

County Map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA



LOCATION

The area follows the floodplain of the River Colne from Rickmansworth in the north east to West Hyde and Harefield in the south.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Essentially a young landscape created through extensive mineral extraction in the early 20th century. A relatively peaceful area, valued for its range of recreational opportunities on the edge of extensive urbanisation. Scattered pasture provides an indication of the former character, but much of this is a 20th-century creation.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- level river valley between 0.6 and 1 km wide
- extensive and numerous waterbodies following restoration of sand and gravel workings
- areas of both remnant and restored pasture
- widespread recreational opportunities associated with waterways and wetlands
- controlled access to areas creating a tranquil character
- strong vegetated character hiding both settlement and waterbodies

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Grand Union Canal and locks
- Rickmansworth Aquadrome
- sewage works
- alder and willow carr at Stockers Lake
- remnant watercress beds
- Maple Lodge Sewage Treatment Works



Grand Union Canal • (J. Billingsley)

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. The geology of the area is river alluvium which is overlaid by stoneless clayey, fine silty and fine loamy soils (Fladbury 3 series), affected by ground water.

Topography. Essentially a flat river valley flood plain along its core. Man-made features such as the canal and the banks of the gravel pits provide the main changes in level.

Degree of slope. There is a very slack fall of less than 1 in 500 over a 4.5 km length.

Altitude range. 39-46m.

Hydrology. Wetland habitats and watercourses form a key component of the landscape. These comprise the river Colne, the Grand Union Canal and a large number of lakes created following extraction of sand and gravels. The water is highly calcareous and in some of the lakes there are direct spring sources. Eutrophication is a problem in the watercourses and lakes. Biological condition is relatively worse downstream of the Maple Lodge sewage treatment works.

Land cover and land use. Waterbodies created from restored mineral workings are the major land cover with recreational land uses for a wide range of both active and passive activities. There are also areas of pasture with grazing mainly by sheep and cattle.

Vegetation and wildlife. There are several important habitats including semi-natural floodplain meadows and remnant semi-natural stands of crack willow and alder, which are the natural woodland type for the area. There are also areas of reed swamp (or 'poor fen') which is a BAP priority habitat and in which the rare yellow loosestrife is found. Maple Lodge reed beds are also a distinctive feature. Within the discrete areas of woodland the main species are poplar, alder and willow. These include some areas of carr at Stockers Lake Nature Reserve, which also supports the largest heronry in the county and the rare bittercress. There is also extensive secondary tree cover in the form of linear belts which follow lakesides, canals and local roads and combine to create an enclosed character. Hedges are generally confined to the local roads and comprise mainly hawthorn and willow with field trees.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The landscape has been extensively altered over the last 200 years. The area would originally have comprised floodplain meadows, but few remain. Sands and gravels were extensively extracted, mainly between 1920 and 1940. Following this many of the sites have been restored as wetlands.

Field pattern. This landscape would have traditionally been unenclosed. Few of the floodplain meadows remain, e.g. Stockers Farm, while other fields are the result of 20th-century enclosure with a more regular field pattern, e.g. Lynsters Field, and are generally small in size.

Transport pattern. There are a few sinuous and enclosed minor roads crossing the floodplain between the lakes and over the canal. The A412 (the former North Orbital Road) follows the western boundary of the area. The Grand Union Canal, built in the early 19th century, is a major recreational corridor.

Settlements and built form. Settlement within the floodplain is still limited to the occasional lock-keeper's cottage and isolated industrial buildings such as the sewage works. Elsewhere isolated traditional brick farmsteads sit on the edge of the floodplain, e.g. Lynsters and Stockers Farm. The encircling urban settlement is usually screened from view but houses often back onto the area, e.g. at Rickmansworth.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

BAP: *A 50 year vision for the Wildlife and Natural Habitats of Hertfordshire.*

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

There are views from the elevated valley slopes to the east and west outside the area to the valley floor, e.g. from Mount Pleasant, Harefield and from Tilehouse Lane. However, the extent of the waterbodies is generally concealed by the extensive secondary tree cover and the adjacent residential areas. Within the area the views are often contained, creating a coherent and small/medium-scale landscape. There is a clear sense of tranquillity throughout much of the area.

Rarity and distinctiveness. This is a young landscape but one that has rapidly developed to create a strong sense of place with local value. It is relatively rare in Hertfordshire.

VISUAL IMPACT

Extensive mineral extraction and restoration has changed the character of the landscape. The area is locally degraded by a number of unkempt or insensitively located industrial buildings and sites, including the sewage works. Some of the built forms are attractive, e.g. Springwell locks.

ACCESSIBILITY

There is a wide range of recreational activities in the area. The area is part of the Colne Valley Regional Park, and the Aquadrome at Rickmansworth is a significant local attraction. Activities include sailing, water-skiing, fishing, walking, boating, cycling and bird watching. There are a number of long distance waymarked paths including the Grand Union Canal Walk and the Colne Valley Trail. Facilities are generally in a good state of maintenance and well signed for local residents. The facilities are not clearly signed for the wider population.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

The area exhibits some contrasts but Rickmansworth Aquadrome and Stockers Lake are very highly valued both by locals and those living at some distance, making this one of the county's most remarked-upon locations (A).

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

Colne Valley Regional Park.

CONDITION

<i>Land cover change:</i>	widespread
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	mature or young
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	fragmented
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	variable
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	declining
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	moderate
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	high

ROBUSTNESS

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	apparent
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	continuous
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	relic
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	locally visible
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	contained
<i>Visual unity:</i>	coherent
<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: IMPROVE AND CONSERVE**

- maintain a balance between conservation, recreation and agricultural activities within the area
- promote sustainable and integrated multiple uses for gravel pits and canals
- support the continued management of valuable nature conservation sites associated with former mineral extraction
- manage the wetland and waterside tree population, particularly those that are short-lived, by selective felling, coppicing, pollarding and replanting on a rotation basis to maintain tree cover
- encourage the establishment of buffer strips of semi-natural vegetation along all watercourses, avoiding potential conflict with recreational use
- control erosion and pollution of waterbodies, canals and watercourses
- protect remaining river valley habitats of significant nature conservation interest, including reed swamp, wet woodland, open water, spring sources and reed beds
- avoid the construction of flood management or retention features that would be difficult to integrate into the natural landscape of such areas
- improve the management of old meadows and pastures by ceasing fertiliser and herbicide application and introducing sensitive grassland management such as late hay cutting and low-density livestock grazing
- encourage retention of traditional grazing patterns
- promote the use of hedged field enclosure in place of fencing where land is equestrian pasture
- improve management of recreational areas to enhance biodiversity value
- improve the layout, surfacing, signage and landscape design of the Aquadrome car park and entrance
- ensure structures and activities for active recreation are visually integrated
- promote greater opportunities for public access throughout the area, providing links to existing routes
- promote hedgerow restoration and management to roadsides and field boundaries through locally appropriate measures, including coppicing, laying and replanting/gapping-up
- encourage the renovation of redundant or derelict buildings for recreational or agricultural activities



• Springwell Inns, Stockers Lake
(J. Billingsley)