

Coastal Levels

Landscape Sensitivity & Change

This is an extensive, flat, and open landscape that has long views within it, and out to the adjacent rising ground. It is therefore highly sensitive to any interruption of the horizon by built structures of all but the smallest scale. Development on the adjacent slopes, including associated land use change, can have a profound effect on the setting of, and views from, this landscape.

Cattle grazed grassland is the characteristic land cover. However, the extent of this has been reduced by agricultural change. The switch to arable production has, in many places, led to a loss of characteristic landscape features and a simplification of the dyke network.

Carr and plantation woodland is a small but significant feature within this landscape although both agricultural change and nature conservation management has reduced woodland cover. The inland side of this landscape, and the adjoining slope, is often wooded and so maintaining this feature is important to the setting of this landscape.

The demands for habitat creation and enhanced wildlife conservation, in conjunction with adaptation to sea level rise, are already threatening the existence of parts of this landscape. One outcome of this coastal squeeze is likely to be an expansion of the landscape of Saltmarsh and Intertidal Flats into the area covered by Coastal Levels. The management of these changes will require active intervention in the physical processes and a clear long-term vision.

This landscape is a key characteristic of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and, in combination with the landscape types around it, contributes to the special character of the AONB. Furthermore, much of this landscape is part of, or adjacent to, protected and ecologically sensitive sites, including European Designated Sites.

Key Forces for Change

- Sea level rise.
- Management of land for nature conservation
- Changes to agricultural practice and land use within this landscape.
- Changes of land management and land use adjacent to this landscape especially the changes to the quantity, scale and style of built development.
- Large-scale infrastructure projects related to Sizewell and the port of Felixstowe.

Development Management

Conserve the setting of this landscape

The construction of new buildings on the coastal slope, or changes of land use, can

easily have an adverse affect on the setting of this landscape. If these changes are to be permitted the highest standards of design and effective mitigation strategies should be applied to minimise the detrimental impact on both the visual amenity and landscape character of the Coastal Levels.

Construction of buildings that project above the skyline should be avoided if at all possible, while repositioning the proposal or adding a planting scheme behind the building can be partially successful. However, reducing the height of the development may also be required and should be considered even if this entails significant level changes.

Even if it does not puncture the skyline the majority of new building is likely to be visible from the coastal levels. Therefore, construction related to existing clusters and the use of sympathetic and unobtrusive materials is always to be preferred.

Manage the impact of large-scale infrastructure projects

Very large-scale infrastructure projects that have an overriding public interest may take place in, or adjacent to, this landscape. However, these will require comprehensive management and long-term planning to minimise the landscape and visual impact during both the construction and operational phases of the project.

Although large-scale construction will cause a significant visual change, this landscape together with the associated Saltmarsh and Intertidal Flats and the beach (Coastal Dunes and Shingle Ridges), have some capacity to accommodate large-scale structures. This is because of their open and simple nature. However, it is important to minimise the impact of lighting and associated small-scale clutter as this will detract significantly from the visual and experiential qualities of this landscape, as well as the special character of the AONB.

Manage coastal realignment

Where realignment is deemed to be necessary the process should be managed to maintain and enhance local landscape character. Without the active management of this process coastal levels may not return to a mosaic of salt-marsh and intertidal flats. The remains of structures such as river walls and dyke networks may restrict the movement of water and sediment, therefore the process of change is likely to require active intervention.

Installation of flood or sea defence structures

Wherever possible the landscape and visual impact of these structures should be minimised. The use of sympathetic materials and low, unobtrusive structures will reduce the impact of these interventions. However they may put at risk natural processes that maintain some landscape types such as Coastal Dunes and Shingle Ridges, and Saltmarsh and Intertidal Flats.

Maintenance of sites for wildlife conservation

There is continued scope for habitat management and enhancement of sites for wildlife benefit. However, these changes need to be managed sensitively with careful consideration of the historic landscape and wider visual landscape impacts, as well as

the issues raised by increased visitor numbers.

Land Management Guidelines

Support the continuation of traditional economic activities

Restore and maintain the grazing with cattle. The continuation of traditional agricultural practices is integral to the character and condition of these landscapes and grazing is often critical to the successful management of important wildlife sites in this landscape.

Restore and retain the pattern of drainage

The pattern of meadows divided by ditches and dykes are a characteristic feature of this landscape and should be maintained with sympathetic management. This will also deliver ecological benefits.

Maintain levels of grassland

Arable reversion through agri-environment schemes, or with the expansion of livestock enterprises, can help maintain the character of this landscape and also deliver ecological benefits.

Encourage and support appropriate management of woodlands

These landscapes contain a proportion of wet and plantation woodland, and it is important to maintain the appropriate balance of grassland and woodland. While wet woodland is an important part of the habitat mix in this landscape excessive creation of plantation woodland should be avoided.