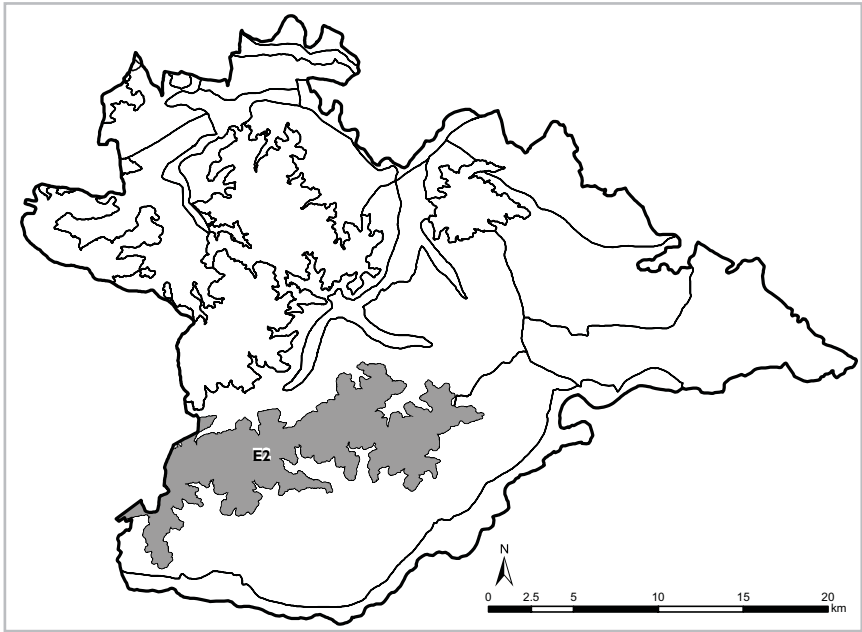
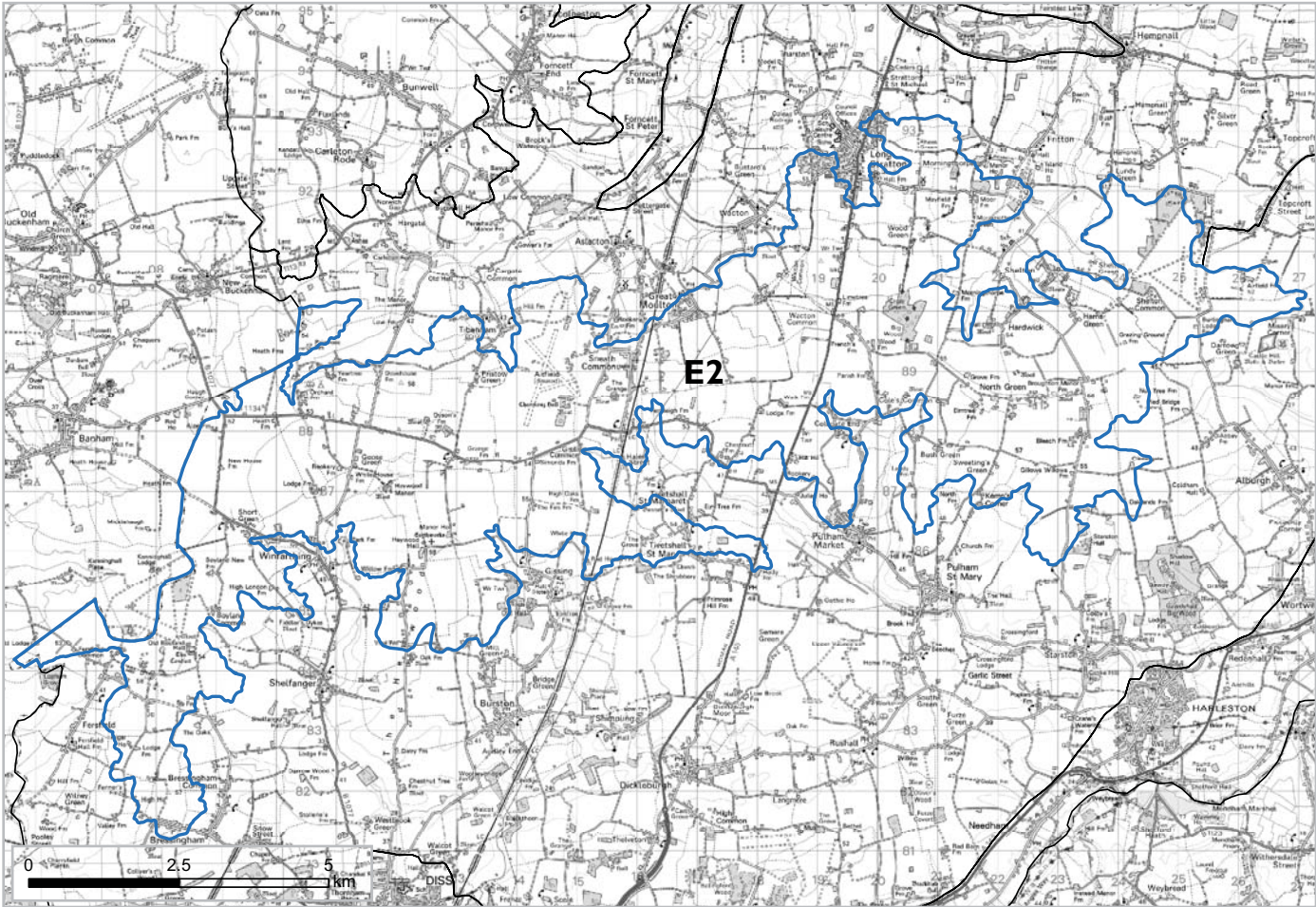


Character Area: E2  
Great Moulton Plateau Farmland



Location within South Norfolk District



Extent of the Great Moulton Plateau Farmland Character Area



Flat open plateaus with roadside lined by ditches



Hedgerows provide enclosure along roadsides



Wide grass verges and former hedgerow trees



Open skies



Large farm buildings



Airfield west of Sneath Common





## 17. E2: GREAT MOULTON PLATEAU FARMLAND

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### DESCRIPTION

- 17.1. **Location and Boundaries:** The Great Moulton Plateau Farmland character area comprises an area of elevated plateau above the 50m contour in the southern part of South Norfolk District. To the north, south and west lower lying Tributary Farmland slopes away from the plateau towards the rivers of the Tas and Waveney. Its western edge is formed by the boundary of South Norfolk District, although the plateau character extends into Breckland District.
- 17.2. The character of the **Great Moulton Plateau Farmland** is illustrated in **Figure E2**.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- **Flat, elevated plateau landform** above the 50m contour with little topographic variation.
- **Extensive arable farmland** with large-scale fields and notable absence of boundaries.
- **A large-scale landscape** of openness and exposure.
- **Isolated and infrequent blocks of mixed woodland**, otherwise woodland is confined to tiny farm copses.
- **A number of greens and commons**, some with associated pond habitats.
- **Expansive skies** are a defining feature with distant views and farm buildings visible in the open landscape.
- **Hedgerows are sparse** with fuller enclosure along roadsides.
- **Hedgerow trees are an important feature**, marking the lines of former boundaries.
- **A140 cuts north-south through the centre of the character area**. Otherwise straight rural roads cut through the area.
- **Grass verges** and occasionally ditches occur along road sides.
- **Timber framed houses and moats**.
- **Large scale farm buildings, water towers, telegraph poles** exposed in this open landscape and **distinct absence of churches**.
- **Sparsely settled with scattered farmhouses**, some linear settlement with absence of centre/ core.
- **Disused airfields are a feature of the plateau** at Shelton and Pristow Green.

## **Geology and Soils**

- 17.3. The simplicity of the Plateau Farmland 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**

- 17.4. Topographic variation is minimal with much of the plateau lying between 50 and 55m AOD. It is most elevated in the west, with land rising to 60m AOD west of Long Row and south of Old Boyland Hall. The flatness of the plateau landform and lack of enclosure affords a strong sense of openness with expansive skies and distant views, both internally within the plateau and across the adjacent landscapes from the plateau edge.

## **Land Cover and Biodiversity**

- 17.5. This is a simple and uniform landscape, dominated by arable farmland with large-scale, regular, geometric fields. There has been wide-scale removal of boundary vegetation to accommodate modern farm machinery and the scarcity of hedgerows accentuates the scale and openness of the plateau. Where hedgerows do occur as field boundaries they tend to be fragmented however alongside roads hedgerows tend to be fuller and provide a sense of enclosure.
- 17.6. Remnant hedgerow trees, primarily oak, are characteristic and an important indicator of former field boundaries. Grass verges and sometimes ditches occur alongside the rural roads which dissect this area. Water is not a significant feature with minor ditches/ tributaries and small field ponds occurring but not distinctly visible.
- 17.7. Within the open arable landscape, woodland is limited to a small part of the plateau in the east. Spring Wood and a large block of woodland comprising Big Wood (SSSI and ancient woodland), Crow Green and Low Wood (County Wildlife Site) are dominant here. The smaller Home Wood, east of Gissing is also a County Wildlife Site. Elsewhere, woodland and tree cover is limited to occasional isolated farm copses. Boudica's Way, a 40 mile footpath running from Norwich to Diss and linking existing footpaths, crosses the Plateau. This path intends to increase access to areas of countryside in the district and raise awareness of farmers to use more environmentally sensitive methods in this intensively farmed area. In addition to this particular right of way, the plateau has a comprehensive network of footpaths.
- 17.8. A number of greens and commons (appearing on the Norfolk list of registered commons) occur within this character area providing local variation within the predominantly arable land cover. Wacton Common (south of Wacton) and Wood Green County Wildlife Site (south east of Long Stratton) both have pond habitats. Gissing Common County Wildlife Site (adjacent to the B1134) is a linear stretch of semi-improved calcareous grassland.
- 17.9. Disused airfields are a feature at Pristow Green and at Shelton, south of Spring Wood. Airfields are now under arable crops with remnant runways and hangers indicative of their former use.

## **Historic Character**

- 17.10. Historic features include timber framed houses and associated moats, which are a notable feature of this landscape. Old Boyland Hall (a 16<sup>th</sup> Century timber framed house) Wacton Hall (timber framed) and Channonz Hall (a red brick farm house built to replace the c.1569 Elizabethan house that was demolished in 1784) all have moats. The main purpose of moats is believed to have been either defensive or a status symbol. In the wider context of South Norfolk, timber framed houses are of great historic and architectural interest and form one of the most widespread and impressive survivals of the late medieval landscape.

## **Settlement and Built Character**

- 17.11. This character area is sparsely settled, with dispersed farmhouses and farm buildings. Linear settlement occurs at Sneath Common, comprising a line of residential housing of single plot housing along a road, with no obvious centre/core. Great Moulton on the plateau edge is a nucleated settlement; its church however is separate, within the adjacent character area.
- 17.12. There is a distinct lack of churches in this character area. Communication masts and telegraph poles are more noticeable due to the open nature of this landscape. Large farm buildings, grain stores and silage towers are also obvious in the open landscape. There are also views to the suburban edge of Long Stratton. Water towers are also a feature.
- 17.13. The A140 cuts north to south through the centre of the character area and the B1134 dissects the western half of the plateau. Otherwise a network of noticeably straight rural roads cut through the area. Away from the main roads the plateau has a quiet, rural and almost vacant character.

## **EVALUATION**

### **Significant Landscape Assets**

#### ***National/International***

- Big Wood (SSSI and ancient woodland).

#### ***District/County***

- Open views.
- Halls and associated moats (e.g. Channonz Hall).

#### ***Local***

- Drainage ditches.
- Mature hedgerow trees.
- Wide grass verges.
- Distinctive plateau landform.

## **Sensitivities and Vulnerabilities**

17.14. The principal sensitivities and vulnerabilities of the Great Moulton Plateau Farmland include:

- strong sense of openness, long views and expansive skies and open views, particularly from the edge of the plateau;
- the blocks of ancient woodland where they remain;
- the setting of historic halls and moats;
- the network of quiet, straight rural lanes that cross the plateau;
- mature hedgerow oaks and hedgerow boundaries where they remain;
- the sparse and small scale settlement patterns and individual identity of the settlements;
- the need to maintain the characteristic hedgerow trees and prevent further degradation of boundaries.

## **Landscape Strategy**

17.15. **The overall strategy is to conserve the Great Moulton Plateau Farmland with its expansive skies, created by its elevated landform, dominance of arable farming and lack of settlement. It would be beneficial to consider:**

- conserve and maintain grass verges alongside roads;
- re-instate hedgerows alongside roads and as field boundaries. Also maintain and promoting hedgerow trees;
- conserve and manage the existing large blocks of woodland.

## **Development Considerations**

17.16. Any development in the area must respect the character of the Great Moulton Plateau Farmland Character Area.

- maintain the essentially open, unsettled character;
- limit linear development along roads - prevent merging of settlements to maintain individual identity;
- ensure main road (A140) through the character area does not provide a catalyst for linear development.
- Conserve large scale open views and expansive skies and consider the effects of further tall structures on these characteristics.