

Plateau Estate Farmlands

Landscape Sensitivity & Change

This is a flat or very gently rolling landscape of medium soils that is characteristic of the transition between the Brecks and the claylands, and between the Sandlings and the claylands.

The Plateau Estate Farmlands are more comprehensively settled than the adjacent Estate Sandlands with clustered village settlement and a scattering of farmsteads, however the multiple nucleation of settlement across a range of sizes within a parish, which is found in the claylands, is not usually present in these landscapes.

This is a relatively “new” landscape of C18th and C19th estate farms, and new woodlands. There are large number of enclosed heathlands and commons across these landscapes that are at the heart of this regular landscape pattern.

There is scattered woodland cover, mostly in the form of rectangular plantations and coverts. The overall planned nature of this landscape is complimented by a series of landscape parklands such as those at Fornham or Campsey Ash as well as the larger and more complete Somerleyton.

Key Forces for Change

- Expansion of existing settlements into this landscape and creation of new settlement patterns and clusters associated with infrastructure development.
- Conversion and expansion of farmsteads for residential uses.
- Large-scale agricultural buildings in open countryside.
- Redevelopment of former airfield sites to new uses.
- Changes in the management and use of landscape parklands.
- The introduction of new agricultural techniques.
- Leisure as a driving force for changes in economic activity.

Development Management

Settlement form and expansion

In respect of *visual impact* the regular nature of this landscape means that it does have more potential capacity, to accept significant settlement expansion than the ancient countryside of the claylands. The Plateau Farmland with its simpler and more modern land cover pattern and extensive regular pattern of tree cover can be adapted to accept larger growth.

Unlike the Estate Sandlands this landscape does have a history of settlement. Therefore there is some capacity, in terms of *landscape character*, for the tightly

clustered settlements to expand. However, it is important to integrate the settlement edge into the surrounding rural and sparsely settled countryside to minimise the impact on the character of the wider countryside. Furthermore, given the extensive European ecological designations (SPA and SAC) adjacent to parts of this landscape, the opportunities for significant settlement expansion are further constrained. Parts of this landscape type are also included within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Finally, if developments encroach on landscapes located on river valley sides or coastal slopes they will have a profound landscape impact on the character of these adjacent landscape types.

The settlement pattern in the Plateau Farmlands has a strong tendency towards clustered villages surrounded by a scattering of individual farmsteads. Wherever possible this clear distinction should be maintained.

Barn conversions and extensions

Given the range of substantial and “late” historic farm buildings within this landscape type there is considerable demand for these to be converted to other uses, although this may not be acceptable in terms of policy. If, however, such applications are supported the result may be large and extensive complexes of multiple dwellings or offices and light industrial units. C19th (and later) farm buildings are capable of accommodating new uses while conserving the character of the landscape rather more easily than older farm structures.

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 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.

The change of land use, especially to residential curtilage, can often be more disruptive to the wider landscape than modifications to the buildings. Changes to the surrounding land from agricultural to residential use, 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. The impact of new garden curtilage in this landscape is potentially even more significant than that in a clayland landscape because of the characteristic settlement pattern found here, as discussed above.

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. The plantations, shelterbelts, and tree lines found throughout this landscape provide opportunities to design locally appropriate planting schemes to reduce the visual impact further.

The siting of buildings should relate to an existing cluster of buildings whenever possible. Usually, although not in all cases, using a 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 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 these trees are retained for the lifetime of the development. The option to modify the management of existing hedgerows should also be explored. New planting should be designed to integrate the development into the character of the landscape, and may consist of both backdrop and screening planting.

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.

Redevelopment of former airfield sites

In most cases a specific master-plan approach is the most effective way to deal with 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.

Landscape of leisure - Golf courses, holiday complexes, caravan sites, tourist centres

The regular and recent nature of this landscape means that it does have more potential capacity, in respect of *visual impact*, to accept these developments but effective design and mitigation measures will be vital.

However, the *impact on the character* of the landscape both directly and indirectly may be highly significant and it may not be possible to effectively mitigate these impacts. Therefore such developments would constitute a profound and undesirable change to landscape character.

Changes in the management and use of landscape parklands

Any proposals for change could have a negative impact on these historic landscapes. The majority of sites, regardless of designation status, will require an overarching

management plan or strategy to guide changes. This should cover the maintenance, preservation and management of existing features, as well as the restoration or creation of new or lost ones. When sufficient information is not available the applicant should undertake detailed background research. Planning applications that affect historic parklands should therefore be accompanied by a suitable management plan or other detailed evidence, to support the proposals.

Impact of deer on the condition of woodland cover

Large-scale deer control should be supported and individual sites may require deer fencing. New woodland plantings, as well as screening and mitigation schemes, will require effective protection from deer to support their establishment.

Visual impact of cropping and production, and land use changes

The changes in cropping practices that have taken place across some of the Plateau Farmlands, such as the use of fleece and plastic, as well as outdoor pig production, have had a significant effect on the landscape. The siting and style of structures subject to planning control, such as static feed bins for pigs, poly tunnels or reservoirs should be appropriately conditioned to minimise their landscape impact.

Land Management Guidelines

- Reinforce the historic pattern of regular boundaries.
- Restore the quality of elm hedges with coppice management.
- Restore, maintain and enhance the network of tree belts and pattern of small plantations found across much of this landscape type.
- Restore, maintain and enhance the historic parklands and the elements within them.