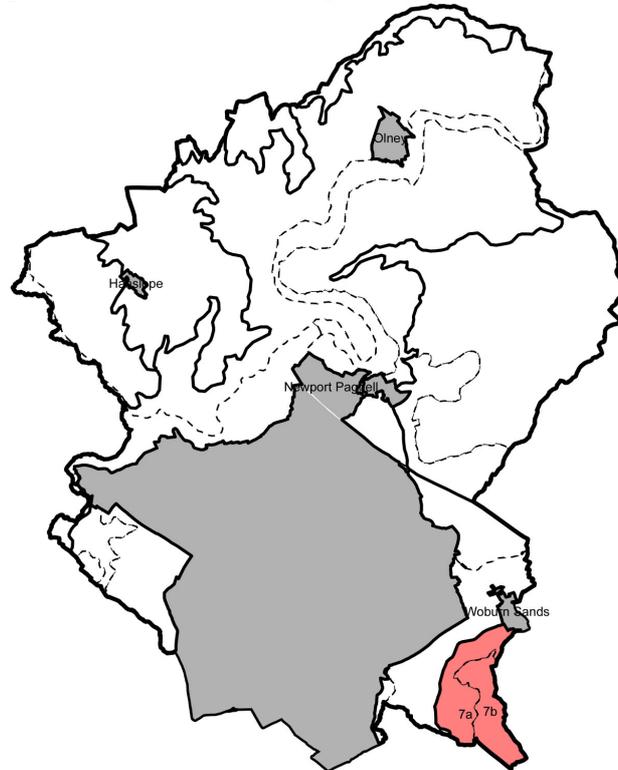


7. Brickhills Greensand Ridge

Summary Page

Location

The area lies close to the south boundary of the authority straddling the A5. The Brickhills Greensand Ridge is part of a larger character area recognised at a national level in the Joint Character Map of England that extends into neighbouring Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire.



Character Summary

The area is distinctive and significantly different to the remainder of the rural areas in Milton Keynes and is. The elevated landform of the ridge is a major topographical landmark and feature as seen from many parts of authority including from within the city. Two sub areas have been identified as follows:

- Brickhills Greensand Slopes – the prominent escarpment slopes rise sharply from the clay fringes below. There is a mix of deciduous and coniferous woodland with pockets of pasture on the lower slopes
- Brickhills Greensand Plateau – the lighter sandy soils of the plateau support coniferous plantations and recreational uses including a golf course

Key Characteristics

Brickhills Greensand Slopes

- High proportion of woodland cover including areas of both deciduous and conifer plantations
- Patchwork of pasture fields to the lower slopes and open land of the slopes - grazing land with gappy over mature hedges
- Extensive recreational uses including walking, cycling, riding and shooting
- Settlement mainly limited to vernacular buildings in small villages
- Presence of greensand 'sandstone' in local buildings

Brickhills Greensand Plateau

- Small areas of original existing heath habitat
- Parcels of pasture
- Panoramic views to Milton Keynes to north from the slopes and A5
- Extensive recreational uses including golf courses, walking, cycling, riding and shooting
- Settlement mainly limited to isolated vernacular buildings
- Presence of greensand 'sandstone' in local buildings
- Relatively peaceful away from A5 and Bow Brickhill Road
- Sandy nature of the ground aids year round access.

Distinctive features

Brickhills Greensand Slopes

- Church Lane

Brickhills Greensand Plateau

- Bow Brickhill Church
- Aerial Mast
- Danesborough Hill Fort



Assessment

Geology and Soils

The geology within this character area is markedly different to the underlying geology in the rest of Milton Keynes Council's administrative area. The Brickhills Greensand Ridge is located on the edge of a band of the Lower Greensand geological formation, which are now more correctly known as Woburn Sands in this location. The greensand known locally as 'sandstone' was locally quarried and some of the old pits remain e.g. 'stoneground', which now serves as a car park off Church Lane/ The Cut, is the site of a disused quarry. The soils in this character area are well drained and sandy with high iron content, particularly on the slopes of the ridge (Frilford Association). As the ridge plateaus out, the soils become loamier but still well drained (Milford Association). There are also areas on the boundary of the

authority that have an underlying chalky till with more clayey and seasonally waterlogged soils of the Ragdale Association.

Topography

The Brickhills Greensand Ridge is a prominent ridgeline with a plateau along its crest, which continues over the County boundary into Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire running in a south west, north east direction. The north-west face of the ridge which overlooks Milton Keynes has a steep scarp slope and a number of secondary folds. The dip slope to the south east has a gentler slope, but is predominantly located in the adjacent authorities. The more gentle slopes in the adjacent Clayland Fringes character area form an important part of the setting of the ridge.

Degree of Slope

The slopes of the Brickhill Greensand Ridge can be as steep as 1 in 6.5, although they can be less steep in some locations, with slopes of 1 in 10. The plateau area on the top of the ridge is much flatter and has average slopes of approximately 1 in 40.

Altitude Range

The slopes of the Greensand Ridge rise from 100m AOD to a maximum height of 165m AOD. The plateau area beyond this has more gentle slopes and reaches a maximum height of 171m, which is marked by an Ordnance Survey triangulation pillar.

Hydrology

The underlying Greensand geology of the area is naturally porous and is an important aquifer. Water stored in this aquifer is used as a water source for the surrounding area, and has been used as such for a long time. Evidence of this can be found in Bow Brickhill where The Blue Spring pump is located at the top of Church Road, and was the original water source for the houses in this location. A natural spring line occurs where the greensand meets the clay and which also creates some localised waterlogging.

Land cover and land use

The slopes are heavily wooded with a mix of both ancient deciduous woodland and coniferous plantations. To the fringes of the woodland areas on the lower slopes there are a number of small to medium scale permanent pastures which are ecologically locally valuable. The plateau is also heavily wooded mainly with coniferous plantations with minimal understorey.

Biodiversity

There is a distinctive pattern of vegetation on the ridge. This includes extensive commercial Scots Pine plantations dating from the 19th century, located on the lighter sandy soils, together with ancient oak woodland with sweet chestnut and holly understorey on some of the heavier clay soils on the slopes. Much of the woodland replaced the naturally occurring heathland vegetation that was found on the ridge. There are a number of important acidic mires which contain species scarce in south east England.

There is a variety of wildlife including roe and muntjac deer, black squirrels and rabbits, badgers, buzzards, wallabies, great crested newts, buzzards, sparrow hawks, badgers and foxes.

Historical and Cultural significance

Danesborough Camp dates from the Iron Age and could have been a base for the tribes who were resisting the Roman advance. The 8.5 acre site is enclosed by the remains of a ditch and rampart which would originally have been up to 20ft. The name is slightly misleading, as the Danes did not come until the 9th - 12th centuries. Evidence of kilns near the camp has been identified and there are also a number of medieval brick and tile kilns near Little

Brickhill. Most of the area is now owned by the Bedford Estates (Woburn) who are the predominant influence on the current management of the area.

Local paintings of the area include Thomas Webster's painting 'A village choir' 1847, and Stanley Roy Badmin's 1940 painting of Bow Brickhill which formed part of the "Recording Britain" project. Both paintings are held by the Victoria & Albert Museum



Field Pattern

Much of the landscape was historically open heath on the light unproductive soils where much of the land was common. There are a few ancient woodlands which were extended by the creation of secondary woodland in the 18th to 19th century and thereafter more extensive coniferous plantations. Smaller strips of organic pre 18th century enclosure relate to the pasture to the lower slopes of the ridge. Many of these fields have tall and gappy hedged enclosure while the enclosure of the woodlands is generally.

Transport Pattern

The main feature of the transport network is the A5 which sweeps up the escarpment on dual carriageway constructed in the early 1990's before which the route followed the alignment of the Roman Watling Street which passes through Little Brickhill. Way from the busy A5 the road network consists of a number of narrow lanes and those which run through the Woburn Estate are marked by picket fences, mature oaks or mixed box and holly hedges. The steep and distinctive steep Church Lane rises out of Bow Brickhill.

Settlement and Built form

There are two village settlements within the area. Little Brickhill developed along Watling Street where a market was established in the village in 1228 and the county Assize Courts were held until 1638. The presence of the main turnpike through the village led to the development of a number of fine houses including a many from the Georgian period. Bow Brickhill straddles the boundary with the Southern Clayland Fringe character area to the north and includes a number of picturesque old cottages lining the steep Church Lane which rises out of the village up the escarpment. All Saints Church, Bow Brickhill stands isolated on the edge of the plateau contained in the woodland and is built from local Greensand.

Useful References and Links

Sir Frank Markham "*History of Milton Keynes and District*", vol 1, 1973

Greensand Trust <http://www.greensand-trust.org.uk>

Henry Mundy memoirs www.bowbrickhill.com/munday.html

Evaluation Page

Visual and Sensory perception

The wooded environment on the slopes and plateau offers an opportunity for tranquilly close to the urban area. There are also some fine panoramic views from the ridge over the claylands and the city to the north however these are restricted in the summer months when the deciduous trees are in leaf where the woodland can create a contained feel. Views to the ridge from the north are equally if not more significant as they provide the backdrop and natural context to much of the city. In addition the lower slopes of the ridge and the adjacent fields within the adjacent Southern Clayland Fringe sub area provide an important area of open land over which the ridge can be appreciated.

The A5 dual carriageway represents a major impact on the local landscape with visual and noise intrusion. However the route also provides fine panoramic views over Milton Keynes and to the wooded ridge. The main aerial mast on the ridge is another significant visual detractor.

Recreational Opportunities

The area is a significant focus for recreational activity for the whole of the authority and further a field. The area together with the adjacent parts of the Greensand Ridge within Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire are well used by the local population. Historically public access to the Bedford Estates was restricted however with the creation of the golf courses in the 1970's increased access was provided, however this is still contained to narrow footpaths routes in parts. A large part of the area is under an Access Management agreement facilitated by the Greensand Trust. The pressure of increasing usage is causing some problems of erosion e.g. by use by cyclists and there are limited facilities for visitors to the area. Activities include cycling, walking, running, golf and riding. Shooting of game birds on the Bedford Estate is restricted to a few days a year.

Community Views

Time depth perspective

" the view is magnificent beyond words; reaching for miles. The village stands partly on the hillside and partly on the flat beyond. The country further on as far as the eye can reach is divided into squares (fields) enclosed with hawthorn and blackthorn hedges with large trees; oaks, elm, ash or willow here and there at intervals"

Henry Mundy recollections of view from Bow Brickhill c. 1840-44

Evaluation Matrix

7a Brickhills Greensand Slopes

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER	WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
Impact of landform*	Insignificant	Apparent	Dominant /Prominent
Impact of landcover*	Insignificant	Apparent	Dominant /Prominent
Historic pattern*	Insignificant	Apparent	Dominant/Prominent
Visibility from outside	Widely visible	Locally visible	Concealed
Sense of enclosure	Open/exposed	Partial	Contained /confined
Tranquillity	Discordant	Moderate	Tranquil
Distinctiveness/rarity	Frequent	Unusual	Unique /rare
Totals * Prime condition categories if tie	1	2	4
CONDITION	POOR	MODERATE	GOOD
Landcover Change	Widespread	Localised	Insignificant
Age Structure of Tree Cover*	Overmature	Mature/Young	Mixed
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival*	Relic	Scattered	Widespread/Linked
Management of semi-natural habitats	Poor	Not obvious	Good
Survival of cultural pattern (fields and hedges)	Declining/Relic	Interrupted	Intact
Impact of built development*	High	Moderate	Low
Visual unity	Incoherent	Coherent	Unified
* Prime condition categories if tie			
Totals * Prime robustness categories if tie	0	1	6
MATRIX			
	Good	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen
	Moderate	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve
	Poor	Reconstruct	Improve and restore
Condition			
		Safeguard and manage	Conserve and restore
			Restore condition to maintain character
	Weak	Moderate	Strong
	Strength of Character		

Landscape Strategy = Safeguard and Manage

Sensitivity

Ecological - High

Cultural – Mainly High with some Moderate

Visual - High

Tranquillity - Low

Evaluation Matrix

7b Brickhills Greensand Plateau

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER	WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
Impact of landform* Impact of landcover* Historic pattern* Visibility from outside Sense of enclosure Tranquillity Distinctiveness/rarity	Insignificant Insignificant Insignificant Widely visible Open/exposed Discordant Frequent	Apparent Apparent Apparent Locally visible Partial Moderate Unusual	Dominant/Prominent Dominant/ Prominent Dominant/Prominent Concealed Contained /confined Tranquil Unique/rare
Totals * Prime condition categories if tie	1	2	4
CONDITION	POOR	MODERATE	GOOD
Landcover Change Age Structure of Tree Cover* Extent of semi-natural habitat survival* Management of semi-natural habitats Survival of cultural pattern (fields and hedges) Impact of built development* Visual unity	Widespread Overmature Relic Poor Declining/Relic High Incoherent	Localised Mature/Young Scattered Not obvious Interrupted Moderate Coherent	Insignificant Mixed Widespread/Linked Good Intact Low Unified
Totals * Prime robustness categories if tie	2	1	4
MATRIX			
	Good	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen
	Moderate	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve
	Poor	Reconstruct	Improve and restore
Condition			Safeguard and manage
			Conserve and restore
			Restore condition to maintain character
	Weak	Moderate	Strong
	Strength of Character		

Landscape Strategy = Safeguard and Manage

Sensitivity

Ecological - High

Cultural - Moderate

Visual - Low

Tranquillity – Mainly Very High with some Low

Guidelines

Countryside Management

Generally

- Support the Greensand Trust in the management of the area and adjacent authorities in conjunction with the Bedford Estates
- Promote the retention of a balanced woodland community including areas of native broadleaves with a balanced profiles alongside areas of indigenous native conifers
- Promote localised reversion from woodland to areas of traditional heath habitat
- Support a co-ordinated approach to recreational management to balance diverse pressures from a range of uses including informal recreation, golf and shooting and to address increased usage, lack of facilities, car parking and funding
- Promote the laying and gapping up of hedges to strengthen the small pasture fields and reverse the decline and move towards post and wire enclosure
- Improve waymarking within the woods utilising local materials and sympathetic detailing for signage
- Seek ways of further enhancing the public access throughout the area including
- Promote the historic and cultural history of the area through interpretation and education
- Protect and enhance the ecologically valuable acidic wetland communities
- Protect and enhance the areas of permanent pasture ensuring that management encourages species diversify
- Ensure the management of local roads and lanes retains the distinctive character and avoids any over engineered or urbanising influences

7 a Brickhills Greensand Slopes

- Identify and promote the retention of key views from the ridge. This could include creating localised clearing looking out

7 b Brickhills Greensand Plateau

Guidelines in relation to development

- Retain the visually important setting of the ridge in the context of Milton Keynes including the pasture with the Brickhills Greensand Ridge and the adjacent arable and pasture fields with the Southern Clayland Fringe
- Restrict built development in the area retaining the primary use for forestry, agriculture and informal recreational
- Proposed development within or adjacent to the Ouse Valley should be accompanied by a landscape and visual assessment as part of any planning application

- Protect the historic setting and structure of the villages including views to the villages and the retained open spaces within them
- Where built development or restoration of buildings is considered appropriate indigenous materials should be used to maintain and enhance the character of both existing villages and individual properties
- Prevent development that could detract from local landmarks including village churches
- Protect the plateau from development that would impinge on or disrupt the existing wooded skyline as seen from within or outside the area
- Restrict further masts or aerials on the skyline and promote the removal of existing masts where possible