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Land north of Baldock:

Landscape sensitivity study

**Report to North Hertfordshire District Council,
July 2013**



Project Title: Landscape Sensitivity Study for land north of Baldock

Client: North Hertfordshire District Council

Version	Date	Version Details	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by Principal
0	June 2013	Initial draft	Andrew Tempany, Richard Swann	Andrew Tempany	Kate Ahern
1	June 2013	Second draft	Andrew Tempany, Richard Swann	Andrew Tempany	Kate Ahern
2	July 2013	Issued	Andrew Tempany, Richard Swann	Andrew Tempany	Kate Ahern



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Prepared by LUC
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Acknowledgements:

This study was steered by a team of officers from North Hertfordshire District Council – Helen Leitch and Louise Symes and Richard Kelly. The study was undertaken by Land Use Consultants (LUC) in conjunction with the steering group. LUC’s team comprised Kate Ahern (Principal), Andrew Tempany (Project Manager), Richard Swann and Victoria Goosen.

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1 Introduction

Context and Scope

Background

- 1.1 Land Use Consultants (LUC) was commissioned in June 2013 by North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) to undertake a landscape sensitivity analysis study for an area covering land north of Baldock. The study area is shown at **Figure 1.1** below.

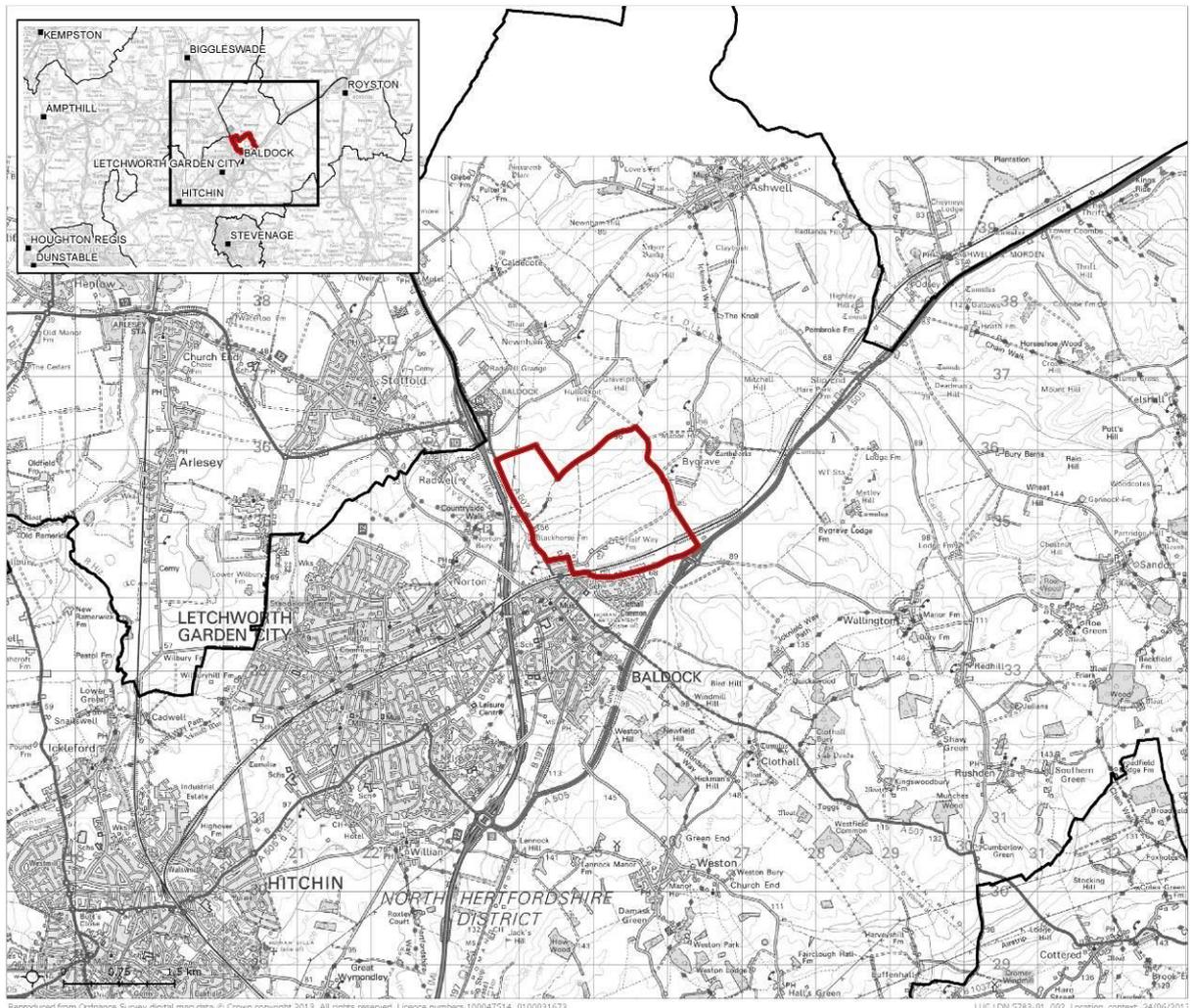


Figure 1.1: Site location and context

- 1.2 This study will provide background information in relation to the Local Plan currently being prepared and to inform future development within North Hertfordshire.

Site location and context

- 1.3 The study area is located to the north of Baldock, bounded by the Great North Road to the west, a ridge of high ground to the north, housing along Ashwell Road near Bygrave to the east and the B656 Royston Road along the fringe of Baldock to the south.
- 1.4 The total study area is 334 hectares.

Key study objectives

- 1.5 Key objectives of this study are as follows:
 - To assess the sensitivity of the landscape of the study area for possible large scale residential and mixed use development, and to provide sensitivity judgments, to inform future spatial planning and preferred options within the Local Plan
 - To provide guidance to focus change in the most positive terms, for parts of the study area which are judged to have lower landscape sensitivity to the change proposed

Summary of existing landscape studies

- 1.6 The baseline for this study is formed by the landscape classification in the North Hertfordshire District and Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment (LCA). This detailed district wide LCA provides a suite of strategic landscape design and management guidance. The North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment provides a good basis for the study, with some sub divisions defined to reflect the more local scale of this study.
- 1.7 In addition, account has also been taken of two earlier landscape sensitivity studies:
 - North Hertfordshire Sensitivity Study, The Landscape Partnership, 2011 (a strategic study undertaken to understand inherent sensitivities of the district character areas)
 - Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study, NHDC, 2006 (this looked at small land parcels around the periphery of the main settlements in North Hertfordshire District)
- 1.8 Reference has also been made to the North Hertfordshire District Green Infrastructure (GI) Plan (LUC, 2009) in developing landscape guidance and recommendations, as appropriate, in this study.

2 Methodology

2.1 This sets out the method used in undertaking the study. The key stages were as follows:

- Desk study and data review
- Landscape classification
- Criteria definition
- Field survey
- Sensitivity analysis
- Landscape guidance

Desk study and data review

2.2 This involved review of the earlier landscape sensitivity study developed by NHDC for parts of the Baldock urban/ rural fringe and the landscape character context for the study area (the latter presented in **section 3**), to focus both method development and an understanding of landscape issues to inform selection of sensitivity criteria to test through fieldwork. The key data used is:

- NHDC, 2006 Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study for edge of settlement in North Hertfordshire
- NHDC, 2011, North Hertfordshire Landscape Study (Character, Sensitivity and Capacity), [based on the original Landscape Character Assessment of North Hertfordshire and Stevenage by Babbie, 2004 and the Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity work by The Landscape Partnership, 2011]
- LUC, 2009, North Hertfordshire District Green Infrastructure Plan
- Relevant saved Local Plan policies from the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan

Landscape classification

2.3 The existing district landscape character area in which the site lies was divided into smaller scale landscape units for the purposes of the study (presented at **section 4**). Sub divisions were made after reviewing a variety of GIS data, such as Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC), heritage designations and the nature conservation context of the study area, and tested in the field.

Criteria definition

2.4 A series of criteria have been defined to focus the analysis. These make reference to the work previously undertaken by LUC on behalf of Landscape East in developing a Regional Landscape Sensitivity Method, and to the North Hertfordshire District Landscape Character Assessment. The criteria have also been informed by our knowledge of the area through the Green Infrastructure Plan and the earlier landscape sensitivity work at Stevenage North and Hitchin south west.

2.5 The criteria are presented, with explanation, in three separate sections, below. These are:

- Analysis criteria – identifying landscape attributes
- Development model for the analysis
- Landscape sensitivity scale and definitions

Analysis criteria – identifying landscape attributes

- 2.6 The following landscape attributes have been used to assess sensitivity to residential and mixed use development:

Landform and topography

- 2.7 Presence or absence of landform variation. For example, whilst rolling/undulating landforms may be more able to contain visual impact of development, they would have a higher sensitivity to residential development in landscape terms than flat landforms or those with comparatively little topographic variation. Key landform features such as undeveloped valleys, hill slopes or scarps which serve to contain development will have a higher sensitivity.

Landscape pattern, complexity

- 2.8 Level of landscape structure and field pattern variation. For example a landscape comprising a complex array of different habitats and/or land cover features such as ancient woodland, or presence of key habitats will have a higher sensitivity to residential development than will a simple landscape.

Cultural pattern and time depth

- 2.9 Indicators include aspects of the historic landscape/historic environment, such as parkland, historic processes which have shaped the landscape, and scheduled monuments and their setting. A landscape with a strong sense of 'time depth' (historic continuity) and intact cultural pattern will have a higher sensitivity to residential development than a landscape where cultural pattern is eroded or comparatively absent.

Settlement pattern

- 2.10 Consideration of settlement form, density and age/vernacular, and coherence of settlement edge. Landscapes with a coherent settlement edge, without built form and infrastructure or those displaying a small scale and traditional settlement character (e.g. nucleated or dispersed) will have a higher sensitivity to residential development than will landscapes characterised by infrastructure and modern development or settlement 'edge' influences.

Experiential qualities

- 2.11 These include movement, tranquillity, sense of remoteness and aesthetic attributes such as interplay of colour, texture, light and reflection. Landscapes with a higher degree of remoteness and tranquillity will have a higher sensitivity to residential development.

Visual and intervisibility

- 2.12 This includes consideration of key views, visual relationships and inter-visibility within and across the landscape units and with significant features of the wider landscape. Landscapes which form a skyline in key views will have a higher sensitivity to residential development which may breach these skylines.

Development model used to inform the analysis

- 2.13 The principal form of development being assessed for the purposes of this study is a possible urban extension to Baldock north, although some consideration has also been given to the feasibility of new settlement detached from Baldock. Whilst the work has considered large scale residential development in a more general sense (in the context of medium to high density residential development) for the purpose of assessing landscape sensitivity, the following models have informed thinking and the production of supporting guidance to focus change:
- Medium to high density scenario of 2-2.5 storey dwellings arranged at a net density range of 30-40 dwellings per hectare (equivalent to a gross density of 15-20 dwellings per hectare);
 - Possible employment use on land between the railway line and Royston Road.

Landscape sensitivity scale and definitions

- 2.14 The following 5 point sensitivity scale was developed and applied to the landscape units in relation to the landscape attributes.

Landscape sensitivity scale

Sensitivity level	Definition
High	Key characteristics of the landscape are highly vulnerable to the type of change being assessed, with such change likely to result in a significant change in character.
Moderate-high	Many of the key landscape characteristics are vulnerable to the type of change being assessed, with such change likely to result in a potentially significant change in character. Considerable care will be needed in locating and designing change within the landscape.
Moderate	Some of the key characteristics of the landscape may be vulnerable to the type of change being assessed. Although the landscape may have some ability to absorb change, some alteration in character may result. Considerable care may be needed in locating and designing change within the landscape.
Moderate- low	The majority of the landscape characteristics are less likely to be adversely affected by change. Although change can potentially be more easily accommodated, care would still be needed in locating and designing change in the landscape. There is an opportunity to create and plan/ design for new character.
Low	Key characteristics of the landscape are less likely to be adversely affected by change. Change can potentially be more easily accommodated without significantly altering character. Sensitive design would still be needed in relation to accommodating change in the landscape. There is an opportunity to create and plan/ design for new character.

Field survey

- 2.15 The landscape attributes of the local landscape units, and their sensitivities to the development model, were tested through field survey (June 2013) and recorded on a survey form (survey form template is shown at **Appendix 1**). Field survey was undertaken from public vantage points, rights of way and public highways within and in the vicinity of the study area, supported by photographs and map annotations, as appropriate.

Sensitivity analysis

- 2.16 With reference to the analysis criteria and 5 point sensitivity scale defined above, an overall landscape sensitivity judgement was defined for each landscape unit, supported by colour coded GIS mapping. The judgement included a narrative of what is sensitive, and why, to help inform guidance.

A note on the baseline for the sensitivity analysis

- 2.17 Given that the detailed form and density of proposed development within the area is still largely unknown and cannot be predicted until more detailed spatial proposals emerge, the baseline for the assessment has been taken as conditions on site in June 2013.

Landscape guidance

- 2.18 The overall sensitivity judgement was used to identify whether development can be accommodated in the landscape units, and to develop landscape guidance to focus change in ways which respond to landscape character – identification of important and sensitive landscape features which would act as constraints to development.

Notes on scale and relationship to previous studies

- 2.19 This study has been undertaken at a scale of 1:10,000 and within the existing framework set by the District LCA. It understands the sensitivity of the landscape and the attributes which make up that landscape, to a specific form of change (residential and mixed use development), as opposed to the strategic sensitivity analysis undertaken in the character area level study by The Landscape Partnership, which identified inherent or general landscape sensitivities. Therefore different judgements are reflective both of study scale and the fact that landscape attributes have specific sensitivities and levels of sensitivity vary with specific/defined change scenarios.
- 2.20 Account has also been taken of the findings of the earlier settlement fringe landscape sensitivity analysis by North Hertfordshire District Council, in developing this study.

3 Study area: Landscape & Environmental Context

- 3.1 This section sets out the landscape context of the study area in terms of landscape character and relevant environmental designations. Relevant information on biodiversity and cultural pattern has been included, insofar as this relates to character.

Landscape Character

- 3.2 This summarises national and local (district) landscape character context. Landscape character context is shown at **Figure 3.1**.

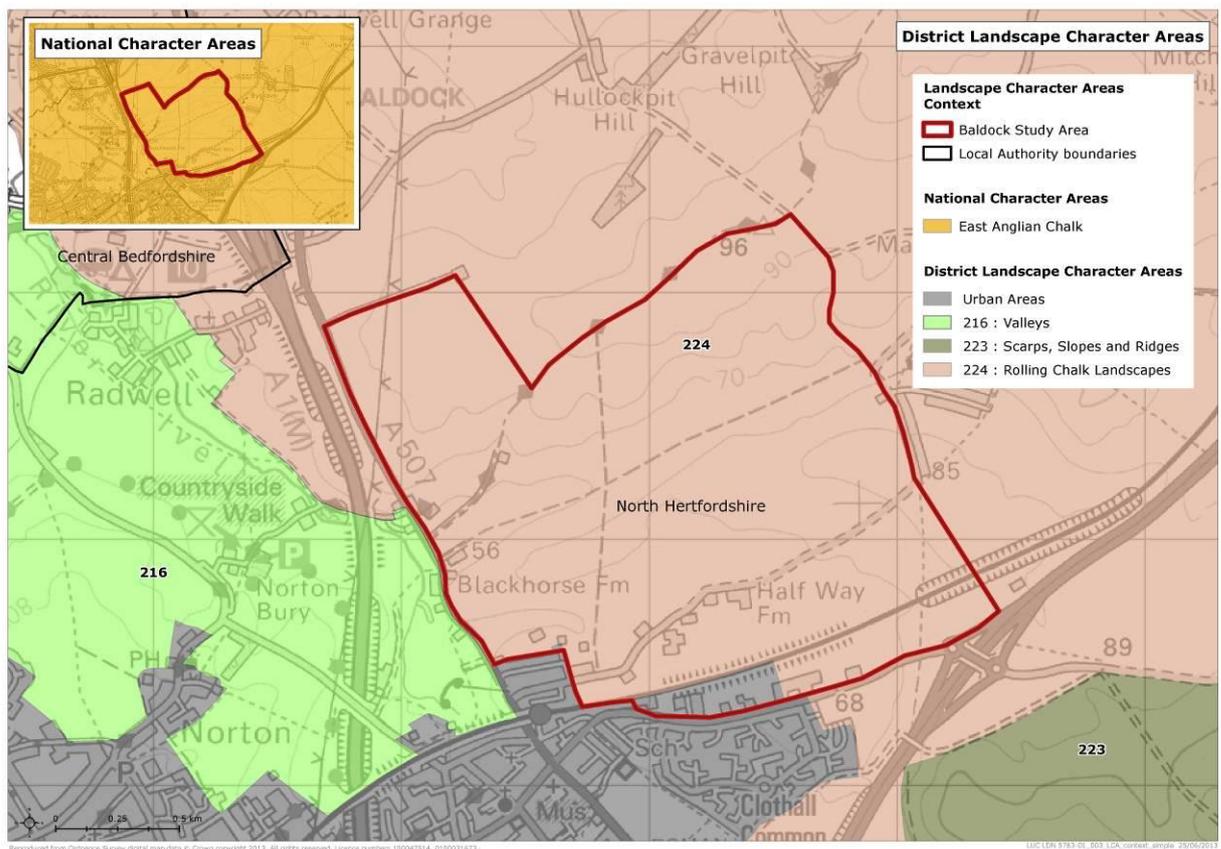


Figure 3.1: Landscape character context

National character context

- 3.3 The study area lies within National Character Area (NCA) 87: East Anglian Chalk. The key characteristics relevant to the study areas are as follows:

NCA 87: East Anglian Chalk

- 3.4 A landscape defined by distinctive open variable/rolling topography – a continuation of the Chilterns. Rolling chalk downlands are now mainly under arable cultivation with distinctive roadside and hilltop beech belts and clumps and ash woodlands. The landscape is crossed by a network of long straight roads, such as the A505 and the A1(M), and settlement pattern is defined by isolated farmsteads and nucleated valley villages, with a few larger towns associated with large

transport corridors e.g. Baldock, Letchworth. A number of villages still retain a sense of rural character. Ancient routes such as the Icknield Way are a feature of the landscape.

Local landscape character

- 3.5 The North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment is the source of baseline information on the landscape character of the study area. The landscape character area within the study area is LCA 224 North Baldock Chalk Uplands. The LCA identifies this as a rolling chalk landscape with chalk knoll landforms and a large rectilinear field pattern under arable cultivation and a nucleated settlement pattern, with suburban settlement edges apparent in places e.g. at Baldock. The Ivel Valley is a key feature and transport corridors such as the A1(M), A505 and the railway are distinctive features.

Green infrastructure

- 3.6 The North Hertfordshire District Green Infrastructure Plan (GI Plan) identifies a number of characteristics, opportunities and principles for green infrastructure in and around Baldock's urban-rural fringe, including the study site. Relevant points noted in the GI Plan are summarised below:
- Identification of Bygrave Common within the area of search as a strategic GI asset, both due to access links and for the biodiversity interest of the farmland (within a wider high biodiversity area for birds including ground nesting species). Bygrave Common has semi natural open space provision potential with sensitive management, given the above.
 - Retention of Bygrave Road as a linear habitat corridor.
 - Where landscape screening is considered in relation to new development, this should avoid blanket screening and should respond to/integrate with distinctive chalk landforms.
 - Conservation of the long rural views across the large scale chalk farmland landscape north of the town.

Nature conservation designations

- 3.7 A section of hedgerow on the northern side of Bygrave Road within the site is a Local Wildlife Site (LWS). The grassland on the embankments of the A1(M) link at Junction 10, abutting the site's northern boundary, is also a LWS. Biodiversity interest otherwise relates to the land adjacent to the site, for example the Ivel Valley immediately west, which is a LWS and also a Local Nature Reserve which includes two BAP Priority Habitats – deciduous woodland and lowland meadow. Nature conservation context is shown at **Figure 3.2**.

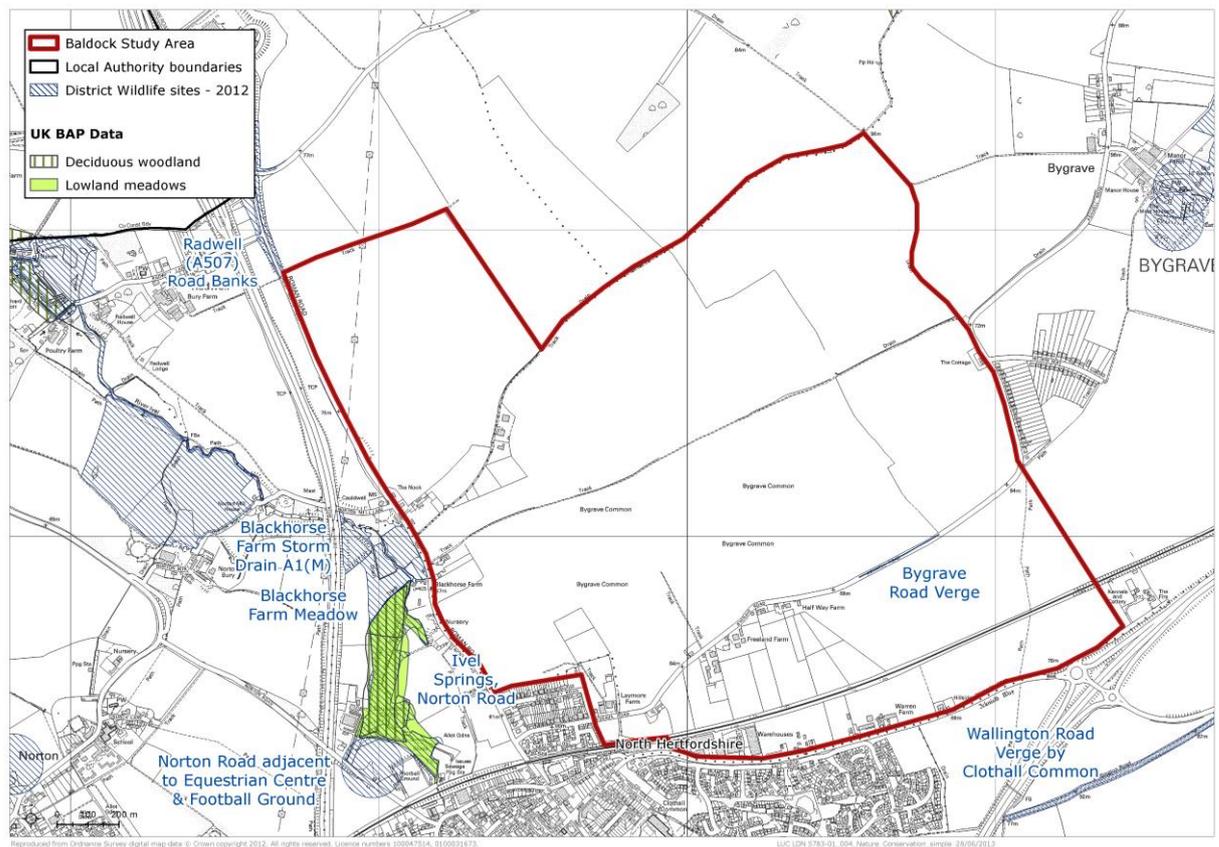


Figure 3.2: Nature conservation context

Cultural heritage

- 3.8 The cultural heritage context and historic landscape character types from the Hertfordshire Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) are shown on **Figure 3.3** below. Significantly this shows that a large part in the centre of the site is open field systems associated with the historic Bygrave Common and that it was never enclosed. 19th century field systems persist in the eastern and north-western parts of the site, with 20th century fields around the settlement edge of Baldock/immediately north of the railway line.

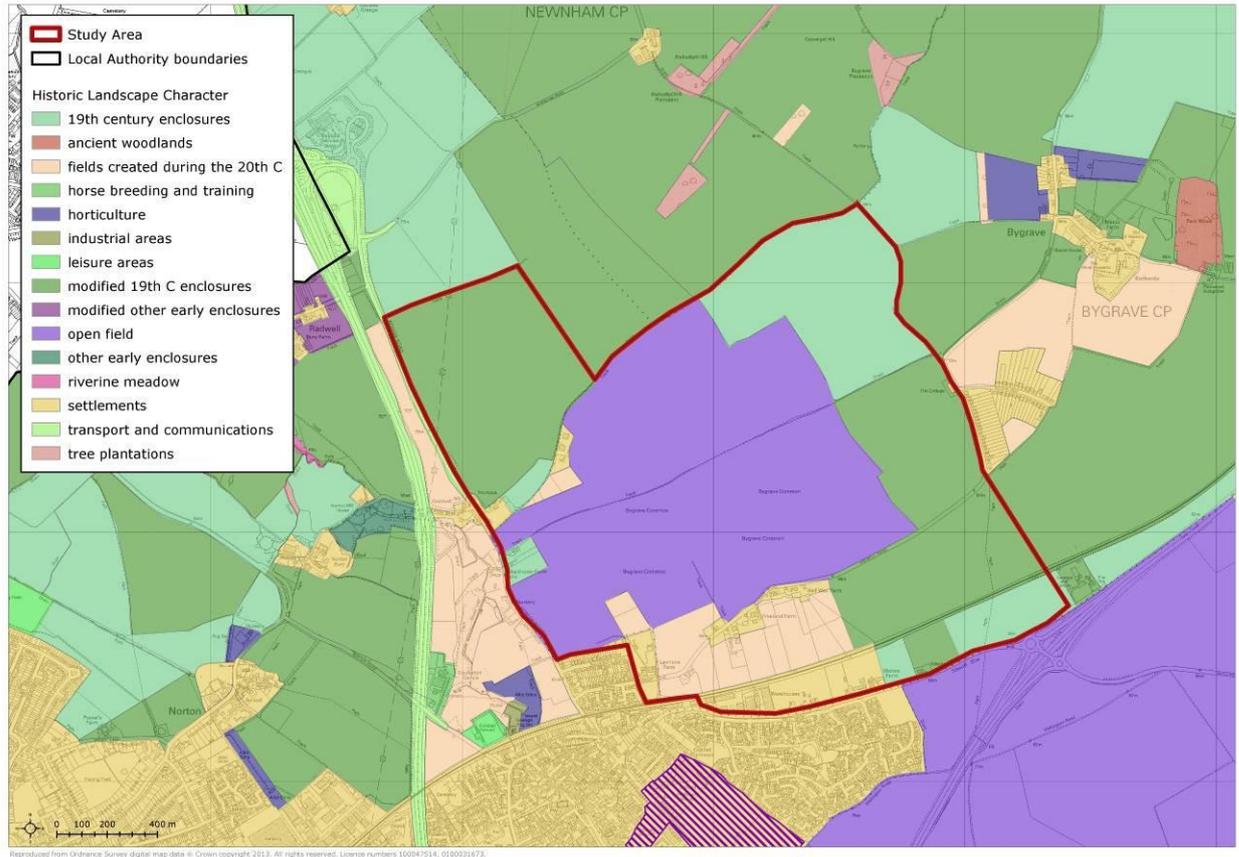


Figure 3.3: Cultural heritage

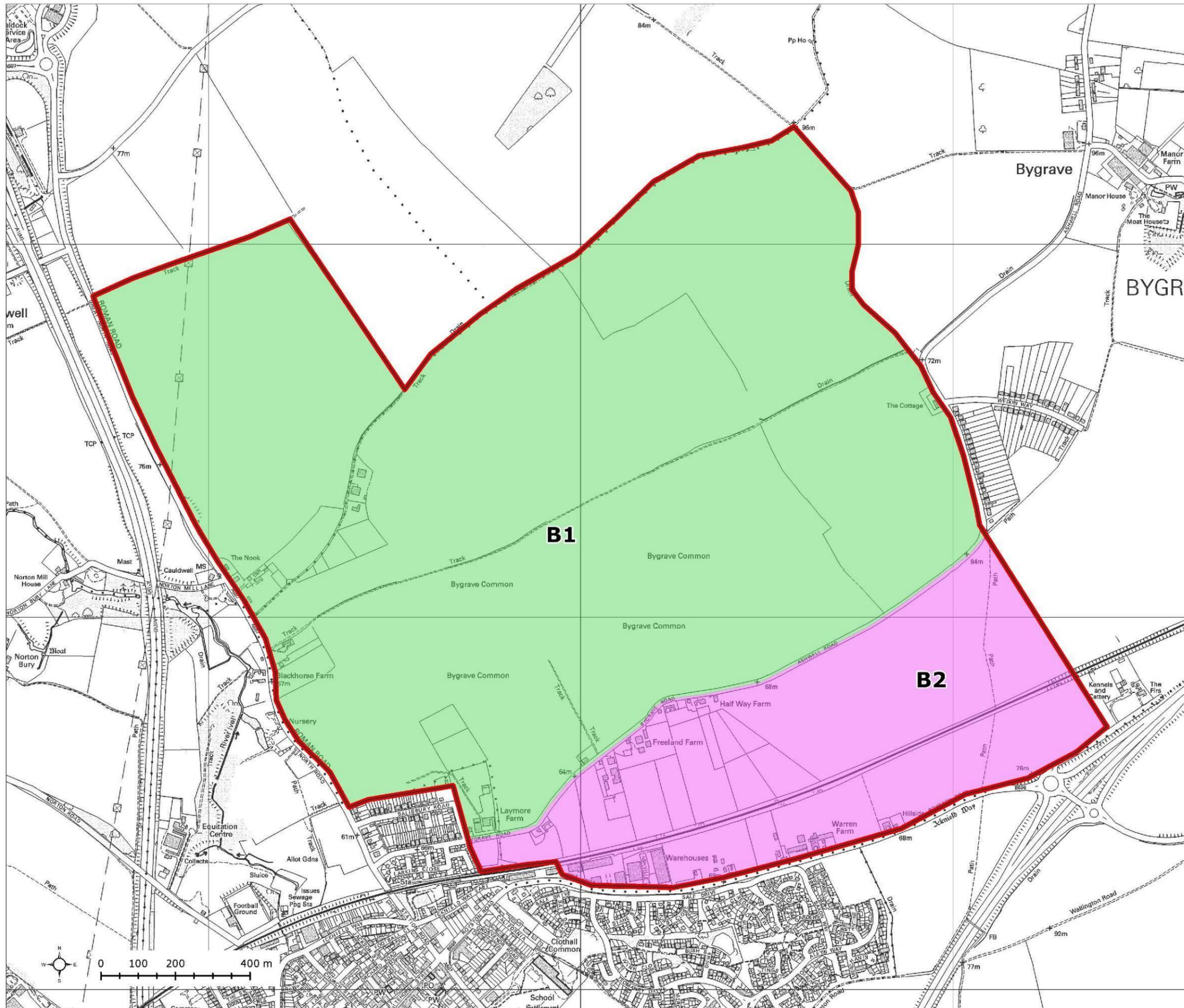
4 Sensitivity Analysis and Guidance

- 4.1 This section sets out the sensitivity analysis for the two landscape units within the study area. The sensitivity analysis has applied the criteria presented at **section 2**, together with the 5 point sensitivity scale. The sensitivity analysis has been undertaken with reference to medium to high net density (30-40 dwellings per hectare), large scale residential development. Potential principles for landscape mitigation in relation to least sensitive areas are set out drawing SK_1. Consideration has also been given to potential infrastructure where relevant, such as access roads/access points.
- 4.2 For the purposes of this study, the district landscape character area 224, North Baldock Chalk Uplands, has been used, sub-divided into two smaller units based on common landscape patterns and characteristics observed in the field. The landscape units used for the analysis are shown on **Figure 4.1** overleaf.
- 4.3 The sensitivity analysis has been undertaken at a scale of 1:10,000 and is appropriate for use at that scale.
- 4.4 The local landscape units are as follows:
- B1 (Baldock 1): Covering the more open, large scale, rural upland landscape in the central and northern parts of the landscape unit;
 - B2 (Baldock 2): Covering the more enclosed, smaller scale, urban fringe landscape along the north eastern edge of Baldock.
- 4.5 The findings are presented in the remainder of this section. Supporting mapping in relation to the sensitivity analysis is shown on **Figure 4.2**, at the end of this section. Summaries and conclusions as to the study's findings are presented at **section 5**.

Landscape Sensitivity Study for Baldock

Figure 4.1
Landscape Units for Analysis

 Study Area



Map Scale @ A3:1:10,000

LUC

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LUC LDN 5783-01_006_Landscape_units 26/06/2013

Source:

Landscape character unit: B1

Baseline

Location

- 4.6 This landscape character unit makes up the larger part of the site, including all of the site area to the north of Bygrave Road.
- 4.7 The study area is bounded by the A507 Great North Road to the west, by a ridge line with a public right of way (the Icknield Way Trail) to the north and across fields along the line of Ashwell Road to the east.

LCA context

National
Area 87: East Anglian Chalk. A distinctive and open topography (a continuation of the Chilterns) and large scale chalk downland, now mainly under arable cultivation. The landscape is cut by minor chalk river valleys such as the Ivel and the Rhee and crossed by long straight roads and ancient Roman routes such as the Icknield Way, with the A1 and A1(M) corridor partly following the route of the ancient Great North Road. Settlement is limited to a few large towns on key routes, and to compact nucleated valley villages of rural character.
Local (District)
The LCU is located entirely within the central southern section of District LCA area 224 – North Baldock Chalk Uplands. A section of the southern edge of this landscape character unit borders Baldock (Salisbury Road) and to the west of this a short section borders District LCA area 216 – Arlesey – Great Wymondley, but to the north and east LCA area 224 continues for some distance beyond the site boundaries. Key characteristics are given below.

Summary description from North Hertfordshire District LCA

- 4.8 The district landscape character area assessment describes the *large scale open arable fields in combination with the rolling chalk downland as the most characteristic feature of the North Baldock Chalk Uplands and vulnerable to change*. The *extensive views across the large scale open rolling landform* are noted, as is the high intervisibility with character areas to the south. Overall sensitivity is considered to be *moderate*, with a relatively robust character, but visual sensitivity is judged to be *moderate-high*.

Policy context and designations; relationship to designated landscape interests

- 4.9 There are no designated landscapes within the part of the character area covered by the landscape unit.

Landscape functions

- 4.10 The principal function of this area is as arable farmland, but it is also important recreationally, both for local routes out from Baldock, to nearby villages (e.g. Newnham, Ashwell and Bygrave) and for the long distance Icknield Way Trail.

Sensitivity analysis

Criteria	Comment
Landscape	
Landform and topography	Topographically this is a landscape of rounded saddleback ridges and valleys running in between in a generally east-west direction, although at a smaller scale slopes are relatively shallow and even. Closer to the edge of Baldock the landform becomes flatter. The ridges are prominent and increase sensitivity to development.
Landscape pattern and complexity	This is a relatively large scale, homogeneous and simple landscape - unusually so for a location so close to sizeable urban areas – principally a result of lack of enclosure, undulating chalk topography with long views, few dwellings within the LCU, lack of woodland and homogeneity of land cover. There are few clearly defined field boundaries and, other than on the western and southern fringes, no built development. As an intact and open rural landscape in close proximity to a town this area is sensitive to development. Those field boundaries that do exist, principally the hedgerow along the bottom of the larger valley alongside a public right of way, tend to run along the landform rather than across it, which helps to strengthen the east-west orientation. There are several small areas where a stronger field structure exists, in association with Laymore Farm on the edge of Baldock and around the Nook and Ivel Grange in the north western part of the study area. Such areas would be sensitive to residential development, due to the potential impact on legibility of landscape pattern.
Cultural pattern and time depth	Whilst there are no evident historic features within the study area, the open fields that cover much of the area relate to an absence of enclosure in the first place, rather than any subsequent clearance of hedgerows. This is a rare survival which gives the landscape value and sensitivity in cultural heritage terms (see 3.8 above). The broader landscape does have a number of ancient features and monuments, such as the Arbury Banks hill fort to the north, but the study area itself does not have any role in terms of visual connections between such sites.
Settlement and human influences	Although bounded to the south west by the edge of Baldock, the transition from town to countryside is very sharp as a result of the open, large scale landscape characteristics described above. There are very few of the urban fringe features, such as loss of productive agricultural function, lack of landscape management and incoherent, piecemeal development that often characterise such locations. This is a managed, rural landscape. Elsewhere the only settlement within the character unit is individual properties close to the Great North Road in the north western part of the study area and one house near Bygrave. Whilst functionally the Common helps to maintain rural separation between Baldock and the historic, nucleated

Criteria	Comment
	settlements to the north (e.g. Ashwell and Newnham), there is no visual relationship with these villages. Some 20 th century linear development does exist along Ashwell Road near Bygrave, just beyond the site boundary. Across Bygrave Road to the south there are several farms and associated buildings, adding to the rural character. On higher ground to the west of the site the landscape has a much more urban character, with the A1(M) and a line of pylons running south towards Letchworth, but the wooded Ivel Valley helps to create a sense of separation from these intrusive elements.
Perceptual/experiential qualities (colour/texture/light/reflection, movement, tranquillity, remoteness)	Whilst traffic noise from the A1(M) and Great North Road, and to a lesser extent from the railway and Royston Road to the south, are intrusive, the rolling chalk landform, open fields and homogeneous green textures create a relatively strong sense of tranquillity, and the strong footpath network offers accessibility to appreciate this quality. From within the valleys the ridges create separation from the town, and whilst there are still views westwards to the A1(M), pylon line and Letchworth the rural landscape and long views to the east create some sense of remoteness. The panoramic ridge crest views encompass more urban landscape but also provide, through elevation, a sense of detachment from these influences and thus an increased sense of remoteness and greater sensitivity. The prevalence of farmland birds (noted in 3.6 above) adds to the sense of tranquillity.
Visual	
Visual relationships and views (including key vantage points from designated landscapes)	Visual sensitivity is an important consideration as there are a number of public rights of way crossing the area. The ridge and valley topography heavily influences views within the character unit and also strengthens separation between Baldock and the villages to the north. The higher ridge along the northern edge of the study area can be considered important for views of the town, so any development needs to relate well to existing settlement so as not to appear incongruous. The lower ridge running through the centre of the landscape hides the land between that ridge and the edge of Baldock (Salisbury Road) from viewpoints along from the northern ridge. The footpath corner and bench to the south of the row of houses on Ashwell Road can also be considered a key viewpoint towards Baldock. There are no views from designated landscapes, although the south western edge of the study area is visible from the Ivel Springs Nature Reserve. The church of St Mary in Baldock is an important landmark in views from higher ground.
Level of intervisibility: With other landscape character areas and settlements	The site is visible in views from higher ground in all directions, but there is limited visibility from Baldock other than from the immediate urban edge. The wooded, smaller scale character of the Ivel Valley, within LCA area 216 to the west, is quite distinct and different from the chalk uplands of LCA area 224, despite the connecting valley form. LCA area 224 continues beyond the ridgelines to the north and west, so there is no relationship with other character areas in these directions.

Criteria	Comment
<p>Overall landscape sensitivity</p>	<p>Justification and judgement</p> <p>Overall landscape sensitivity to possible residential and mixed use development is judged to be moderate-high due to the open, rural character, high visibility, cultural heritage and natural interest and recreational value.</p> <p>Within this area, sensitivity can be considered to lessen towards the southern edge, in the immediate proximity of the urban edge of Baldock. Sensitivity is also slightly lower toward the linear settlement on Ashwell Road, where there is slightly less of a sense of openness towards the head of the valley and the historic characterisation indicates that the fields are more modern than those to the east.</p> <p>The highest levels of sensitivity relate to the high ground towards the northern edge of the study area.</p>

Landscape guidance and recommendations

4.11 Key recommendations for this landscape unit are:

- Avoid development on exposed ridges and in northernmost valley, where the landscape is most rural and remote in character;
- Relate any new development to existing settlements, due to high visibility of the study area, where possible utilising screening impact of east-west ridge to north on views from public right of way;
- Give preference to developing on land that has been enclosed in the past (see figure 3.3);
- Any landscaping in association with development should avoid compromising the open, rural character of the main body of the site;
- Ensure that the public right of way network is not adversely affected.
- Bygrave Common is an important component of the local Green Infrastructure (GI) network so any development to the north of Bygrave Road should be set back from the public right of way between the road and the Common, leaving a green buffer strip to either side of the hedgerows. Likewise there should be a suitable open, buffer strip between any new housing and the arable farmland.
- Bygrave Road / Ashwell Road has a rural character which should as far as possible be retained. Appropriate planting and avoidance of urban street furniture and hard landscaping would assist with this.
- Traffic calming measures on the Great North Road would enhance GI connectivity by providing a safer footpath crossing.

Landscape character unit: B2

Baseline

Location

- 4.12 This landscape character unit makes up the south eastern part of the site, to the south of Bygrave Road.
- 4.13 The study area is bounded by the Bygrave Road / Ashwell Road to the north and the B656 Royston Road to the south, extending west to the settlement edge of Baldock and east as far as the A505 bypass junction with the B656.

LCA context

National
Area 87: East Anglian Chalk. A distinctive and open topography (a continuation of the Chilterns) and large scale chalk downland, now mainly under arable cultivation. The landscape is cut by minor chalk river valleys such as the Ivel and the Rhee and crossed by long straight roads and ancient Roman routes such as the Icknield Way, with the A1 and A1(M) corridor partly following the route of the ancient Great North Road. Settlement is limited to a few large towns on key routes, and to compact nucleated valley villages of rural character.
Local (District)
The LCU is located within the central southern section of District LCA area 224 – North Baldock Chalk Uplands – other than the western half of the land to the south of the railway line, which is classified as urban. Other than where it borders the urban edge, LCA area 224 continues for some distance beyond the site boundaries. Key characteristics are given below.

Summary description from North Hertfordshire District LCA

- 4.14 The district landscape character area assessment describes the *large scale open arable fields in combination with the rolling chalk downland as the most characteristic feature of the North Baldock Chalk Uplands and vulnerable to change*. The *extensive views across the large scale open rolling landform* are noted, as is the high intervisibility with character areas to the south. Overall sensitivity is considered to be *moderate*, with a relatively robust character, but visual sensitivity is judged to be *moderate-high*.
- 4.15 Reference is made to the *prominent and intrusive* built eastern edge of Baldock, and the urbanising influence of piecemeal development. Small (< 5 ha) urban extensions are considered to potentially be appropriate on the eastern fringes of Baldock, but nowhere else in the character area.

Policy context and designations; relationship to designated landscape interests

- 4.16 There are no designated landscapes within the part of the character area covered by the landscape unit.

Landscape functions

- 4.17 The eastern half of the LCU is under arable cultivation but this gives way to smaller pasture enclosures with some horses but no livestock. The south western end of the study area is industrial and warehouse units.

Sensitivity analysis

Criteria	Comment
Landscape	
Landform and topography	The landform is fairly flat and even, rising only gently eastwards for the most part but steepening toward the eastern edge of the study area.
Landscape pattern and complexity	The scale of the landscape here is smaller than in the unenclosed fields to the north, although more so to the west than the east. To either side of the railway line, between Bygrave Road and Royston Road, fields are smaller (increasingly so towards the town centre), reflecting an absence of arable production. The landscape is relatively simple, with little tree or hedge cover which would be sensitive to development. Its pattern is defined by the roads and railway line which contain it.
Cultural pattern and time depth	There are no evident historic features within the study area. Royston Road marks the route of the ancient Icknield Way but this adds no sensitivity in terms of adjoining land uses on the edge of the town.
Settlement and human influences	Coming into Baldock from the east, the transition from town to countryside is more gradual than on the edge of the B1 character unit to the north of Baldock. Dispersed farms and former farms, mostly of the same age and architectural style, mark the northern and southern edges of the character unit, modern housing comes into view to the south of Royston Road and closer to the centre industrial units and warehouses lie between Royston Road and the railway line. The stronger edge character reduces sensitivity to development.
Perceptual/experiential qualities (colour/texture/light/reflection, movement, tranquillity, remoteness)	Although the higher, more open ground at the eastern end of this area shares characteristics in common with the B1 character unit to the north, the influence of the more developed landscape to the south towards which the landform slopes, is stronger. There is less of a sense of remoteness and tranquillity, and a stronger urban-edge perception, reducing sensitivity to development.
Visual	
Visual relationships and views (including key vantage points from designated landscapes)	Visually the late 20 th century development to the south of Royston Road forms a backdrop to views from higher ground to the north – a settled visual character which reduces sensitivity. The higher, eastern end of the area sits on the skyline when viewed from the west, but otherwise the area is

Criteria	Comment
	low-lying in relation to its surroundings. The church of St Mary in Baldock is an important landmark in views from higher ground.
Level of intervisibility: With other landscape character areas and settlements	The site is visible in views from higher ground to the north, east and south, but there is limited visibility from Baldock other than from the immediate urban edge. LCA area 224 continues a short distance to the west and south before becoming LCA area 223 Wallington Scarp Slopes: an open chalk landscape with extensive views northwards across the study area.
Overall landscape sensitivity	<p>Justification and judgement</p> <p>Overall landscape sensitivity to possible residential and mixed use development is judged to be moderate-low due to the extent of existing urban influence, the lower, more level terrain and less rural character.</p> <p>Within this area, sensitivity can be considered to lessen towards the town and increase towards the higher, more open eastern end.</p> <p>There are sensitivities relating to the dwellings along Bygrave Road and Royston Road, which all appear to date from the early 20th century and to have been built in the same style and so combine to influence character, but modern development to the south of Royston Road, and the more urban character of this road, make the area to the south of the railway line less sensitive than that to the north.</p>

Landscape guidance and recommendations

4.18 Key recommendations for this landscape unit are:

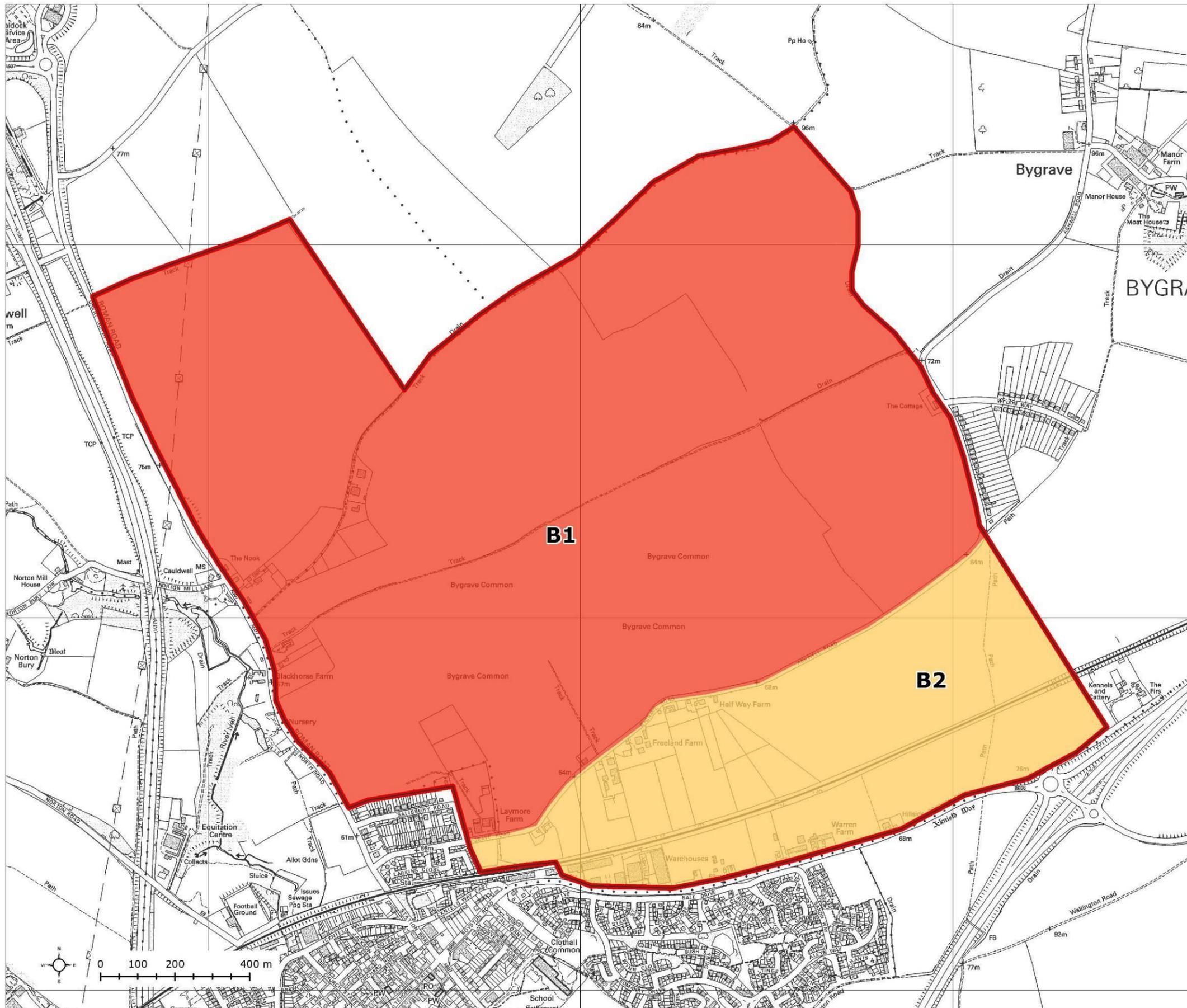
- Relate any new development to the urban edge of Baldock, due to the high visibility of the study area, and avoid extensive linear development which would be out of keeping with the nucleated form characteristic of Baldock and other settlements in the locality.
- Landscaping could be used to add green corridors along existing field boundaries, and to enhance the ecological value of the railway corridor. A buffer of open grassland to either side of the railway would enhance GI links.
- Consideration could be given to using landscaping to create separation between any new development and the existing dispersed properties along the southern side of Bygrave Road and the northern side of Royston Road. Consideration could also be given to the potential for incorporating architectural features of these properties into any new development.
- Scale, materials, colours and screening will be important considerations in any development of buildings associated with the provision of new employment. Developers should also be encouraged to consider the use of green or brown roofs on new commercial buildings. The aim should be to create a less harsh urban-rural transition to this side of the town than exists at present, and to avoid creating structures which are highly prominent in views towards Baldock centre (from any direction), detracting from the visual focus on the town centre area around St Mary's Church and giving the impression of linear urban 'sprawl' along the easterly approaches to the town. The Ashville Trading Estate buildings are, through their massing and colour, out of keeping with any other buildings on the eastern side of the town.

Landscape Sensitivity Study for Baldock

Figure 4.2

Landscape Sensitivity Ratings

-  Study Area
- Sensitivity Rating
-  Moderate - High
-  Moderate - Low



Map Scale @ A3:1:10,000



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LUC LDN 5783-01_007_Sensitivity_rating 26/06/2013

Source:

5 Summary and conclusions

- 5.1 This section sets out the conclusions and recommendations in relation to development within land to the north of Baldock, in response to the sensitivity analysis presented at **section 4**.
- 5.2 The sensitivity analysis indicates that character unit B1 has moderate-high sensitivity overall and character unit B2 has moderate-low sensitivity. This suggests that there is more potential for housing, and also employment development, in B2 than in B1, although both units have areas of higher or lower sensitivity within them (as described in section 4).
- 5.3 **Drawing SK_1** indicates the least constrained areas for development, with their size in hectares (although these measurements are an overall figure not taking into consideration any infrastructure). It also identifies key views, ridge lines and opportunities for landscaping in association with development.
- 5.4 The drawing shows that scope for development in relation to the size of the study area is limited, with large areas being of relatively high sensitivity, although the suggested areas still amount to a significant total size: 26.2 hectares. Of this area, 22 hectares has some scope for residential development and 4.2 hectares has potential for employment use. The suggested areas can be ranked in order of sensitivity:
- The areas in B2 (11 ha to the north of the railway line and 4.2 ha to the south) would be least sensitive to development, with the land to the south of the railway line providing opportunities for sensitively designed employment use;
 - Extending northwards from the edge of Baldock, the areas exhibiting the highest existing degree of enclosure by hedgerows, roads and the existing urban area – i.e. the 1.1 ha and 2.2 ha fields in the vicinity of Laymore Farm (totalling 3.3 ha) – would be the least sensitive areas in unit B1;
 - Sensitivity would increase with extension north into unenclosed arable farmland (two areas totalling 5.7 ha) and any housing located beyond the floor of the southernmost east-west valley, onto the upslope, would sit less comfortably in the landscape. Ideally any development to the north should present a consistent front – i.e. avoiding any ‘tongues’ extending further into the open fields in some places than others;
 - Considering the possibility of development that does not extend Baldock, the only possible area identified is alongside the linear development to the south-west of Bygrave (2 ha). This is the most sensitive of the areas identified but offers some potential in that there is more containment in this area, towards the head of the valley, than is the case further west, and new buildings would be visually associated with the existing dwellings on Ashwell Road. Good landscaping, high design standards and low density would be important if this was to be viable.
- 5.5 If the 22 ha identified as having some potential for residential use were to be fully developed (although in reality this would be unlikely as the defined areas include some existing residential properties) this would yield a potential maximum of:
- 660 dwellings at a net residential density of 30 dwellings per hectare (equivalent to 330 dwellings at a gross¹ density of 15 dwellings per hectare);
 - 880 dwellings at a net residential density of 40 dwelling per hectare (equivalent to 440 dwellings at a gross density of 20 dwellings per hectare).
- 5.6 The most appropriate access for any future development areas would be from the westernmost end of Bygrave Road (limiting impacts on rural road character and attendant need for re-grading

¹ Gross residential density includes all supporting infrastructure such as highways, whilst net relates to residential plot footprint only.

and vegetation loss) and Royston Road, with potentially several access points from each depending on the size of development proposed.

- 5.7 Relating any new development to existing housing, and retaining a nucleated form, would be important in terms of minimising landscape impact. There are not considered to be any suitable locations for creating separate new settlement areas.

Appendix 1: Field survey form template

5783 LAND NORTH OF BALDOCK – FIELD SURVEY FORM

Date:	Weather:	Photos:
Time:	Surveyors:	
Landscape unit:		
<u>District LCA context:</u> LCA name and number: Key characteristics: Condition (from LCA matrix): Robustness (from LCA matrix): Evaluation (from LCA description):		
Relevant landscape policies/designations:		
Landscape functions:		

Sensitivity analysis			
<i>Criteria (and supporting survey prompts)</i>	<i>Landscape values, comments and judgements</i>		<i>Landscape guidance and opportunities (if applicable)</i>
<i>LANDSCAPE</i>			
<u>Landscape scale:</u> Presence/absence of human scale features Presence or absence of enclosing elements Field pattern, form and size			
<u>Landform:</u> Scarp slopes Ridge and valley U shaped valley Rolling/undulating/flat Level of landform variation Gradient/slope			

Landscape pattern and complexity:

Cultural/time depth:

Field pattern/earthworks

Settlement influences

Manors/parkland/estates/parks and gardens

SAMs

Roman roads

Sunken lanes

Landscape structure:

Enclosure pattern

Vegetation types, age and scale, density

Habitats

Colour/texture

Others:

Evidence of geological exposure

Hydrology:

Chalk rivers/streams

Springs

Seasonal winterbourne/'gutter'

<p><u>Settlement and human influences:</u></p> <p>Age of settlement</p> <p>Form, whether nucleated, linear/dispersed</p> <p>Scale</p> <p>Density and massing</p> <p>Materials palette</p> <p>Character of roads</p> <p>Settlement edge – characteristics/nature of</p>			
<p><u>Skyline character:</u></p> <p>Open/framed/screened</p> <p>Settled/developed</p> <p>Landmarks</p>			

<u>Perceptual qualities/experience:</u> Colour and texture Light and reflection Movement Tranquillity Remoteness Rarity (from LCA description) Condition/management			
<i>VISUAL</i>			
Visual relationships and views: Nature of views, whether open/expansive, framed, foiled, glimpsed or screened Intervisibility with adjacent landscape unit			
Overall sensitivity judgement and comments:			

