



District Map showing location of
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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

LOCATION

To the north of Tring urban area, and incorporating four balancing reservoirs for the Grand Union Canal, which runs through the area.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The Grand Union Canal infrastructure exerts a strong influence on the character of the area through the presence of the Aylesbury Arm and more significantly four substantial balancing reservoirs that lie at the base of the Chiltern foothills. The reservoirs are supported by large engineered bunds and flanked by hybrid poplars. Canal architecture, hump backed bridges and brightly painted barges provide further distinction to the area. The various canal related environments are popular for recreation. The reservoirs are designated Nature Reserves of some ornithological significance.

To the remainder of the area there is an emphasis on arable farming and a relatively dense settlement pattern centred around the villages of Long Marston, Wilstone, and Marsworth.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Grand Union Canal (Aylesbury Arm), including bridges and canal architecture
- regulating reservoirs for the Grand Union Canal
- long established settlements with varied vernacular building styles

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Wilstone Reservoir and associated extensive bunding
- interesting thatched and half timbered cottages with brick infill at Long Marston
- ruined church and moat at Long Marston



- Grand Union Canal
(HCC Landscape Unit)

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. In geological terms, the area is a mixture of Lower Chalk Marl surrounding the reservoirs, which supports well drained calcareous silty soils, (Wantage 1 association) and a lens of Pleistocene superficial outwash gravels and alluvium over Gault Clay around the villages of Long Marston and Wilstone to the north west, which supports permeable calcareous loamy soils, (Block association).

Topography. Generally gently undulating, although in localised areas strongly influenced by relatively recent man made features i.e. embankments for the Tring Reservoirs and banking for the canal.

Degree of slope. Typical slopes across the area vary between 1 in 60 and 1 in 70.

Altitude range. This ranges from 86m at Long Marston to 105m at the Tring gap foothills.

Hydrology. The hydrology of the area is particularly important. Calcareous springs from the underlying Totternhoe Stone are the source of the River Thame and its tributary ditches. They also supply the man made reservoirs and the canals which are prominent elements in the local landscape. The reservoirs were created for the Grand Union Canal from 1793. Shortly after the construction of the canal it became clear that there was insufficient water supplies at the Tring Summit and vast quantities of water were required to enable the boats to progress through the various locks. The first reservoir was built at Wilstone and water was pumped by steam engine to the canal. In 1817 two more reservoirs were built at Tringford and Startup End. Two arms of the Grand Union Canal - the Aylesbury Arm and the Wendover Arm (now partly disused) also run through the character area. To the north the area displays a commonality with Marstongate Vale, (Area 112), with wet ditches marking several field boundaries and numerous small ponds and several moats, particularly at Gubblecote.

Land cover and land use. The balancing reservoirs occupy a considerable proportion of the southern part of the area. Elsewhere there is a relatively high proportion of arable crops on the better drained brown earths. Pasture is more frequent in close proximity to the villages and there a few small relic orchards.

Vegetation and wildlife. The area is unique in Hertfordshire, owing to its nationally important series of ecologically rich wetlands. The principal habitats are: damp neutral/calcareous grasslands, fen and aquatic habitats. The only woodland is secondary willow woodland and scrub associated with the reservoirs. Apart from the reservoirs themselves and their marginal fens etc, important sites include old meadows at Astrope and Long Marston, the Aylesbury Arm of the Grand Union Canal and remnant (but partly severely degraded) fen meadows by Wilstone Reservoir (Rushy Meadow). Millhoppers Nature Reserve contains a mix of grassland habitats and some fine veteran black poplars.

The reservoirs provide habitat for a wide range of breeding aquatic birds of importance, including Grey Heron, various duck species, Great Crested Grebes, Little Ringed Plover, and occasionally the nationally rare Black-necked Grebe.

They are also highly important for migrant birds, such as Black, Arctic and Common Terns, various warblers, swifts and occasional rare vagrants. The surrounding fen habitats also support local bird species, such as Reed Warbler and Water Rail. Aquatic invertebrates are also important, the reservoirs having a large number of local and scarce species recorded from them.

The flora recorded from the area includes the only site in Hertfordshire for Shoreweed, as well as the very local Round-fruited Rush, and has two sites for the scarce Green-flowered Helleborine.

- Marsworth Reservoir (J.Billingsley)



HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The most prominent and distinctive historic and cultural features relate to the canal. The Grand Union Canal, built from 1793, provided a commercial transport link from London to Birmingham via Aylesbury and ultimately linked into Brindley's 'Grand Cross' canal network to the north. The significant reservoirs are dominant landscape elements but are also culturally and historically significant, comprising a relict 'Industrial Revolution' working landscape. Long Marston is known as the location of the last witch - lynching in England, where Ruth Osborne was captured and drowned in the village pond.

Field Patterns. The main historic field pattern dates from the 18th century parliamentary enclosures. Field sizes are variable with some small to medium pasture near the settlements and otherwise larger arable units. Hedges are medium height and generally in good condition. Black poplars form distinctive hedgerow trees.

Transport pattern. The area is served by a number of secondary and minor roads that connect the relatively dense settlement pattern. Verges are locally wide and contain wet ditches, however some of the lanes are narrow and subject to flooding e.g. 'Watery Lane.' The historic pattern of canals is also a key feature. These are generally straight where they cross the vale.

Settlements and built form. The area comprises a number of nucleated settlements interspersed with traditional farmsteads. The density of settlement is noticeably greater than Area 112 to the north due to the relatively better drained soils. Long Marston is centred around a crossroads where traditional dwellings combine a mix of stylistic elements including; weatherboarding, timber framing and thatch. These styles mingle with less harmonious modern properties. Long Marston also has a ruined 14th century church and several moated properties. Wilstone is a large hamlet centred on a wide main street.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

English Nature : SSSI notification

- Manor Farm, Wilstone (J,Billingsley)



VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

The area can be seen from the distant views on the Chiltern escarpment and from some of the more local views north of the Tring reservoirs. Within the landscape the generally level topography and network of hedges mean that views are often more restricted. From within the area the reservoirs are only locally visible being contained by mature belts of vegetation. The canal environments provide a pleasing contrast to the adjacent agricultural land uses. Views to the Chilterns escarpment, Wingrave hills and the distinctive Mentmore Park to the north are a feature of the area.

Rarity and distinctiveness. This area is rare within Hertfordshire due to the number of large reservoirs.

VISUAL IMPACT

The three major balancing reservoirs create a significant impact on the area. Locally the associated earth embankments are visually intrusive, particularly where the water is not apparent e.g. north of Wilstone Reservoir. Other locally intrusive features include the sewage works.

ACCESSIBILITY

There is a good network of public footpaths throughout the settled agricultural landscape, along the Grand Union Canal Walk and around the balancing reservoirs which are popular for ornithologists and anglers.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

The reservoirs are highly valued, making this one of the county's most valued locations (A/B).

"These artificial sheets of water were formed amid picturesque surroundings, and with their reed-fringed and tree-bordered edges form a pleasant feature in the otherwise waterless landscape" A MacDonald from "That Tring Air" 1940.

"There are few pleasures to equal skimming over the ice on a winter afternoon, with the sun setting behind the black-etched elms on the far bank," P Slemek in "The beauty of Tring's reservoirs" Hertfordshire Countryside v.21 No.87 July 1966.

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

Landscape Conservation Area :Wilstone Reservoir

Long Marston and Wilstone Conservation Areas

SSSI :Tring Reservoirs

Areas of Archaeological Significance:north of Tring Reservoir, north-east of Gubblecote Farm, north-west of Wilstone and around Long Marston

CONDITION

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

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

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

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

- support conservation and development of the black poplar population, through survey, management of existing trees and new planting
- support a strategy to limit built development within the area or the impact of development that may affect the area from outside
- encourage the management and retention of the local pattern of open ditches as a characteristic drainage feature and wildlife resource. Monitor water quality
- support management initiatives for the reservoir sites and the protection/enhancement of their wildlife/wildfowl value. Explore multiple uses where compatible with wildlife interest
- 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 grassland wherever possible avoiding agricultural improvements e.g. use of fertilizers and herbicides, in order to maintain their nature conservation value. Encourage traditional management by grazing
- promote crop diversification and the restoration of mixed livestock/arable farming where possible
- ensure that built development both in the area or adjacent is integrated through the use of native tree and shrub species and the creation of hedging and planting to the perimeter
- encourage the improvement and maintenance of existing ponds and the creation of new features
- conserve and enhance the canal environment including the locks and architecture
- develop a clear strategy for the improvement of car parking problems particularly around the reservoirs, by making positive provision and protecting verges from indiscriminate parking
- encourage the management of local pattern of hedgerows through traditional cutting regimes, gapping up new planting to restore. To include black poplar, willows and ash as main hedgerow trees
- identify key public viewpoints to the Chilterns escarpment, Wingrave hills and Mentmore. Retain and enhance these views
- 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 for reducing the visual impact of earth embankments associated with the reservoirs
- promote the retention and restoration of existing orchards and the creation of new orchards. Encourage the use of traditional varieties of fruit and minimise the use of herbicides and pesticides
- 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
- Wilstone Reservoir (A. Tempany)

