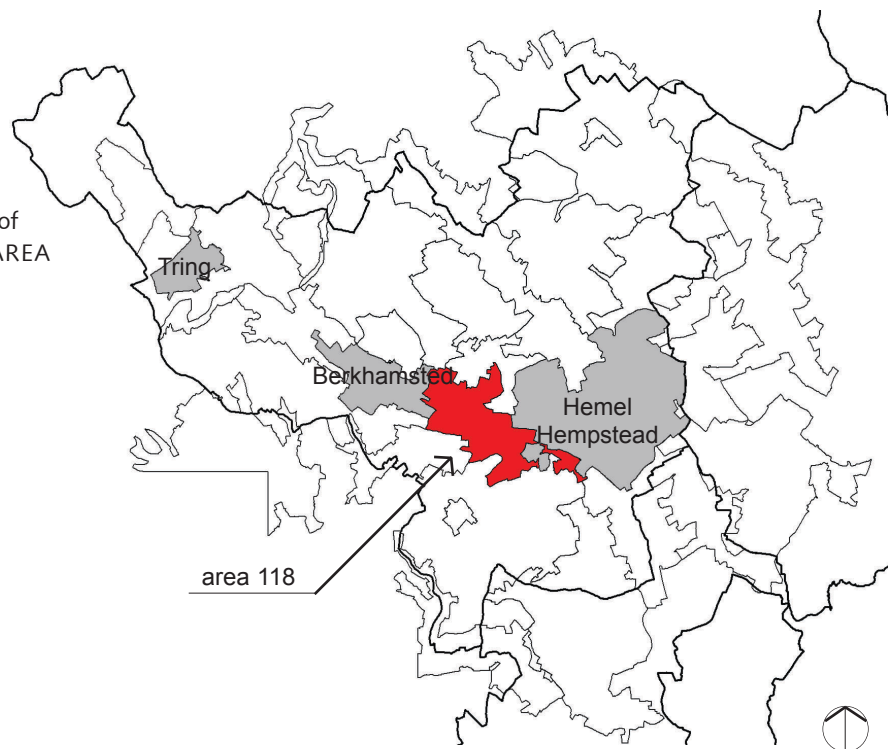


District Map showing location of
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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LOCATION

This section of the Bulbourne Valley runs between Roughdown Common, Hemel Hempstead to the east and Berkhamsted to the north west.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The area occupies a relatively steep sided valley, strongly influenced by the major settlements of Hemel Hempstead and Berkhamsted at either end, which spread up the slopes and onto the adjacent plateau. The narrow congested valley floor combines areas of wet meadow with important corridors for canal, road and rail. At its eastern end the area flows into Hemel Hempstead at Boxmoor where the meadows create a relaxed rural approach to the town. On the valley slopes open large scale arable farming is characteristic while elsewhere there are distinctive chalk landscapes associated with Roughdown and Sheethanger Commons.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- narrow valley floor dominated by arterial transport routes including the London to Glasgow West Coast Main Line, Grand Union Canal and the A41
- steeply sloping valley sides with views to major settlements and associated 'landmark' buildings
- wetland meadows and pollarded willows associated with River Bulbourne
- canal basins, locks, barges, bridges and architecture
- influence of the Boxmoor Trust at Boxmoor Common, Roughdown Common and Sheethanger Common.
- large arable fields and few hedgerows to valley slopes
- minor roads running up the valley slopes in sunken lanes with hedgebanks

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Rare breeds on Boxmoor Trust land
- A41 bypass and Roughdown Common cutting
- Roughdown Common and Sheethanger Common chalk downland and scrub
- railway embankments, bridges and gantries
- Winkwell Docks and canal settlement
- sewage works
- disused watercress beds at Old Fishery Lane
- Winkwell heavy plant depot and disused gravel pits (fishing lakes)

- Grand Union Canal (A.Temporary)

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. Geological composition is largely similar to that in the upper Bulbourne Valley, (Area 117). The area occupies the outwash flood-plain eroded valley sides below Berkhamsted, with extensive Upper and Middle Chalk at the surface on the valley sides, sometimes obscured by hill-wash. On the slopes the soils are generally well drained flinty fine silty soils, (Charity 2 association). The relatively narrow valley floor is occupied by fluvo-glacial gravels and alluvium. Here soils are shallow loams over flinty gravels and affected by groundwater, (Frome association). Upper slopes on the north side of the valley have some slumping from superficial acidic sands and gravels lying on clay-with-flints around Little Heath, (see Area 120). Snooks Moor is partially designated as a Regionally Important Geological Site.

Topography. This area forms one of the most striking geomorphological features in Hertfordshire, created by Pleistocene ice erosion through the Chiltern escarpment. Along this section the main valley is joined by a number of secondary valley features.

Degree of slope. Gradients to the northern slopes are typically 1 in 10 while to the south they are generally steeper around 1 in 8, with some areas including Sheethanger Common and Roughdown Common locally 1 in 5 or more.

Altitude range. This ranges from 85m in the valley floor at Boxmoor to 155m below Little Heath.

Hydrology. As the surface geology is permeable, the only natural surface water is in the River Bulbourne, which is dependent on ground water. In its hey day before the canal, the River Bulbourne was a full and fast moving river yielding a healthy crop of eels and fresh fish and powering watermills. As with the Upper Bulbourne, the course of the River Bulbourne is now rather weak in relation to the Grand Union Canal, which frequently intersects and follows its path. It is, however, once again characterised by a wide variety of floodplain vegetation, in particular the wet meadows at Boxmoor Fields. Springs rise from the chalk at Bourne End. Ponds, lakes (filled in gravel pits) and relic watercress beds also characterise the area.

Land cover and land use. There is a mix of land uses the valley floor including; grazing pasture, recreation (e.g. fishing) and the strong infrastructure elements of the railway and canal. To the valley slopes open large scale arable farming is generally characteristic of the free draining soils, particularly to the north. In contrast to Area 117 there are a number of other land uses here including; orchards, parkland at Westbrook Hay, fishing in old gravel pits by the canal, a golf course on Sheethanger Common and downland scrub and woodland at Roughdown Common.

Vegetation and wildlife. The valley floor historically had quite extensive alluvial pastures, but almost all of these have been lost. The remaining areas at the west end of Boxmoor are improved grassland. Wet alder/willow woodland is the natural woodland type of the valley floor, and vestiges remain associated with some of the recent gravel pits. The calcareous springs (formerly used as cress

beds) at Bourne End are of local interest, along with some of the old gravel pit lakes, notably Winkwell Lake.

To the northern valley slopes several semi-natural woodlands survive, notably Gutteridge Wood, dominated by oak, ash and beech woodland, and especially notable for its old pollarded trees. The south west valley slopes around Bourne End have some older, mostly improved grasslands etc, but most is also arable farmland, except for secondary grassland at Little Hay Golf Course. One ancient woodland of note is Hanging Wood, characterised by ash/hazel woodland with some beech.

To the south eastern slopes an abrupt spur of exposed Upper and Middle Chalk above the valley floor at Boxmoor supports both Sheethanger and Roughdown Commons, which were extensive chalk grassland sheep-walks. The former has vestiges of chalk grassland around an old chalk pit but is otherwise semi-improved grassland and secondary woodland around a golf course. Roughdown Common is an important area of chalk grassland and scrub, partly destroyed by the A41 built in the mid 1990's. The settlement of Felden between these sites has calcareous flora in old gardens. Outside the commons, the slopes have some reasonably old beech woodland at Bury Wood, as well as mainly replanted woodland at Hay Wood. Other areas are arable or secondary grasslands, with one or two small fields of older calcareous grassland adjoining Felden itself.

Most of the area has no species of particular note. The old pollarded beeches at Gutteridge Wood may harbour important invertebrates, but there are no records. The aquatic habitats associated with the River Bulbourne have some locally notable species, such as Water Whorl-grass and Tussock Sedge. The chalk grasslands at Roughdown Common, however, are especially important for supporting one of the best populations of Juniper in the County, while the remnants of chalk grassland at Sheethanger Common still contain one of only two colonies of Frog Orchids in Hertfordshire.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The historic pattern of grazing along the river valley survives in places and is particularly conspicuous at Boxmoor. The character of the valley floor was massively changed by two waves of transport innovation during the Industrial Revolution with the coming of the canal and then the railway. Snooks Moor, which is part of the Boxmoor Trust land, is named after the local highway man whose gravestone is on the moor. The area is now grazed by the distinctive Belted Galloway cattle.

Field Patterns. To the valley slopes the predominant pattern is of large prairie fields with few hedges and narrow verges. Further up the slopes on the plateau edge remnant pre 18th century organic, sinuous and coaxial enclosure survives. Within the valley bottom there is a stronger pattern of parliamentary enclosure around the canal and railway. These field units tend to be smaller in scale and are usually contained by tall hedges.

Transport pattern. The valley floor serves as a major arterial corridor through which the Grand Union Canal, London to Glasgow Main Line and A41 run. At Bourne End the A41 runs south of Berkhamsted over the Chiltern dip slope while the original alignment of the Roman Road, Akeman Street now follows the A4251 through the town. Elsewhere narrow hedged lanes follow the valley floor while sunken lanes run up the steep valley slopes. Verges are generally absent in these minor roads.

Settlements and built form. Apart from the urban areas of Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead to the peripheries, settlement within the character area is essentially small scale and relatively sparse. There is a small hamlet at the Winkwell Docks, near Bourne End, with several good half timbered properties and brick buildings, including the Three Horseshoes Public House, alongside a distinctive swing bridge over the canal. Small clusters of houses and isolated houses, of a variety of ages and styles, make up the remainder of the built form, although the modern buildings of Hemel Hempstead New Town, such as the Kodak Building, are intermittently visible throughout the area. At Boxmoor there is a pleasing intermingling of late 19th and early 20th century settlement with the rural meadows and villas on the edge of Roughdown Common.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

English Nature : SSSI and RIGS notifications
Herts CC: Register of Parks- Westbrook Hay

- Snooks Moor
(J.Billingsley)



VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

The area is generally contained from view, apart from on the adjacent plateau edges. There is a curious mix where open, large scale arable fields on the valley sides sit alongside extensive areas of residential development punctuated by high rise buildings within the built up areas. There are some fine views across the valley although a number are urban in character. The arterial character of the valley is the unifying feature with the main line railway, canal and A41 all occupying the valley floor. This creates a busy and noisy atmosphere which is only partially subdued by the Boxmoor Trust meadows and the canal side environments.

Rarity and distinctiveness. Overall this is a frequent landscape type within the county. The exceptions are the narrow valley floor which carries the arterial transport routes and the steep chalk landscapes at Roughdown and Sheethanger Commons which are considered unusual.

VISUAL IMPACT

There is a strong visual impact from various landmark buildings in the adjacent towns particularly Hemel Hempstead. These include: Kodak Tower, Jarman Park Leisure Complex, and neo Georgian architecture of Hemel Hempstead (Grammar) School. The major areas of residential development are a key feature and most prominent when looking across the valley sides. Bourne End Industrial area is another significant grouping. The embankments for the West Coast Mainline railway, together with associated overhead gantries, are strong containing and divisive features. This is particularly emphasised where they directly abut the A41. The bypass, built in the mid 1990's, created a major feature in the

landscape in its own right. The route severed the Roughdown Common SSSI by a deep cutting and resulted in the construction of two significant grade separated junctions.

ACCESSIBILITY

The waymarked Grand Union Canal Walk follows the valley floor. There also public access through Boxmoor Trust land including Roughdown Common and Sheethanger Common. Otherwise there are few footpaths and some of the slopes have limited access e.g. south of Little Heath.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

This linear landscape is noted for its distinctiveness and is well regarded by many users (B); respondent 2317 writes "The Bulbourne Valley walk has wildlife, wildflowers, trees etc, gently rolling hills with unspoilt views...canalside interest, pubs, boats etc...It is accessible to all". The sub-area Boxmoor/Roughdown common is also valued in its own right; "It is kept nicely, it has cattle and horses on it, it is not too well manicured giving the impression of common land. It gives a pleasant impression on entering Hemel Hempstead" (2320).

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

AONB (north of railway)
SSSI: Roughdown Common
RIGS: Snooks Moor
Landscape Development Area (south of London Road and Boxmoor)
Landscape Conservation Area (north east of railway)
Winkwell Conservation Area
Areas of Archaeological Significance: Stoney Lane/Broadway Farm

CONDITION

<i>Land cover change:</i>	localised
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	mixed
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	scattered
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	good
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	declining
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	High
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	moderate

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	prominent
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	apparent
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	apparent
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	locally visible
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	partial
<i>Visual unity:</i>	incoherent
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	frequent

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: IMPROVE AND CONSERVE**

- promote awareness and consideration of the setting of the AONB, and views to and from it, when considering development and land use change proposals on sites adjacent to the AONB
- develop a strategy to limit built development within the area and mitigate the impact of existing development either within or adjacent to the area on the edges of Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead
- encourage the retention of the existing pattern of hedges and to create new features to further enhance landscape and ecological links between woodlands and within the arable landscapes to the valley sides. Use the line of old field boundaries and/or rights of way where possible
- promote the retention and restoration of the historic parkland at Westbrook Hay through a range of initiatives including; tree planting, supporting pasture in preference to arable and replacing metal estate fencing
- promote the appropriate management of woodland in order to conserve and where absent to re-establish a rich ground flora and the distinction between different management systems, such as high forest and coppice with standards. Encourage planting new hanging woodlands to the upper slopes with indigenous mixed broadleaves with a mix to include beech, ash and cherry
- promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and important semi-natural habitats and the creation of links between semi-natural habitats
- conserve unimproved and semi-improved meadows within the valley floor and by avoiding agricultural improvements in order to maintain their nature conservation value. Encourage traditional management by grazing and the maintenance of smaller scale hedged field units
- within the valley floor encourage the planting and maintenance of willows, alder and poplar
- encourage the management and enhancement of existing wetland features within the valley floor environment, to re-create lost features and seek opportunities to create new features. To balance the recreational uses with the ecological value and to encourage a strategy to improve the water quality and quantity
- conserve and enhance the distinctive character of rural settings by promoting the conservation of important buildings and high standards of new building or alterations to existing properties, all with the consistent use of traditional materials and designed to reflect the traditional character of each area
- promote the retention and restoration of existing orchards at Broadway Orchard and the creation of new orchards. Encourage the use of traditional varieties of fruit and minimise the use of herbicides and pesticides
- promote the maintenance and upgrading of the Grand Union Canal Walk and the associated architectural features and buildings
- promote the retention of the character of local minor roads by the management of hedgerows and sunken lanes up the valley sides. Where part of a hedge has been damaged or removed it should be replanted with a mix of indigenous species
- ensure that local highway improvements are sympathetic to the scale, pattern and character of the existing road network
- enhance the landscape by promoting the removal of existing eyesores, repairing damage and mitigating the effects of existing intrusive developments
- Kodak building, Hemel Hempstead (A.Tempany)

