

15. G1: EASTON FRINGE FARMLAND

LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES

- 15.1. The Easton Fringe Farmland is located to the west of Norwich. It is a small linear belt occupying a ridge of land between the Tud and Yare Rural River Valley Character Areas from about 30m to over 50m AOD. This character area falls entirely within the NPA at the important western gateway into Norwich.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- **Undulating landscape sloping towards a distinct ridge top** marking the boundary between the valleys of the Yare and Tud.
- **Sand and gravel geology which has led in the past to use of the land for mineral extraction** resulting in areas of derelict and degraded landscape.
- **Highly developed ridge top with a strong urban fringe character** including the presence of urban settlement, large retail superstores with their associated car parks plus a park and ride scheme.
- **Recreational uses** including the presence of a golf course and the Royal Norfolk Showground.
- **Attractive arable and pastoral farmland context**, somewhat marginalized by the development, but retaining a strong rural character.
- **Absence of significant wooded areas.**
- **Major transportation through-route and gateway into South Norfolk** due to the presence of the Norwich Southern Bypass.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

- 15.2. This landscape is defined predominantly by land use which comprises farmland with urban and urban fringe development. This character has arisen as a result of factors relating to location and physical features.
- 15.3. The geology of the character area is sand and gravel and it occupies an undulating ridge of land between the valleys of the Yare, to the south, and Tud, to the north. This ridge is a locally prominent feature of the landscape and is visible from the valleys of the Yare and Tud and the surrounding tributary valley landscape. Conversely, from the ridge there are views into the surrounding landscapes, although these have been restricted by landuse in the area.
- 15.4. One of the principal features of this area is the Norwich Southern Bypass, the westerly origin of which is in this area. Indisputably this is the route from which most people experience this character area. It is an important feature of the Easton

Fringe Farmland and passes along the ridgeline introducing considerable noise and activity into this landscape before dropping down into the valley of the Yare, south of the area. This area is thus the gateway into South Norfolk and Norwich from the west.

- 15.5. In common with the valleys of the Yare and Tud the mineral deposits of this area have been extensively worked which has resulted in localised landscape degradation and dereliction, some of which remains. The combination of derelict 'brownfield' land, the easy access of the Norwich Southern Bypass and the strategic location of the area so close to Norwich has had a profound and irreversible effect upon the character of this once agricultural landscape, leading to the construction of a large complex of retail warehousing and superstores along the Bypass. These large buildings are totally unprecedented elsewhere in the South Norfolk landscape creating a distinctive edge-of-town/urban fringe character.
- 15.6. The settlement within this area is clustered along the ridgeline and comprises the village of Easton and the Norwich suburb of New Costessey. Easton is based around a historic core but is perceived largely as a post-war development. Easton is visible from the surrounding landscape, in particular its distinctive water tower which acts as a local landmark.
- 15.7. The combination of other land uses also add to the fringe character. These include the new park and ride scheme (although this appears to be well screened) and recreational landuse which include a golf course and the Royal Norfolk Showground. The Royal Norfolk Showground was originally historic parkland (Costessey Park) which has now disappeared. Easton Hall, an eighteenth century hall, has now been converted into an agricultural college. There are no other records of historic or archaeological features of national importance in the area.
- 15.8. The remaining landscape is farmed, predominantly arable.
- 15.9. The character of the Easton Fringe Farmland is illustrated on **Figure G1: Easton Fringe Farmland**.

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	-	

Presence of Scheduled Ancient Monuments	-	
Presence of round-towered churches	-	
Presence of isolated churches		
DISTRICT/COUNTY:		
Strong regional vernacular character	✓	Some rural dwellings but overpowered by out-of-town shopping etc.
Presence of historic parkland particularly EH listed.	-	
Wooded appearance	✓	
Distinctive valley landform	-	
Waterways visible within the landscape	-	
Watermills present	-	
Windmills present	-	
Moats present.	-	
LOCAL:		
Pastoral Farmland with visible grazing animals.	✓	
Important Views that provide sense of place	✓	Important as a gateway into South Norfolk and Norwich.
Willow pollard and/or poplar-lined watercourses	-	
Drainage ditches	-	
Wide grass verges alongside roads	-	
Good hedgerow network	-	
Mature hedgerow trees	-	
Presence of river crossings	-	
Sunken Lanes	-	
Water bodies	✓	Flooded gravel workings
Distinctive plateau landscape	✓	
Area of or including significant strategic breaks between settled areas	✓✓✓	Important strategic gaps between New Costessey and Easton.

See summary table for greater explanation of Landscape Assets

SENSITIVITIES AND VULNERABILITIES

15.10. The sensitivities and vulnerabilities of this landscape have been assessed and are considered to be:

- balance of developed area to rural context. Because of the highly developed character of much of this area further intrusion of built features upon the rural landscape by may have significant effects upon the perceived quality;
- the need to consider the views from the surrounding landscape, which is highly sensitive to any development on or near the prominent ridge top within this area;
- the need to preserve good quality rural views from the ridge top to the surrounding countryside;
- 'gateway' location that emphasises the importance of this area in promoting a positive view of the South Norfolk landscape and entry to the City of Norwich;
- the need to preserve distinction and a clear identity between Norwich City and Easton and the other ridge top development.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

15.11. **The strategy for the Easton Fringe Farmland is to conserve and protect the remaining farmland and enhance the areas that have already been developed, particularly to improve the landscape quality of this area as an important gateway into South Norfolk and Norwich. This could include:**

- new woodland creation to screen and promote positive views of existing and proposed development;
- development of a land use strategy to prevent incremental and ad-hoc erosion of remaining quality for example through identification and protection of marginalized farmland;
- promoting greater awareness of the location as the entry into South Norfolk;
- identification of damaged land and forward planning for its future use through restoration and management e.g. to woodland or wetland.

DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

15.12. Any development should respect the character and landscape assets of the Easton Fringe Farmland Character Area and this will necessitate consideration of the following criteria:

- consider the cumulative impacts of any development upon the overall character of this area;
- consider the impact of any proposals upon the quality of the 'sense of arrival' into South Norfolk District and the City of Norwich and encourage developments that would enhance the quality of this experience;

- avoid tendencies towards incremental linear development associated with the A47 corridor.



- The Valley Urban Fringe is characterised by the presence of or views to large institutional buildings such as the University of East Anglia.



- Gravel workings continue to be an integral part of the valley character and as they become abandoned are restored to attractive flooded wetland areas.



- Keswick village is one of the few developed areas within the valley that has vernacular appeal and includes the weather-boarded Keswick Mill.



- In some areas of the valley such as near Whittingham there are views to the city of Norwich including the Cathedral.

Figure F1: Yare Valley Urban Fringe

Figure G1: Easton Fringe Farmland



- The large retail superstores adjacent to the Norwich Southern Bypass have a high impact upon the character area, affecting the perception of the City.



- Arable farmland, away from the developed ridge has a rural character, disturbed only by the electricity pylons.



- The 'ridgeway' settlement of Easton is highly visible from adjoining character areas (e.g. the Tudor Valley) and can be discerned by its water tower which acts as a distinct landmark.

