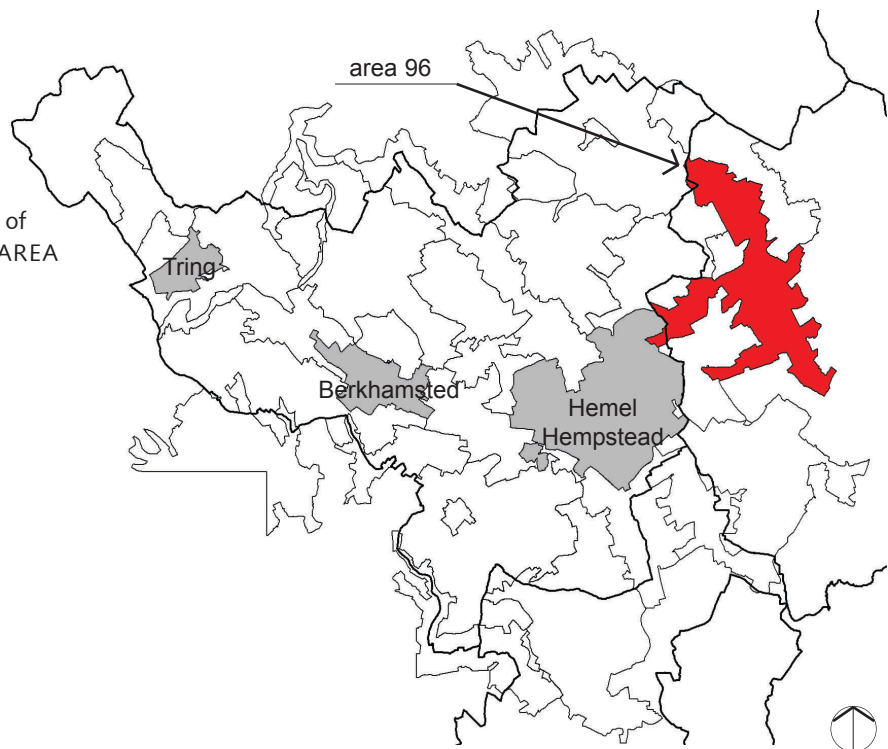


### District Map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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#### LOCATION

This area follows the stretch of the Ver valley that runs from Junction 9 of the M1 (to the north of Redbourn) downstream to St. Albans. The area also includes the dry valley west of Redbourn along Hempstead Road.

#### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

A broad, open river valley with gentle slopes and extensive views. Riverine vegetation is confined to a narrow, linear strip along the meandering watercourse. Large arable fields on the valley's gentle slopes are characteristic and contrast with the small fields of wetland pasture along the river banks in the lower stretches between Redbourn and St. Albans. The course of the river is reinforced by the straight Roman road of Watling Street. Mature plantations of willow and poplar border the river around Pre Mill House and hotel, creating a more enclosed character. A continuous strip of pasture tracks the base of the dry valley from Redbourn along the Hempstead road. The main valley is also marked by a disused railway line now used as a way-marked footpath, the Ver Colne valley walk.



#### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- narrow strip of wetland habitats along valley floor south of Redbourn
- cultural pattern and historic settlements follows the line of the river
- open, gently undulating valley slopes
- large arable fields
- discrete woodland blocks to north of the area, including conifers
- isolated settlement
- lack of field boundaries on valley slopes
- hedge banks along lanes crossing slopes
- mature willow and poplar plantations in the floodplain
- pockets of pasture along urban edges and the dry valley between Redbourn and Hemel Hempstead

#### DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Watling Street Roman road
- Redbournbury Mill and ford
- Redbourn by-pass
- M1 corridor and Junction 9
- show ground
- disused railway line - now a footpath and cycle way
- meadow pasture
- Aubrey's hill fort
- horsiculture along Hempstead Road

- Water meadows at Redbournbury (HCC Landscape Unit)

**PHYSICAL INFLUENCES**

**Geology and soils.** The chalk bedrock is overlaid by clay-with-flints drift on the upper valley slopes, sand and gravel on the lower valley slopes and alluvium in the valley bottom. Neutral acidic loams on the upper slopes are stagnogleyic paleo-argillic brown earths, which are fine silty and loamy soils with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging. Some well drained clayey soils over chalk outcrops and colluvium, variably flinty (Batcombe association). On the dry tributary valley north of Gorhambury soils are typical paleo-argillic brown earths which are well drained fine silty and clayey soils, often very flinty (Carstens association). In the valley bottom soils are typical argillic brown earths which are well drained fine silty soils, locally very flinty, some shallow over flint and periglacial gravels (Charity 2 association).

There is a site of Regionally Important Geology (RIGS) at Redbournbury Chalk Pit south of Redbournbury Mill.

**Topography.** This section of river valley runs in a north west/south east direction for approximately 9 km. It is mainly dry to the north of Redbourn with the River Ver running underground in places. South of Redbourn the valley takes on a classic river valley form with a floodplain, valley slopes and dry secondary valleys feeding into the main valley. The slopes of the valley to the north east are steeper than those to the south west, however, the dry valleys to the south west are larger and extend further.

**Degree of slope.** The valley slopes typically range between 1 in 15 and 1 in 25. In the dry valley immediately north of Gorhambury Estate the slopes average 1 in 13.

**Altitude range.** The highest point is 140m near Turner's Hall Farm and the lowest point is 84 in the floodplain to the south of the area.

**Hydrology.** The river Ver is a chalk stream, partly a seasonal winterbourne to the north of Redbourn. The flow is variable depending on the level of extraction at Luton. To the north of the area a balancing pond is located at Junction 9 of the M1. Between this point and Redbourn the river runs mainly underground and is large drain when above ground. There are also two springs in this area, Northfield Spring and Scout Spring, and two fords to the east of Redbourn and two at Redbournbury Mill. On the floodplain south of Redbourn there are two areas of disused watercress beds. The river meanders within the floodplain with a number of threaded courses. There is a small dam above Corn Mill and a series of sluices above Pre Mill House. Surface water is rare on the valley slopes, but a covered reservoir lies at the head of the dry valley just east of Hemel Hempstead and small ponds are associated with farmsteads and settlements, e.g. Kettlewell's Farm.

**Land cover and land use.** The area is predominantly arable farmland with open wetland meadow along the valley floor to the south. The smaller fields along the valley floor are used for pasture and cattle graze the river banks along the river to the south of Redbourn. To the north, the valley is mainly arable, except for the golf course at Harpendenbury Farm. There are a number of plantations within the valley. A hazardous waste treatment plant (the only one in Hertfordshire) operates from the Redbournbury

Chalk Pit site. The dry valley that runs between Redbourn and Hemel Hempstead is strongly marked by the extent of horse pasture. Paddocks are defined by timber and wire fences.

**Vegetation and wildlife.**

Remnant discrete woodlands are found on the valley slopes and are typically oak/beech/ash/hazel/cherry with more of an oak/hornbeam mix to the south east. Poplar and willow plantations around Pre Mill and hotel are significant features adjacent to the A5183. To the north of Redbourn there are more coniferous stands and ornamental planting around the golf club at Harpendenbury Farm.

Hedgerow species comprise hawthorn, holly, blackthorn, bramble, willow, elder, elm with hedgerow oaks, willows and ash.

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

**Field pattern.** Fields along the valley floors are notably smaller than those on the valley slopes and their linear shapes run parallel to its sinuous course. Fields on the broader valley slopes are medium to large and their boundaries perpendicular to the direction of the river. The field shapes are sub-regular or irregular. Much of the historic pattern, including most of the co-axial field systems and the associated hedgerows, have been lost to changes in agricultural practices in the later part of the 20th century.

**Transport pattern.** The main St. Albans to Redbourn road (A5183) follows the linear course of the Roman road of Watling Street along the valley between Redbourn and Bow Bridge, crossing the River Ver on several occasions. Rural lanes branch off from this road at right angles and generally follow the dry valleys up to the plateaux to the east and west. The lanes to the north of Redbourn are more sinuous. At the northern end of the area the M1 and Junction 9 form an imposing feature in the landscape. At Redbourn, the disused railway line crosses the area and is marked by parallel mature hedges. The railway line is now used as a public right of way for walkers and cyclists, known as the 'Nicky Line'.

**Settlements and built form.**

There is evidence of development along the river valley floor dating back to the late 2nd century AD, particularly closer to the Roman town of Verulamium. Settlement outside the built up areas of Redbourn and St. Albans is dispersed, with isolated houses and farms dotted along the valley. The building style is predominantly vernacular, using mainly red brick and tile, e.g. Redbournbury Mill and Corn Mill. The hamlet of Shafford includes groups of estate cottages. Black weatherboard farm buildings are also seen in the area.

**OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION**

Habitat Survey of Site 55/001 Redbournbury Meadows  
Hertfordshire Countryside Volume 6 No. 23 Winter  
1951 front cover Illustration of ford at Redbournbury  
Hertfordshire Countryside Volume 38 No. 289 May 1983 p.  
21 Illustration of Redbournbury Mill  
Hertfordshire Countryside Volume 24 No. 130 February  
1970 p. 21 Illustration of Redbourn Landscape  
English Heritage: Schedule entry

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The main Upper Ver Valley is widely visible from the surrounding plateaux. The open slope character permits extensive views across the arable landscape resulting in a visual unity in the area.

Hedgerows are few and far between on the slopes but those that border the lanes are located high on steep hedgebanks, preventing views to and from the lanes. Traffic moving along the A5183 disrupts the rural character.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** Although this is one of a number of river valleys in the county, it is unusual to find a valley that is so broad and open. The water meadows south of Redbourn are the most distinctive feature.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

The mills along the river are both locally important heritage sites and distinctive features along its length. The traffic moving along the Roman road detracts from the rural feel of the area. The settlements of Redbourn and St. Albans are apparent throughout the valley area. The waste treatment plant is locally visible, particularly the security fencing and works associated with it.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

Total length of Public Rights of Way - 26,994m  
Total length of Other Public Access - 16,455m  
Total length of Designated Cycle Routes - 8,871m  
Total length of all public access - 52,320m  
Area of LCA in square metres - 16,933,032  
Length to area ratio - 1:234

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

There is insufficient data at present to establish a complete picture of community views about this area, however the environs of Redbournbury are clearly regarded as of significant value, with few other locations noted (B). "I love this sort of place – an unassuming little corner that is so typical of the English Countryside and yet can be easily lost because it is not sufficiently important for anyone to worry about protecting it". Gordon Benningfield on Redbournbury in 'Benningfield's English Landscape' Cameron Books 1985.

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

Landscape Conservation Area (south)  
Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Site (RIGS) at Redbournbury Chalk Pit  
SM: Aubreys Camp south-west of Redbourn  
Conservation Areas: Shafford Mill and to the southern tip of St. Albans

**CONDITION**

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

**STRENGTH OF CHARACTER**

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	<b>apparent</b>
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	<b>prominent</b>
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	<b>interrupted</b>
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	<b>widely visible</b>
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	<b>open</b>
<i>Visual unity:</i>	<b>coherent</b>
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	<b>unusual</b>

CONDITION	GOOD	Strengthen and reinforce	<b>Conserve and strengthen</b>	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
		<b>STRENGTH OF CHARACTER</b>		



### STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE: CONSERVE AND STRENGTHEN

- within existing woodlands, encourage the replacement of softwoods with indigenous native deciduous communities, provide hedgebank management and re-establish a species-rich ground flora
- utilise ancient hedge and field boundaries to establish the most appropriate location for wood restoration and expansion
- encourage the reversal of habitat fragmentation and the creation and improvement of habitat links to create eco-corridors
- promote a clear strategy for the visual and noise mitigation of motorways and trunk roads and positively integrate these corridors into the local landscape character
- Restore and enhance wet grassland to provide a habitat for wading birds
- conserve and manage marshy grassland. Avoid over-grazing, heavy public pressure, damage from vehicles and pollution
- encourage the dissemination of information about the historic importance and appropriate management of woodland features such as banks and ditches
- encourage reversion from arable uses to pasture and grassland
- protect remaining river valley habitats of significant nature conservation interest, especially where they contribute to a suite of habitats, such as neutral grassland, running water, wet grassland, valley or floodplain woodland, grazing marsh, fens and swamp
- promote the use of low-density stock grazing as a management technique
- promote the re-introduction of permanent pasture and flooding regimes as normal agricultural practices, to increase landscape and habitat diversity
- 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 or storage ponds.
- enhance and restore hedgerows and ditches as characteristic field boundary patterns
- promote the use of traditional field enclosure where land is converted to equestrian pasture
- encourage the retention and enhancement of rights of way and recreational routes
- ensure that new and restored buildings are in keeping with the local vernacular
- promote the use of traditional field enclosure where land is converted to equestrian pasture
- within golf courses a high proportion of the total area shall be dedicated to and maintained as wildlife habitat, building upon established areas of wildlife interest already present. Landscape management plans to be an integral part of the facilities
- encourage the re-use of existing agricultural buildings for uses such as equestrian activity and tourism
- Poplar plantation, Pre Mill (HCC Landscape Unit)

