Settled Fenlands

Landscape Sensitivity & Change

This is a flat plain where most of the land is at sea level, but small sandy islands and ridges may rise to about 4m above sea level. It is a landscape of relatively small, narrow fields that are divided by straight, water-filled drains, with long axes that lie mainly at right angles to the former cattle drove roads which radiate out from the higher dryer land, or “hards” of Mildenhall.

Unlike the Planned Fenlands, in the Settled Fenlands there is a pattern of small-scale landholding, as a result of which there are frequent changes of ownership over small groups of fields. There are no real village cores in this landscape type, rather there are a series of very small hamlets or clusters of farms. These farms tend to be beside the roads, rather than set back on their own land, as they are in the Planned Fenlands.

There is tree cover in the form of small plantations of poplar and conifer belts or even some pine lines. Also, the roads are often lined by trees and occasionally hedges which is in marked contrast to the Planned Fenland landscape. Overall trees, especially lines of poplars, are usually a visually prominent and constant feature of this landscape.

Although this is also a large-scale landscape, the tree cover, the mixed agriculture and the more complex pattern of settlement means that the Settled Fenlands feel more “lived in” than the Planned Fenlands. As a result it experiences the wider range of pressures for change typical of many rural landscapes.

Key Forces for Change

- Large-scale agricultural buildings in open countryside.
- Change of land use to horse paddocks and other recreational uses.
- The introduction of new agricultural techniques.
- Extension of garden curtilage.

Development Management

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. Planting with poplar in the Settled Fenlands landscape type is usually both appropriate and effective. However, on some sites local variation of planting may mean there are opportunities to use other species.

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 presence of trees lines throughout this landscape means that in many cases it will be possible to screen the site in a locally appropriate manner. 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 fleece and plastic, and outdoor pig production that 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 pigs, 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. Furthermore the wider landscape impact of these changes are usually further reduced by the number of tree lines found in this flat landscape.

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 these latter are required they should be screened with planting.

Land Management Guidelines

- Restore and maintain the historic pattern of the regular dyke network.
- Restore and maintain the pattern of shelterbelts and tree lines found in this landscape.
- Maintain the distinctive character of drove-ways enclosed by planting.
- Maintain condition and habitat diversity of the dyke network with sympathetic management.
- Safeguard the widespread archaeological remains relating to early settlement found in this landscape.