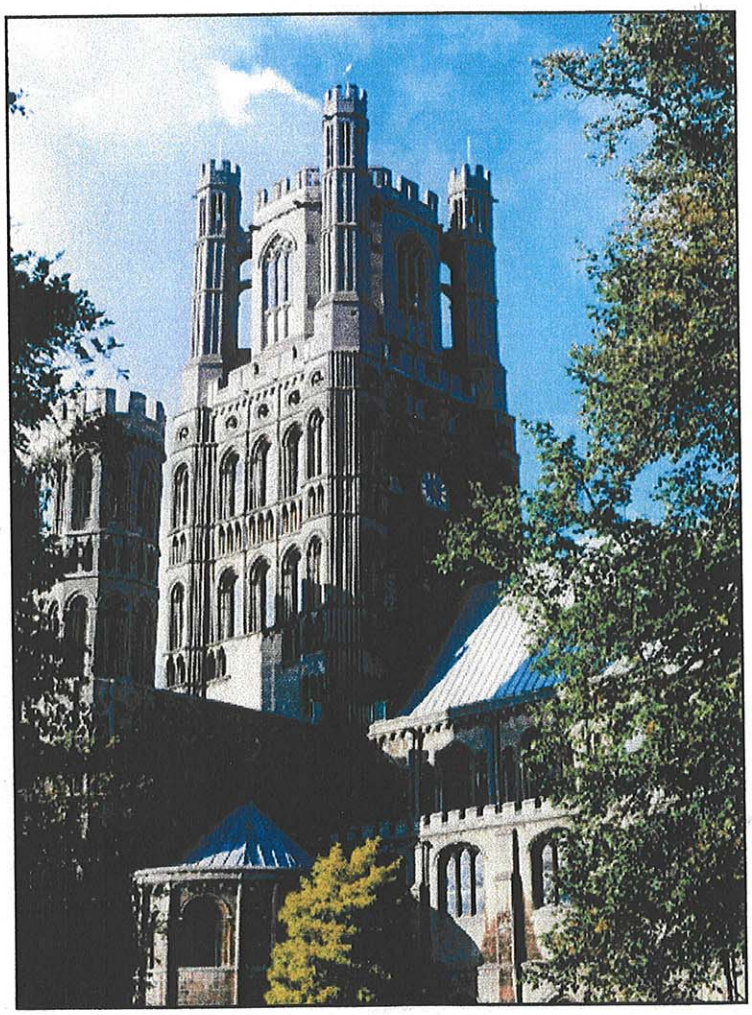
SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE

ELY ENVIRONMENTAL CAPACITY STUDY



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July 2001

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ELY : ENVIRONMENTAL CAPACITY STUDY

Supplementary Planning Guidance

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This environmental capacity study of the landscape and townscape of Ely has been adopted by the Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance (July 2001). The study has been prepared by Landscape Design Associates on behalf of East Cambridgeshire District Council.

The aims and objectives of the study are to :

- assess the significance of historic cathedral cities in the UK, placing Ely in its national context;
- understand the geographical and landscape context of Ely;
- assess the elements that make Ely distinctive and provide it with its unique sense of place;
- assess the capacity of Ely to accommodate further development in light of its environmental constraints and an understanding of its distinctiveness;
- set out a vision for the future of Ely as an independent, potential input to the Local Plan process.

This assessment is not a fully comprehensive capacity study of the urban area, as might form part of a sequential test for locating new development, consistent with PPG3-Housing. Equally, it is not a district-wide study aimed at identifying whether Ely is strategically a good location to accept future housing or employment allocations. Rather, it offers a potentially important contribution to such potential studies, leading to the next review of the Local Plan. It addresses the issue of Ely's distinctive historic character and its special identity as a small cathedral city. When assessing the capacity of Ely to grow it is crucial that consideration is given to these important factors, which are integral with a sustainability analysis.

This study therefore represents an environmental perspective on capacity, identifying what is required to conserve the key environmental qualities of Ely and how this can inform development decisions.

1.2 The Background to Development Pressures in Cambridgeshire

The Cambridgeshire Structure Plan (1995) states that approximately 7,500 new households are to be accommodated within East Cambridgeshire in the period up to 2006, whilst RPG6 (November 2000) expects that there will be a requirement for 4,000 dwellings (net) per annum in Cambridgeshire in the period up to 2016. This places significant demands on the local authorities to find locations for accommodating this growth. Priority is likely to be given to locating new development within and on the edge of existing urban areas, on brownfield sites and at places with good communication links, although it is inevitable given the scale of growth proposed across the region that greenfield sites will continue to be developed.

Large scale housing growth can bring potential conflict with the need to protect the environment and the distinctive character of settlements. This can apply in many situations, including options where the radical expansion of free-standing towns is involved. Not all towns have the same capacity to absorb growth without significant adverse impact on their environmental or historic qualities, or on their settings. This can be particularly the case where settlements have special existing environmental or historic qualities. Ely is just such a special place.

There is a growing awareness that the environment needs to be assessed in a broad and strategic way in order to identify those areas with greatest capacity to accept development in a sustainable form. The current review of the Cambridge Green Belt is an example of this. Consequently the development and application of the capacity assessment methodology can make a positive contribution to the debate because it clearly identifies those areas which influence the character of a settlement and its setting, and thus the capacity to accept change. The Ely environmental capacity study sits within this context.

1.3 Development within Ely

The East Cambridgeshire District Local Plan (adopted June 2000) contains a significant number of allocated housing sites around Ely most notably to the west and north west of the city between the existing urban edge and the A10 by pass. Some of these commitments are now under construction. The capacity study assessment has taken into account all allocated development sites as if completed.

1.4 Methodology – A Strategic and Integrated Approach

Winchester

The methodology used to undertake the capacity assessment of Ely has been drawn from that developed and piloted by Landscape Design Associates in Winchester (1998). It formed part of a national pilot study, jointly proposed and supported by the Countryside Agency, English Heritage and the Environment Agency and the methodology was referred to as a case study in the Countryside Agency's interim Landscape Character Assessment Guidance (1999 – refer appendix 1). The method considers an environmental capital approach to assessment – a new integrated method of evaluating the environment to inform decisions about management and future change. This concept was first set out in the provisional guide 'What matters and why: Environmental Capital – a new approach' (Countryside Commission, English Nature, English Heritage, and Environment Agency, August 1997).

The capacity assessment methodology developed for Winchester addressed the limitations of methods which relied solely on traditional designations and definitions of historic character, such as 'the cathedral precincts', 'the street pattern' or 'the Conservation Area'. These provide insufficient consideration of the role played by the wider landscape and townscape in defining the character of a city and its setting. A deeper, more inclusive definition was therefore required which considered the totality of the settlement and its influences, whether visual, perceptual or historic. In order to achieve this both the landscape and townscape had to be assessed in the round, considering existing environmental designations, as well as the function of the landscape setting in creating a distinctive place.

The development of the capacity assessment at Winchester, and more recently by Landscape Design Associates in Salisbury, is a reflection of this growing trend to assess landscape and townscape in terms of its function and to identify their critical environmental capital – those aspects of the environment that, if lost, cannot be replaced. Capacity assessment also assists decisions on how the landscape or townscape can be managed to conserve valuable characteristics and functions, or changed and enhanced in positive ways.

Character and Local Identity

The importance of retaining character and local identity has been recognised for some time.

PPG15: Planning and the Historic Environment (1994), paragraph 1.3 states that:

'The Government has committed itself to the concept of sustainable development - of not sacrificing what future generations will value for the sake of short-term and often illusory gains. This approach is set out in ***Sustainable Development: The UK Strategy****. It is also a key element of the development plan system, as set out in PPG12. This commitment has particular relevance to the preservation of the historic environment, which by its nature is irreplaceable. Yet the historic environment of England is all-pervasive, and it cannot in practice be preserved unchanged. We must ensure that the means are available to identify what is special in the historic environment; to define through the development plan system its capacity for change; and, when proposals for new development come forward, to assess their impact on the historic environment and give it full weight, alongside other considerations.'*

This guidance is reiterated in the DETR publication 'Planning for Sustainable Development: Towards Better Practice' (October 1998) which states that:

'Protecting landscape character and local distinctness can contribute to sustainable development by:

- *providing attractive and distinctive countryside close to where people live, in order to reduce demands to travel further for informal recreation;*
- *enriching the countryside for those who live and work there, and those who visit;*
- *ensuring new building work is of high quality and contributes to distinctive local character;*
- *increasing woodland cover to contribute to air quality improvements, reduce rate of surface water run-off and provide visual benefits; and*
- *continuing strong protection of the soil as a resource for production of food and other products, and as an ecosystem for vital organisms.*

Planning policy guidance makes clear the commitment to maintaining the distinctive character of the rural landscape and enhancing the environmental quality of the countryside. The challenge is to achieve this while accommodating appropriate development.'

Similarly, a discussion paper by English Heritage entitled 'Sustaining the Historic Environment: New Perspectives on the Future' (March 1997) states that:

'Sustainability is firmly rooted in the present, and in quality of life and local

distinctiveness, to both of which the historic environment makes a major contribution.'

'People believe it is important to keep sight of the past for personal reasons, and because it gives them a sense of belonging, defines their identities at national and local scale, and provides depth and character for their working and living environment.'

The East Cambridgeshire District Local Plan (2000) also highlights the importance of retaining character and local identity, and includes a range of policies that seek to protect the historic environment and to ensure that development reflects the distinctive character and appearance of local areas. Policies 67 to 78, for example, relate to the historic environment, and seek to promote development that respects the character and appearance of the district's Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings. Policies 58 to 60 state that new development should respect local diversity and distinctiveness in terms of scale, height, layout and materials, and should not cause harm to the character and appearance of an area. Policy 82 supports this approach in relation to development in the countryside, highlighting the need to respect landscape character.

Capacity Assessment of Ely

In 1998 a limited environmental capacity assessment was undertaken in the southern part of the city for use at the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan Inquiry. This assessment and the application of the Winchester methodology was endorsed by the Countryside Agency (refer to Appendix 2). The capacity assessment detailed here completes the assessment of Ely City. It considers aspects of historical development, visual character and distinctiveness. No real distinction is drawn, in the methodology, between landscape and townscape – reflecting the complex interaction between the two in the make-up of the environment of many settlements, but especially at Ely. The approach enables not only local character to be recognised, but also urban structure – views, landmarks, distinctive edges, memorable places and so on. It also allows 'borrowed character' to be recognised, that is, the character of a place derived not only from the place itself, but also by the visual influence of other, sometimes distant places – for example, views of the fens and other island settlements.

1.5 What makes a city and its setting distinctive?

This assessment recognises many aspects of, and variations within a place, and identifies the particular features which make a place unique and special. It assesses Ely's existing buildings, streets, gardens, watercourses, meadows, farmland, woodland and recreational land as well as the history of the city and its landscape. It sets out the combinations of features which interweave to produce the sense of place that defines the essence of Ely and its surrounding setting.

The report considers the whole city and setting. It does not select the 'best' areas for sole consideration and ignore the less favoured areas. Instead it assesses the influences that each area contributes to the overall character. By definition, the value of each area of influence will vary in the number, extent, quality, and interrelationship of its component parts. However, there is a value in the 'ordinary' street or field, particularly when it forms a context, setting or contrast to the areas of special merit such as major buildings, streets of historic houses or outstanding landscapes.

By extending the assessment process creatively, it is possible to develop a vision for the place, which is derived from an understanding of its existing distinctive character. The

vision can be further extended into guidelines for design and management. Initiatives could include the conservation of the special character of places, and the enhancement of other places and features, whether these are buildings, built-up areas, landscapes or wildlife habitats.

1.6 Limitations of Survey

It should be noted that although the whole of Ely has been subject to a thorough survey, the complexity of urban form and landscape is such that the need for minor adjustments of boundaries between character types and capacity classification cannot be discounted.

In addition, classification of character and capacity has been based on groups and zones of buildings and landscapes. The plans should not be used on a property by property basis.

1.7 Report Structure

This report can be divided into the following sections:

- Sections 2.0 and 3.0 consider the historical development of cathedral cities and the importance of Ely in relation to the national context. They also consider the historical growth of Ely and its key characteristics in terms of urban form.

- Section 4.0 defines the city and its landscape setting, looking specifically at character and existing designations both within the landscape and built up areas.

- Section 5.0 looks more closely at the quintessential views of Ely that define it as a distinctive place – assessing what components of the view make it special.

- Section 6.0 takes this a step further by assessing the sequential approaches to the city, which afford dramatic views, gateways and points of arrival.

- Section 7.0 looks specifically at the capacity study which draws on the analysis of sections 4.0, 5.0, and 6.0 to make judgements on the function of the landscape and townscape in contributing to, and strengthening, Ely's sense of place.

- Finally section 8.0 discusses the findings and concludes with a vision for the future of Ely. The vision is based on the recognition and importance of local distinctiveness and sense of place, the creative use of the planning system and the targeting of resources to those areas which have the greatest potential for benefiting from the always limited resources of time, people and budgets.

2.0 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HISTORIC CATHEDRAL CITIES

2.1 Introduction

The free-standing cathedral city is one of the most distinctive features of the English landscape. The interrelationship between the city, cathedral and surrounding landscape being one of the prime components. The extent to which this relationship is immediately recognisable is largely dependent on the subsequent growth of the city, particularly growth in the twentieth century. The dynamic tension in the composition of the city and its setting is critical, and the essential character of a cathedral city can easily be disrupted by the introduction of large-scale, inappropriate elements. The introduction of inappropriate development in terms of its location, scale or mass can cause the historic core to become swamped, resulting in the loss of views to the cathedral and/or cause visual competition on the skyline.

2.2 Cathedral Cities in the UK – Relationship of Cathedral and Landscape

There are many cathedrals in the UK constructed during the Medieval Period, whose origins are often linked to earlier monastic communities which were establishing themselves in the Anglo-Saxon Period. Whilst many cathedrals were constructed as independent communities it wasn't long before settlement established itself adjacent to these domineering structures. Traditionally growth would have been out along major road routes creating a star like pattern of development comprising a nucleated core centred on the cathedral and a linear pattern of development along the routes.

The exact geographical location of cathedrals, monuments that by their very scale, represented wealth and power, was carefully considered. Originally early monastic communities sought locations that provided a variety of natural resources to allow them to be self-sufficient. This often resulted in them siting themselves on the banks of rivers, which provided running water and meadows suitable for grazing, with nearby higher land suitable for crops. Cathedrals benefited from these locations but their siting was selected in order that the monument dominated the surrounding landscape either by height and scale and/or use of topographic variations. Thus many cathedrals are located on the highest ground so they are visible for miles around. Examples include Durham, Lincoln and Ely. At Lincoln for example, the cathedral is located on the highest land and dominates the landscape by rising above the landform, the cathedral spire or tower attracting views from the surrounding countryside. Alternatively cathedrals may be viewed from surrounding elevated land over a wide area as at Truro, Salisbury and Winchester. In these latter examples the cathedral and the city are subservient to the landscape, and the compact urban form and cathedral can be surveyed from many surrounding elevated viewpoints, as they are located in a valley landscape setting.

In this way the siting of cathedrals in the landscape is established on two fronts. Firstly a need for a diverse range of environmental resources to sustain a community, often resulting in an intimate relationship with a rich fertile river valley. Secondly a site which could enhance the image of the cathedral as a monument displaying wealth and power, and thus a close relationship with strong landform.

2.3 The Physical Growth of Cathedral Cities

As with most settlements in the UK the majority of development whether it be housing or commercial has taken place within the twentieth century post war period. Within the space of fifty years there has been a substantial increase in the size of cities with large-scale suburban housing estates, out of town shopping developments and industrial/business park developments. The impact of this has been a significant loss of countryside but also the loss of the historic identity of many of our towns.

This is particularly true for historic cathedral cities. Many have suffered from significant development which has swamped the urban core, or structures which compete with the cathedral landmark. Examples of this can be seen at Lincoln and Peterborough. At Ely, however, much of the historic core remains intact, the Cathedral dominates other built form and the landscape and the city has remained relatively small in size. With the loss of the distinctive qualities of other cathedral cities it is imperative that those cities which remain distinctive are treated with sensitivity.

3.0 THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ELY

(Drawing No. 1255LP/1 and Figure 1)

Ely is an island city of the Fens. The Fens has a history as a changing landscape, where comparatively small fluctuations in sea level have been the cause of major changes in the wetness of the land and consequently in is habitability. The Fens has a long, complex and fascinating history of flood, settlement and drainage.

Prehistory

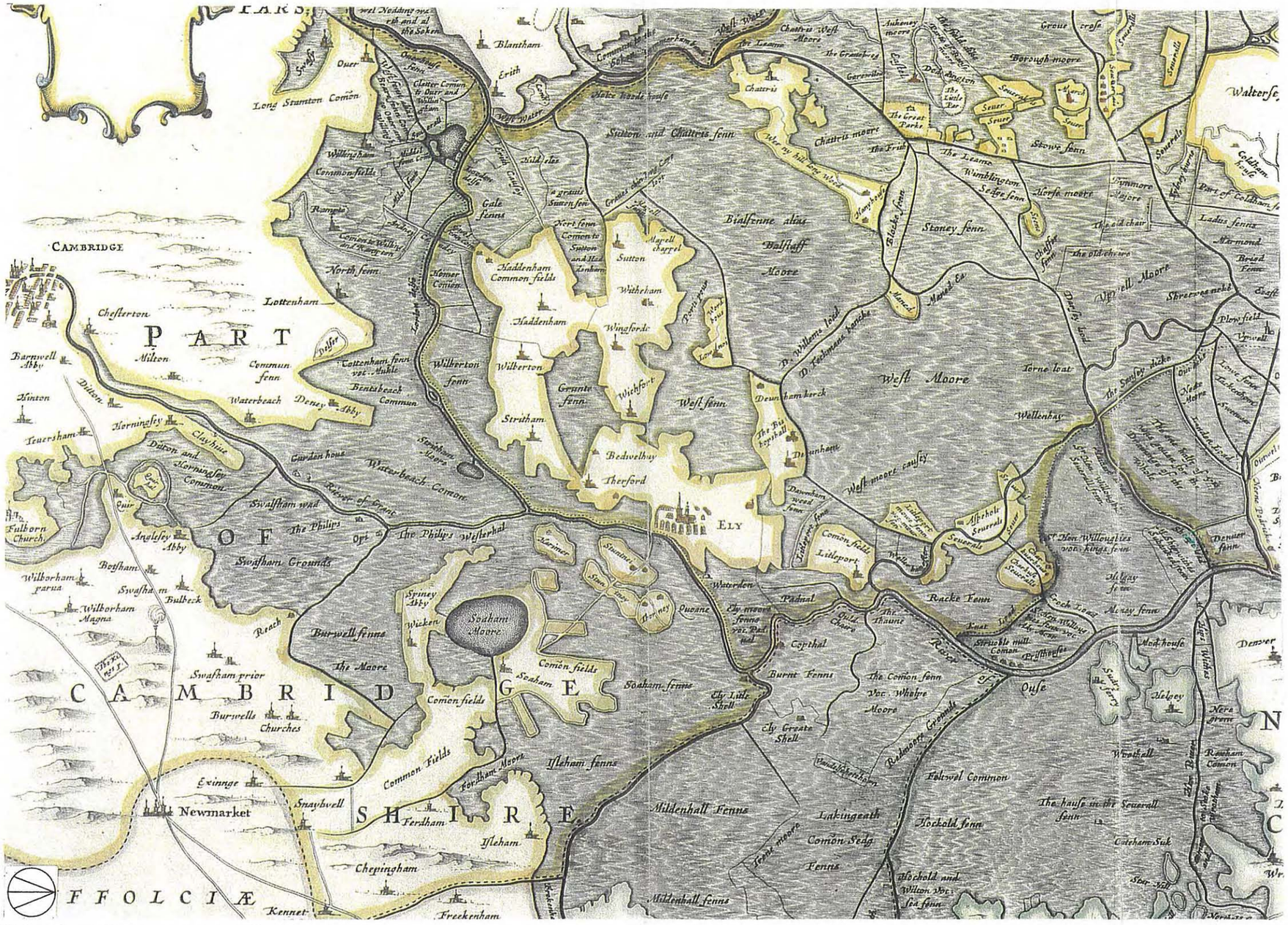
The history of the City of Ely really begins with the establishment of a monastery in the 7th century. There is however archaeological evidence of prehistoric settlements in the neighbourhood of Ely. The end of the Ice Age the country of Ely district comprised a series of low hills and shallow valleys. In the course of time the valleys became filled with alluvial deposits so that only the tops of the hills were left rising above a plain, which became the Fenland of today. This plain was alternately subjected to flooding by freshwater brought down by the rivers, and to inundation by the sea, leading respectively to deposits of silt or buttery blue clay, or the formation of peat. Neolithic (c. 2000BC) and Bronze Age people, (c.1500-500BC) occupied the margins and hills of the fens and, judging from the number of their weapons and tools that have been found under or in the peat, appear to have used the fens extensively as a hunting ground during dry periods. There is also evidence of prehistoric roads built to the island of Ely; During the Bronze Age (c.2000-700BC) at least three causeways were built into the island of Ely; one from New Fordy Farm at the end of the Wicken promontory leading towards Seven Stars on the Ouse opposite Little Thetford; a second from Stuntney leading towards Ely, its line parallel with and slightly north of the present Stuntney Causeway; a third, less well authenticated, leading from the north-western point of the island of Barway towards the Ouse. During the earlier part of the Iron Age (c.500-100BC), the Fens became less hospitable, and there are no traces of people during those times except on the surrounding islands.

Roman Period

The period of Roman occupation (43-410AD) was one of comparatively intensive settlement and major change in the Fenland. There is evidence of large-scale and effective planning of a kind not seen again until the 17th century: roads and canals were built, rivers diverted and many settlements established. The Romans built a road known as Akerman Street across the fens to the higher ground where Ely now stands and this continued as far as Littleport. The Romans also built at least two roads across the peat, from Castor to Denver and from Cambridge to Denver. It is likely too that a Roman road led from Ely to Soham and so, ultimately to Colchester.

Anglo-Saxon Period

By the end of the Roman occupation of Britain the fen county again became waterlogged and ceased to be settled. The fens were remote, unhealthy and dangerous. The fen assumed the appearance, which later influenced the history of Ely. It was a waste of meres and watercourses with islands often rising only a few inches above the water level. Thick beds of reeds grew to more than the height of a man. When the Angles and Saxons came they chose the higher ground and the margins of the fen for their dwelling using the fen only for hunting and fishing. Fish and fowl abounded, providing a living for the independent people who dared to settle. Eels were particularly plentiful, the name Ely in fact meaning 'Eel Island'.



'Taken from J.Blaeu – Regiones Inundate 1648'

Historic Map

LANDSCAPE DESIGN ASSOCIATES

CHKD. AF APP. RT DATE April 2000

DWG. No. 1255LP/Fig 1

Ely Environmental Capacity Study

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In summer the parts of the fen not flooded were used for growing hay and for grazing; so with peat for fuel, reed to thatch the cottages, osiers for baskets and traps, and eels, fish and wildfowl for food, the fenmen were largely self-supporting. Apart from the islands, the southern Fens remained as fenland for the next thousand years until the large scale drainage schemes were carried out in the 17th century.

At this time there was no one living where the city of Ely now stands. In 607AD a church was founded about a mile from the present city, at a place called Cratendune. The history of Ely however, really begins with the second attempt at a religious settlement in 673AD. Saxon princess Etheldreda eventually decided on a site nearer to the river to found a monastery of which she became Abbess. The building of a monastery for her newly founded house of monks and nuns began on the north side of the settlement, close by the site of the present Cathedral. The inhabitants of Cratendune abandoned their village and moved to the vicinity of the monastery where a community of lay folk gradually gathered around the rising monastery. It is therefore possible to say exactly when Ely began to exist.

Ely monastery was among the religious houses pillaged and burned by the Danes in 870. The next phase of ecclesiastical building began in 970 when the conventual church and monastic building, derelict since their destruction a century earlier, were restored and re-founded as a Benedictine Abbey. There grew up a college or community of not monks but secular priests who continued an orderly and religious life at Ely during the following turbulent years. Ely escaped further damage in the second Danish intrusion and prospered in all aspects of monastic life. (It is recorded that a monk improved the grounds of the abbey next to the church. He laid out gardens and orchards 'in very elegant taste'.)

Medieval Period

In 1071 William the Conqueror built a castle at Ely as part of his plan to control the fens and maintain submission of the Isle of Ely. The castle comprised a conical mound (the motte) crowned by a keep and a lower courtyard (the bailey). The remains of Ely Castle (now a scheduled ancient monument) can still be seen on the south-west side of the Cathedral Park. The site of the motte is marked by a conspicuous mound (Cherry Hill) and looking down towards the east from Cherry Hill one can trace mounds which mark the site of the bailey. Excavations between 1974-77 revealed the base of the windmill that occupied the site in earlier times.

The greatest period of ecclesiastical building in Ely began in 1083 with the building of the present Cathedral. The present buildings were begun close by the restored Saxon one, by Simeon the first Norman abbot. A medieval survey of 1086 shows that at this time the settlement at Ely was purely rural.

In 1109 Ely was made the see of a bishop. The prior became head of the monastery and the abbot established his bishop's palace to the west of the monastery. The buildings of the Cathedral were substantially complete by about 1189. It had taken a century to complete the building which has now stood in its completeness for over eight hundred years.

St Mary's Church was rebuilt a few 100 yards to the west of the Cathedral in the early thirteenth century. This is the only indication that there was a previous church on the site, so it is impossible to guess at the date or appearance of the earlier church. Some other Ely buildings, which date from the 13th century, are situated about a quarter of a mile to the west of St. Mary's Church. They are the remains of two small religious houses or hospitals, as they were called. They are at present known as St John's Farm (now a scheduled ancient

monument) and St Mary's Barn. Both stand at the bottom of St. Johns Rd, which used to be the main road from Cambridge and Witchford.

The medieval survey of 1251 shows that the settlement at Ely is still largely rural, though with marked urban beginnings.

The survey of 1416 depicts the medieval city, street by street. It shows that in 1416 the city is laid out much as in modern times, yet with the early possibilities of normal municipal development unfulfilled. Many of the medieval names are readily recognisable today.

To the west of the Cathedral is the Bishop's Palace. Its oldest parts are the eastern redbrick tower and the lower sections of the western tower, both work of Bishop Alcock (1486-1501). (The western tower was completed and the wing added to it in 1550. The rest of the present building is 17th century work).

Post Medieval
Henry VIII destroyed many churches in 1539 and the Cathedral did not escape. Ely like all other monasteries was dissolved, but on account of the Bishop's connection with it, the Cathedral and most of the monastery buildings were allowed to survive, and the monks suffered less than most of their brethren elsewhere. The Cathedral was reformed in 1541 along with the famous Kings School.

17th Century
The existing structure and road system in the centre of Ely is shown on the 17th century maps (1610 & 1660).

During this period the landscape setting of the city was significantly altered. A General Draining Act had been passed in 1600. This caused unrest among the inhabitants of Fenland who opposed these schemes, as they knew that they would alter their way of life and take away the living they had made from fishing and wild-fowling. It was another 30 years before work started on any comprehensive undertaking to drain the fens. In 1630 Dutch engineer Vermuyden was appointed to design and implement an elaborate system of drains and river diversions, including the construction of the Ouse Washes. The results of the drainage work were good and crops were grown on the reclaimed land; but it was soon found that the surface of the ground began to sink and it was necessary to pump the water from the ditches and dykes up to the higher level of the main drains and rivers, first by windmills, later by steam and now by diesel and electric pumps.

19th Century
Ely was the first great cathedral to be thoroughly restored; the work began in 1845.

The most important development at Ely in the 19th century, was the opening of the Eastern Counties Railway main line from London to Norwich via Ely, which increased the prosperity of Ely. This line opened in July 1845, the line to March and Peterborough the following year and the line to Kings Lynn in 1847. Ely has always been an important railway junction with lines radiating in five directions.

The district of Ely known as Waterside, dates from the latter part of the 18th century.

20th Century
Until after the War of 1914-18 very little development took place at Ely. The extent of the

city which had remained roughly the same for centuries received its first extensive enlargement in the early 1920's with the development of the New Barns Estate to the north of the city. This was followed in the 1930's by private development along Lynn Road, at Orchard estate and along Downham Road, Cambridge and Barton Roads and Vineyard area.

During 1962-3 St. Audrey's School and Ely High School were moved to an extensive site and in 1968 Needham's County Secondary School was added to the group. The Urban District Council built more houses at High Barns in 1958 and at West Fen in 1962, as well as development off St Johns Road, West End, and Wichford Road.

The late 20th century has seen the most substantial development which has included the A10 bypass, another railway branch line, development at Lynn Road and Prickwillow Road and the Cambridgeshire Business Park. Two more recent areas of housing development in the 1990's have occurred at Witchford Road and St Johns Road, and between High Barns and Prickwillow Road.

Although significant development is now planned to the west side of Ely the development of the city to the south and east has been contained by the river and railway line.

Modern Day

The modern plan of the city follows remarkably closely the broad layout of medieval times, the core of the city centred around the Cathedral (and down to the waterfront). It is interesting to see how little the city has changed in its layout from the medieval survey of 1416, and how most of the names have been handed down. Ely is characterised by its distinctive pattern of narrow streets, timbered houses and monastic buildings clustered around the great Cathedral. Due to its historic isolation, Ely has remained small and retained much of its rural character. Ely is still very much a city of the Fens. The lack of tall buildings and relatively unchanged street pattern has enabled the historic approach to the Cathedral to be retained contributing greatly to the city's identity and visitors sense of arrival.

The historic development illustrates that there are many buildings which grew up around the Cathedral which today collectively contribute to the sense of place of this historic core. Ely has the largest collection of medieval domestic architecture in England. Of monastic buildings, there are the cloisters (now a scheduled ancient monument) originally 12th century/ rebuilt 16th century, the Prior's House and the Bishop's House built in what was the monks' refectory, Prior Cauden's Chapel, now the chapel of Kings' School, which was built by Alan of Walsingham, the Ely Porta, or great gate of the monastery, and beyond it the tythe barn, now a gymnasium for Kings' school. Open space has always been maintained in the Cathedral Park to the south of the present Cathedral. Thus Ely's historic core and main bulk of settlement has remained relatively unaltered.

However, more recent residential and commercial growth at the edges of the city, has started to impact on approaches, views and character of the city, and thus peoples experience of the place. Whilst much of the development on the edge of the city occupies the island slopes, more recent development has started to creep off the island and on to the fen i.e. the Angel Drove site which houses the Cambridgeshire Business Park. This development is atypical of the traditional location of development and the historic form of the city.

4.0 LANDSCAPE AND TOWNSCAPE CONTEXT

4.1 Geological and Topographical Setting (Drawing Number 1225LP/2)

Ely is located on a island comprising lower greensand boulder clay and kimmeridge clay, while surrounding the island the landscape comprises boulder clay, kimmeridge clay, nordelph peat and alluvium (refer to Figure 2). The geology gives rise to the distinctive topography (refer to Drawing No. 1255LP/2).

The city is served by mainline train services that connect it to March and Peterborough, Kings Lynn, Norwich, Ipswich and Cambridge. The eastern side of the city is bordered by the Great River Ouse and the railway line embankment. To the west the city is bordered by the A10 bypass.

The closest settlements to Ely include Chettisham to the north, Queen Adelaide to the east and Witchford to the southwest. Further afield there are the settlements of Little Downham, Littleport, Prickwillow, Stuntney and Little Thetford.

4.2 Landscape Character (Drawing Number 1225LP/3 and Photograph Panel A)

In the Countryside Agency's National Character Map, Ely and its surrounding landscape, fall within Landscape Character Area 46 'The Fens'. The single unifying factor of the Fens is its low-lying, level terrain which, except for fen islands such as the Isle of Ely, rarely reaches 10m above sea level. This produces a landscape of open panoramas and expansive skies where changing weather patterns have a significant effect on the area's visual character.

As part of the capacity assessment, and in line with the Countryside Agency's Landscape Assessment guidance, a more detailed landscape assessment of Ely and its immediate setting has been undertaken. This subdivided, at a more local scale, the landscape into three Landscape Character Types: Ely Island, Transitional Landscape and Fenland. These are described in detail below:

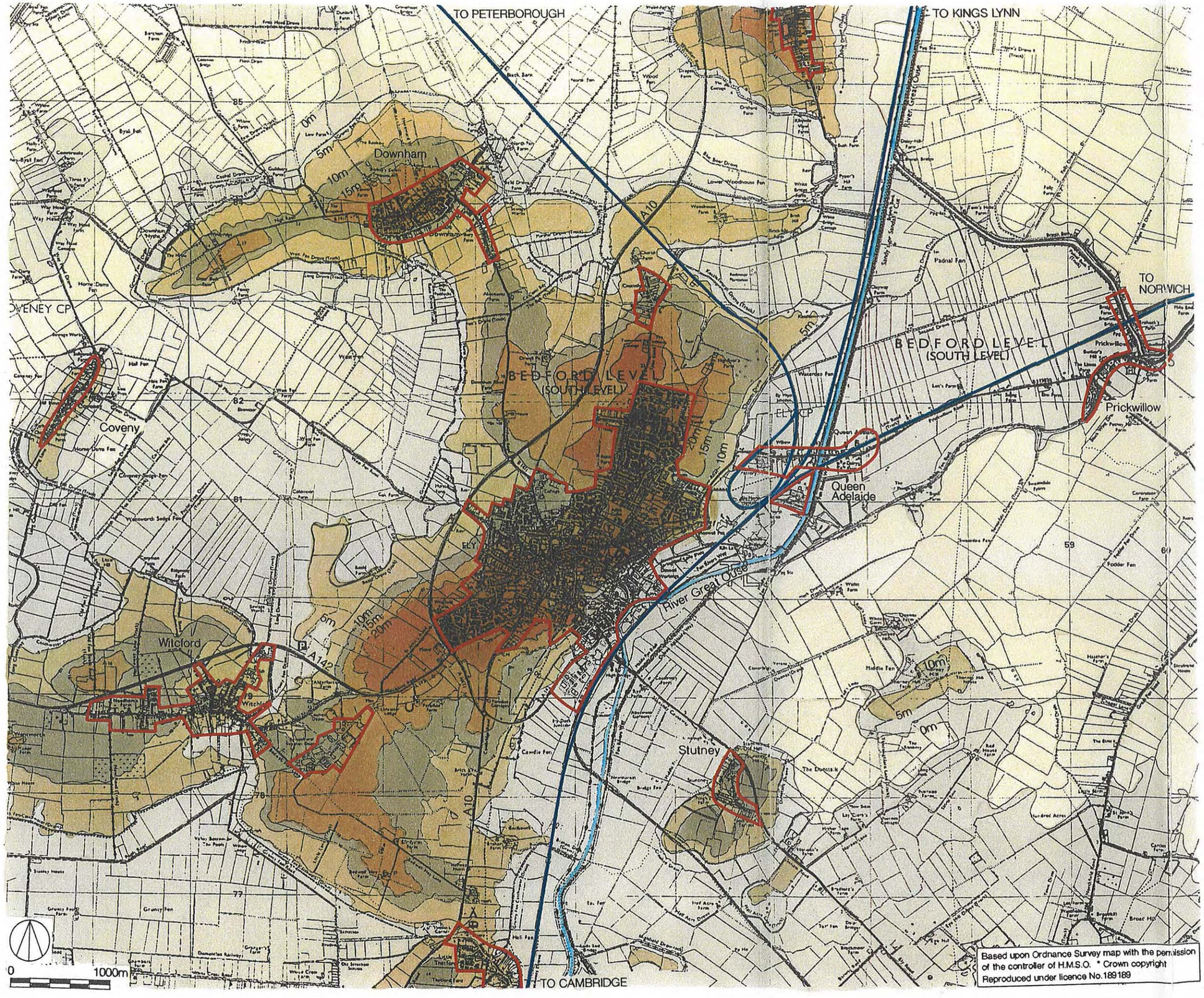
Ely Island
This landscape is the identifiable island of Ely. It is defined principally by topography and also by views, or sequence of spaces, that are unique to Ely, distinguishing it from other fen islands or the wider 'Isle of Ely' which stretches up to Little Downham and across to Witchford (refer drawing number 1225LP/3). Ely Island ranges from 5m AOD (Above Ordnance Datum) to 26m AOD and is approximately 2.5km across and 5.5km long. The gradient of the island slopes are most pronounced to the east and west sides of the island where the land quickly drops into the flat fen and where built form has traditionally located on the steeper slopes.

Land use on the island ranges from built form, recreational and public open space through to areas of agriculture at the southern and northern ends of the island. Nearly all development associated with the City, with the exception of the Cambridgeshire Business park, is located on the Island.

Transitional Island
This area of landscape ranges from 5m AOD to 20m AOD and includes other island

Ely Environmental Capacity Study

Landscape Context and Topography



Existing settlement

Existing railway routes

Land 20m AOD and above

Land 15 – 20m AOD

Land 10 – 15m AOD

Land 5 – 10m AOD

Land 0 – 5m AOD

Land below 0m AOD

River Great Ouse

0 1000m

LANDSCAPE DESIGN ASSOCIATES

CHKD AF APP. RT DATE April 2000

DWG. No. 1255LP/2

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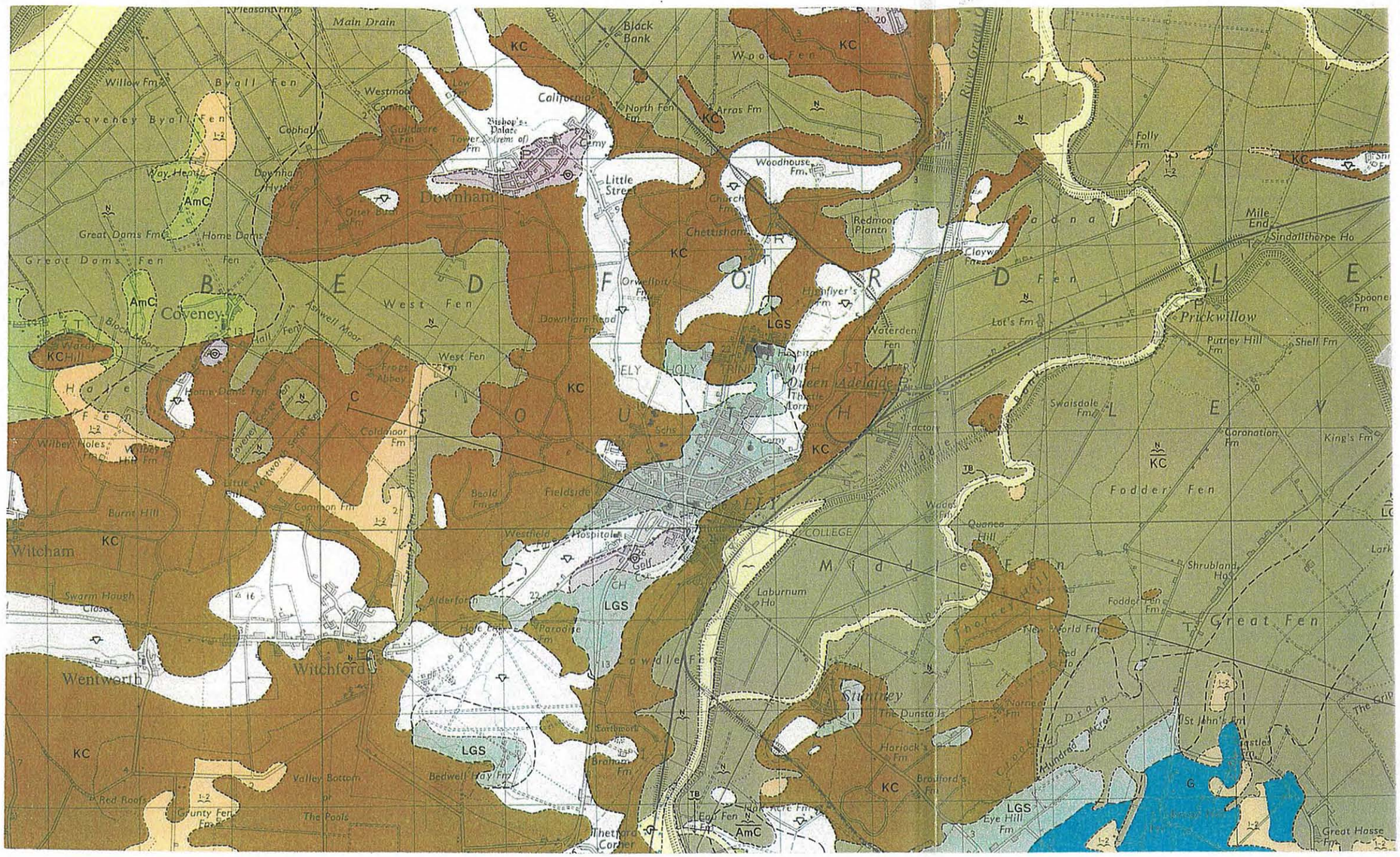
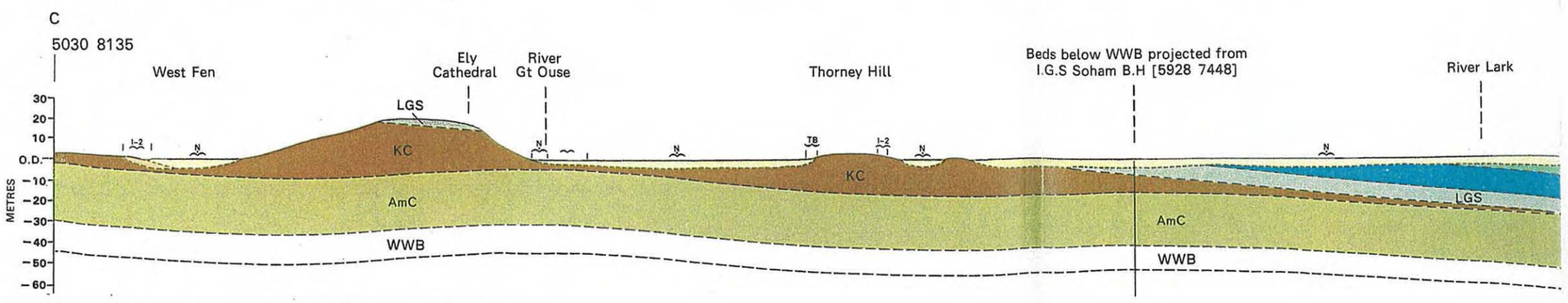


Geological cross sections along lines drawn on the map



Taken from Geological Survey of Great Britain Sheet 173, 1980

DRIFT

QUATERNARY

RECENT

- Nordelph Peat
- Shell Marl
- Alluvium
- Marine Alluvium, salt marsh deposits (Terrington Beds)
- Marine Alluvium, older salt marsh deposits (Barroway Drove Beds)
- 1st and 2nd Terrace, River Gravel
- Older Gravel Beach Deposits (March Gravels)
- Head
- Glacial Sand and Gravel
- Boulder Clay (Till)

SOLID

CRETACEOUS

JURASSIC

- LCk Lower Chalk
- G Gault
- Ca Carstone
- LGS Lower Greensand
- RxB Roxham Beds
- KC Kimmeridge Clay
- AmC Ampthill Clay

- Geological boundary, Drift
- Geological boundary, Solid
- Borehole

Abbreviation:—

m Metres

Geology

LANDSCAPE DESIGN ASSOCIATES

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DWG. No. 1255LP/Fig. 2

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settlements that surround Ely and a gently undulating landscape that connects Ely island to Little Downham, Witchford and Little Thetford. This landscape is predominately in agricultural use with the exception of the small settlements and the industrial park to the east of Witchford. The landscape is moderately treed with hedgerow field boundaries. The undulating topography and vegetation help to create a feeling of enclosure and foreshorten views. Views to other islands and built landmarks tend to appear, disappear and reappear as one passes through this landscape.

Fenland
This landscape comprises the flat agricultural landscape surrounding the fen islands and extends far beyond the study area. Within the study area it ranges from –5m AOD to 5m AOD and is generally sparsely vegetated. The soil is a characteristic rich dark brown reminiscent of earlier flooded fen and the development of peat. The flat topography of this landscape and its space vegetation results in a feeling of vast scale and exposure, with long distant views, particularly to the fen islands and built landmarks such as churches and Ely Cathedral. The rectilinear pattern of drainage ditches, many of which were laid out in the seventeenth century, is a strong landscape characteristic. Where vegetation occurs, generally in the form of windbreaks, it follows this drain network and reinforces the pattern.

4.3 Planning Context (refer drawing number 1225LP/4)

The importance of Ely historically is reflected in the planning designations that protect the historic character of the city including Listed Buildings, a Conservation Area and Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAM). All three SAM's and the majority of the listed buildings fall within the Conservation Area boundary. The significant number of Listed Buildings and the size of the Conservation Area demonstrate the strong character and relatively intact nature of the city historic core which contributes greatly to the distinctiveness of the city as a whole.

The landscape setting of the city is also covered by a variety of designations, mainly relating to nature conservation, the majority of which lie to the east of the city around the Great River Ouse. They include a Nature Conservation Zone, a SSSI at Roswell Pits and numerous County Wildlife Sites of importance for wetland, grassland and scrubby woodland which support populations of rare vascular plant species and habitats for breeding birds. These designations significantly restrict development from extending to the east of the city.

There are no landscape quality designations within Ely.

The Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines (1991) is adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance. It sets out, for the fenlands character area and its islands, suitable landscape enhancement strategies, which make an important contribution in protecting local character and creating new, richer and more diverse landscapes. These strategies are discussed in more detail in section 8.0 with specific reference to Ely.

4.4 Townscape Character

The townscape character assessment has identified key variations in character relating to the historical development of Ely, and the progressive development of the city in response to the landform setting, which has resulted in a distinct pattern. These areas of temporal

and spatial development range from the peripheral areas of residential development, whose coherence is principally derived from the unity of housing style and period of development, to the historic centre itself. The variations of landform, and the alignment of the principle approach roads into the city, have also influenced townscape character.

Townscape character is not separate from landscape. There are areas in the city where the landscape infiltrates into the city, notably at the Great River Ouse, where townscape and landscape merge 'borrowing' character from each other. In other areas within the city the spatial identity of some of the townscape character results from the presence of significant areas of landscape, notably Cathedral Park, which contributes to and enhances the townscape surrounding it.

Examples of townscape character are illustrated on Photograph Panel B.

5.0 VISUAL ANALYSIS AND QUINTESSENTIAL VIEWS

5.1 Introduction

Ely city is visible over significant distances due to its elevated location, but also due to the distinctive silhouette of the Cathedral on the skyline which makes it readily identifiable from the surrounding landscape.

This study is concerned with the visual appearance of Ely as a city, i.e. the relationship of the Cathedral with city development and landscape setting. Therefore this study has focused attention on areas where the Cathedral, city and landscape setting are discernible and form an important relationship, rather than considering all views over long distances (refer to drawing numbers 1255LP/5 and 6). It identifies those views that encapsulate the quintessential qualities of the city. Photograph panels C-F illustrate some of the typical views to and from Ely. Many of the quintessential views identified on drawing number 1255LP/6 are included on these photograph panels, although not all.

5.2 Landmarks

Whilst there are a number of distinguishing landmarks in Ely such as the water towers and the church of St Mary's, it is without question the Cathedral which dominates views and provides the most distinctive landmark of all.

From whichever direction the visitor approaches Ely, the silhouette of the Cathedral stands out on the skyline, with its single tower at the west end and the wide and comparatively squat octagonal lantern to the east.

5.3 Quintessential Views

An assessment of quintessential views has therefore focused on the Cathedral. These views identified are regarded as distinctive, dominant, and often arresting. The significance of a view varies and is dependant on:

The viewing angle
The foreground
Topography and landscape character
Distance away from Cathedral
Direction of sun

Views can be divided into two main categories; firstly key views from the surrounding landscape, and secondly views from the city outskirts and from within the city. These are discussed in detail below. Whilst there are many other views of the Cathedral these are regarded as less impressive although they are of course important in their own right.

5.3.1 Key Views From the Surrounding Landscape (refer to drawing number 1255LP/5):

- The South

Ely Road beyond Stretham Village

This is the most impressive long distant view of the Cathedral from the surrounding landscape. From this viewpoint the Cathedral is seen rising high above a fringe of trees with limited views of the development of the town. The land to the southeast of the city including the golf course and land between Witchford Road and Cambridge Road is important in forming the treed and green setting of the Cathedral. Equally the rising ridge of land surrounding Bedwell Hey Farm is significant in forming a closer rural foreground in these views.

- The South and East

Stuntney Village and A142
This is one of the most impressive views of Ely Cathedral where the scale of the monument and its location on a distinctive island surrounded by the town is most apparent. The proximity, angle and the fenland foreground, which gives it geographical context, contribute to the distinctiveness of this view. The surrounding town development does not detract from the view, as there are no buildings that compete with the scale of the Cathedral in terms of height or mass and the built area is very well treed.

- The North

South of Littleport and the A10 approach
From this direction the Cathedral is seen at some distance. It appears to be over the brow of the hill with only its towers remaining visible. The extension of the city northwards has resulted in recent housing development appearing in the middle distance on the skyline, although there is still a significant amount of agricultural land on the 'Ely Island' which forms the foreground. The Cathedral is less significant in these views because of the topography of Ely Island and the distance of the view.

- The West

Little Downham Island and West Fen Road
These views are distinctive in that the Cathedral is seen as the highest point of the town. Whilst the town surrounds the Cathedral, views to the Cathedral from this direction are often seen against the sun, so that the Cathedral is seen in silhouette and the surrounding town is in shadow and therefore less distinctive or dominant in the view. Allocated development and that currently under construction on this side of the city is generally in keeping with the character of development already seen to the east of the Island. Establishing vegetation within the urban form will be important in breaking up the mass of development.

The areas of higher land to the southeast and north of the town frame views and contain development, and as such their upper slopes are sensitive as is the skyline. The foreground is comprised of typical fen farmland.

Witchford and the A142
From this direction the Cathedral is a significant landmark from considerable distance. However, it is not until close to Witchford Village that it is seen within a discernible landscape context. From here the towers of the Cathedral are dominant and impressive. The ridge line or 'Transitional Island' landscape to the west of Ely forms the foreground to the view.