



Swaffham Bulbeck LANDSCAPE STUDY Part One: Parish Landscape Character Assessment

for Swaffham Bulbeck Parish Council

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1.0 Introduction

1. Chartered Landscape Architect Lucy Batchelor-Wylam was appointed by Swaffham Bulbeck Parish Council in July 2019 to undertake a landscape character assessment (LCA) of the parish. The LCA has three key purposes. The first is to provide a framework for understanding the different patterns of landscape and settlement elements across the parish with the aim of informing future change management. The second is to form an evidence base to underpin the emerging neighbourhood plan policies, and more specifically to inform a settlement fringe sensitivity study, which forms part two of this appraisal.

What is Landscape Character Assessment?

2. Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is the process of identifying and analysing variation in the character of the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features (characteristics) that make landscapes distinctive and create a sense of place. The methodology for undertaking LCAs is set out in 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment' (published by Natural England, 2014).
3. LCA helps to inform, plan and manage change and can be useful when undertaken at a scale appropriate to neighbourhood plan-making. It helps an understanding of the ability of different landscapes to withstand different types of development pressures and draw out the particular issues to which any future development should respond, such as:
 - Promoting understanding of sense of place and allowing development to respond to local building forms and patterns of development;
 - Integrating any new development successfully into its landscape setting;
 - Considering the scale of proposed development in relation to the topography; adjoining built form and local views, etc.
4. Landscape is understood as a result of the interaction of the natural, physical components of the environment with the human element - historical and cultural, land use and human interventions over time. It should map and describe the variations in physical, natural and cultural attributes that relate to the rural landscape, as well as its experiential characteristics, such as tranquillity. It is not just experienced visually, but through sounds, smells, memories and cultural associations. Landscape Character Assessment presents descriptions of these attributes in a consistent, robust and structured way so the characteristics of different areas can be understood and compared.
5. This study also includes elements of townscape assessment where the landscape and

built form interface. Townscape character assessment looks at the variations in the character of the built form of settlements and highlights indicators of value. The definition of townscape, described in GLVIA3¹ is: *“the landscape within the built-up area, including the buildings, the relationship between them, the different types of urban open spaces, including green spaces and the relationship between buildings and open spaces.”* (Paragraph 2.7) Guidance on the undertaking of Townscape assessments are less formalised but the Landscape Institute published a guidance note in 2017².

Purpose

6. The assessments were commissioned to help provide the Swaffham Bulbeck Neighbourhood Plan group the means of making sound decisions in relation to spatial planning, to help explain to residents and land owners why any such decisions were taken, to convey to developers the importance of attention to sense of place, and to identify and protect aspects of value.
7. Taking a landscape character led approach to plan making will ensure that local distinctiveness is maintained and enhanced, highly valued places and views are identified and, in relation to future development, help ensure development goes in the 'right' place and is well integrated into its setting.

Landscape classifications and references

8. Landscape character assessment analyses differences in topography, soils, hydrology, woodland and tree cover, land use and farm type, settlement patterns, and perceptual experience. These physical and human influences combine to create the unique and distinctive characteristics found in different landscapes.
9. Landscape character assessment can be applied at different scales from the national to the local, parish level. In classifying landscapes, two categories may be identified:
 - Landscape character **types** - these are landscapes with broadly similar combinations of geology, landform, vegetation, land use, field and settlement patterns. They repeat across a landscape so that landscapes belonging to a particular type such as 'Valley Meadowlands', may be found in different places.

¹ Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (GLVIA3) (Landscape Institute and Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013)

² Townscape Character Assessment LI Technical Information Note 05/2017. Revised April 2018. Townscape Character Assessment Technical Information Note.

1.0 Introduction continued:-

Landscape character **areas** - these are unique areas that occur in only one place and are therefore geographically specific. They have their own individual character and identity.

National level

10. Nationally, there are 159 National Character Area (NCA) profiles. The descriptions for each are available on the Natural England website. Swaffham Bulbeck parish falls across two NCAS - 'No. 46 :The Fens' and '87 : East Anglian Chalk'. These identify the differences between the flat fenland type to the north of the parish and the chalky uplands in the south. The NCAs are mapped and their key characteristics are reproduced in Appendices A - C (see separate document).
11. The Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines (1991) remain extant and constitute the baseline evaluation of landscape character in the County. They promote a vision for landscape enhancement and contain a set of sound design principles in relation to new development, as well as mapping and describing 8 county landscape character types.
12. Two appear to cover the parish, reflecting the split recognised at national level, with the 'Chalklands' to the south and the 'Fenlands' to the north. This assessment contains useful reference material, for example principles for management and improvement of the landscape in each type. (See reproduced in appendices D and E).

County/district level

13. Often a district level assessment is available, from which a parish study can be developed. However, East Cambridgeshire do not have a district level assessment so it was not possible to directly develop this parish level from it. But the parish is partially covered by Suffolk County's comprehensive assessment, and the southwest end of the parish is covered by the Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership character assessment undertaken in 2013. The Suffolk assessment 'types' cover most of the parish so this study was referred to as a valid source of information, the Ouse Washes assessment was less relevant.
14. In addition to the existing assessments, the following sources of information were used to help develop parish character area boundaries:
 - Topography data from OS maps
 - Soils and geology data from Landis
 - Designations for heritage and ecology information from government GIS website Magic Map ³

- Historic mapping from National Library of Scotland website
- Google's aerial photography

15. Other reference sources included emerging East Cambridgeshire Local Plan mapping and the extensive historic information available on www.british-history.ac.uk and Swaffham Bulbeck Parish council website. Listed building information was obtained from Heritage England; no Conservation Area Appraisal was available.

Existing relevant planning guidance and policy

16. A brief review was made of available landscape-related guidance or planning policy to understand the wider context into which the NP will sit.

Local Plan

17. The importance of planning for the protection and enhancement of landscape character is endorsed strongly by the NPPF and carried through into district level planning.
18. The Local Plan, adopted by the Council on 21 April 2015, is the statutory development plan for East Cambridgeshire. 'Policy ENV 1: Landscape and settlement character' is directly relevant to landscape and requires:

Proposals for development should be informed by, be sympathetic to, and respect the capacity of the distinctive character areas defined in the Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines. Development proposals should create positive, complementary relationships with existing development and will protect, conserve, and where possible enhance:

- *The pattern of distinctive historic and traditional landscape features, such as watercourses, characteristic vegetation, individual and woodland trees, field patterns, hedgerows and walls, and their function as ecological corridors for wildlife dispersal.*
- *The settlement edge, space between settlements, and their wider landscape setting.*
- *Visually sensitive natural and man-made skylines, hillsides and geological features.*
- *Key views into and out of settlements; this includes quintessential views of Ely Cathedral and the setting of the City as a historic 'isle' settlement close to the fen edge and the valley of the River Great Ouse.*
- *The unspoilt nature and tranquillity of the area.*

³ magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap

1.0 Introduction continued:-

- *Public amenity and access; and*
 - *Nocturnal character of rural areas free from light pollution. Suitable compensatory provision must be made in the event of significant harm where necessary.*
19. Landscape issues are also covered in other policies of the Local Plan, such as those that push for high quality design responses (ENV2), biodiversity protection and enhancement (ENV7), the maintenance of the Green Belt (ENV10) and various policies relating to protection of heritage features.
20. The Local Plan sets out a vision for each village. See page 302 for Swaffham Bulbeck. This notes that the village:
- *Is likely to grow at a slow rate over the Plan period, with new housing being built on suitable 'infill' sites within the village. No new housing allocation sites are proposed on the edge of Swaffham Bulbeck.*
 - *A 'development envelope' has been drawn around Swaffham Bulbeck to define the built-up part of the village where infill development may be permitted. The purpose is to prevent sprawl into the open countryside. Development on infill sites will need to be in line with Policy GROWTH 2.*
 - *Outside the development envelope, housing will not normally be permitted – unless there are exceptional circumstances, such as essential dwellings for rural workers, or affordable housing. Housing schemes outside the development envelope will be assessed against Policy GROWTH 2 and other Local Plan policies as appropriate.*

Supplementary Planning Documents

21. East Cambridgeshire also has an adopted Design Guide SPD (2014) which supports the Local Plan. Pages 24 to 33 are concerned with landscape issues. It sets out general principles for good design and requirements that include:
- Consideration of existing important views
 - Seeking of opportunities for creative habitat enrichment
 - Reflection of the local landscape character through the choice of appropriate native species, patterns and forms, material etc.
 - Paying particular attention to the edges of new development, especially where boundaries are adjacent to the countryside

22. East Cambs District also have an SPD that supports neighbourhood planning⁴. In relation

4 <https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Com%20Led%20Dev%20SPD%20as%20>

to landscape character it states a requirement for NP policy:

'No significant harm would be caused to the character or setting of the settlement and the surrounding countryside' (para 2.3.9)

For sites outside the settlement boundary, the impact on the character of the locality and the countryside will be important to consider. Community-led schemes should avoid causing significant harm to the appearance and character of the local landscape and townscape, or harm to heritage assets (including their setting).....

Green Infrastructure study

23. The Cambridge Green Infrastructure Study by LDA (2011) is a further driver for delivering landscape related benefits. One of the key issues for East Cambridgeshire district was to *'protect the countryside from inappropriate development, and to protect and enhance the district's natural environment including distinctive landscapes, habitats and biodiversity.'*
24. The NP could consider the ways in which it can contribute to the relevant GI priorities for the district, as set out in the report (p143 and 144):
- *Meeting deficits in Green Infrastructure and open space (formal and informal) provision.*
 - *Development of a series of District-wide strategically important Green Infrastructure and open spaces that link district planning and development priorities.*
 - *Improve the level of high quality biodiversity and conservation provision across the District.*
 - *Improve social engagement, ownership, and promote a long-term appreciation of Green Infrastructure, open space and the wider countryside of East Cambridgeshire.*
 - *Develop a network of functional Green Infrastructure links that promote a better quality of life, place and environment for East Cambridgeshire.*
 - *Creation of safer and healthier populations that support prosperous and involved communities in East Cambridgeshire.*
 - *Promotion of a District-wide initiative to increase woodland creation and outdoor recreation.*

adopted%2025%20Feb%202016.pdf

Green belt

25. The southern half of the parish is in the Cambridge Green belt. This policy designation protects a wide belt of land around Cambridge from development, as set out in the NPPF, and carried forward under policy ENV 10 of the Local Plan. However, development can be permitted by local Councils in “exceptional circumstances” as set out in NPPF para 145 which can include limited infilling or affordable housing on village edges. Local landscape character assessment could help in determining the appropriateness of any proposal in terms of landscape impact.
26. Detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments should be carried out, on a site by site basis, should development be proposed within the Green belt.

2.0 Approach

Method

1. For brevity, a detailed methodology is not given here, but methods follow nationally accepted best practice and available guidance on undertaking Landscape Character Assessment⁵.
2. The character areas were initially mapped via desktop study. Through overlaying maps of topography, soils, field patterns, land use, aerial mapping etc, areas of common or divergent character emerged. The initial desktop stage resulted in a set of draft boundaries, which were then tested and adjusted if necessary following visual survey in the field. Their boundaries generally follow some line in the landscape or feature such as field boundaries or roads.
3. The parish landscape was divided into 7 rural character areas - see page 12. Each area is named after a local place or feature and they are shown on Map 2. It is important to note that on the ground there is often a transition zone between one character area and another, so it follows that landscape character is unlikely to abruptly change at each boundary. When considering a piece of land near to a boundary the character description and guidelines for two or more areas may be relevant.
4. Each character area is then described under a set of common headings and they are supported by a set of representative illustrative photographs.

Character area analysis

⁵ ‘An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment’, Natural England, 2014

5. Seven rural character areas are described. Five of these about the built up area boundaries in some way and these settlement fringes are more likely to be the focus for future change. The assessment does not analyse the character of the built-up areas in any great detail, but does look at the edges and gateways that interface with the rural character areas. The sensitivity assessment goes into greater detail in terms of analysing settlement pattern and built form.
6. For each character area, the landscape is described under the following headings:

Constituent landscape types/areas

Provides reference to the relevant area description for any existing available character assessment.

Location, landscape setting and physical characteristics

Describes where the area sits within the parish and within the landscape, and gives a summary of its physical character.

Topography, soils and hydrology

Describes the landform, its elevation in metres above ordnance datum (AOD) and the soil types that dominate; whether there are water courses or ponds in the area; the direction that drainage basins fall toward.

Landcover and land use

Describes how the land is being used, the types of farming or cropping, and whether it is being managed for another activity, such as shooting. It describes the pattern of enclosures. It includes the amount and types of vegetation found; whether any semi-natural environments are found. Common hedge and tree species are listed.

Scale and enclosure

What is the scale of the landscape? What patterns the landscape demonstrates in terms of the size and form of its fields, e.g. whether organic or geometric in shape, and the presence or absence of boundary hedges. These factors lead to a sense of intimacy from a fine grained landscape, or openness when enclosure patterns have been lost.

Settlement and Gateways

Describes the amount, type, densities and pattern of settlement found, approximate age of the housing stock; the shape or form and ‘grain’ of the settlement. The degree to which an area’s pattern of subdivisions is small and frequent (fine grain), or large and infrequent (coarse grain). How today’s patterns relate to the historic pattern.

ROW (Rights of Way) and the Road network

Describes the road network and what the gateways into the village are like. Describes the extent and value of any rights of way.

Materials

What materials are seen in the built form, roof coverings, enclosures. What vernacular detailing is present.

Heritage, landmarks and features of value

Lists the aspects of value including:

- Listed buildings/structures and their settings
- Scheduled Monuments
- Greenspaces which are designated in the Local and/or Neighbourhood Plan
- Non-designated heritage buildings, open spaces, or other features, which contribute positively to the character of an area
- Areas designated and protected for geological or biological conservation, such as SSSIs and County Wildlife Sites; ancient woodland and veteran trees.
- Registered Parks and Gardens; parkland.

Visual and perceptual experience and views

Description of the visual experience - whether views are generally open or intimate, whether long or short; how scenic they are. Whether the area feels noisy or tranquil, busy or remote and isolated. Whether the landscape feels well cared for and in good condition, or where there are aspects that are degraded or cause visual intrusion. Are there any Key views in the area?

Condition, issues and opportunities

In what condition are the landscape and its features? How strongly does the historic character endure to this day?

Is any aspect under threat? What should be the objectives for conservation or enhancement? Are there possibilities for future creation of ecological habitat, or expanded recreation etc?

Supporting work

7. The completed Landscape Character Assessment provided the basis for further assessment and guidance. The Swaffham Bulbeck Fringe Sensitivity Assessment is part two of the landscape assessment project, which assesses zones of land on the village boundaries for their sensitivity and value in landscape and visual terms. This provides guidance as to their suitability for development and identifies landscape related constraints and opportunities.

3.0 Context

1. Swaffham Bulbeck is a rural parish in the district of East Cambridgeshire, lying approximately halfway, as the crow flies, between Newmarket and Cambridge. It is a longitudinal-shaped parish, one of several aligned south of the Cam, stretching about 6 miles from north to south, encompassing a range of landscape types from heathland in the far south, across loamy chalky claylands to peaty Fenlands in the far north. This variation in the soils and topography had a strong impact on historic land management and is responsible for the patterns in the landscape today and in fact explains the long thin shape of the parish.
 2. The landscape has a long history. The parish was known as 'Suafam' and 'Suafham' in an Anglo-Saxon charter of AD950 which meant 'the place or home of the Swaefe.' The word Bulbeck was added in the early Medieval period, after Hugo de Bolebec, who was granted a manor here soon after the Norman Conquest.
 3. There is plenty of evidence for pre-Roman occupation. Just to the north of the parish boundary runs the Ickniel Way which dates from early Neolithic times (4 000 - 2000 BC). The Ickniel Way is traversed at right-angles by long dykes and earthworks, which may have once marked territorial boundaries. The longest is the Devil's Dyke which runs through neighbouring Swaffham Prior parish. The chalklands in the south are also long settled. There is an extensive area of burial mounds scattered here - five bowl barrows (SMs) dating from the Bronze Age (2000 - 700 BC) were found at Upper Hare Park (to the south of the A14).
 4. In past eras, the drier chalk belt over which the central part of the parish lies, provided the easiest route along the edge of the fens for travellers and thus settlement became established. As human activity developed in the Fens drainage channels began to be cut which both drained the land to make it more viable for farming, as well as providing the opportunity for people to travel the waterways. Lodes, the straight drainage channels through the landscape, were first cut by the Romans, but some may be also Saxon or early Medieval in date.
 5. The village was an important port on Swaffham Bulbeck Lode as part of the fenland network of navigable waterways and flourished as a trading post from the 17th century. As a direct result of this and its importance for agriculture, the resulting prosperity led to the construction of many timber-framed buildings in the village and the growth of the hamlet known as Commercial End. These fine buildings contribute considerably to the character of the village.
 6. Since this period the village and its landscape setting has not changed markedly over recent centuries - today's aerial views show markedly similar patterns and arrangements to the early OS maps of the late 19th century. In the southern part of the parish the boundaries still largely follow the longitudinal strip patterns first laid out under a medieval open field pattern although much amalgamation has taken place resulting in often vast featureless arable lands.
 7. There is a substantial amount of history of the evolution of the village that can be read in A F Wareham and A P M Wright, 'Swaffham Bulbeck', in A History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely: Volume 10, Cheveley, Flendish, Staine and Staploe Hundreds (North-Eastern Cambridgeshire) (London, 2002), pp. 247-252. It is available online at www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/cambs/vol10/
- ### Parish form
8. The distinctive shape of the parish, and its neighbours, is 'coaxial'. This term explains a linear form, running perpendicular to the river Cam, which forms its boundary in the far north. UEA landscape historian Tom Williamson refers to work undertaken by Harrison (2002) to argue the form of these parish layouts is ancient in origin. They functioned to allow farmers to share access to a range of resources, as the topography and soil vary from the marshy rivers edge to chalky upland. The linearity is explained in terms of providing the ability to move livestock from upland pastures to lowland fields and meadows, and back again, and to access a range of other resources —wood, fodder, timber etc. It also relates to the direction that drainage ditches would have been cut towards the river Cam. Williamson states these factors '*served to 'etch a grain' into the landscape which later, as more land was brought into cultivation and was enclosed as fields, became the dominant framework of the countryside*' (1 p6).
 9. This also helps explain the form of the road network in terms of the tracks that were used for livestock movements across the range of different environments. These historic landscape factors continue to have a very strong influence on landscape character today.
 10. At the end of the Lode, a further settlement cluster grew up, once known as Newnham, is now known as Commercial End. Successive families of merchants prospered here from 1650 to 1850.
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1. The Ancient Origins of Medieval Fields, Williamson T, 2016 Published online in The Archaeological Journal Volume 173

3.0 Landscape context continued:-

Topography and hydrology

11. The north of the parish is low-lying, flat fenland and all lies below the 5m contour. The main road and village sits along its southern edge just as land begins to rise; the village is found between the 5m and 10m contours. Land south of the village begins to steadily rise towards the chalky uplands which becomes gently rolling in the southeast of the parish and rises to a height of 55m AOD. The elevated nature of this end of the parish allows long views and has a very different feel to the fenlands in the north.
12. The hydrology of the area is a key aspect of the village's form, identity and history. The upland part of the parish to the east has no evident watercourses but spring-fed streams from neighbouring parishes wind naturally into the fenland edge where, over the centuries, their character has been changed to straightened, man-made drainage ditches. A regular, geometric network of ditches is found north and west of the village accompanied by associated bridging points, pumps and dykes. The ditches all drain towards the northeast where the river Cam forms the northern boundary of the parish, some via the Swaffham Bulbeck Lode.
13. The Lode is a long straight water course that links into the Cam and was initially cut in Roman times. Its navigation potential brought prosperity and growth in the 18th century and saw a port develop in the area now known as Commercial End. The efficient geometry of the ditches and the straight droeways that crossed the fen now form a key aspect of its character.
14. The Fens to the north were originally covered by trees, but became inundated with peat as the prehistoric Cam and other rivers slowed and eventually flooded the fenland basin. Any dwellings in the area were forced onto the higher grounds in the centre and south of the parish, along the edge of the fen, where they are found to this day.

Geology and soils

15. There is a varied soil profile from the north to the south of the parish owing to its transitional position across the fenland edge and up onto the chalk slopes.
16. On the elevated land to the south soils are chalky and loamy clays overlying chalk bedrock. There are also patches of light acid soils which would have been heathlands in centuries

past. Today these light, more freely draining lands, beyond the A14, are dominated by the horse-racing industry and large areas are dedicated to enclosed pasture.

17. West of the heath, downslope, the chalky and loamy clays have long offered good farming. The land was farmed in medieval times in an open field system whereby a few large fields, of several hundred acres each, were divided into many narrow unfenced strips of land under the control of the local Manor. The lack of woodland and enclosures endures to this day and the open large-scale character of the landscape is distinctive if sometimes a little overwhelming.
18. The soils are markedly different in the low-lying land north of the main village. Here dark peaty fenland soils are found, now drained for agriculture, which overlie deep peats and mudstone bases. These fertile soils are locally very important for agriculture and horticulture. Historically the fen was a valuable resource, providing peat for fuel, thatching reeds, summer grazing, then fish and wildfowl in winter when water levels rose. With grain and heath pasture for sheep available on the chalk uplands, fen edge villages such as Swaffham Bulbeck grew prosperous.

The road network

19. Settlement in Roman, and then Saxon times, grew up in the centre and south of the parish between the productive uplands and the edge of the fen, elevated just out of the flood zone. An ancient, often winding road network, follows the fen edge accordingly linking the village with Bottisham, Lode and Swaffham Prior. The village houses became clustered and distributed along these routes. The main route from the ancient Cambridge/Newmarket toll road has a different character. It runs in a straight line towards the village from the east, and was historically unsettled.
20. In the fen farmlands to the north, the parish is criss-crossed by a grid-like network of narrow droves and lanes. They often cross the parish at right angles to its axis meaning the scattered farms e.g. Slades Farm, Highbridge Farm, Lythel's Farm can only be reached via other parishes.

Twentieth century change

21. In 1910 records show the whole parish contained 170-80 dwellings, mainly medieval and post medieval timber-framed houses and 19th century brick cottages, as well as outlying farmsteads. These were scattered along the fenland edge on the main road to Swaffham Prior and, from the 18th century, along the loop road through Commercial End. Today many of these are listed and contribute very positively to the historic street scenes and give the village its special character.
22. After the second World War infill began to take place, as it did in most villages in East Anglia. Forty-five new houses were built in the 1960s but the largest development was of council built housing; 80 dwellings were built between 1930-60 and the Maryland Estate was further enlarged from the early 1970s. The district council built another estate in the 1970s at Vicarage Close, semi-detached and bungalows in the ubiquitous red-brown brick that characterizes local authority houses of this era. Limited further infill in the ensuing decades has brought the total number of dwellings to over 400 today.

Summary

23. Swaffham Bulbeck has a particularly direct relationship with its landscape setting, on which the shape of the parish itself is founded. The variety of its soils and environmental profiles, from Fen to upland, historically meant access to a wide range of resources, transportation methods and options for farming. The necessity of passing from east to west to access the different environments has shaped its linear patterns and networks as well as leading to its growth, prosperity and rich built heritage. It also has a rich 'designed' landscape heritage - the presence of two parklands at either end of the villages also hint at historic wealth, contributing positively to local character today.
24. Distinctiveness is strongest where the historic buildings and farmsteads remain dominant features in the street scenes, and where there is interaction with topography and open space. Preservation and /or enhancement of these open spaces, and the historic buildings and their settings, is of primary importance to retain the special character of Swaffham Bulbeck.

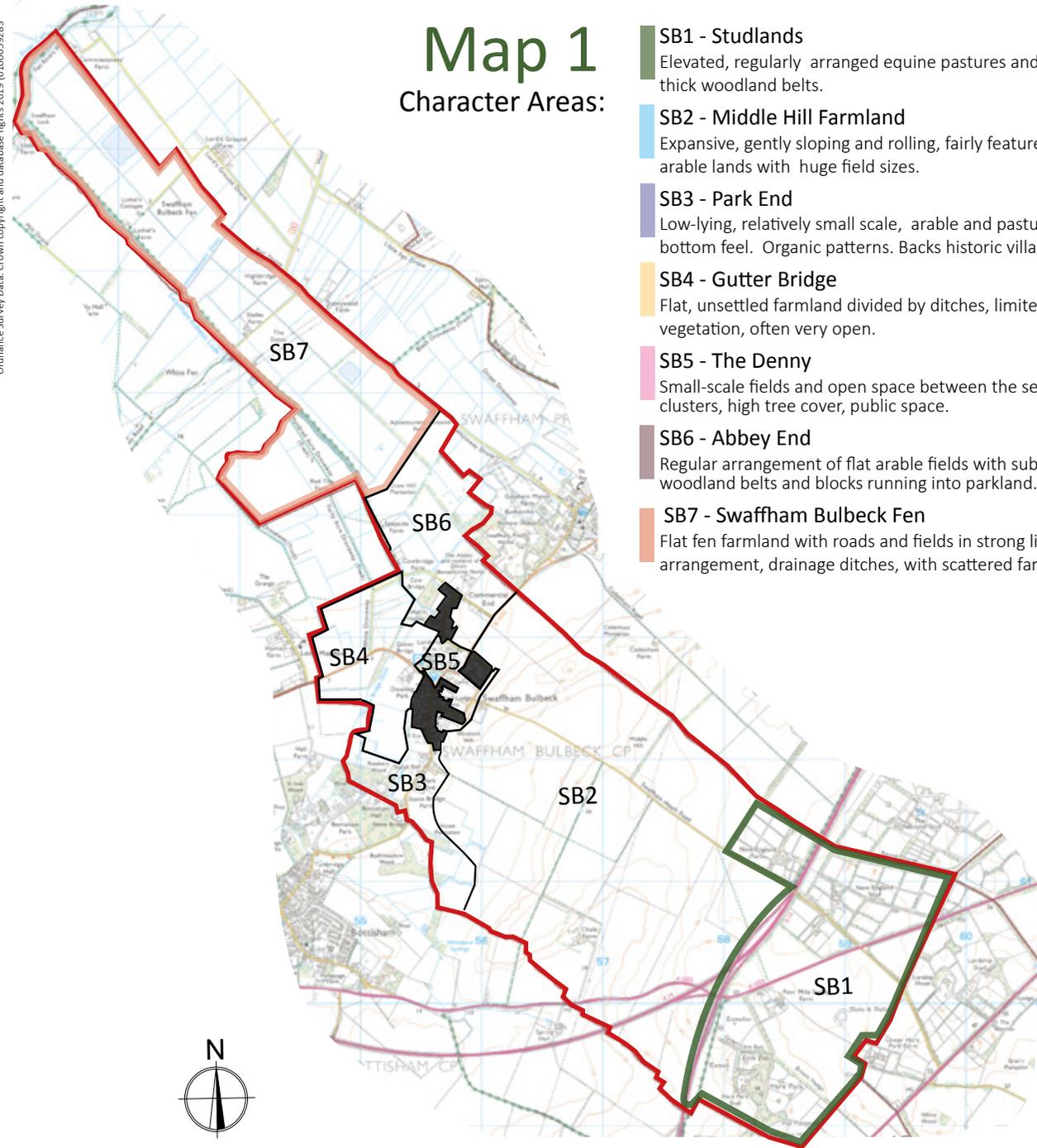
4.0 CHARACTER AREAS

Map 1

Character Areas:

- SB1 - Studlands**
Elevated, regularly arranged equine pastures and parkland; thick woodland belts.
- SB2 - Middle Hill Farmland**
Expansive, gently sloping and rolling, fairly featureless open arable lands with huge field sizes.
- SB3 - Park End**
Low-lying, relatively small scale, arable and pasture with valley bottom feel. Organic patterns. Backs historic village edge.
- SB4 - Gutter Bridge**
Flat, unsettled farmland divided by ditches, limited structural vegetation, often very open.
- SB5 - The Denny**
Small-scale fields and open space between the settlement clusters, high tree cover, public space.
- SB6 - Abbey End**
Regular arrangement of flat arable fields with substantial woodland belts and blocks running into parkland.
- SB7 - Swaffham Bulbeck Fen**
Flat fen farmland with roads and fields in strong linear arrangement, drainage ditches, with scattered farms.

Ordnance Survey Data. Crown copyright and database rights 2019 (0100059283)



Character Area SB1 - Studlands

SB1 - DESCRIPTION

Constituent landscape types/areas

NCA: 87. East Anglian Chalk

Suffolk Character Assessment: 13. Rolling estate Chalklands

(Refer to appendices A - D in separate document)

Location, landscape setting, and physical characteristics

A landscape in the far southeast of the parish, severed from the rest of the parish both physically and visually by the corridors of the A14 and A11, which are in cuttings and lined by trees. The A14 generally contains the area, but the Yearlings of the New England Stud Farm are housed in an enclave north of the A14 on Swaffham Heath Road.

Its landscape character is dominated by Studs and the horse breeding industry, which makes it feel more contiguous with the adjacent parishes here than the rest of the parish to the west.

Topography, soils and hydrology

Land feels flat or very gently sloping and is found between the 40 and 60m contour, rising gently to the southern tip of the parish, to a height of about 58m AOD at Hare Park.

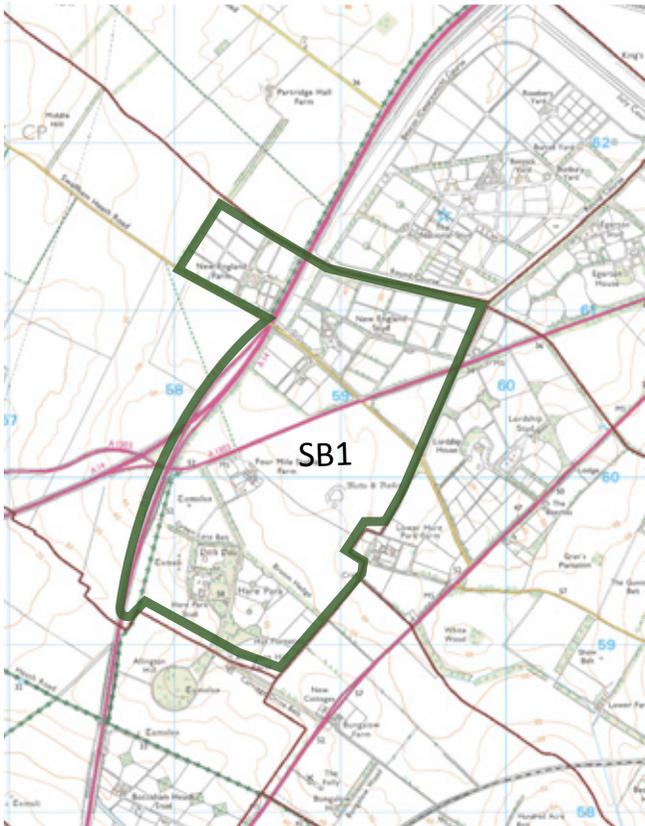
Soils are fertile, free-draining, slightly acid base-rich soils. Water courses are not present.

Landcover and land use

This area is former heathland that would have been important sheep grazing lands. Now this area forms the edge/extent of the large area under stud farms and equine land use to the southwest of Newmarket - a combination of pastures and woodland screens and shelterbelts.

Scale and Enclosure

Moderate scale landscape with strongly enclosed feel from the frequent tree belts and hedges. The enclosure pattern is a grid of paddocks which overwrote the extensive areas of common land that would have previously endured for centuries. Enclosure forms are relatively 'young' in that they would have been laid out to accommodate equine breeding which began with the birth of the racing industry in Newmarket in the late 17th century.



SB1 - DESCRIPTION

The studs are enclosed within deep woodland tree belts and roads usually have a deep verge and a hedge which confine views. Farmland too is often enclosed by woodland belts which afford some open views backed by a wooded skyline.

Settlement and Gateways

The settlement pattern in the Rolling Estate Chalklands tends to be clustered villages surrounded by a scattering of individual farmsteads. But here settlement is absent apart from the stud farms and their associated cottages, sometimes along the roadside.

Rights of Way and the road network

The area is linked to the main village of Swaffham Bulbeck by a road bridge over the A14 but the area feels more contiguous and connected with adjoining Stetchworth and Dullingham. As well as the major trunk roads that pass through the parish (A14/A11), the secondary network is of long, straight and relatively wide roads. Roads are often accompanied by avenues of trees or straight hedges.

Few rights of way. Historically public access is unlikely to have been compatible with the required security at stud farms so this might be one reason for the dearth of public RoW in the area. One footpath links from the A1303 and heads southwards out of the parish alongside the A14, northwest of Hare Park.

Materials

The architecture of the studs themselves is concealed from view but the older roadside cottages demonstrate a vernacular of brick or render with red plain tiled roofs and white paintwork windows. Examples of newer dwellings are mixed - with slate roofs and cobble walls.

Heritage, landmarks, features of value

The area has the remains of five tumuli that date from the Bronze age, scattered around Hare Park - all designated Scheduled Monuments.

No listed properties are present.

Visual and perceptual experience and views

Highly ordered, well managed landscape with distinctive affluent 'studlands' feel. Moderate scale and geometric, sense of enclosure provided by regular tree belts and containment of views. Feel of uniformity results from large tracts under single ownership. Lack of fine grained patterns, varied textures or organic patterns but perceptions of tranquil, unpopulated landscape.

Noise from the A14 is a constant presence in the southwestern edges of the area.

Condition, Issues and Opportunities

Condition of the landscape is very good, woodland stock is well maintained. The boundaries of the studs usually have a clipped and regularly managed appearance.

Ecological value associated with the woodlands. Opportunities to further promote biodiversity across the grasslands and their margins.

Changes can be accommodated relatively easily with suitable planting that is consistent with the character of the landscape given its geometry and simple land cover pattern.

SB1 - VIEWS

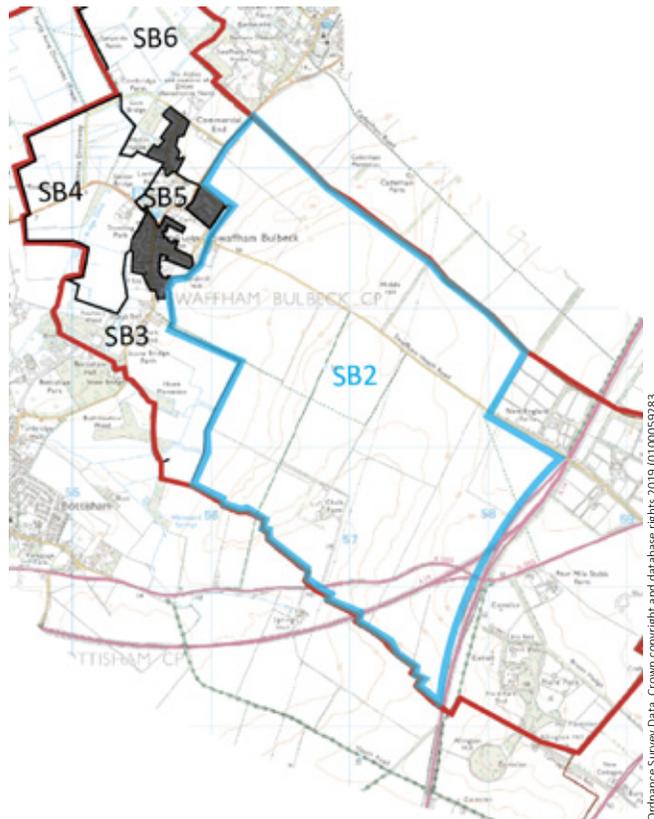


Typical Studland roads



Photo from Swaffham Heath Road toward east, with New England Stud behind trees (to the left). Strongly wooded character.

Character Area SB2 - Middle Hill Farmland



SB2 - DESCRIPTION

Constituent landscape types/area

NCA: 87. East Anglian Chalk
 Suffolk Character Assessment: 13. Rolling Estate Chalklands
 (Refer to appendices A - D in separate document)

Location, landscape setting, and physical characteristics

The largest character area in the parish - a sloping and elevated, very gently rolling landscape tilting gently towards the southwest and west. It has an open, large-scale and geometric feel. It stretches from the village edge in the west to the A14 corridor in the southeast. It forms part of the shoulders of the chalk uplands that edge the wide, shallow valleyside of the River Cam.

Topography, soils and hydrology

The gently rolling land rises steadily from the edge of the village in the northwest, from the 10m contour, to about 50m AOD adjacent to the A14 in the southeast. Soils are agriculturally important free-draining mineral soils and deep loams - chalky and loamy clays overlying chalk bedrock.

There are generally no water courses in this character area but on its lower, southwestern edges a couple of spring-fed streams rise and flow northwestward.

Landcover and land use

The area is entirely arable farmland laid out in very large rectilinear fields. Its longitudinal field shapes are a vestige of the medieval open field system which would have once been found here. Woodland is not present in the character area other than some narrow linear tree belts, and hedges are sometimes present. However, distant wooded horizons form part of the visual experience.

Scale and enclosure

Very large scale, open arable farmlands with few enclosures. Hedges and closely spaced roadside tree plantings are sometimes present and farm hedges are in mixed condition, some dense and continuous and others very gappy and sporadic. Tree species seen along roadsides are hawthorn, field maple, and ash and beech.

SB2 - DESCRIPTION

Settlement and Gateways

Settlement is generally absent apart from one farmstead - Chalk Farm and its associated cottages - which are accessed from, and feel more geographically linked to, Bottisham to the southwest.

Rights of Way and the Road network

Rights of way form a light criss-cross across the valleyside connecting Swaffham Heath Road to Chalk Farm and to the A1303.

The old Cambridge/Newmarket toll road (A1303) passes through the southern corner of the area, elevated over the A14 carriageway as it enters the parish, offering long views.

The less busy Swaffham Heath Road crosses the area further north in a straight line, parallel with the parish boundary. Leaving the village it takes a straight route up the valleyside, the large-scale geometric field network arranged in perpendicular fashion either side.

The straightness of the road network and the linear arrangement of the enclosure pattern is distinctive.

Materials

Little built form or features present. Chalk Farm dates from the early 1800s, and was built on the land of the open field system after the Inclosure Acts took place. It is a brick house and the cottage seen at the entrance to the long drive to Chalk Farm is also brick with a slate roof.

Heritage, landmarks, and features of value

On the eastern edge of the character area there are three neolithic bowl barrows close to the A14 corridor. These are Scheduled Monuments even though they have long been ploughed out. This barrow group lies within an extensive area of burial mounds scattered upon the chalk grounds of south east Cambridgeshire.

There are no listed buildings in this area.

Visual and perceptual experience and views

Empty, open featureless farmland - the vegetative features present often have little impact faced with the scale and openness of the landscape. Sense of prairie-style farms which lack many natural features.

Skylines are often bare but horizons can appear wooded as shelter belts on the uplands, or valley bottom trees link up. A line of large pylons marches across the area. These pylons and other vertical features such as telegraph poles are visually prominent and seen clearly against the bare skylines.

Long unconstrained views are possible from elevated points and are a key part of the experience of the landscape.

Noise from the A14 is a constant presence in the southeastern edges of the area.

Condition, Issues and Opportunities

Future agri-environment schemes may provide the means for enhancing the structure of the landscape with more hedge and tree planting, especially if planned to form corridors and links across the landscape. This would be a major boost to biodiversity. Planting patterns should follow the linear form of the enclosure patterns. Woodland is not historically characteristic here but if planted in linear forms, using mixed native chalkland woodland species, there would be considerable biodiversity benefits.

Expansion of the species-rich grass verges found on parts of Swaffham Heath Road would also be a positive move for biodiversity.

SB2 - VIEWS



Photo looking southeast beside Heath Road towards bare skyline.



Glimpse of Church tower from footpath through farmyard

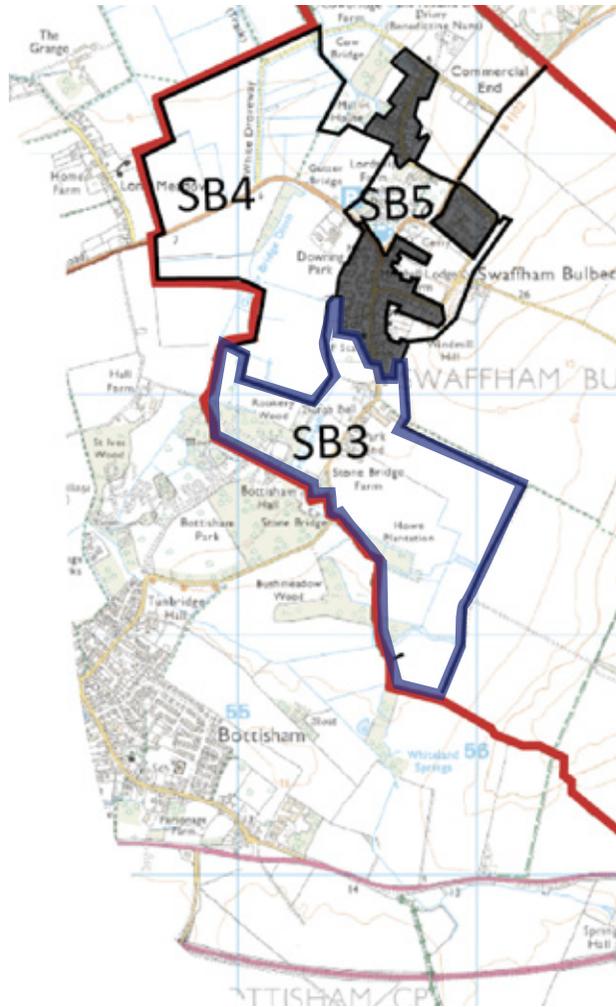


Photo from Burgh Hall farm towards the open fields to the southeast.



Swaffham Heath Road ascends the valley side, lined with trees.

Character Area SB3 - Park End



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SB3 - DESCRIPTION

Constituent landscape types/area

NCA: 87. East Anglian Chalk
 Suffolk Character Assessment: Majority of the area is 13. Rolling Estate Chalklands
 (Refer to appendices A - D in separate document)

Location, landscape setting, and physical characteristics

The area lies along the village edge either side of Park End road, and to the south of the main village cluster, helping separate it from Bottisham to the south.

This is a transitional landscape which connects the toe of the slope of the uplands to the edge of the fen, and it has a valley bottom feel. It has a much smaller scale appearance than the adjoining landscapes upslope and is much more enclosed.

Topography, soils and hydrology

It is a flat-feeling, low-lying landscape on the edge of the fen / floodplain between the 6m and the 13m contour, (approximately) which is dissected by a small tributary stream that drains into Swaffham Bulbeck Lode to the north - Mill Steam. The stream has an organic form in places but its channel has also been straightened, and is used as a conduit to drain the surrounding land by straight cut drainage channels.

Soils are still the shallow lime-rich chalky and loamy clays found upslope, overlying chalk bedrock, but they are more silty and less free-draining here on the lowest reaches of the slope.

Landcover and land use

The area comprises pasture and arable farmland laid out in small and medium hedged fields, as well as parkland.

The name Park End refers to Bottisham Park which is found between Bottisham and Swaffham Bulbeck, and which forms the southern end of the parish. The park dates from the 19th century and is a County Wildlife Site. Tree cover is higher here than in the upland landscapes to the southeast and the fenlands to the northwest. It is present in various forms - as woodland in the park, as field hedges and tree belts, and it is also seen fringing the course of the Mill Stream.

SB3 - DESCRIPTION

Scale and Enclosure

Small and modest size enclosures with a somewhat more organic feel to the pattern than in the rest of the parish. This often relates to the winding course of the Mill Stream in its vicinity. Small fields back the village edge which hint at earlier inclosure than much of the open farmlands to the southeast.

Feels considerably more enclosed owing to the trees found in the valley bottom and the frequent hedges and well vegetated domestic boundaries that back the area along the village edge.

Settlement and Gateways

Settlement has long been found along Park End road - there are a number of Listed buildings including the late 15th century Burgh Hall (Grade II*) which has its origins as a medieval manor, and the parish church of St. Mary. The edge of the village here is correspondingly organic and porous (in contrast to 20th century edges which tend to be straight and continuous).

Rights of Way and the road network

The main route through the village runs in a north-eastwards direction, following the ancient travellers' routes along the edge of the fen. The road takes a somewhat winding route from Bottisham through the village, towards Swaffham Prior, and it was along this route that the main medieval settlement developed, alongside the manorial farmsteads.

Rights of way are absent in this area.

Materials

Timber framed houses are the historic vernacular form - Burgh Hall and Linton House are two particularly fine examples. Although not originally exposed at the time of building, the stud work seen today in buildings such as Burgh Hall was only exposed in later centuries and results in a distinctive vernacular architecture. Downing farmhouse is gault brick but it

probably incorporates an earlier timber-framed building within it. In the 19th-century new cottages, some plain grey brick, were inserted amongst the older stock.

Heritage, landmarks, and features of value

This area is long settled. In terms of archaeology numerous finds in the vicinity, including flints and bronze axes, suggest human presence at various periods over most of the Stone, Bronze and Iron Age. The south of the area is formed of parkland - Bottisham Park. Part of the estate (although beyond the parish boundary) are the remains of a deserted medieval village which are a designated Scheduled Monument.

The current form of the park took shape between 1800 and 1820 when it was re-arranged around the new Hall, and was surrounded with screening plantations of oak, beech, fir, and larch.

The curtilages of approx. 12 listed buildings, including one Grade I and one Grade II* listed buildings, back onto this character area and their small scale, vegetated settings help contribute to the character of this area.

St. Mary's Church (13th-14th century) is Grade I listed and has a late Norman tower.

Visual and perceptual experience and views

Skylines are treed, views are contained by rising land to the southeast and by tree cover in the valley bottom to the west. Sense of small scale and visual containment felt here is absent in much of the rest of the parish. Strong sense of heritage from the winding nature of the road and the presence of old buildings.

Condition, issues and opportunities

Protection of heritage settings is important, as is recognition of the historic value in the small-scale 'grain' of the landscape.

SB3 - VIEWS



Google Streetview

Approach from Bottisham along Park End



View from south to the Rayner Farms yard

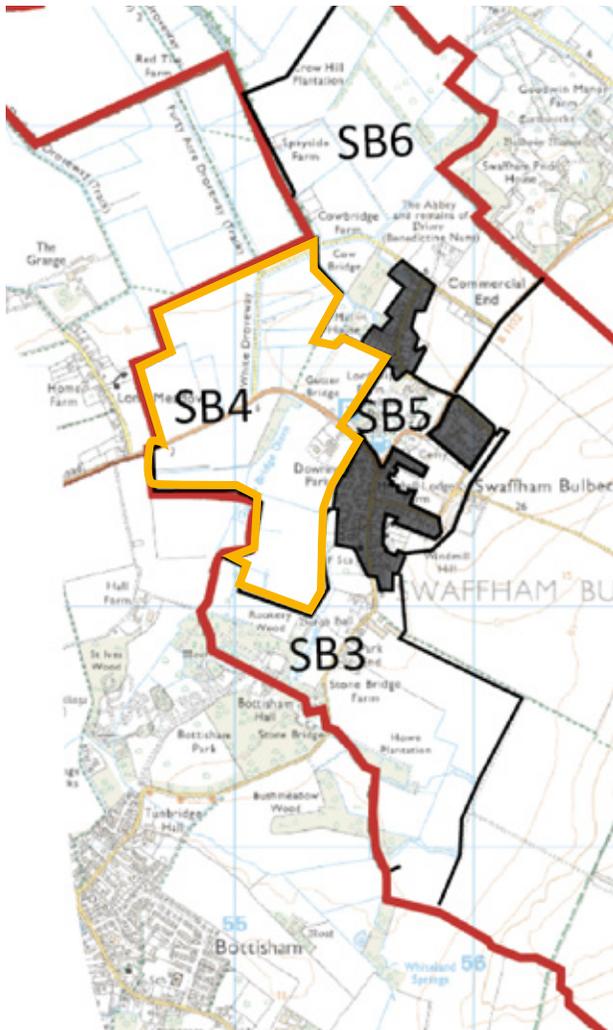


Burgh Hall



Village edge are generally well integrated

Character Area SB4 - Gutter Bridge



SB4 - DESCRIPTION

Constituent landscape type/areas

NCA: Boundary of 87. East Anglian Chalk and 46. The Fens.
Suffolk Character Assessment: Majority of the area is in 22. Settled Fenlands
(Refer to appendices A - D in separate document)

Location, landscape setting, and physical characteristics

This is a simple fen-edge farmed landscape lying either side the B1102 Station Road that connects the village to the hamlet of Long Meadow and Lode to the west. The character area helps provide separation between settlement clusters.

Topography, soils and hydrology

It is a flat-feeling, low-lying landscape on the edge of the fen composed of arable farmland. The farmland is divided regularly by straight-cut drainage ditches. It is a fairly featureless landscape but its strong linear forms and openness are distinctive characteristics.

Soils are transitional from the chalky and loamy clays into the peaty fen land edge - here they are not free-draining hence the need for regular drainage.

Landcover and land use

A simple, flat landscape under arable farmland, farmed in strips, sometimes within larger open fields. These are sometimes divided by hedges and trees, but trees and hedges in the adjoining area, particularly to the southeast, provide a sense of distant enclosure along the skyline. Small woodland block at Gutter Bridge - highly valued for recreation locally.

Scale and Enclosure

Moderate to large-scale, open landscape. Fields are often unhedged or, when hedges are present they are very gappy.

Settlement and gateways

The area lies between the village clusters along its east side, and a row of houses comprises Long Meadow to the west. Settlement is therefore present in views along the skyline to either side but is generally absent internally.

The exception is Downing farmhouse, within the complex of buildings at Downing Park, on the south side of Station Road on the village edge.

SB4 - DESCRIPTION

The barns of this previous old farmstead (one listed and converted to residential) now form a small business park, and are set behind a stone wall within a formal landscaped setting.

Rights of Way and the road network

The main Station Road and cuts through this area taking a sweeping curve towards Lode before straightening out. A much quieter narrow unhedged lane - White Droeway - is a straight ancient drovers track which leads northwards towards outlying farms.

This area offers informal recreation. There is a short length of footpath along the northeastern boundary, a path that leads into Gutter Bridge Wood and the droeway connecting into Fen Lane is an important circular route for walkers.

Materials

Materials seen around Downing farm are mixed - the listed house is gault brick but it probably incorporates an earlier timber-framed building. The conversions to form the business park has built form faced with unstained timber weatherboarding and is enclosed by grey brick walls.

Heritage, landmarks, and features of value

Downing farmhouse is, a post-medieval farmhouse, grade II listed but it cannot be easily seen from the road and does not contribute to the street scene.

The landscape pattern and orientation is a relict of times when cattle would have been driven between the river, as a source of drinking water, and the pastures on the uplands to the southeast. The linear patterns and long straight drove roads seen today are distinctive and have landscape heritage value.

Visual and perceptual experience and views

Openness with the parcel of land, but containment along the skylines to the south and west from tree cover in adjoining character areas.

Sense of emptiness and exposure. Large skies overhead.

Condition, issues and opportunities

- Bolster hedges in decline.
- Plant native hedges along field boundaries for biodiversity.

SB4 - VIEWS



View toward Long Meadow at the junction of Station Road and White Drove



Village edges have partly vegetated boundaries

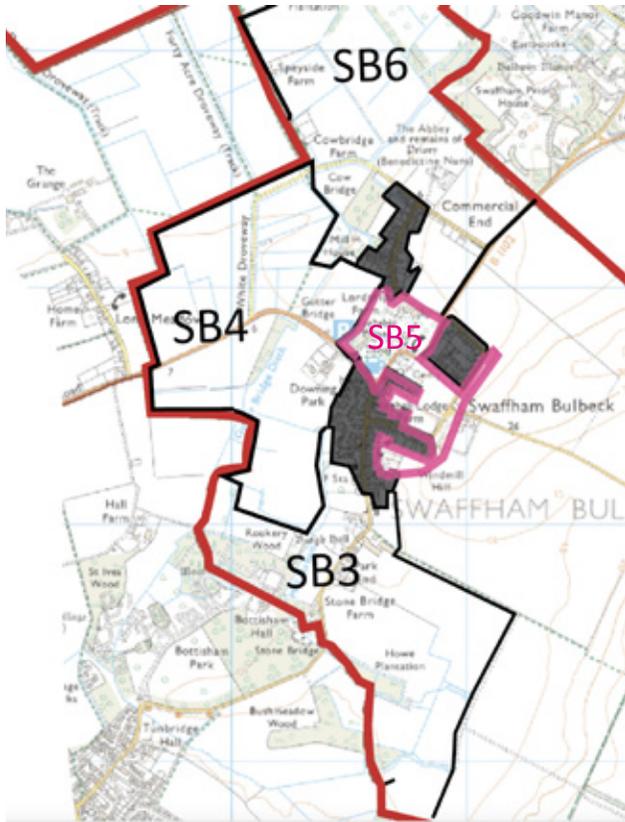


Photo of farmland west of the Denny Plantation



Village fringes seen behind the Downing Park farm buildings

Character Area SB5 - The Denny



SB5 - DESCRIPTION

Constituent National county landscape type/area

NCA: 87. East Anglian Chalk

Suffolk Character Assessment: Straddles the boundary of both 13. Rolling Estate Chalklands and 22. Settled Fenlands. (Refer to appendices A - D in separate document)

Location, landscape setting, and physical characteristics

This is a landscape in transitional position connecting the base of the slope to the east to the edges of low lying land to the west along the historically settled fenland edge. It functions to edge and separate the three village clusters. It adjoins the southern edge of the Commercial End cluster, the west, south and east sides of the Maryland Avenue/Heath Road cluster and the northern and eastern sides of the main village cluster. It forms various functions - public open space, extensive private curtilage as well as some farmland.

Topography, soils and hydrology

It is a flat feeling, low lying landscape between the 5m and 15m contour. Soils are shallow lime-rich chalky and loamy clays, overlying chalk bedrock.

Landcover and land use

The area is laid out in medium and small enclosures with an underlying rectilinear feel in the form of small fields backing the village edges. A large farmstead is also part of the streetscape.

Tree cover is frequent, as well as hedges and avenue-style tree plantings along roadsides.

There is a large open space north of the High Street known as The Denny. It has a football pitch, a cricket pitch, a pavilion, a play area and exercise equipment. There is a smaller green next to it, where the Bottisham Road joins the main road, on which is a war memorial.

The area functions to physically separate the village clusters yet also link them across open space. Here Station Road and High Street meet and the shop/post office and the Black Horse pub give this area its village centre feel. The landscape here has a formal appearance and the cemetery opposite and tree planted grounds of Lordship farm contribute - this is a private space but contributes visually to the streetscene with something of a parkland feel.

SB5 - DESCRIPTION

Scale and Enclosure

This area is of smaller scale, and has notably more tree cover, than the adjoining landscapes to the west and east. The trees provide a feeling of containment.

Settlement and Gateways

The area fringes much of the village's edges. The edges on the older parts of the village dog-leg in and out, are 'porous' and often have well vegetated rear curtilages forming a buffer to open countryside. In contrast the block of housing at Maryland Avenue/Heath Road faces straight out into the countryside and has straight stark edges; it is a low density estate development of bungalows and semi-detached houses mostly built sometime in the 1970s. The approach to the village from the north is therefore quite abrupt. Other approaches are softer, for example the avenues of horse-chestnuts at Downing Park.

Rights of way and the road network

The main route from Lode to Swaffham Prior snakes through the centre of the village in a succession of sweeping bends revealing the village only in sections and separating the different clusters from one another. This experience of the village as a sequence, rather than as a continuous or nucleated settlement, is key to its character.

There is a short right of way across Lordship Meadow connecting the Denny and village centre amenities to Commercial End.

Materials

Timber-framed, colour-rendered houses are the historic vernacular form but later gault brick became common. Roofs are mixed - slate and tile - the older buildings tend to have plain tiles.

Walls at Lordship Farm are whitewashed. The farmhouse has a distinctive double gable.

Heritage, landmarks, features of value

Much of the character area, land between the clusters, and to the west of Commercial End is a designated Conservation Area. About half of Swaffham Bulbeck's Conservation Area is open space.

Moated site, now covered in woodland, opposite Downing Park is a designated Scheduled Monument.

Visual and perceptual experience and views

Skylines are treed, and views are readily contained by tree cover and built form.

Views across open space to the villages edges are important contributors to character, especially where quality of the built form is high. Many important views to key buildings are found in this area.

Condition, issues and opportunities

Protection of heritage settings is important as well as the open space that forms their setting.

Recognition of the small-scale grain of the landscape.

Protection of important open spaces - both for recreation and where spaces are visually important to the character of the streetscene.

Protect views of distinctive features as they aid orientation.

Prevent development relating to the farmstead that erodes its historic form and arrangement and agricultural character.

SB5 - VIEWS



Rolling landform south of Maryland Avenue



Lordship Cottage



Quarry Lane

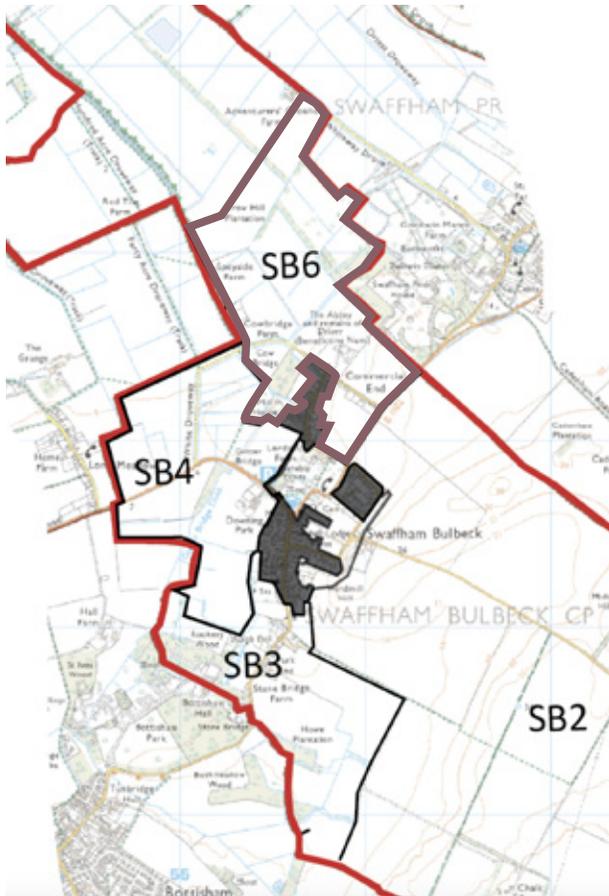


The Black Horse overlooks the Denny



Looking down over the cemetery towards the Denny.

Character Area SB6 - Abby End



SB6 - DESCRIPTION

Constituent landscape type/area

NCA: 87. East Anglian Chalk

Suffolk Character Assessment: Straddles the boundary of both 13. Rolling estate Chalklands and 22. Settled Fenlands. (Refer to appendices A - D in separate document).

Location, landscape setting, and physical characteristics

This area is west side of the B1102, wrapping around Commercial End, and goes west as far as Fen Lane. It is part of the transitional edge of the chalky loamy claylands where they meet the peaty landscape of the extensive farmed fenlands to the north. It has a different feel to the openness of both the fenlands and the elevated uplands as there is considerably more tree cover and a stronger sense of enclosure.

Topography, soils and hydrology

It is a flat-feeling, low-lying landscape and lies just to either side of the 5m contour. Soils are transitional from the shallow lime-rich chalky and loamy clays in the south, moving into the peaty fenland soils towards the north of the area where regular drainage channels start to appear.

Landcover and land use

The land is under arable cultivation. Tree cover is much higher in this area than other parts of the parish. The western edges of the woodland and laid out parkland at Swaffham Prior House contribute to the wooded feel, as does Sanger Wood

The rural-settlement edge has a historic feel and attractive 19th century brick houses and cottages contribute positively along the edges of the character area.

Scale and Enclosure

The farmland area is laid out in medium-sized enclosures, broadly rectilinear in form but with a little variation. The farmland is interspersed with tree belts which lead to a feeling of enclosure.

SB6 - DESCRIPTION

Settlement and Gateways

The area includes the settlement, sometimes described as a hamlet, of Commercial End - once known as Newnham End which is to the north of the main village cluster. The Nunnery, or Priory, now the Abbey, were the earliest existing buildings when the Lode, first cut in Roman Times, began to be used for transport and trading. More settlement grew up on the port as a result.

This area now comprises many listed buildings and has an attractive small scale, historic feel. The area is backed by a block of woodland to the north which forms the grounds of the Mill.

The small green at the eastern end of Commercial End is an attractive node/gateway into Commercial End, flanked by vernacular cottages and the Merchant's House house with a fine Dutch gable.

Rights of Way and road network

Roads are hedged and feel enclosed, long views are not commonly experienced.

There is a footpath/cycleway along Abbey Lane from its junction with the A505.

Materials

A small number of rendered timber framed houses and gault brick houses form the vernacular building materials. Roofs are both pan-tile, plain tile and slate and thatch.

Much of the upper part of the current house at the Abbey is brick and flint and dates from the 18th century, but its undercroft is limestone and formed part of a 13th century Nunnery.

Heritage, landmarks, features of value

Much of the character area, land between the clusters, and to the west of Commercial End is designated Conservation Area.

The Abbey is Grade I listed. There are 10 other listed buildings in Commercial End.

Visual and perceptual experience and views

The main B1102 forms the eastern boundary to the character area and brings a belt of noise and disturbance, otherwise the rest of the character area is fairly quiet and tranquil. Skylines are treed, and views are contained - readily on this flat land by trees cover and built form.

Views across open space to the villages edges are important contributors to character, especially where quality of the built form is high. For example attractive views to a chapel (now converted) on the southern edge of Commercial End cluster are distinctive.

Condition, issues and opportunities,

Protection of heritage settings is important as well as the open space that forms their setting.

Recognition of the small-scale grain of the landscape.

Protection of important open spaces - both for recreation and where spaces are visually important to the character of the streetscene.

Protect views of distinctive features as they aid orientation.

SB6 - VIEWS



From Fen Lane looking east into character area



View along Fen Lane, north of Commercial End

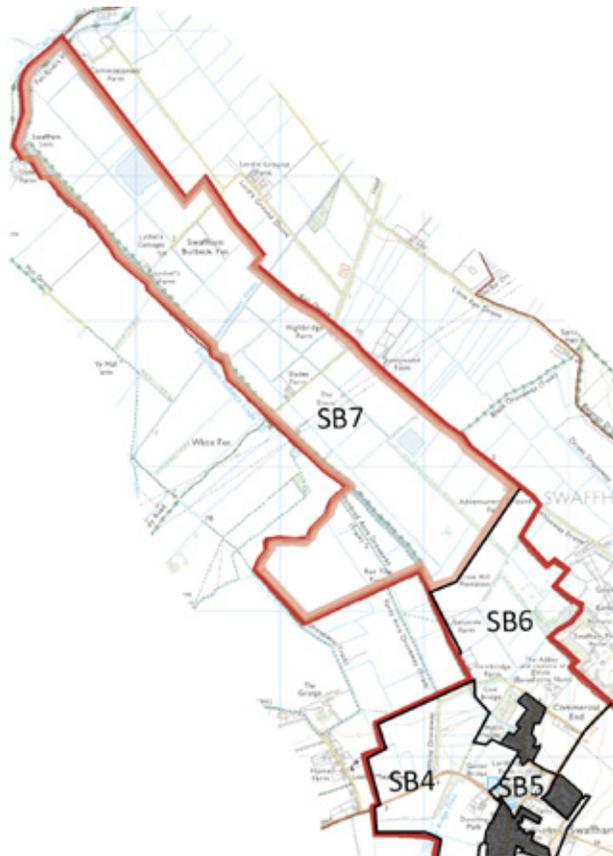


Photo of the Abbey



Farmland east of the Abbey with well-wooded edges

Character Area SB7 - Swaffham Bulbeck Fen



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SB7 - DESCRIPTION

Constituent landscape type/area

NCA: 46 The Fens
Suffolk Character Assessment: 22. Settled Fenlands.
(Refer to appendices A - D)

Location, landscape setting, and physical characteristics

This character area forms the northernmost reaches of the parish, up to its boundary with the embanked river Cam. It is defined by the channel of the Lode along the southwest boundary. It is part of a wide area of flat generally unsettled fenland under intensive agricultural use.

Topography, soils and hydrology

This is a notably flat and low-lying landscape found between the 2m and 5m contour south of the meandering course of the river Cam. Soils are dark and silty and composed of peat. The fenlands would naturally be seasonally water logged, but the flood prevention measures on the Cam and the regular network of linear drains remove water to leave soils that are light, workable and fertile and are important for cereals, turf and horticulture. The frequent straight ditches, cut at right angles to the Lode and to the Cam, are man-made and pumps and sluices are employed in places to take water from in-field networks of drainage ditches into the main rivers to keep the land dry.

There are agricultural reservoirs at intervals across the landscape.

Landcover and land use

All the land here is farmland, wide open fields often sub-divided into wide belts of different crops, interspersed at intervals with straight drainage ditches and old narrow droveways. The pattern is distinctively rectilinear and the fields, drains and droveways are laid out in a repeating grid.

Cereals, turf, herbs and vegetables are grown, sometimes under plastic sheeting. The fields are divided by rush filled ditches or narrow lanes where biodiversity often flourishes in a narrow strip between the mono-cultures. There are occasional shelterbelts but no woodland. Tall poplar or willow trees are scattered along drainage ditches and the edges of the Lode and the Cam, and have long-reaching visual impact in this flat landscape. The droveways are sometimes slightly elevated and feature little railed bridging points over the drains. The land has shrunk over time as a result of drainage and the courses of rivers often sit above the land in these landscapes, making water pumping necessary.

SB7 - DESCRIPTION

Scale and enclosure

A large-scale, simple landscape, arranged in a strongly rectilinear form. Continuous hedges are less common than scattered scrubby shrubs and trees along the lanes - species such as hawthorn, oak, willow and elder are planted informally to form a sort of hedge along the lanes. Narrow tree belts provide a wind break at intervals.

Settlement and gateways

Settlement is generally absent - it was never established owing to the seasonal flooding that would have affected the area in centuries past. However, a small number of outlying farms and their cottages are set within the network of fields at intervals. They feel isolated from the village, and are connected on narrow lanes indirectly, via other parishes. Large farm buildings are sometimes seen, farmyards often edged by mature trees.

Rights of way and the road network

There are no main roads in the character area, only a network of very narrow straight lanes which cross the farmland at right angles to one another.

Rights of way across the farmland itself are scarce but pedestrian access is provided at regular intervals along the droves and along the embankments of the Lode and the Cam.

Materials

Historically unsettled, there are few buildings in this area apart from the farmsteads which are relatively modern. Vernacular building materials appear on older houses as pale gault bricks under slate roofs.

Heritage, landmarks, features of value

There are no listed buildings or SMs. Two rows of tall pylons cross the area and are very dominant in the skyline.

Visual and perceptual experience and views

Expansive feel to the landscape and awareness of big skies overhead. Views can be long and uninterrupted across farmland often dotted with farm machinery or irrigation rigs providing the only movement points of interest. Lack of settlement gives rise to a sense of isolation and remoteness. The distant horizons are often 'treed', trees can have long range impact in this flat landscape.

Condition, issues and opportunities

This is a landscape under intensive use and pressure for productivity. Its important soils need protecting through sustainable farming practices, and agricultural agreements to the benefit of biodiversity and climate change regulation.

Encourage the establishment of areas of semi-natural habitat such as reedbed and washland. In tandem with the larger fenland projects, seek local smaller scale opportunities to rewild and reintroduce a more complex and dynamic landscape comprising wet and dry species-rich meadows, reedbeds, wet woodlands and open water.

Protect the biodiversity relating to the margins of ditches, lanes and droves and seek opportunities to expand them.

Promote the creation of permissive and definitive access to increase opportunities for people to visit and pass through the area using sustainable transport methods

Look for opportunities to tell the story of the history of the former fen to visitors.

Seek opportunities to tie into the Wicken Fen vision.

SB7 - VIEWS



Scenes from the fenland landscapes