

MIMRAM VALLEY



Outline case for Local Landscape Designation



V2 March 2026

MIMRAM VALLEY LANDSCAPE AREA

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STATUS NOTE

This paper has been prepared by members of the project team experienced in the subject matter. It has not been prepared specifically as ‘evidence’ in planning practice terms and may be the subject of revision and updates. Views expressed in this report are those of the authors unless otherwise stated.

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(NB: Some figures predate minor boundary adjustments by Parish Councils – see para. 8.4)

1.0 THE CHALLENGE

Welwyn Neighbourhood Plan

- 1.1 The emerging Welwyn Neighbourhood Plan (as at 2026) includes the following:

6.4 Mimram Valley Blue³⁷-Green Corridor

Project No. 2: Local Landscape Designation – Mimram Valley

WPC will seek to extend the Tewin initiative and achieve Local Landscape Designation for the Mimram valley overall, enabling greater protection for the precious chalk stream environment of our local river by exploring the potential to extend the current scope and partner with adjacent parishes, H&MWT (as Catchment Management Hosts for the Rivers Lea & Mimram) and WHBC.

Justification

This project seeks to continue the direction initiated by Tewin Parish Council³⁸ and extend a “blue-green corridor” for the Mimram Valley, to the north of Welwyn Garden City. WHLP Policy SP12 refers to the Green Corridor proposed to extend around the south of Welwyn Garden City, noting its location, aims and objectives. WPC’s objective is (as far as is possible) to link up the green spaces and footpaths bordering the River, from Digswell, along the A1000, through Lockleys Farm and Sherrardswood School grounds, Welwyn village and Singlers Marsh and hopefully beyond, to the river’s source near Whitwell. The Welwyn Parish section is illustrated in Map 3 at Appendix 1. The River Mimram and its associated valley are rarely in full view for their whole length and are highly vulnerable from the continued threat of urban expansion, local pollution and lack of care for the landscape.

Survey responses showed all aspects of the environment were very important to residents, with particular focus on the Mimram. To be able to preserve and present this beautiful landscape for the enjoyment of all and to protect it for future generations would be a major contribution. Land/riverside ownership is vested with numerous individuals/organisations: liaison, co-ordination and establishing the co-operation of landowners is a major project currently under way, to turn this concept into reality.

Fig 1: Extract from Welwyn Neighbourhood Plan 2026 – Project No 2 Local Landscape Designation

- 1.2 The fundamental ‘challenge’ for the project is a matter of statutory planning policy not concomitant issues such as water quality, housing development or farming practices.
- 1.3 There is also no intention of repeating or duplicating other topic-specific planning policies such as listed buildings, nature conservation and environmental protection or work associated with hydrological or catchment management. There is however an inevitable relationship which should be improved by a strategic designation.
- 1.4 ‘Green corridor’ is a widely used term employed for many different concepts from linear parkways in towns and cities to nature recovery initiatives and urban design techniques for major new developments.
- 1.5 After numerous iterations, this project is termed ‘Mimram Valley Landscape’¹ in order to distinguish it from other projects and capture the essence of the special geography described and illustrated in the following text.

¹ Previously described as *Mimram Valley Green Corridor*, *Mimram Valley Blue-Green Corridor*, *Mimram Valley Parklands*

- 1.6 The Welwyn Neighbourhood Plan (as at March 2026) identifies the route of the corridor within Welwyn Parish only – see below.

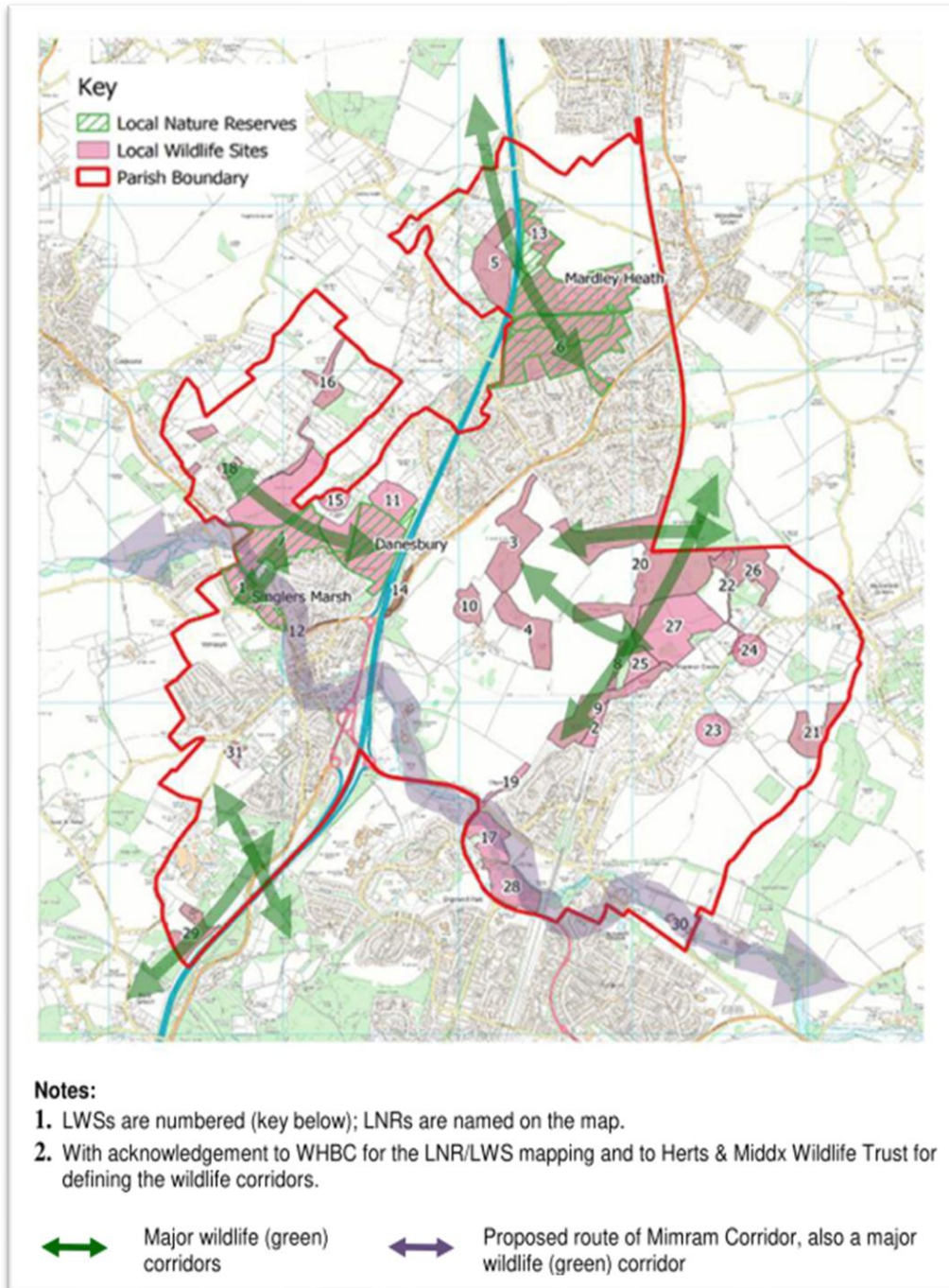


Fig 2: Extract from Welwyn Neighbourhood Plan - Mimram Valley corridor (in grey)

- 1.7 To the east, a landscape corridor had already been identified in 2022 between Digswell and Panshanger Park – see later.

Stakeholder organisations and parallel projects

- 1.8 On the one hand, the involvement of numerous different agencies in the environment of the Mimram Valley presents a problem of overlapping interests, responsibilities and objectives. On the other hand, the strategic benefit of defining a geographical area and applying clear land use and planning principles benefits coordination, resources and outcomes.
- 1.9 The parishes and assemblies associated with the River Mimram are identified below. The river occasionally defines boundaries.

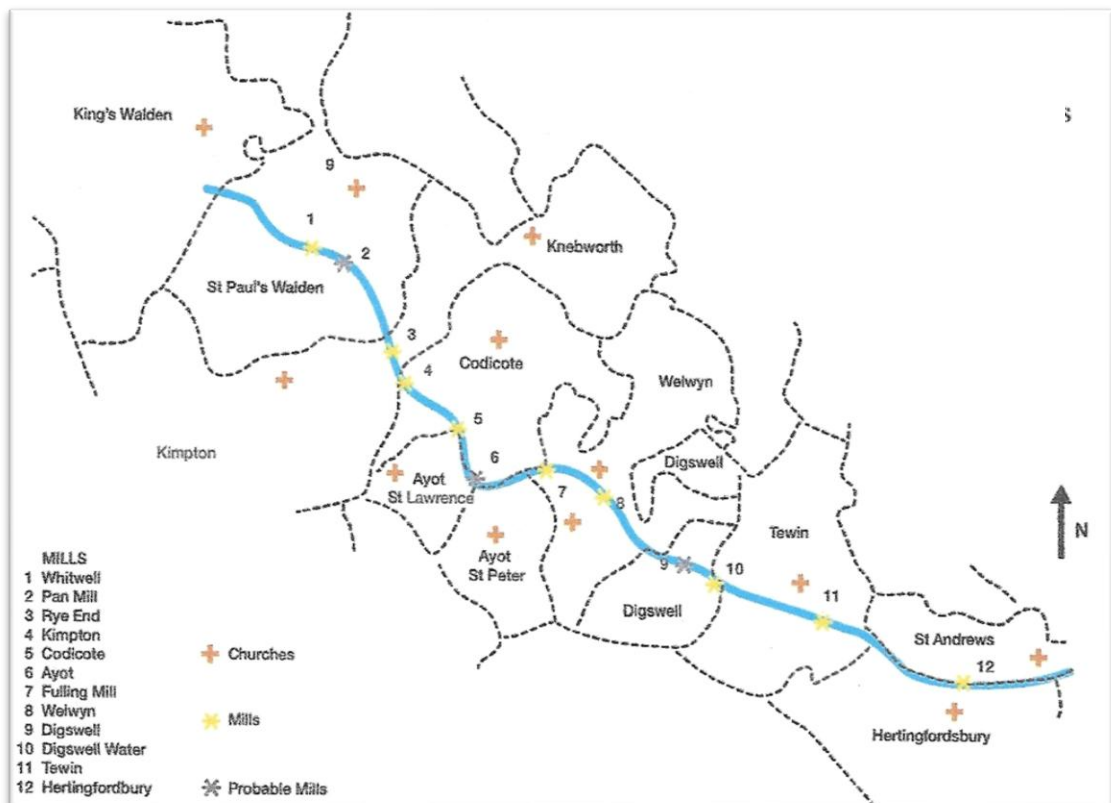


Fig 3: Parishes, churches and mills in the Mimram Valley

- 1.10 The various stakeholder organisations identified to date are listed at Appendix 1. Participation and comment have been encouraged throughout the project.
- 1.11 It is also important to monitor the progress and findings of parallel projects which may have a bearing on the definition or success of the project – they are listed at Appendix 2.
- 1.12 The aim is to engage with local communities and business interests to define the corridor from the source of the River Mimram to its confluence with the River Lea at Hertford.

Benefits of local landscape designation

- 1.13 Adoption of a 'Local Landscape Designation' is promoted in the National Planning Policy Framework – December 2024.

187	Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by (a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value ...
188	Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.

- 1.14 The Mimram Valley accommodates a multiplicity of environmental assets including historic parks and gardens, heritage assets, nature sites, landscape features and community interests. They often interconnect – sometimes harmoniously, sometimes in conflict.

- 1.15 Irrespective of ultimate terminology, the benefits of a designation are numerous.

- | | | |
|----|------------------|---|
| 1. | Identity | Recognition that the corridor means more than just part of the countryside or semi-rural area. |
| 2. | Statutory | Once incorporated into the statutory planning policies, the corridor will represent more than 'a material consideration' in planning terms and be the primary determinant of decision making. |
| 3. | Strategic | The corridor will provide policy continuity across three (at present) separate local planning authorities – see National Planning Policy Framework above. |
| 4. | Holistic | The corridor will underpin the whole valley homogeneity and the connectivity of its |

environmental assets. It will provide a collegiate approach and context for individual projects.

5. **Permanence** Designation is based on physical environmental features making it more resilient to policy change – unlike Green Belt policy.

6. **Finance and Grants** Designation will add weight to complementary projects seeking financial assistance under DEFRA’s Environmental Land Management Scheme and other government initiatives.

Heightened awareness of the valley’s rich past will help future decision makers and investors to act in a sensitive way.

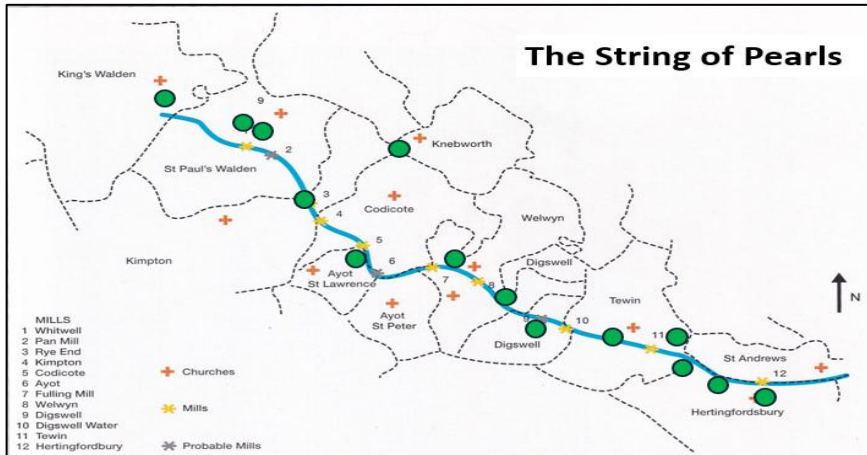
7. **Awareness/Education** Designation will help to raise awareness of the ‘jewels’ which exist within the corridor and encourage sympathetic investment in its assets. Children would benefit from ‘hands on’ experience of the social history /time capsule embedded in the corridor

1.16 Any number of shared ambitions for the corridor will arise from future consultation and involvement of stakeholders, eg farmers, landowners, community. Identifiable schemes will be incorporated in the next stage of the project, including the preparation of Supplementary Planning Guidance.

2.0 RIVER MIMRAM AND MIMRAM VALLEY

River Mimram

- 2.1 The River Mimram flows for some 12 miles from its source at Stagenhoe Bottom near Whitwell to its confluence with the River Lea at Hertford. The river valley accommodates numerous areas of special environmental interest for landscape, heritage, wildlife and culture – like a string of pearls.



- 2.2 At Hertford, the Mimram joins the River Lea and later the rivers Beane and Rib before finally reaching the River Thames via the Lea Valley.

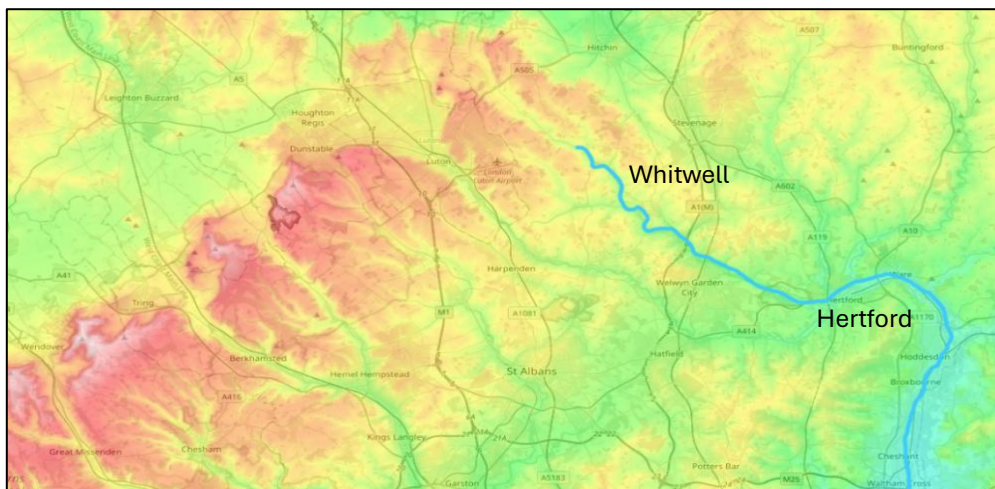


Fig 4: River systems from Chilterns

- 2.3 It is possible to follow most of the course of the River Mimram by footpaths. There are just a few deviations – at Hoo Park, Codicote Bottom, Welwyn village and the A1(M).

Hydrology

(A full account of the Hydrology has been produced by Andrew Palmer entitled 'The River')

- 2.4 The River Mimram is one of the finest stretches of chalk river in Hertfordshire. It arises at Stagenhoe Bottom, near Kings Walden, fed by rain falling on the foothills of the Chilterns and permeating through the chalk topography.

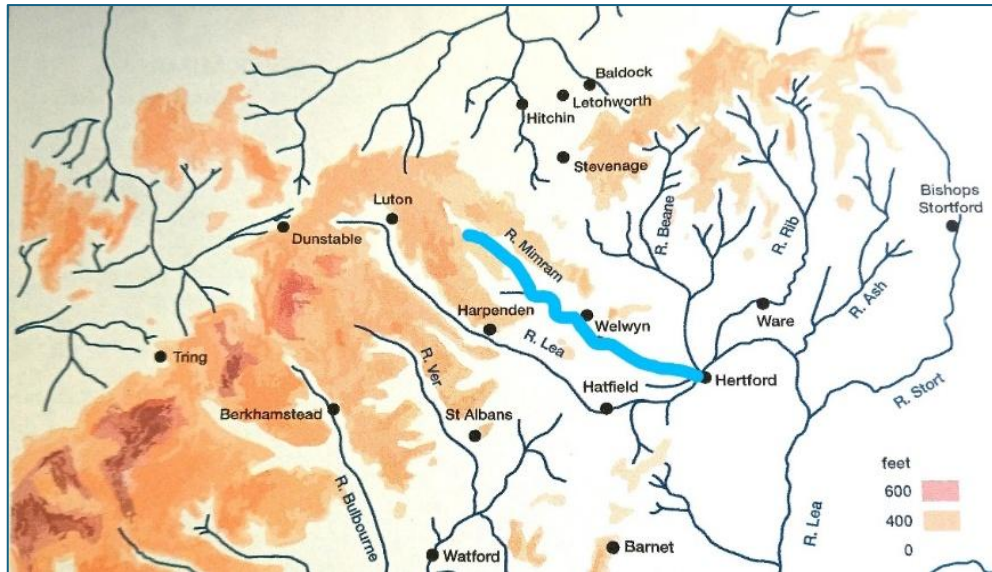


Fig 5: Hertfordshire rivers

- 2.5 The proposal relates to the Mimram Valley as defined by landscape and topography and not the catchment area which is far more extensive.

Character areas

- 2.6 In order to appreciate and assist later initiatives and projects, the valley can conveniently be sub divided into several distinct character areas.
- 2.7 These areas are described in Tony Rook’s book – RIVER MIMRAM (see later).

Area 1 – Whitwell Valley

Kings Walden – Stagenhoe Bottom – Whitwell village – St Pauls Walden

Area 2 – The Hoo

St Pauls Walden – Hoo Park – Rye End – Kimpton Mill

Area 3 – Codicote Bottom

Kimpton Mill – Codicote Bottom – Ayot St Lawrence -Pulmer Water – Fulling Mill

Area 4 -Welwyn Village

Fulling Mill – Singlers Marsh – Welwyn village – A1(M)

Area 5 – Digswell Meadows

A1(M) – Lockleys – Digswell Meadows – Digswell Lake – Digswell viaduct - Digswell Water

Area 6 – Tewin Parklands

Digswell Water – Tewin Water – Tewinbury – Tewin Mill – Archers Green – Marden Hill – Poplars Green

Area 7 – Panshanger Park

Poplars Green – Panshanger Park – Hertingfordbury

Area 8 – Hertingfordbury

Epcombs – Hertingfordbury Mill – Hertford viaduct – Hertford Town Football Club - River Lea

3.0 CORROBORATIVE EVIDENCE 1799 – 2024

Humphry Repton 1752 – 1818

- 3.1 Humphry Repton was a renowned landscape designer of the 18th/19th century alongside Lancelot (Capability) Brown. Commissioned by the Cowper dynasty, Repton was responsible for the design of two major estates in the Mimram Valley – Tewin Water and Panshanger.

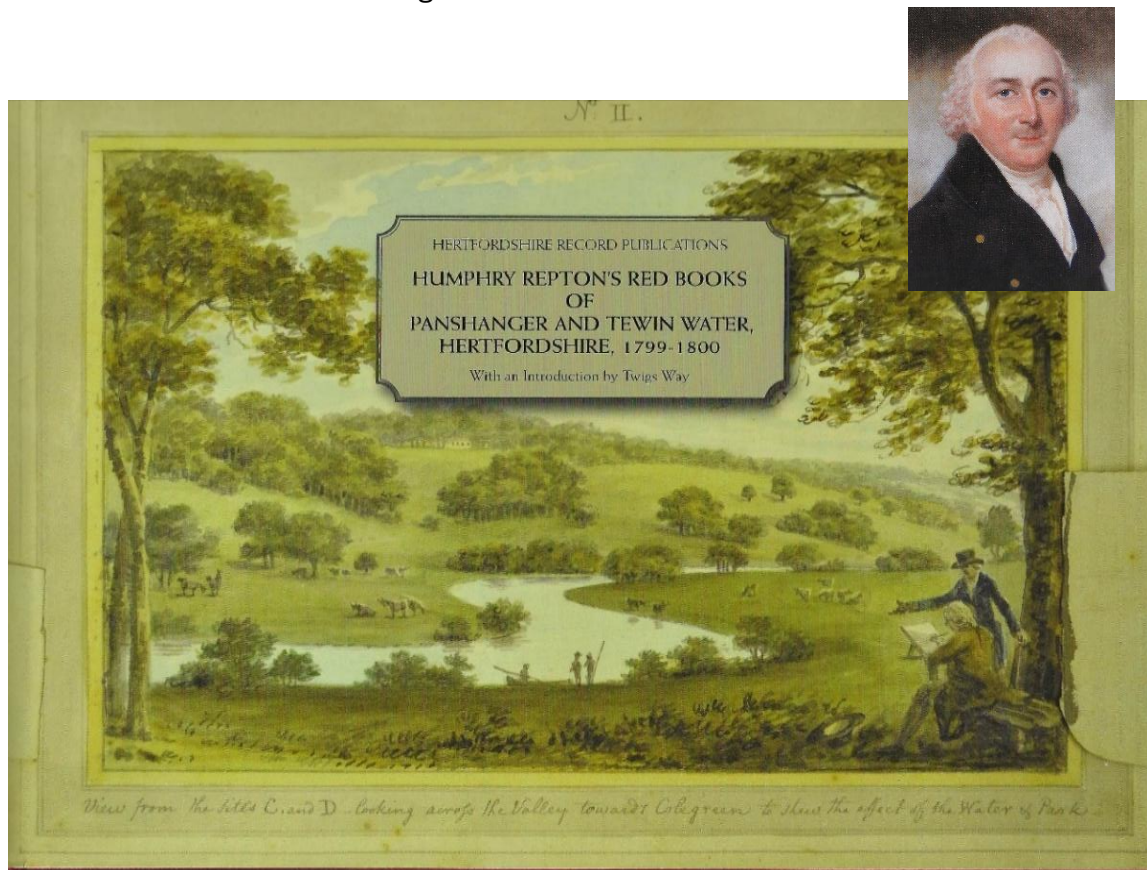


Fig 6: Humphry Repton's Red Book of Panshanger and Tewin Water

- 3.2 Apart from the scenic impact of his work, Repton is credited as saying:

'The whole of the beautiful valley from Welwin (sic) to Hertford including Digswell, Tewin Water and Cole Green, belonging to the same noble family While each possesses its independent privacy and seclusion, their united woods and lawns will, by extending through the whole valley, enrich the general face of the county.'

Abercrombie Plan 1944

- 3.3 Sir Patrick Abercrombie was commissioned by the Minister of Town and Country Planning to produce a plan for Greater London. It is reported that he proposed the designation of the Mimram Valley at Tewin as an 'Area of High Landscape Value', but the proposal was overturned by pressure from the then Welwyn Garden City Corporation seeking to expand the town northwards.

Hertfordshire County Development Plan 1951 – 1962

- 3.4 With the greater authority of the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, Hertfordshire County Council, the then plan making authority, identified the lower Mimram Valley (Lockleys to Hertingfordbury) as an Area of Great Landscape Value in 1951.

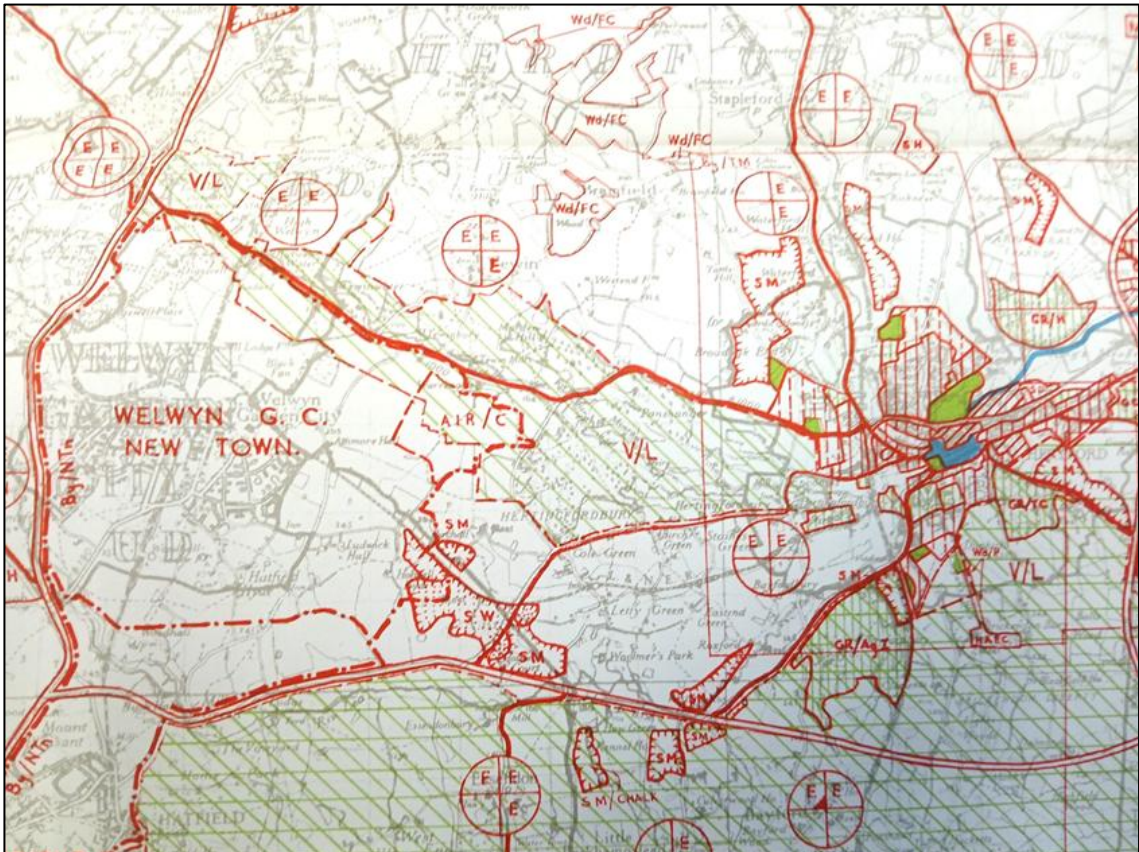


Fig 7: Extract from Hertfordshire's County Map 1951 - see diagonal green hatching V/L

- 3.5 The designation remained in the 1958 County Plan (S/S approved 12 December 1958) and the First Review 1962 (S/S approved 11 May 1971) except that the area to the south of the Hertford Road was placed under the plan making responsibility of Welwyn Garden City New Town Corporation.
- 3.6 The designation was lost when statutory plan making responsibilities were fragmented in the Local Government Reorganisation of 1974.

The Mimram Valley, Hertfordshire 1992

3.7 In 1992, Tewin Parish Council and the Tewin Society produced an appraisal of the lower Mimram Valley - Welwyn to Panshanger - and advocated its recognition as 'an extended rural heritage area' covering the concentrated series of mansions and park landscapes in an area of substantial scenic value and historical significance.

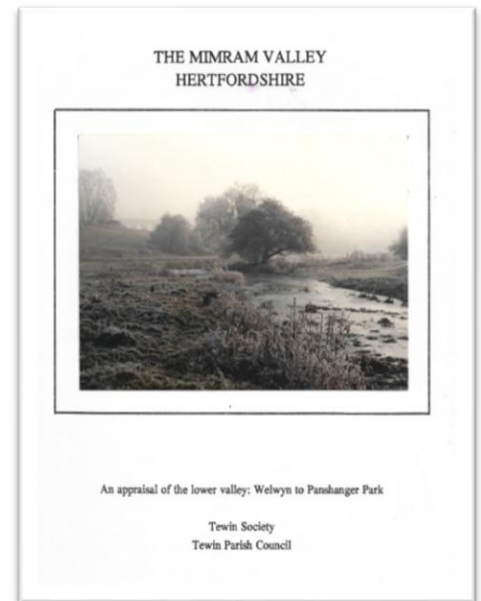
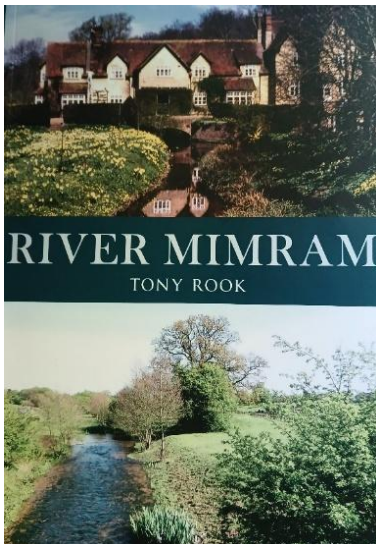


Fig 8: The Mimram Valley appraisal 1992

River Mimram - book by Tony Rook 2014

3.8



This gem of a book was written by a local resident and reinforces the wider recognition of the valley in exceptionally readable form.

Fig 9: RIVER MIMRAM book by Tony Rook 2014

The case for a local landscape designation

3.9 Finally, a volunteer group under the banner 'Mimram Valley at Tewin' produced, in January 2022, a further report on the lower valley encapsulating most of what had preceded it. The report was necessarily confined to the Tewin Parish as the group, at that time, had no remit from the other stakeholders.

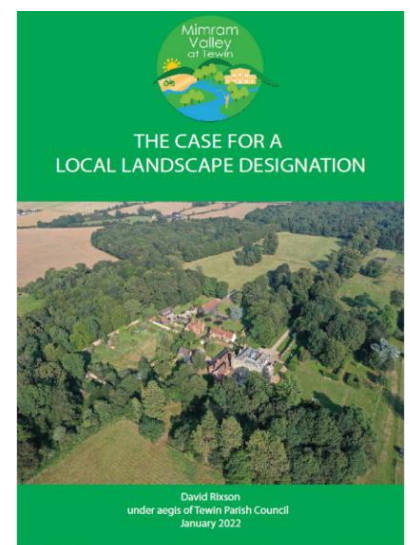


Fig 10: Mimram Valley at Tewin - The case for a local landscape designation - January 2022

4.0 LANDSCAPE, LAND USE AND FARMING

Landscape appraisal

- 4.1 The Mimram Valley corridor is valued for its distinctive natural chalk stream and sequence of parkland landscapes which extend from Kings Walden in the west to Panshanger Park in the east.
- 4.2 There are a large number of historic churches, manors, mills and bridges bearing witness to the important heritage and cultural value of the Mimram Valley.
- 4.3 The Valley slopes include numerous ancient woodlands standing among arable fields bounded by hedgerows and veteran trees. Together with pastoral floodplains and wild flower meadows, they provide a richly biodiverse habitat – see later.



Fig 11: Aerial photo of Marden

Methodology

- 4.4 A landscape assessment has been carried out with reference to the following:
1. Landscape Character Assessments: Guidance for England and Scotland
 2. Landscape character assessments obo North Hertfordshire, Welwyn Hatfield and East Hertfordshire Districts
 3. Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note 02/21: Assessing Landscape Value outside national designations
 4. Natural England: Review of Local Landscape Designations
- 4.5 The factors taken into account in defining the area for designation included:
1. Natural heritage - ecological, geological, geomorphological and physiographical interest
 2. Cultural heritage - archaeological, historical and cultural interest
 3. Landscape condition - landscape elements, water courses, incongruous features
 4. Associations - arts, sciences, historical events and famous people

5. Distinctiveness - features, character, settlements
6. Leisure – long distance footpaths, village character, recreational facilities
7. Scenic – landform, landscape features, viewpoints, landmarks

Land use

- 4.6 In the upper Mimram Valley, arable agriculture predominates presenting a semi-rural rolling landscape with sporadic settlements and areas of woodland.



Fig 12: Upper Mimram Valley

- 4.7 In the lower Mimram Valley, urban development is more in evidence and the landscape character is more enclosed.

Farming practices are more diverse embracing livestock, viticulture, recreation and hospitality.



Fig 13: River Mimram at Tewinbury

Land ownership and farming

- 4.8 The pattern of land ownership, i.e. relatively large estates and the businesses of farming, are the principal determinants in the history, appearance and future of the Mimram Valley. Everything is interconnected. Recently (2024-2025), local farmers have come together to form the ‘Mimram Farm Cluster’. It is to be hoped

that this communal organisation will help and ultimately benefit from the long-term vision of the Mimram Valley Landscape project.

- 4.9 The land management is fundamental to the character and appearance of the Mimram Valley. In turn, farming practices are influenced by Government (DEFRA) incentives such as the Environment Land Management Scheme (ELMS), Sustainable Farming Initiative, Countryside Stewardship and Landscape Recovery grants.
- 4.10 Farmers are also encouraged to diversify, invest in nature recovery and woodland planting.



Fig 14: Lamb Dell Wood

National Government initiatives

- 4.11 Several national government initiatives are in progress which may also have an influence on future land use in the valley including:
- *Land use framework for England – consultation from January 2025*
 - *Farming roadmap and food strategy – DEFRA 2025*



Fig 15: Arable farmland at the Ayots

5.0 HISTORY AND HERITAGE by Kate Harwood

5.1 A full account of the social, cultural and landscape history of the valley has been produced by Kate Harwood in five separate standalone volumes.

1. Digswell to Panshanger
2. Digswell to Welwyn
3. Welwyn to Kings Walden
4. Panshanger to River Lea confluence
5. The Working Landscape

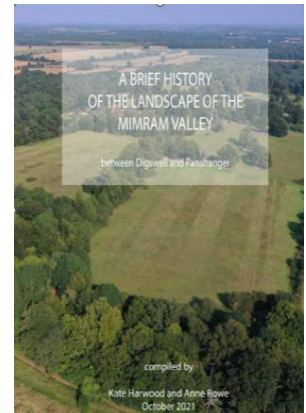


Fig 16: Landscape history – Vol I Digswell to Panshanger

Each of the Volumes 1 – 4 cover the history of the landscape in a discrete part of the Mimram Valley and adjacent slopes.

- 5.2 Early evidence of parks and occupation from Saxon times are found in Hertingfordbury Park and at Kings Walden Park which, although not a park at the time, is of Saxon origin. Medieval parks were at Hertingfordbury (the hunting park for Hertford Castle) and Kimpton. Later parks were laid out further along the valley at Lockleys - a late 17th century park and St Paul's Waldenbury - a Grade 1 outstanding early 18th century 'Forest Garden'. Lancelot 'Capability' Brown was commissioned to design parks at The Hoo, Kimpton, Cole Green (now part of Panshanger) and Digswell, traces of which remain. Several later 18th century/early 19th century parks were also laid out including Ayot St Lawrence, Danesbury and Hertingfordbury Rectory.
- 5.3 Three of these landscapes are indebted to Humphry Repton, the foremost designer of the late 18th/early 19th century. His Red Books for Tewin Water and Panshanger have survived and these sites are both on the National Register. The influence of Repton is apparent at Digswell Park, also owned by a member of the Cowper family. In the late 18th century, Hertingfordbury was owned by the Cowpers and the walled kitchen garden bears a remarkable similarity to that at Cole Green, designed by 'Capability' Brown.
- 5.4 Other significant gardens are at Epcombs, dating from the 17th century and at Hertingfordbury Rectory, once part of Hertingfordbury Park. Many of these parklands also include historic buildings and interesting features, such as the Fernery at Danesbury or the Greek Temple at Ayot St Lawrence. From elevated positions, these estates often benefit long views both across and along the valley. Only three properties are in the valley bottom - Lockleys, Epcombs and Hertingfordbury Rectory.

- 5.5 Volume 5 is a summary of the working landscape including a historic overview of the breweries, mills, tanyards and other industries, as well as farming which included watercress beds and osier beds.

Historic Houses

- 5.6 The principal estate houses are listed by Historic England as follows.

Grade II*

- Ayot St Lawrence House: mid-late 18th century, with listed stable block, earlier manor house, St Lawrence Old Church and St Lawrence New Church (Greek Temple) within the park.
- Lockleys: 1717 on site of earlier house. Alterations by Reginald Blomfield c 1911. With listed stable block, 17th century farm and Roman British villa remains in the park.
- Marden Hill: 1790-4 by F Carter, 1818-19 by Sir John Soane. Garden contains a listed octagonal former dairy and listed dog statue.
- St Paul's Walden Bury early 18th century with James Pain in 1767 and Castings (trained by Devey) in 1887 and many listed garden temples, orangery, Gardener's House and statues in the Grade I park.

Grade II

- Danesbury House: 1775, rebuilt 1820s. Locally designated fernery, ice house, water tower and stable block.
- Digswell House: c. 1807 by Samuel Wyatt .
- Stagenhoe: rebuilt 1737, Victorian additions. Surrounded by listed walls with listed Dower House and Granary
- Hertingfordbury Park: early 17th century with 19th and 20th century additions. Park contains locally designated walled garden, disused railway bridge and site of ice house.
- Tewin Water House: Rebuilt 1789 for 3rd Earl Cowper. Remodelled 1798 by J T Groves for H Cowper. Altered 1892. Enlarged and renovated 1902 for A Beit. Ice House in Grade II park.



Fig 17: Tewin Water House

Locally Designated

- Epcombs: Surrounded by listed walls and garden gates
- Kings Walden Bury: 1972 locally listed ice house in park

- 5.7 Houses at Panshanger and Kimpton Hoo were demolished in the 20th century. Panshanger Park contains listed orangery and conservatory, walled kitchen garden and gardener's house as well as ice house, underground store and barn. Kimpton Hoo Park includes a listed bridge by William Chambers which carries the entrance drive over Capability Brown's broadwater.

Historic Parks and Gardens

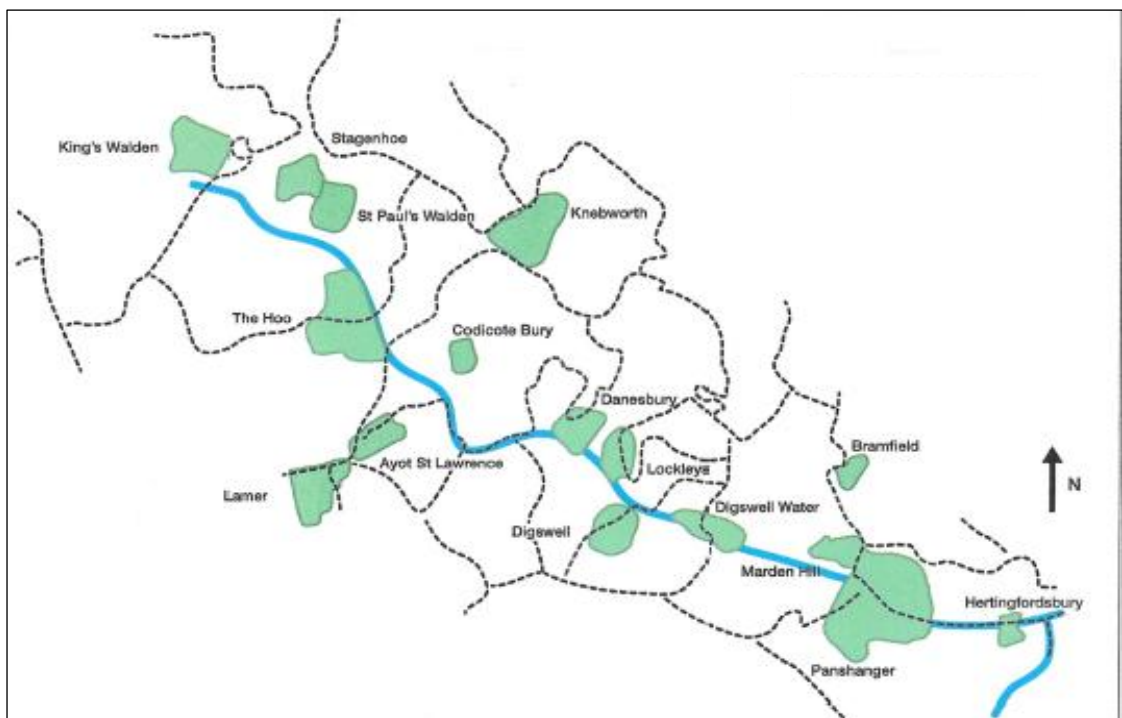


Fig 18: Parks and Gardens

- 5.8 Historic England maintains an official Register of nationally designated Parks and Gardens, together with their grading (I, II*, II) descriptions, historical notes and plans.
- 5.9 Hertfordshire Trust maintains lists of locally designated parks and gardens which they have researched and recorded. East Herts DC and Welwyn Hatfield BC also maintain lists of historic parks and gardens compiled with the help of Hertfordshire Gardens Trust and included in their Local Plans.
- 5.10 Within the Mimram Valley corridor there is a concentration of these national designated landscapes, as well as local significant assets.

6.0 NATURAL ASSETS by Paul Johnson

- 6.1 The rolling countryside of the Mimram Valley has extensive areas of farmland used for arable agriculture and the grazing of animals. However, throughout both the upper and lower valley areas there is much ecological interest evident in a wide range of nationally and locally designated wildlife sites, nature reserves, ancient woodlands, historic parklands with veteran trees, grasslands, water bodies, fen and swamp and hedgerows.
- 6.2 The River Mimram itself is a spring-fed chalk stream, one of only 200 in the world and as such is of international importance as a rare habitat. It provides valuable aquatic, semi-aquatic and marginal vegetation associated fish, invertebrates, birds and mammals. The river corridor is some 20km in length.
- 6.3 There is a significant opportunity throughout the wider valley to increase biodiversity by both creating and improving existing habitats. It is also possible to promote regenerative farming, ecological connectivity and ecologically sound land management practices.
- 6.4 A review of natural assets has been undertaken in two parts:
1. **Upper Mimram Valley** – report by Martin Ketcher
The upper section of the valley extends from the source of the Mimram at Whitwell in the northwest to Welwyn in the south-east and is bounded by the A1(M). The river corridor is some 10.5 km in length and typically 2 to 3km in width, narrowing at Welwyn village.
 2. **Lower Mimram Valley** – report by Paul Johnson
The lower section of the valley extends from the A1(M) at Lockleys, south-eastwards to Hertingfordbury and the confluence of the Mimram with the River Lea at Hertford, a distance of about 9.5km. The corridor here is initially narrow as the river passes through the gap between Welwyn Garden City and Digswell but then widens to about 2km in the open countryside at Tewin, Marden Hill and Panshanger Park before narrowing again at Hertingfordbury.
- 6.5 Preparation of both reports was greatly aided by the Herts Environmental Record Centre which kindly provided much valuable data. Other information was drawn from published material from a variety of public bodies and voluntary organisations. This document provides a short summary identifying the key natural assets and the opportunities for improvements in biodiversity. There are several parallel action programmes in progress which address specific ecological challenges. A Local Landscape Designation of the Mimram Valley will help to unify and coordinate these programmes through information and knowledge transfer.

- 6.6 The reports identify statutorily designated sites of national and local interest, locally designated wildlife sites and key habitats and species recorded as part of the Hertfordshire Ecological Network inventory (2011 - 2013) and other more recent surveys undertaken by voluntary groups. Maps showing the nationally important sites and the local wildlife sites are provided overleaf.

Nationally Designated Sites

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

- 6.7 There is one nationally important SSSI in the corridor located at Tewinbury in the lower valley. This is a 7.3 ha site bordering the Mimram with a range of wetland habitat types actively managed by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. A wide range of rare plants and uncommon bird species as well as water vole can be found.



Fig 19: Tewinbury Site of Special Scientific Interest

Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) sites

- 6.8 There are 22 ancient woodlands in the corridor which are listed in the AWI. These have been in continuous woodland cover for over 400 years and are generally oak/hornbeam woods typical of Hertfordshire. They cover some 150ha, with approximately 106ha in the upper valley and 44ha in the lower valley. Of the 16 woods in the upper valley, 6 are Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (ASNW) and 10 are Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS). The lower valley has 6 ancient woods, 4 of which are ASNW and 2 are PAWS. The 10 ASNW amount to some 72ha and the 12 PAWS approximately 78ha.

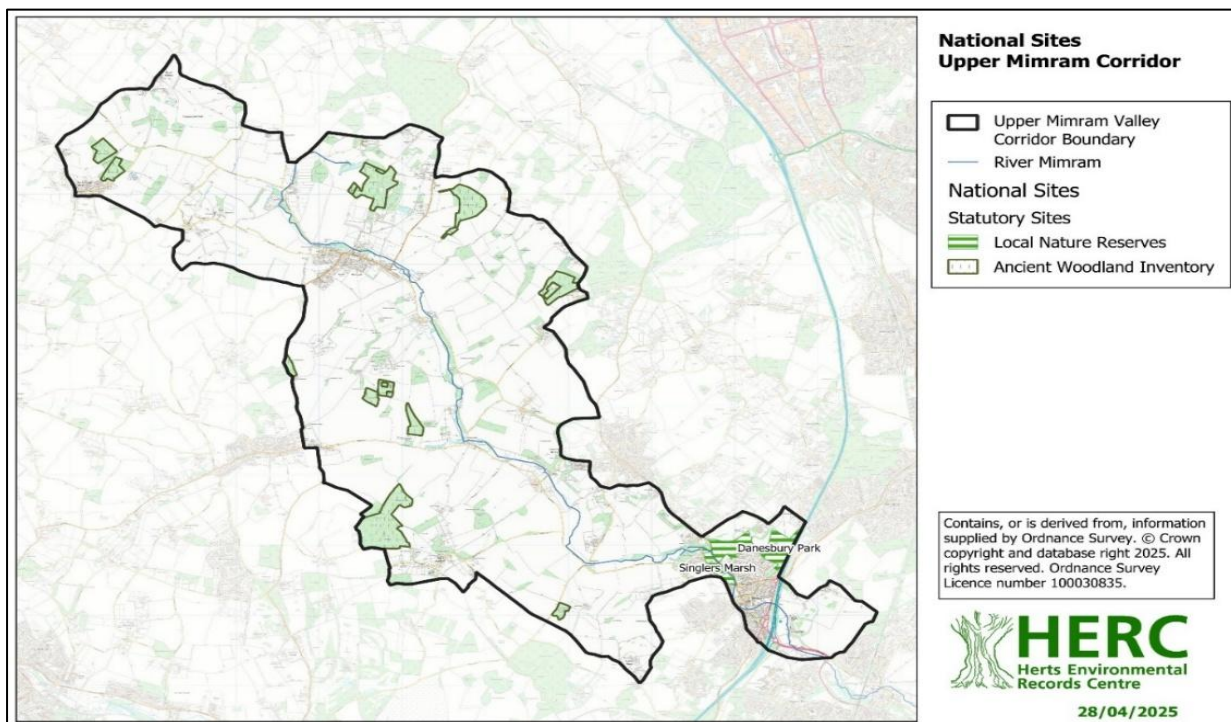


Fig 20: Upper Mimram Valley - National sites

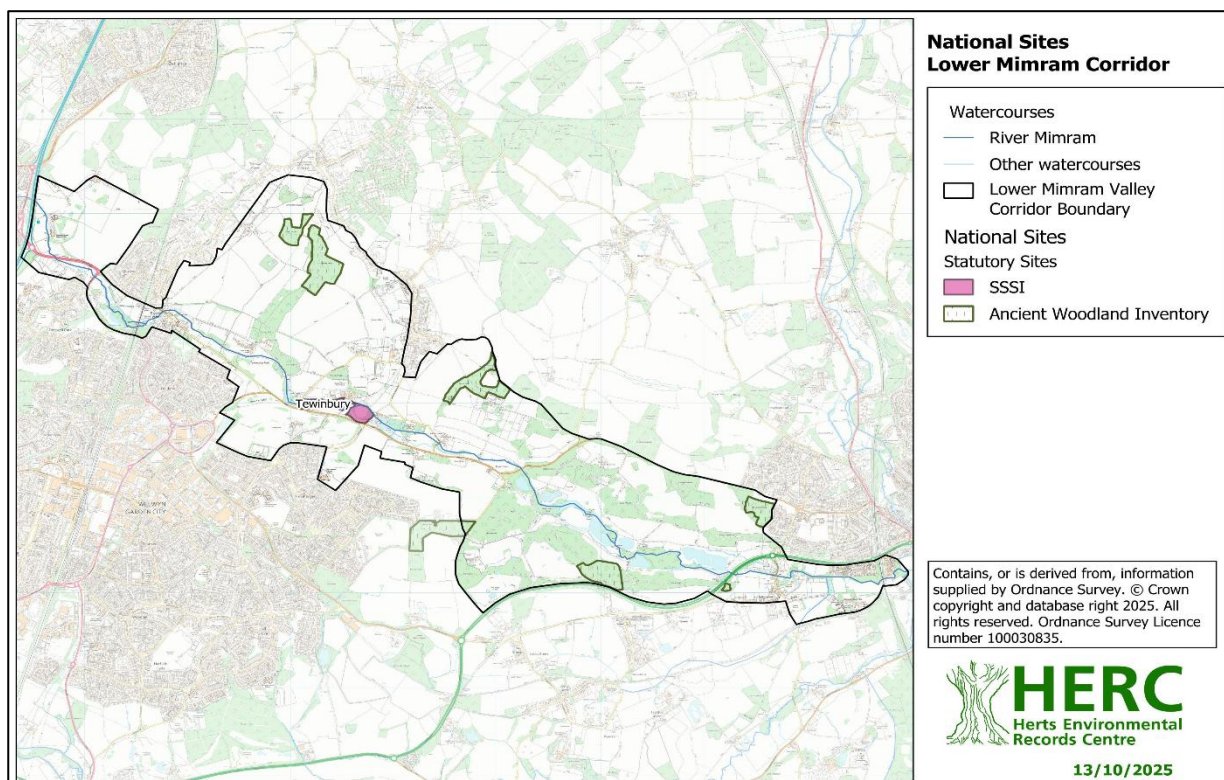


Fig 21: Lower Mimram Valley - National sites

Local Nature Reserves (LNR)

- 6.9 LNRs are protected areas designated by local authorities. There are two such reserves in the upper valley at Singlers Marsh and Danesbury Park, near to Welwyn village². They total some 31ha.

Locally Designated Sites

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)

- 6.10 There are 82 LWS in the corridor, 56 of which are in the upper valley and 26 are in the lower valley. The upper valley LWS cover an area of 289ha, while those in the lower valley amount to 322ha.
- 6.11 The upper valley sites comprise 172ha of woodland (18 sites), 94 ha of grassland (24 sites), 7.7ha of fen and swamp associated with the river (9 sites), the remainder being buildings often associated with the presence of bats.
- 6.12 The lower valley sites comprise 40ha of woodland (7 sites), 267ha of grassland (11 sites), 228ha of wetland (4 sites), 251ha riverine (8 sites) and 6 sites involving buildings and areas associated with bats. (NB - some sites are notified for multiple features).
- 6.13 Of particular note in the lower valley is Panshanger Park, an historic landscape and country park extending to over 400ha of which 216.5ha is a LWS. The site is notable for its water bodies, large areas of grassland, fen, swamp and woodland with some 800 veteran trees including the Blackadder and Panshanger oaks. The area is also notable for its resident and migratory birds, mammals, dragonflies, moths, butterflies and rare dead wood beetles. The River Mimram at Panshanger Park has important fish and crayfish populations.
- 6.14 Maps showing the location of the Local Wildlife Sites are provided overleaf.

² In addition to the Tewinbury SSSI and the two Local Nature Reserves in the Upper Valley, previously noted, there are two further Local Nature Reserves in the Lower Valley: Willowmead (near Hertford) and Archers Green (near Tewin). All these reserves are within the valley boundary as defined.

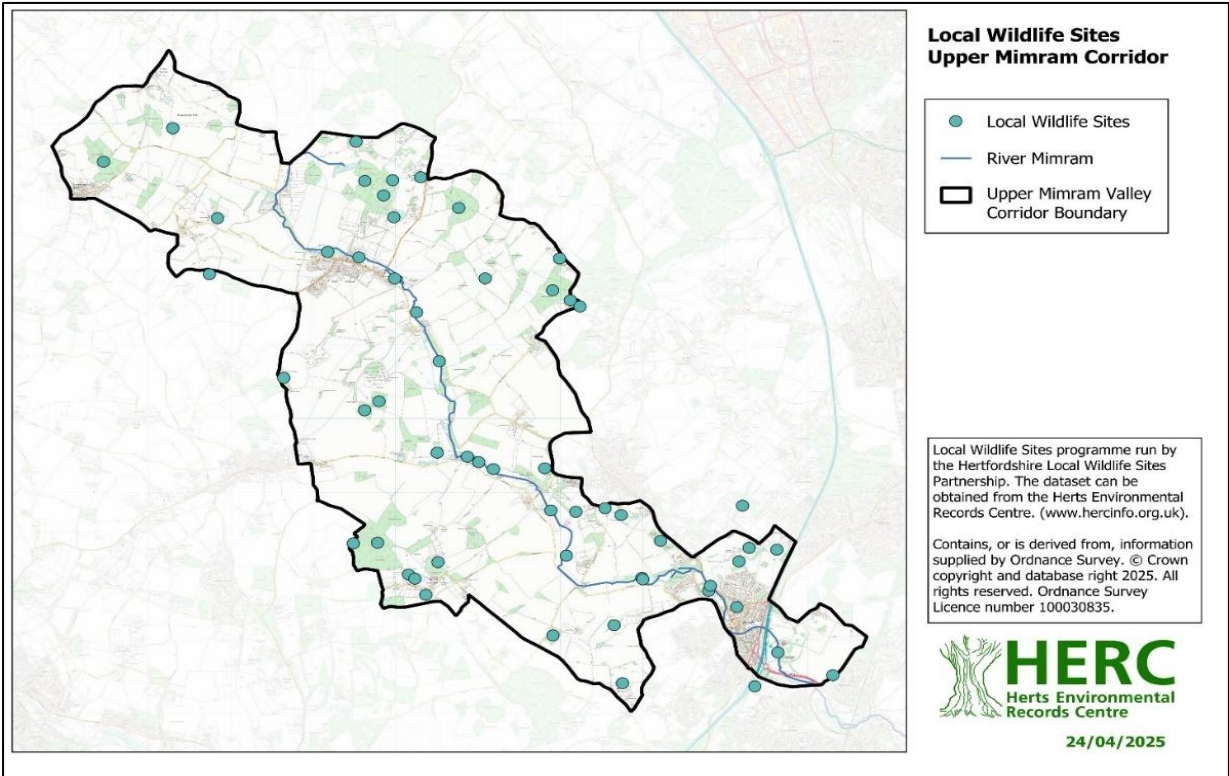


Fig 22: Upper Mimram Valley - Local wildlife sites

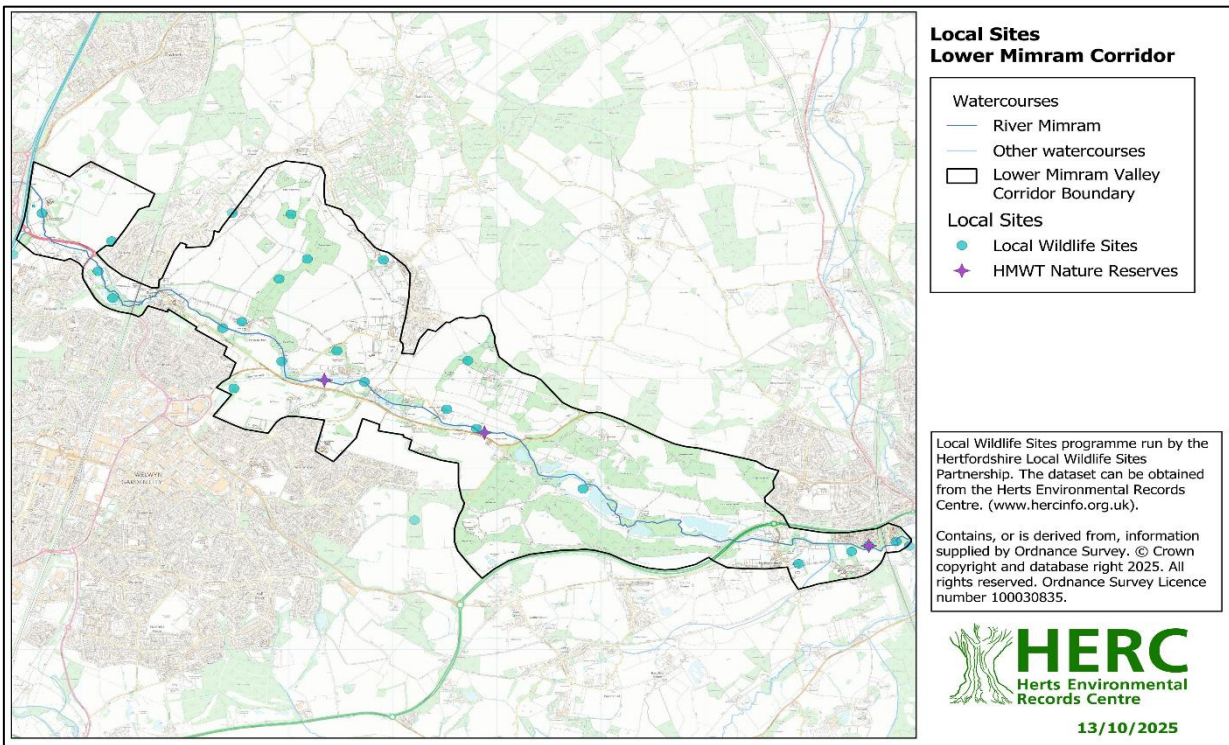


Fig 23: Lower Mimram Valley – Local wildlife sites

Species

- 6.14 Extensive records are held of species occurring in the Mimram corridor. Botanically, interest in both the upper and lower valley centres on ancient woodland communities, wetland plants associated with the river and fen together with swamp areas near to the river. Some 692 higher plant species have been recorded together with diverse fungal, lichen and moss flora
- 6.15 Land based mammals found in the corridor are typical of rural Hertfordshire including fallow deer, muntjac deer, grey squirrel, mole, badger, rabbit, hare, fox, stoat, weasel, harvest mouse, field vole, bank vole, common shrew and pygmy shrew. Water based mammals include declining populations of invasive mink due to intervention management and increased sightings of water vole and otter. The habitat mosaic also supports 10 species of bats.
- 6.16 Breeding bird surveys are undertaken by the British Trust for Ornithology in the upper valley. Specialist woodland birds appear to be in decline as are insectivorous birds. Spotted flycatcher and marsh tit have been lost to the valley in recent years but there has been a big increase in red kite and buzzard populations. Skylark numbers have also shown an increase recently. In the lower valley, there is a similar story but the broadleaved woodland and grassland attract woodpeckers, tree creepers, nuthatch, barn owl, tawny owl and birds of prey such as kestrel and hobby. The larger water bodies at Panshanger and Digswell Lake attract a wide range of wetland birds both resident and migratory including coot, moorhen, heron, egret, cormorant, geese, swans, wildfowl, waders, sedge warblers, Cetti's warblers and kingfisher. Swifts and swallows appear as summer visitors.
- 6.17 The Mimram and associated lakes and ponds are home to 21 species of fish including brown trout, dace, loach, grayling, 3-spined stickleback, brook lamprey and crayfish.
- 6.18 Invertebrates make up about 60% of the species records held. Intensive recording, especially at Panshanger Park, which has a wide range of habitat types, has highlighted diverse and important populations of moths, beetles, ants, wasps, butterflies, river flies, dragonflies and damselflies. However, in the largely agricultural areas of the upper valley, an ongoing decline in invertebrate numbers has been noted.

Potential for habitat improvement

- 6.19 In 2011 – 2013, the Hertfordshire Ecological Network habitat inventory was undertaken for the county. Habitat network maps were produced from the site data in broad categories such as marshy grassland, broad leaved semi-natural woodland, standing water etc. The individual habitat 'bits' were assessed and given a level value from 1 – 5 with those at Level 1 having the greatest value for

wildlife. Level 2 sites were important components of ecological networks and had the potential to reach Level 1. Level 3 sites (subdivided into 3a, 3b and 3c) had no existing habitats of significance but Level 3a /3b sites were considered high / medium priority for habitat creation and contribution to ecological corridors linking higher value Level 1 and 2 sites to form a more robust ecological network.

- 6.20 In both the upper and lower Mimram valley, the combined total of Level 1 and Level 2 sites significantly exceeds the total for both nationally and locally designated sites. This illustrates the importance of sites which are considered of high value but do not have a designation. In turn these sites are considerably exceeded in area by Level 3a/ 3b areas which although not having known habitats present are a high / medium priority for habitat creation.
- 6.21 Overall, throughout the corridor there is significant potential for habitat improvement, particularly in relation to broad leaved woodland, grassland of various types, fen and swamp and lake and riverine habitats. This could be achieved by a combination of activities such as regenerative farming, agricultural stewardship schemes, biodiversity net gain initiatives, and efforts by corporate bodies and landowners such as water companies, mineral companies, developers, local authorities and voluntary conservation groups.
- 6.22 Excellent examples already exist in the Mimram corridor such as the Chalk Streams initiative (Affinity Water), Whitehill Flower Meadow (Welwyn Parish Council), Digswell Lake (Digswell Lake Society), Tewinbury and Archers Green wildlife reserves (Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust) and Panshanger Park (Tarmac). All such sites are important but Panshanger Park, given its size and setting within the lower Mimram valley, has huge potential to demonstrate how integrated sustainable land management practices can benefit biodiversity across many habitat types whilst maintaining commercial fishery, woodland and agricultural operations, an active volunteer group as well as community access for education and recreation.

7.0 COMMUNITY INTEREST

Churches and schools

- 7.1 Reflecting past life more than the present, each community in the valley benefitted from its own church and school – no more so than the small village of Ayot St Peter where the church, rectory, school and manor house buildings still exist near to one another – social history frozen in time and evidenced by preserved buildings.



Fig 24: St. Peters Church and former school

- 7.2 Such is the value of so many artefacts and treasures of social history in a single location that school children (and adults!) could benefit from ‘on site’ experiences.

7.3 The Manor House

The Manor House at Ayot St Lawrence originates in the 16th century when the Lordship of the Manor reverted to the Crown under Henry VIII. Thereafter, successive ownerships resulted in partial or wholesale rebuilds until Lord Brocket bought the estate in 1928 and restored the residence and walled garden.



Fig 25: The Manor House at Ayot St. Lawrence

Mills, pubs and village halls

- 7.4 Most communities manage to sustain a pub and village hall even if the local mills are no longer in agricultural use.



Fig 26: Fulling Mill at Welwyn



Fig 27: The Bull at Whitwell

- 7.5 The historical relationship between church – school – rectory and manor house - estate – mill - pub can still be appreciated in many parts of the Mimram Valley – see Kate Harwood’s earlier chapter on history and heritage.
- 7.6 A brief paper by Kate Harwood entitled ‘... A note on the working landscape’ identifies the mills, breweries and other rural industries that existed in times gone by.

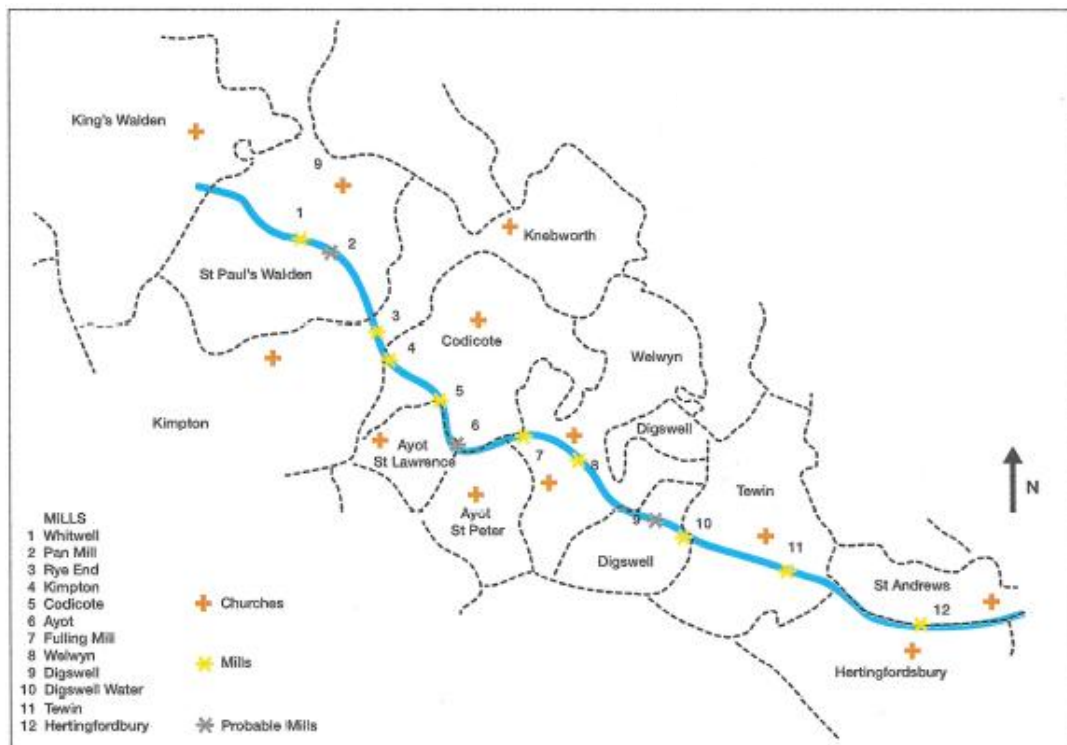


Fig 28: Churches and mills

Footpaths and viewpoints

- 7.7 The valley accommodates a network of well used footpaths and public rights of way. In turn, these paths provide access to points of interest and panoramic views of the valley.



Fig 29: Footpath at Dawley Wood

- 7.8 A continuous 15 mile walk already exists from the source of the river Mimram at Stagenhoe near Whitwell to the confluence with the River Lea at Hertford.

Kings Walden - Stagenhoe – Whitwell – Hoo End – Hoo Park – Hoo Bridge – Rye End – Kimpton Mill – Codicote Mill – Ayot Lodge – Ayot House - Ryefield Farm – Linces Farm – Singlers Marsh – Welwyn Village – Lockleys- Welwyn Viaduct – Tewin Lodge West – Tewin Water – Westley Wood – Tewinbury – Tewin Mill – Archers Green – Poplars Green – Panshanger Park- Hertingfordbury Mill – Cole Green Way – Hertford Town Football Ground

- 7.9 A future project could improve the relationship of the walk and the river – see Chapter 9.0 – Repton Trail and provide waymarking and information boards.

8.0 BOUNDARY DEFINITION AND PLANNING POLICY

National planning policy guidance

- 8.1 Before rehearsing the local considerations, it is worth repeating the official guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework – Department of Housing, Communities and Local Government 2024.

187 Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by (a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value ...

188 Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.

- 8.2 Consequently, the immediate question for boundary delineation is ‘catchment’ or ‘landscape’ determination.

Methodology

- 8.3 Following the landscape assessment guidance identified in Chapter 4.0, the project team established a list of features to be considered for inclusion in the area to be designated:

1. River Mimram and its tributaries
2. Topography
3. Landscape, especially woodlands
4. Heritage assets, especially historic parks and gardens
5. Wildlife sites and interconnections
6. Social history and associations
7. Community interests, eg footpaths, viewpoints, landmarks and archaeology

- 8.4 The selection process and boundary delineation involved three stages:
- Stage 1 - Provisional boundary – to establish an area of search and basis for consultation.
- Stage 2 - Parish consultations – inviting local knowledge and adjustments.
- Stage 3 - Professional audit – ensuring compliance and consistency.

- 8.5 The corridor area and boundary selection process was further assisted by site specific guidance on identifying a corridor boundary.

- 8.6 The recommended area for designation is included at the rear of this paper and separately in digital format.

Provisional planning policy

- 8.7 It is primarily for the statutory plan making authorities to determine planning policies consistent with other matters in a development plan.
- 8.8 Whilst the term ‘local landscape value’ is an officially recognised designation, arguably, the features of the Mimram Valley corridor suggest a broader description – ‘Area of historic landscape and environmental importance’.
- 8.9 Local district and neighbourhood plans already include planning policies concerned with specific environmental features, eg conservation areas, listed buildings, registered parks and gardens, biodiversity.
- 8.10 Other initiatives and regulations address matters of landscape recovery, water quality, nature recovery and land management.
- 8.11 Many of the above considerations have additional relevance and importance when viewed in the context of the Mimram Valley as a whole but it is the landscape, heritage, nature and community interest which lie at the heart of any policy.
- 8.12 A policy could be framed in the following terms.

Policy – Mimram Valley Area of Historic Landscape and Environmental Importance

Any proposals for development or investment in environmental enhancement should recognise, respect and enhance the special environmental qualities of the Mimram Valley as described in a Supplementary Planning Document.

(A Supplementary Planning Document would normally be prepared by or on behalf of the Local Planning Authorities and follow established preparation procedures.)

- 8.13 The Mimram Valley is identified for its holistic relevance to all the above considerations and more.

9.0 MIMRAM VALLEY ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS

9.1 With heightened awareness and appreciation of the special combination of environmental assets in the valley, several local community projects are already in progress.

1. **Panshanger Park** – landscape and nature recovery following mineral extraction by Tarmac.



Fig 30: Panshanger Park plan



Fig 31: Panshanger Park (aerial photograph)

2. **Archers Green** – nature recovery under stewardship of Herts and Middx Wildlife Trust.



Fig 32: Archers Green local nature reserve

3. **Marden Fields** – landscape recovery following fragmentation of ownership, aka ‘Plotlands’.



Fig 33: Marden Fields (aerial photograph)

4. **Repton Trail** – improvement of riverside footpath at Poplars Green linking to Panshanger Park.

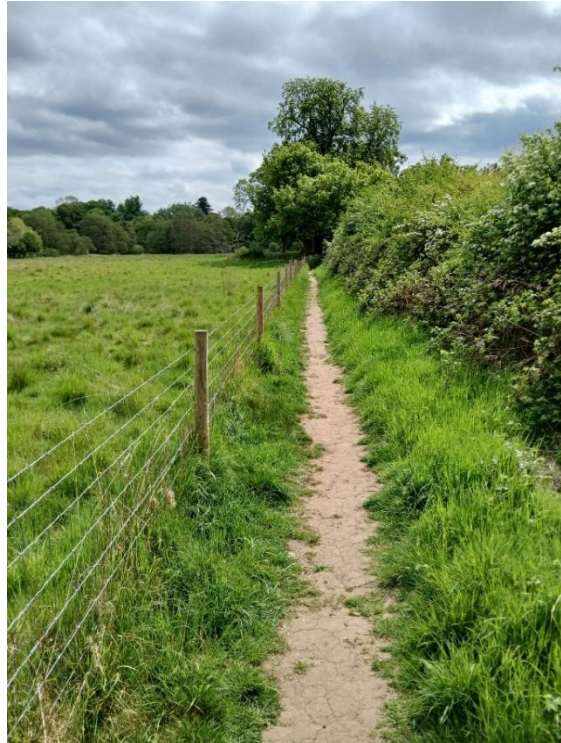


Fig 34: Repton trail at Poplars Green

9.2 Future projects include:

5. **Mimram Valley SPD** – preparation of Supplementary Planning Guidance
6. **Mimram Walk** – Kings Walden to Hertford

APPENDIX 1: STAKEHOLDER ORGANISATIONS

1. Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs
2. Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government
3. Natural England
4. English Heritage
5. Historic England
6. Environment Agency
7. Hertfordshire County Council
8. East Hertfordshire District Council
9. Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
10. North Hertfordshire District Council
11. Tewin Parish Council
12. Welwyn Parish Council
13. Hertingfordbury Parish Council
14. Codicote Parish Council
15. St Pauls Walden Parish Council
16. Kings Walden Parish Council
17. Kimpton Parish Council
18. Knebworth Parish Council
19. Ayot St Lawrence Parish Council
20. Ayot St Peter Parish Council
21. Hertford Town Council
22. Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust
23. Council for the Preservation of Rural England
24. Hertfordshire Local Nature Recovery Partnership
25. Hertfordshire Natural History Society
26. Chalk Stream Working Group
27. Mimram Valley at Tewin
28. Friends of the Mimram
29. Welwyn Planning and Action Group
30. Digswell Residents Association
31. North Hertfordshire Ramblers Group
32. Digswell Lake Society
33. Mimram Farm Cluster
34. Landowners
35. Affinity Water
36. Hertfordshire Gardens Trust

APPENDIX 2: PARALLEL PROJECTS 2025

1. **River Mimram Wildlife Enhancement Programme (2024-2026)** – Environment Agency
2. **River Mimram Appraisal Report (2024 -)** – Affinity Water
3. **Hertfordshire Nature Recovery Strategy** – Hertfordshire County Council (2024-)
4. **Welwyn Hatfield Green Infrastructure Plan 2011**
Project No 3 – River Valleys Project - River Lea and River Mimram - Land Use Consultants obo WHBC
5. **Welwyn Hatfield Green Corridor Project** – Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
6. **Hertfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2011** – Hertfordshire County Council
7. **Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan 2023** – Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership 2024
8. **River Mimram Catchment Management Plan** – River Lea Catchment Partnership
9. **Land use framework for England** – DEFRA and DHCLG

Further projects may emerge once LLD has been established.

MIMRAM VALLEY

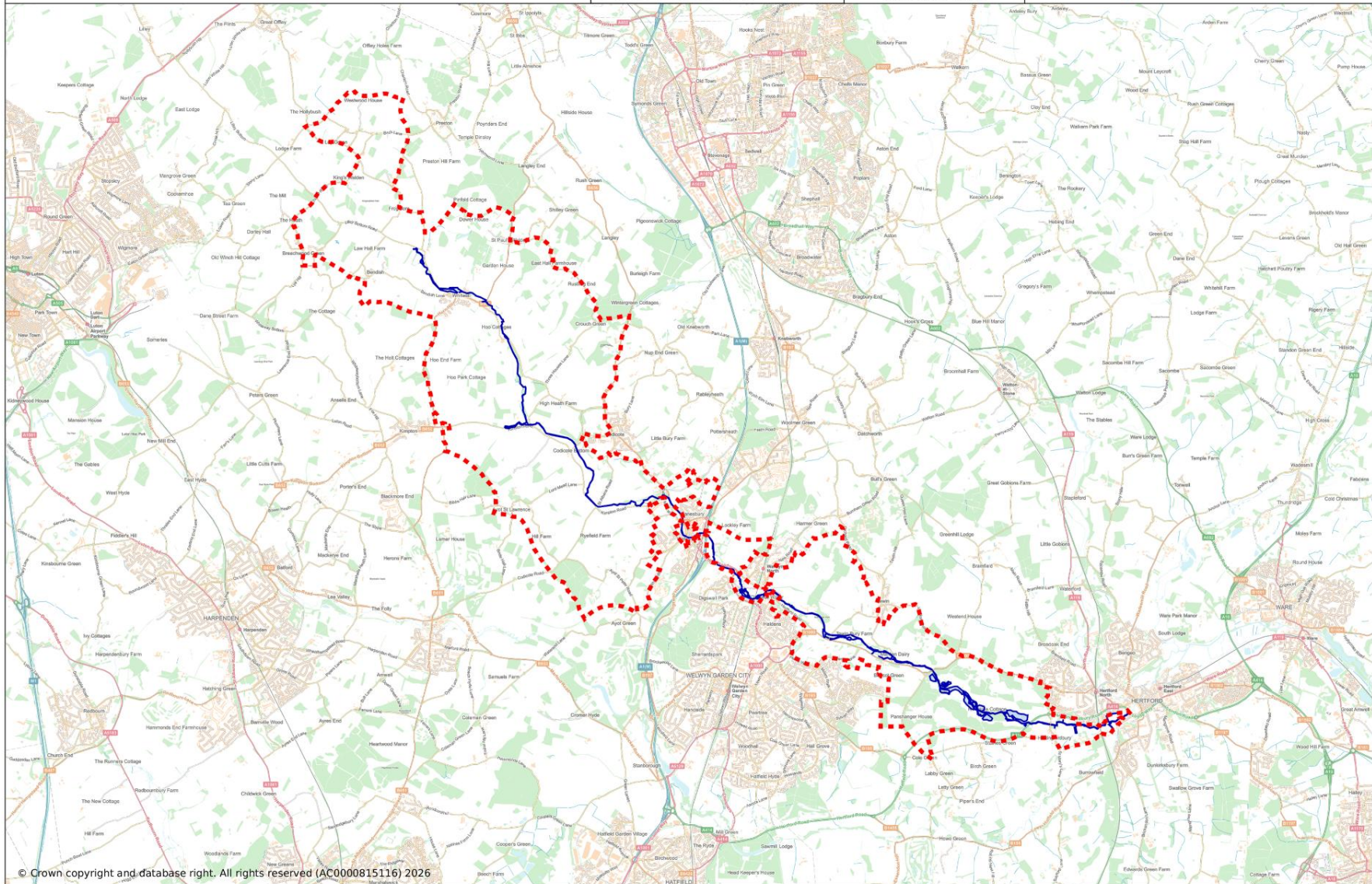
Proposed Local Landscape Designation Boundary

Welwyn

Author:

Date: 12/03/2026

0 500 1000 2000m
Scale: 1:100000 @ A4



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Fig 35: Landscape area designation boundary (red dots)