

LOCATION

The area stretches approximately 4km along the upper course of the Mimram valley, to the south of Codicote Bottom, encompassing the broad valley slopes to the north and south of the water course.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

A broad curving open valley, with gently undulating slopes and a flat open valley floor. West of Pulmer Water the valley floor is flat and agricultural cultivation has been taken right up to the water's edge in places, rendering the watercourse almost invisible. In contrast to the east a narrow sub area of pasture follows the flood plain of the River Mimram which begins to braid and then sharply turns a 90 degrees corner southwards. The settlements of Old Welwyn and Danesbury enclose the eastern end of the valley and a distinct change in land cover and vegetation associated with the underlying geology and soils forms the north western end. The southern slopes of the valley are much broader and more gently undulating than the northern slopes. Arable crops and the lack of hedgerow vegetation create a uniform character, texture and colour to the majority of the landscape. The area feels open and light with many opportunities to take views right across the valley. Despite its proximity to settlement, the area has a fairly remote character.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- gently undulating broad valley slopes
- sinuous country lanes
- isolated residential and farm buildings in red brick
- regular field pattern
- flood meadows and wetland habitats adjacent to River Mimram east of Pulmer Water
- arable cropping
- lack of hedgerows and woodlands

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- pollarded and coppiced willows at Singlers Marsh wildlife site
- informal recreational activities in Singlers Marsh area
- forded river crossings
- open cast lime quarry and associated planting

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology & Soils

The soils are mainly shallow well drained calcareous coarse and fine loamy soils over chalk rubble, (Aberford association). Striped and polygonal soil patterns exist and there is locally a slight risk of water erosion. To the valley edges and near Singlers Marsh there are some deep fine loamy over clay with flints soils with seasonal waterlogging, (Hornbeam 2 association).

Topography

A gently sloping valley bowl focused on the course of the river Mimram and the Kimpton road that follow the valley floor. This unusual curving river valley feature has been created by the water flowing around a solid glacial plug on which the village of Codicote is located. The slopes undulate particularly around Ryefield farm in the south of the area.

Degree of slope

Slope gradients range from 1 in 10 on the slopes around Ryefield farm to the south of the area to 1 in 30 on the broader more open slopes to the west. Along the Mimram the levels drop by as little as 1 in 400

Altitude Range

Levels range from 120m near Tanyard Lane to 65m along the river valley floor.

Hydrology

The River Mimram flows along the bottom of the valley although to the west it is barely perceptible as the arable landscape continues right up to its banks. The river becomes more evident to the east of the area where minor roads cross the river by fords. Land around Pulmers Water and at Singlers Marsh becomes seasonally water logged and shallow pools of water become apparent on the surface. This renders the land unsuitable for arable crops and the land is instead managed by periodic grazing. The River Mimram is one of the main tributaries of the River Lea which it enters within the confines of the county town of Hertford.

Land Cover and Land Use

Land cover and land use is prominent in the valley due to the openness of the area

caused by the lack of hedgerows, woodland vegetation and settlement. Land cover comprises open farm land, with land use being primarily arable. The secondary land use is pastoral with areas of informal recreation at Singlers Marsh. Woodland cover is fragmented and insignificant but there is some new tree planting associated with the northern part of the estate of Ayot House. Some localised areas of settlement bordering the Singlers Marsh sub-area.

Vegetation and Wildlife

Small islands of woodland and scrub vegetation border the river Mimram in the east. Oak, weeping willow and pussy willows have grown in these wet areas and coppiced and pollarded willows can be found in the Singlers marsh area. Hawthorn and blackthorn scrub mixed with willow can be found further along the river Mimram to the west.

The valley slopes are dominated by intensive farmland, whilst areas of unimproved marshy, neutral and calcareous grassland still exist along the course of the river and support a varied flora including cowslips, despite the increase in horse grazing.

Singlers marsh is an important area of wetland habitat and Longhorn cattle used to graze the area. Locally scarce flora found here include the Meadow Saxifrage and Bistort and other less rare species such as Pond sedge, Yellow Flag Iris, Meadow Sweet, Lesser Stitchwort, Wood Rush, Dog's Mercury, Sorrel and Germander Speedwell. Hedgerow species include privet and holly with occasional oak, holly and ash as hedgerow trees. A screen of Leyland Cypress have been planted around the area of a disused chalk quarry on the northern slopes of the valley. Associated areas of scrub and rough grassland can be found and fossils and flints have been exposed by the former excavations.

Fauna local to the area include birds such as Black Caps and White Throats and mammals such as Water Shrew and Harvest Mice. The valley is noted for its resident population of Water Voles, which seem to be surviving the continuing threat from mink.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

A much visited area by passing travelers using the old Great Northern Road linking Welwyn and the village of Codicote. Reverend Joseph Spence a traveler in 1743 noted that the corn was thriving well in the area around Welwyn (Welling) and there were 'sweet woods' and fields planted with Walnut trees. The mills that used to work along this stretch of the river may have been used for fulling, milling flour or the pulping of rags for paper. There are several archaeological sites on the north facing slopes of the valleys and around Singlers bridge.

Field Pattern

The historic field pattern is predominantly pre 18th century irregular enclosure, subsequently rationalized by 19th century parliamentary enclosure and then by late 20th century enlargements. The valley is dominated by the medium to large arable fields in a largely regular formation. There is evidence of historic field boundaries such as the bare raised banks where a hedgerow once grew and the occasional hedgerow tree now standing in isolation in the carpet of cropland. Headlands are non-existent, creating a strong scene of intensively farmed fields with over managed hedgerows.

Transport Pattern

The transport pattern is largely dictated by topography and the hydrology of the area. Kimpton road follows the base of the valley which is a narrow road, bordered in part by low and intermittent hedgerows, banks and narrow verges. The road is joined occasionally at right angles by smaller lanes and tracks that climb the slope towards isolated farms and settlements. Codicote village lies on the route of the old Great North Road (the Hitchin road) which divides the unsettled arable land of the Codicote Bottom valley in the west from the settled incised slopes to the east. The road was historically well used by traders and merchants and those taking spring waters at Welwyn (Welling).

Settlement and the Built Form

Settlement is very sparse in the valley contributing to the rural character of the area. At the eastern end of the valley, around the Singlers Marsh water meadows, the landscape becomes confined by the roman settlement of Welwyn and the spread of development along either side of the river. The mill is a black timbered building. Other houses in the locality are generally 20th century and comprised of a mixture of brick, render and timbered construction types. A cemetery borders the valley on the western gentle slopes. The house at the ford crossing and crossroads at Pulmers water comprise a two storey red brick building. The lodge house and remnant tree avenue along the carriage drive to Ayot House, (see Area 34) lies within the valley.

The Hertfordshire way clips the south west corner of the area, following the Avenue from Ayot lodge up the slopes to Ayot House.

Other Sources of Area Specific Information

Brian Waters: Thirteen Rivers to the Thames
 Malcolm Tomkins: So That Was Hertfordshire - Traveler's Jottings 1322-1887
 Nikolaus Pevsner: The Buildings of England - Hertfordshire
 Jeffery W. Whitelaw: Hidden Hertfordshire
 Hertfordshire's Federation of Women's Institutes: The Hertfordshire Village Book
 Tony Rook: The History of Hertfordshire

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

A contained valley of medium scale landscape elements. Views are limited by topography and vegetation on the horizon. Views to the east of the area are confined more by vegetation and settlement close to the edges of Welwyn.

Rarity and Distinctiveness

This area is unusual in Hertfordshire due to the shape and confinement of the valley, skirting the southern boundary of Codicote village.

VISUAL IMPACT

The most dominant impact on the area is the lime quarry on the south facing slopes and its surrounding screening by tall ornamental fir trees. The road and settlement has an influence on the eastern tail of the valley. Management techniques at the Singlers marsh wildlife site increases the contrasting scale of visual impact and landscape change further along the river valley.

ACCESSIBILITY

The Singlers Marsh Nature Reserve is a valuable local amenity for public access. Access to the countryside along the floor of main arable valley is poor however there are a number of routes that cross the valley, including fords over the river and one route through the historic park and garden of Ayot Place.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

The MORI survey indicates that this area is not widely regarded for its distinctiveness although this conceals an entirely different local picture. A survey of 1500 households in adjoining Welwyn, undertaken in 2000, with a 37% response rate, yielded 80% support that the river Mimram and its wildlife was the village's greatest asset.

"The river Mimram always had an attraction for us children. In summer we would build dams to deepen the water so we could swim. In winter, Singlers Marsh would freeze and we could slide or skate on the ice" Tony Jones. "Welwyn in the 1930's and 40's' Codicote Historian No. 35 Nov 1991.

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

Areas of Archaeological Significance (5No.)
Wildlife Site: Singlers Marsh
Landscape Conservation Area (majority)
Welwyn Conservation Area (adjacent)
Historic Park and Garden: Ayot Park

CONDITION	
Land cover change	Widespread
Age Structure of Tree cover	Mature or Young
Extent of Semi-natural habitat survival	Relic
Management of Semi-natural habitat	Poor
Survival of Cultural pattern	Declining
Impact of built development	Low
Impact of land use change	High
STRENGTH OF CHARACTER	
Impact of land form	Prominent
Impact of land cover	Dominant
Impact of historic pattern	Insignificant
Visibility from outside	Concealed
Sense of enclosure	Contained
Visual unity	Coherent
Distinctiveness / Rarity	Unusual

Strengthen and Reinforce	Conserve and Strengthen	Safeguard and Manage
Improve and Reinforce	Improve and Conserve	Conserve and Restore
Reconstruction	Improve and Restore	Restore Condition to Maintain Character

EVALUATION

INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

Landscape Character Sensitivities

- Hedgerows along minor roads within the Character Area are often tall, particularly along roads that travel up the valley slopes. Those within the valley bottom are often more clipped. These hedgerows are infrequent within the Character Area as a whole and would be sensitive to removal.
- The slopes of the steep valley feature that forms the Character Area are largely open and would be vulnerable to change
- The corridor of the River Mimram is generally well vegetated, particularly with a variety of willows, which would be vulnerable to clearance work
- Remaining pasture within the bottom of the valley adds variety to the landscape and would be sensitive to conversion to arable farmland
- The Hertfordshire Way promoted footpath, which runs through the western end of the North Hertfordshire part of the Character Area
- The predominantly unsettled character of the area would be vulnerable to change
- The very minor roads that pass through the Character Area, often including passing places and occasionally fords, would be sensitive to improvement
- The River Mimram is not a significant feature in the landscape. However, it would be vulnerable to work that affected its current naturalistic state

Overall Codicote Bottom Arable Valley is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. The gently rolling valley landscape is relatively rural, despite its close proximity to urban areas, and has retained areas of grazing and flood meadows in the valley bottom.

Visual Sensitivities

- Open views along the sweeping chalky slopes
- Occasional cross valley views through gaps in vegetation
- Skylines are generally open throughout the Character Area, but slightly more wooded to the west
- Codicote Quarry chalk pit has caused an intrusive visual impact on the south facing chalk slopes within the North Hertfordshire part of the Character Area

In visual terms, Codicote Bottom Arable Valley is considered to be of **moderate to high sensitivity**. Views along the open valley slopes and the areas of open skyline would be particularly sensitive to development.

LANDSCAPE VALUE

Overall Codicote Bottom Arable Valley is considered to be of **moderate landscape value**. Aspects of particular value are the visual intactness of the landscape and the relative sense of remoteness.

EVALUATION

CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT

Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural and undeveloped character. It would introduce a scale of development that would be entirely out of keeping with the Character Area at present and its undeveloped location. Large scale development could not be accommodated within Codicote Bottom Arable Valley without a significant visual impact and interrupting key views. The steeply sloping and undulating landform would also make major development difficult to accommodate.

The landscape capacity for major urban extensions or new settlements is considered to be low.

Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)

This type of development would be inappropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural and undeveloped character. Any development would reduce the openness of the Character Area and would be difficult to accommodate on the steeply sloping and undulating landform.

The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered to be to low.

Major transport developments/improvements

This type of development would not generally be appropriate within this Character Area, due to the largely rural character of most routes at present. Upgrading of existing narrow, twisting lanes could erode the character of the landscape. Additional traffic would also affect the peace and tranquillity of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for major transport developments/improvements is considered to be low.

Commercial/warehouse estates

This type of large scale development would not be appropriate in this character area. There are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. Existing minor roads would be inappropriate for any significant larger volumes of traffic. Upgrading of existing narrow lanes could erode the character of the landscape. Additional traffic would also affect the peace and tranquillity of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for commercial/warehouse estates is considered to be low.

Individual large/bulky buildings

There may be some limited capacity for sympathetically located and designed individual large buildings, particularly if they were of a vernacular appearance and in keeping with the rural character. However, large buildings could be highly visible within the Character Area if not carefully located.

The landscape capacity for individual large/bulky buildings is considered to be low to moderate.

Large scale open storage

This type of large scale development would not be appropriate in this character area and there are not currently any large scale developments of this type within the area. Extensive development would also disrupt the open views and sloping landform.

The landscape capacity for large scale 'open' uses is considered to be low.

EVALUATION

Mineral extraction/waste disposal

This Character Area currently contains a quarry that is visually intrusive. Further extraction could be equally intrusive on the slopes or valley floor. Restoration proposals for any consented schemes should be mainly at grade or possibly as wetland along the valley and include for additional planting in character with existing patterns.

The landscape capacity for mineral extraction is considered to be low to moderate. Waste disposal would be a problem in all character areas due to the presence of aquifers.

Incremental small scale development

There may be some very limited capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were of an agricultural or vernacular design and in keeping with the rural character. This could include carefully planned sites on the edge of Welwyn or Danesbury. However, large buildings, if not carefully located, could erode the rural and undeveloped character of the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for incremental small scale developments is considered to be low to moderate.

Utilities developments e.g. masts, pylons, wind turbines

There are very few detractors such as these within this Character Area at present. New utilities developments or structures such as masts or wind turbines would have a major impact on the rural character of Codicote Bottom Arable Valley. Large scale developments, tall elements such as these would be highly visible within the Character Area.

The landscape capacity for utilities developments is considered to be low.

GUIDELINES

STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE

Strategy: Restore Condition to Maintain Character

NB. Guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire.

Landscape management guidelines

- Promote the creation of a network of new medium to large woodlands in the open arable landscape, particularly with a view to visually integrating the intrusive elements.
- Utilise ancient hedge and field boundaries to locate the most appropriate location for wood restoration and expansion
- Encourage the reversal of habitat fragmentation and the creation and improvement of habitat links to create eco-corridors.
- Encourage reversion from arable uses to pasture and grassland along the valley floor to link Singler's Marsh with other areas of pasture to the west.
- Encourage the eradication of invasive non-native species.
- Promote hedgerow restoration and creation throughout the area to provide visual and ecological links between existing and proposed woodland areas. Pattern to follow historic field boundaries where possible.
- Maintain and develop the traditional pattern of roadside verges as a local feature and a wildlife resource.
- Restore arable land to permanent pasture and meadow. Priority will be given to land which buffers or links sites of existing wildlife importance.
- Protect remaining river valley habitats of significant nature conservation interest.
- Promote the use of low-density 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 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.

- Enhancement and creation of wetland landscape features such as reedbeds, ponds, scrapes and pollarded willows.
- For areas of semi-improved acid grassland avoid over-grazing, heavy public pressure, damage from vehicles, pollution and invasion by alien species.
- Promote the creation of uncropped or grass field margins to link between intensive arable production and important semi-natural habitats and along rights of way.
- Encourage the establishment of wet native woodland along watercourses, including black poplar and pollarded willow.

Built development guidelines

- Retain the rural character of Codicote Bottom Arable Valley, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the Character Area
- 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.
- Ensure that the surroundings of converted and new buildings are designed and maintained to be in keeping with their agricultural surroundings. Ensure that 'garden' details are screened from view where possible and native species are used for hedging/tree planting to the perimeter.
- Hard detailing should be kept to a minimum, with an emphasis on the use of natural materials
- Avoid the location of new development in visually intrusive locations, such as higher ground or where it would be visible on the skyline
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area