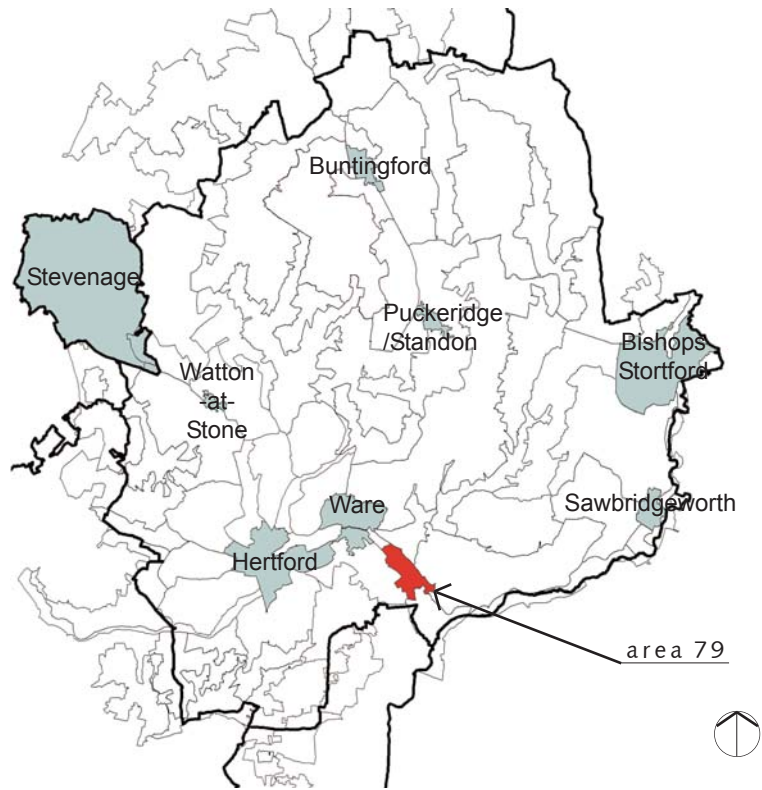


County map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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LOCATION

River valley east of Ware, south-eastwards to Stanstead Abbots

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

An area of man-made lakes and wetland vegetation with a 20th-century character belied by the presence of the manicured surrounds of the New River on the south-western edge. A significant transport route with an urban tinge to its character. An open wetland landscape within a flat river valley bottom, extensively wooded, comprising the River Lea Navigation, the Lea river and extensive flooded former mineral workings, some of which have been restored as nature reserves

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- enclosed river valley
- variety of hydrological types: meandering river, canalised Navigation and extensive waterbodies from former mineral workings
- urban influences
- sharp transition between rural and urban character
- densely vegetated with wetland species
- contrast between ordered Lea Navigation canal and apparent naturalness of flooded mineral workings
- relatively tranquil, despite proximity of railway
- screening effect of vegetation

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- extensive waterbodies and wetland vegetation
- nature reserves



Amwell Quarry Nature Reserve • (C. Bailey)

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. Gleyed (poorly draining) soils over alluvial drift (Fladbury 1 series).

Topography. Flat floodplain

Degree of slope. There is a slope of 1 in 966 between the eastern edge of Ware and Stanstead Lock.

Altitude range. 30m to 40m.

Hydrology. This stretch of the Lea valley contains the river Lea/Lee and the River Lea Navigation. This is an important stretch of the river (2km) for nature conservation interest, especially flora, but the two watercourses are not dominant landscape features within the valley, which is nonetheless characterised by water, chiefly in flooded former mineral extraction sites. At Amwell Magna a major enhancement programme has placed wetland shelves in a loop of a backwater to the Lee navigation to provide a fringe of marginal plants at the water's edge, to maintain an adequate depth of water for fish movement and to prevent siltation.

Land cover and land use. There is still a little grazing pasture within the valley, and pockets of arable cultivation, but the dominant land use is recreation and amenity, with nature conservation. Mineral extraction continues, and housing development is taking the place of former nurseries along the south bank to the east of Ware. There is a significant nature reserve at Amwell Quarry, a former mineral extraction site.

Vegetation and wildlife. The ecology of this area is dominated by Amwell Quarry SSSI, which is now a private nature reserve. The former floodplain grasslands and ditch systems were replaced in the 1970s-80s by gravel extraction and then restored for nature conservation, to include important spring-fed lakes, reed beds, wet grasslands and alder/willow woodland. It forms part of the proposed Lee Valley SPA. Beyond the SSSI woodland cover is extensive and consists of wetland species such as willow, poplar and alder, with ash and beech. Around the man-made lakes a variety of wetland tree species have either been planted or have evolved naturally. Amwell Quarry attracts overwintering wildfowl populations of national importance and outstanding assemblages of breeding birds, dragonflies and damselflies. It is also important for mammals, grass snakes, common newts and frogs and supports a small area of reedswamp, an important habitat for bittern.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The organic character of this area is masked by the extensive impact of mineral extraction, which has created an artificial landscape. The Lea Navigation is also a planned element but the lush vegetation masks this artificiality with a cloak of naturalness. Former land uses have all but disappeared, with arable cultivation replacing grazing meadows in some of the remaining terrestrial areas, while most of the former farmland is now under water.

Field pattern. The historic field pattern of grazing meadows is no longer present.

Transport pattern. There are no roads within the river valley, rather they are set just above the floodplain. Both the Lee Navigation and the railway provide a strong linear element.

Settlements and built form. There are no settlements or buildings within the river valley. All development is on the adjoining slopes, above the floodplain.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

English Nature SSSI notification.

Lee Valley Regional Park *Park Plan Volume Two*.

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

This area is enclosed by landform and vegetation and is remarkably rural in parts despite its proximity to urban centres and a major road network, although the over-riding character is urban fringe.

Rarity and distinctiveness. In the context of the Lea Valley character areas this is a frequent landscape

VISUAL IMPACT

Housing, development and the railway all have an impact on this area generally, which can be transformed locally by the screening effects of vegetation

ACCESSIBILITY

The Lea Valley Walk links Ware and Stanstead Abbots along the Lee Navigation, but there are no cross-routes or other access

COMMUNITY VIEWS

This area is highly regarded by the community for its distinctiveness, in particular Amwell pits/mouth of the River Ash (B).

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

SSSI and part of Lee Valley pSPA/Ramsar site: Amwell Quarry.
mainly Landscape Development area; partly Landscape Conservation Area.

CONDITION

Land cover change: **widespread**
Age structure of tree cover: **mixed**
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival: **extensive**
Management of semi-natural habitat: **not obvious**
Survival of cultural pattern: **relic**
Impact of built development: **high**
Impact of land-use change: **high**

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

Impact of landform: **prominent**
Impact of land cover: **prominent**
Impact of historic pattern: **relic**
Visibility from outside: **concealed**
Sense of enclosure: **contained**
Visual unity: **incoherent**
Distinctiveness/rarity: **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				

STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE: RESTORE CONDITION TO MAINTAIN CHARACTER

- support the proposals of the Lee Valley Regional Park management plan
- support the BAP initiative to create a 'necklace' of wetland habitats along the river valley
- encourage an improvement in the local footpath network, particularly in relation to railway stations and railway crossings, building on the existing paths to both sides of the Lea Navigation, with connecting footbridges over
- resist development that would not contribute to or enhance the landscape character of the area, such as light industry, housing or glasshouses
- resist any development that could affect the local water table and thence wetland habitats
- encourage the connection of existing wetland habitats along the river valley
- ensure that new woodlands are managed to develop a diverse age structure and to maximise their nature conservation potential by favouring locally indigenous species over amenity species
- ensure that restoration plans for mineral extraction sites are adhered to and are designed to maximise nature conservation potential by increasing the range of wetland habitat types within the river valley
- encourage the development of passive recreational opportunities, where these will not conflict with nature conservation objectives
- encourage the restoration of derelict orchards, with financial incentives where necessary
- encourage the provision of additional planting to screen development on the edge of this area, ensuring that species are locally indigenous



• Lea Navigation
(P. Shears)