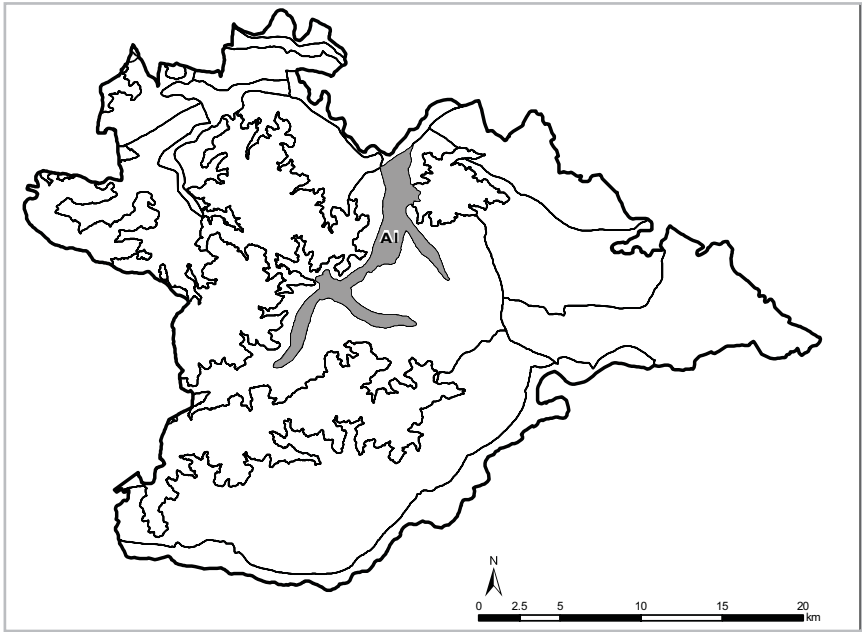
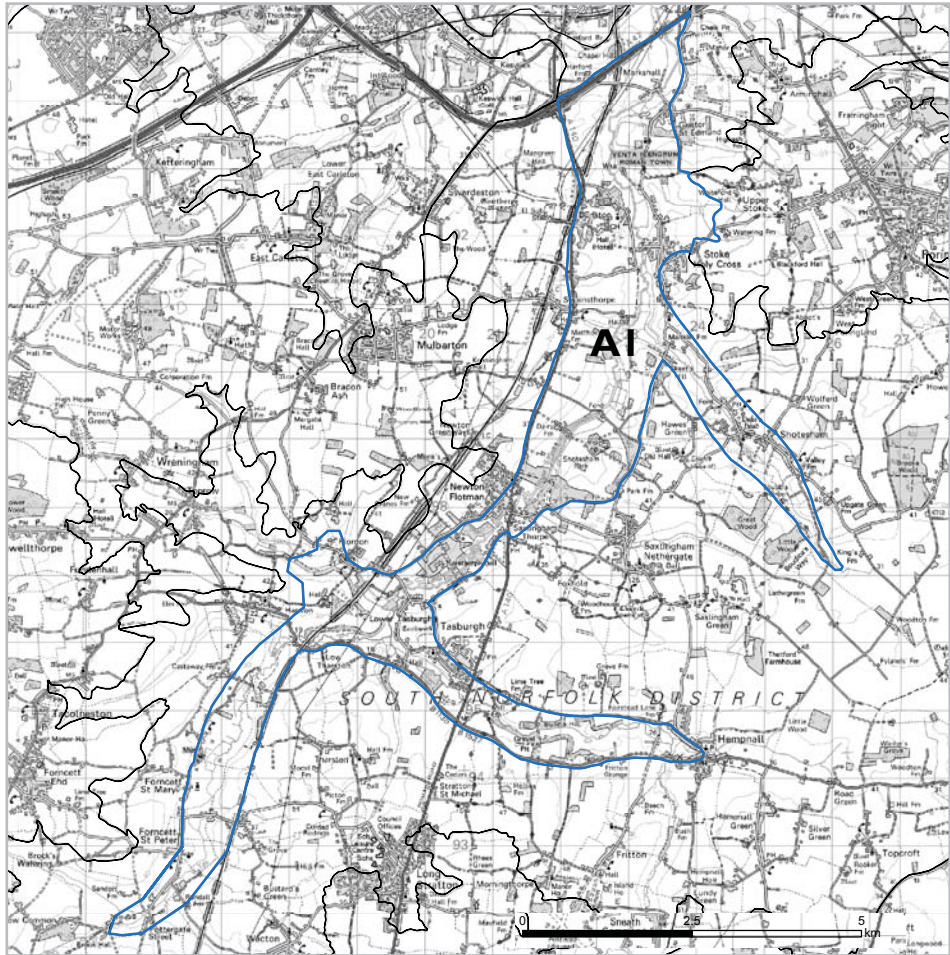


Character Area: AI
Tas Rural River Valley



Location within South Norfolk District



Extent of the Tas Rural River Valley Character Area



The strong valley form as in this view from Stoke Holy Cross



Grazed pasture on the valley floor



Buildings with shaped or 'Dutch' gable ends are a feature of the landscape



Forded river crossings, such as near Shotesham Park

5. A1: TAS RURAL RIVER VALLEY

DESCRIPTION

- 5.1. **Location and Boundaries:** The Tas Rural River Valley runs in an approximately south to north direction through the heart of the Norwich Policy Area from Tasburgh in the south to the Norwich Southern Bypass in the north. Most of the character area is within the Norwich Policy Area with a small part extending to the Rural Policy Area. The boundaries are defined topographically, in relation to the top of the valley sides and roughly follow the 30m contour, except where human influences have caused a distinct change in character. For example, in the lower part of the valley the A140 defines the boundary on the west side as the road creates a clear division on the upper valley side.
- 5.2. The character of the **Tas Rural River Valley** is illustrated in **Figure A1**.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- **Distinct, moderately wide simple valley form** with medium-scale clearly defined flat valley floor, shallow side slopes and adjoining smaller-scale tributary valleys.
- **Less enclosed than some other valleys with a feeling of exposure and openness and some long views within the valley** but restricted external views.
- **River alternately visible and hidden** marked by sparse waterside vegetation including reed filled ditches and narrow woodland belts. The flat, wide, green valley floor is a distinctive feature.
- **A large number of attractive fords and small bridges** occurring at regular intervals along the river and side tributaries.
- **Pastoral valley floor** with cattle grazing and **distinctive willow pollards** lining the watercourses on the valley floor.
- **Upper tributary valleys of great ecological richness** and importance, including areas of fen, marsh and unimproved wet and neutral grassland.
- **Fragmented woodlands and shelterbelts on the valley sides** creating a wooded fringe to much of the valley interspersed with more open areas of arable land.
- **Presence of historic earthworks** including Scheduled Ancient Monuments, including the large highly visible defensive earthworks of Venta Icenorum and the earthworks at Tasburgh.
- **Sparsely settled character** with buildings clustered around fording points and at the top of the valley sides.

- **Characteristic vernacular buildings** particularly notably including weather boarded mill houses and Dutch gable ends.
- **Presence of a small number of distinctive halls and parkland** including English Heritage listed parkland at Rainthorpe Hall.
- **Network of narrow peaceful rural lanes** throughout the valley including sunken lanes.
- **A more disturbed character** in the north of the area due to the influence of pylons, railway and roads.
- **Role in dividing and defining east and west of South Norfolk District.**

Geology and Soils

- 5.3. The geology of the Tas Valley comprises Sand and Gravel deposits which form the valley sides, whilst the valley floor consists of a wide band of alluvium. In the lower part of the Tas valley, near Caistor St. Edmund, the underlying chalk has been quarried from the valley floor. This former quarry site is designated as an SSSI because it exposes the Beeston Chalk (with its remarkable paramoudras), which is some of the youngest *in situ* chalk in Britain found in the area. Throughout the valley, soils are cambic gley and argillic brown earths and of low agricultural quality, predominantly Grade 4, with some areas of Grade 3 on the valley sides.

Landform, Topography, Scale and Enclosure

- 5.4. The landform of the Tas Valley, is particularly distinctive, with a simple, moderately wide form and a flat and clearly defined valley floor. The distinct north-south valley topographically divides the east from the west of South Norfolk District thereby creating spatial definition within the district. Overall, there is a strong sense of enclosure within the valley, although this varies considerably, with some areas appearing more open and others more confined and intimate. The latter is the case particularly in the upper reaches of the river where the valley form is much narrower. The river itself is not a particularly dominant feature and is often hidden within a wide green floodplain. The main indication of the presence of the river is the vegetation, which intermittently lines its banks, including some lines of willow pollards. The river is also observable from the crossing points - the large number of fords are a particularly characteristic and memorable feature of the Tas Valley. There are also a number of small bridged crossings such as the bridge at Newton Flotman.

Land Cover and Biodiversity

- 5.5. The wide valley floor appears green and lush with a strong pastoral quality and is grazed by cattle, creating a strong contrast with the more intensive arable land use of much of the district. The upper reaches of the narrow reed and rush filled tributary valleys are a further distinctive feature of the Tas Valley, and together represent a resource of great biodiversity interest. Towards Shotesham the whole of the tributary valley floor is designated as an SSSI for its extensive areas of unimproved marshy and wet neutral grassland. Similar SSSI designated sites are located in the upper reaches of the Tas, for example the unimproved meadowland at Forncett

Meadows and a traditional spring line meadow at Aslacton Parish Land. At Flordon Common shallow fenland peat lines the valley floor, with springs emerging on the valley side from the underlying chalk allowing a rare calcareous spring-fed fen to develop.

- 5.6. Woodland is also particular feature of the valley floor in the southern part of the valley with linear wet woodland lining the river corridor, plus larger woodland blocks in the valley near Newton Flotman. By comparison the drier valley sides are irregularly wooded, with small woodland blocks and belts, including distinctive pine clumps and shelterbelts. Together, these features create a wooded backdrop to much of the valley landscape. There are scattered mature (sometimes overgrown) hedgerow trees of ash, oak, elm and poplar but many of the hedgerows have been removed or are in decay, reflecting the intensive nature of arable farming on the upper valley sides.

Historic Character

- 5.7. The presence of a number of large earthworks within the Tas Valley has a strong influence on its character. These include the earthworks at Tasburgh and the large remnants of fortifications at Caistor St Edmund (Venta Icenorum), which are visible across the valley and create a distinct open landscape. This character area, particularly towards the northern end, has the greatest concentration of Scheduled Ancient Monuments in South Norfolk. They include a large number of sites associated with Caistor St. Edmund, the attractive fifteenth century brick and ashlar bridge at Newton Flotman and the earthworks at Tasburgh. Although not a principal defining characteristic of this character area, there are attractive ornamental gardens at Rainthorpe Hall, near Tasburgh, which are listed by English Heritage. There are also areas of parkland at associated with Dunston Hall (a hotel with golf course) and at Shotesham Park.

Settlement and Built Character

- 5.8. The valley is distinct for the perceived scarcity of settlement due to the well-integrated nature of the built environment with the surrounding landscape. Buildings and settlements are sparse and of a rural vernacular appearance. The buildings include some distinctive vernacular styles, particularly ornamental gable ends. Villages tend to be small linear settlements occurring at either the upper or lower area of the valley side, or small clusters of buildings, including distinctive millhouses, around fording points. The main settlements are Tasburgh, Shotesham, Newton Floman and Stoke Holy Cross. Tasburgh has a fine round towered church and millhouse, while Shotesham has an interesting knapped flint church and several attractive brick-built dwellings with ornamental gables (Dutch). Stoke Holy Cross has a timber weather-boarded millhouse which was Colman's first mustard-mill.
- 5.9. There are a number of small roads and lanes within the valley, connecting the settlements. They are generally small scale, and include a number of 'historic' sunken lanes. The exception is the former Roman Road linking Norwich and Ipswich (now the A140) which runs along the upper slopes on the western side of the valley and effectively forms the boundary of the character area, adding an element of noise and movement to this peaceful valley landscape. Other modern intrusions include the pylons to the north of the area and the Norwich Southern Bypass, which defines the northern limit of the character area.

EVALUATION

Significant Landscape Assets

National/International

- SSSIs including Shotesham marshy and wet neutral grassland, Forncett Meadows, Aslacton Parish Land spring line meadow, Flordon Common shallow fenland peat, Caistor St. Edmund quarry.
- SAM at Tasburgh (earthworks) and Roman Centre at Caistor St. Edmund and associated sites.
- Presence of round-towered churches (Tasburgh) and isolated churches (Caistor St. Edmund).

District/County

- A strong vernacular quality. Dutch/shaped gables are particularly evident.
- English Heritage listed Grade II parkland at Rainthorpe Hall.
- Wooded quality – but few ancient woodlands.
- Distinctive valley landform.
- Rivers and streams visible within the landscape.
- Attractive weather-boarded watermills.
- Moats present.

Local

- Grazed pasture on the valley floor (cattle-grazed).
- Number of important local views within the valley, e.g. to Caistor St. Edmund.
- Willow pollards present.
- Wide grass verges alongside roads.
- Good hedgerow network.
- Mature hedgerow trees.
- Attractive river crossings with fords particularly evocative of the Tas Valley.
- Sunken lanes.
- Water bodies.
- Valley provides an important landscape division between settled plateaux to east and west of District.

Sensitivities and Vulnerabilities

5.10. The principal sensitivities and vulnerabilities of the Tas Rural River Valley Character Area include:

- the peaceful rural character of the Tas Valley and the sensitivities to incremental small scale change, including upgrading of the rural lane network (e.g. kerbing would be very detrimental to the character of the sunken lanes which are a feature of the valley, with their small fords and river crossings);
- particular vulnerabilities in the northern part of the valley due to the impact of infrastructure and large scale land uses relating to the urban edge of Norwich including pylons, golf courses and development in association with the transport corridors (A140 and A47);
- visual sensitivities of the Tas Valley to new development/landscape change as a result of its open character, wide flat floor and long valley views, plus importance of valley crests;
- loss of hedgerow boundaries and trees, resulting in a further opening up of the landscape creating some very large scale and bleak areas on valley sides;
- small scale development pressures (infill, residential extensions) within the valley which could, over time, erode the local rural vernacular and the sense that buildings are well-integrated within the landscape context;
- sensitivity of historic landscapes, particularly Caistor St. Edmund to visual intrusion.

Landscape Strategy

5.11. **The overall strategy is to conserve the peaceful, rural quality of the Tas Valley and its distinctive landscape character, created by the wide open pastoral valley floor with ecologically rich wetland habitats, important archaeological earthwork resource, and perceived scarcity of settlement. This will include:**

- conservation and enhancement of the important wetland habitats. There is an opportunity to reinstate wetland habitats and landscapes to link together the existing isolated designated sites. The moderately wide floodplain and absence of settlement on the valley floor, suggests that the Tas Valley would be a good candidate to consider such management;
- restoration of hedgerows on the valley sides, plus management of the small woodland blocks. There are also opportunities for further woodland planting to create a more enclosed character on the valley sides;
- maintain the character of the rural lane network and particularly the sunken lanes with their fords and bridge crossings, which characterise the area;
- consider implementing a more targeted landscape strategy for the northern part of the valley (north of Stoke Holy Cross) – maintaining openness around Venta

lcnorum, but with opportunities for landscape/habitat restoration within the valley and screening along the main transport corridors.

Development Considerations

- 5.12. Any development must respect the character of the Tas Rural River Valley and conserve and enhance the key landscape assets as described in the landscape character assessment. In particular it must seek to maintain the peaceful rural qualities of the valley. This will include reference to the following considerations:
- respect the sparsely settled character of the valley, with its occasional buildings of local rural vernacular character, with a clear relation to the landscape context;
 - maintain the distinctive settlement pattern, either nucleated around bridges or around ford crossing points or as linear settlements along roads on the valley sides. The objective should be to maintain the linear settlements (e.g. Stoke Holy Cross) as discrete areas and prevent gradual and incremental extension along the roads;
 - consider the impact of developments within the adjacent landscape character areas, particularly the higher land of the Tas Tributary Farmland (character area BI) on the character of the rural valley. The openness of parts of the valley and views that can be obtained make it particularly vulnerable;
 - ensure that the northern part of the Tas Valley is not further degraded, by large scale of infrastructure developments associated with the roads. Ensure the rural character of the area adjacent to the Norwich Southern Bypass is maintained;
 - consider the impact of any proposals on the rural lane network;
 - maintain the role of the sparsely-settled Tas Valley in dividing the more settled areas to the east and west and avoid developments that may create the impression of developed corridors running across the valley.