

## 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 they are frequently wet.

### Landholding and enclosure pattern

Most of this landscape type consists of small meadows, bounded by ditches and, where dry enough, hedges or trees. Fields landscapes 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 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the wet soils were exploited for hop-growing and Dagworth in the Haughley valley was the centre of the 19<sup>th</sup>-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 consists occupies the higher land towards the edges and occasionally within, as at 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 over laid 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, this is very different from other valley floor landscapes in the county were 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 20<sup>th</sup> century: the decline in the value of meadows has resulted in some being converted to arable (where drainage was possible) while others were planted poplar plantations or allowed to revert to woodland or scrub.