

Settled Chalklands

Landscape Sensitivity & Change

These landscapes are on free draining chalk and gravel outcrops on the edge of the fens. They have historically been the focus for settlement and are scattered with a series of small hamlets that have expanded, especially West Row and Beck Row. Mildenhall and Lakenheath have also expanded into this landscape. The relationship of this urban settlement to the surrounding rural landscape can be potentially problematic, requiring effective control to minimise landscape and visual impact.

Outside the main built up areas of Lakenheath and Mildenhall, the Settled Chalklands consist of scattered clusters of settlement surrounded by an open arable landscape of large fields such as around Wamill Hall, or the land north of Maids Cross Hill. There are very few boundary hedges or tree lines and large open areas of landscape created by airfields.

On the Mildenhall plateau there are a series of settlements, Beck Row and West Row being the largest, but there is also Thisley Green and Wilde Street. These settlements are, for the most part, modern in character; they are also where the majority of tree and hedgerow cover is concentrated.

Undley and Wilde Street retain a more rural character reminiscent of the Settled Fenland landscape, although more comprehensively settled. There is little woodland cover, but the historically important Aspoll Close is an important historic landscape and ecological feature.

The presence of the two airbases is an important driver for economic activity and settlement expansion. The majority of this landscape is under considerable pressure from expansion of settlements and other developments.

Key Forces for Change

- Expansion and modification of settlements
- Changes of land management and land use
- Large scale buildings in the open countryside
- Expansion of garden curtilage

Development Management

Minimise the impact of settlement expansion on the surrounding landscapes

This landscape has been, and continues to be, a focus for settlement. It is important to minimise the impact of development on the adjacent countryside of the Settled Chalklands and the surrounding landscape of the Settled Fenlands.

The characteristic pattern of planting found in this landscape, especially in relation to

clusters of development, means that it is possible to design effective and locally appropriate boundary planting that will minimise the impact of settlement expansion on the surrounding landscape and the adjacent landscape of the Settled Fenlands. In the absence of effective and well managed planting the flat open character of this landscape means that any new development can have considerable visual impact over a wide area.

Settlement form and expansion

The objective should be to maintain the existing distinction between, and individual form of, settlement clusters. This is especially important where these are still apparent, for example at Undley and Wilde Street.

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. However large buildings set against the open sky should use shades of grey or blue. 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 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.

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.

Change of land use to horse paddocks and other recreational uses

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.

The regular pattern of this landscape means that in many cases it will be possible to

screen the site in a locally appropriate manner with new tree lines or hedges. However, it may also be necessary to specify the type and extent of fencing to be used. 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 controlled, to minimise the visual impact of these activities.

The visual impact of cropping production and land use changes

In this landscape changes in cropping practices, such as the use of poly-tunnels, have taken place. These can have a significant visual impact. However, the flat landform and the use of existing and new tree lines can be effective in mitigating much of the visual impact. Furthermore the siting and style of structures subject to planning control, such as static feed bins for outdoor pig production, poly tunnels or reservoirs should be appropriately conditioned to minimise their landscape and visual impact.

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. However, the modern simple character of this landscape means that it is, in comparison with many other landscapes, easy to mitigate the impacts of these changes with effective planting.

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.

In this landscape, gardens are generally well screened by planting as there is a need to create good shelter from the wind. If boundary fencing is to be used this can, depending on the choice of materials, have a significant visual impact. The use of 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 with planting.

Land Management Guidelines

- Restore and maintain the historic pattern of regular field boundaries.
- Restore and maintain the pattern of shelterbelts and tree lines found in this landscape.
- Maintain the condition and habitat diversity of chalk grassland and arable flora habitats.
- Safeguard the widespread archaeological remains relating to early settlement found in this landscape.