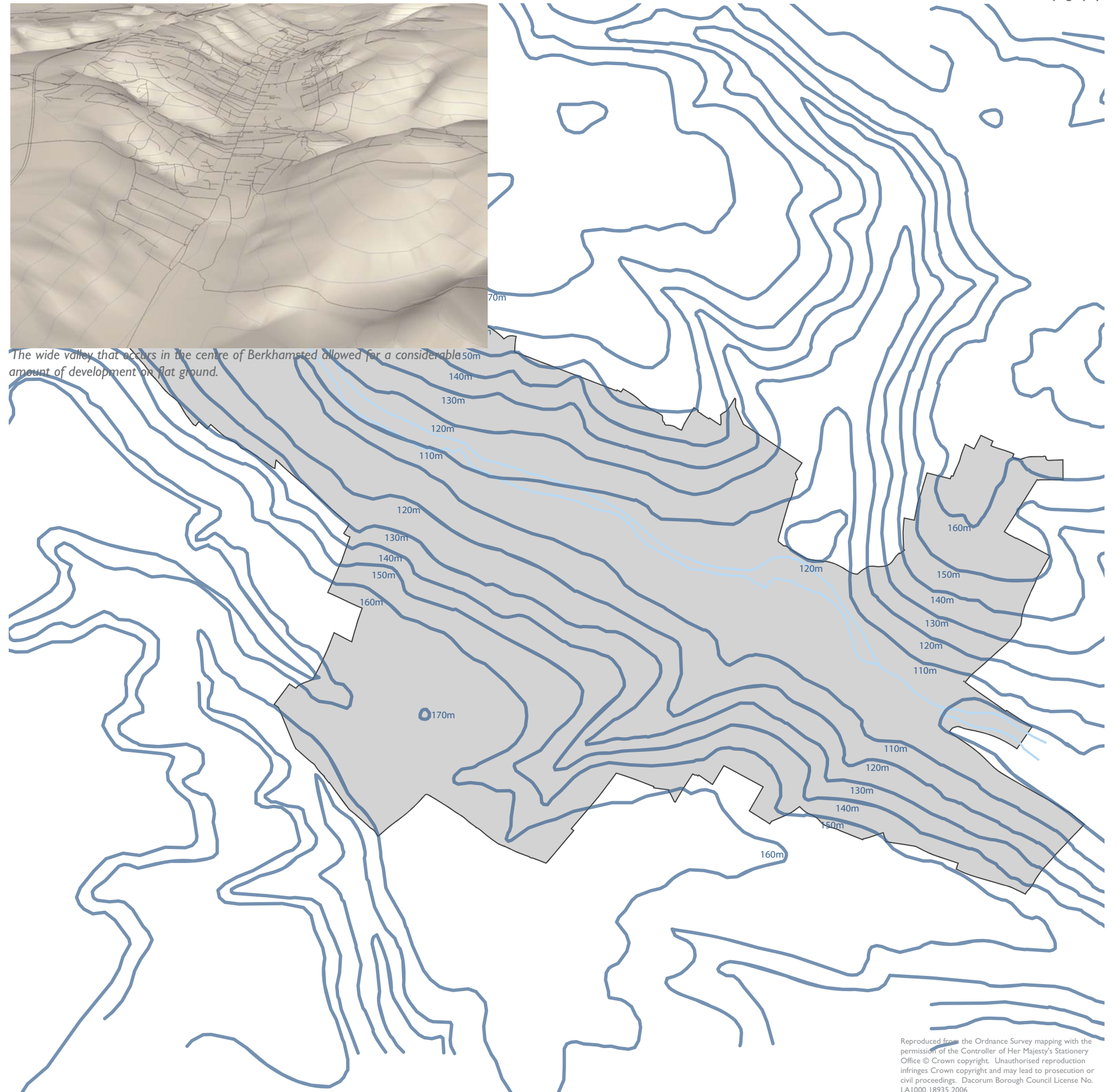




## MAKING PLACES TOPOGRAPHY

Berkhamsted rests within the Bulbourne Valley between Hemel Hempstead and Tring. The Bulbourne Valley has been a route through the Chilterns for thousands of years and Berkhamsted's linear form is a direct response to the various routes (and edges) that have been formed in the valley. The prehistoric boundary formed by Grim's Ditch was paralleled by the Roman Road, Akeman Street, which ran from London to Chester.

The topography has had a profound impact on the town's morphological development. The town centre has developed in elongated fashion with the residential developments rising along the valley slopes. The wide valley that occurs in the centre of Berkhamsted allowed for a considerable amount of development on flat ground.



### KEY ISSUES MP5: TOPOGRAPHY

**MP5A**  
Berkhamsted's development and morphological evolution are a direct result of the area's topography.

**MP5B**  
The town centre has developed in elongated fashion with the residential developments rising along the valley slopes.

Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Dacorum Borough Council License No. LA1000 18935 2006

## CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE TOWN MORPHOLOGY

The morphology drawing shown at the right illustrates only the areas of built form. The drawing highlights a number of particular features with regards to street pattern, building type and building density.

As described earlier, Berkhamsted's growth occurred along the floor of the Bulbourne valley, spurred by the old Roman road built along its flatter ground.

### Street pattern

The old medieval street network, shaped by the burgage plots, can be seen in the area around St Peter's church (1). The parish of Northchurch, which was once a separate settlement to the west of the Berkhamsted town centre, has remnants of the old street patterns. (2). The Victorian street grid began to push the residential communities up the valley slopes (3). By the 20th century, ribbon-style and curvilinear streets and then cul-de-sacs (4) were developed for new and generally less dense residential areas. In the last 20 years, higher density areas have appeared close to the town centre (5).

### Open space

As seen in the drawing, there is relatively little open space within Berkhamsted, apart from the area along the canal and within school grounds. The schools are recognisable as large footprints floating in open space.

### Building type

Berkhamsted can be understood through this drawing as a primarily residential town as seen by the street types and size of the building footprints. Larger footprints along the canal indicate an employment area and the density along the High Street indicates the site of retail and commercial spaces.



### KEY ISSUES CEI:TOWN MORPHOLOGY

#### CEIA

Berkhamsted's history as a valley turnpike town has created a clearly legible growth with primarily commercial and open spaces uses along the valley and residential buildings on the valley slopes.

#### CEIB

There is little designated open land throughout Berkhamsted.

# CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE

## TOWN CENTRE MORPHOLOGY

The town centre morphology provides a close look at the built conditions in relation to street patterns and open space. Berkhamsted's town centre is essentially linear in structure with limited activity occurring on side streets.

**Block structure and permeability**  
Berkhamsted Castle (1) was built north of the river and the medieval St Peter's Church (2) was built on axis with the old castle. This axis established the first significant development stretching the town north and south of the Roman road. The clear Victorian block structure south of the High Street allows for permeability of both vehicles and pedestrians (3).

The two areas north of the High Street that are divided by Lower Kings Street (which contain a Tesco Metro (4) and Waitrose (5) respectively) are relatively impermeable to vehicles and have unclear routes for pedestrians. The morphology shows small alleyway gaps for pedestrians to penetrate these open spaces that are occupied by car parks.

**KEY ISSUES**  
**CE2: TOWN CENTRE MORPHOLOGY**

**CE2A**  
The Victorian block structure reveals a clarity to vehicular and pedestrian movements.

**CE2B**  
The area north of the High Street where the food retailers are based lack clarity and clear permeability.



Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Dacorum Borough Council Licence No. LA1106 1893/2006

## CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE BUILDING LINES, SETBACKS AND GAPS

Building lines establish the way in which a series of building structures meet the street and pavement. A continuous building line facilitates a clear image of the street, creating a 'street wall' and block perimeter. Setbacks and gaps, while sometimes providing interesting features or key gathering spaces, can impact the clarity of this street wall. For the purposes of this study the town centre drawing focuses primarily on the High Street.

Parts of Berkhamsted High Street have very wide pavements, which facilitates a particularly strong pedestrian path along the pavements. Typical pavement widths vary between two and three metres. Tring, in comparison, had average pavement widths of 1.5 metres with frequent narrow to one metre. There are areas along Berkhamsted High Street where the width can grow to as much as 13 metres. These setbacks can potentially be 'dead' spaces along the High Street.

### Post office Sorting Office site

The sorting office site is setback considerably, creating a significant dead space along the High Street (1).

### High Street and Church Lane corner

The corner of the High Street, Church Lane and the entrance to the Tesco Metro car park represents a considerably setback that should be considered an opportunity site. Some consultation participants cited the Tesco's building as ill-suited to this historic site and have envisioned a new public space here (2). Regardless of this consideration, the pavement in front of Costa is 13 metres wide (3) and could be transformed into a considerable public realm asset.



### KEY ISSUES

#### CE3: BUILDING LINES, SETBACKS, GAPS

##### CE3A

Berkhamsted has a wide pavement facilitating strong pedestrian paths.

##### CE3B

The wide pavement combined with setbacks can create dead zones along the High Street.

##### CE3C

There are particular setbacks along the High Street that could become key public realm spaces.

## CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE BUILDING ORIENTATION

Active building frontages can be a key factor in the success of a commercial street, providing both vitality and 'eyes on the street'. A site survey was conducted to establish which buildings fronted onto the High Street. The survey also considered the impact of the food retailers located just north of the High Street.

### High Street

The High Street consists entirely of active frontages, creating a strong and vibrant High Street. Some of the facades, such as the post office, are not dynamic. There are also a number of temporal uses that occur along the pavement, such as a weekly plant sale.

### Food Retailers

Pedestrians use the alleyways off of the north side of the High Street to access the food retailers, car parks, and the Canal Walk. The car parks act as barriers to people accessing the open space along the canal. In particular, Waitrose's inactive frontage combined with its car park is particularly noteworthy as detracting from the connection to the canal.

### KEY ISSUES

#### CE4: BUILDING ORIENTATION

##### CE4A

The High Street consists entirely of active frontages, creating a strong and vibrant High Street.

##### CE4B

The inactive frontage along the food retailers and their car parks create unappealing pedestrian routes between the High Street and the Canal Walk.



Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Dacorum Borough Council License No. UK 1000 18935 2006

## CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE DESIGNATED OPEN LAND

Berkhamsted has few designated areas of open land with the settlement. There are no designated Local Nature Reserves within Berkhamsted, although the town does have approximately 22 hectares of Wildlife Sites, including Berkhamsted Castle (1), the railway embankment, the River Bulbourne meadow, the New Road allotments, and Tunnel Fields. The Grand Union Canal and adjacent Canal towpath are significant open spaces for the residents of Berkhamsted (2).

According to the Urban Nature Conservation Study, access to the Wildlife Sites is relatively limited given the location of these sites north of the High Street and the restrictions to their access. The designated open land is generally managed as part of school grounds (3), allotments (4), sports pitches (5), or cemeteries (6). The southern side of town is relatively deficient in designated open land and has no access to Wildlife Sites.

It is recommended that a general buffer of approximately 100 metres within the settlement adjacent to the Green Belt be created that precludes building of over two-storeys. This buffer would protect views into the Green Belt and from the Green Belt into the town.

### KEY ISSUES CE5: DESIGNATED OPEN LAND

CE5A  
There are no designated Local Nature Reserves within Berkhamsted.

CE5B  
The southern side of town is relatively deficient in designated open land and has no access to Wildlife Sites.

