



# THE CASE FOR A LOCAL LANDSCAPE DESIGNATION



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# 1.0 RIVER MIMRAM

*'The River Mimram – the jewel in Hertfordshire's countryside'*  
River Lea Catchment Partnership 2012

- 1.1 From its source near the Hertfordshire village of Whitwell, midway between Luton and Stevenage, to its confluences with the rivers Lea, Beane and Rib at Hertford, the River Mimram flows through many different settings – Fig. 1.



Fig 1. River Mimram – Whitwell to Hertford

- 1.2 The stretch of the river from Digswell to Panshanger Park is attractive, often concealed but highly vulnerable on account of the seemingly insatiable appetite for urban expansion. There are currently (2019-2021) four candidate sites in the Mimram Valley under consideration for Green Belt release to accommodate new housing development.<sup>1</sup> By necessity, this report assumes that the current land uses in the study area remain substantially unchanged.
- 1.3 It is apparent from these studies that a similar level of protection might be justified for the whole river corridor from Lockleys in the west to Hertford in the east. Such consideration falls outside this remit being in adjacent local authority areas – see later.



Fig. 2 Mimram Valley between Tewin and Welwyn Garden City

## 2.0 RIVER MIMRAM AT TEWIN

*'The whole of the beautiful valley from Welwin (sic) to Hertford, including Digswell, Tewin Water, Panshanger 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 though the whole valley, enrich the general face of the country.'*

*Humphry Repton's Red Book of Tewin Water, Hertfordshire 1799-1800*

**2.1** This report is a compilation of evidence supporting the case for a local landscape designation and part of a wider initiative to protect and enhance the intrinsic qualities of the Mimram Valley from Digswell in the west to Panshanger Park in the east – the area lying within Tewin Parish. It is hoped that similar proposals will be considered in the adjoining authorities so that the holistic qualities of the lower Mimram Valley can be protected.



**Fig. 3** Study area in the landscape context

**2.2** Fig. 3 identifies a landscape assessment study area selected by reference to existing landscape studies, notably the Landscape Character Assessments for Area 42 Lockleys, Dawley and Tewin and Area 43 Mimram Valley Parklands together with fresh fieldwork.

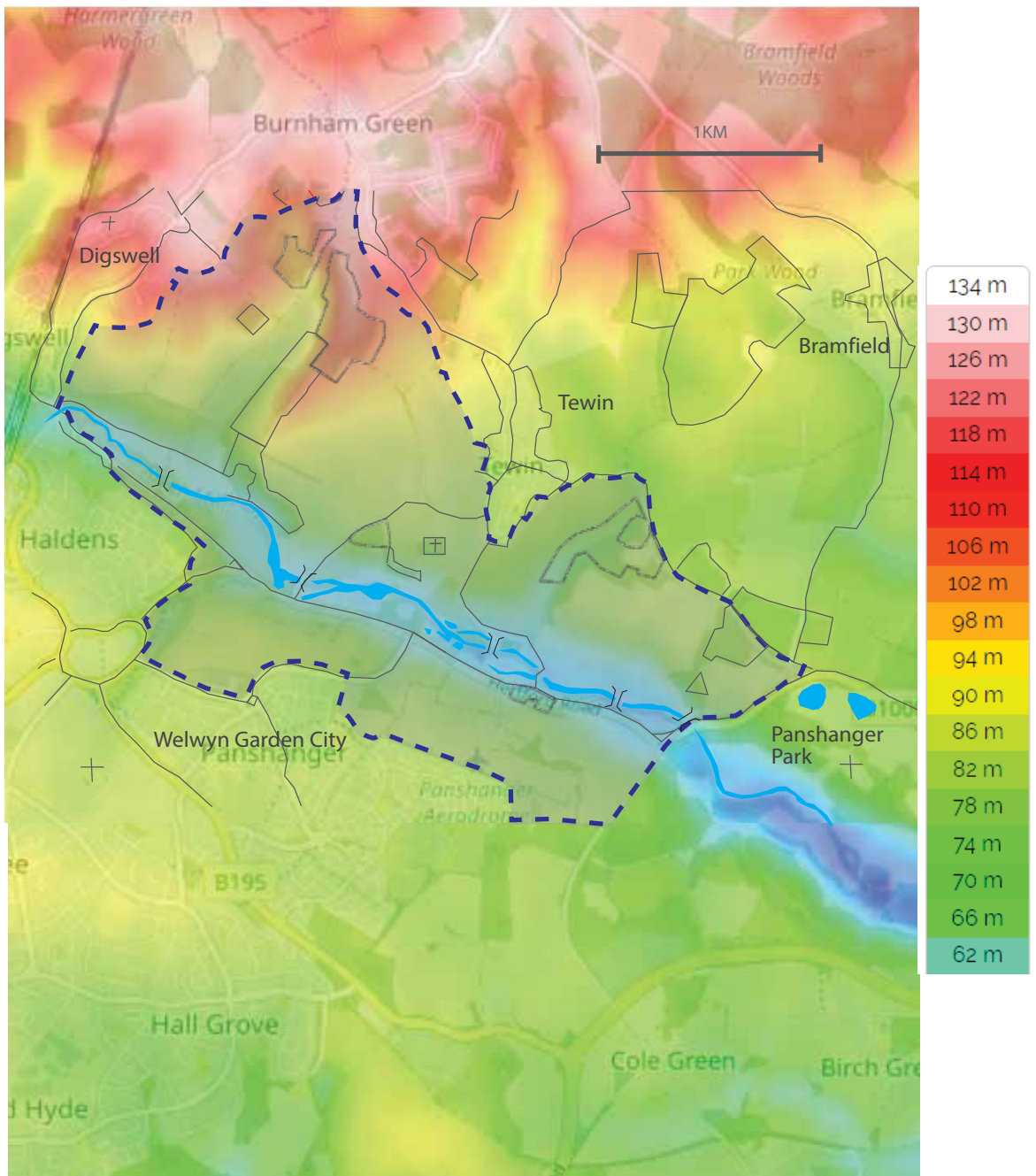


Fig. 4 Mimram Valley at Tewin

### 2.3

So much has been eloquently said and professionally written about this beautiful stretch of river valley that it is not necessary to repeat it here (see Section 9.0). Instead, this report records the outstanding features which are present in the area and makes the case for an overarching statutory planning policy to recognise their unique concentration – TEWIN AREA OF HISTORIC LANDSCAPE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPORTANCE.



# 4.0 LANDSCAPE HISTORY

*'The Mimram Valley is notable for its particularly dense concentration of country houses, park and gardens heading west from Hertford .....*

*A brief history of the Mimram Valley between Digswell and Panshanger by Kate Harwood and Anne Rowe – October 2021*

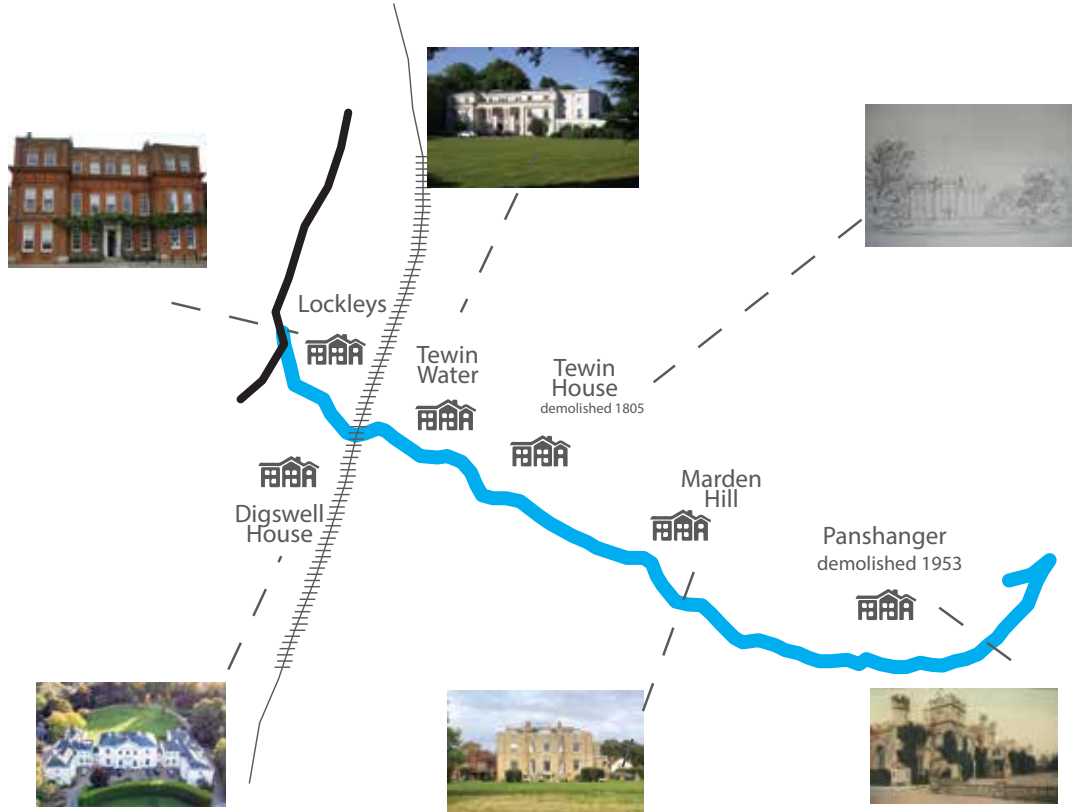


Fig. 6 Large 18th and 19th century country houses

4.1 A short section of this report cannot do justice to the resourceful and scholarly work of Anne Rowe and Kate Harwood quoted above (and Fig. 7). The casual reader is left with images of life in the 18th and 19th centuries lifted straight from a Jane Austen novel. This literary analogy goes some way towards understanding why this historic landscape is so important to conserve as a whole

4.2 In addition to the Harwood/Rowe report, 'The History of Tewin by the People of Tewin'<sup>2</sup> provides a companionate account of the social history of the Valley (Fig. 8).

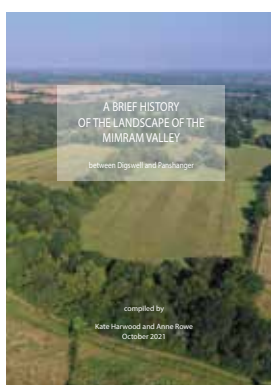


Fig. 7 Report on landscape history

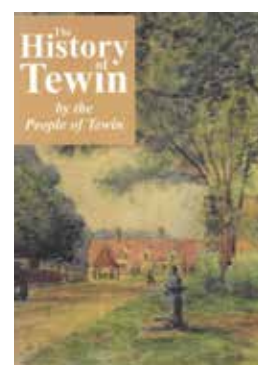


Fig. 8 The History of Tewin by the People of Tewin

# 5.0 LANDSCAPE FEATURES

*'In Hertfordshire's most secret part of all there is a river with a surrealist name that seems to have come straight out of Lewis Carroll for it is called, believe it or not, the Mimram'*

Paul Jennings 1963



Fig. 9 River Mimram

5.1 The River Mimram has innumerable admirers and devotees. It is the foremost environmental asset in the Tewin area. It is not only a feature in its own right, but also gives rise to other local landmarks along its course – see Fig. 10.



Fig. 10 Landmarks along River Mimram



5.2 The south facing slopes of the lower Mimram Valley benefit from extensive woodland coverage including many classified as ‘ancient woodland’ – see Fig. 11.

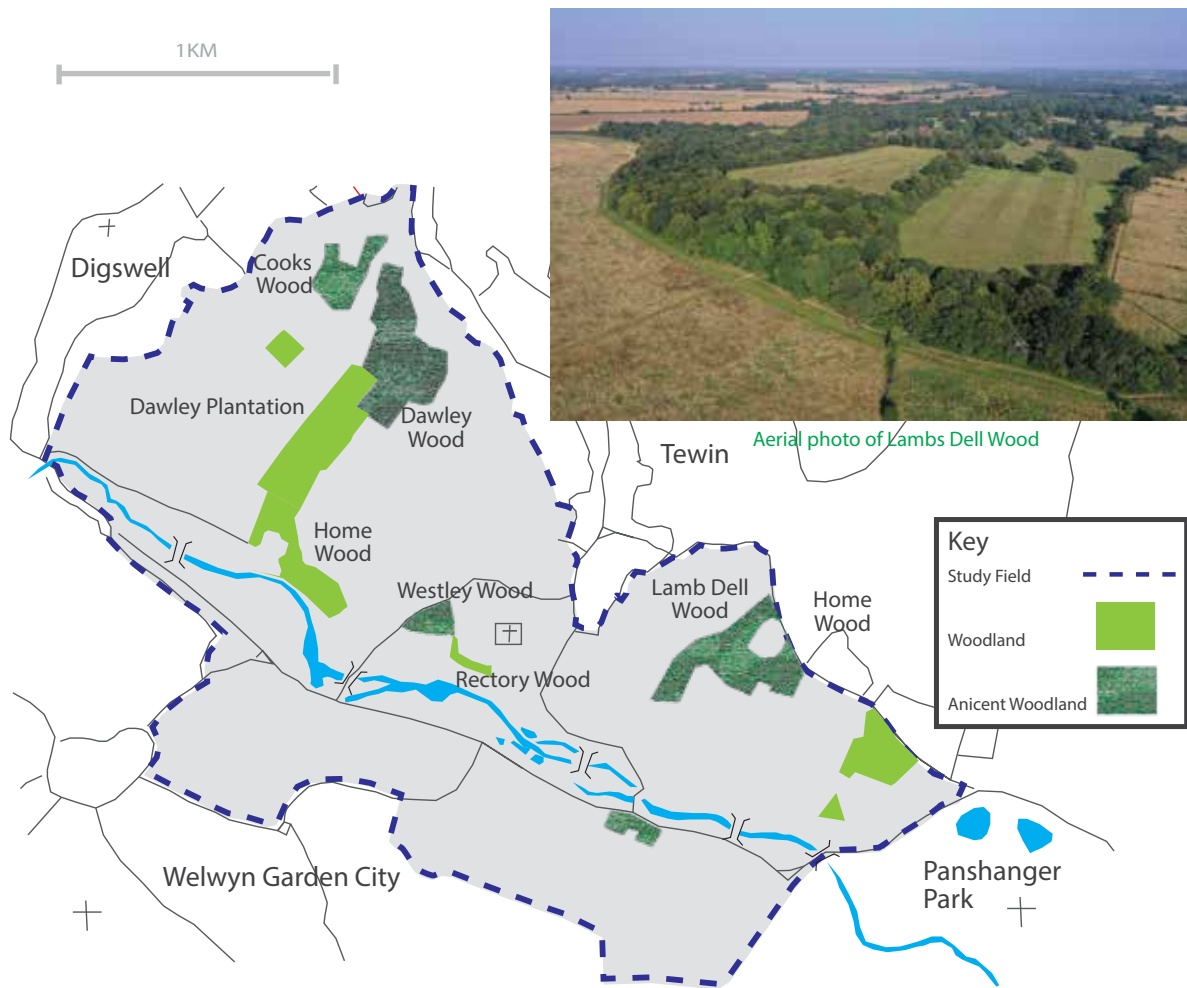


Fig. 11 Woodlands

5.3 As well as their scenic value, many of these woodlands are important as wildlife habitats and have been identified as such by East Herts Council – see Section 7.0.

5.4 In accordance with National Government guidelines, landscape character assessments have been produced for this area – Area 42 Tewin, Dawley and Lockleys/Area 43 Mimram Valley Parklands . These assessments provide highly professional analysis of the landscape. For this reason the work does not need duplication here.

# 6.0 HERITAGE ASSETS

6.1 Within a 2.5 kilometre stretch of the Mimram Valley there are no fewer than 22 buildings and structures which are statutorily 'listed' for their architectural or historic importance. This rich concentration of heritage assets is due in no small part to the social, economic and scenic importance of the area.



Fig. 12 Listed buildings

Key to Fig. 12

- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1 Tewin Water House and stable block | 12 Marden Hill House, service block/annexe |
| 2 Tewinbury Farmhouse                | 13 Octagonal store and wall                |
| 3 Stable building                    | 14 Barn                                    |
| 4 Cow sheds and former granary       | 15 Ha ha wall                              |
| 5 Barn and former wheelhouse         | 16 The Cottage                             |
| 6 St Peters Church                   | 17 Walled Gardens                          |
| 7 Beit memorial                      | 18 Statue of spaniel                       |
| 8 Grimston memorial                  | 19 Warrengate Farmhouse                    |
| 9 War memorial                       | 20 South Barn                              |
| 10 The Old Rectory                   | 21 Barn (to east of Marden Dairy)          |
| 11 Former stables                    | 22 Mimram Cottage, 2 Hertford Road         |

Details of the listing and description can be found on the Historic England website

## 6.2

The area also includes three Historic Parks and Gardens.

1. Tewin Water – registered by Historic England
2. Marden Hill – locally important (East Herts SPD 2007)
3. Tewin House – identified in Harwood/Rowe's Landscape History

They are shown at Fig. 13 (Taken from Harwood/Rowe Report)

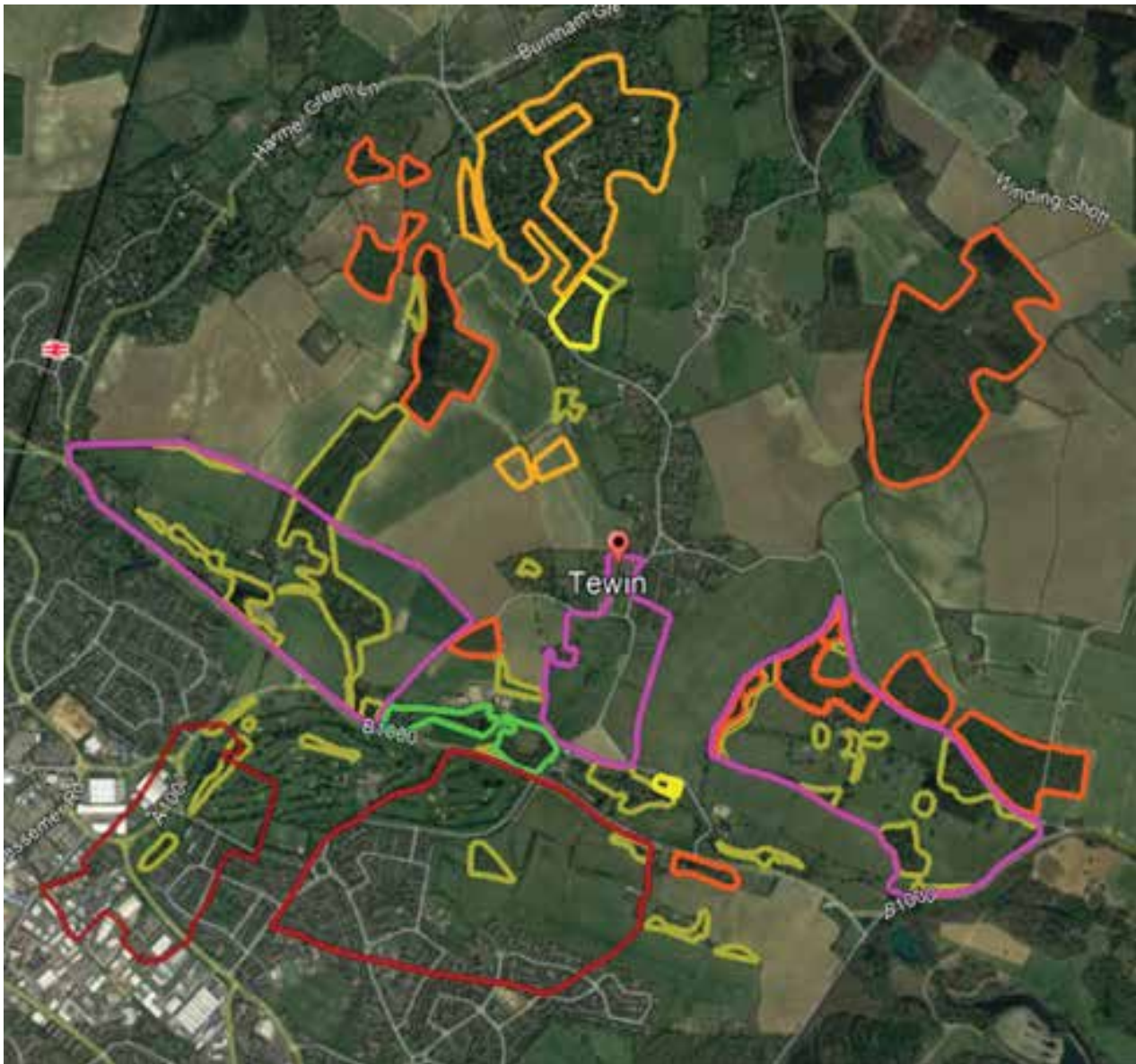


Fig. 13 Historic Parks and Gardens

### KEY

- historic parks and gardens
- ancient woodland
- lost woods
- SSSI
- priority wood habitat
- priority orchard habitat
- possible extent of 16th-century rabbit warrens

## 6.3

Additionally, East Herts Council has identified five Areas of Archaeological Significance in its District Plan.

## 7.0 NATURAL HISTORY

7.1 At present, there are numerous locally designated wildlife sites in the lower Mimram Valley. They are identified in the East Herts District Plan 2018 – Fig. 14.

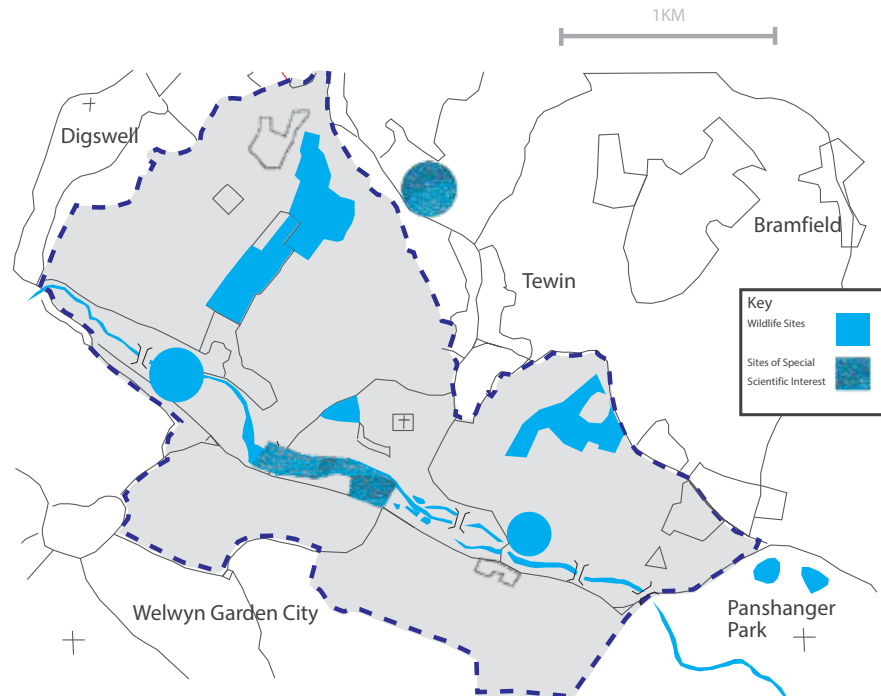


Fig. 14 Designated wildlife sites

7.2 More information about the wildlife in the Valley can be found on the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust website, Herts Environmental Records Centre and Herts Biological Records Centre

7.3 At Tewinbury Farm, there is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest currently managed by Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust – Fig. 15.

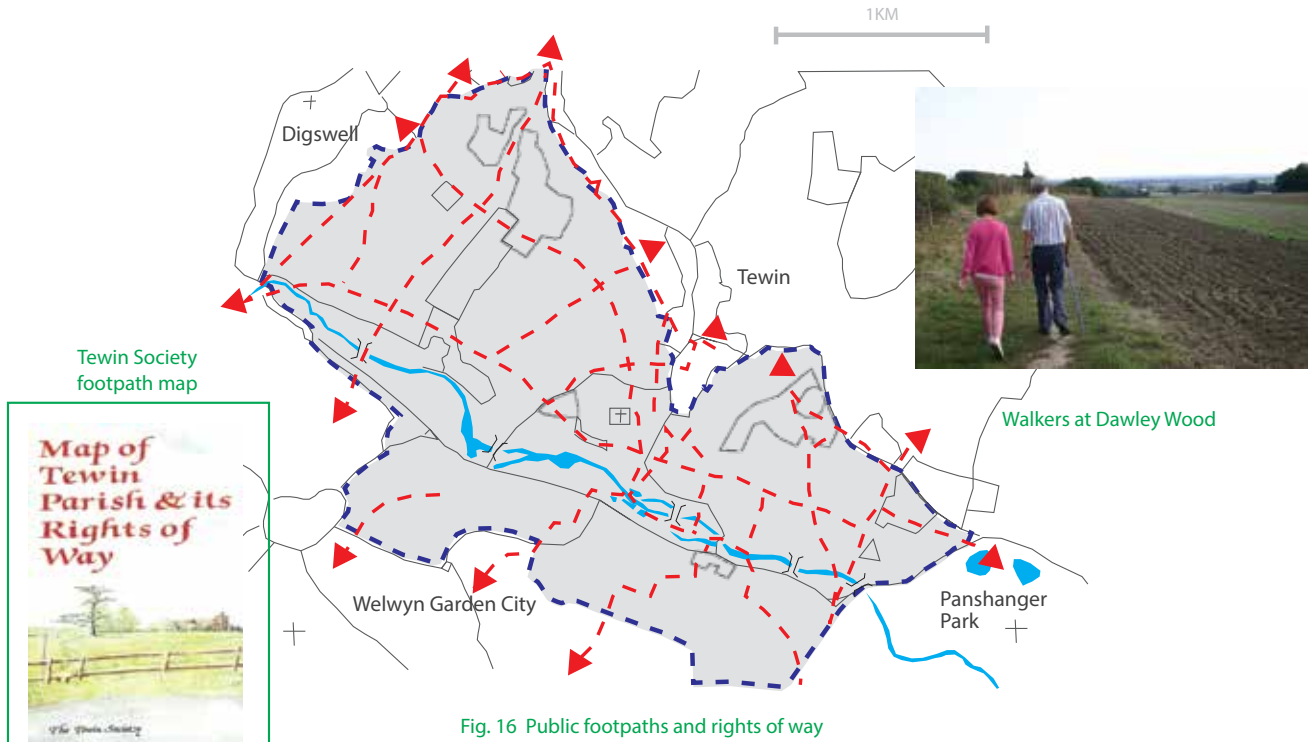


Fig. 15 Tewinbury Farm - Site of Special Scientific Interest

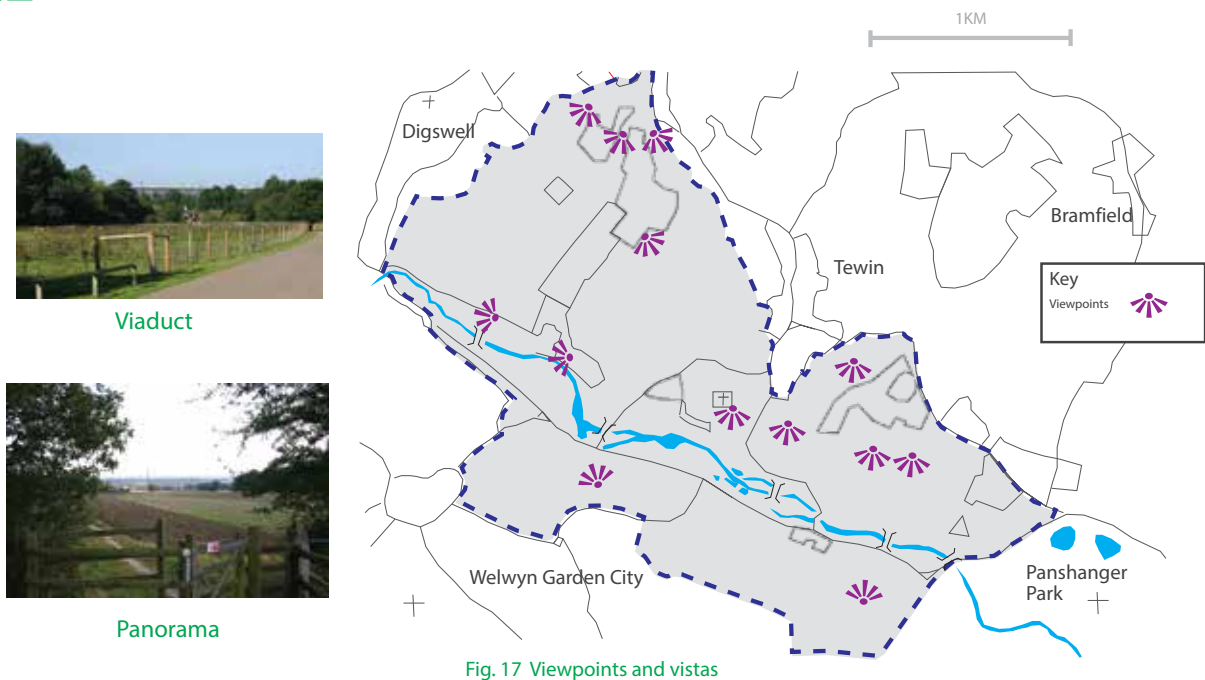
7.4 Based on informed anecdotal evidence and the near continuous designation of wildlife sites along the river and its margins, it is reasonable to assume that the ecological importance of the valley is currently underestimated. Further specialist survey work would be valuable.

# 8.0 COMMUNITY INTEREST

8.1 The Valley accommodates a network of public footpaths and rights of way – Fig. 16.



8.2 From these paths there are panoramic views across and along the Valley – Fig. 17.



8.3 Given the exceptional combination of landscape history, scenic beauty, heritage assets and wildlife resources, the Valley should benefit from ‘holistic’ recognition and protection.

8.4 Local school children can benefit from real life evidence of the past – its social structures, farming practices and day-to-day living.

## 9.0 CORROBORATIVE EVIDENCE

9.1 The claim to secure planning policy recognition of the special qualities of the lower Mimram Valley is not new.

9.2 **Humphry Repton**  
The work by Humphry Repton 1799-1890 published in his Red Books for Panshanger and Tewin Water<sup>3</sup> imagined an extended riparian corridor uniting the various parklands along the Valley (see Section 2.0).

9.3 **Abercrombie Plan 1947**  
In the History of Tewin<sup>2</sup>, it is reported that Professor Abercrombie's Plan designated the lower Mimram Valley as 'high landscape value' but this status was overturned by pressure from the then Welwyn Garden City Corporation seeking to expand the town northwards.

9.4 **The Mimram Valley 1992**  
In 1992, Tewin Society and Tewin Parish Council produced 'An appraisal of the lower valley: Welwyn to Panshanger Park'. The report advocated a planning policy to recognise the '.... significant scenic and historic value' as an 'extended rural heritage area'.

9.5 **Landscape Character Assessments 2007**  
More recently, East Herts District Council has included Landscape Character Assessments Area 42 and Area 43 as Supplementary Planning Documents supporting the statutory policies of its District Plan. The assessment of Mimram Valley Parklands confirms the '.... unusual area for its scale and the unity and completeness of the focus of the parkland on the river. This stretch of the Mimram has been highly regarded for its scenic beauty since at least the end of the 18th century ....'



Fig. 18 Mimram Valley Parklands

# 10.0 NEW LOCAL LANDSCAPE DESIGNATION

10.1 The evidence is compelling.

10.2 The area identified below should be the subject of a local landscape designation and incorporated in the statutory East Herts District Plan at the earliest opportunity.

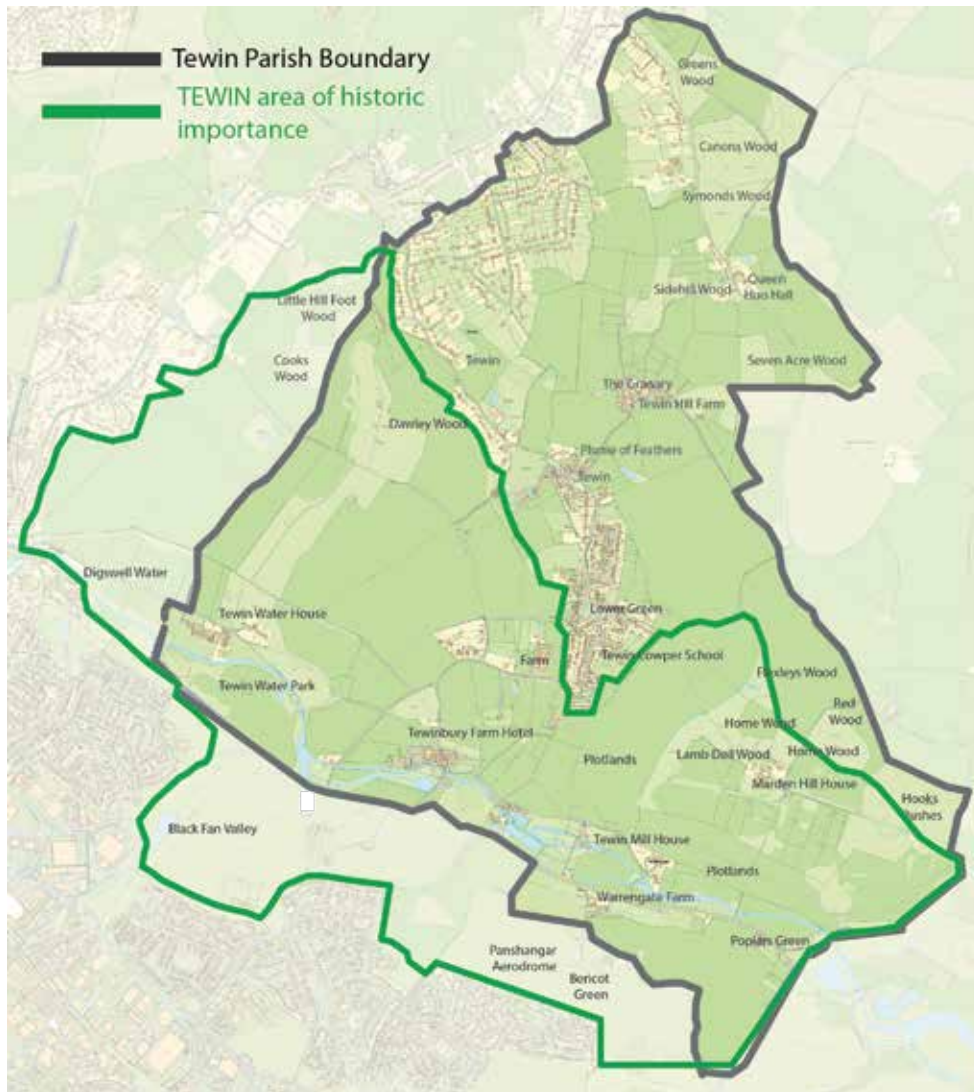


Fig. 19 Tewin Area of Historic Landscape and Environmental Importance

Footnotes:

1 Welwyn Hatfield District Plan – Green Belt Review Stage 3 Final Report – March 2019 by Land Use Consultants

2 The history of Tewin by the People of Tewin published by Tewin Orchard in association with the Tewin Society 2009

3 Humphry Repton's Red Books of Panshanger and Tewin Water, Hertfordshire 1799-1800 by Hertfordshire Record Publications Volume 27