

Wooded Valley Meadowlands

Key Characteristics

- Flat narrow valley floors
- Wet clay and peat soils
- Small meadows bounded by ditches or hedges
- Plantations of poplar and cricket bat willow
- Carr woodland and scrub
- Confined views

Location

This landscape character type is found in the valleys of the western tributaries of the upper Gipping valley in central Suffolk:

- The Rattlesden River valley from Stowmarket and Combs to Great Finborough.
- The valley of a stream that flows from Stowmarket through Haughley to Wetherden.

Geology, soils and landform

This landscape type occurs in narrow, flat, valley floors with thick clayey alluvium overlying peat deposits, as a result of which they are frequently wet.

Landholding and enclosure pattern

Most of this character type consists of small meadows, bounded by ditches and, where dry enough, hedges or trees. These meadowlands generally form small parts of larger farming businesses. Many of the parcels have been planted with cricket bat willow, or reverted to carr woodland.

Briefly, in the late 18th and 19th centuries the wet soils were exploited for hop-growing. Dagworth in the Haughley valley was the centre of the 19th-century hop-growing industry in Suffolk, with kilns for processing them in the farmstead complex of Dagworth Hall. There are also earthwork signs of hop beds in the Rattlesden valley at Combs.

At Great Finborough the valley floor was incorporated into the landscape park of Finborough Hall and the Rattlesden River was dammed to create a linear lake,

surrounded by tree plantations. The area is now part of a golf course and retains its wooded nature, though the lake has gone.

Settlement

Settlement occupies the higher land towards the edges, and occasionally within, this landscape type. An example of this is Dagworth Hall, a settlement recorded in Domesday Book and bearing a name indicative of a Saxon origin.

Trees and woodland cover

This landscape is based on wet clay or peat soils overlaid with pasture or rough rushy grassland and dotted with older alder carr woodlands and newer plantations of willow and poplar. Overall there is a roughly equal balance of wooded and grassland parcels, very different from other valley floor landscapes in the county where woods and plantations are not as dominant.

Visual experience

These are very attractive river valley landscapes contained or confined by woodland and the surrounding higher land.

In the Rattlesden valley the road runs close to the valley bottom and views are largely confined by the trees on either side. In the Haughley valley, views are mainly downwards into the valley from the A14 trunk road and are of patches of distant woodland interspersed with fields.

Condition

These landscapes have undergone substantial change in the 20th century: the decline in the value of meadows has resulted in some being converted to arable (where drainage was possible) while others were planted with poplar plantations or allowed to revert to woodland or scrub.