

Rolling Estate Chalklands

Key Characteristics

- Very gently rolling or flat landscape of chalky free draining loam
- Dominated by large scale arable production
- "Studscape" of small paddocks and shelterbelts
- Large uniform fields enclosed by low hawthorn hedges
- Shelter belt planting, often ornamental species
- A "well kept" and tidy landscape
- Open views
- Clustered villages with flint and thatch vernacular houses
- Many new large "prestige" homes in villages

Location

This landscape type is found on the western fringe of Suffolk, running from the county boundary in the west around Newmarket and though Snailwell, Chippenham and Freckenham, to Barton Mills on the south side of the River Lark.

Geology, landform and soils

This is an open very gently rolling or flat landscape with free-draining mineral soils and deep loams.

Landholding and enclosure pattern

Newmarket Heath area to the west of the town was formerly more open, but is now occupied by the world-famous racecourse and racehorse studs with rectangular paddocks and linear plantations. Elsewhere, planned enclosure in the 18th and 19th centuries has replaced the extensive areas of common fields that dominated the landscape in the 17th century, with geometric late-enclosure fields. Where land is devoted to horse racing, as in Exning, the enclosure pattern is a small network of paddocks divided up by post and rail fencing and narrow shelterbelts.

Settlement

The villages form tight clusters in the river valleys, the traditional houses and other buildings are often flint-walled and thatched, but there is a strong presence of new large "prestige" homes that are suburbanising the feel of many villages.

Trees and woodland cover

There is a fragmented woodland cover of small plantations and belts made up of species such as oak, Scots Pine and willow. The deep free-draining soils found here mean that crop production is focussed on field vegetables supported with irrigation. This type of cropping has a significant visual impact on the landscape and is in clear contrast to the wooded chalk slopes to the south with their thinner soils on which cereals predominate.

The hedgerow cover is sparse and uniform, with straight rows of hawthorn or narrow belts of trees dividing large fields. In the places where stud farms are frequent, such as south of Newmarket, the enclosures are smaller and bounded by a comprehensive network of shelterbelts, where the species choice is often ornamental.

Visual experience

The feel of this landscape is one of open space with long views, which is emphasised by the straight roads and regimented pattern of belts and hedges. However, where the "studscape" is most apparent, belts of trees and woodland planting confine the views.

Condition

This is a largely tidy and well-kept landscape that has been maintained by the income from farming the good soil and the horse racing industry. However, the expansion and suburbanisation of villages is eroding the local character.

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Landscape Sensitivity & Change

This is a gently rolling landscape of free draining soils in which the villages are confined to river valleys and tend to be in the form of quite tight clusters. The wider landscape is settled with a scattering of estate farmhouses and associated buildings.

The enclosure pattern of large rectilinear fields is augmented in some places by networks of tree belts associated with horse racing studs. This activity, along with large-scale cereal and vegetable production shape much of the character of this landscape.

Unless there is a “studscape” of tree belts and small enclosures, much of this landscape has long open views. Therefore large buildings in the open countryside can be prominent. However, such changes can be accommodated with suitable planting that is consistent with the character of the landscape.

Key Forces for Change

- Expansion of existing settlements into this landscape and creation of new settlement patterns and clusters associated with infrastructure development.
- Conversion and expansion of farmsteads for residential uses.
- Large-scale agricultural buildings in open countryside.
- Changes in the management and use of landscape parklands.
- The introduction of new agricultural techniques.
- Leisure as a driving force for changes in economic activity.

Development Management

Settlement extension

In respect of *visual impact* the regular nature of this landscape means that it does have more potential capacity to accept significant settlement expansion than the ancient countryside of the claylands. The Rolling Estate Chalklands with its simpler and more modern land cover pattern and regular pattern of tree cover can be adapted to accept larger growth.

Unlike the Estate Sandlands this landscape does have a history of settlement. Therefore there is some capacity, in terms of *landscape character*, for the tightly clustered settlements to expand. However, it is important to integrate the settlement edge into the surrounding rural and sparsely settled countryside to minimise the impact on the character of the wider countryside. Furthermore, given the extensive European ecological designations (SPA and SAC) adjacent to parts of this landscape, the opportunities for significant settlement expansion are further constrained.

Finally, if developments encroach on landscapes located on river valley sides or the fen edge they will have a profound landscape impact on the character of these adjacent landscape types.

The settlement pattern in the Rolling Estate Chalklands has a strong tendency towards clustered villages surrounded by a scattering of individual farmsteads. Wherever possible this clear distinction should be maintained.

Barn conversions and extensions

Given the range of substantial and “late” historic farm buildings within this landscape type there is considerable demand for these to be converted to other uses, although this may not be acceptable in terms of policy. If, however, such applications are supported the result may be large and extensive complexes of multiple dwellings or offices and light industrial units. C19th (and later) farm buildings are capable of accommodating new uses while conserving the character of the landscape rather more easily than older farm structures.

Any new building should usually be close to the existing cluster of buildings and should be subordinate in size to the principal buildings. The design, including finishes such as tiles, brickwork, mortar, or wooden cladding should be appropriate for the style of buildings present. Staining used for exterior boarding should be capable of weathering in the traditional way, as a permanent dark or black colouring is not locally appropriate.

The change of land use, especially to residential curtilage, can often be more disruptive to the wider landscape than modifications to the buildings. Changes to the surrounding land from agricultural to residential use, which entails the introduction of lighting and other suburban features, can be extremely intrusive. Unless the site is well hidden, it may be necessary to impose clear conditions relating to the extent of garden curtilage and how this is screened from the wider landscape. The impact of new garden curtilage in this landscape is potentially even more significant than that in a clayland landscape because of the characteristic settlement pattern found here, as discussed above.

Large scale agricultural buildings in open countryside

The right choice of siting, form, orientation and colour of these buildings can make a considerable contribution to mitigating their impact. The plantations, shelterbelts, and tree lines found throughout this landscape provide opportunities to design locally appropriate planting schemes to reduce the visual impact further.

The siting of buildings should relate to an existing cluster of buildings whenever possible. Usually, although not in all cases, using a shade of the colour green is preferred as this will integrate well with vegetation. The correct orientation of the building can also significantly change the visual impact of the development, and this consideration should always be explored.

In addition to new planting to mitigate the impact of a development, the location of the

development in relation to existing trees that act either as screening or as a backdrop should be carefully considered. The planning authority should ensure these trees are retained for the lifetime of the development. The option to modify the management of existing hedgerows should also be explored. New planting should be designed to integrate the development into the character of the landscape, and may consist of both backdrop and screening planting.

The care and maintenance of the planting should be made a condition of these developments. In many cases the landscape impact of these projects is only acceptable if it is mitigated by effective planting. The applicant should therefore provide a detailed scheme of planting and aftercare, which can form the basis of a condition. Furthermore, depending on the risks to be controlled, the planning authority may need to consider a 106 agreement to secure the landscaping and design requirements for an extended period.

Landscape of leisure - Golf courses, holiday complexes, caravan sites, tourist centres

The regular and recent nature of this landscape means that it does have more potential capacity, in respect of *visual impact*, to accept these developments but effective design and mitigation measures will be vital.

However, the *impact on the character* of the landscape both directly and indirectly may be highly significant and it may not be possible to effectively mitigate these impacts. Therefore such developments would constitute a profound and undesirable change to landscape character.

Changes in the management and use of landscape parklands

Any proposals for change could have a negative impact on these historic landscapes. The majority of sites, regardless of designation status, will require an overarching management plan or strategy to guide changes. This should cover the maintenance, preservation and management of existing features, as well as the restoration or creation of new or lost ones. When sufficient information is not available the applicant should undertake detailed background research. Planning applications that affect historic parklands should therefore be accompanied by a suitable management plan or other detailed evidence, to support the proposals.

Impact of deer on the condition of woodland cover

Large-scale deer control should be supported and individual sites may require deer fencing. New woodland plantings, as well as screening and mitigation schemes, will require effective protection from deer to support their establishment.

Visual impact of cropping and production, and land use changes

The changes in cropping practices that have taken place across some of the Rolling Estate Chalklands, such as the use of fleece and plastic, as well as the introduction of irrigation, have had a significant effect on the landscape. The siting and style of structures subject to planning control, such as static feed bins for pigs, poly tunnels or reservoirs should be appropriately conditioned to minimise their landscape impact.

Land Management Guidelines

- Reinforce the historic pattern of regular boundaries.
- Restore, maintain and enhance the network of tree belts and pattern of small plantations found across much of this landscape type.
- Restore, maintain and enhance the historic parklands and the elements within them.
- Maintain and expand the area of chalk grasslands in this landscape.