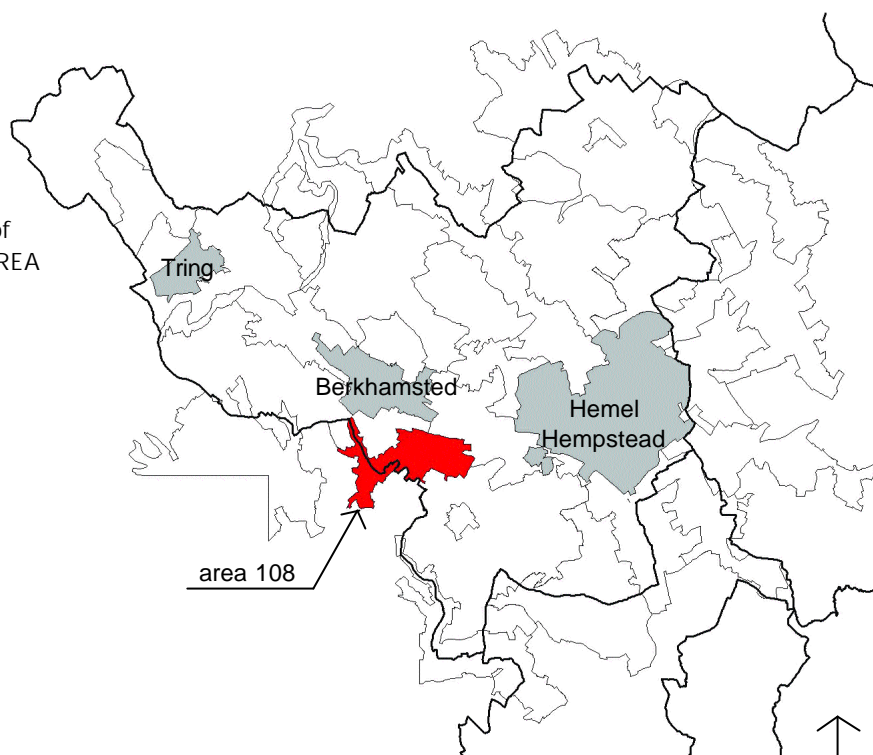


District Map showing location of  
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA

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Hertfordshire County Council

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## LOCATION

A series of interconnected dry valleys situated to the west of Bourne End and the Bulbourne Valley and north of the Bovingdon plateau.

## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The strongly sloping landform provides wide panoramic views over the Bourne Valley. Bourne Gutter is a winterbourne which seasonally flows from the upper reaches of the valley. There is minimal settlement and the area feels very empty and remote despite the open views from the elevated A41. Further to the west, up the valley heads, there is more containment and a higher proportion of woodland cover.

## KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- relatively steeply sloping system of narrow dry valleys
- winterbourne with seasonal heavy flows
- open and panoramic views
- large scale arable fields to slopes
- smaller areas of grazing in valley bottoms
- discrete and elongated woodlands to slopes, including conifer plantations
- remote character and only a few isolated farms
- gappy hedges and post and wire fencing

## DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

- A41 Bypass to east
- McDonalds, Lodge and BP Service area
- Bourne End Industrial Estate



- Valley bottom meadows near White Hill (J.Billingsley)

**PHYSICAL INFLUENCES**

**Geology and soils.** The Geology comprises flinty and chalky drift over Chalk. Soils comprise well drained flinty fine silty soils in valley bottoms and shallow fine silty calcareous soils over chalk to the valley slopes, (Charity 2 association).

There is a small area of fine loamy and clayey soils on the narrow ridge of Mounts Hill (Batcombe association), which overlies clay with flints.

**Topography.** This is one of the most distinctive physiographical features of west Hertfordshire, being a particularly well-marked bourne feature cut into the Upper and Middle Chalk. It comprises a steep sided predominantly dry valley feature of variable width.

**Degree of slope.** Valley slopes are typically steep, between 1 in 5 and 1 in 6.

**Altitude range.** This ranges from 100m at Vale Farm up to 150m on the plateau edge.

**Hydrology.** The Bourne Gutter stream flows when the water table is high, arising from springs in the Chalk Rock at Harriotts End. This winterbourne, which is a tributary of the Bulbourne, can also run intermittently through the valley, more frequently to the southern end adjoining the Bulbourne, where damp floodplain vegetation and pasture are evident. Records indicate that the bourne flows when local rainfall exceeds 30 inches in the previous 12 months.

**Land cover and land use.** The area is characterised by open arable fields with some grazing in the moister valley bottoms. Further up the valleys there is more woodland cover. This comprises both deciduous trees and plantation conifers e.g. at Hockeridge Bottom.

**Vegetation and wildlife.** There are some substantial hanging woodlands associated with the steep sides of the Gutter, partially re-planted with conifer, but deriving from typical calcareous beech/ash woodland. The most notable examples are The Larches/Heathen Grove, Great Wood and Coleshill Wood, (all formerly in Buckinghamshire). A section of Hockeridge Wood is included in the area, and is similar. Smaller copses of importance also occur south of Berkhamsted at Sandpit Green.

Semi-natural grasslands are all but absent, although locally interesting remnants occur along the floor of the Bourne Gutter at Vale Farm.

The most important habitat of the area is the Bourne Gutter itself, with its springs, the latter having had some scarce invertebrates recorded from them.

Important flora in the area includes a number of sites for the true Oxlip, in the only region in Britain away from its main East Anglian strongholds. The woods also hold locally important orchid and fern populations, including Fly Orchid, as well as Coralroot Bittercress at its most northerly site in Hertfordshire. An old apparently native Black Poplar tree is also well-known as a county boundary marker at Vale Farm.

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

There is a well established tradition that the Bourne stream is a 'woe water,' and its appearance is a signal of impending disaster, pestilence or war. The ancient estate of Westbrook Hay is visible on the periphery, where the area adjoins the Bovingdon and Chipperfield Plateau, (see Area 107).

**Field Patterns.** The historic field pattern is pre 18th century sinuous/irregular enclosure. This is retained in part but has been diluted by the field amalgamations of the 20th century. Where present hedges are low and gappy and in poor condition. Elsewhere post and wire fencing is common.

**Transport pattern.** The area is traversed by the A41 to the north and by two minor roads to the south. Otherwise the only access is by narrow farm tracks, with narrow verges, into and along the valley bottom.

**Settlements and built form.** Apart from Bottom Farm on Swing Gate Lane there is little evidence of vernacular architecture. There are a few other isolated farms, dating from the 20th century, however the buildings are generally in a neglected condition and architecturally undistinguished.

The built forms at Bourne End Industrial Estate (1920's onwards) and those at the A41 Service Area to the east of the area are essentially detractors.

**Other sources of area-specific information**

**VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION**

The area is locally visible from the adjacent plateau edges, most noticeably from the intrusive A41 as it rises up the valley slopes to the north. Within the landscape the valley slopes create a strong sense of enclosure with woodland cover becoming more important further up the valleys. Otherwise there are open views due to the large scale fields and the lack of hedges. Away from the A41 there is a sense of relative remoteness.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** This is a relatively unusual landscape in the county.

**VISUAL IMPACT**

Detracting features are the mid twentieth century industrial estate at Bourne End, and the nearby service area associated with the Bourne End junction of the A41, with its commercial developments such as the Travel Inn and McDonalds. Many of the field boundaries, both hedges and post and wire fences are in poor condition.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

There are a number of footpaths and bridleways within the area. However there are no routes that follows the central section of the Bourne Gutter which contributes to the remoteness of the valley.

**COMMUNITY VIEWS**

There is little evidence that this area is of wide regard, although data on community views of this area is limited (E).

"Beyond the tamed valley, the far side shows hill spurs, coombes and patches of woodland characteristic of the Chilterns." EG Meadows 1977.

**LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS**

Landscape Conservation Area (south and west)

Landscape Development Area (east)

**CONDITION**

*Land cover change:*

**localised**

*Age structure of tree cover:*

**mixed**

*Extent of semi-natural habitat survival:*

**scattered**

*Management of semi-natural habitat:*

**not obvious**

*Survival of cultural pattern:*

**interrupted**

*Impact of built development:*

**low**

*Impact of land-use change:*

**low**

**STRENGTH OF CHARACTER**

*Impact of landform:*

**dominant**

*Impact of land cover:*

**prominent**

*Impact of historic pattern:*

**insignificant**

*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	<b>Improve and conserve</b>	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**

- support a strategy to limit the visual impact of existing built development either within or adjacent to the area including Bourne End Industrial area and the A41 services
- encourage the retention of the existing pattern of hedges and create a few new features to enhance landscape and ecological links between woodlands. To include the promotion of hedgerows in selected locations to replace post and wire fences
- promote the appropriate management of woodland in order to conserve and where absent to re-establish a rich ground flora and the distinction between different management systems, such as high forest and coppice with standards. To encourage replanting plantations with indigenous mixed broadleaves
- 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 within valley floor avoiding agricultural improvements in order to maintain their nature conservation value. Encourage traditional management by grazing
- promote a strategy for the continued mitigation of the A41 on the area
- promote the retention of the character of local minor roads by the management of hedgerows, hedgebanks and verges. Where part of a hedge has been damaged or removed it should be replanted with a mix of indigenous species
- conserve and enhance the distinctive character of individual buildings by promoting the conservation of important buildings and high standards of new building or alterations to existing properties, all with the consistent use of locally traditional materials and designed to reflect the traditional character of the area

- Bottom Farm (J.Billingsley)

