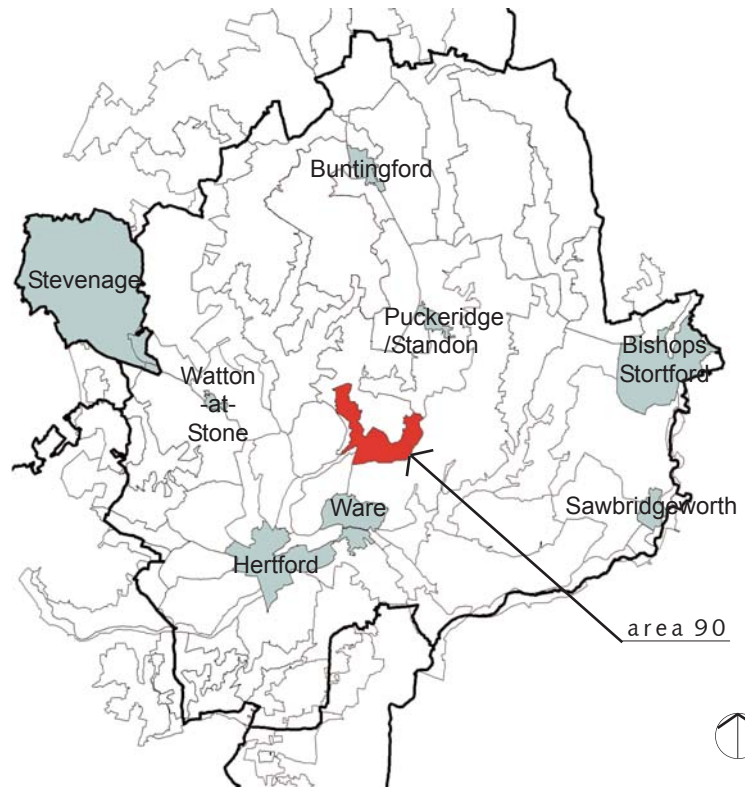


County map showing location of LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

©Crown copyright .All rights reserved.
Hertfordshire County Council
100019606 2004



LOCATION

The Rib valley between Thundridge and Barwick Ford

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Short, steep valley slopes with a V-shaped valley floor and little wetland, with woodland on the steepest slopes. Historic Youngsbury lies on the north bank

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- undulating narrow valley landform
- arable production
- little woodland except Sawtrees Wood
- hamlets and isolated farmhouses - no significant settlements other than Wadesmill/Thundridge
- similarity of opposing valley slopes
- tributary valleys (The Bourne, Barwick Tributary) of similar scale and character to main river valley

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- Youngsbury's historic landscape



TimberHall, Cold Christmas • (HCC Landscape Unit)

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. Stoneless clayey calcareous soils over river alluvium on the valley floor, with deep well-drained loamy soils over till (glacial drift) on the valley slopes (Melford series).

Topography. Steep valley slopes above narrow valley floor, especially between Youngsbury and Thundridge; elsewhere more open valley with less obvious floor

Degree of slope. 1 in 6 on the steepest slopes; elsewhere 1 in 11 to 1 in 22. The fall of the river through this area is 1 in 470.

Altitude range. 55m to 90m

Hydrology. The Bourne flows into the Rib at Wadesmill from the north and the Barwick tributary flows eastwards to Barwick Ford. 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.

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

Vegetation and wildlife. On the valley floor there is only discontinuous streamside ground flora and very little river valley grassland. The valley slopes are covered with arable fields, except on the steepest slopes, where small woodland blocks link to the plateau above and there are some important old hedge complexes, within which hazel is the dominant species. Woodland species include hornbeam with elm, hazel and holly. The hanging woods at Sawtrees Wood have vestiges of dry grassland on their southern side. There are a few pure elm hedges, or mixed hedges of holly, blackthorn, hawthorn, field maple and elder, occasionally pure hawthorn, but many are fragmented or lost.

Youngsbury Park is a key parkland site in the Biodiversity Action Plan for Hertfordshire, with some acid grassland and important old oak and beech.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

There is a significant settlement at Thundridge/Wadesmill, a fording point on the river and a staging point on the A10. Elsewhere any previous contrast between pastoral cultivation on the valley floor and arable cultivation on the slopes has been lost and little of the former field pattern remains.

- Youngsbury consists of an 18th-century park and woodland with 4 hectares of garden around the house, the front part of which is dated 1745, the back early 19th century, with 18th-century stables. There are extensive 16th to 18th-century walled kitchen gardens, an arboretum, an icehouse and tumuli and Roman barrows within the grounds, which extend to the river Rib. Capability Brown's involvement included widening the river and creating two islands, designing a ha ha and placing small groups of trees in open parkland. Nineteenth-century development of the kitchen garden was re-created in the late 20th century, with notable mixed borders. There is a moat and church in a bend of the river on the southern edge of the parkland.

Field pattern. Medium irregular with few hedgerows and some very large fields

Transport pattern. One narrow lane winds its way along the valley slope, below the plateau edge, on the south of the river between Thundridge and Barwick Ford, except at the steepest point around Sawtrees Wood. There are no other roads in this area, but many footpaths and waymarked routes.

Settlements and built form. Thundridge and Wadesmill were staging points on the old A10 and still have several 'coaching inns'. Most of the housing, though, dates from the late 18th and 19th centuries.

- Fabdens is a late medieval hall-house with exposed studding and several original doorways.

OTHER SOURCES OF AREA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Bisgrove, R., *The Gardens of Britain*, 3, (1978).

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

Stroud, D., *Capability Brown*, (1975).

English Heritage *Register of Parks and Gardens: Hertfordshire*.

VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

Within the area there are extensive views from the upper slopes, while at pinch points within the valley there are few views and a sense of confinement.

Rarity and distinctiveness. The remoteness and tranquillity of this area are now rare in Hertfordshire.

VISUAL IMPACT

This is a remote and tranquil rural area, but arable cultivation has blurred the distinction between the river valley and its slopes. There is no impact from built development or transport.

ACCESSIBILITY

Widespread footpaths in the western and central parts of this area, linking through to those in other areas; little in the eastern part.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

This is a distinctive and valued landscape (C)

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS

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

CONDITION

Land cover change: **insignificant**
Age structure of tree cover: **mature**
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival: **fragmented**
Management of semi-natural habitat: **not obvious**
Survival of cultural pattern: **declining**
Impact of built development: **low**
Impact of land-use change: **high**

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

Impact of landform: **prominent**
Impact of land cover: **apparent**
Impact of historic pattern: **continuous**
Visibility from outside: **locally visible**
Sense of enclosure: **partial**
Visual unity: **coherent**
Distinctiveness/rarity: **unusual**

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: IMPROVE AND CONSERVE**

- 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
- survey and manage parkland and veteran trees for biodiversity value
- encourage new woodland planting and management to maintain age diversity and a species-rich ground flora.
- when planting within parklands, care should be taken to respect the historic context of existing features and their form and character. Ornamental species should only be used to replace damaged or over-mature specimens, where appropriate
- hard landscaping details such as steps, balustrades, pond copings, statuary and urns should be conserved. Replacements should be in facsimile and in natural materials. Gazebos, temples, follies, grottoes, obelisks, park bridges, ice houses, terraces, ha-has, boundary walls, gates and gate piers should contribute to the planned landscape and its setting. Replacement, renovated or new features should be architect designed and in keeping with their original setting
- discourage the ploughing of grasslands within parkland
- initiate discussion on public access to woodland areas on fringes of the estate for informal recreation



• Timber Hall, Cold Christmas (HCC Landscape Unit)