

Wooded Chalk Slopes

Landscape Sensitivity & Change

This landscape type consists of a handful of small valleys that have been cut into chalk. Therefore the rivers are small and can be no more than seasonal in their flow. As a result the break between valley sides and valley floor is much less distinct than in other parts of Suffolk.

The landscape is generally scattered with farmsteads and hamlets, but there are only two villages in this landscape, Moulton and Dalham, that are both strongly nucleated. Most of the other settlements in this area are on the edge of the adjoining estate landscapes e.g. Lidgate, Gazeley and Upend.

The enclosure pattern is regular and made of large arable fields surrounded by small hawthorn hedges with a scattering of small plantation woodlands. Ancient woodland blocks and parklands fringe this landscape at the top of the slope.

Immediately to the south of Newmarket the landscape is a “studscape” of shelterbelts and plantations associated with the horseracing industry.

Key Forces for Change

- Change of land use to horse paddocks.
- Construction of large agricultural buildings.
- Expansion of garden curtilage.
- Impact of deer on the condition of woodland cover.
- Changes to settlement form pattern and building style.

Development management

Exaggerated visual impact of the height of buildings and structures

In these valley side landscapes, the visual impact of new vertical elements is increased by the landform. Therefore new buildings are likely to have a significant impact on both the character and visual amenity of valley floor and valley side landscape types. The setting of specific features and elements of these landscapes, such as small-scale enclosure patterns or historic buildings and monuments can also be significantly damaged.

The majority of development will, to some degree, be subject to this problem. Therefore, it is essential to manage this issue effectively, taking every opportunity at the earliest stages of the development of the proposal to modify and improve it or to be clear with the applicant that the impact of the proposal is unacceptable or may be at a high risk of refusal due to landscape impacts.

Settlement form and expansion

It is important to maintain the existing pattern of settlement clusters on the valley sides and minimise visual intrusion on the very sensitive landscapes on the valley floor. New building here needs to be carefully located; it must be of appropriate scale and style as well as being integrated into the existing pattern of vegetation and settlement. Avoid, wherever possible, ribbon development on valley sides and slopes when this will cause settlement clusters to merge.

Barn conversions and extensions

These proposals require careful consideration and considerable attention to the detail of form and styling. Redevelopment proposals should also enhance the contribution these historic sites make to the wider landscape.

Specifically, any new building should usually be close to the existing cluster of buildings and should be subordinate in size to the principal buildings. The design, including the finishes such as tiles, brickwork, mortar, or wooden cladding should be appropriate for the style of buildings present. Staining used for exterior boarding should be capable of weathering in the traditional way, as a permanent dark or black colouring is not locally appropriate. As farmsteads in this landscape have usually developed over an extended period there may be a range of styles on site.

The change of land use, especially to residential curtilage, can often be more disruptive to the wider landscape than modifications to the buildings. The changes to the surrounding land from agricultural to residential use, which entails the introduction of lighting and other suburban features, can be extremely intrusive. Unless the site is well hidden, it may be necessary to impose clear conditions relating to the extent of garden curtilage and how this is screened from the wider landscape. Usually the risk of new domestic curtilage damaging the visual amenity and character of a valley side landscape is significant because of the shape of the land.

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. The visual impact of domestic clutter and garden paraphernalia can be particularly intrusive in these sloping landscapes. New or expanded curtilage should always be designed to fit into the local context and respect the established pattern.

In many cases the extent of gardens in a village or cluster within a parish is relatively uniform, with all gardens following a defined boundary with agricultural land. If settlement expansion is required then the local pattern must be respected wherever possible. However, new garden curtilage may be required in other situations, such as in association with barn conversions, or dwellings for agricultural workers in open countryside.

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.

Effective boundary planting is essential for reducing the visual intrusion of garden extensions into the open countryside. This should be conditioned as part of the change of land use and is especially important when a section of arable land is taken in, because in these cases there are often no existing hedgerows or other boundary features present.

The style of boundary fencing and hedging to be used can have a significant impact. The use of appropriate 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 by appropriate hedging. In the wooded chalk slopes, this is likely to be purely hawthorn, with ash and oak as hedgerow trees.

Change of land use to horse paddocks

Outside the horseracing industry, the proliferation of post and rail fencing and subdivision of land into small paddocks, using temporary tape can have a significant 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. On a sloping site 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. The extension of the “studscape” also has the potential to have significant visual impact and to cause substantial change to landscape character. However, if this takes place adjacent to existing studs it is possible that it can be accommodated within the landscape.

Impact of deer on the condition of woodland cover

Large-scale deer control should be supported and individual site may require deer fencing. New woodland plantings, as well as screening and mitigation schemes, will require effective protection from deer to support their establishment.

Land Management Guidelines

- Reinforce the historic pattern of regular field boundaries.
- Maintain and increase the stock of hedgerow trees.
- Maintain the area of woodland cover.
- Conserve and enhance areas of chalk grassland.