

LOCATION

Valley of the River Quin located to the north of Braughing and extending northwards along the B1368 to Biggin Bridge (south of Barkway). Incorporates the settlements of Hare Street and Great Hormead.

- village of Great Hormead with many vernacular buildings in enclosed tributary valley
- B1368 passing through the centre of area

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

A shallow valley around the River Quin with open arable farmland either side. A bland landscape with few treasures. The River Quin is poorly defined in many stretches with little or no streamside vegetation. Settlements and field patterns are focused on the B1368 which passes through the centre of the area. The area contains several twentieth century features which detract from the quality of the area including: high voltage electricity pylons, chalk pit, Silkmead Farm industrial area, telecom masts, grain silos by Mutfords Farm and a sewage treatment works. The valley is sparsely vegetated but includes a substantial area of ornamental conifers north of Hare Street which form a dominant but inappropriate feature in the valley. The area includes the historic settlement of Great Hormead within a short, steep-sided tributary valley.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- shallow valley with gently sloping sides
- open, arable farmland
- small settlements and individual properties scattered along the B1368
- fragmented hedges, some low and broken, others more substantial
- frequent extensive views along and across the valley
- absence of woodland and few mature trees

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- telecom masts on distant horizon

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology & Soils

The area is dominated by fluvo-glacial deposits from the Anglian glaciation, over much of the underlying chalk, except in some areas east of the river. Boulder Clay occupies the upper valley slopes, and the valley floor has a narrow belt of recent alluvium. Soils are generally fertile, calcareous and well-drained due to the presence of sand. To the west side of valley soils are a mix of deep, fertile, well drained fine loamy, coarse loamy and fine loamy soils, (Melford series). To the east side of valley there are areas of shallow well drained calcareous silty soils over chalk (Upton 1series).

Topography

A shallow valley around the River Quin with gently sloping sides. At the northern end, the valley divides into three small shallow valleys, each following upper tributaries of the River Quin. At the southern end of the area (north of Braughing), the valley becomes slightly narrower with steeper sides.

Degree of slope

At the northern end of the valley the slopes are typically 1 in 20 and at the southern end slopes vary between 1 in 7 and 1 in 15.

Altitude Range

Levels range between 73m in the valley bottom at Quinbury Farm (at the southern end of the valley) to 120m at the top of the valley sides (at the northern end of the valley).

Hydrology

The River Quin which rises near Barkway (north of the area) is a small and insignificant watercourse, typically a winterbourne, especially north of Great Hornead. The watercourse is fed by a number of sources including springs from Biggin Moor, Great Hornead Brook, Little Hornead Brook and various field ditches. Within the area, riverside vegetation is often absent which means the river is barely distinguishable at many points.

Land Cover and Land Use

The valley sides are dominated by open arable farmland in small to medium fields with some occasional large fields particularly at

the northern end. Hedgerows between fields and along roads are fragmented. Some are low and broken with significant gaps and others more substantial. The area contains virtually no woodland, and map evidence, together with the cropmark evidence of early cultivation, suggests that woodland has not been a significant component in the landscape from a very early date. However, a significant block of mixed vegetation including a substantial proportion of ornamental conifers is present around a former works site to the north of Hare Street. This is visually intrusive and detracts from the character of the valley. A small area of trees and shrubs has also recently been planted close to Quinbury Farm. The valley also contains a few non-agricultural land uses including an industrial area at Silkmead Farm and a sewage works between Hay Street and Dassels.

Vegetation and Wildlife

Owing to its fertile, well-drained soils, the area is almost devoid of semi-natural vegetation. There are some remaining neutral grasslands of local interest at Dassels, and some secondary grasslands and scrub on former allotments at Hare Street. The road verges of the B1368, and a green lane at Beauchamps are probably the most important remaining grasslands. There are no woods, and no aquatic habitats of any note. The chalk quarry west of Anstey is of local importance for a limited chalk flora on spoil banks etc.

The chalk spoil banks at Anstey Pit hold a significant colony of Kidney Vetch, as well as occasional plants of Woolly Thistle, both scarce in Hertfordshire. Tall Broomrape also occurs. The local arable weed Shepherd's Needle is known from fields at Hare Street. Pepper Saxifrage and Meadow Cranesbill survive in grasslands at Dassels.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The majority of its farmsteads and isolated houses are dispersed along the valley sides, with the settlements at Hare Street, Dassels and Great Hornead being sited on B1368, the road north from Braughing to Barkway, or on the B1038, the east-west road from Buntingford to Brent Pelham. These hamlets

and villages all have medieval origins, as do the majority of farms within the area. Quinbury, Mutfords and Biggin Manor Farm are all medieval sites; and Biggin Farm is also the site of a medieval hospital and chapel. While the present day settlement pattern has medieval or post-medieval origins there are indications of late Neolithic or early Bronze Age activity along the valley, including an extant barrow at Bummers Hill and cropmarks of ring ditches (plough-raised burial mounds) at Lincoln Hill, Anstey and at Mutford's. A Bronze Age axe has been found at the latter site. Cropmarks of linear ditches and enclosures also provide evidence of undated, but early occupation and exploitation of the landscape. The villages of Hare Street and Great Hormead were once prosperous settlements and contain several large properties including Hare Street House, (the country residence of Catholic Archbishops of Westminster) the Georgian-fronted Dane End Farm in Great Hormead and the Tudor Old Rectory in Great Hormead. Until recently Great Hormead was known for its two windmills but these no longer remain.

Field Pattern

Fields units are typically large in size, but locally there are some smaller units around settlements and properties. The field systems of the area were originally pre-18th century unenclosed common arable fields, and smaller 'irregular' enclosure fields, with the latter system predominating on the eastern side of the valley and at its southern end, close to and east of the river. Small areas of these 'irregular' enclosure field systems survive at Biggin Manor, Bandons, east of Hare Street and north east of Dassels, but nearly all the unenclosed common arable and irregularly enclosed field systems of pre-18th century date have been superseded. In the southern half of the area 20th century 'prairie' fields predominate, but substantial blocks of 18th century or later enclosure fields survive in the northern part of the area, north of the Hormead road. This contrasting survival appears to reflect the contour of the valley slope.

Transport Pattern

The B1368 runs through the area forming a locally important north-south route connecting the settlements of Barkway, Hare Street, Dassels, Braughing and Standon. At Hare Street the B1368 is crossed by the B1038

which is an east-west route providing routes to and from Buntingford. Several other minor roads connect with the B1368 and provide east-west connections across the valley. These are predominantly straight roads which join the B1368 at right angles.

Settlement and the Built Form

Settlement is concentrated along the B1368 on the west side of the River Quin in a series of small linear settlements: Hay Street, Dassels and Hare Street. These include a mixture of traditional vernacular buildings and a variety of more recent development. The area also includes the village of Great Hormead which is located in a small tributary valley on the east side of the River Quin. The village is an historic settlement focussed around a central linear road. Pevsner refers to the village street as 'uncommonly charming' and it contains a large proportion of vernacular buildings many of which are thatched properties with large overhanging roofs and exposed timbers. The Three Tuns public house is a traditional pub in the centre of the village.

Other Sources of Area Specific Information

Pevsner: Hertfordshire - The Buildings of England

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

The area is widely visible from the edge of the adjacent plateaux and from within the arable areas. Views are generally open and extensive due to the absence of significant blocks of vegetation. However, from the B1368 views are more infrequent and are often filtered or screened as a result of roadside vegetation. The settlement of Great Hormead is also visually contained due to its location within a narrow and relatively steep-sided valley.

Rarity and Distinctiveness

The area is a bland landscape with few distinctive features

VISUAL IMPACT

There are a number of detracting features along the length of the valley which affect the visual quality of the area. Hare Street includes a mixture of twentieth century development much of which does not compliment the older vernacular buildings in the village. To the north of Hare Street, a former works site contains a large number of coniferous trees which are highly visible and detract from the character of the river valley. Other detracting features in the area include a large silo on Mutfords Farm, Anstey quarry, Silkmead Farm industrial area and two high voltage powerlines which cross the valley north of Hare Street.

ACCESSIBILITY

Footpaths and bridlepaths cross the valley at regular intervals within the area. This includes a short section of the waymarked Hertfordshire Way which diverts across the valley from Great Hormead to Hare Street before crossing back across the valley to Little Hormead. However, there are few paths or bridleways in a north-south direction adjacent to the River Quin.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

An area of modest general regard but particularly valued locally, as evidenced by a community campaign to have the area included within a new AONB [D]

River Quin: "Sometimes the tiny feeders which swell the larger stream, Will travel on the highway – a thing you'd scarcely dream; And as for fords and bridges, they everywhere abound, To lure the traveller onward where some goodly scene is found."

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

SAM - Bummers Hill: a bowl barrow 135m north-west of Mutford Cottages.
Great Hormead Conservation Area
Areas of Archaeological Significance

CONDITION	
Land cover change	Widespread
Age Structure of Tree cover	Mixed
Extent of Semi-natural habitat survival	Relic
Management of Semi-natural habitat	Not obvious
Survival of Cultural pattern	Interrupted
Impact of built development	Moderate
Impact of land use charge	Moderate
STRENGTH OF CHARACTER	
Impact of land form	Apparent
Impact of land cover	Apparent
Impact of historic pattern	Apparent
Visibility from outside	Widely visible
Sense of enclosure	Open / exposed
Visual unity	Coherent
Distinctiveness / Rarity	Frequent

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

- Vegetation associated with the River Quin is intermittent and generally located outside of North Hertfordshire
- The Character Area as a whole is a shallow valley, but within North Hertfordshire the landform is flatter and more open
- Within much of the Character Area hedgerows are present along the B1368, the main route through the area. Within North Hertfordshire these hedgerows are not present
- The settlement pattern within the Upper Quin Valley is ribbon development along the B1368, either dispersed or more concentrated such as in Hare Street. This is not the case within North Hertfordshire, where no built form is present
- Two lines of electricity pylons stride through the centre of the character area on an east – west axis and are an existing detractor to the character of the area. This is not the case within North Hertfordshire, where pylons are only visible in the distance
- Rights of way, including the Hertfordshire Way, cross the valley frequently in an east – west direction. However, there are no rights of way within the North Hertfordshire part of the Character Area
- The Character Area as a whole is generally smaller scale than some of those elsewhere in North Hertfordshire and land uses are more varied. However, the parcel of land within North Hertfordshire forms part of a medium to large arable field and is less characteristic

Overall Upper Quin Valley is considered to be of **moderate to low sensitivity**. The river is not a dominant feature within the Character Area and the single parcel of land within North Hertfordshire is not distinctive.

Visual Sensitivities

- Views within the Character Area as a whole are restricted by the sides of the shallow Quin valley, although this is not as obviously the case within North Hertfordshire
- Views along the valley are generally open due to a lack of significant blocks of vegetation within the wider Character Area
- The skyline from within the Character Area as a whole is varied, with some areas open and others wooded. From within North Hertfordshire the horizons are generally wooded, with woodland blocks occurring within Character Areas beyond the Upper Quin Valley

In visual terms, Upper Quin Valley is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. Views along the valley are relatively open but are more restricted when looking out of the valley.

LANDSCAPE VALUE

Overall Upper Quin Valley is considered to be of **low landscape value**. Although there are minimal incongruous elements and a sense of remoteness and tranquillity within Upper Quin Valley, the landscape and landform is not particularly memorable. This is particularly the case within the North Hertfordshire part of the Character Area.

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 small scale nature. Within North Hertfordshire there is only just over 5ha of land on which to locate a new settlement, although the small area of land within North Hertfordshire could form part of a larger area of land in the wider Character Area. A new settlement would introduce elements that would alter the character and affect existing key characteristics such as the small settlements and extensive views along the valley. Increased housing development would be likely to affect the existing minor roads, which could erode the character of the landscape.

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

Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)

This type of development would not be entirely appropriate within this Character Area, due to its rural, isolated and undeveloped character. Within North Hertfordshire there are no settlements that could be extended into this Character Area.

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

Major transport developments/improvements

This type of development would not be appropriate within this Character Area, due to the largely rural character of most routes at present. Upgrading of existing roads and lanes could erode the character of the landscape. Additional traffic would also affect the peace and tranquillity of the Character Area. There are limited opportunities within North Hertfordshire for transport improvements in this 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 and/or HGVs. There would be limited opportunities to develop large buildings within the North Hertfordshire part of this 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 an agricultural or vernacular character and in keeping with the rural character.

Large agricultural buildings are currently located along the B1368, interspersed with residential properties, but within the North Hertfordshire part of this Character Area there would be limited opportunities to develop large buildings.

The landscape capacity for individual large/bulky buildings is considered to be low to moderate, but low within North Hertfordshire.

Large scale open storage

The smaller scale of Upper Quin Valley would make it more difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses without potential loss of vegetation. There may also be potential impacts on the River Quin and its tributaries. This would not be in keeping with the rural character of the area and could introduce new elements that would conflict with the existing characteristics. The minor roads are unlikely to have capacity to accommodate this type of development and there would be limited opportunities to develop large open uses within the North Hertfordshire part of this Character Area.

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

EVALUATION

Mineral extraction/waste disposal

This Character Area is currently rural in appearance with small scale linear development along the B1368. Whilst some small scale mineral extraction could be accommodated with careful design and mitigation measures, there would be limited opportunities to undertake mineral extraction in the North Hertfordshire part of the Character Area. There may also be a need to upgrade local roads, which could dilute the landscape character. If minerals schemes were consented, restoration proposals should be mainly at grade and include for additional planting in character with existing patterns.

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

Incremental small scale development

There may be some capacity for carefully located and designed small scale developments within the Character Area, particularly if they were agricultural or vernacular in form and style and in keeping with the rural character. However, due to the limited extent of the Character Area within North Herefordshire any proposals would need clear justification.

The landscape capacity for incremental small scale developments is considered to be low to moderate, but low within North Hertfordshire.

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

There are currently a small number of detractors within or visible from the Character Area, including telecommunications masts on the horizons. Further utilities developments or structures such as masts or wind turbines are likely to have a noticeable impact on the rural character of the Upper Quin Valley as a whole. Large scale tall elements such as these would be highly visible within the Character Area, as well as in surrounding Character Areas, and could only be located in a relatively exposed location in North Hertfordshire.

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

GUIDELINES**STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE****Strategy: Improve and Conserve**

NB. Guidelines apply only to land within North Hertfordshire.

Landscape management guidelines

- Ensure new planting is encouraged within the area. 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
- Protect the remaining river valley habitats of nature conservation interest, especially where they contribute to a suite of habitats, such as neutral grassland, running water, wet grassland, valley or floodplain woodland and grazing marsh
- Promote the re-introduction of permanent pasture adjacent to the River Quin
- Promote the enhancement of the River Quin and its tributaries by the creation of wetland landscape features such as reedbeds, ponds, scrapes and pollarded willows
- Promote the management of existing riparian trees. Promote additional tree planting of native water loving species, willow, alder and poplar to emphasize the line of the watercourse
- 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 to reduce their acid or calcareous nature, in order to maintain their nature conservation value
- 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, hedges and hedgerow trees
- Encourage the development of an improved network of rights of way particularly along the valley giving enhanced recreational opportunities for residents

Built development guidelines

- Retain the rural character of the Upper Quin Valley, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the Character Area. Ideally this should follow the pattern of ribbon development along the B1368
- Avoid the location of new development in visual intrusive locations, such as on the edges of the valley where it would be visible on the currently largely undeveloped skyline
- Resist development that could lower the water table within river valleys and affect wetland habitats
- Traffic calming measures, where considered necessary, must be of a scale and design that relates to the local the landscape character of the settlement.
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area