

13. Lowland Village Farmlands

Summary description

This is a well settled, low lying landscape which is often crossed by major river corridors. The high density of settlement, intensive agriculture and major transport infrastructure mean that this is often a busy, rural landscape.

Location

Located predominately in west Norfolk, south Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire.

Physical environment

The shape of the land

A generally low lying, gently rolling topography, although some areas adjacent to lower lying levels can appear elevated.

Ground type/Soils

A mixture of soil types including both productive sandy and clayey brown soils.

Natural / water features

This landscape is drained by small streams and ditches which are visually indistinct. Occasionally there are gravel extraction lakes (e.g. Hemingfords and Buckden) along the River Great Ouse and within the Ivel valley in Bedfordshire.

Vegetation and land use

Ecological character

A productive, intensively farmed agricultural landscape, with patches of *wet woodland*, *reedbed* and *wet grassland* along river valleys and in damp, low-lying hollows. Almost 10% of these sites are afforded some degree of designated protection.

Land use

Arable land use predominates with some areas of pasture and orchards. Occasional mineral extraction, lake creation and brickworks.

Tree cover

Groups of trees, often around farmsteads and occasional small plantations.

Historic and built environment

Historical development

A landscape dominated by the late enclosure of common fields. Large pockets of earlier enclosure also exist, also created from common fields. All fieldscapes have experienced significant modification during the 20th century.

Enclosure pattern

Medium/large scale, regular field pattern, defined by well trimmed hedgerows. Field systems include a mix of rectilinear & sinuous patterns, reflecting the process of planned surveyor enclosure from common fields.

Settlement pattern

A dense, largely nucleated, rural settlement pattern composed of small towns (e.g. Biggleswade), villages and outlying farmsteads. Larger towns (e.g. Bedford) often exert an urbanising influence on this landscape.

Building descriptions

Main building materials include Gault clay, brick, clay tile, render and thatch.

Historic features

Medieval moated sites and fine stone churches are a characteristic feature.

Perceptual qualities

Visual experience

Sparse woodland cover giving rise to open character and extensive views.

Tranquillity

Away from major transport routes this landscape has a greater sense of tranquillity although intensive farming activity and a high density settlement pattern mean that many areas retain a busy feel.

RLCT 13 Lowland Village Farmlands

Key priorities

The key integrated objectives are:

- A. Maintain strong, open drainage pattern
- B. Manage and enhance the agricultural landscapes and address loss of biodiversity from agricultural intensification and the impact of 'horseyculture'
- C. Plan for issues and opportunities resulting from mineral extraction and urban growth, including biodiversity gain and public access

Objectives	Integrated interests and services
<p>A. Maintain a strong, open drainage pattern</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. promote wider and continued uptake of ELS (Entry level Stewardship) and HLS (Higher level Stewardship) schemes to restore and reinstate flood meadows from arable 2. restore and reinstate riparian features and vegetation including willow pollards, wet woodland and specimen native black poplar 3. enhance the value of existing restored mineral sites and development areas for biodiversity, access and recreation 4. enhance the opportunities on larger water bodies (e.g. Grafham Water) for active recreation, balancing with the needs of biodiversity and maintaining water quality 	<p>landscape, biodiversity, access, sense of place, tranquillity, recreation, flood alleviation,</p>
<p>B. Manage and enhance the agricultural landscape and address loss of biodiversity from agricultural intensification and the impact of 'horseyculture'</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. promote wider and continued uptake of ES and HLS schemes to broaden the landscape, access and biodiversity value of the claylands including use of winter stubble for bird populations 2. restore gappy hedges and reinstate lost hedgerows adding new features using indigenous species mixes and increased number of hedgerow trees of appropriate locally native species 3. reinstate species rich grassland where feasible and locally in character 4. restore and enhance ponds which provide valuable habitat for protected species (e.g. Great Crested Newts) 	<p>landscape, biodiversity, access sense of place tranquillity, carbon storage</p>

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. enhance ditches through clearance and planting where appropriate and provide improved opportunities for storm water retention 6. manage areas of new paddocks and promote appropriate enclosures with hedges rather than wire fences 7. manage existing woodlands using traditional methods (e.g. coppicing), extend existing woodlands, create new woodlands and create linkages with ancient woodland sites and smaller woodland blocks in the valleys but without creating too much visual enclosure in the landscape 8. promote extended and enhanced access within agricultural landscapes 	
<p>C. Plan for issues and opportunities resulting from mineral extraction and urban growth, including biodiversity and public access</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. support and create a new landscape within the Marston Vale through a mosaic of woodland, water, agriculture and development 2. create and enhance infrastructure corridors through the area focusing on opportunities for sustainable access, recreation and regeneration including: road corridors, waterways (e.g. Bedford Milton Keynes waterway link), guided bus routes and SUD systems, combining appropriate well designed landscaping together with habitat creation 3. create new and enhanced landscapes in visually prominent urban fringes softening the interface with the rural landscape 4. restoration of former clay pits and landfill sites to realise a mix of development opportunities including recreation, promoting the management of bio- and geo-diversity value (e.g. Stoneworts, Dragonflies and Great Crested Newt populations at Orton Pit , Peterborough) 5. creation of new green infrastructure facilities for existing and new populations with sustainable access to local people (e.g. country parks) 6. enhance and extend the network of rights of way in the area with focus on strategic routes In accordance to requirements of local GI strategies 	<p>landscape, biodiversity, cultural heritage, geo-diversity, sense of place, recreation, flood alleviation, carbon storage</p>