland.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

Panshanger Park is recognised as a distinctive and valued parkland landscape (C).

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

- County Wildlife Site.
- Landscape Conservation Area.
- Grade II\* in English Heritage *Register of Parks and Gardens*.

**CONDITION**

- Land cover change:* **widespread**
- Age structure of tree cover:* **mixed**
- Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:* **fragmented**
- Management of semi-natural habitat:* **poor**
- Survival of cultural pattern:* **declining**
- Impact of built development:* **low**
- Impact of land-use change:* **high**

**STRENGTH OF CHARACTER**

- Impact of landform:* **insignificant**
- Impact of land cover:* **prominent**
- Impact of historic pattern:* **relic**
- Visibility from outside:* **concealed**
- Sense of enclosure:* **not known**
- Visual unity:* **not known**
- Distinctiveness/rarity:* **unique**

<b>CONDITION</b>	<b>GOOD</b>	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	<b>MODERATE</b>	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	<b>POOR</b>	Reconstruct	<b>Improve and restore</b>	Restore condition to maintain character
		<b>WEAK</b>	<b>MODERATE</b>	<b>STRONG</b>
<b>STRENGTH OF CHARACTER</b>				

**STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE: IMPROVE AND RESTORE**

- ensure that mineral extraction does not destroy significant landscape features and remaining structures or areas of ecological significance
- encourage discourse to secure public access to relic historic built features within parkland, with due regard to public safety issues
- encourage the planting of native species used in historic boundary plantings wherever reinforcement planting is required
- ensure that restoration after extraction respects the relic parkland and reinforces it where possible
- ensure that mineral extraction does not affect the water table within the parkland, with potential consequent impact on vegetation
- seek to reinstate SSSI status for the parkland, with particular reference to wood pasture, veteran trees, heathland, neutral grassland and alder carr



• River Mimram  
marginal vegetation  
(P. Shears)