

## 4. A: RURAL RIVER VALLEY

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### LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES

- 4.1. The Rural River Valley Landscape Type is very important in giving spatial definition to and creating variety within the South Norfolk Landscape. There are five areas which correspond to this landscape type: The broad valley of the River Waveney in the south of the district, the narrower valleys of the Tud and Wensum, west of Norwich, the meandering rural reaches of the River Yare/Tiffey south west of Norwich, and the distinctive River Tas, which runs in a south-north direction from Long Stratton to the south of Norwich. The boundary of this landscape type is defined primarily by topography and corresponds with the upper crest of the valley side, which generally occurs below the 30m AOD contour. Occasionally, the perceived boundary has been affected by cultural features which have transgressed this natural boundary to either extend or reduce the influence of the valley-form character, for example in the valley of the Waveney where the settlements have grown up as an integral part of the valley landscape, although now extend beyond the natural valley line.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- **Distinct valley landform** created by glacial and fluvial activity, with wide flat valley floodplains, which create important divisions within the district landscape.
- **Semi-enclosed landscape** with long views within the valley but restricted views from the valley, creating occasional areas of more intimate character.
- **Perceived presence of a river that is often not actually visible within the landscape** but which at close-range is seen to be attractive, of significant size and distinct character.
- **Willow pollards and lines of poplar** flanking ditches and watercourses on the valley floor, plus reeds and marsh in areas.
- **Attractive river crossings** including fords and old bridges approached by sunken lanes.
- **Areas of pastoral floodplain** predominantly grazed by cattle, set within the arable landscape that occupies the valley sides.
- **Historic quality to areas within the valley landscape** due to the presence of visual reminders of the valleys' settled past, particularly the earthworks at Venta Icenorum, watermills, historic river crossings and round-towered churches.
- **Settlements predominantly small and nucleated of strong vernacular character with scattered farmsteads** on the valley floor or linear settlements at the valley side crest, with a few large towns of 'market town' quality distinct to the Waveney.
- **Characteristic vernacular** architecture particularly including red brick and

Dutch gable ends, windmills, weather-boarded watermills and round towered churches.

- **Presence of characteristic ecological assemblages**, uncommon or unfound elsewhere in the district, including wetland vegetation, heathland and wet meadows/pastures.

## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

- 4.2. Geologically the river valleys are perhaps the most interesting and varied parts of the district. Here a combination of glacial and later fluvial processes have cut into the ubiquitous Glacial Till to sometimes reveal the sand and gravel of the Norwich Crag and, more rarely, the underlying chalk strata. Over these earlier strata, glacial sand and gravel and later terrace and alluvium have been deposited. These processes have created the distinctive valley landform, which is undoubtedly the defining feature of the Rural River Valley landscape type. The valleys have developed a gentle u-shaped profile. However, there is a certain degree of variability, with valley forms ranging from large-scale, open valley landscapes with broad flat flood plains such as the River Waveney to more confined valley forms such as the River Tud. The valley sides appear gentle, but are in fact deceptively steep in places: creating slopes of up to nearly 1:1. Views within the valleys are often quite long range and open, although becoming more intimate in small pockets close to river crossings. Views out of the valleys are restricted although the valley landscapes can often be viewed from the surrounding higher areas. Views of landmarks are a feature of the Rural River Valleys.
- 4.3. Although water is an essential part of this landscape it is usually unseen except at close range: its presence alluded to by other features such as bridges or vegetation. East Anglia is one of the driest parts of England and because of this the rivers tend to be smaller than might otherwise be expected in an area so close to the sea. Despite this, wherever they are visible, the Rivers Waveney, Tas, Yare, Tud, Tiffey and Wensum are perceived as 'rivers'. This is considered distinct from the River Chet, which (at least within South Norfolk District) appears as little more than a stream without a defined valley floor, and hence is not considered to correspond to the Rural River Valley Landscape Type and is instead included within the 'Tributary Farmland' landscape type. The overall direction of drainage is eastwards with all but a small area in the west of the district ultimately draining into the River Yare and thence to the sea.
- 4.4. The river valleys appear to have been settled relatively early and by Roman times the main settlements were almost all within the river valleys, including the Roman administrative centre at Caistor St Edmund (Venta Icenorum) in the Tas Valley. Other early valley settlements included those along the Waveney such as Scole and Ditchingham and numerous smaller settlements in the Tud/Wensum Valley around the site of modern-day Costessey. Remnant features from this former eminence include, for example, the high proportion of round-towered churches observable in the Waveney valley and indicated by the high number of Scheduled Ancient



Monuments (SAMs) in this landscape type.

- 4.5. Today, the valleys tend to be sparsely settled with a peaceful and almost remote rural character. Settlement comprises scattered farmsteads, an occasional large hall, or small villages clustered around attractive fords or bridges, such as at Barford and Bawburgh in the Yare Valley (Bawburgh Bridge is a Scheduled Ancient Monument), or other such features, such as one of the water or paper mills which were established in the valleys between the late seventeenth and eighteenth century. Sometimes small, usually linear, settlements are found on the upper slopes or crest of the valley sides such as Shotesham in the Tas Valley and Costessey on the crest between the Tud and Wensum. Larger towns relating to valley landscapes are confined to the linear belt along the River Waveney that includes Roydon/Diss, Harleston, Scole, Wortwell, (and Bungay and Beccles in adjoining Suffolk). Diss and Harleston grew up as some of the most important market towns in Norfolk until the close of the eighteenth century. The settlements tend to be of an attractive vernacular character.
- 4.6. Some of the valleys have been exploited as transportation corridors with the main London-Norwich railway line and the A140 passing through the Tas Valley. These patterns relate, in part, to earlier settlement history and the Roman Road connecting Scole to Caister St Edmund. The roads, particularly cross-valley rural lanes, are sometimes sunken.
- 4.7. The landscape around the settlements is predominantly agricultural including both arable farmland and pastoral cattle-grazed landscapes which are less common elsewhere in the district, leading to the distinctly 'green' character to the valleys. This pattern of pastoral use on the valley floor was established early with the Waveney identified as being one of the prime dairying regions of Norfolk during the Mediaeval period. The reason for this would seem to be that the valley landscapes are of a lower agricultural grade (commonly grade 3) with poorer agricultural soils prone to flooding. Areas of horse-grazing and pig-rearing are also found in the valleys. Hedgerows are generally poor or of low species diversity and gappy. 'Post and wire' fences are the common field boundary in many areas.
- 4.8. The Rural River Valleys are some of the most wooded landscapes in South Norfolk although woodland cover is variable with mixed woodland more characteristic of the northern valleys than those in the south. Ancient woodland is uncommon. Many stretches of the rivers are tree-lined and neat lines of poplar and willow pollards are characteristic, particularly in the valleys of the Yare, Tud and Wensum. Plantation conifers are also found in the valleys to the north of the district. Heath, uncommon in South Norfolk, is found in some river valleys - notably the Waveney where it has formed on the sandy and peaty soils.

## LANDSCAPE ASSETS

✓✓✓ very characteristic/important   ✓✓ characteristic/important   ✓ noticeably present/important

– Asset not present or present but by virtue of extent or quality does not contribute significantly to landscape character

ASSET/LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE		NOTES
<b>NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL:</b>		
<b>Nationally important ecological assemblages</b>	✓✓✓	Heathland present in the Waveney Valley. Wetland assemblages particularly important in Waveney, Tas and Wensum. Some areas of ancient woodland
<b>Presence of Scheduled Ancient Monuments which are visible within the landscape</b>	✓✓✓	Includes the important earthworks at Venta Icenorum, Tasburgh and at Arminghall as well as extant features such as Bridges (e.g. at Bawburgh).
<b>Presence of round-towered or 'Saxon' churches</b>	✓✓	Especially in Waveney Valley.
<b>Presence of isolated churches</b>	✓✓	
<b>DISTRICT/COUNTY:</b>		
<b>Strong regional vernacular character</b>	✓✓	Dutch/shaped gables most common in River Valleys. Strong market town quality within the Waveney Valley.
<b>Important Views</b> that provide sense of place.	✓✓	Key views to important regional landmarks evident including Norwich Cathedral, Venta Icenorum (Caister St Edmund) and Wymondham Abbey.
<b>Presence of historic parkland</b> particularly EH listed.	✓✓	Kimberley Hall in the Tiffey valley is the most important EH listed parkland within the district
<b>Wooded appearance.</b>	✓✓	Variable – some valleys more wooded than others (particularly those with plantations in the north of the district, west of Norwich).
<b>Distinctive valley landform</b>	✓✓✓	Very important in introducing topographic variety into the landscape.
<b>Waterways</b> visible within the landscape	✓✓✓	River corridor joined by tributary streams
<b>Watermills</b> present	✓✓	Particularly in the Tas Valley
<b>Windmills</b> present	✓✓	Examples of operational windmills in the Waveney Valley
<b>Moats</b> present.	✓	
<b>LOCAL:</b>		
<b>Pastoral Farmland</b>	✓✓✓	Variety of pastoral landscapes including cattle-grazed valley floor, sheep pasture, horse paddocks and pig-rearing
<b>Willow pollard and/or poplar-lined watercourses</b>	✓✓✓	Willow pollards characteristic and avenues of poplars particularly characteristic of the Tud and Wensum
<b>Drainage ditches or boundary fences</b>	–	
<b>Wide grass verges</b> alongside roads	✓	
<b>Hedgerow network</b> with mature, diverse, linked hedgerows	✓	Parts of the valley floor have a good hedgerow network

<b>Mature hedgerow trees</b>	✓	
<b>Presence of river crossings</b>	✓✓✓	Bridges are characteristic of all valleys, although the quality of the bridges is variable. Fords are particularly associated with River Tas.
<b>Sunken Lanes</b> or lanes with high banks	✓✓	Attractive cross-valley sunken lanes.
<b>Water bodies</b> including farm ponds, village ponds, lakes or flooded gravel workings	✓✓✓	Number of small lakes associated with rivers. Ponds frequently occur.
<b>Distinctive plateau landscape</b>	—	
<b>Area of or including significant strategic breaks between settled areas</b>	✓✓	Yare valley provides important topographic separation between Norwich and its rural hinterland. The Tas valley is an important strategic break between the settled areas of Poringland and Wymondham-Hethersett.

See summary table for greater explanation of Landscape Assets

## CHARACTER AREAS

- 4.9. The Boundaries and character of these are subject to more detailed analysis and definition. The main subdivisions are anticipated to be:

### **Norwich Policy Area** (see Volume 2 for more details)

- Tas Rural River Valley (A1)
- Yare/Tiffey Rural River Valley (A2)
- Tud Rural River Valley (A3)
- Wensum Rural River Valley (A4)

### **Outside of Norwich Policy Area**

- Waveney Rural River Valley.







- There are some attractive villages and market towns associated with Rural River Valleys, in particular the Waveney Valley as demonstrated by Denmark Street, Diss.



- The river flood-plain are often quiet pastoral landscapes as demonstrated by these cows grazing the Waveney Valley near Earsham.



- Wide fords crossing the river valleys are a feature of the Rural River-Valley Landscape Type, such as this impressive ford in the Tas Valley near Shotesham.



- Sunken lanes with wide vegetated verges are characteristic of the cross-valley lanes such as this example from the Tas Valley.

Figure A: Landscape Type A - Rural River Valley



- Tributary Farmland is characterised by a flat to undulating shelving landform as demonstrated in this example close to Carleton St Peter.

- The watercourses and their valleys are not prominent features in the landscape as illustrated by the upper reaches of the River Chet at Bussey Bridge, near Chedgrave.



Figure B: Landscape Type B - Tributary Farmland



- Areas of parkland occur within the landscape as indicated by these impressive gate lodges related to Langley School.



- Round-towered churches occur either isolated or associated with settlement, particularly in the east of the district, such as here at Woodton.



- Large agri-industrial buildings occur within this landscape, such as Simpson's Malt near Tivetshall.

