

## 7. A4: WENSUM RURAL RIVER VALLEY

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### LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES

- 7.1. The Wensum Rural River Valley is found in the far north of South Norfolk District, falling entirely within the Norwich Policy Area. The area is defined by the landform of the upper valley sides, generally at about 30m AOD. Only a very small section of the River Wensum falls within the boundary of South Norfolk District and, therefore, landscape character should be considered in a wider context.

#### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- **Wide valley form** largely occurring outside of the District boundary.
- **Presence of extensive flooded gravel pits** arising from former extraction of sands and gravels.
- **Small areas of paddock and grazing**, generally associated with the outskirts of settled areas.
- **Large areas of deciduous woodland blocks on the valley sides and distinctive poplar avenues on the valley floor** contributing to a wooded naturalistic valley character.
- **Important wetland habitats** especially the River Wensum that has been designated as an SSSI.
- **Settled valley** (particularly outside of the District) including the Strong linear settlement of Costessey that follows a meander of the Wensum.
- **Brick-based architecture including elements of Cosseyware** – fine decorative brick work produced in Costessey at the turn of the century. Generally lacking the rural vernacular appeal of valleys more distant from Norwich.
- **Presence of Mariott's Way recreational path.**

### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

- 7.2. The valley form of this section of the River Wensum is fairly large and broad, occupying land generally below 30m AOD on the highest valley sides, but up to 35m AOD. The geology of the area comprises Alluvial deposits, creating earthy peat soils. Sand and gravel deposits occur on the higher land giving rise to brown sands. The soil is of low quality (Grade 4). Consequently, and because of the presence of the extractable sand and gravel deposits, the principal use of this valley is non-agricultural apart from limited use of the valley for grazing paddocks associated with the outskirts of settlements.

- 7.3. A major recent impact on the character of the valley has been gravel extraction. As a result of this there are a large number of remnant flooded gravel pits in the area. The other principal land use is forestry. Woodland is a particular feature of the area and, for the most part, comprises deciduous semi-natural woodlands on the valley sides. On the valley floor regular grids of poplar planting along the drainage ditches are a particular feature of the area. Although this woodland is not of significant ecological merit it is of immense scenic importance and contributes to the strong wooded quality of the valley. Hedgerows do not feature prominently within the landscape.
- 7.4. The river Wensum is a large river and is considered to be a nationally important enriched calcareous lowland river, which has therefore been designated an SSSI. In particular the river is noted as *'probably the best whole river of its type in nature conservation terms'* (taken from SSSI citation). It has a diverse invertebrate and flora population and flows within a largely natural corridor.
- 7.5. The Wensum Valley appears somewhat segregated from South Norfolk by virtue of limited access roads and limited visual connectivity with other areas. However, the valley is used for recreation with the Marriott's Way recreational path passing through the valley. The Wensum connects with the heart of Norwich which emphasizes its important role as an ecological and recreational corridor.
- 7.6. The valley of the River Wensum was settled early and by the Roman period there were villages, established on the gravel terraces within the current character area. This was part of a broad trend that ultimately resulted in the formation of Norwich (outside this area but founded around the banks of the Wensum). Despite this there are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments recorded within the area, presumably in part due to the activities of the extraction industry. This area of the Wensum remains settled to this day, however the greatest intensity of settlement (Taverham and Drayton) is concentrated on the left (north) bank outside of the district. Within this character area settlement comprises the village of Costessey – a predominantly linear settlement, the form of which follows a pronounced meander of the Wensum. However, Costessey is very close to New Costessey (in the Easton Fringe Farmland Character Area) and the City of Norwich. The open farmland between these settlements is very important in retaining a sense of identity for these settlements.
- 7.7. Costessey retains a strong visual character although this is considerably more urban and less vernacular than those settlements within the more rural river valleys. Likewise, roads within much of this area have a suburban quality. Within Costessey there are many fine examples of buildings employing the locally-famous Cosseyware, the ornamental brickwork produced by George Gunton from his Costessey brickworks in the Edwardian era including Park House and numerous 'ordinary' residences. Brick is the predominant building material of the area although post-war and more modern styles (including bungalows) and materials are also common.
- 7.8. The character of the Wensum Rural River Valley is illustrated in **Figure A4: Wensum Rural River Valley**



## 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>		
Nationally important ecological assemblages	✓✓✓	All of the River Wensum is designated a an SSSI.
Presence of Scheduled Ancient Monuments	-	
Presence of round-towered churches	-	
Presence of isolated churches	-	
<b>DISTRICT/COUNTY:</b>		
Strong regional vernacular character	✓	Cosseyware is an important material adding to the architectural character of the area.
Presence of historic parkland particularly EH listed.	-	
Wooded appearance	✓✓✓	
Distinctive valley landform	✓✓✓	
Waterways visible within the landscape	✓✓✓	
Watermills present	-	
Windmills present	-	
Moats present.	-	
<b>LOCAL:</b>		
Pastoral Farmland with visible grazing animals.	✓	Horse paddocks.
Important Views that provide sense of place	✓	
Willow pollard and/or poplar-lined watercourses	✓✓✓	Poplars especially characteristic.
Drainage ditches	-	
Wide grass verges alongside roads	✓	

Good hedgerow network	-	
Mature hedgerow trees	-	
Presence of river crossings	✓	
Sunken Lanes	✓	
Water bodies	✓✓	Important flooded gravel workings.
Distinctive plateau landscape	-	
Area of or including significant strategic breaks between settled areas	✓✓	New Costessey-Costessey-Norwich strategic gap(s) are very important.

See summary table for greater explanation of Landscape Assets

## SENSITIVITIES AND VULNERABILITIES

7.9. The principal sensitivities and vulnerabilities of the character area include:

- threat of urbanising trends causing Costessey to lose its 'village' character and unattractive linear sprawl at the edge of the settlement;
- further suburbanisation of roads and village edges;
- loss of the wooded character of the Wensum Valley and the distinctive variety of woodlands which create diversity within the landscape;
- deterioration of the River Wensum and its valuable ecology as a result of development or management practices that would affect its setting or the quality of its water, including run-off from urban areas;
- loss of views to the River;

## LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

7.10. **The overall strategy is to conserve the rural quality of the Wensum valley for residents and recreational users and resist the apparent suburbanising influences through careful control of the location, nature and quality of development. In addition enhancement of the area is sought through protection and management of woodland and wetland habitats. In order to achieve this it is recognised that liaison and co-operation with adjoining authorities will be necessary. Such projects may include:**

- restoration of hedgerows, particularly adjacent to existing settlements;
- implementation of the Wensum Valley Strategy in cooperation with adjoining Districts;
- maintenance of existing and creation of new recreational opportunities.

## **DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

7.11. Any development permitted within the area should respect the character of the Wensum Rural River Valley and should conserve the existing landscape assets. In particular it should include reference to the following:

- prevent linear expansion of Costessey along the River Wensum;
- respect the character of Costessey and prevent loss of identity through merging with other proximate settlements (e.g. New Costessey);
- resist infill or extension development which does not respond positively to the landscape context and existing character;
- respond positively to the remaining vernacular context and the unique character of the decorative brickwork present in some buildings;
- assess the impact of any development proposal upon the River Wensum SSSI and its setting, including potential impacts of drainage/run-off which could damage the delicate ecological balance of this calcareous river;
- consider the effect of any development upon views to the River Wensum.







- Contrasts between the deciduous and coniferous woodlands on the valley sides and poplar plantations on the valley floor are a feature of the Tud Valley.



- The Tud Valley is sparsely settled with clusters of farmhouses which integrate into the rural landscape (Costessey Park).



- Pig farms with their characteristic pig shelters, post and wire fencing and bare earth are particularly evident within the valley of the River Tud.



- Avenues of plantation poplar are characteristic of the Tud Valley floor, as seen here from the Norwich Southern Bypass.

Figure A3: Tud Rural River Valley

Figure A4: Wensum Rural River Valley



- Flooded Wensum Rural River Valley near Costessey showing diversity of bankside vegetation.



- Wooded river channel with pasture land valley floor on the outskirts of Costessey.



- Distinctive lines of poplars set against flooded gravel works are a feature of the Wensum Valley, as here near the Ringland Hills.

