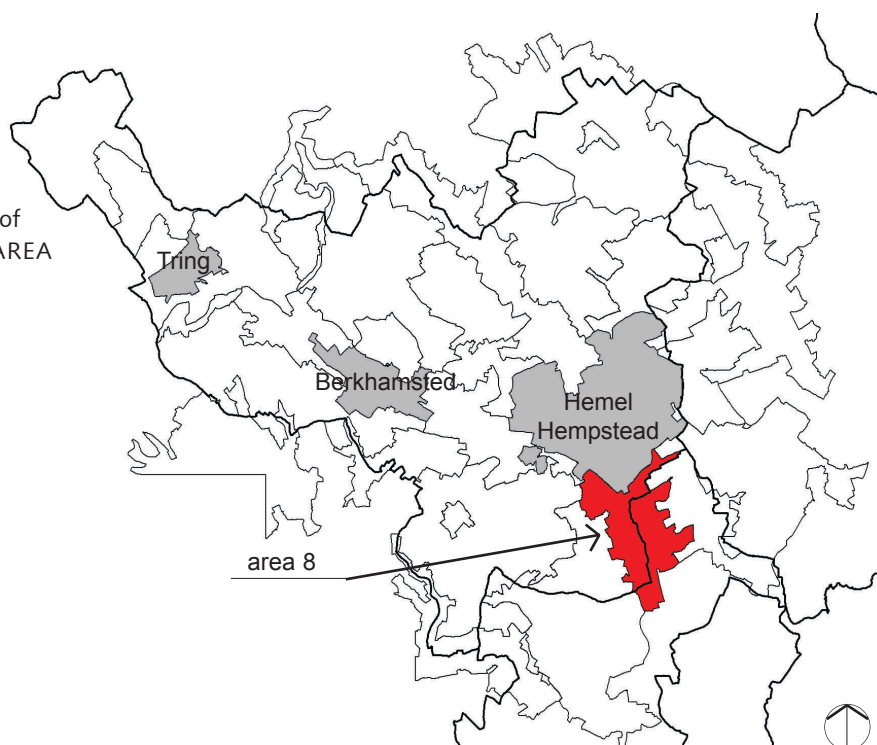


District Map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

©Crown copyright .All rights reserved
Dacorum Borough Council
100018935 2004



LOCATION

The area follows the Gade valley and associated side slopes from the southern edge of Hemel Hempstead to Hunton Bridge.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

A narrow but marked floodplain. There is a strong influence from built development arising from its function as a transport corridor over the centuries. Steep and topographically matching slopes rise to either side with occasional dramatic open views across the valley. Major land use on the valley floor and west slopes is pastoral with some recreational. To the eastern slopes there is a mix of arable and pasture. The area is visually and functionally divided by built development, including industrial uses, along the valley floor but more noticeably up the valley sides, where residential development follow roads that run steeply perpendicular up the slopes.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- level valley floor
- multiple arterial routes including roads, rail and canal
- steeply sloping valley slopes with secondary valleys running perpendicular to the Gade
- high proportion of 20th-century built development, both in valley and on the slopes

- linear woodland on steep slopes and edge of adjacent plateau
- pastoral slopes in the west and arable to the east
- meadow pasture on the valley floor
- medium-scale parklands overlooking the valley
- M25 viaduct major landmark along the valley

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- canal locks
- Kings Langley Common
- Ovaltine factory



Gade Valley slopes from Kings Langley •
(J. Billingsley)

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. On the south side slopes of the valley the soils are a mix of well-drained fine loamy over clayey soils and coarse and fine loamy over clayey soils with slowly permeable sub soils (Marlow association). The underlying geology is a combination of plateau and river-terrace drift. To the north, the soils (Hornbeam 2 association) have a similar composition but overlie plateau drift. A narrow belt of soils is found to the north east slopes. These are well-drained calcareous fine silty soils, some being shallow on the slopes (Coombe 1 association), and lie over chalky drift and chalk. On the valley floor the soils are comprised of shallow calcareous and non-calcareous loamy soils (Frome series) over flint gravel and small areas of peat.

Topography. The valley floor varies in width between 200-300m wide. The side slopes fall from the adjacent plateau at about 125m. There is a marked pattern of rippling secondary valleys running perpendicular to the main slopes.

Degree of slope. The valley floor falls at 1 in 400. The valley slopes typically range between 1 in 11 and 1 in 14, with some of the secondary valleys at 1 in 8.

Altitude range. Valley floor between 75 - 65m. Adjacent plateau at 125m.

Hydrology. The Grand Union Canal, built in the 1790s to provide a direct link between London and Birmingham, combines with the river Gade for most of the valley, giving a full yet slow-moving character to the watercourse. There are two separate waterbodies, one an angling site and the other, Kings Langley Lake, a spring-fed former gravel pit. There are secondary channels, some of which act as mill races, and a number of weirs, locks and dams. The water meadows have a few drainage ditches but on the side slopes there are no significant streams. There are wells at Numbers Farm.

Land cover and land use. There is a wide range of land uses in the area. On the valley floor there is a mix of pasture, recreation including the canal, allotments, a football club, fishing and a number of major industrial sites. On the east slopes the primary land use is pastoral, particularly in smaller fields, but there are also areas of arable. Woodlands are linear in form yet make a significant visual contribution and emphasise the landform. An area of parkland exists at Nash Mills, now Abbots Hill School. On the western slopes there is a mix of visually prominent pasture, residential and an area of parkland with mature specimen trees including cedar and pines at Shendish Manor, now a golf club. Woodlands tend to follow the secondary valleys, e.g. The Nucket.

Vegetation and wildlife. The slopes contain some areas of Chiltern dip slope woodland where the main species is beech. Other species include oak, ash, field maple and hornbeam. Hedges on the slopes are generally in good condition and medium to tall. Species include hawthorn, beech, blackthorn and holly. Barnes Lane, north-west of King's Langley, is ancient in origin with dog's mercury in both verges. There are also a few areas of remnant calcareous grassland on the slopes, e.g. Rucklers Lane and

within the Long Deans Nature Reserve at Nash Mills. Tree rows and hedges follow the canal and emphasise the watercourse. Species are mainly willow, poplar and sycamore.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The royal deer park (largely to the west of the character area) reached a maximum size of 950 acres, and was enclosed in the 14th century. The Tudors abandoned the royal palace but the site of a hunting lodge is still present in the floodplain close to the M25.

Field pattern. On the eastern slopes there is a strong pattern of pre-18th century co-axial enclosure, i.e. fields that have parallel boundaries on one axis with further sub divisions at right angles. These boundaries follow the parallel lanes running up from the Gade which are a strong feature of the area. The co-axial pattern is retained in the centre of these slopes, but there has been a move to larger prairie fields to the south adjacent to the M25. On the valley floor areas of traditional meadow pasture remain south of the M25 viaduct. The Gade valley was once a centre for growing alder for tableware. The meadow pasture is partly unenclosed and partly marked by fencing. On the western slopes there is a predominance of a parliamentary field pattern characterised by straight lines. Kings Langley Common, with its wayside cottages, still survives within the settlement.

Transport pattern. A number of arterial routes pass along the valley floor, including the Grand Union Canal, Euston railway, A41 and the A4251 (formerly A41). Crossing the valley and running up the slopes perpendicular to the main corridor are a series of minor roads. The M25 crosses the valley on a large elevated viaduct.

Settlements and built form. Kings Langley dates from the 11th century. In the 14th century a deer park created by Edward I brought royal patronage. Industrialisation arrived with the advent of the Grand Union Canal. Nash Mill was converted to papermaking in the 18th century and by 1840 the Dickinson family were producing a fine quality silky paper which was distinctive because it could safeguard against forgery. A number of prominent local buildings utilise flint as a building material, e.g. Nash House. Larger houses include Shendish Manor and Abbots Hill (1839) built by John Dickinson. Other local materials include red brick and clay tiles.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

English Heritage: Schedule entries

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

The natural topography creates a coherent medium-scale landscape unit despite the presence of considerable built development on the valley floor and the side slopes. There are clear views into the area from the edge of the adjacent plateau areas and from the M25 viaduct. Within the area the facing slopes create a sense of containment. There are more limited views along the valley due to either the variety of built development or in the more open areas by hedges along the main arterial routes.

Rarity and distinctiveness. The character of the valley is uncommon in the county. The concentration of arterial routes and the visually prominent built forms within a strongly contained valley with steeply rising slopes are the most distinctive features.

VISUAL IMPACT

Urban development is a key element of the area. Residential areas follow the secondary valleys up the side slopes and there are significant industrial units dating back to the advent of the paper industry on the valley floor. The main Euston railway line passes through the valley on embankment, and the M25 viaduct is a major landmark hovering over the ancient flood meadows. Radio masts on the horizon to the east are notable.

ACCESSIBILITY

The Grand Union Canal/river Gade with its associated long-distance footpath are a major feature through the area. There are a number of footpaths on the upper slopes.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

With the exception of the area around Shendish Manor there is currently insufficient evidence that the community regards this as a distinctive landscape (E).

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

AONB: (part-north of Sarratt)

Landscape Conservation Area (majority)

SM: two barrow sites on Chipperfield Common

SSSI: Westwood Quarry (geological interest).

Area of Archaeological Significance: Chipperfield Common

CONDITION

<i>Land cover change:</i>	localised
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	mature or young
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	fragmented
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	variable
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	interrupted
<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>	interrupted
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	locally visible
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	contained
<i>Visual unity:</i>	incoherent
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	unusual

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**

- emphasise the valley form by planting new woodlands and shelterbelts on the top of the valley slopes and the plateau edge
- provide planting to minimise the impact of existing built development up the valley sides
- promote hedgerow restoration and creation throughout the area to provide visual and ecological links between existing and proposed woodland areas. Pattern to follow historic field boundaries where possible
- manage existing tree belts and individual trees along the valley floor and supplement where there are intrusive features
- encourage the establishment of wet native woodland along watercourses, including alder and pollarded willow
- promote the management of Kings Langley Common to provide a mix of habitats including grassland, scrub and woodland. Encourage traditional management if compatible with suburban context
- promote sustainable and integrated multiple uses for gravel pits and canals
- encourage the establishment of buffer strips of semi-natural vegetation along all watercourses avoiding potential conflict with recreational use
- resist the targeting of redundant or derelict pasture for development and encourage effective management, possibly including low-level recreational use
- protect river corridors and water meadows from development that would alter its character visually or environmentally, such as culverting, impact on a floodplain, loss of water meadows, ditches or storage ponds
- improve the management of old meadows and pastures by ceasing fertiliser and herbicide application and by introducing sensitive grassland management such as late hay cutting or low-density livestock grazing
- promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and important semi-natural habitats and the creation of links between semi-natural habitats
- promote crop diversification and the restoration of mixed livestock/arable farming where possible
- conserve unimproved and semi-improved calcareous grassland, avoiding agricultural improvements and over-grazing to maintain their nature conservation value
- traffic-calming measures, where considered necessary, must be of a scale and design that relates to the local landscape character of the settlement
- ensure all existing and proposed recreational land uses include appropriate measures to manage and enhance the existing landscape setting and historical and ecological value
- ensure new planting is encouraged to maintain age diversity. Ensure landscape improvements respect the historic context of existing features and the form and character of parkland and gardens. Ornamental species should only be used to replace damaged or over-mature specimens where appropriate
- encourage reversion from arable uses to pasture and grassland
- restrict ploughing of grasslands within parklands
- ensure that design proposals for minor roads fit the grain of the local landscape, both horizontally and vertically; avoid significant impact on the local field pattern and hedgerows
- maintain and develop the traditional pattern of roadside verges as a local feature and a wildlife resource
- promote a clear strategy for the visual and noise mitigation of the M25 and A41
- improve public rights of way between the canal and the valley slopes
- conserve and enhance the distinctive character of traditional settlements and individual buildings by promoting the conservation of important buildings and high standards of new building or alterations to existing properties, all with the consistent use of locally traditional materials and design to reflect the traditional character of the area



• Grand Union Canal and M25 viaduct (J. Billingsley)