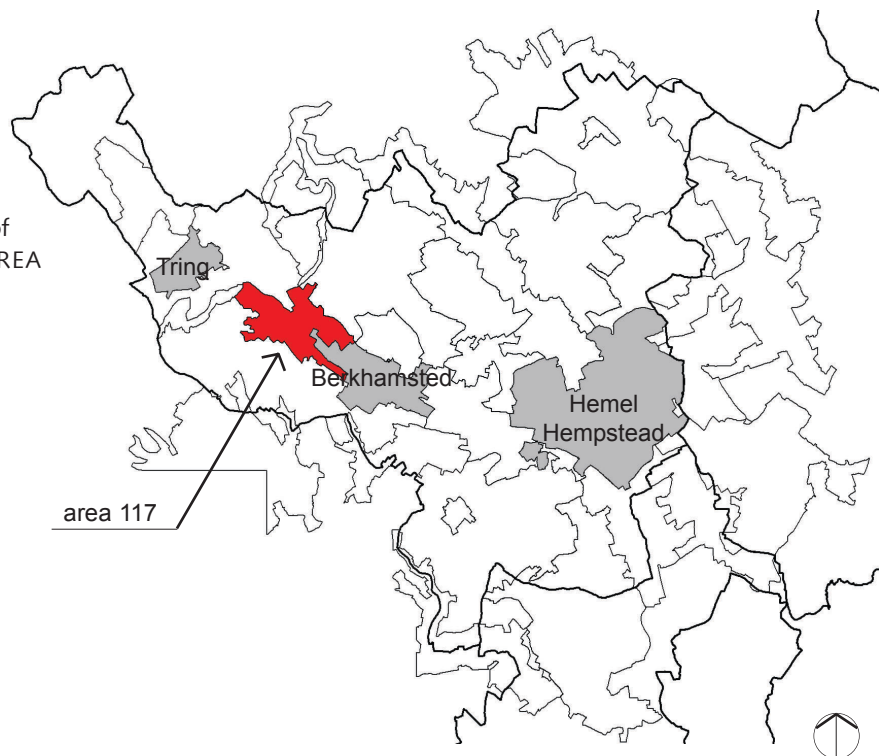


District Map showing location of  
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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#### LOCATION

The upper Bulbourne Valley is located to the north west of Berkhamsted. It extends as far as Cow Roast locks on the valley floor close to the current source of the Bulbourne. The slopes extend further up the valley to meet the scarp slopes, south east of Tring.

#### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The area is a relatively contained and steep sided valley, strongly influenced by Berkhamsted which has spread up the valley slopes and marks the eastern end of the character area. The narrow valley floor combines areas of wet meadow with arterial transport corridors. The Grand Union Canal, intercepts with, and runs along, the course of the inconspicuous River Bulbourne along the valley floor. The valley slopes are predominantly arable and unsettled.

#### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- narrow valley floor dominated by arterial transport routes including the London to Glasgow West Coast Main Line and the Grand Union Canal
- canal basins, locks, barges, bridges and canal architecture
- unsettled valley slopes mainly arable with large fields and few hedgerows
- minor roads running up the valley slopes in sunken lanes with hedgebanks

#### DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- A41 bypass to southern valley side
- railway cuttings, gantries and bridges
- Cow Roast canal settlement



- Pollards on River Bulbourne (A.Tempany)

**PHYSICAL INFLUENCES**

**Geology and soils.** The valley sides are eroded Middle Chalk and some Upper Chalk, with overlying hill-wash deposits of flinty and chalky drift. On the slopes the soils are generally well drained flinty fine silty soils, (Charity 2 association). The majority of the valley floor is covered with fluvo-glacial outwash gravels and some later alluvium. Here soils are shallow loams over flinty gravels and affected by groundwater, (Frome association).

**Topography.** This area forms one of the most striking geomorphological features in Hertfordshire, created by Pleistocene ice erosion through the Chiltern scarp. It is a narrow valley, with relatively steep sides which rise up to the plateau areas to the north and south.

**Degree of slope.** To the valley sides the gradients are variable, but typically 1 in 7. The narrow valley floor is almost level.

**Altitude range.** 115m in the valley floor and up to 175m on the upper slopes to the south west.

**Hydrology.** The somewhat insignificant River Bulbourne rises in the north west near Cow Roast and runs through the valley, its course being intersected at numerous points by the Grand Union Canal, which took much of the river's water supply when it was constructed in 1797 and is now a considerably more prominent feature. 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. The valley floor is rich in floodplain and wetland vegetation, indicative of frequent localised flooding.

**Land cover and land use.** The narrow section of the valley down stream of Cow Roast has some derelict remains of flood-plain pastures in places associated with the River Bulbourne. There are also some urban fringe uses including sports fields and allotments. Arable farming is characteristic on the free draining valley slopes over limestone.

**Vegetation and wildlife.** Areas of grassland at Park Hill Farm are largely improved.

The north east slopes below Norcott Hill and Northchurch Common are almost entirely arable, except for linear belts of semi-natural beech/ash/hazel woodland on the steeper slopes at Norcott Hill. The south west slopes are likewise mainly arable farmland on Chalk. On the upper slopes, there are a number of remaining ancient woodlands, together with secondary plantation. The ancient woods are dominated by calcareous beech/ash woodland, the most important being Hardings Wood and Lower Wood. Some calcareous grassland persists near No Man's Friend Wood. There are few species of flora or fauna of special note in the area, except for the presence of Wood Vetch at its only extant site in Hertfordshire at Hardings Wood. Whitebeam is also notable in several woods on the chalk on both sides of the valley. The area is of some importance for bats, such as the Whiskered Bat, and dormouse is recorded.

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

At Cow Roast the area contains one of the most important Late Iron Age and Roman industrial landscapes in England. The historic pattern of grazing along the river valley survives in places. The character of the area was massively changed by two waves of transport innovation during the Industrial Revolution with the coming of the canal and then the railway.

**Field Patterns.** The historic pattern of the majority of the area is derived from the 18th century parliamentary enclosures, with some later enlargements in the 20th century. There are some pockets of pre 18th century irregular/sinuuous enclosure to the south east around Woodcock Hill. Field sizes to the slopes are typically large with few hedges except along the roads. There are smaller units at settlement edges and along the canal.

**Transport pattern.** The valley floor serves as a major arterial corridor through which the Grand Union Canal and London to Glasgow Main Line pass. The A41, upgraded in the mid 1990's from the original Akeman Street Roman Road route through Berkhamsted, now drops off the Chilterns dip slope and across the southern valley sides south of New Ground. Narrow sunken lanes run up the steep valley slopes. Verges are generally narrow or absent. Rossway Lane is particularly attractive in the autumn and spring.

**Settlements and built form.** Outside of the dense urban sprawl of Berkhamsted, which lies to the southern periphery, settlement is limited to isolated houses and farms, of various styles and periods or features that relate to the canal and railways that pass through the area. These include early 19th century lock keepers cottages, and associated lock architecture which together with 19th century railway architecture such as bridges, add interest and variety to the built form. Cow Roast and Dudswell are the best examples which are designated as a Conservation Area. There are some isolated undistinguished commercial and industrial units at New Ground.

**OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION**

English Heritage: Schedule entries

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The valley is widely visible from the plateau edges and Area 114, the Tring Gap Foothills. The area itself is open in character with sweeping views across the valley between the slopes, particularly as seen from the A41. The central valley floor is not strongly defined, rather the Grand Union Canal and the associated features are the prime feature. The A41 and the main line railway create both continuous and frequent noise intrusion. This section of the valley has the strong sense of being an arterial corridor despite the lack of settlement.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** Overall this is a frequent landscape type within the county. The exception is the narrow valley floor which carries the arterial transport routes and this is considered unusual.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

The built edge of Berkhamsted and Northchurch present intrusion, particularly from the northern slopes. The A41 is a significant feature to the south west where it drops down from the plateau and there are some locally intrusive industrial and commercial buildings along the line of the A4251 at Cow Roast. The railway creates less impact than in the Lower Bulbourne Valley, (Area 118), since it is largely contained by cutting with the gantries being the main visible feature.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

The waymarked Grand Union Canal Walk follows the valley floor. There are a few footpaths, but some of the slopes have limited access e.g. south of Northchurch Common. The waymarked Icknield Way crosses the area from Crawleys Lane to Norcott Hill.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

This landscape includes some distinctive elements, particularly the canal (C). (Data on community views of this area is limited).

"It will be a sad day for many when it is no longer possible to cruise along the fields and villages of this corner of Hertfordshire." D Andrews in "Through 66 locks to the highest point" Hertfordshire Countryside v.23 No.113 Sept 1968.

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

AONB

Dudswell Conservation Area

SM: Cow Roast (2 no.)

Areas of Archaeological Significance: Cow Roast, Hamberlins Lane

Landscape Conservation Area: south east of Darr's Lane

**CONDITION**

*Land cover change:*

**localised**

*Age structure of tree cover:*

**mature**

*Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:*

**scattered**

*Management of semi-natural habitat:*

**not obvious**

*Survival of cultural pattern:*

**declining**

*Impact of built development:*

**moderate**

*Impact of land-use change:*

**moderate**

**STRENGTH OF CHARACTER**

*Impact of landform:*

**prominent**

*Impact of land cover:*

**apparent**

*Impact of historic pattern:*

**apparent**

*Visibility from outside:*

**locally visible**

*Sense of enclosure:*

**open**

*Visual unity:*

**coherent**

*Distinctiveness/rarity:*

**frequent**

CONDITION	GOOD	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	MODERATE	Improve and reinforce	<b>Improve and conserve</b>	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 e.g. Cow Roast and the edge of Berkhamsted
- 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 or rights of way where possible
- 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
- within the valley floor encourage the planting and maintenance of willows, alder and poplar
- 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
- 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
- promote the maintenance and upgrading of the Grand Union Canal Walk and the associated architectural features and buildings
- 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 of the character of local minor roads by the management of hedgerows and sunken lanes up the scarp. Where part of a hedge has been damaged or removed it should be replanted with a mix of indigenous species
- promote as strategy for the continued mitigation of the A41 on the area by additional planting while still allowing for some views from the road
- ensure that local highway improvements are sympathetic to the scale, pattern and character of the existing road network
- continued support should be given for the management and improvement of the Icknield Way
- Upper Bulbourne valley from Northchurch Common (A.Tempany)

