

8. E: PLATEAU FARMLAND

LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES

- 8.1. The Plateau Farmland Landscape Type occurs in the western part of the district in three principal areas, all of which continue beyond the South Norfolk boundary into the adjoining Breckland District. The Plateau Farmlands are defined by their elevation and all are primarily delineated by the 50m contour. However, it should be noted that not all areas above the 50m contour line have been classified as Plateau Farmland due to differing land use patterns.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- **Distinct flat and elevated landform** as a result of the simplistic underlying Glacial Till geology.
- **Large fields of arable monoculture** with characteristic swathes of cereal, oilseed rape and sugarbeet monoculture.
- **Sense of openness and exposure** due to the elevation and scarcity of enclosing elements.
- **Long views of the district** from the plateau edges and shorter internalised plateau views. Inner plateau largely invisible from other areas.
- **Mature remnant oak hedgerow trees** are features in the agricultural landscape. However, hedgerows have been severely degraded or lost leading to fragmentation within the landscape.
- **Straight plateau-top roads** characteristically lined with attractive wide grass verges and ditches.
- **Wooded horizons** as a result of visual merging of hedgerow trees and woodlands in the landscape, which integrate settlements into the landscape.
- **Presence of tall structures including masts and poles** which disturb the rural scene interrupting the sense of openness.
- **Sparsely settled landscape** mostly comprising larger edge-of-plateau settlements, small nucleated and long linear settlements.
- **Presence of historic features within the landscape** including isolated church, moats, and farm ponds.
- **Some vernacular buildings** particularly including the use of brick and Dutch gable ends, but intermixed with more modern bungalow development.
- **Disused air fields**

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

- 8.2. Geologically this is the simplest area of the district. The solid geology comprises a blanket coverage of Lowestoft Till - a chalky Glacial Till, forming stagnogleyic soils of loam and clay drift often containing flints. This simplicity is reflected in the landform, which is the flat plateau landscape typical of Norfolk. The topographic variation is very minimal, varying by as little as 10m in three kilometres. The plateaux are the most elevated areas in the district - up to 70m AOD west of Bunwell. The flatness of the plateau creates a strong sense of openness with vast skies and dramatic horizons.
- 8.3. Water does not figure to any significant degree in the landscape. A few channels, which mark the upper sources of tributary valleys occur but these are not particularly noticeable. There are a number of static water bodies including small farm ponds and remnant moated features.
- 8.4. The soils are clayey, stony and periodically waterlogged, making them heavy and difficult to work, and the agricultural grade is not particularly high - generally Grade 3 but with occasional patches of Grade 2. For this reason the plateau clays were one of the last areas to be settled and cleared of woodland, which was still present at the time of the Domesday survey in 1300. Despite this, the plateau uplands are today one of the premier agricultural areas of East Anglia, principally because modern farm machinery can tolerate the heaviness of the soil and can operate efficiently over these flat expanses. Consequently, there has been wide-scale clearance of boundary vegetation over the last century, resulting in vast regular field sizes of arable monoculture (cereal or sugarbeet) punctuated by remnant over-mature hedgerow trees primarily oak, often along roadside drainage ditches. The absence of hedgerows amplifies the open scale of the landscape and where present they tend to be fragmented, flailed, single species hawthorn. There are few woods remaining on the plateau, however these include some of ecological interest – including SSSIs and ancient woodlands.
- 8.5. In combination these factors have resulted in a large scale open landscape with a character which changes with the seasons: exposed and bleak on a rainy winters day, yet exhilarating on a summer's day when the sun reflects from golden cereal fields as far as the eye can see, fringed in woodland formed by the visual merging of individual trees and farm copses. Long-range views from the edge of the plateau take in a wide panorama of South Norfolk and are some of the best in the district. However, away from the plateau edge internal views are restricted. The view of a church, sometimes solitary, across the flat open farmland is a distinctive characteristic. A few of these include the distinctive round-tower and most originated in the thirteenth century.
- 8.6. The farmed plateaux are sparsely settled, often with little visible but a scattering of farmhouses and functional farm barns. There are some linear settlements such as Sneath Common, Ashwellthorpe and Bunwell strung along the grid of straight roads which criss-cross the area. The Old Roman Road called Pye Road, now the A140 passes through some plateau areas. There are also occasional larger nucleated settlements such as Great Moulton, Fornsett End and Hingham (which originated as a market town), tending to occupy the edge of the Plateau. There are few halls or manors, Old Boyland Hall being an exception. However, there are some attractive

brick gabled houses, particularly of the Dutch type around Hingham and Deopham where there was once a sizable brick works.

- 8.7. More modern historical features are also evident. In particular disused airfields which occur at regular intervals across the plateau, such as at Deopham Stalland, near Winfarthing, and at Sneath Common. Where these are present the landscape appears more open, vacant and neglected. Communications masts are also evident in some areas and because of the openness of the area telegraph poles are more noticeable than elsewhere.

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
NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL:		
Nationally important ecological assemblages	✓	Ancient woodland
Presence of Scheduled Ancient Monuments	-	
Presence of round-towered churches	✓	Mostly square towers
Presence of isolated churches	✓✓	
DISTRICT/COUNTY:		
Strong regional vernacular character	✓	
Important Views that provide sense of place	✓✓	
Presence of historic parkland particularly EH listed.	-	
Wooded appearance	✓	Wooded horizons
Distinctive valley landform	-	
Waterways within the landscape	-	
Watermills present	-	
Windmills present	-	
Moats present.	✓✓	

LOCAL:		
Pastoral Farmland with visible grazing animals.	-	
Willow pollard and/or poplar-lined watercourses	-	
Drainage ditches	✓✓✓	Particularly characteristic due to waterlogging.
Wide grass verges alongside roads	✓✓	
Good hedgerow network	-	
Mature hedgerow trees	✓	
Presence of river crossings	-	
Sunken Lanes	-	
Water bodies	✓✓	
Distinctive plateau landscape	✓✓✓	
Area of or including significant strategic breaks between settled areas	-	Plateaux not settled or insufficiently close to Norwich to serve key function.

See summary table for greater explanation of Landscape Assets

CHARACTER AREAS

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

Norwich Policy Area

- Ashwellthorpe Plateau Farmland
- Great Moulton Plateau Farmland

Note: Only a very small extent of each of these character areas falls within the Norwich Policy Area and, therefore, neither character area description has been included in Volume 2.

Outside the Norwich Policy Area

- Hingham-Mattishall Plateau Farmland



- Mature hedgerow trees and ditch-lined roads are features of the landscape such as here at Hales Street



- The flat elevated landscape affords long-range views particularly at the plateau edge, as at Welborne, and means that tall elements such as pylons are a feature of the landscape.



- There are some attractive buildings within the landscape such as Old Hall Farm - near Carleton Rode, which is constructed from characteristic warm red brick.



- Isolated churches occur on the plateau, as demonstrated by this fine flint square towered example at Fundenhall.

Figure E: Landscape Type E- Plateau Farmland

Figure F: Landscape Type F - Valley Urban Fringe



- The suburban edge of Norwich, including areas or recent development indicate the proximity of the urban area and influence the undeveloped perception of many areas within the valley.



- The River Yare is well-vegetated with attractive wooded banks and wetland habitats.



- Flooded gravel workings are a feature of the Yare Valley.



- The valley floor is flat with areas of wet grassland and some wooded areas.

