

County map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

©Crown copyright .All rights reserved.  
Hertfordshire County Council  
100019606 2004



**LOCATION**

Linear north-south feature between the southern edge of Woodhall Park and Hertford/Bengeo, including the flat valley floor and short, sharp valley slopes.

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

A narrow flat floodplain with steeply rising valley sides. The river is not dominant enough to be a major landscape feature, but the valley does differ significantly from the arable uplands to either side, not least in the congregation within it of transport features, such as road and railway. A mix of pasture and woodland is typical throughout, with the southern part strongly influenced by ribbon development, industry and mineral extraction, while the northern part is more rural and remote.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- series of 'ford' villages set along floodplain on both sides of river, linked by narrow lanes
- mineral workings on both slopes in the southern part of the area. Some restored to 'nature reserve' (Waterford)
- isolated arable farms above floodplain, linked to valley settlements
- pasture, arable and woodland within floodplain, especially at the northern end, where the divided watercourse is only an incident within the floodplain
- mixed land-use pattern, with some grazing on slopes, some arable in valley bottom

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

- railway
- very small, low bridges over the watercourses
- Goldings mansion and parkland
- some ribbon development along valley

**FURTHER INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON**

HCC Countryside Management Services: Beane Valley Project.

## PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

**Geology and soils.** The valley floor has gleyed (poorly draining) mainly calcareous soils over alluvial drift (Thames series), while the slopes to either side are brown (free draining loamy) soils over chalky till (Melford series).

**Topography.** The river Beane occupies a narrow flat floodplain, within steeply sloping valley sides

**Degree of slope.** 1 in 10 to 1 in 20 on the valley sides; 1 in 275 along the length of the river between Goldings Park and the A119

**Altitude range.** 40m to 75m. There is a fall of 20m along the length of the river between Watton-at-Stone and Hertford.

**Hydrology.** The river Beane flows southwards to its confluence with the Lea at Hertford. It is classified as a chalk stream but has suffered from low flows since the early 1950s, as a result of public water supply abstractions, and retains valuable features only in its lower reaches between Waterford and Hertford. Despite this it retains a largely natural character, with shallow banks and gravel beds. Submerged and emergent species are typical of chalk rivers and are often abundant enough to choke the channel. Although the surrounding area is chiefly in intensive arable cultivation, there are valuable wetland habitats.

**Land cover and land use.** This is a landscape of treed farmland and wetland vegetation, with a high proportion of mineral extraction sites at the southern end and some low-key recreational use. Most of the pasture is on the valley floor or the lower slopes, especially at the northern end of the area, with arable production flowing down the slopes from the uplands above. There are few field boundaries. At Waterford a large former mineral extraction site has been allowed to regenerate at low level as a nature reserve. On the opposite bank alternative uses for redundant sites have been found.

**Vegetation and wildlife.** Most of the floodplain grasslands at the northern end of this area have been drained and ploughed, although some have recently been put back to grass. At the southern end (Bengeo Mead and parts of Waterford Marsh) there are remnant alluvial grasslands, with some valley slope grassland at Goldings. The valley slopes, where not cultivated, can support heathy vegetation such as is developing at the Waterford Heath nature reserve. Within the floodplain there are wet woodland habitats including alder and willow carr, marshy grasslands, reed bed and fen. Adjacent to this on the steepest slopes are linear woodlands of willow, hazel, poplar, field maple, hornbeam, oak and ash. Great Mole Wood forms the boundary at the southern end and contains relic oak/hazel and hornbeam woodland. At Clusterbolts/Foxleys Woods there are unique 'hanging woodlands' with calcareous spring systems from perched water tables. Oak is an infrequent hedgerow tree and there are some distinctive conifers associated with settlement.

## HISTORIC AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The dominant historic pattern of this area is its change of use from common to intensive arable production and the impact of 20th-century development. Its chief historic feature is Goldings, which has been recorded as a significant landscape since at least 1766 and was described in 1770 as '*upon a gentle eminence. Before it [the mansion] lies a beautiful vale enriched with a serpentine river, fed by a trout stream, called Beneficial (or Beautious) River. The lands are happily varied, the hills are adorned with dropping woods and the town of Hertford perfects this pleasure-giving view*' (sale particulars, 1770). When the estate changed hands in 1861, the new owner improved and enlarged the park. Bramfield Road was diverted around the perimeter and the Watton Road was moved to bring a loop of the River Beane into the park. The Mole Wood millstream was also tapped to feed a new, wide, meandering 'river' called Goldings Canal, with a series of bridges. Elements from the 18th century survive within this landscape, which was until recently owned by Hertfordshire County Council.

**Field pattern.** There is no consistent field pattern or size in this area. Some grazing meadows are clearly marked in small parcels on the valley floor, while on the slopes field sizes tend to echo the large size of the arable plateau above. Field boundary hedges are infrequent, usually medium height and mixed species, sometimes recently planted.

**Transport pattern.** The A119 follows a route along the valley side between Hertford and Watton-at-Stone, on the west bank of the river. The railway between Hertford and Stevenage crosses the floodplain on embankment above Hertford and then veers away onto the high ground to the west. There are three minor east-west road crossings between Hertford and Watton-at-Stone, with sunken lanes diving precipitously off the plateau towards the valley settlements between densely hedged banks with minimal verges.

### Settlements and built form.

- Stapleford and Waterford, as their names imply, are lower valley-side settlements on both sides of the river, linked by narrow lanes over unassuming brick bridges across the watermeadows. In addition there are individual farmsteads set slightly higher on the valley slopes, of varying ages. Waterford Hall Farm is of yellow brick and clay tile, while Patchendon Farm dates from at least the 17th century.
- Goldings mansion was rebuilt between 1871-77 on higher ground away from river as a neo-Jacobean/Tudoresque red brick mansion, within an improved and enlarged park with pleasure gardens

## OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Herts. Gardens Trust and R. Bisgrove, *Hertfordshire Gardens on Ermine Street* (1996), p.13.

HCC data on historic parks and gardens.

Environment Agency *LEAP* for Upper Lee (1999).

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

This area is widely visible from neighbouring valley slopes and the plateau above. Views within the area are filtered by wetland/valley bottom vegetation. The scale of landscape elements is small to medium and this is a contained and coherent landscape area. It is generally tranquil, especially away from the road and railway, from which there is occasional noise.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** The river valley contains the best example of wetlands in central Hertfordshire, at Waterford marsh and Bengoe Mead, albeit with a slightly greater urban influence at its southern end. Goldings is an important historic park.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

The impact of built development, from light industry and housing on the valley floor, is apparent. The impact of land use change is perceived most in the loss of grassland to arable, particularly where there is arable cultivation on the valley floor.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

Footpaths and the waymarked routes of the Herts Way are localised along the river, with areas of informal public open space.

Condition: fair.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

This area is valued for its distinctive valley landscapes, particularly between Waterford and Hertford (C).

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

Landscape Conservation Area.

The lower Beane is recognised as a High Biodiversity Area (HBA) for its wetlands and woodlands.

Goldings is listed Grade II in the English Heritage *Register of Historic Parks and Gardens*.

CONDITION	
<i>Land cover change:</i>	<b>localised</b>
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	<b>mixed</b>
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	<b>widespread</b>
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	<b>good</b>
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	<b>intact</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>prominent</b>
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	<b>continuous</b>
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	<b>widely visible</b>
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	<b>contained</b>
<i>Visual unity:</i>	<b>coherent</b>
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	<b>frequent</b>

<b>CONDITION</b>	<b>GOOD</b>	Strengthen and reinforce	<b>Conserve and strengthen</b>	Safeguard and manage
	<b>MODERATE</b>	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	<b>POOR</b>	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		<b>WEAK</b>	<b>MODERATE</b>	<b>STRONG</b>
<b>STRENGTH OF CHARACTER</b>				

**STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING****CHANGE: CONSERVE AND STRENGTHEN**

- consider the possibility of constructing fords rather than bridges whenever new crossings of the Beane are contemplated, in light of current low flows
- protect 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, grazing marsh, fen and swamp
- promote the de-intensification of agricultural practices within river valleys
- resist the targeting of redundant or derelict pasture for development
- resist development that could lower the water table within river valleys and affect wetland habitats
- promote an increase in stock grazing as a management technique
- promote the re-introduction of permanent pasture and flooding regimes as normal agricultural practices, to increase landscape and habitat diversity
- promote the establishment of buffer strips along the river to prevent pesticide, herbicide and fertilizer run-off and provide habitat for wildlife. Encourage linkage to eco-corridors and woodlands within the wider landscape
- resist further mineral extraction within the area, unless restoration proposals can be seen as a positive impact over time. Consider de-watering implications and proposed levels of restoration, ensuring that the latter respects the existing contours
- ensure that restoration proposals for existing minerals site are properly implemented and maintained. Where necessary, negotiate improved restoration by agreement, preferably to grassland or woodland and without permanent damage to existing landforms
- promote increased linear and circular footpaths within the river valley.