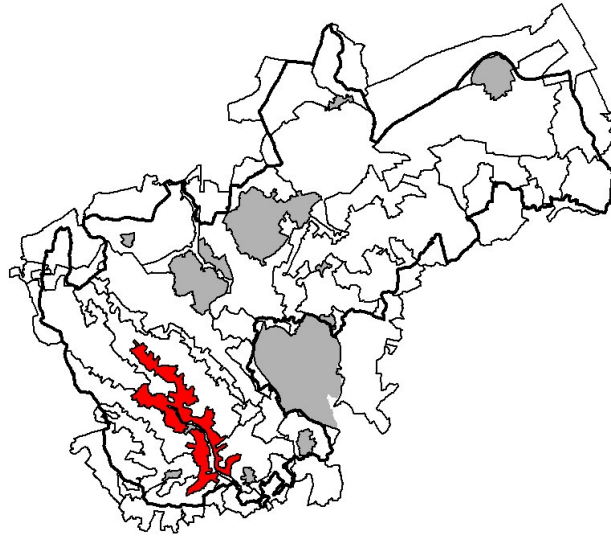


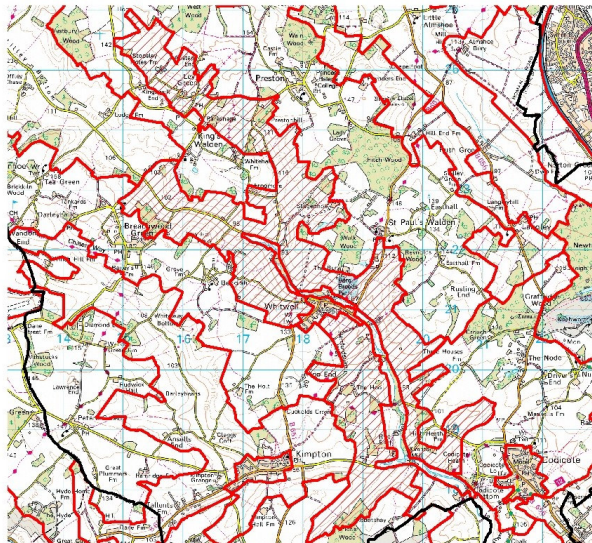
## LOCATION



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### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

The Whitwell valley comprises two arms that form a confluence north of Whitwell settlement. South of Whitwell the continuity of the valley can be sub-divided into two smaller units either side of the River Mimram sub-area. The northernmost reaches of the valley extend to the southeastern outskirts of Great Offley village. The western arm of the valley extends towards the pinch point at Kings Walden, north of which the valley widens to form Lilley Bottom (Character Area 212).



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### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Steeply incised valley sides in a chalk landscape plateau. The upper reaches of the valley are dry Water springs to the surface west of Stagenhoe Bottom Farm.

The valley gradually widens to the south as it incorporates an increasing number of tributaries (usually dry). The valley floor of the River Mimram sub-area is characterised by extensive flood meadows. The land is given over to rough grazing, mainly cattle with some horse grazing adjacent to houses. The field pattern is largely lost through grazing out of hedges. Mature trees are scattered throughout the area. In the Whitwell valley woodlands are scattered, irregular in shape and predominantly mixed deciduous and evergreen. The road network follows the valley bottoms with small winding roads connecting the valley sides. Field sizes are generally large and regular in shape, but with more irregular field parcels in the upper reaches north of Frogmore Bottom.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Steep sided valley
- Dominant arable land use
- Scattered woodland parcels of irregular shape
- Locally smaller field parcels on the upper reaches of the valley
- Smaller paddocks and horse grazing associated with local settlements
- Flood meadow vegetation screening views of the River Mimram

### DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Hoo Parkland
- Bridge over dry river bed at Hoo Park
- Various ford crossings
- Watercress at Whitwell

**ASSESSMENT****PHYSICAL INFLUENCES****Geology & soils**

Generally free draining calcareous or neutral loamy brown soils over Chalk. Valley slopes are overlain by coombe deposits and thin Clay-with-Flints. Poorly draining gleyed soils over alluvial drift underlain by chalk locally outcropping along the River Mimram.

**Topography**

Narrow valley in upper reaches gradually widening to the confluence with the Kimpton valley. Flat valley bottom in River Mimram sub-area.

**Degree of slope**

Typically 1:10 slopes to valley sides.

**Altitude range**

Valley corridor falls from 140m north of Stopsley Holes Farm to 75m to the west of Codicote.

**Hydrology**

The Whitwell valley contains the source of the River Mimram. The spring is located 0.5km to the west of Stagenhoe Bottom Farm. Side valleys that feed into the Whitwell valley are mainly dry. Over the lower reaches the Mimram is a comparatively fast flowing chalk stream.

**Land cover and land use**

The predominant land use is arable farming with mainly grazing on the valley floor but with extensive areas of wetland vegetation.

**Vegetation and wildlife**

Valley slope woodlands of beech occur at Watkins and Lords Wood and at a few remaining fringes and hedges, where the species are growing in conjunction with hazel and holly. Some less common species such as orchids and adders-tongue fern are present within Watkins//Lords Wood.

Remnants of old neutral alluvial grasslands occur at Stagenhoe Bottom and Valley Farm.

Hoo Park contains row of ancient sweet chestnuts, part of an old avenue of trees from the 17<sup>th</sup> century park landscape. Some 18<sup>th</sup> century trees, which were part of Brown's design, also survive.

A landscape park at Stagenhoe was created in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Within the River Mimram sub-area the predominant

semi-natural vegetation types are neutral alluvial grasslands, mixed tall herb fen and remnant alder/willow woodlands.

Ecological interest reflects the influence of the River Mimram. The Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan describes the river stretch between Kimpton Mill and Fulling Mill, as being of high biodiversity value. The calcareous springs of the Mimram are of some importance including the springs at Stagenhoe Bottom, the cress-bed springs at Nine Wells and the seasonal lake at Law Hall Farm.

An interesting wet woodland site occurs adjacent to the River Mimram in close proximity to Kimpton Hoo. Tall fen vegetation occurs beneath a mixed wood canopy that includes cricket bat willow, poplar plantation and hazel coppice. Species rich grasslands on alluvial soils are present by the River Mimram in the vicinity of Kimpton Mill and further along the riverbanks to Codicote Mill. Mimram Valley Marsh supports an array of wetland habitats, including sedge and reed beds, marshy grassland, derelict watercress beds, old plantations and some acidic grassland communities.

Fulling Mill Meadow incorporates wet and dry habitats ranging from swamp through to old unimproved grassland.

Wintering water rail, kingfisher and grey wagtail are associated with the springs and river at Kimpton Mill. River Mimram is very important for water voles

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

To the northeast of Whitwell lies St Paul's Walden a 12th century medieval settlement incorporating the parish church of All Saints. To the south lies a cluster of cropmarks including four prehistoric ring ditches, enclosures and linear ditches of unknown date and function. To the northwest of Whitwell lies a documented deserted medieval village; and to the south a medieval moated site, known as Bull Moat, situated within the historic park of Hoo.

**Field pattern**

The historic agricultural landscape comprises a mixture of prairie fields with post-1950s boundary loss, pre-18th century irregular enclosure, pre-18th century irregular sinuous

enclosure, 18th century and later enclosure and ancient woodland. Today there are a high proportion of removed hedges, a predominantly large scale field pattern but with smaller fields on some steeply sloping ground. Smaller field parcels are associated with settlement fringes.

The historic agricultural landscape pattern of the River Mimram sub-area consists of a mixture of post 1950s enclosure, prairie fields with 1950s boundary loss and pre-18th century irregular enclosure. Today there is no apparent field pattern, there are, however, post and wire fences to control grazing.

### **Transport pattern**

Combination of primary routes following valley bottoms interconnected by small winding lanes often sunken and rising up the valley side. A small number of local lanes ford the River Mimram.

### **Settlements and built form**

The historic settlement pattern is characterised by outlying cottages, villages and farmsteads. The Character Area includes the larger settlement of Whitwell and incorporates some associated ribbon development. The scattered farmsteads are further up the valleys. Traditional buildings date from the 17th century. Whitwell High Street contains a c.1700 red brick house of 3 bays and the timber framed Bull Inn.

The historic settlement pattern is sparse within the River Mimram sub-area with no documented traditional buildings.

The bridge at Hoo Park was part of the landscape designed by Capability Brown in the 1760's.

**EVALUATION****VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The valley is a combination of open, undeveloped landscape mainly in the upper valley reaches contrasting with the well settled, partly sub-urban character of the valley bottom. The upper valley sections have a greater sense of remoteness reinforced by the sparse distribution of development.

The tranquil character of the River Mimram sub – area is complemented by its pastoral quality. The verdant quality also being in stark contrast to the large scale enclosing arable landscape.

**Rarity & distinctiveness**

Landscape type comparatively frequent in the west of the District. However the River Mimram sub-area is unusual and the upper reaches of the valley tend to be dry.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

More recent ribbon development at Whitwell following the valley bottom and stretching out along the B651 intrudes into the valley setting. Of particular note are the associated pony paddocks and stabling facilities. Higher up the valley the narrower, steeper slopes provide a sense of visual containment. From higher vantage points long distance views are available down the valley.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

The valley bottom contains the road network with connecting roads following feeder valleys. The Rights of Way network often cuts across the valleys.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) have undertaken Tier B (Community of Place) consultations. Views of the local community have been sought and contributor's responses to each of the Character Areas will be analysed and a summary of the responses provided by HCC.

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

LC1	Landscape Conservation Area
GD 1909	Hoo
SAM HT 73	Bridge at Hoo Park

<b>EVALUATION</b>
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<b>CONDITION</b>	Whitwell Valley	River Mimram sub-area
Land cover change:	Widespread	Localised
Age structure of tree cover:	Mixed	Mature
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:	Relic	Scattered
Management of semi-natural habitat:	Not obvious	Good
Survival of cultural pattern:	Declining/Relic	Declining/Relic
Impact of built development:	Low	Moderate
Impact of land-use change:	Moderate	Moderate
<b>Matrix Score:</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

<b>ROBUSTNESS</b>		
Impact of landform:	Apparent	Apparent
Impact of land cover:	Apparent	Prominent
Impact of historic pattern:	Apparent	Insignificant
Visibility from outside:	Widely visible	Locally visible
Sense of enclosure:	Open	Contained
Visual unity:	Coherent	Unified
Distinctiveness/rarity:	Frequent	Unusual
<b>Matrix Score:</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

<b>CONDITION</b>	<b>GOOD</b>	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	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>ROBUSTNESS</b>				

## EVALUATION

## INHERENT LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

## Landscape Character Sensitivities

- A largely rural, character throughout Whitwell Valley, which would be vulnerable to the addition of urbanizing features
- The character area is a steeply, incised valley stream in a chalk dip slope. The source of the River Mimram is located in Whitwell Valley. Side valleys which feed into the Whitwell Valley are mainly dry. The valleys are significant features of the area and the loss of character or lack of management would be detrimental
- The landuse is predominantly large, regular arable fields, but with smaller fields on the steeper ground and upper reaches of the valley, where the land is used for grazing, cattle and sheep. Horsiculture paddocks are also present and associated with settlements. Hedgerows are the traditional boundary treatment, but many have been lost. The area is vulnerable to the further loss of hedgerow boundary treatment
- The area is characterised by scattered woodland blocks of irregular shape and a mixture of deciduous and evergreen planting. The loss of this characteristic would be detrimental to the area
- Valley slope woodlands of beech are present in the character area and in some situations are growing in conjunction with Hazel and Holly. Removal or poor management of these habitats would be detrimental to the character of Whitwell Valley
- The area is tranquil with generally quiet roads. The primary roads follow the valley bottoms. These are interconnected by smaller winding roads. The roads are characterised by hedgerows, many of which are low and clipped. However some of these are gappy or have been removed. The character area is vulnerable to further loss of these features
- There is little development in the character area, with generally isolated properties and farmsteads, which are found higher up the valley. The settlement of Whitwell abuts the character area, in the bottom of the valley. Whitwell is a village of rural character but with a number of small estate developments set back from the through roads. Ribbon development stretching along the valley bottom from Whitwell intrudes on the valley setting. The character area is vulnerable to inappropriate or unsympathetic development and any form of development not in scale with the area
- To the south the character area includes The Hoo parkland, which comprises a significant area of parkland character, with individual specimen trees, grazing land and estate fencing. This character could be at risk from development pressure and inconsistent management
- The character area includes some historic features for example prehistoric ditches, deserted medieval villages and a medieval moated site found within the historic park of Hoo. These features could be at risk from development pressure and inconsistent management
- The flight path for Luton airport crosses the character area and is an existing detractor to Whitwell Valley
- There are a number of rights of way that run across the valley slopes, including the Hertfordshire Way

Overall Whitwell Valley is considered to be of **moderate sensitivity**. The largely rural character area is quiet and tranquil, with a historic parkland character in areas. However there has been some degradation due to loss of hedgerows and field patterns. The Luton flight path is a detractor to Whitwell Valley.

**EVALUATION****Visual Sensitivities**

- Cross valley views from the higher vantage points are an important feature of the Character Area
- Panoramic views are common from the higher valley slopes
- Views along the valley are an important feature in the character area

In visual terms, Whitwell Valley is considered to be of **moderate to high sensitivity**. Views across and along the valley would be sensitive to the introduction of further built or urbanizing features.

**LANDSCAPE VALUE**

Overall Whitwell Valley is considered to be of **moderate landscape value**. Aspects of particular value within Whitwell Valley are the relatively few incongruous elements, the striking landform, the visual interest, cross valley and along valley views and the perceived distance from settlement in the upper valley, the relative tranquillity and the historic feel to the landscape.

**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 relatively remote, rural and undeveloped character. It would be of an inappropriate scale and would introduce elements that would urbanise the landscape, altering the character and removing the existing key characteristics. Visual impacts would also be high, due to the cross valley views currently experienced. Increased housing development would be likely to affect the existing rural lanes, which could erode the character of the landscape.

The landscape capacity for major 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 and undeveloped character. Visual impacts could be high, due to the cross valley views currently experienced. Some small scale expansion at the periphery of Whitwell, carefully designed and in keeping with the existing character of the village, could possibly be accommodated.

The landscape capacity for small urban extensions is considered to be moderate to 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 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. There would also be restricted areas of level land for this type of development and substantial earthworks would be likely to be required. Existing minor roads would be inappropriate for any significant larger volumes of traffic and/or HGVs. Any upgrading of the existing network would cause damage to the landscape character.

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 character. However, large buildings could be highly visible within the Character Area if not carefully located would erode the rural and intimate character of Whitwell Valley.

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

**Large scale open storage**

The landform within Whitwell Valley would make it difficult to accommodate large scale 'open' uses without considerable visual impact in the valley landscape. This would not be in keeping with the rural character of the area and likely to be very open to view and introduce new elements that would conflict with the existing characteristics. The minor roads are unlikely to have capacity to accommodate development or would need considerable upgrading to be able to accept larger volumes of traffic and/or HGVs, which would further dilute the landscape character.

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



**EVALUATION**

**Mineral extraction/waste disposal**

This Character Area is currently relatively undisturbed and rural in appearance. Whilst some small scale mineral extraction could be accommodated with careful design and mitigation measures, larger scale extraction or waste disposal would not be in keeping with the character of Whitwell Valley. The minor roads would need considerable upgrading to be able to accept larger HGVs, which could further dilute the landscape character. Restoration proposals for any consented schemes 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 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 a vernacular style and form and in keeping with the rural character. However, due to the existing character any proposals would need clear justification to avoid the erosion of the rural and contained character of Whitwell Valley. Any development should in most cases be closely associated with existing settlements.

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 urbanising elements within this Character Area at present. There are currently few detractors in the areas. New utilities developments or structures such as masts or wind turbines would have a major and overpowering impact on the rural character of Whitwell Valley. Large scale developments, tall elements such as these would be highly visible within the Character Area, as well as potentially visible in surrounding Character Areas.

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

**GUIDELINES****STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE****Strategy: Improve and Restore****Landscape management guidelines**

- Promote the management of ancient woodlands to encourage a diverse woodland flora
- Encourage the management of existing and planting of new beech woodland in strategic locations along the sloping valley sides
- Encourage diverse woodland management practice
- Promote the creation of buffer zones between intensive arable production and areas of semi-natural habitat and the creation of links between habitat areas
- Promote hedgerow restoration along the lines of historic field boundaries and for the creation of visual links between existing woodland areas
- Promote the use of traditional field hedges in place of post and wire enclosures to new grazing areas
- Protect and preserve the pattern of narrow winding lanes and associated hedge banks, sunken lanes, verges and hedges
- Promote the diversity of hedgerow species and the planting of standard hedgerow trees
- Retain, manage, reinstate and extend flood meadow and grazing pasture within and along the valley floor to provide connectivity and reduce nutrient leaching from arable to watercourses
- Manage and restore patterns of natural watercourses and associated habitats including secondary streams to valley sides, braided watercourses, cut offs
- Conserve, monitor and enhance river margin habitats for protected species
- Promote arable reversion to grassland to improve mosaic of habitats and to aid water quality and recharge of aquifer
- Encourage the preparation and implementation of restoration and management plans for the parkland landscape at The Hoo

- Maintain and extend the rights of way network

**Built development guidelines**

- Conserve the traditional character of Whitwell Valley, ensuring that any development located within the character area uses appropriate vernacular materials and features to avoid inappropriate visual intrusion
- Protect and preserve the pattern of winding lanes and associated hedgerows and hedge banks
- Retain the rural character of Whitwell Valley, ensuring that any new development is appropriately sited and of a scale, form and style appropriate to the Character Area
- Encourage the planting of appropriate broadleaved woodland and vegetation to screen new development that could intrude in rural views
- Planting should reflect existing patterns, with hedges following field and road boundaries and strategic isolated copses to mitigate any development
- Avoid the location of new development in visual intrusive locations
- Ensure that new development does not necessitate the removal of existing woodland blocks or the loss of ancient hedgerows
- Ensure that lighting necessitated by new development minimises the impact on the Character Area
- Manage and enhance the valleys as corridors for green infrastructure proposals and habitat creation including both the main valley corridors and the more hidden narrow tranquil valleys