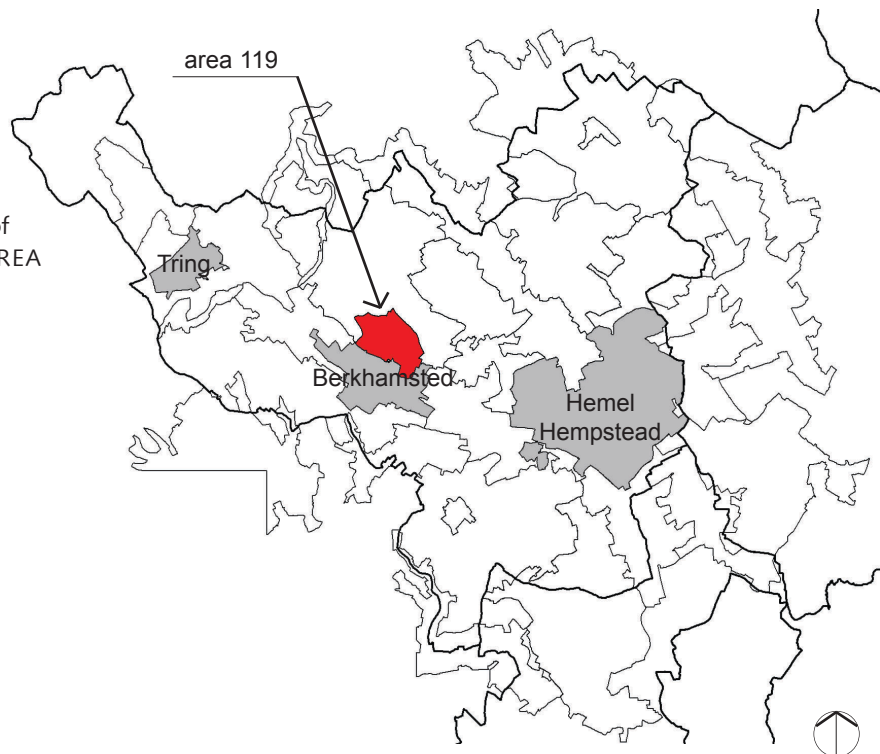


District Map showing location of  
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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



#### LOCATION

A small area centred around a dry valley and associated plateau edge running north from Berkhamsted Castle on the outskirts of Berkhamsted town up to Berkhamsted Common and the Ashridge Estate.

#### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The area demonstrates a relatively enclosed and simple character centred around a narrow dry valley leading off the Bulbourne Valley. The ruins of Berkhamsted Castle provide the full stop at the mouth of the valley. There are strong historical links between the castle and the remainder of the character area. The area is now somewhat degraded, though traces of a parkland or estate character are evident including large field trees, together with remains of estate architecture at the former Berkhamsted Place.

#### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- narrow enclosed valley with gently undulating landform to upper slopes
- recreational uses towards Berkhamsted
- open pastoral farmland
- mixed arable and grazing to the higher slopes
- individual and scattered estate farms
- sub-urban settlement prominent to the fringes to the south at Berkhamsted
- stock proof fencing and gappy hedgerows

#### DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Berkhamsted Castle ruins (1066 - 1475) - double moat with steep earthworks
- remains of Berkhamsted Place parkland and farm buildings
- double chestnut avenue along road leading to Berkhamsted Common
- Berkhamsted Cricket Club



- Well Farm  
(HCC Landscape Unit)

## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

**Geology and soils.** The underlying geology is Upper and Middle Chalk, with clay-with-flints on the crest of the ridge. The soils are well drained flinty, fine silty soils to the valley bottoms with more shallow calcareous fine silty soils to the slopes, (Charity 2 association).

**Topography.** This small area occupies two dry valleys and part of the intervening spur north of Berkhamsted. Berkhamsted Castle is sited at the mouth of the main valley where it joins the Bulbourne Valley at Berkhamsted.

**Degree of slope.** Typically 1 in 50 on the plateau and as much as 1 in 8 to the steeper valley slopes.

**Altitude range.** From 110m at Berkhamsted castle up to 180m near Northchurch Farm

**Hydrology.** Springs at the foot of the valley feed the double moat of Berkhamsted Castle at times of high water table. Before the arrival of the canal the River Bulbourne helped to provide water for the moats.

**Land cover and land use.** Land cover is essentially open pastoral farmland, predominantly sheep grazing. To the upper slopes there are some areas of arable around Northchurch Farm. Close to the built edge of Berkhamsted there are a number of playing fields.

**Vegetation and wildlife.** Most of the Area is occupied by semi-improved neutral or calcareous grasslands, with some arable farmland and some old hedgerows. A few small ponds exist on the clay, but are not specially important. Berkhamsted Castle itself is notable for some remaining old calcareous grassland (too heavily mown), as well as for its moats, which are important for aquatic life. Great Crested Newts are of note at the Castle moat, along with Flowering Rush.

## HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The character of the area is strongly influenced by its historical associations with the former strategic stronghold and Royal Palace at Berkhamsted Castle, together with the parklands of its successor at Berkhamsted Place and its proximity to the Ashridge Estate. The area originally formed the hunting park of the extensive stone built, and now ruinous, castle, which was constructed from 1066-1075. The castle was sited on a primary routes into London and on the course of the River Bulbourne, a strategically important setting. Originally built for Robert, Count of Mortain, it was rebuilt in stone under the ownership of Thomas a Beckett c.1160-1170. Today, its double moat with steep sides and the motte are the most prominent features, in addition to somewhat ragged curtain walls. Berkhamsted Place succeeded the castle after its occupation ceased with the death of Cecily, Duchess of York in 1495. Berkhamsted Place was a fine symmetrical, gabled Elizabethan House built around a central courtyard c.1580. It had knapped flint and stone chequerboard work in its façade, incorporating much building material from the castle. It was greatly reduced in size by a 17th century fire which destroyed three wings and much altered in ensuing centuries. The greater part of the house was demolished in 1967, although fragments survive.

Of the parkland, little tangible evidence survives, the land essentially being used as grazing pasture, with a fairly run down character. Some mature field trees do survive, however, as do pines and other ornamentals at the site of Berkhamsted Place. Also of note is the double avenue of mature chestnuts (horse chestnut to one side, sweet chestnut to the other) on the Northchurch Road to the Ashridge Estate. The lower fields, now a cricket field, are locally known as 'Kitcheners Field' due to their use as a training camp in WWI.

**Field Patterns.** The historic field pattern consistently dates from the parliamentary enclosures. Field sizes are typically small to medium in size. To the New Road valley there has been further amalgamation in the 20th century. Many of the fields are marked by post and wire fences with a few gappy hedgerows. Where present verges are medium in width.

**Transport pattern.** The transport pattern comprises a single B road, New Road, that leads from Berkhamsted to Ashridge.

**Settlements and built form.** There is evidence of the site of a Roman building in the fields north of the castle. Today settlement is sparse within the area, but where present comprises both traditional farms e.g. Northchurch Farm and more modern, but undistinguished farms e.g. Well Farm. There is a small private residential estate on the plateau to the south east that is otherwise detached from Berkhamstead. The remainder of the area is more strongly influenced by development to the perimeter. This includes the southern edge of Berkhamsted where suburban houses overlook the enclosed valley setting and along the railway viaduct which abuts and overlooks the castle. At Berkhamsted Place, aside from the ruins of the house and some semi derelict farm buildings, virtually all trace of the estate architecture has gone, with the exception of an old garden wall. A number of inappropriate 1960's/70's houses are built next to it, and most of the grounds are now occupied by recent pastiche timbered houses.

## OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Pevsner: Hertfordshire - The Buildings of England  
English Heritage: Schedule entry

- Berkhamsted Castle (A. Tempany)



**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

There is a strong sense of containment within the dry valley, which is reinforced by woodland to the north on Berkhamsted Common, hedges to the east and residential development to the south. This is a small to medium scale landscape. There are some commanding elevated views into the valley from the neighbouring residential areas within Berkhamsted. Otherwise the valley is relatively hidden, except for selected glimpses from the other side of the Bulbourne valley. The elevated sections of the plateau are visually contained by the woodland of the Ashridge estate and this part of the area has a relatively isolated quality. The setting of the castle is tightly contained by the railway viaduct to the south and by mature trees to the north, thereby detaching it from its associated historic parkland. The area is relatively quiet except for the railway to the south and the traffic on New Road.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** Overall this is a frequent landscape type within the county.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

Sub-urban settlement is locally prominent on elevated ridges to the fringes of Berkhamsted to the south. Within the farmland the most significant detractors are the poor condition of the hedges, the presence of post and wire fencing and the bland 20th century farm properties.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

The area is well served by a number of footpaths providing links between Berkhamsted town and Berkhamsted Common and the Ashridge plateau. Berkhamsted Castle is in the care of English Heritage and is open to the public free of charge.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

This area is of regard, mainly by association with the adjoining Ashridge area (D). (Data on community views of this area is limited).

"The situation is unimpressive", Pevsner "The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire" 1950

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

AONB (majority of area)

SM's: Berkhamsted Castle and Roman building to the north  
Berkhamsted Conservation Area

Area of Archaeological Significance: Berkhamsted

**CONDITION**

<i>Land cover change:</i>	<b>localised</b>
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	<b>mature</b>
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	<b>relic</b>
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	<b>not obvious</b>
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	<b>declining</b>
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	<b>moderate</b>
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	<b>moderate</b>

**STRENGTH OF CHARACTER**

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

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
- support a strategy to limit built development within the area and the impact of development that may affect the area from outside including any further development to the urban edge of Berkhamsted
- encourage the retention of the existing pattern of hedges and to create new features based on the historic patterns to further enhance landscape and ecological links between woodlands. To include the promotion of hedgerows to replace post and wire fences
- 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 in order to maintain their nature conservation value. Encourage traditional management by grazing
- conserve and enhance the setting of Berkhamsted castle. To include the management of the existing site and to develop a strategy for reinforcing the links with the former parkland to the north
- support the investigation, conservation and interpretation of the historic patterns of the landscape including the relationship between the castle, Berkhamsted Place and Castle farm
- 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
- 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 upgrading of the links from Berkhamsted to Berkhamsted Common and the Ashridge estate
- proposals to change agricultural land to other uses such as golf courses should be very carefully examined and should only be permitted where they do not undermine the distinctive character of the landscape
- Berkhamsted Cricket Club (A.Tempany)

