

## Plateau Claylands

### Landscape Sensitivity & Change

This landscape type is principally one large plateau of clay soil in the north of the county, with a second very small plateau to the south of Lowestoft. The main area is dissected by small streams and rivers which give important physical variation to the landscape. There is also considerable local variation in the extent and density of the network of hedges and trees; some areas being largely denuded of tree hedgerow cover while others are partially or completely intact.

The characteristic land cover is arable farmland divided by an irregular sinuous field pattern; there is very little ancient woodland, rather a scattering of small copses and occasional plantations associated with farmsteads and field ponds. The historic field pattern has in places been severely degraded by boundary rationalisation.

Former WWII airfields are recurring features of this landscape. They are often the focus of industrial and transport-orientated development that can have a considerable local visual impact.

Settlement is scattered widely throughout this landscape, with parishes tending to have multiple built clusters of various sizes: large often, elongated groups; outlying groups often based on green side settlement; and wayside settlements and farmsteads. These historic patterns within parishes are easily lost to infill and ribbon development.

The Plateau Claylands contains an important array of moated sites and farmsteads, both multi-period collections of buildings and some planned estate-type farmsteads. These are often the focus for redevelopment and modification. As well as the loss of characteristic features on individual buildings the associated development of garden curtilages and paddocks has a significant impact on the wider landscape, which increases with the frequency of such conversions.

There are several important commons and greens that are completely or partially intact. Many others have been enclosed, but remain as important open spaces that shape the relationship of buildings to each other and define the form of settlements. Intake of such land into gardens, or a change of use, has a significant impact on the character of the wider landscape.

Developments in agriculture have increased the demand for large-scale buildings, such as those associated with poultry production. These can cause considerable intrusion if the siting, colour and planting is not appropriate, or their visual impact is not adequately mitigated.

## Key Forces for Change

- Expansion of garden curtilage
- Change of land use to horse paddocks and other recreational uses
- Settlement expansion eroding the characteristic form and vernacular styles
- Conversion and expansion of farmsteads for residential uses
- Large-scale agricultural buildings in open countryside
- Redevelopment of former airfield sites to new uses
- Development of wind turbines

## Development Management

### **Manage the expansion of garden curtilage**

The expansion of a garden which is not in keeping with the existing local pattern has a significant impact on the local character and form of the built environment, as well as historic patterns of field enclosure. New or expanded curtilage should always be designed to fit into the local context and respect the established pattern. Furthermore, the visual impact of domestic clutter and garden paraphernalia on the wider countryside is often highly significant.

In many cases the extent of gardens in a village or cluster within a parish is relatively uniform, with all gardens following a defined boundary with agricultural land. If settlement expansion is required then the local pattern must be respected wherever possible. However, new garden curtilage may be required in other situations, such as in association with barn conversions, or dwellings for agricultural workers in open countryside.

If a large area of agricultural land is to be attached to a domestic dwelling the planning authority should define the extent of the garden curtilage. The objective is to create a clearly defined and agreed distinction between the wholly domestic areas and, for example, land to be used as a paddock.

Effective boundary planting is essential for reducing the visual intrusion of garden extensions into the open countryside. This should be conditioned as part of the change of land use and is especially important when a section of arable land is taken in, because in these cases there are often no existing hedgerows or other boundary features present.

The style of boundary fencing and hedging to be used can have a significant impact. The use of appropriate low impact materials, such as post and wire fencing is preferable to close boarded fencing or fence panels. If the latter are required they should be screened by appropriate hedging. The use of locally appropriate hedging species including hawthorn, field maple, dogwood and other typical clayland species should be specified in preference to non-native plantings such as leylandii or laurel for example.

### **Change of land use to horse paddocks**

The proliferation of post and rail fencing and subdivision of land into small paddocks using temporary tape can have a significant negative landscape impact. In ecologically sensitive areas the impact on the quality and condition of grassland can be adverse. Mitigation strategies in terms of design, layout and stocking rates should be employed where possible.

It may be possible to screen the site with an effective and appropriate planting scheme. However, it may also be necessary to specify the type and extent of fencing to be used. On a sloping site post and rail or white tape can be particularly intrusive. If necessary brown or green fencing tapes should be conditioned and planting should be required to soften the impact of the post and rail fencing. Furthermore the location of field shelters and material storage areas should be specified, to minimise the landscape impact of these activities.

Opportunities should also be taken to design a field layout that is in keeping with the local field pattern or the historic pattern of boundaries.

### **Settlement expansion eroding the characteristic form and vernacular styles**

Parishes in this landscape tend to consist of multiple clusters of varying sizes. The release of land for development should, if at all possible, reflect the local pattern. Ribbon development destroys this pattern and can have a considerable impact on the wider landscape. When vernacular styles and detailing are used for housing or other development the choice should echo that of the immediate locality or the specific cluster in which the development is proposed.

### **Conversion and expansion of farmsteads for residential and other uses**

These proposals require careful consideration and considerable attention to the detail of form and styling. Redevelopment proposals should also enhance the contribution these historic sites make to the wider landscape.

Specifically, any new building should usually be close to the existing cluster of buildings and should be subordinate in size to the principal buildings. The design, including the finishes such as tiles, brickwork, mortar, or wooden cladding should be appropriate for the style of buildings present. Staining used for exterior boarding should be capable of weathering in the traditional way, as a permanent dark or black colouring is not locally appropriate. As farmsteads in this landscape have usually developed over an extended period there may be a range of styles on site.

The change of land use, especially to residential curtilage, can often be more disruptive to the wider landscape than modifications to the buildings. The changes to the surrounding land from agricultural to residential, which entails the introduction of lighting and other suburban features, can be extremely intrusive. Unless the site is well hidden, it may be necessary to impose clear conditions relating to the extent of garden curtilage and how this is screened from the wider landscape.

### **Large scale agricultural buildings in open countryside**

The right choice of siting, form, orientation and colour of these buildings can make a considerable contribution to mitigating their impact. There are also opportunities to

design locally appropriate planting schemes to reduce the visual impact further.

Specifically, the siting of buildings should relate to an existing cluster of buildings whenever possible. Usually, although not in all cases, some shade of the colour green is preferred as this will integrate well with vegetation. The correct orientation of the building can also significantly change the visual impact of the development, and this consideration should always be explored.

In addition to new planting to mitigate the impact of a development, the option to modify the management of existing hedgerows should also be explored. There are often significant opportunities to retain these boundary features at a specific height. Furthermore, the location of the development in relation to existing trees that act either as screening or as a backdrop should be carefully considered. The planning authority should ensure that these trees are retained for the lifetime of the development.

New planting should be designed to integrate the development into the character of this landscape, and may consist of both backdrop and screening planting. Although there should be a preference for native tree species other options should not be overlooked. There are some specific local styles in this landscape, such as the use of 'Lombardy' poplar. In addition, on difficult sites, it is important to select species that will grow successfully - this may require options such as *Pinus nigra* or *Alnus incana*.

The care and maintenance of the planting should be made a condition of these developments. In many cases the landscape impact of these projects is only acceptable if it is mitigated by effective planting. The applicant should therefore provide a detailed scheme of planting and aftercare, which can form the basis of a condition. Furthermore, depending on the risks to be controlled, the planning authority may need to consider a 106 agreement to secure the landscaping and design requirements for an extended period.

#### **Development of former airfield sites**

In most cases a specific master-plan approach is the most effective way to deal with the development of these sites. It is then possible to implement strategic planting schemes to mitigate the visual impact of long-term growth on the site, rather than dealing with proposals and mitigation on a piecemeal basis.

Specific issues relating to airfield development also include the preservation of cultural and historic features, such as bunkers and control towers, and the need for a design that retains them in an appropriate setting. Also, the alignment of runways etc can be echoed in the layout of buildings and the arrangement of planting.

#### **Development of large-scale wind turbines**

These developments have a significant local visual impact that cannot be effectively ameliorated; however, they usually take place in those areas that are the most open and lacking in tree and hedgerow cover. An opportunity therefore exists to generate long-term landscape enhancement through extensive hedge planting schemes, which will provide a positive landscape legacy beyond the lifetime of the turbines. To achieve this, applicants should explore opportunities to manage funds generated by

the income from the development to improve the condition of the landscape. Such a scheme is likely to cover an area within 4-6km of the site. The principal objective is to compensate for the landscape impact of the development by providing a long-term legacy of landscape *compensation*. There is little scope for planting to act as *mitigation* except at locations more distant from the turbines, when their scale in the landscape is reduced. In these more distant locations planting can be used to remove turbines from the views of specific receptors or from the setting of listed buildings. This work can also be included in an offsite planting scheme.

### **Land Management Guidelines**

- Reinforce the historic pattern of sinuous field boundaries
- Recognise localised areas of late enclosure hedges when restoring and planting hedgerows
- Maintain and restore greens and commons
- Maintain and increase the stock of hedgerow trees
- Increase the area of woodland cover based on information from the Historic Landscape Characterisation and in consultation with the Archaeological Service
- Maintain and restore the stock of moats and ponds in this landscape