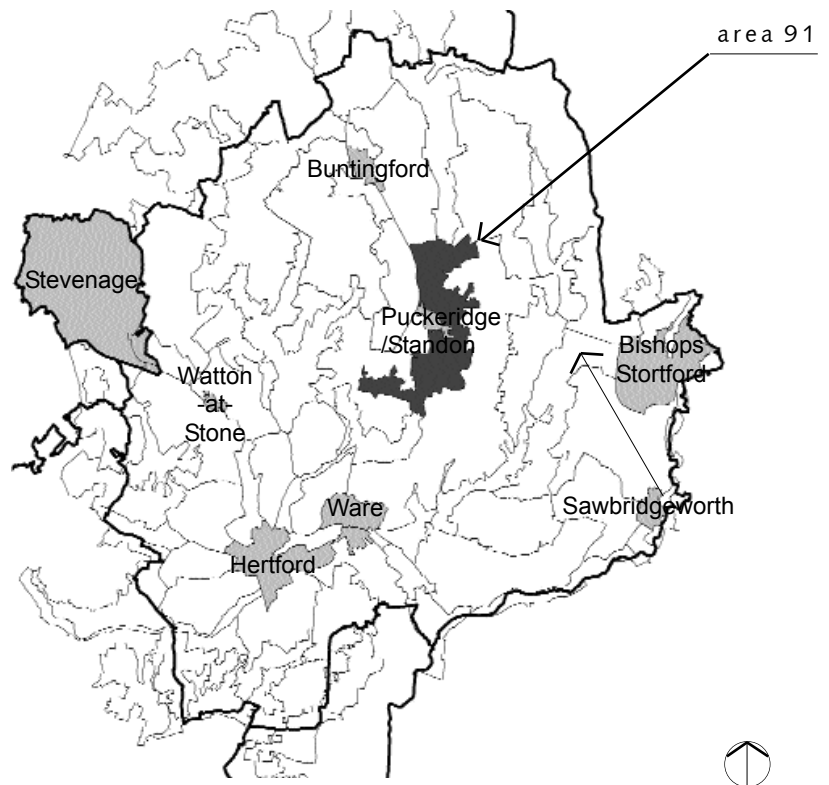


County Map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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LOCATION

The Rib valley and slopes between Barwick Ford and Braughing

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Variable valley landform, within which watercourses are not a significant feature, opening out to a broader undulating arable valley. Between Barwick Ford and The Lordship and again around Braughing it is an undulating arable valley, while north and south of Standon it is much narrower. The ancient settlements on the valley slopes are a notable local feature.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- undulating valley landform, generally quite open but narrowing towards Standon
- arable production
- tributary valleys (Braughing Warren Bourne and Braughing Bourne) of similar scale and character to main river valley
- extensive woodland (Plashes Wood)
- hamlets and isolated farmhouses, with significant ancient settlements at Standon, Puckeridge and Braughing
- similarity of opposing valley slopes

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Standon and Braughing settlements
- hedgerow oaks set within fields rather than in hedge
- herbicide spray marks out the watercourse

Rib Valley south of Standon. •
Watercourse marked only
by herbicide
(P. Shears)



* see foreword

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. Deep well-drained loamy soils over till (glacial drift) on the lower valley slopes (Melford series), overlaid with slowly permeable calcareous clay soils over chalky till (Hanslope series).

Topography. Steep valley slopes above narrow valley floor (Standon to The Lordship), elsewhere open valley with no obvious floor

Degree of slope. 1 in 8 to 1 in 30; river fall between Standon and Barwick Ford is 1 in 5000

Altitude range. 60m to 100m

Hydrology. The Rib is classified by the Environment Agency (EA) as a salmonid river and supports exceptionally diverse groups of invertebrates, ranking in the top 5-10% nationally. It is very meandering in this area, especially between Latchford and Standon, but is a significant feature in the villages of Braughing and Green End. In its upper reaches Braughing Bourne and the river Quin enter from the east. Low flows in the 1990s resulted in sections of dry riverbed, with consequent impact on water quality, but in mid 2000 the river Quin was a running shallow watercourse.

Land cover and land use. Arable cultivation throughout, with indigenous woodland on the steepest slopes and very small amounts of pasture

Vegetation and wildlife. There are some important old grasslands on the alluvial floodplain and on the gravel terraces at Standon Lordship. Apart from these there is little wetland vegetation and the watercourse is scarcely noticeable. There is some pasture in the valley bottom above Braughing, with woodland, giving a sense of enclosure, and a young wetland plantation by the fishing lake below The Lordship. Veteran oaks have been recorded at Hamelsmead. The valley slopes are covered with arable fields with a few fragmented hedgerows of pure elm or mixed holly, blackthorn, hawthorn, field maple and elder, occasionally pure hawthorn. Bracken is widespread on the upper slopes. Standon Lordship supports the last significant fen habitat in the Rib valley.

Plashes Wood, between Colliers End and Latchford, is designated SSSI for the richness and diversity of its ancient woodland and is among the most important as well as largest woods in this part of the county (72 ha). The rich ground flora reflects the local variation in soil types (mixed acidic/calcareous) and good management in the past. It contains chiefly oak/hornbeam coppice with standards, with ash and beech, over bluebells and dog's mercury. It also has oak, ash, beech and silver birch over hazel, elder and blackthorn, as well as some coniferous plantation, marshy clearings and ponds.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Braughing and Standon are significant ancient settlements within the valley, but beyond their boundaries arable cultivation prevails and little of the former field pattern remains. Braughing was an important Belgic and Roman settlement and there is a cluster of six Scheduled Ancient Monuments, representing the remains of the Roman town, near the railway station south west of the present village. The earliest record of a deer park at Standon Lordship is 1240.

Field pattern. Medium irregular with few hedgerows and some very large fields. Degraded by loss of hedge boundaries, although hedges are often retained along roadsides.

Transport pattern. One narrow lane without verges winds its way along the valley slope between Barwick Ford and Standon, while the B 1368 runs northward through Green End from its junction with the A10(T) near the site of a Roman town. Standon and Puckeridge lie on the A120, a fast, modern road with wide verges and modern amenity planting.

Settlements and built form

- Puckeridge has benefited from a bypass; the apparently late Georgian vernacular facades of many of its buildings conceal much earlier structures behind, including medieval hall houses. It is linked via 20th-century housing to :
- Standon, described in Pevsner as '*a very pretty village, with houses nicely grouped between the church and the Endowed School to the south ... a long two-storey house with a 16th century timber frame with brick-nogging infill.*'
- Braughing has a mainly 15th-century church, a handsome 16th-century cottage with a pargetted upper floor and a square of 17th-century houses. The river here is no more than a stream and is accessible only by footpath.
- The Lordship includes the remains of an early Tudor mansion and is set picturesquely in a meander of the river.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Pevsner, N., rev. Cherry, B., *Hertfordshire*, Penguin (2000).

Biodiversity Action Plan for Hertfordshire, p.54.

English Nature *Natural Area Profile: East Anglian Plain*.

HCC data on parks and gardens.

English Nature SSSI notification.

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

This is an area in which historic continuity is rather masked by 20th-century development but retains its integrity, although its historic importance is not readily perceived in the wider landscape, rather retained in the settlements. It is generally quite open, with extensive views within the area, although the landform provides a sense of containment within much of the area. It is very tranquil away from the A120.

Rarity and distinctiveness. Plashes Wood is rare by virtue of the diversity of its vegetation and is unusually large for this area. The settlements indicate the historic value of this area, which is not reflected in its landscape features.

VISUAL IMPACT

Distinctive features: The Lordship set in a large meander of the river. Loss of internal field boundaries has degraded the visual unity of this area.

ACCESSIBILITY

Quite good - central footpath (Harcamlow Way) along river valley in the main, plus many lateral routes.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

All the locations that include fords, and the stretches of valley in between, are noted for their distinctiveness, alongside mention of historic and cultural associations, making the Rib valley as a whole one of the most valued landscapes in the district. (B)

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

Landscape Conservation Area

SSSI and Ancient Woodland: Plashes Wood

The Rib valley is recognised as a High Biodiversity Area (HBA) for its wetlands and woodlands

CONDITION

<i>Land cover change:</i>	localised
<i>Age structure of tree cover:</i>	mature
<i>Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:</i>	fragmented
<i>Management of semi-natural habitat:</i>	not obvious
<i>Survival of cultural pattern:</i>	declining
<i>Impact of built development:</i>	low
<i>Impact of land-use change:</i>	low

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

<i>Impact of landform:</i>	prominent
<i>Impact of land cover:</i>	prominent
<i>Impact of historic pattern:</i>	interrupted
<i>Visibility from outside:</i>	locally visible
<i>Sense of enclosure:</i>	contained
<i>Visual unity:</i>	coherent
<i>Distinctiveness/rarity:</i>	frequent

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		

* see foreword

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

- promote the development of natural woodland around large blocks of ancient woodland and ensure that developers and landowners are aware of this BAP objective
- intensive agricultural practices prevent the establishment of an ecological and landscape corridor along the Rib, which would provide food, cover and a migratory route for wildlife. Encourage landowners to establish buffer zones along the watercourses to prevent run-off from herbicides, pesticides and fertilizer and to provide wildlife havens. Where possible, link these buffer zones to the wider landscape via hedges, field margins or woodland
- encourage landowners to safeguard existing hedges, increase hedged field boundaries, create permanent grass strips around field margins and prevent spray drift, using financial incentives as available
- use ancient wood, hedge and field boundaries, including banks and ditches, to identify the most appropriate location for woodland expansion on the steeper valley slopes
- use only indigenous species of local provenance wherever possible
- encourage reversion from arable use to pasture and grassland within the river valley, while retaining arable cultivation on the upper slopes to reinforce this area's distinctiveness
- encourage landowners and developers to retain and increase ponds and wetland areas to enhance their visual and wildlife functions
- promote the use of low-density stock grazing as a management technique
- ensure that local inhabitants are aware of the BAP objective of creating a 'necklace' of inter-connected wetland habitats along the river valley
- encourage the planting of wetland species along the watercourses, such as willow and black poplar
- encourage management of the planting along the A120 to promote locally indigenous species



• Standon Village street
(P. Shears)