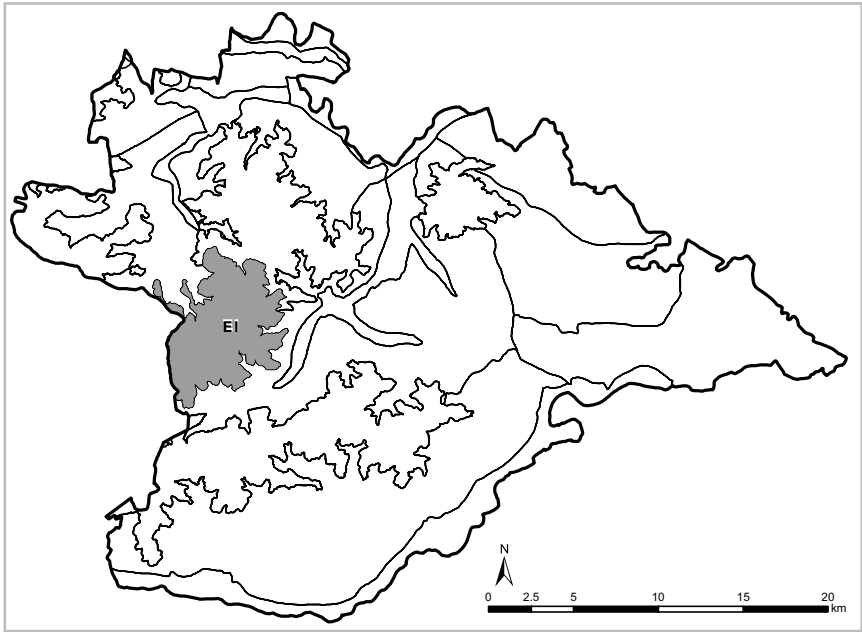
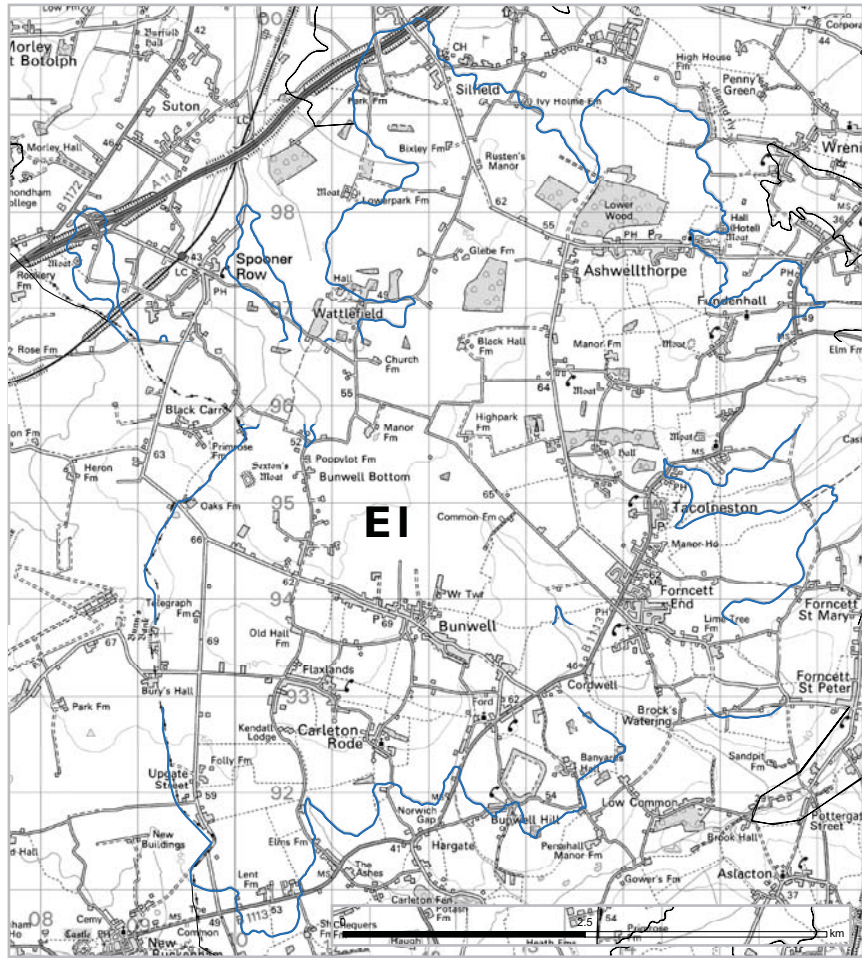


Character Area: EI

Ashwellthorpe Plateau Farmland



Location within South Norfolk District



Extent of the Ashwellthorpe Plateau Farmland Character Area



View to Talconeston transmitting station



Mature remnant oak hedgerow trees occur within trimmed hawthorn hedges



Roads are flanked by wide grass verges



Large geometric arable fields



Woodland blocks provide enclosure



The church at Bunwell

16. EI: ASHWELLTHORPE PLATEAU FARMLAND

DESCRIPTION

- 16.1. **Location and Boundaries:** The Ashwellthorpe Plateau Farmland character area is located in the west of South Norfolk District, forming an area of higher flat land above the 50m contour. It is bounded to the northeast by the slightly lower lying and settled plateau farmland (DI). To the northwest, east and southeast the land the plateau edge is marked by tributary farmland sloping down towards the Tiffey and Tas respectively. To the west the plateau extends across the South Norfolk District boundary into Breckland District.
- 16.2. The character of **Ashwellthorpe Plateau Farmland** is illustrated in **Figure EI**.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- **Distinctive flat, elevated landform**, above the 50m contour.
- **A large-scale landscape of both openness and enclosure** provided by woodland.
- **Panoramic views** and some **framed views** along roads.
- **Predominantly arable farming** within large geometric fields.
- **Mature remnant oak hedgerow trees** occur within trimmed hawthorn hedges.
- **Moats are a feature**, sometimes associated with halls and sometimes occurring in isolation.
- **Linear settlement occurs along roads** with some vernacular buildings intermixed with more modern development.
- **Rural roads have very straight stretches** and are often flanked by wide grass verges.
- **Presence of tall structures**, with the prominent mast of Tacolneston transmitting station plus lines of telegraph poles.
- **An overall peaceful rural character** created by the absence of main roads and development.

Geology and Soils

- 16.3. The simplicity of the landform is a reflection of the uniformity of the underlying geology comprising a thick layer of chalky glacial till (Lowestoft Till).

Landform, Topography, Scale and Enclosure

- 16.4. The flat, elevated landform, occurring above the contour level 50m AOD has little topographic variation. Land to the west of Bunwell is some of the most elevated in

the district, rising above 70m AOD. This is a large-scale landscape with vast skies and a strong sense of openness, with long range views across much of South Norfolk from the plateau edge. However, locally, areas of woodland (Lower Wood and Fundenhall Wood) and parkland (Tacolneston Hall) provide enclosure and contain views within the plateau.

Land Cover and Biodiversity

- 16.5. The predominant land use is arable farmland. Fields are mostly large and geometric in shape, although smaller linear fields are frequently associated with settlement. Boundaries comprise trimmed hawthorn hedgerows with large mature oaks occurring as hedgerow trees providing a distinctive feature. Hedgerows are fragmented in places but some replanting has taken place. Where hedgerows are absent the openness and scale of the landscape is exaggerated.
- 16.6. Large blocks of woodland provide a degree of enclosure in the north of the area around Ashwellthorpe. Much of the woodland is of ancient origin and of significant biodiversity interest. Lower Wood (broadleaved mixed and yew woodland) is a SSSI containing a large number of near veteran trees. Fundenhall Wood and Upper Wood are also ancient woodlands. The southern part of the area is, in comparison, much more open with woodland limited to small blocks and copses such as at Grove Wood and Bunwell Wood, which are both County Wildlife Sites. Parkland and associated woodland belts at Tacolneston and Wattlefield provide further variation in land cover. Together, the areas of woodland along with occasional small farm woods and shelterbelts provide enclosure, interrupting long-range views and providing contained views along roads.
- 16.7. Water is limited to occasional drainage channels along roads and minor channels associated with the upper parts of tributaries, although these do not register within the wider landscape. Throughout the area there are numerous small field ponds and moats.

Historic Character

- 16.8. Features of notable historic interest include the halls and churches. The red brick Tacolneston Hall c.1700 includes a moat and is surrounded by woodland. It is a local site of archaeological interest, and appears on the county register of 'sites and monuments'. Banyard's Hall, located to the south east of Bunwell is a c17 timber framed house with a moat. Moats also occur in isolation, north east of Bunwell and north of Tacolneston.
- 16.9. Churches occur at the edge of or lie outside of linear settlements. An isolated church occurs outside Bunwell. Non-conformist chapels such as that at Carleton Rode are also a feature.

Settlement and Built Character

- 16.10. Settlement follows a distinctive linear pattern along roads, with the greatest density of settlement being in the south and west of the area towards the plateau edge, for example at Bunwell, Ashwellthorpe, Carleton Rode and Tacolneston. Most villages comprise long single lines of houses along the road backing onto farmland as at Bunwell. At Tacolneston, development has expanded beyond the road to create a

more clustered form. Villages include timber-framed houses dating from the 15th to 17th century but are otherwise dominated by modern residential development. Within the north-eastern and central part of the plateau villages are absent. Isolated farmhouses are dispersed throughout the character area and distinctive black timber and brick barns are a re-occurring feature. Footpaths are concentrated in the south and west of the area, associated with the occurrence of settlement and forming a network that connects villages.

- 16.11. Tacolneston transmitting station with its prominent mast lies to the north west of Tacolneston and is visible within much of the character area and the wider landscape. Telegraph poles are also more visible in this area due to its open character.
- 16.12. A network of quiet rural roads cross the area and connect settlements, some of which follow very straight stretches, flanked by wide grass verges. This is a peaceful, rural landscape with an absence of major roads, traffic and large-scale development.

EVALUATION

Landscape Assets

National/ International

- Lower Wood (SSSI) Fundenhall Wood and Upper Wood (Ancient Woodland).

District/ County

- Halls and associated moats (e.g. at Banyard's Hall and Tacolneston Hall).
- Woodland County Wildlife Sites.
- Distinctive barns and farm buildings.
- Historic buildings associated with settlement.

Local

- Wide grass verges.
- Mature hedgerow trees.
- Field ponds.
- Field pattern including smaller fields associated with settlement.
- Plateau landform.

Sensitivities and Vulnerabilities

- 16.13. The principal sensitivities and vulnerabilities of the Ashwellthorpe Plateau Farmland Character area:
- strong sense of openness with vast skies and long range views particularly from the plateau edge;

- the woodland assemblages;
- historic hall and moats;
- the quiet rural lane network and wide grass verges;
- the mature hedgerow oaks;
- the individual identity of the settlements;
- the smaller field pattern associated with settlements;
- overall peaceful, rural character.

Landscape Strategy

16.14. The overall strategy is to conserve the Ashwellthorpe Plateau Farmland with its wide open skies, significant woodland assemblages and quiet rural roads which all contribute to its overall peaceful character. In managing this landscape it would be beneficial to:

- continue to re-instate hedges along roads and field boundaries. Promote a new generation of oak hedgerow trees;
- conserve and manage existing large blocks of woodland and where appropriate take opportunities to link isolated woodland through planting initiatives;
- maintain quiet lanes and grass verges;
- conserve the pattern of fields and particularly the smaller enclosures around settlements;

Development Considerations

16.15. Any development in the area must respect the character of the Ashwellthorpe Plateau Farmland and:

- constrain further linear development along roads that would result in the merging of settlements and loss of individual village identity (e.g. eastwards at Ashwellthorpe);
- maintain individual village identity;
- maintain the setting of halls;
- avoid clutter with existing masts and telegraph poles;
- conserve and enhance the quiet lanes and grass verges;
- consider the impact of any form of development on the open character and panoramic views that can be obtained from parts of the plateau.