



Fynn Valley Landscape Value Appraisal

For Playford Parish Council

March 2022

1. Introduction

1. I am a Chartered Landscape Architect with 15+ years experience of working in the field of landscape assessment and appraisal in East Anglia. I was appointed in January 2022 to provide a landscape value statement for Playford Neighbourhood Plan. The findings of this report are based on professional judgement, backed by evidence provided.
2. The primary purpose of the statement was to document a review of the Fynn Valley, within Playford parish, previously protected with Special Landscape Area (SLA) status (in the now replaced Suffolk Coastal Local Plan) with the intention of redefining an area of greater landscape value/sensitive landscape for the Playford Neighbourhood Plan.
3. The secondary purpose of the statement is as a future reference tool to help inform responses to planning applications. Ultimately, both purposes aim to protect against inappropriate development causing harm to the distinctive setting of the Fynn Valley through Neighbourhood Plan policy.
4. Responses to consultation in 20xx revealed that showing that residents have a strong identity and connection to the distinctive landscape in which Playford is located. (Can we add a bit from consultation?)
5. The reports objectives are to:
 - Review the extent of the old SLA
 - Define and map aspects of value in the landscape within the Neighbourhood Plan area;
 - Provide understanding about the area's special qualities, scenic value, views, biodiversity assets and cultural features which contribute to the value of the landscape;
 - Identify the sensitivities of the landscape to future development or change management.

Context

6. Playford is a small village of some 200 residents situated on the north side of the Fynn Valley in the jurisdiction of East Suffolk District Council. It lies approximately halfway between Ipswich to the west and Woodbridge to the east. Despite the proximity of the village to the edge of Ipswich at Rushmere and Kesgrave, and the A12 corridor, it retains a very rural and 'off the beaten track feel'.
7. Playford is historically an 'estate' village, associated with Playford Hall, a defining factor in shaping the character of the landscape, and in limiting the growth of the village over time. The hall is a Grade II* Elizabethan mansion with a moat (Scheduled Monument), dating back to c. 1590 when it was built for Sir Anthony Felton, Sheriff of Suffolk.

'Prior to the death of the 4th Marquis of Bristol in 1951 the parish of Playford, almost in its entirety and for some 600 years, had belonged to his family and its forebears ¹.

A considerable amount of detailed local history of Playford and its houses and farms, and sometimes illustrious residents, is available on the parish council website.

8. There are a small number of other listed buildings in the village, including the church and some older cottages, but much of the housing stock is more modern and dates from the mid-century, after the estate had been sold. This more modern housing form a tight cluster in the centre of the settlement. Older dwellings tend to have a more scattered character along the narrow lanes that once served the estate and farms.
9. The Fynn is a small river that rises near Witnesham and winds its way east to join the river Lark, before flowing out into the Deben at Martlesham Creek, where the landscape becomes an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The settlement nestles on the valley side, concealed within views from the plateau, by the narrow and relatively steep valley sides, and by considerable mature tree cover. Settlement is found between the 15m and 30m contour. The distinctive

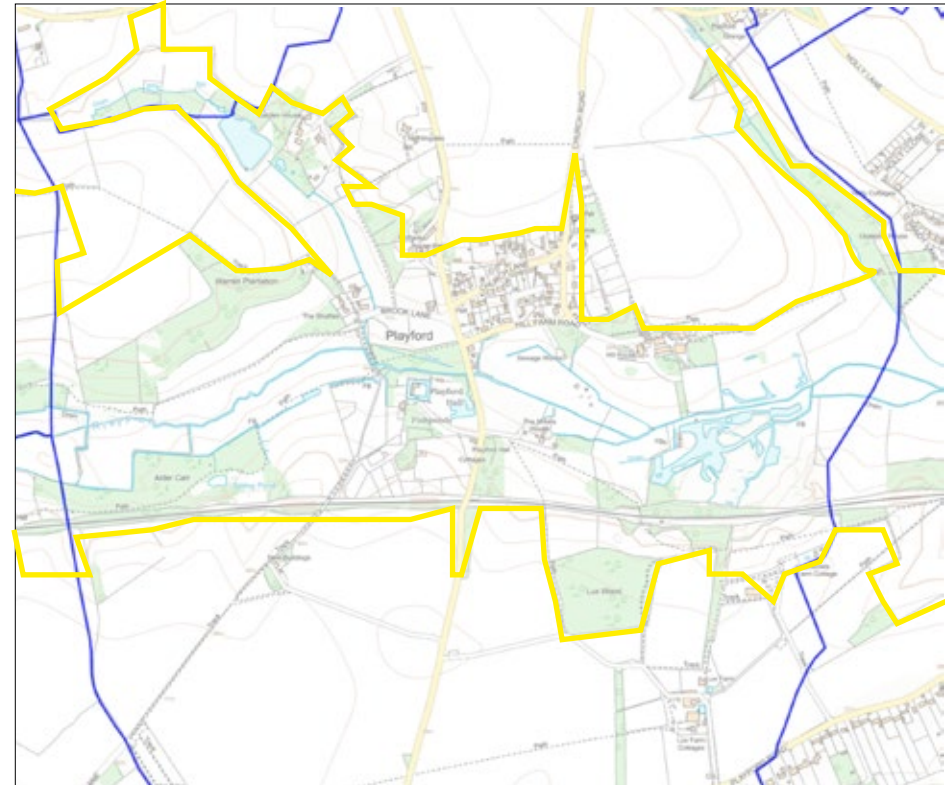
1 'Hill House' document on <http://www.playford.org.uk/History>.

topography is a defining characteristic of the village's setting and the approach from the north is particularly distinctive, Butts Lane descends quite abruptly through a tunnel of trees to the valley bottom. Land use in the lower parts of the valley is pastoral, with a mosaic of other habitats including ancient woodland, wet alder carr and open water managed for wildlife. Arable land is generally only found on the upper valleysides and plateaux where better drained land and simpler topography makes modern farming possible.

Evaluating landscape

10. Previously, the Fynn Valley was covered by a 'Special Landscape Area' Local Plan designation. It is mapped on figure 1.1. This designation has now disappeared from the local plan. Instead, protecting landscape character falls under a more generic landscape policy - 'Policy SCLP10.4: Landscape Character'. This requires proposals for development to be informed by, and sympathetic to, the special qualities and features of landscape in all circumstances. See SCLP10.4 in appendix 1.
11. One reason SLA have been discontinued in Local Plans across Suffolk is the SLAs were not evidenced by detailed assessment. Instead, the following justification was given;
 - *'River valleys which still possess traditional grazing meadows with their hedgerows, dykes, and associated flora and fauna;*
 - *Historic parklands and gardens;*
 - *Other areas of countryside where undulating topography and natural vegetation, particularly broadleaved woodland, combine to produce an area of special landscape quality and character.'*
12. Whilst SLA policies are no longer in use, the removal this local landscape designation does not mean that the qualities of the landscape that led to designation have somehow changed. The past inclusion of part of the study area within a Special Landscape Area is therefore relevant to this study and forms part of the area's designation history.

Figure 1.1 Previous Special Landscape Area (SCDC Local Plan)



The NPPF and valued landscapes

13. Paragraph 170 of the NPPF states: ‘Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by...protecting and enhancing valued landscapes...’
14. However, the definition of a ‘Valued Landscape’ is not provided in the NPPF. It has consequently been the subject of various well documented planning appeals and inquiries which have sought to test and unpick how the definition of landscape value should be applied outside of designated landscapes.
15. To help address this grey area, the Landscape Institute have recently published new guidance to help clarify how landscapes of greater value than the ‘everyday’ should be defined. Guidance Note TG02/21 ‘Assessing landscape value outside national designations’ (published in 2019) states that a ‘valued landscape’ is an area identified as having ‘sufficient landscape qualities to elevate it above other more everyday landscapes’. However, it states ‘it is not possible to set a definitive threshold ... It is a judgment that must be made on a case-by-case basis, based on the evidence. There should be a weight of evidence that supports the recognition of a landscape as valued above more everyday landscapes.’
16. The approach in TG02/21 is also in line with accepted national guidance on:
 - Landscape Character Assessment (Natural England, 2014)
 - Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (Natural England,)
 - Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment)
17. The guidance supports identification of higher value landscapes at the Neighbourhood Plan level. It advises, in paragraph 2.2.1; ‘*Landscape value at the local authority or neighbourhood level can be assessed and mapped spatially, i.e. through identifying areas for local landscape designation. Studies to support spatial designations should identify the landscape qualities of each area of landscape proposed for designation.*’
18. It gives guidance on the approach, in paragraph 2.3.2 it states; ‘*In undesignated areas, landscape value should be determined through a review of existing*

assessments, policies, strategies and guidelines and, where appropriate, by new survey and analysis’ and suggests assessing value under the following 8 headings:

- Natural heritage
- Cultural heritage
- Landscape condition
- Associations
- Distinctiveness
- Perceptual (Scenic)
- Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity)
- Functional aspects.

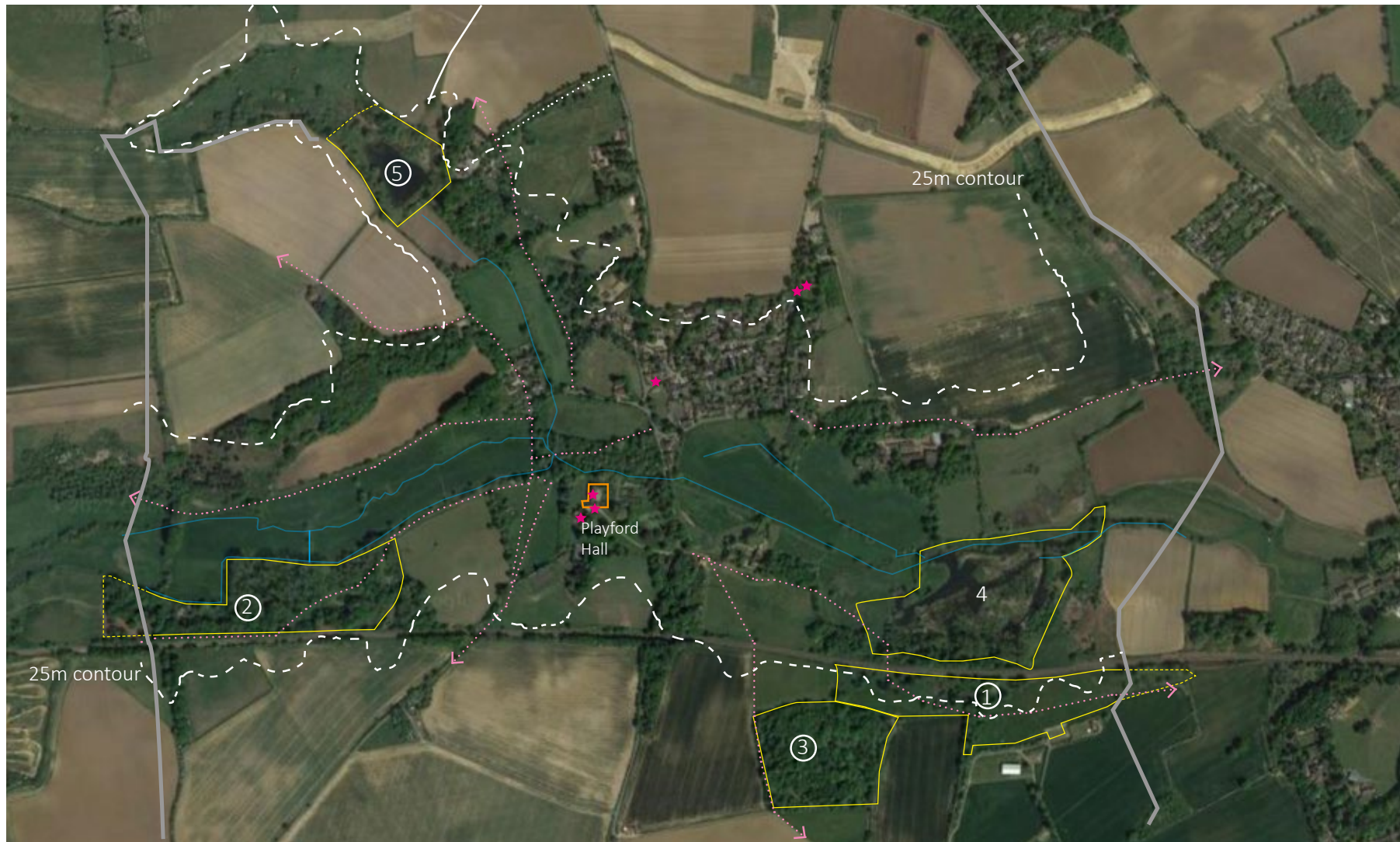
19. This appraisal, therefore, takes this approach and provides evidence of landscape value under each heading. A table summarising a response to each heading is provided later in the report.

Method of appraisal







20. The appraisal was approached in the following order:
 - a) A ‘desktop’ review was undertaken of available information relating to landscape value. These included:
 - Designations on GIS website (www.magic.gov.uk.) including heritage, SSSIs, Nature Reserves and Local Wildlife Sites.
 - Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment (SCC, 2011) (www.suffolklandscape.org.uk)
 - Suffolk Coastal Landscape Character Assessment (AFA, 2018)
 - Ipswich Fringe Sensitivity Assessment (AFA, 2018)
 - CWS Review by Suffolk Wildlife Trust consultancy (2009)
 - Aerial photography and historic maps.
 - b) A site visit was undertaken to assess the landscape ‘on the ground’ and to identify any important views within the study area.
 - c) Finally, the findings of the study were written up.

2. Desktop: Designations

Figure 2.1 Designations and ROW



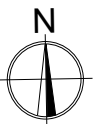
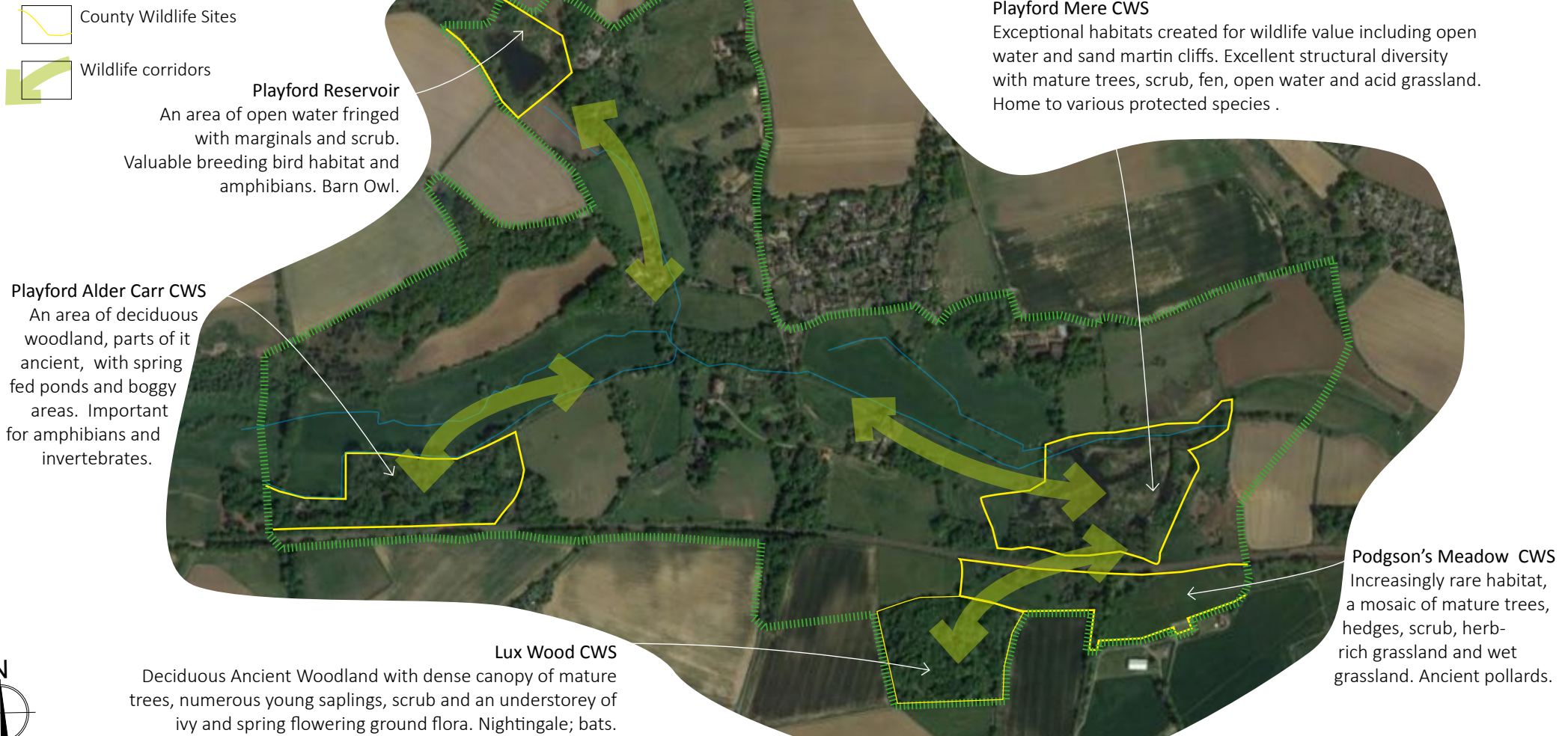
KEY:

- | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------|---|--|---|-----------------------|
|  | Parish boundary |  | River and drains |  | County Wildlife Sites |
|  | Rights of Way |  | Scheduled Monument
(Playford Hall moat) |  | Listed buildings |

3. Desktop: Ecological value of the Fynn valley

1. The Fynn valley river corridor links into woodlands on the valley sides and is flanked by several miles of traditional meadows that stretch west to Tuddenham. Both natural and man-made habitats (the reservoir and the Mere) add considerable habitat value. The river and its tributaries make up an important wildlife corridor for protected species such as otter and water vole between the habitats.
2. Five County Wildlife Sites are found within the parish - all are ranked as 'important' in a County/Regional context. The summary information given below is taken from the 'Ecological Assessment for Suffolk Coastal District Council - CWS Review by Suffolk Wildlife Trust consultancy (2009).

Figure 3.1 Ecological value



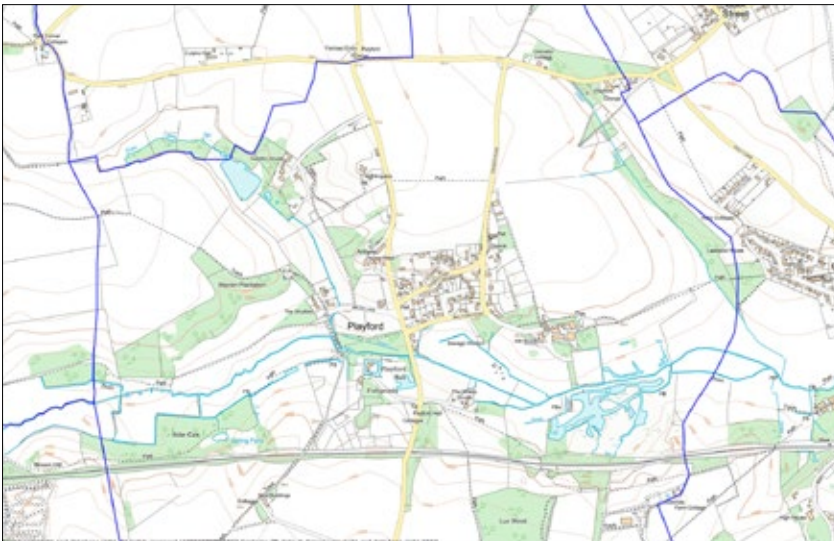
4. Desktop: Historic landscape



OS map 1884



OS map 1928

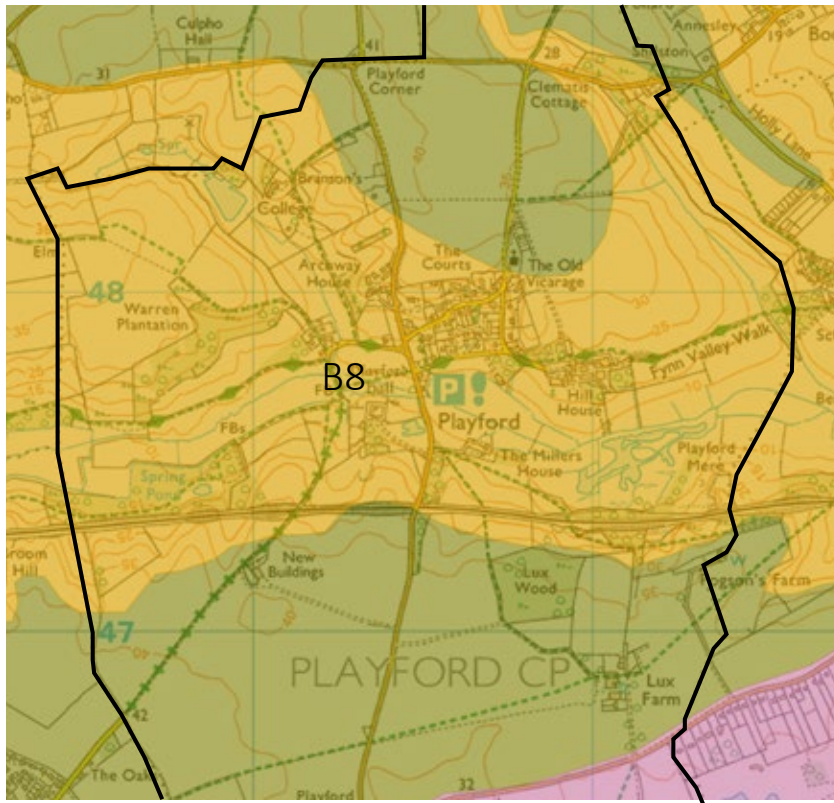


Current OS map

1. Playford was a tiny settlement at Domesday with a church and farmstead recorded. It remained as a small cluster of scattered dwellings associated with the Hall at least until the late 19th century where maps show a loose form of scattered settlement..
2. A review of the old maps show there has been little change within the landscape between the 1880s to the present day. The small-scale systems of winding lanes, meadows and scattered woodlands endure. This indicates there is a strong degree of time-depth within the landscape, which is a key indicator of landscape value.
3. The village has not expanded its boundaries as such, but a period of infilling between Church Road and Butts Lane took place from the mid century after the estate was sold in 1951, with substantial increase in density of the dwellings between Church Lane and Hill Farm Road. Their drives and curtilage treatments have had an suburbanising effect on the rural lanes but the village nevertheless retains a small scale character, traditional character.
4. A considerable amount of detailed local history of Playford and its houses and farms, and sometimes illustrious residents, is available on the parish council website.

5. Landscape Character and sensitivity

Figure 5.1 Landscape character - county and district



Suffolk LCA types:

<div style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 20px; background-color: #f4b400; margin-right: 5px;"></div> Rolling Valley Farmlands and Furze	<div style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 20px; background-color: #8ebf6d; margin-right: 5px;"></div> Ancient Rolling Farmlands	<div style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 20px; background-color: #c080d0; margin-right: 5px;"></div> Rolling Estate sandlands
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Suffolk Coastal LCA areas:

B8 B8: Fynn Valley

1. Change management through the planning system is now focused on analysis and understanding of landscape character at all spatial scales from the NPPF policies through to Neighbourhood Plans. Published Landscape Character Assessments provide mapping and descriptions of landscapes sharing similar characteristics. This part of Suffolk is in NCA Profile: 82 Suffolk Coast and Heaths.
2. A more focused set of studies was carried out in 2018 by this author and Alison Farmer Associates which assessed the landscape character of Suffolk Coastal District Council ¹, and looked at the sensitivities of parts of the Ipswich rural fringe in relation to future expansion. Playford parish was assessed as part of these studies ². They were commissioned as evidence base documents for the 2020 Suffolk Coastal Local Plan and can be accessed here: <https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy-and-local-plans/local-plans/local-plan-evidence-base/>

Local Landscape Character

3. Playford sits within the 'Rolling Valley Farmlands and Furze' landscape type of the Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment. The rising slopes and narrow plateaux, above the (approx) 30m contour, are the 'Ancient Rolling Farmlands' type. See appendix 2 for details of the Rolling Valley Farmlands and Furze key characteristics.
4. The boundaries of the types were used to generate the character areas in the district character assessment Suffolk Coastal Landscape Character Assessment (2018). Playford lies in the area named 'B8 -Fynn Valley'. This gives a more locally tailored description of landscape character and is a key reference.
5. Relevant excerpts from the B8 character area describe Playford 's landscape setting:

Small tributaries with similarly steeply denuded valleysides, join the Fynn, adding complexity to the landform where they converge and giving a scenic, rolling character.

The valley bottom is grassland, in small-scale, organic-shaped longitudinal fields which, together with fragments of woodland, form a mosaic in the valley bottom. The pastoral land use and small scale enclosure patterns show considerable time-depth and create an intimate feel. Trees on the valley side and plateau edge play a regular and definitive part of its character.

The area has a highly rural character and away from the villages the river corridor feels isolated

¹ Suffolk Coastal Landscape Character Assessment, AFA, 2018

² Settlement Sensitivity Assessment Volume 1; Landscape Fringes of Ipswich, AFA, 2018

5. Landscape Character and sensitivity continued:-

and tranquil, for example in parts of Playford which have a quiet 'back water' feel despite the frequency of settlement and the relative close proximity of Ipswich.

Views within the narrow valley are intimate. They are contained by the steep slopes and woodland that is scattered along the water course, and fragmented along the valley side. Woodlands are small, but their vertical impact makes them a prominent part of any view.

Particularly distinctive to the experience of the area is the sudden change to the character of the roads and lanes as they descend from the more open plateau landscape into the valley. The transition is marked by the descent through densely vegetated, ivy covered embankments which, together with trees overhead, form dramatic, tunnel-like entrances to the villages.

6. The description clearly indicates a landscape with many positive contributing features, natural habitats and an overall sense of ruralness and tranquillity.

Landscape Sensitivity

7. In 2018 the Ipswich Fringe Sensitivity Assessment looked at landscape sensitivity within parishes around the periphery of the Ipswich which included Playford (page 53). The study considered the northern half of the parish only, north of the railway line.
8. The study summarised the aspects of sensitivity and value in Playford's rural area thus; *'The sensitivity of this area lies in its small scale intimate character, cultural and natural heritage interest. Its value lies in its role as a recreational corridor close to Ipswich and in its intact landscape patterns.'*
9. Specific qualities/aspects value were listed as:
- The intactness of the landscape;
 - Settlement edges are well assimilated into the landscape by vegetation - the village is unobtrusive within the landscape allowing the rural character to be pervasive.
 - A sense of remoteness; an off the beaten track feel.

- The railway line is unobtrusive.
- Views are intimate and contained by the valley form and by regular woodland;
- Wealth of natural and cultural heritage including Playford Hall, winding ancient lanes, intact historic field enclosure patterns
- Five County Wildlife Sites including ancient woodland.
- High biodiversity value from the combination of habitats. Records of otter, vole,
- Important recreational routes including the Fynn Valley Long Distance footpath.

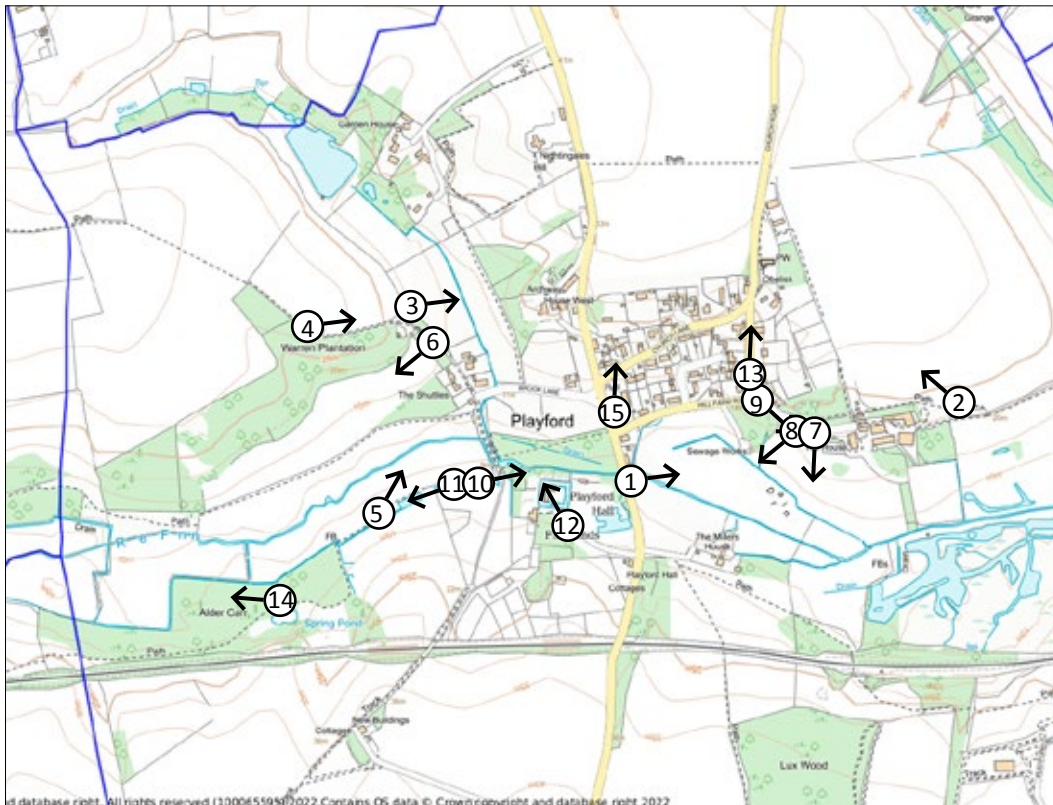
10. The study goes on to state; *'This landscape is highly sensitive to residential commercial development.'*

11. In summary, the district council's evidence base documents relating to landscape character and sensitivity are very useful in helping identify the Fynn Valley as an area with noteworthy aspects of value. The combination of the wealth of natural habitats, intact historic landscape patterns and vegetative features, the strong role of the topography in distinctiveness, the landscape's role as setting to important heritage features and the general feeling of remoteness and tranquillity combine to indicate a landscape of higher value. The landscape would be highly sensitive to disruption and change from development, with resulting adverse impacts on character. Therefore, providing an additional layer of protection through policy at the Neighbourhood and district scale is justifiable and recommended.

3. Photographic record

A Site visit was undertaken in April 2022. The footpaths were walked and photographs and notes were made.

A selection of views showing valued features or scenic compositions are shown here:



View along the valley from near the bridge



Playford Church glimpsed on the skyline

3. Photographic record continued:-



Steeply rolling valley sides with grazed meadows make for attractive views



Water is frequently part of the landscape



3. Photographic record continued:-



7.



8

Attractive long view across the valley bottom from Hill Farm Lane

Large trees are a regular sight in the parish

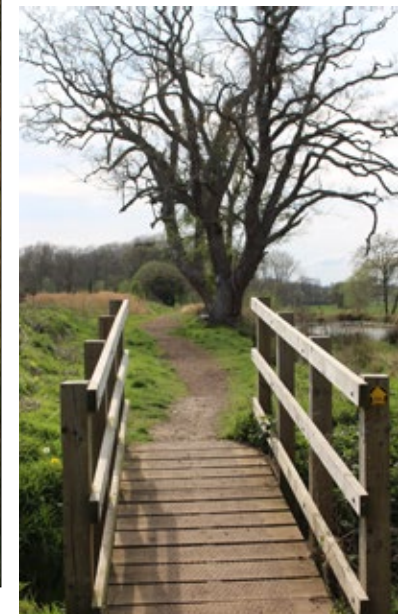


9.

10.



Narrow vegetated lanes convey the settlement's rural character



11.

Attractive footpath routes along the valley bottom

3. Photographic record continued:-

12.



Playford Hall



13.

Glimpses of the Hall from footpath to the west

14.



Alder Carr wood footpath



15.

Recreation ground

6. Landscape Value Criteria

- To help identify the extent of an area of greater value, the current set of criteria for judging landscape value, (as set out in Landscape Institute TGN02/21 Table 1 - p7) are tabulated below. The guidance states (p42) 'It would be expected that a 'valued landscape' would demonstrate the presence of a number of indicators of landscape value, as set out in Table 1.'
- Playford's aspects of value are listed in response to each heading:

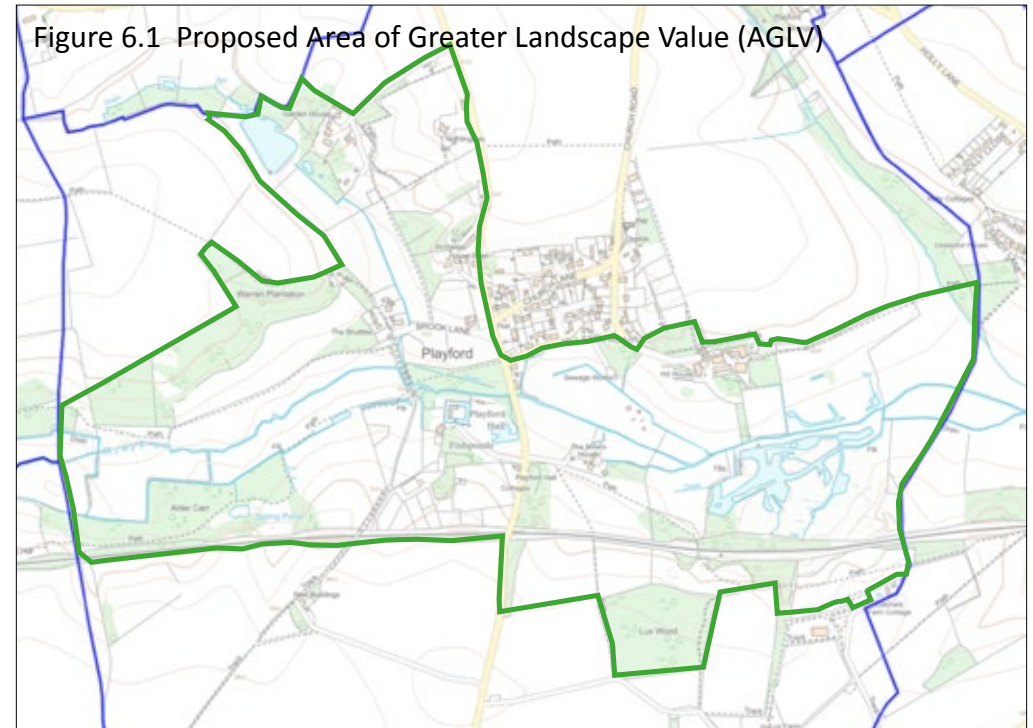
Criteria (from TGN1 02/21):	Evidence - designation or policy	Comment
1. Natural heritage	County Wildlife Sites : (see mapped on figure 2.1) 1. Podgson's Farm Meadow 2. Playford Alder Carr 3. Lux Wood (ancient) 4. Playford Mere 5. Playford reservoir Lux wood and parts of the Alder Carr are ancient woodland.	The valley supports a number of important natural and created habitats that individually and together make an important ecological contribution at the county level. Along with the river itself, other wetland habitats and wet woodland increase the diversity of habitats. There is a high concentration of woodland on the upper valley slopes and wet woodland along the valley bottom, some of which is ancient in origin. There are also meadow habitats in the valley bottom with diverse floral communities. These assets together form an important ecological network and habitat for protected species.
2. Cultural heritage	Scheduled Monument -Playford Hall moat Listed Grade II*: Playford Hall & Revetments around moat. Three listed assets in total. Landscape provides setting. 19th century barns at Hill Farm - undesignated heritage assets. Remnant parkland landscapes south and west of Playford Hall. Strong sense of time-depth from the small-scale pattern of enclosures and long standing traditional land management of the meadows. Implied value from previous designation of Special Landscape Area.	Considerable heritage value associated with Playford Hall with multiple listings. It was once set within small parklands both to the west and to the south. The original Elizabethan house looked on to its park to the west while the remodelled 18th century house looked on to a larger park to the south. Hill farm, although without listed buildings, has an important and rare early-19th century threshing barn and two other notable early agricultural buildings.
3. Landscape condition	Refer to B8: Fynn Valley Landscape Character Area description and SWT Ecological Assessment (2009) (2018)	Landscape is in good condition. The floodplain meadows are managed by traditional grazing, hedges are generally intact. There is a wealth of mature trees as well as surviving ancient woodland. Mere is well managed for wildlife.
4. Associations	Refer to extensive historical record on www.playford.org.uk	A number of illustrious village residents lived at the Hall and Hill House including agricultural innovator Arthur Biddell.
5. Distinctiveness	Refer to B8: Fynn Valley Landscape Character Area description.	The sudden change of slope when descending from the plateau into the village from the north is distinctive and common to a number of villages on the Fynn. The rich combination of habitats and intact river corridor systems is rare and distinctive.

6. Landscape Value Criteria continued:-

1.	Perceptual (Scenic)	Refer to B8: Fynn Valley Landscape Character Area description.	The combination of natural features in association with rolling topography , grazed meadows and water provides scenic experiences. A long distance footpath passes along the valley bottom, and a good network of other footpaths connect into it - the valley offers notable visual amenity to walkers and visitors.
2.	Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity)	Refer to B8: Fynn Valley Landscape Character Area description.	The village has an 'off the beaten track' feel as a result of the topography and wooded and winding lanes which belie the proximity of the edge of Ipswich.

7. Conclusions

1. A review of the evidence and application of professional judgement resulted in the following conclusions being drawn.
2. The lower Fynn Valley in Playford is undoubtedly worthy of designation as an area with greater landscape value and higher sensitivity. There are numerous factors providing justification, and which have helped define the position of the boundaries. The area has a wealth of natural and cultural heritage that together offer important habitat, considerable amenity and recreation opportunity, heritage value and scenic qualities.
3. The area that should be protected lies approximately beneath the 25m contour but includes land above this where there is a natural feature of value or where topographical patterns are particularly distinctive and contribute positively to character.
4. A recommended boundary line is shown in Figure 6.1, which related to lines in the landscape, drawn along physical features. The land within this area has the following valued characteristics:
 - Designated natural heritage (with importance at county/regional level) - semi-natural ancient woodlands, wet woodland, open water, areas of acid grass and marginal plants. Together with the river, system of meadows, field hedges and wide road verges they form a significant network of linked wildlife habitat of high value.
 - Small-scale, intimate, historic landscape patterns endure, often still managed with traditional practices. The long association of Playford Hall with the local farms promoted continuation of traditional management, farming, and game management practices resulting in the rich mosaic of land uses and habitats seen today. Field size and arable farming increases markedly upslope with associated loss of historic patterns.
 - Significant cultural heritage - Scheduled Monument and II* grading to Playford Hall. Undesignated assets at Hill farm. The valley landscape provides setting and backdrop as well as being of historic interest in its own right, understood through the pattern of small and pastoral fields, still arranged within ancient pattern of enclosures.



- Complex valley topography contributes very positively to local distinctiveness and provides scenic views.
 - Important recreational resource with a dense network of footpaths and narrow lanes, providing access to the countryside and its rich habitats. Green infrastructure is important for supporting health, wellbeing and social interaction.
5. The defined area demonstrably meets the Landscape Institute's guidance for recognising landscapes of higher value. It is, therefore, recommended that the area outlined in green is designated under the Playford Neighbourhood Plan for protection.
 6. It is recommended that Landscape and Visual Assessment should be a considered a requirement for any development proposed within this area. It should also be noted that development outside this area could still have adverse effects on the AGLV and appropriate appraisal is recommended on adjoining land where adverse impacts on landscape character, visual amenity, skylines or on the sense of tranquillity could result.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Suffolk Coastal Local Plan 2020

Policy SCLP10.4: Landscape Character

Proposals for development should be informed by, and sympathetic to, the special qualities and features as described in the Suffolk Coastal Landscape Character Assessment (2018), the Settlement Sensitivity Assessment (2018), or successor and updated landscape evidence.

Development proposals will be expected to demonstrate their location, scale, form, design and materials will protect and enhance:

- a) The special qualities and features of the area;
- b) The visual relationship and environment around settlements and their landscape settings;
- c) Distinctive landscape elements including but not limited to watercourses, commons, woodland trees, hedgerows and field boundaries, and their function as ecological corridors;
- d) Visually sensitive skylines, seascapes, river valleys and significant views towards key landscapes and cultural features; and
- e) The growing network of green infrastructure supporting health, wellbeing and social interaction.

Development will not be permitted where it will have a significant adverse impact on rural river valleys, historic park and gardens, coastal, estuary, heathland and other very sensitive landscapes.

Proposals for development will be required to secure the preservation and appropriate restoration or enhancement of natural, historic or man made features across the plan area as identified in the Landscape Character Assessment, Settlement Sensitivity Assessment and successor landscape evidence.

.....

Proposals should include measures that enable a scheme to be well integrated into the landscape and enhance connectivity to the surrounding green infrastructure and Public Rights of Way network. Development proposals which have the potential to impact upon the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or other sensitive landscapes should be informed by landscape appraisal, landscape and visual impact assessment and landscape mitigation.

Proposals for development should protect and enhance the tranquillity and dark skies across the plan area.

Exterior lighting in development should be appropriate and sensitive to protecting the intrinsic darkness of rural and tranquil estuary, heathland and river valley landscape character.

Neighbourhood Plans may include local policies related to protecting and enhancing landscape character and protecting and enhancing tranquillity and dark skies.

Appendix 2: Suffolk County Council Landscape Character Assessment

www.suffolklandscape.org.uk

Rolling valley farmlands & furze

Valley landscapes with distinctive areas of grass and gorse heaths

Key Characteristics:

- Valleys with prominent river terraces of sandy soil
- Small areas of gorse heathland in a clayland setting
- Straight boundaries associated with late enclosure
- Co- axial field systems
- Mixed hedgerows of hawthorn, dogwood and blackthorn with oak, ash and field maple
- Fragmentary cover of woodland
- Sand and gravel extraction
- Golf courses
- Focus for larger settlements

Location

This landscape is found in three areas of the county:

In north Suffolk in the Little Ouse and Waveney valleys from Hopton eastward to Hoxne and in discontinuous patches to the east: at Weybread and Mendham, Homersfield and Flixton, Bungay, and from Beccles to Oulton. Also in the lower part of the Hundred River valley from Ellough to Kessingland.

In south-east Suffolk in the Fynn valley eastward from Winesham to Woodbridge and in the valley of the (east Suffolk) Lark southward from Grundisburgh to its confluence with the Fynn.

In central Suffolk in the upper Gipping valley from Woolpit eastward to Stowmarket and in its eastern tributaries from the Mendlesham area south-westward to Stowmarket, and from the Stonhams south-westward to Needham Market

Geology, landform and soils

This landscape type occurs on a mixture of outwash deposits from the ice-sheets of the great Anglian glaciation – principally silts, sands and gravels, but also including some chalky till and, in places, silts or brickearths from former lakes or meres. In the major valleys it forms relatively narrow bands of well-drained terraces and slopes above the valley floors. In small valleys such as the Fynn it fills the whole valley.

The geological background has resulted in the frequent occurrence of dry heaths, as at Hopton Common, Wortham Ling, Stuston Common and Warren Hills, Shotford Heath, Outney Common in Bungay, and Woolpit Heath. In the past these provided low-quality sheep or rabbit grazing, but in the 20th century many were exploited for sand and gravel, eg at Shotford Heath, Homersfield, Flixton Park and Tostock, leaving a legacy of large water-filled former pits. At Woolpit the calcareous brickearth deposits were used, particularly in the 19th century, for the production of bricks famously known as ‘Woolpit whites’.

Landholding and enclosure pattern

Many of the river-terrace heaths were originally exploited as commons by farmers living nearby, as a source of grazing and especially for gathering gorse which was cut for cattle fodder. Some survive as unimproved open areas, eg Wortham Ling, but others were enclosed and converted to farmland through agricultural improvements from the 18th century onwards and are characterised by straight boundaries. In recent years some have become important areas for the production of irrigated crops, such as herbs at Brome and Oakley. Others were incorporated into landscape parks (Flixton and Worlingham) or, more recently, made into golf courses (Stuston).

Where the soils are better quality, there are older farm units with mixed pasture and arable, characterised by more sinuous and older field boundaries, usually at right-angles to the watercourses, giving a co-axial character to much of the landscape.

Settlement

The river terraces and valley sides were a focus for settlement, like the Valley Clayland and Valley Farmland landscapes. Evidence is often from a very early date because this landscape type provided dry sites that could be easily cleared and farmed while living in close proximity to sources of water and woodland on the adjacent clay soils. The ongoing archaeological excavations at Flixton Park Quarry, have found settlement and funerary activity covering four millennia, ranging from Neolithic and Bronze Age burial mounds to an Anglo-Saxon village and cemetery. Important early settlement evidence has also come from the ominously-named Bloodmoor Hill in Gisleham.

Numerous villages and hamlets with medieval churches occur along the valleys indicating a continuance of the importance of this landscape for settlements. However the limitations caused by dry and poor soils may account for the disappearance of churches at Willingham, Worlingham Parva and Creting St Olave, and the now isolated churches at Market Weston and Redgrave.

Villages tend to be more tightly clustered than is common across north Suffolk as a whole. The river terraces have also been a focus for larger settlements such as Woolpit and Botesdale.

Trees and woodland cover

This landscape has a good tree cover and a few fragmented woodlands on the valley sides, but the views are much more open in the transition between the valley and plateaux landscapes. There is fragmentary broadleaved woodland cover, with multi-species hedgerows including oak, ash, field maple and hawthorn. The remnant heaths are dominated by poor dry grassland, with gorse (or furze) often in abundance.

Visual experience

This landscape can form rather bleak vales such as at Barnby or to the east of Hopton. However within them there are some intimate small valleys, as at Thelnetham.

Condition

The condition of this landscape is very mixed with some important semi-natural habitats such as Wortham Ling and parts of Stuston Common in good condition. However, as with the Valley Clayland and Valley Farmland landscapes, away from the valley sides the completeness and connectivity of the hedgerow network reduces.