

Figure 2.1: Key Environmental Elements

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## Introduction

2.1 The key elements of NRP are described below for existing NRP, the Core Area and the Colney Hall site. The landscape context is described for the area as a whole as many of its characteristics are shared between different components of NRP. It also helps to determine the location and form of development within each of the allocations.

## Landscape context

2.2 The South Norfolk landscape has been described as one of subtle contrasts and restrained beauty with landscapes ranging from the exhilarating openness of the farmed plateaux to the peaceful rural quality of the valleys. The Landscape Character Assessment for South Norfolk (2001) identifies Landscape Types (which are generic and share common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation and human influences) and Character Areas (which are single and unique, discrete geographical areas of a landscape type).

## Landscape Types and Character Areas

2.3 NRP falls within two Character Areas set within two different Landscape Types. These are shown in Figure 2.2 and are described below:

**Yare Valley Urban Fringe Character Area** within the Valley Urban Fringe Landscape Type: This accounts for the north eastern part of NRP. The area is significant in that it provides an open and distinctive boundary with the City boundary. Particular characteristics include its valley form, which is relatively unusual for South Norfolk, and its woodland and waterways (although no waterways are within the NRP area). A typical view within this character area is illustrated in Photo 2.1.

**Yare Tributary Farmland with Parkland** within the Tributary Farmland with Parkland Landscape Type: this is characterised by arable landscapes, intermittent long views to the city of Norwich and a gently undulating topography. A typical view within this character area is illustrated in Photo 2.2.

## Landscape character

2.4 The Core Area in particular is characterised by its open nature, agricultural uses, broad views and relatively little sense of enclosure.

2.5 Colney Hall has a more complex character stemming from a combination of more varied terrain and woodland cover providing a generally more intimate landscape, although the Hall and its immediate environs enjoy a fine south-easterly prospect.

2.6 Both areas have a strong integrity of landscape character; a feature that is continued in much of the existing NRP and the UEA where the integration of development and landscape has been given high priority in most cases. This results in high environmental quality and some fine settings despite featuring substantial and varied buildings and styles.

## Existing development at NRP

2.7 Existing development at NRP comprises four principal elements:

1. The Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital (NNUH) which has a single, dense and well-organised design. It consists of a building core with peripheral access roads and parking. It is located to the south-west of sites allocated for new development at NRP, adjacent to allocations COL1 and COL4.
2. The John Innes Centre (JIC), which has undergone organic growth over time. Its organisation is seemingly ad-hoc, having a range of types and scales of buildings, and lacking clarity of circulation. It is located in the centre of NRP providing the link between existing development and sites allocated for research and development uses.
3. The Food Research Centre site has a similar organisational design to the NNUH site. It contains substantial buildings at a lower density. It is set in a 'landscaped' context with a relatively high quality environment. The Food Research Centre is located to the East of the Core Area, adjacent to the B1108 Watton Road. The triangle site to the North is awaiting development and has road and other infrastructure already in place.
4. The UEA lies to the East of the River Yare and is connected to the remainder of NRP by a link across the River Yare. The university features a range of building styles and types and includes nationally known buildings such as Lasdun's 'Ziggurats' and Foster's Sainsbury Centre. Environmental quality is generally good with landscapes integrated within development.

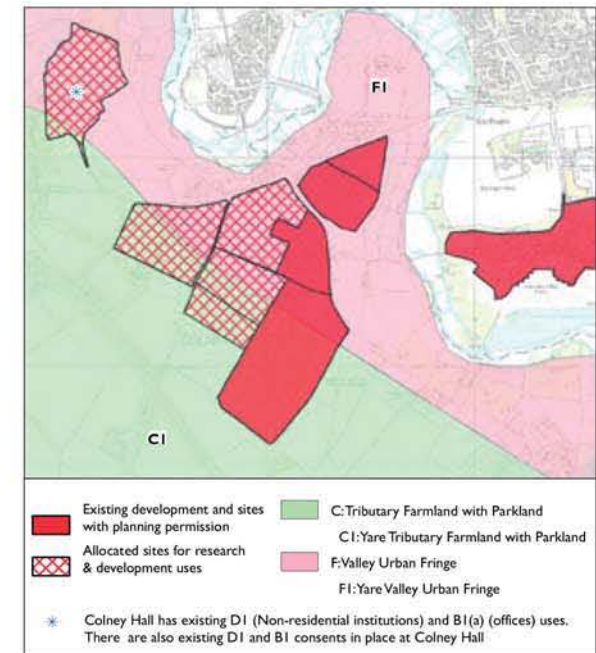


Figure 2.2: Landscape Character Areas

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Photo 2.1: Yare Valley Urban Fringe



Photo 2.2: Yare Tributary Farmland with Parkland



## The Core Area

2.8 The Core Area is characterised by its open nature and relatively little sense of enclosure. This is exacerbated by the open gently rolling topography, relatively large fields and an absence of significant hedgerows. Its character is essentially agricultural although there is awareness of adjacent development – the NNUH and JIC visually, and the A47 and to a lesser extent the Watton Road, acoustically. Despite its urban fringe location, the site has a quiet integrity.

2.9 The east and southern boundaries face onto agricultural land of similar quality although road noise becomes an issue closer to the A47. The landscape south and west of the A47 is also agricultural and feels remarkably rural given the proximity of the city.

## Structural elements

2.10 The principal structural elements within the Core Area are the shelter belts and, to a lesser extent, the hedgerows. These elements have greater significance because of the openness of the landscape.

2.11 The shelter belts are generally dense mixed woodland of a single age. Milestone Plantation running north-south through the Core Area is the principal element. The Milestone Plantation is shown in **Photo 2.3**. However there is a further network of belts planted adjacent to the A47 and to the west of Milestone Plantation. Although recently planted, these belts will have increasing significance in the landscape as they mature. Shelter belts are shown on **Figure 2.1**.

2.12 Elsewhere specimen mature oaks with or without hedgerows provide a secondary structure giving a strong and distinctive 'countryside' character. A belt of poplars towards the north end of Hethersett Lane is significant but has lower value and a shorter expected lifespan.

2.13 These elements have the effect of dividing the main site into a major portion east of Milestone Plantation (with a sub area to the rear of the JIC); and a smaller area west of Milestone Plantation hemmed in between recently planted belts. These shelter belts are the result of efforts to mitigate the strong winds of the area.

## Topography

2.14 The Core Area is characterised by gentle slopes, typically 1 in 30 (**Figure 2.3**). Whilst not a determinant of building form or location, the shallow side valleys to the Yare are significant in terms of surface water drainage.

## Visibility and views

2.15 The highest point is in the vicinity of Hethersett Lane and offers broad views north, east and south-east across the Core Area and beyond. This sense of openness is given structure by the shelter belts which provide the main visual barriers. There are no critical specific views either in or out of the core area. Local landmarks are shown on **Figure 2.1** but do not raise issues of setting. Developers should note however the significance of building silhouette in such an open landscape particularly as much of new development in the core area will be at levels above that of existing landmarks and development generally.

## Habitats

2.16 The majority of the Core Area is actively farmed and there are limited habitats of value. There are no sites designated for nature conservation significance. Owing to its density, Milestone Plantation has a poorly developed ground flora but will undoubtedly be important for bird life. Other immature belts could constitute grassland/glade habitats of some interest.

2.17 The River Yare is located some 200 metres to the East of the Core Area at the closest point.

## Soils

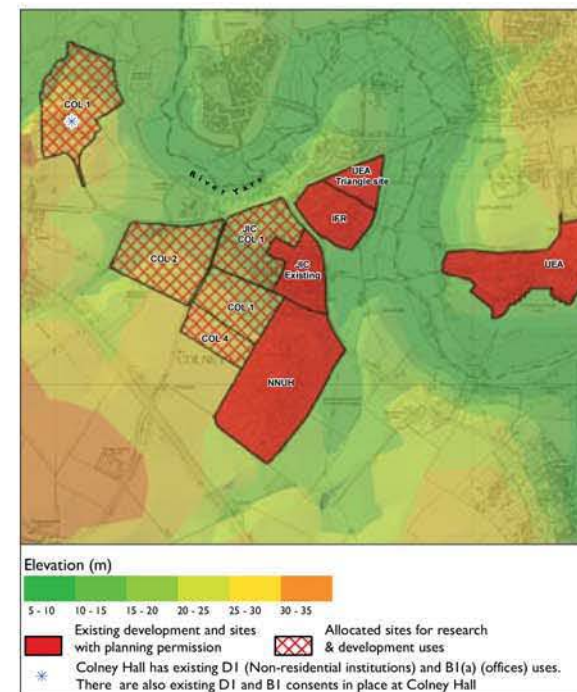
2.18 Soils are generally light and free draining. Consequently there are few ditches or water courses.

## Access

2.19 The site is accessed by the Watton Road and its side roads, Hethersett Lane and Colney Lane. The Watton Road is characterised by relatively high traffic volumes particularly at peak times when it is close to capacity. Eastern parts of this road have been improved with signalised junctions and have an urban character. The western part is a relatively unimproved lane with adjacent hedgerows. There are plans to undertake minor safety-related improvements to this section.

2.20 Hethersett Lane is an unimproved lane and suffers from excess vehicle speeds and a 'difficult' junction with the Watton Road. Colney Lane has been upgraded as far as the NNUH entrance east of which the lane is a bus only route. A recently constructed road provides access to the Cringleford roundabout. Norwich Research Park Development Framework

2.21 The current cross valley link provides access between UEA and JIC/IFR/ NNUH and the NRP core area. There is a cycle path along the Watton Road to the Colney Lane junction and on parts of Colney Lane north. There are no formal or established rights of way across or adjacent to the core area.



**Figure 2.3: Topography**

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**Photo 2.3: Milestone Plantation: Gentle topography principal landscape components**

## Colney Hall

2.22 Colney Hall estate and context has a more complex surrounding character than the Core Area and existing development at NRP. This stems from a combination of more varied terrain and woodland cover providing a more intimate landscape, although the Hall and its immediate environs enjoy a fine south-easterly prospect.

### Landscape structure and elements

2.23 At Colney Hall, woodland forms the principal landscape structure providing a dense envelope to the north and eastern half of the site. The quality of this woodland is variable with the plantation area at the centre being of significantly lower value. The western part of the site is characterised by the remnants of the Hall's designed landscape and includes a number of significant specimen trees, exotics and strategically placed tree groups.

2.24 Broadly speaking this divides Colney Hall into two landscape areas – those more open areas closer to the Hall; and areas of dense woodland to the north and east. The landscape constraints are illustrated on **Figure 2.4**.

### Topography

2.25 Colney Hall site is located on a south-east facing ridge with a relatively steep scarp slope descending to the Yare. Gradients on this scarp would preclude large-scale development.

### Visibility, views and landmarks

2.26 Colney Hall orients towards the east and south. The wooded character of the Yare Valley provides a pleasant middle ground to these views whilst awareness of the city beyond is fairly restricted. The most significant landmark per se is Colney Hall itself (more because of its position than its architectural value). Within the wooded area, particularly the plantations east of the Hall visibility is very restricted forming an inward facing environment heavily screened from inward views.

### Valued habitats

2.27 Colney Hall was subject to an ecological assessment in 2001. This concluded that the higher value areas were the water meadows adjacent to the Yare, some areas closer to the Hall and to the west, and woodland in the north-east corner of the site immediately outside the allocation boundary. This last area known as The Heronry is designated a County Wildlife Site. Large areas of the plantations and sycamore dominated woodland to the east of the Hall, the walled garden and surroundings and the area around the Pump House were all concluded to be of low habitat value. A protected species, the Long Eared Bat, was believed in 2001 to be established in the area immediately to the west of the Hall.

2.28 The River Yare is immediately adjacent to the land allocated for development. However, the actual development envelope lies over 200 metres from the river.

### Heritage

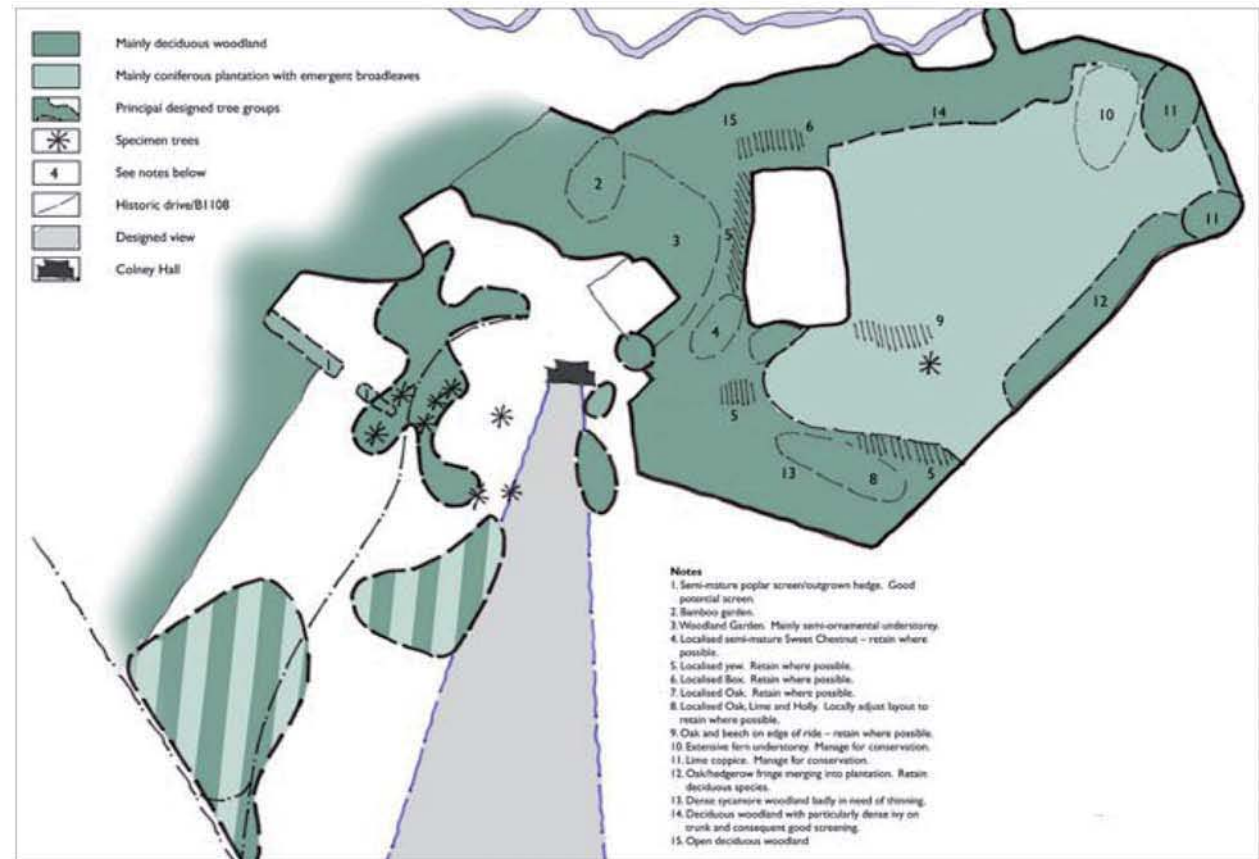
2.29 The Hall is a Grade II listed building set within the remnant of a historic landscape. Although the historic landscape is not on English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens, it is on the Norfolk County Council local list. As such the Hall and all structures within its curtilage, principally the Walled Garden, are protected. This protection also extends to issues of potential impacts on

the setting of the Hall. Given the extensive modifications to the Hall which has arguably led to a significant erosion of its heritage value, issues of setting and curtilage may be of greater weight than those attached to the Hall itself.

2.30 Some of the parkland trees and exotics in the Hall's vicinity have additional heritage value. The walled garden and remains of ornamental rockwork east of the Hall have heritage value with parts of the former predating the current Hall. The most significant historic element is, in many ways, the south-easterly prospect from the Hall.

### Access

2.31 Colney Hall is accessed by a relatively narrow and attractive private drive from the Watton Road. There are no known rights of way across the site.



**Figure 2.4: Colney Hall landscape constraints**