Valley Meadowlands & Fens

Landscape Sensitivity & Change

These are flat valley floor landscapes that are still largely dominated by grazing land, punctuated by small carr woodlands and willow plantations. There is an occasional scattering of farmsteads on the few areas of higher land found here.

There are also occasional valley fens, such as at Pakenham, which are important features of this landscape as well as being valuable wildlife sites. They require sensitive management to maintain this interest.

The Valley Meadowlands and Fens are mostly narrow and enclosed by the valley sides. They can be profoundly affected by changes to the management of land and the construction buildings on the valley sides.

Changes in land use, the loss of grassland and the creation of small horse paddocks and associated structures, can significantly degrade the quality and condition of this landscape.

New woodland plantations and the loss of grazing, leading to the spread of scrub, can also adversely affect the balance of woodland and grassland.

Key Forces for Change

- Development and land use change adjacent to this landscape type.
- The loss of grazing by cattle.
- The creation of new woodlands.
- The introduction of horse grazing.
- Neglect of the characteristic ditch and hedgerow networks.
- The conversion of grassland to arable production.
- Restoration and maintenance of valley fens for wildlife conservation.

Development Management

Conserve the setting of this landscape
The construction of new buildings on the valley sides, 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 valley floor.

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 valley floor. Therefore, construction related to existing clusters and the use of sympathetic and unobtrusive materials is always to be preferred.

Mitigate the impact of horse grazing where possible
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.

It may be possible to screen the site with an effective and appropriate planting scheme. However, it may also be necessary to specify the type and extent of fencing to be used. Fencing, either post and rail or white tape, can be particularly intrusive. 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 specified, to minimise the landscape impact of these activities.

Opportunities should also be taken to design a field layout that is in keeping with the local field pattern or the historic pattern of boundaries.

Maintenance of valley fens for wildlife conservation
There is continued scope for habitat management and enhancement of these fen sites for wildlife benefit. However these changes need to be managed sensitively, giving careful consideration to the historic landscape and wider visual landscape impacts.

Land Management Guidelines

Support the continuation of traditional economic activities
Restore and maintain the grazing with cattle and sheep. 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.

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 though agri-environment schemes, or with the expansion of livestock enterprises, can help maintain the character of this landscape and also deliver ecological benefit.

Encourage and support appropriate planting and 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.