

Rolling Estate Sandlands

Landscape Sensitivity & Change

This is a sloping valley side landscape type that has been, and continues to be, the focus for settlement and other built structures in the Estate Sandlands, especially in coastal parts of Suffolk.

The Rolling Estate Sandlands are comprehensively settled with villages, hamlets and farmsteads. The cores of villages are generally on the valley sides although settlement change and enlargement may have encroached onto the plateau landscape.

The enclosure pattern is usually more complex than the adjacent arable plateau landscape. The slopes can be dissected by short streams, and have a scattering of small plantations and parklands on them.

The vernacular style can often show a degree of uniformity, with an estate style often prevalent. Farmsteads often exhibit features of C18th and C19th improvement with ranges of “model farm” type buildings

The upper slopes of this landscape are often dotted with plantation woodland or occasionally small landscape parklands associated with late 18th and early 19th century houses of the *Nouveau riche*, especially in areas close to Ipswich or Bury St Edmunds.

The combination of soil type, agricultural and silvacultural practice, along with areas of remnant heathland, has created important wildlife habitats for a small range of internationally significant bird species. In many cases, especially in the west, there are European designated sites for the protection of these species. Furthermore, most of the coastal part of this landscape type is included within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which also includes a series of sensitive and designated estuary sites.

The spatial relationship of this landscape to the adjacent valley floor, as well as flat coastal landscape types such as coastal levels, saltmarsh and intertidal flats and the beach, mean that change and development here can have an extensive visual impact.

Key Forces for Change

- Expansion of settlements.
- Leisure as a driving force for changes in economic activity in this landscape, especially, but not exclusively, on the coastal parts of this landscape.
- Changes of land management and land use.
- The introduction of new agricultural techniques such as turf or outdoor pig production and changes in the production of high value irrigated crops such as the use of plastic and fleece on a large scale.

Development management

Exaggerated visual impact of the height of buildings and structures

In these valley side landscapes, the visual impact of new vertical elements is increased by the landform. Therefore new buildings are likely to have a significant impact on both the character and visual amenity of valley floor and valley side landscape types. The setting of specific features and elements of these landscapes, such as small-scale enclosure patterns or historic buildings and monuments, can also be significantly damaged.

The majority of development will, to some degree, be subject to this problem. Therefore, it is essential to manage this issue effectively, taking every opportunity at the earliest stages of the development of the proposal to modify and improve it, or to be clear with the applicant that the impact of the proposal is unacceptable or may be at a high risk of refusal due to landscape impacts.

Settlement form and expansion

Valley side landscapes have historically been a focus for settlement. However, large-scale expansion should be confined to the adjacent plateau. In this location the landscape and visual impact can be more easily mitigated with effective planting and design.

Settlement extension in a valley side landscape is likely to have a significant visual impact and adversely affect the character of the landscape, including that of the adjoining valley floor. A comprehensive Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment is essential to identify the risks and the options for mitigation. These developments tend to create a highly visible new “roofscape” on the sides of valleys. The effect of this can be partially mitigated by planting within the development as well as on the perimeter and offsite. It is essential to ensure that there is sufficient space within the development for effective planting, and that any requirement for offsite planting is considered at the earliest stage. The proposals for mitigation planting must always be commensurate with the scale of the development and the capacity of the landscape to absorb the development without damage to the landscape character.

It is important to maintain the existing pattern of settlement clusters on the valley sides and minimise visual intrusion on the very sensitive landscapes on the valley floor. New building here needs to be carefully located; it must be of appropriate scale and style as well as being integrated into the existing pattern of vegetation and settlement. There may also be specific styles related to a particular landed estate, which should be considered as a design option. Avoid, wherever possible, ribbon development on valley sides and slopes when this will cause settlement clusters to merge.

Large-scale agricultural buildings on or near valley sides

The siting, form, orientation and colour of these buildings make a considerable contribution to mitigating their impact. In a valley side situation, especially if located on the skyline, they will have a considerable visual impact. It is preferable to seek a location outside the valley where the visual impact of this type of development can be mitigated much more effectively. However, especially on the coast, farmsteads are especially concentrated on the valley sides overlooking estuaries, so it may not be

possible to find a suitable alternative location. In these situations ensuring that the proposal is fully part of an existing building cluster and backed by trees are important approaches to reducing the visual impact of these developments.

Barn conversions, extensions and modifications to existing housing stock

The nature of this landscape, and the relationship to the adjacent valley floor, means that any of these changes can have a much greater impact on character and condition than they might in a flatter landscape. To accommodate these changes the visual impact and cultural appropriateness will need careful consideration.

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 on 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 local options for this are quite limited, consisting principally of hawthorn or perhaps gorse. However, in some locations the influence of a landed estate may mean there is a locally distinctive tradition of non-native tree or hedge planting.

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

The regular and recent nature of this landscape means that while the Estate Sandlands *plateau* does have some potential capacity, in respect of *visual impact*, to accept these developments, the landform of the valley sides means that risk of significant visual impact on valley floor or estuary landscapes, for example, is very

high. The risk to visually sensitive and designated landscapes, such as those within the SC&H AONB, is high and the opportunities for mitigation are usually limited.

Furthermore, 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 the landscape character.

Applicants will need to demonstrate that any such proposals will not have a significant impact. A landscape and visual impact assessment is likely to be essential for this, and the scope of this work should be drawn up in consultation with the local planning authority.

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.

Visual impact of cropping production and land use changes

The changes in cropping practices that have taken place across much of the Estate Sandlands as a whole, such as the use of fleece and plastic, and outdoor pig production, have also had a significant effect on this 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, maintain and enhance the pattern of locally distinctive “pine lines”.
- Restore, maintain and enhance the network of tree belts and pattern of small plantations found across much of this landscape type.
- Restore and maintain landscape parklands and their features.