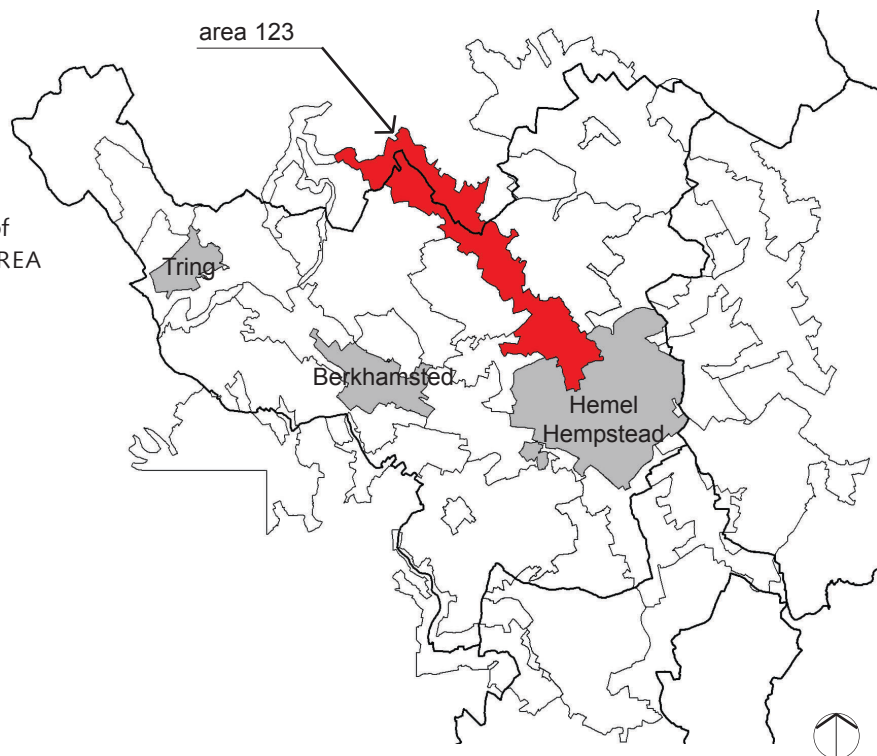


District Map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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LOCATION

The High Gade Valley is located to the north west of Hemel Hempstead and incorporates the hamlets of Water End, Piccotts End, Great Gaddesden and Hudnall Corner. The area is subdivided into valley floor and valley slopes.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The landscape character area covers a broad v-shaped valley, largely comprising mixed farmland and influenced by Gaddesden Place which overlooks the valley from the neighbouring plateau. The valley slopes are mostly cultivated with an occasional discrete woodland block or fragment of chalk downland/beechnagar, particularly towards the western scarp edge of the Chilterns. The course of the meandering River Gade is bordered in most places by water meadows and pasture creating a sub area with wet woodlands, meres and relic watercress beds.

There is a high concentration of vernacular buildings that are linked with the water course and the cultural pattern is

evident, particularly around Water End. The A4146

Leighton Buzzard road follows the length of the valley but has an adverse impact both on the historic settlements and through the associated prominent commercial premises and nurseries.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- steep valley slopes
- long views along the open valley
- traces of downland scrub and woodland
- clustered settlement along watercourse
- wet woodlands and grazing meadow
- sweeping arable fields
- floodplain and wetland vegetation
- ancient settlement
- ornamental nurseries and associated planting

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Gaddesden Place on plateau edge and remnants of parkland on valley slopes
- beech woodlands
- row of cottages at Piccotts End with remnants of a 15th century hall-house that is said to have been a pilgrim's hostel
- Piccotts End Mill and weirs along upper stream
- watercress beds
- Gadebridge Park
- Hudnall Common
- Gaddesden Hall (Noake Mill Lane)
- Great Gaddesden Church
- River Gade (A.Tempany)



PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. The bedrock geology is Upper Chalk towards the southern end and Middle Chalk on the lower slopes and the valley floor. This is overlaid by peri-glacial gravels and subsequent alluvium to the valley floor and cappings of clay-with-flints at the crests of the slopes. The soil in the valley floor comprises shallow calcareous and non calcareous loamy soils over flint gravel, affected by groundwater. There are small areas of peat and a risk of flooding, (Frome association).

The north facing Ashridge and Hudnall Common slopes are characterised by well drained flinty fine soils over chalk or chalk rubble on the valley sides, sometimes shallow in localised areas (Charity 2 association).

The south facing valley slopes comprise well drained, calcareous fine silty soils, deep at the valley bottom and shallow to chalk on valley sides in places, with slight risk of water erosion, (Coombe 1 association).

Topography. The valley was formed, (as with other valleys in the region), as a result of the peri-glacial erosion of the chalk. The additional effect of springs in the Upper Chalk have created a deeply incised river valley with steep sides in places. The valley has a broad and gently undulating valley floor.

Degree of slope. The average gradient to the valley slopes is 1 in 10.

Altitude range. From 160m at Pampard Kennels to 90m at Piccotts End.

Hydrology. Tapped springs in the Upper Chalk have created the River Gade, a fast flowing chalk bed river. The water is highly calcareous and naturally rather nutrient poor giving rise to characteristic weed communities. Substantial springs occur especially at Great Gaddesden and Water End, sometimes formerly used as watercress beds, but with some natural spring polls remaining.

Land cover and land use. The cover is essentially open farmland, used predominantly for arable cultivation on the valley slopes and grazing pasture on the valley floor. Some chalk grassland and pockets of regenerating downland scrub are visible on the north facing slopes. Secondary land use is varied, including common land and recreational woodlands at Hudnall, with mixed and plantation woodland on the north facing slopes. Land cover change on the Piccotts End slopes has been extensive, with a widespread transition to arable agriculture.

Vegetation and wildlife. Woodland cover is linear or discrete and is primarily semi natural beech woodland with isolated stands of ash and hawthorn. A number of other species were noted, such as cherry, particularly to the woodland margins, oak and elder. The woodland at Hudnall Common in particular, is characteristic of regenerating secondary woodland, with much oak and hawthorn evident. In contrast the valley floor and floodplain are composed of 'wet' species such as poplar, willow and hawthorn, with some elder.

Field boundaries are marked by mixed hedgerows on the valley slopes, comprising a diverse range of species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, elm, field maple, sycamore, hazel, holly and dog rose. In the valley floor, fencing, both with

post and wire and relict estate fencing from Gaddesden Place and Ashridge, is more common as a boundary treatment.

Floodplain vegetation reinforces the course of the river in parts, as do wetlands and watercress beds at Water End. The most important habitat types in the area are neutral/calcareous river valley pastures, fen and aquatic habitats associated with the river Gade, some remaining valley slope woodlands and remnant unimproved calcareous or acidic grasslands on the valley slopes. The most important valleys by far are those at Great Gaddesden including riverside fen and spring pool habitats of County importance. Remnants of river valley grassland also exist around Piccotts End. There are locally valuable remnants of fen and marsh habitats at Water End Moor.

Valley slope grasslands have mostly been improved or converted to arable, but there are remaining neutral/calcareous meadows of county importance at Gaddesden Hoo.

Important plant species in the area include the Chiltern Gentian (rarely), Mezereon (of long standing but possibly doubtful origin), wild daffodil, Fly Orchid, Lily of the Valley, Fen Bedstraw and Marsh Arrowgrass. Notable fauna includes some scarce invertebrates associated with the chalk springs and Water Vole along the River Gade.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The cultural and historical pattern relates to the river and associated vegetation. The area generally displays a distinct continuity of theme, with the floodplain being used for grazing and arable agriculture on the valley sides, and various tributaries of the river forming inlets for watercress beds at Water End, some of which are still active. Gaddesden Place and the associated parkland, although largely outside the area, is a visual influence. The Palladian villa occupies a commanding site over the valley and views may glimpsed of it from most of the area. To the south, and bordering the urban fringe of Hemel Hempstead, is the late 18th century Gadebridge Park, formerly belonging to the now destroyed Regency house of the same name, and now a dedicated public open space. It still retains many fine, mature parkland trees and an interesting iron 'chinoiserie' bridge.

Field Patterns. Traces of a pre 18th century coaxial field pattern are found along the river Gade with enclosed meadow pasture. On the northern slopes, the fields become larger and have totally lost their pre-existing field patterns. On the southern slopes the field pattern becomes more organic with medium sized fields.

Transport pattern. The busy A4146 Leighton Buzzard road runs along the valley floor. The remainder of the transport pattern is however largely composed of tracks and lanes, generally sinuous and slightly sunken where they rise up the valley sides.

Settlements and built form. The principal areas of settlement are Great Gaddesden, Water End and Piccotts End, which follow the historic pattern of a settled valley floor. The village of Great Gaddesden and the hamlet of Water End are small in scale and have been largely undeveloped since the late medieval period, both possessing a number of good vernacular timber framed cottages. The large 13th - 15th century Church at Great Gaddesden is a significant element in the valley floor. It is built from dressed Totternhoe clunch and flint, with a massive embattled West Tower with turret and extensive Halsey family chapel to east end. Piccotts End has several medieval cottages and a number of Georgian and Regency villas, including Marchmont, now a public house, and an

extensively restored 19th century watermill. The general character of Piccotts End is affected by its position at the edge of Hemel Hempstead's extensive urban area.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

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

- Gaddesden Place and parkland overlooking Gade valley (J.Billingsley)



VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

From the ends of the valley including Hemel Hempstead to the south and from the adjacent plateau edges the area is widely visible. Views, although fairly extensive, are framed by the relatively steep topography and blocks of woodland on the north facing side (Hudnall Common slopes). Views along the valley floor are extensive, though interrupted by areas of wet woodland and floodplain vegetation, while the south facing or Piccotts End slopes are essentially composed of open arable fields. The majority of the noise is caused by the Leighton Buzzard Road, which runs along the valley floor. Visual unity is strong and cohesive throughout.

Rarity and distinctiveness. The character of the Area is unusual within the county, with the combination of estates and parklands overlooking and at some points extending down into, the valley. The essentially undisturbed wetlands and floodplain vegetation in the valley floor, together with relic watercress beds, add to the distinctiveness of the area.

VISUAL IMPACT

Overall intervention by built development is low, with the majority of settlement concentrated in the valley floor and on the Ashridge side. The isolated Little Gaddesden church can be seen on the edge of the plateau. The Leighton Buzzard Road, although not as major an arterial transport corridor as the A41 in the Bulbourne Valley is a prominent feature. Adjacent to the road there are a number of visually discordant commercial premises including car sales and garden centres.

ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility is difficult, particularly if travelling to visit the area by car due to the lack of stopping places and the fast road along the valley's length. Paths cross the valley at

more than 1km intervals. Access to the southern end of the valley close to the settlement of Hemel Hempstead is better with part of the valley being comprising Gadebridge Park with open access to the public.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

Even though data on community views in this area is limited, this is clearly a highly valued valley landscape (D). Respondent 2160 writes of this area and the associated Nettleden Ridges and Valleys "We know this area as being very picturesque with lovely views from the hills and attractive villages along the dales. There is also a lovely bluebell wood"

"here lie some of England's most typical villages dotted about low hills and luscious valleys, with woods, colourful fields, water and the charm of common or village green" H.Swain in "the Gade Valley" Hertfordshire Countryside v.21 No.87 July 1966 "At Water End we are beside the Gade again and one of Hertfordshire's acknowledged beauty spots. The river is at its loveliest here and the beauty of its waters and banks is enhanced by the most pleasing of old bridges" .L Wyatt in "Ashridge and the Chilterns," Hertfordshire Countryside v.21 No.87 July 1966.

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

AONB (upper reaches)

Landscape Conservation Area (lower reaches)

Conservation Areas: Great Gaddesden, Piccotts End and Water End

SM: Gadebridge Park (Roman Villa)

Areas of Archaeological Significance: Hudnall Common, Great Gaddesden, Gadebridge Park, Piccotts End and Lower Gade Farm (cropmarks)

CONDITION

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

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	prominent
<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>	partial
<i>Visual unity:</i>	unified
<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: CONSERVE AND STRENGTHEN**

- 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 or within the AONB
 - protect surface and ground water quality and the availability of water resources in order to maintain natural flow in all surface rivers and streams sufficient to support the full range of river corridor habitats
 - promote integrated land use, management and development within catchments in order to conserve and enhance river corridors as important and characteristic open landscapes
 - maintain and develop the traditional pattern of roadside verges as a local feature and a wildlife resource. Where development is likely to affect verges and damage is unavoidable, development should include details of protection of the remaining verge and replacement of its nature conservation value within the proposed scheme. This is particularly important where verges include hedgebanks, sunken lanes, ditches and hedges
 - restrict further built development within the valley and develop a strategy for mitigating existing impacts
 - promote the multiple uses of ancient woodland through education and access
 - encourage the reversal of habitat fragmentation and the creation and improvement of habitat links to create eco-corridors
 - promote the expansion of woodland beyond ancient woodland boundaries, using ancient hedge and field boundaries as the most appropriate location for woodland and expansion
 - survey and manage parkland and veteran trees for biodiversity value including Gaddesden Place parkland
 - 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 particularly along the valley floor
 - encourage landowners and developers to retain and increase ponds and wetland areas to enhance their visual and wildlife functions.
 - 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
 - resist development that could lower the water table within river valleys and affect wetland habitats
 - native tree species only should be planted on boundaries, with exotic/ornamental species only in close proximity to dwellings
 - promote the use of low-density stock grazing, permanent pasture and flooding regimes as normal agricultural practices and management technique
 - promote the creation of buffer strips along watercourses to prevent pesticide, herbicide and fertilizer run-off and provide habitat for wildlife; encourage their linkage to eco-corridors within the wider landscape
 - all areas of existing unimproved chalk grassland should be managed for nature conservation
 - 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 designed to reflect the traditional character of the area
 - avoid the construction of flood management or retention features that would be difficult to integrate into the natural landscape of such areas
 - promote hedgerow restoration through locally appropriate measures including; coppicing, laying and replanting/gapping up
 - conserve and manage marshy grassland. Avoid over-grazing, heavy public pressure, damage from vehicles and pollution
- Water End (A.Tempany)

