

Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document: Consultation Draft 2021

Huntingdonshire District Council | Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Supplementary
Planning Document: Consultation Draft 2021

Chapter 3 - Landscape Character Area Assessments

3 Landscape Character Area Assessments

- 3.1** Landscapes comprise many elements formed over millions of years and are constantly evolving. They are shaped by a combination of natural processes and human influences and exhibit features from different stages in their history and development. The particular combination of features provides each landscape with its unique identity. The foundation of any landscape is the underlying geology. The majority of Huntingdonshire lies on Jurassic clay with glacial till covering the higher land in the northern and western parts of the district. The distinctive low lying, flat landscape of the Fens was formed by the post-glacial accumulation and subsequent drainage of peat. Alluvial material has been deposited along the floodplains of the Rivers Nene and Great Ouse giving fertile flood meadows with extensive gravel deposits in the Ouse valley. A small area to the north-west of the district is underlain by Oolitic limestone extensively used in the traditional buildings of the Nene valley.
- 3.2** Huntingdonshire has nine identified landscape character areas which are shown in Figure 3.1 and can be viewed on the [interactive map](#), these are:
- The Fens
 - Fen Margin
 - Central Claylands
 - Ouse Valley
 - South East Claylands
 - Northern Wolds
 - Grafham Water
 - Southern Wolds
 - Nene Valley
- 3.3** These landscape character areas can be broadly divided into the:
- low-lying fens
 - undulating claylands
 - upland areas (the Wolds)
 - main river valleys
- 3.4** The fens are flat and at or below sea level. Former wetlands they were drained to allow agriculture on the rich, fertile soils. The landscape is dominated by straight, artificial watercourses with deep field ditches and a network of drainage channels. Inland of the fens the land rises steeply into the claylands which gently undulate between 10 and 50m AOD. Streams in this area are typically narrow, and flow generally west to east but they are not a strong visual feature in the landscape. The Alconbury Brook has, however, a significant catchment area before flowing into the River Great Ouse.
- 3.5** The highest land in the district, rising to 70m AOD, lies across the western and southern parts with the eastern parts being typically no more than 30m AOD. The district is incised by the wide valley of the River Great Ouse as well as the steeper, narrower valleys of its tributaries, especially the River Kym, Ellington Brook and Alconbury Brook. Their meandering courses are often lined with trees and vegetation making them visible in the landscape and of high ecological value. The valley of the River Great Ouse flows south to north before turning east to west at Huntingdon. It comprises a broad, shallow sided valley with a wide floodplain which has been extensively worked for gravel extraction shaping the landscape through the resultant large bodies of water. Only a small section of the Nene valley lies within Huntingdonshire at the north-west tip. This also has a broad floodplain dominated by meadows and wetland vegetation.

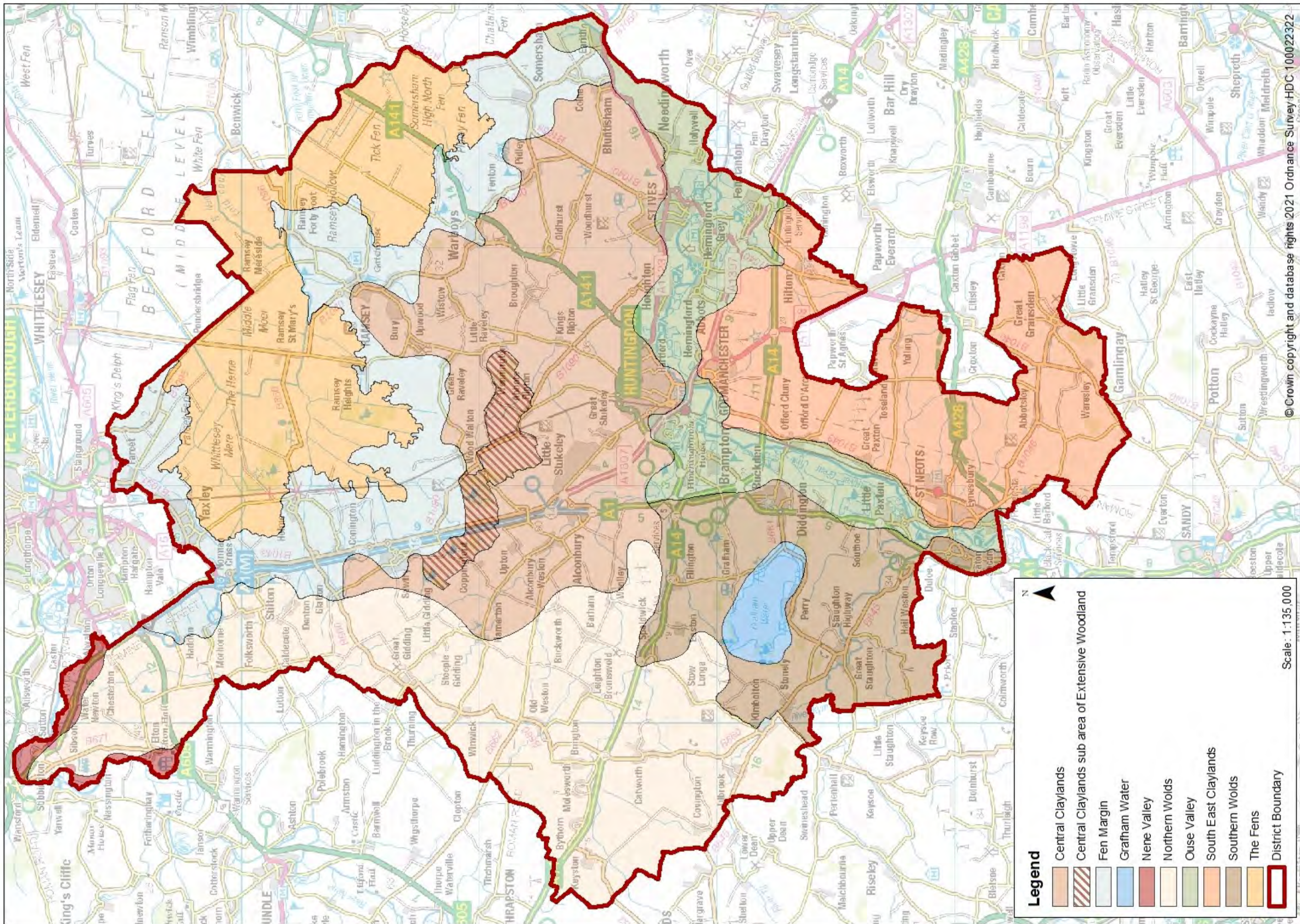


Figure 3.1 Landscape Character Areas

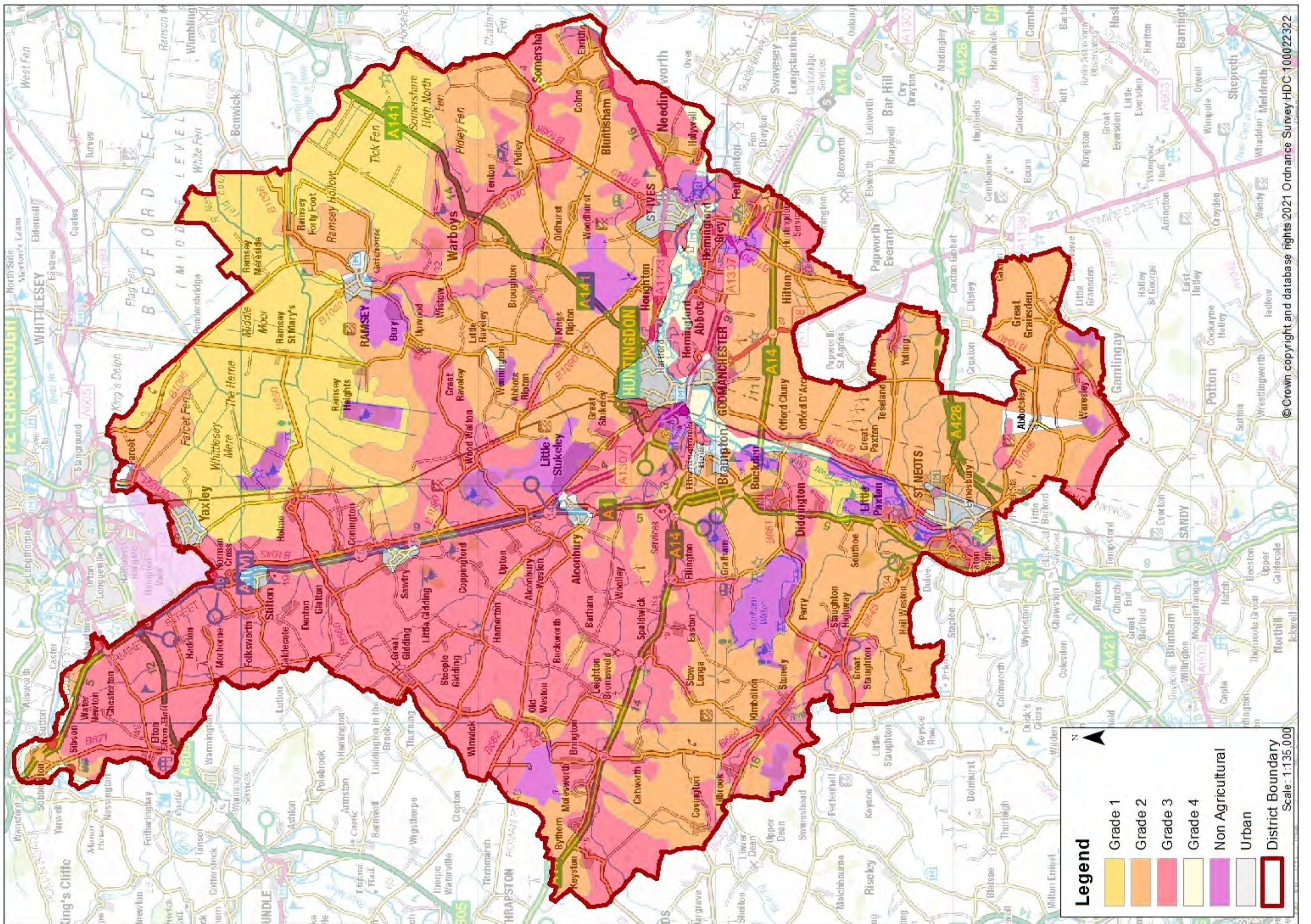


Figure 3.2 Agricultural land classes across Huntingdonshire

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Agriculture and human interaction with the landscape

- 3.6** The clay soils which cover the majority of the district have traditionally been used for arable agriculture mixed with some pastoral elements. The fens are exceptionally productive and support arable farming and horticulture along with limited amounts of livestock. Along the main river valleys the traditional land uses comprise flood meadows used for hay and grazing livestock along with other unimproved grassland. Agriculture remains the dominant land use in the district. Changing agricultural practices have influenced recent evolution of the landscape affecting field sizes, hedgerows, ponds and wetlands. Modern management techniques are seeking to redress some of these impacts through reintroducing landscape features such as hedgerows, woodlands and wetlands to boost biodiversity.
- 3.7** Agricultural land is a valuable asset in itself as it contributes to the local and national economy and assists with food security. Huntingdonshire's agricultural land is almost entirely of good quality: 98% is classed as grades 1, 2 or 3. 15% is grade 1 (excellent quality) which is concentrated in the north east of the district, mainly in the Fens with a few pockets along the Ouse Valley. The land north of Huntingdon and land south of the A14 is predominantly grade 2. From the Nene Valley in the north of Huntingdonshire south to the A14 corridor and extending from the district's western boundary to the A1 the land is classed almost entirely as grade 3. Figure 3.2 shows this.
- 3.8** Archaeological evidence of human habitation in Huntingdonshire indicates prehistoric activity was focused on the higher land in the north of the district around the Nene valley along with higher pockets within the Fens and Fen margins. The majority of Huntingdonshire's Scheduled Monuments are located within these areas. The Romans constructed roads through the landscape including Ermine Street the route of which is still reflected in the A1198 and A1. Towns developed at Godmanchester by the river crossing and near Water Newton.
- 3.9** The rivers became major trading routes influencing how settlements have dispersed across the landscape with Huntingdon, St Neots, St Ives and Godmanchester all developing by the river Great Ouse. The landscape was extensively forested in Saxon times with Woodhurst being one of the finest examples nationally of a ring village constructed in a forest clearing. By Norman times nearly all the current villages in the district had been established. Many medieval features remain within the landscape including deserted villages, abbeys, moats, bridges and ridge and furrow field patterns. These are distributed across Huntingdonshire but with a particular concentration in the clayland areas closest to the Fens.
- 3.10** The post medieval period saw transformational changes in the local landscape with the comprehensive draining of the Fens creating a rich agricultural area from the former wetlands supported by introduction of pumped drainage channels. The enclosures of the 17th-early 19th centuries also had a significant impact on parts of the district creating larger more regular fields surrounded by hawthorn hedgerows. Establishment of parklands for country estates had a localised impact particularly around Kimbolton and Elton. Built infrastructure and housing development have contributed major changes to the Huntingdonshire landscape since the early 19th century including introduction of the railways, major roads, establishment of airfields and the creation of Grafham Water in the 1960s.
- 3.11** The largest settlements in the district include St Neots, Huntingdon, St Ives and Godmanchester which all have origins as crossing points of the River Great Ouse. Of the towns, only Ramsey is not on this route being focused on the medieval abbey built on higher land within the Fens. The district contains a large number of villages ranging from large settlements like Yaxley and Sawtry to much smaller ones such as Broughton and Wistow. Hamlets are rare but isolated farms are scattered throughout the district. All settlements contain examples of vernacular architecture. Thatch and render construction is most commonly seen in medieval houses in the claylands. Red and buff brick used from the 18th century onwards with red being commonly used in Fen buildings and buff predominating in the Ouse valley. Limestone is the traditional building material in the Nene valley and is used for churches and bridges throughout the district.

Nature Sites

- 3.12** Within the identified landscape character areas are internationally, nationally and locally important wildlife sites which supports a rich and varied ecology with an extensive network of important nature conservation sites (Figure 3.3). These include internationally important nature sites such as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), and Ramsar sites and nationally important sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Importance (SSSIs) and National Nature Reserves (NNRs), which benefit from statutory protection. The district also includes locally designated sites such as county wildlife sites (CWSs) and local geological sites (LGSs), which are not statutorily defined but provide important habitats to sustain a wealth of biodiversity. Policy LP30 Biodiversity and Geodiversity sets out the Council's approach to development proposals in relation to biodiversity and geodiversity including identified sites.
- 3.13** Within the relevant landscape character area assessment further details on their special qualities and contribution to the landscape character area are explored. Their location is shown in Figure 3.3 and listed below (they can also be viewed on the [interactive map](#)):
- Portholme SAC
 - The Ouse Washes SAC/SPA
 - Woodwalton Fen (Ramsar site) that is part of the Fenland SAC
 - Holme Fen NNR
 - Monks Wood NNR
 - Upwood Meadows NNR
 - Grafham Water SSSI is the largest of the 27 SSSIs within Huntingdonshire
 - 131 County Wildlife Sites including Little Paxton Pits and Somersham Local Nature Reserve
- 3.14** Many locally and nationally important habitats and species are found in the district including meadows, hedgerows, ponds, grazing marsh, woodland, orchards, parkland, fen, wetlands, reedbeds and lakes. Many of these habitats comprise important features in the landscape strongly influencing their character. Woodland habitats are concentrated towards the centre of the district including blocks of deciduous woodland dominated by oak and ash with an understorey of hazel, elder, hawthorn and wild cherry. Some areas are designated as ancient woodland and many are protected and managed as nature reserves or county wildlife sites. Huntingdonshire has five historic parks and gardens supporting an extensive range of mature trees including lime, sycamore, cedar of Lebanon and giant redwood adding to the ecological richness of the landscape.
- 3.15** Wetlands are particularly important habitats within Huntingdonshire. For centuries the fens were extensive wetlands but since drainage only a few pockets of wet fen remained at Holme and Woodwalton fens. The Great Fen project is transforming the landscape in their vicinity adding 3,700 ha around the existing reserves and recreating a range of wetland features, providing enhanced flood storage and contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation by creating large areas for wildlife.
- 3.16** Huntingdonshire also contains large expanses of open water which have significant impacts on the character of their local landscapes. The largest is Grafham Water reservoir part of which is designated as a site of special scientific interest. Others have been created through extensive quarry restoration schemes along the Ouse valley with many now supporting fisheries or nature reserves.

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The Great Fen and other Strategic Green Infrastructure Projects

3.17 As well as designated wildlife sites, the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 supports the provision of green infrastructure. Policy LP3 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 sets out the Council's approach to protecting and enhancing Huntingdonshire's green infrastructure for the benefit of biodiversity, recreation and leisure. The policy identifies three Green Infrastructure Priority Areas: the Ouse Valley, Nene Valley and Grafham Water (all shown in Figure 3.4 and can be viewed on the [interactive map](#)). Each of these priority areas are explored in greater detail in their respective landscape character areas assessments. The Ouse Valley and Grafham Water each form their own distinct landscape character areas. In contrast, the Great Fen is a strategically important wetland project which overlaps with three landscape character areas: the Fens, the Fen Margin and the Central Claylands. Policy LP3 also sets out the Council's approach to the Great Fen its Landscape and Visual Setting. The extent of the project is shown in Figure 3.3.

3.18 The Great Fen combines landscape-scale habitat restoration with promotion of public access to the natural environment and conservation. The vision is to develop a sense of fenland wilderness, whilst still allowing significant levels of controlled public access and a diversity of land management, including traditional farming. The range of habitats includes open water, reed beds, wet grazing meadows, active bog systems and drier grasslands and woods.



Open water at Holme Fen

3.19 The [Great Fen Master Plan \(2010\)](#) has been endorsed as planning guidance and is a material consideration for development management purposes by the Council. The Master Plan contains detailed advice on preferred proposals within the area that balance tourism and nature conservation requirements. Along with the core area of the Great Fen itself, a wider landscape and visual setting area has been defined which is closely visually connected to the core project area. The primary aim of the Landscape and Visual Setting is to protect the tranquillity of the Great Fen itself, particularly from visual intrusion (including obtrusive light) and noise intrusion from major structures such as wind turbines, telecommunications masts and any other development located in the immediate setting. Beyond this boundary major structures, although potentially visible from the Great Fen area, are less likely to impact on the setting of the Great Fen. The Great Fen is part of a wider Fens for the Future project; its vision is to promote connectivity in the Fens between sites, for example between the Great Fen and Wicken Fen along the Rothschild Way. The [Fens for the Future Strategic Plan 2012](#) will help to deliver these aspirations.

3.20 There are a number of other important green infrastructure projects within or near the district that should be supported where possible. Notably the West Cambridgeshire Hundreds is a strategic project focused on ancient woodlands mainly within South Cambridgeshire but including woodland in the southeast of the district, near Great Gransden. The scheme aims to enhance the unique biodiversity found in these woodlands through better management, maintaining or reinstating traditional coppicing, widening rides and providing better conditions for butterflies and other insects.



Speckled butterfly in woodland

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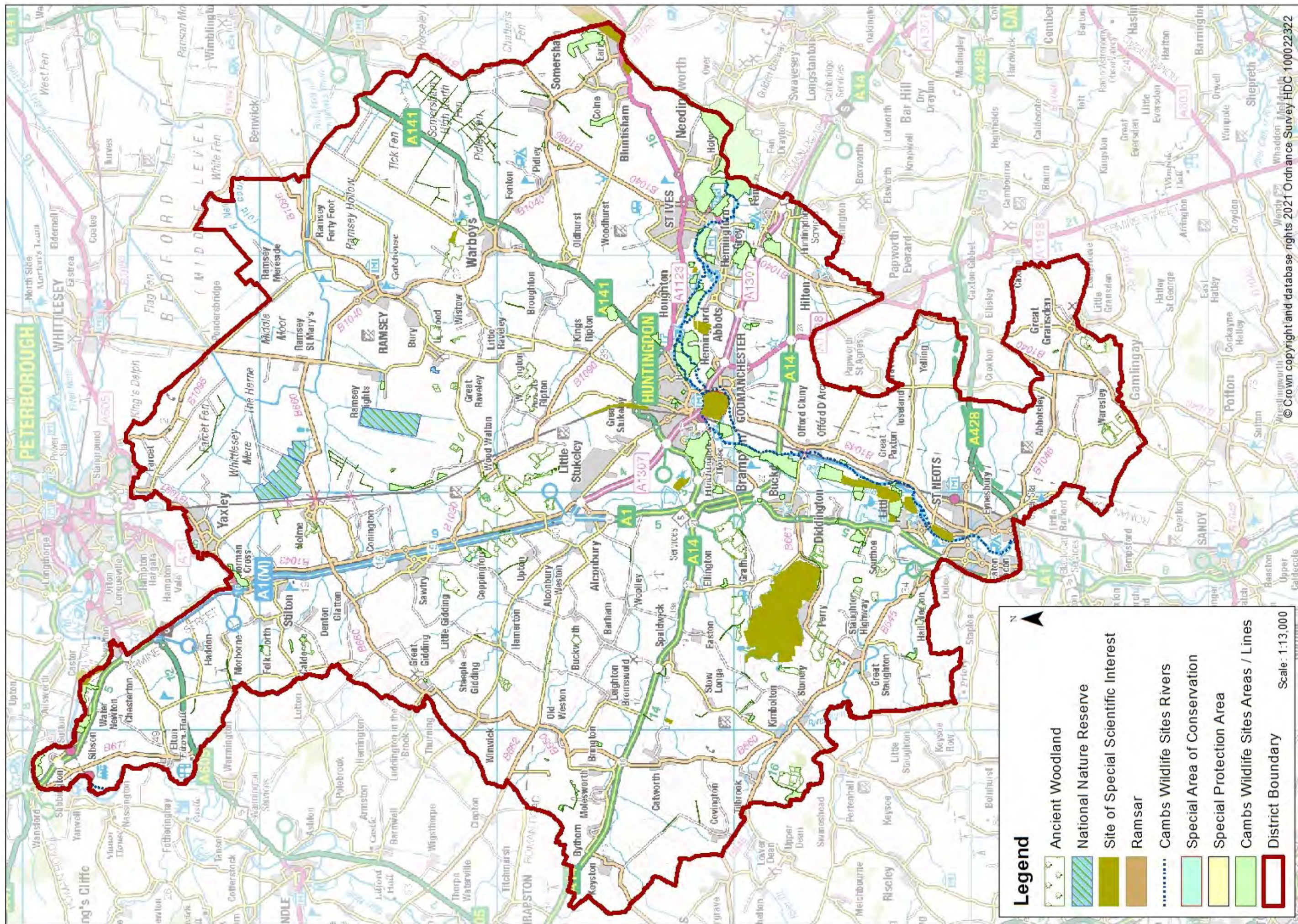


Figure 3.3 Internationally, nationally and locally important nature sites and Green Infrastructure projects across Huntingdonshire

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The Fens

- 3.21** The Fens landscape character area lies in the north east of Huntingdonshire and is distinctive for its low-lying, flat, regular open character arising from its man-made network of drainage channels and waterways. The Fens extend north and east into surrounding districts. The southern and western boundaries follow the 0m contour (sea level) and abut the Fen Margin landscape character area.
- 3.22** For much of their history, the Fens have been flooded by the sea or rivers, creating areas of marshy swamp. Their distinctive peaty soil is the result of the decomposition and accumulation of organic matter from the forests and swamps over many thousands of years. Remnants of wet fen and associated carr woodland (wetland woodland, with alder and willow as the dominant species) are rare, but remain at Holme and Woodwalton Fens. These wetland and woodland habitats support a wide variety of animals and plants.
- 3.23** Attempts to drain the Fens were made in Roman and Medieval periods, but it was not until the 17th Century that the area was comprehensively drained to enable the area to be used for agriculture, by initiatives including the Ramsey Forty Foot drain, and the re-channelling of the River Nene. The surrounding land was then drained into the channels by a regular series of straight field ditches, initially pumped from the land using wind pumps but later with steam, diesel and electric pumps.
- 3.24** This long history of habitation and the build-up of peat means that the Fens landscape can hold significant archaeological finds. Peat shrinkage is exposing new archaeological sites, and therefore up-to-date information is always needed before development or planting schemes are planned. Survey work carried out by [English Heritage's Fenland Project](#) provides invaluable information for individual sites.
- 3.25** There are very few settlements located within or partially within this character area, the only ones are very small and are most closely associated with Ramsey; they are Ramsey Mereside and Ramsey St Mary's as well as Pondersbridge which mostly falls within the neighbouring authority of Fenland. Other very small clusters and isolated properties are found throughout the landscape such as Ramsey Hollow.
- 3.26** While there are few settlements within the Fens, several parish boundaries fall within it and their landscape character are therefore influenced by the Fens. These parishes are:
- Bury
 - Farcet
 - Ramsey
 - Stilton
 - Wistow
 - Conington
 - Holme
 - Sawtry
 - Upwood and the Raveleys
 - Wood Walton
 - Denton and Caldecote
 - Pidley-cum-Fenton
 - Somersham
 - Warboys
 - Yaxley





Aerial view of typical Fens LCA countryside

Key Characteristics

- An expansive landscape of flat land below sea level, with long views to distant horizons with the sky playing a dominant role.
- Predominantly used for arable agriculture on the dark peaty soil.
- Water management (drainage) is fundamental to the appearance and maintenance of the landscape: ditches, dykes and rivers (often artificially straightened and raised above the surrounding land level) are prominent in views.
- Roads, ditches, field boundaries and crops are laid out on regular grids, which gives rise to a geometric landscape.
- The flat and horizontal nature of the landscape can give vertical features an unusual prominence.
- Settlement is limited to isolated farms, with a few linear villages along main roads.
- Sparse woodland cover. Isolated field trees and shelterbelts are visually significant.
- In the western part of the area, the nature reserves at Holme and Woodwalton illustrate the wet and wooded character of the Fens before they were cleared and drained.

- 3.27** The essential character of the Fens derives from the combination of flat land and sky with long views to distant horizons. Water management is fundamental to the appearance and maintenance of the landscape through a grid pattern of ditches, dykes and rivers. These are often straightened and raised above the surrounding land level making them prominent in views. Arable agriculture using the dark, peaty soil dominates use of the Fens.
- 3.28** The horizontal rhythms of regular straight roads and drains are typical with the skyline punctuated by vertical features such as buildings, trees and wind turbines. Its long views and horizontal emphasis mean that the introduction of large, vertical structures can have a significant effect on the character of the landscape. The openness of the landscape gives rise to a strong sense of isolation in more remote parts of the area.

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The expansive peat fields and scattered farmsteads by Ramsey Hollow are typical of this area



The Fens LCA supports a significant number of wind turbines on edges of villages and in more exposed locations

3.29 Peat shrinkage is a major issue affecting the character of the area. As water is pumped from the land and channelled out through the drainage system to the sea the water level is lowered and the peat dries out. Wind erosion has reduced the depth of peat in some parts of the Fens exposing the underlying clay. The deepest areas of peat remain around Holme Fen. The Fens are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change through potential heating enhancing the drying processes but also from increased variability in water levels ranging from impacts of flash floods and potential sea level rises. The Fens landscape character area is part of a larger area responsible for around a third of England's vegetable production; changing agricultural practices are a key determinant of the area's future character.



Due to peat shrinkage many fields are significantly lower than the roads from which they are accessed



The River Nene Old Course flowing east under Bodsey Toll Road is one of the larger managed watercourses in the Fens within Huntingdonshire

3.30 Villages are linear in form, sometimes stretching for several miles along roads. Buildings are usually simple in shape and design, constructed from red or buff brick with little ornamentation and slate or pantile roofs. Farm buildings are usually situated on isolated islands of slightly higher ground. Lines of poplar trees forming shelter belts around buildings are a distinctive feature. Large, modern farm buildings can be visible for long distances. Remnants of wet fen and associated carr woodland with alder and willow as the dominant species remain at Holme and Woodwalton Fens.

- 3.31** Wind turbines have been introduced into the landscape such as that at Tick Fen which can often be apparent in long distances views



Linear development, Herne Road, Ramsey St Mary's



Tick Fen hosts one of the larger windfarms in the LCA being relatively isolated from any settlement but highly visible from the A141

- 3.32** The character of the Fens is predominantly a result of the artificial drainage regime which supports its agricultural role. Broad landscape management and improvement principles for the more extensive Fenland landscape area included within the [Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines](#) on pages 61 to 67.

Great Fen Green Infrastructure Priority Area

- 3.33** The Great Fen project area primarily falls within the Fens landscape character area and encompasses Holme Fen and Woodwalton Fen which are both National Nature Reserves. This strategic landscape scale project aims to transform over 3,000ha of mainly arable land into a highly biodiverse fenland landscape. Originally the Great Fen was part of a large natural fenland landscape much of which was below sea level. Whittlesey Mere, a large shallow area of open water was the last of the great meres to be drained around 1850 turning Whittlesey Mere and Holme Fen into farmland. This dominates the northern part of the Great Fen area. A mixture of fens, bogs and wet woodland dominates the southern part. Whilst the project will not return the land entirely to its natural condition, water level management and introduction of pasture in place of arable fields will help to establish a far more biodiverse landscape.

- 3.34** The project will protect remaining fragments of the ancient fenland landscape, create large areas for wildlife and prevent further loss of the peat soils. It will also provide enhanced flood storage and landscape scale opportunities for climate change mitigation and adaptation. A Great Fen Masterplan was published in 2010 which seeks to increase connectivity around the area and encourages people to enjoy the natural landscape through quiet recreational pursuits such as bird watching and walking and more active landscape management volunteering. Wide open spaces and long views will dominate the Great Fen replicating the natural characteristics of the wider Fens area with some parts including woodland and reed beds providing a more enclosed feel. The Great Fen landscape and visual setting area defined in the Local Plan to 2036 is intended to provide a buffer around this sensitive area to prevent development in its immediate surroundings from having a detrimental visual impact on the project area.



Yellow iris at Woodwalton Fen

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Peat soil colours the water's edge at Holme Fen



Waterway at Woodwalton Fen

Looking Forward

- 3.35** The Fens have a strong character and sense of place but the landscape is vulnerable to change. In the short term its long views mean that introduction of large buildings can have a significant impact, often being visible from long distances. Additionally, development can be intrusive particularly where it deepens the village form from its traditional linear character.
- 3.36** In the medium to longer term the impacts of climate change may be particularly severe for the Fenland landscape due to increased variability in water levels and higher temperatures affecting the peat. Drying out of the peat may worsen this further by releasing carbon emissions itself and through suffering greater wind erosion causing more depletion of the peat soils.
- 3.37** Reducing peat depth is already an issue in the area; in some places the peat has gone completely exposing the underlying clay which is far less fertile and gives rise to the need for different agricultural practices further altering the appearance of the landscape. The Fens contain valuable environments which are rare at a national level, particularly the open fen, reedbeds and carr woodland. The Great Fen project is already making significant contributions to enhanced landscape management and restoration of wetland habitats and this is expected to continue to extend and improve over the coming decades. Key issues for the Fenland landscape character area looking forward are:
- Retaining the large scale vistas and key long distance views
 - Maintaining the linear form and distinctive architecture of the villages
 - Management of water and drainage systems to ensure groundwater quality and minimise drying out of the peat
 - Management of dykes, ditches and verges to improve biodiversity
 - Protection of open fen, carr woodland and reedbeds
 - Successful development of the Great Fen project to recreate wetland areas, manage and effectively connect Holme and Woodwalton Fens
 - Careful consideration of the siting of tree planting to provide shelter belts without detracting from the fundamental open expansive scale of the Fen landscape
 - Planting of trees and hedges around agricultural buildings, farmsteads and village edges to soften the harsh outlines of buildings in the flat landscape

Development proposals should:

- Contribute to management of water and drainage systems to minimise detrimental impacts on the peat, maintain groundwater quality and improve their ecological value.
- Retain the large scale, open vistas and long distance views across open countryside.
- Maintain the linear form and distinctive architecture of the Fen villages.
- Undertake appropriate archaeological surveys where necessary to add to the historical environmental record of the Fens.
- Locate additional tree planting in a sensitive manner that does not detract from the open, expansive nature of the Fens landscape.
- Protect, enhance and where appropriate extend wetland habitats within the Great Fen project area in accordance with the aspirations of the area's masterplan.
- Enhance existing and support additional trails and public rights of way in accordance with the Great Fen project aspirations and the area's masterplan.

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Fen Margin

3.38 The Fen Margin landscape character area comprises a narrow arc of land forming a transition between the Fens to the north and east and the Central Claylands and Northern Wolds landscape character areas to the south and west. The north and eastern boundaries are defined by the 0m contour (sea level) with the southern and western boundaries marked by the start of rising land. The land is low lying and slopes gently eastwards.

3.39 Many of the Fen Margin settlements are ancient in origin. The Fen Margin was an ideal location for settlement, as it had access to the resources both of the wetland fen (including waterfowl, fish, reed, wood) and of the higher land for growing crops. Consequently, several Scheduled Monuments and archaeological assets can be found throughout the character area.

3.40 Trackways would have originally crossed the Fen Margin between the fens and the higher ground, and some of these are still visible in the road and footpath network, often lined with hedge banks.

3.41 Many parish boundaries fall within or partially within the Fen Margin landscape character area. Their landscape character is therefore influenced by or in part influenced by the Fen Margin character, these are:

- | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Alwalton | • Bluntisham | • Bury |
| • Colne | • Conington | • Denton and Caldecote |
| • Earith | • Farcet | • Folksworth and Washingley |
| • Glatton | • Haddon | • Holme |
| • Morborne | • Pidley-cum-Fenton | • Ramsey |
| • Sawtry | • Somersham | • Stilton |
| • Upwood and the Raveleys | • Warboys | • Wistow |
| • Wood Walton | • Yaxley | |





The Fen Margins contain diverse uses within a predominantly flat landscape

Key Characteristics

- A low-lying area, which slopes gently eastwards towards the Fens.
- Generally well vegetated, with deciduous woodland, hedgerow trees and orchards, particularly around the village of Colne.
- A matrix of land uses, comprising arable farmland, pasture, airfield, orchards, deciduous woodland and settlements.
- Settlements situated on the higher land, otherwise a sparsely populated landscape.
- Considerable recent housing development on the edges of most settlements.
- Rich in archaeology with numerous Scheduled Ancient Monuments, mostly from the Medieval period, including several moats, an abbey and a motte & bailey castle.

- 3.42** The landscape character of the Fen Margin is strongly influenced by the adjoining areas but also has a distinct character of its own comprising a mosaic of landscape types united by their flat topography, vegetation (particularly woodlands and treed hedgerows) and extensive skylines.

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Rising land south east from Bury



View of the Fen Margin landscape looking eastwards from Fenton Road toward Pidley Fen

- 3.43** Land uses include arable and pastoral farmland, deciduous woodland, the market town of Ramsey, Conington Airfield and the remaining traditional orchards around Colne and Bluntisham. The field pattern is very different to that of the adjoining Fens typically comprising small irregular fields divided by tall hedges with trees with hedge-banks common along the older lanes. The small size of the fields along with the hedges, trees and woodlands create a sense of enclosure to the landscape although this is partially offset by the expansive views of the sky.



Conington Airfield



Hedgerow with occasional trees east of Stilton

- 3.44** The settlements are diverse in character, typically situated on pockets of slightly higher ground, but overall giving a relatively sparsely populated landscape. The western part of the area contains former coaching villages such as Stilton influenced by the A1 (Great North Road). Whilst the majority of the area is rural in character, a narrow linear belt comprising the A1 (M) and East Coast Mainline railway traverses the western part giving a noisier character. Towards the east of the area villages such as Somersham are strongly linked to their agricultural heritage. Many villages have substantial 19th century developments around their historic cores with building materials including red and buff brick, render, pantile, plain tile and slate. The western part of the area contains some historic limestone buildings typical of those in villages further west and north. Modern developments on the outskirts of some villages can be visually intrusive in the landscape, particularly when viewed from the Fens. Many former agricultural buildings have been converted to homes with limited impact on the surrounding landscape.

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The Bell Inn, Stilton constructed in limestone brings a soft warmth to the streetscape



Manor Farm Court , Great Haddon is an example of successful barn conversions

- 3.45** The area has extensive archaeological assets with medieval scheduled monuments including a motte and bailey castle north of Wood Walton, moats and the remains of Ramsey Abbey. Many of the archaeological features are relatively obscured by woodland although where they are within grassland areas outlines such as moats can be more clearly seen.



Castle Grove east of Sawtry is covered by trees



More recent history is commemorated at Glatton Air Base

- 3.46** The southern part of the Great Fen project area and its visual and landscape impact area extends into the south western part of the Fen Margin landscape character area round Wood Walton. Much of this part is focused on dry grassland reflecting the slightly higher topography of the Fen Margins. The Fen Margin is very much a transitional landscape influenced by the landscape character areas which adjoin it. Its character remains largely intact but parts have experienced the amalgamation of fields as pastoral use has given way to arable farming. Broad landscape management and improvement principles for the more extensive Fenland landscape area included within the [Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines](#) on pages 63 to 67.

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Looking Forward

3.47 Overall the character of the Fen Margin remains relatively intact. Changing farming practices have led to some loss of quality such as abandoned orchards around Colne. Village edges can be intrusive in the landscape when viewed from the Fens in part due to the rising ground on which they are situated. Developments within the Great Fen and its landscape and visual setting area should avoid impacts on the aspirations to protect this as an area of tranquil countryside. Broad landscape management and improvement principles for the more extensive Fenland landscape are included within the Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines (pages 72 to 77). Key issues for the Fen Margin landscape character area looking forward include:

- Effective integration of built edges of settlements with the surrounding landscape to minimise their visual impact
- Maintenance of existing hedgerows, hedgerow trees and woodlands to retain their contribution to the landscape
- Protection of apple and plum orchards and support for the introduction or reinstatement of further orchards
- Protection of the network of hedge banks associated with rural lanes
- Retention of existing archaeological features
- Careful location of further renewable energy generation plant avoiding the Great Fen landscape and visual setting

Development proposals should:

- Maintain existing hedgerows, hedgerow trees and woodlands.
- Protect the character of historic lanes with hedge-banks.
- Create soft edges to built developments which have a visual relationship with the surrounding landscape.
- Protect and conserve the archaeological heritage dispersed throughout the landscape.
- Support the establishment or reinstatement of orchards, particularly in the eastern part of the area.

Central Claylands

3.48 The Central Claylands comprise a large character area in the centre of Huntingdonshire. It includes Huntingdon, Alconbury Weald and St Ives. In the northern part of the character area there is a small sub area of extensive woodland located between Aversley Wood and Wennington Woods. These consist of ancient woodland.

3.49 The area predominately consists of gently undulating farmland situated between the Fen Margin (to the north and east), the Ouse Valley to the south and the Northern Wolds to the west. The land undulates between 10-50m AOD. As well as woodland and arable farmland, other uses within the Central Claylands are urban areas of varying sizes and airfields at Alconbury, Upwood, Warboys and Wyton (some have been reused or are in the process of mixed-use residential led redevelopment).

3.50 Due to its central location and the large area it covers, many parishes fall within or partially within the Central Claylands landscape character area. Their landscape character is therefore influenced by it to some lesser or greater extent, these parishes are:



- | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| • Abbots Ripton | • Alconbury | • Alconbury Weston |
| • Barham and Woolley | • Bluntisham | • Brampton |
| • Broughton | • Buckworth | • Bury |
| • Colne | • Conington | • Ellington |
| • Glatton | • Godmanchester | • Hamerton and Steeple Gidding |
| • Holywell cum Needingworth | • Houghton and Wyton | • Huntingdon |
| • Kings Ripton | • Old Hurst | • Pidley cum Fenton |
| • Ramsey | • Sawtry | • Somersham |
| • St Ives | • The Stukeleys | • Upton and Coppingford |
| • Upwood and the Raveleys | • Warboys | • Wistow |
| • Wood Walton | • Woodhurst | • Wyton on the Hill |

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Typical view of the interaction between the edge of a settlement and the countryside within the Central Claylands

Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating arable farmland.
- Large scale field pattern with few hedgerows or hedgerow trees, giving rise to a predominantly open landscape.
- Relatively large scale developments, including airfields at Alconbury and Wyton, the major transport corridor of the A1/ A14, and significant northern extensions to the towns of Huntingdon and St Ives.
- Extensive cover of ancient woodland in the north west.
- Regularly spaced traditional villages, often clustered around village greens.
- Numerous Medieval moats visible as earthworks in the landscape.

3.51 The vast majority of the area is arable farmland, other land uses include woodland, urban areas and airfields. A strong topographic feature is the plateau to the north west of Huntingdon formerly occupied by Alconbury Airfield and now being redeveloped as Alconbury Weald. Large field sizes create a strong sense of openness which is enhanced by the lack of trees and hedgerows across much of the area. Away from the main settlements the landscape is tranquil and there is a sense of remoteness within much of the open arable farmland.

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Wistow Wood nature reserve typifies the many small woodlands in the Central Claylands



New homes, employment uses and community facilities are creating Alconbury Weald on the plateau formerly used for RAF Alconbury

3.52 The distinctiveness of the Central Claylands is partly achieved by the regular distribution of historic villages. Visible earthworks in the landscape indicate remains of medieval moats and other former developments. Several villages are located at crossing points of streams with some such as Alconbury Weston retaining their fords. Woodhurst is a fine example of a 'Ring Village' with a road layout unchanged since its establishment in dense woodland around 1,300 years ago. Village greens are common and vernacular building materials include brick, render, thatch, tile and timber. Extensive apple and plum orchards formerly dominated much of the eastern part of the area around Somersham and Bluntisham.



Extensive clay field such as this north of Broughton Lane are typical of this LCA and support substantial arable farming



Alconbury Brook runs between High Street and Hamerton Road effectively splitting alconbury Weston into two with the traditional ford and footbridge providing a connection

3.53 The north western part of the area is distinguished by its extensive woodland cover, much of it ancient. Predominantly oak, the ancient woodland has significant conservation value with a concentration of nature reserves, SSSIs and county wildlife sites in the area such as Monks Wood, Wistow Wood and Aversley Wood. The area also contains some conifer plantations established by the Forestry Commission. The tranquillity is greatest in this part of the area where the woodland provides a strong sense of enclosure and forms a backdrop to views.

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industrial unit at Alconbury Hill



Monks Wood provides habitats for butterflies and bluebells

3.54 Along the main road corridors of the A1, A14 and A141 the landscape character is dominated by large scale developments including former airfields, large industrial units, extensive housing areas and the road infrastructure itself. The harsh edges often arising can be particularly intrusive in views of the surrounding countryside. Four solar farms have been introduced into the landscape along with individual and small groups of wind turbines which have localised impacts on the visual appearance of the landscape.



Solar farm near Broughton sits within the agricultural landscape



RAF Wyton - the plateau landscape was suitable for establishing military airfields

3.55 A small portion of the Central Claylands area falls within the Great Fen landscape and visual setting area near Wood Walton, Great Raveley, Upwood and Bury. Developments within this area should avoid impacts on the aspirations to protect this as an area of tranquil countryside. The Central Claylands are a sub-division of the much larger Western Claylands identified within the [Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines](#) and broad landscape management and improvement principles are included within pages 45 to 48.

Looking Forward

3.56 Containing Huntingdon, Alconbury Weald and St Ives, the Central Claylands will continue to face development pressure, particularly in the southern part of the area. The limited hedgerow and tree coverage facilitate long distance views in many places with some large structures highly visible in the landscape. Key issues for the Central Claylands landscape character area looking forward include:

- Protection and management of ancient woodland and hedgerows
- Provision of new woodland areas to give additional structure to the landscape and aid with screening intrusive buildings
- Protection of distinctive nucleated villages
- Minimisation of impacts on distance views from the effective use of the previously developed land at redundant airfields
- Revitalisation and reinstatement of orchards
- Protection of village greens
- Careful location of further renewable energy generation plant avoiding the Great Fen landscape and visual setting

Development proposals should:

- Protect and manage areas of ancient woodland and existing hedgerows.
- Plant new blocks of native woodland and hedgerows to provide a stronger sense of structure to the landscape.
- Protect the remaining orchards and where appropriate extend them or establish new orchards.
- Protect village greens and their immediate surrounding character.
- Retain the built form of distinctive nucleated villages.
- Sensitively redevelop redundant airfields reflecting their prominence in local and long distance views.

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Ouse Valley

- 3.57** The broad, shallow valley of the River Great Ouse flows roughly south to north between St Neots and Huntingdon then turns to flow west to east via St Ives and exits Huntingdonshire near Earith.
- 3.58** The meandering river channel is approximately 10m wide although it sometimes splits into multiple smaller channels. The fertile alluvial soils of the valley floor have strongly influenced the establishment of extensive hay meadows and grazing land along the river valley. Extraction of gravel deposits has led to extensive open water areas creating fisheries, nature reserves and leisure opportunities.
- 3.59** The River Great Ouse was used as a transport corridor from earliest times. The town of Godmanchester developed where the Roman road of Ermine Street crossed the river, and other settlements prospered at bridging points, including Huntingdon, St Ives, Offord Cluny and St Neots. Medieval bridges remain at Huntingdon, St Ives and Little Paxton. From the 18th Century until recent times, the river had an important industrial function, and several mill buildings from this period still line the river banks. In the 19th Century, railway lines were constructed along the valley.
- 3.60** The 20th Century has seen considerable development within the Ouse Valley. Gravel extraction has led to many flooded workings, which have regenerated and/or been restored to provide a range of uses, including fisheries, nature reserves and landfill sites. Other modern developments include marinas, industrial estates and residential areas. Where the river passes through larger settlements, such as Godmanchester and St Neots, the valley is sometimes managed as an urban park, providing public access and recreation.
- 3.61** Due to extensive nature of the Ouse Valley landscape character area, many parishes have boundaries that fall within it. Their landscape character is therefore influenced by or in part influenced by the Ouse Valley character, these are:
- | | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Abbotsley | • Alconbury | • Bluntisham |
| • Brampton | • Buckden | • Colne |
| • Diddington | • Earith | • Fenstanton |
| • Godmanchester | • Great Paxton | • Hemingford Abbots |
| • Hemingford Grey | • Hilton | • Holywell-cum-Needingworth |
| • Houghton and Wyton | • Huntingdon | • Little Paxton |
| • Offord Cluny and Offord D'Arcy | • Southoe and Midloe | • St Ives |
| • St Neots | • The Stukeleys | |





Water dominates the Ouse Valley landscape character area

Key Characteristics

- A mosaic of land uses, united by their topography and relationship to the river.
- The constant feature in the landscape is the River Great Ouse. Its meandering channel is approximately 10m wide, although it sometimes splits into smaller channels.
- Several significant towns and large villages contain attractive buildings and have a strong relationship with the river.
- Urbanising influences occur at road crossings and where the valley passes through towns. Otherwise, the valley floor feels tranquil and isolated.
- Wetlands, flood meadows and unimproved grassland are of high ecological value.
- Willow and poplar trees flourish in the valley, and increase its sense of identity and enclosure.
- Existing gravel workings, and former workings which have been flooded to create significant areas of open water.
- Traditional structures of bridges and mill/industrial buildings are characteristic man-made elements.
- Many recreational activities, including the Ouse Valley Way, boating, fishing and camping.

3.62 The variety of land uses and influences in the Ouse Valley have resulted in a complex mosaic of landscape types including hay meadows, pasture, arable farmland, gravel extraction and marinas with elements running through several towns and settlements. Each creates a different atmosphere but generally the area has a tranquil feel. Vegetation in the Ouse Valley is distinctive, consisting of wetland species such as willow, poplar and alder trees which increase the sense of enclosure. These are complemented by reeds, rushes and sedges. Unimproved flood meadows with traditional management regimes contain a wide variety of grass species and flowering plants. The ecological value of numerous sites is recognised through their designation as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or County Wildlife Sites including Portholme Meadow the largest surviving traditionally-managed meadow in the UK, with an area of 104ha. In 2013, an application was submitted to Natural England by a local interest group to designate an area of the Great Ouse valley and Ouse Washes as an Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB).

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The Ouse Valley LCA introduces a wealth of wildlife into the towns and villages along the river corridor



Barges with waterfowl and reeds, rushes and sedges

3.63 The River Great Ouse is a long established transport corridor with four of the district's five towns being established on its banks. Godmanchester developed where the Roman road of Ermine Street crossed the river. Huntingdon, St Ives and St Neots all developed at bridging points with medieval bridges contributing to the area's character at Huntingdon/ Godmanchester, St Ives and Little Paxton. Settlements occur throughout the Ouse Valley ranging in size from small villages to the historic cores of market towns. They contain a wide variety of building materials including buff and red brick, render, timber framing, pan and plain tile, thatch and slate with architecture surviving from the medieval period onward. 18th and 19th century mill buildings still line the river banks in many settlements. Much of the area outside the towns has a peaceful character complemented by the high quality vernacular architecture creating an attractive location.



The view west from St Ives bridge shows the relationship between the town, river and floodplain meadows



Riverside Mill, a converted Hosiery Mill is located on the banks of the River Ouse next to the historic gateway Town Bridge between Godmanchester and Huntingdon

3.64 The Ouse Valley landscape character is valued for its recreational opportunities too with a long distance footpath extending the whole length of the area. The numerous lakes, linked by the river provide boating and canoeing opportunities along with fishing, walking and wildlife viewing. Sensitive restoration of many gravel workings has enabled them to blend successfully into the landscape as nature reserves and fishing lakes becoming points of high landscape quality in their own right.

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Paxton Pits provides both nature and recreation benefits from former gravel workings



Huntingdon Boat Club located along the River Ouse within Riverside Park supports recreational activities on the river and is an important social centre for users with a café

- 3.65** The A14 upgrade works have provided additional lakes and high quality landscaping features to the west of the landscape character area. The removal of the former A14 viaduct will greatly improve the landscape views from Huntingdon into the Ouse Valley.



The A1/ A14 upgrade works created additional lakes on the western edge of the area



View of the A1 and A14 from overpass looking southwards

- 3.66** The Ouse Valley landscape is under pressure from recreational uses and increased development on land within and immediately adjoining the corridor. The floodplains are particularly sensitive environments. The Ouse Valley is identified within the [Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines](#) and broad landscape management and improvement principles are included within pages 49 to 51.

Ouse Valley Green Infrastructure Priority Area

- 3.67** The Ouse Valley Green Infrastructure Priority Area includes a series of significant nature reserves comprising former gravel pits, wetland meadows and wet woodland habitats. Little Paxton Pits nature reserve has an agreed proposal for an extension to take the site to 285ha with additional lakes, islands and wildflower rich grassland. Portholme meadow is designated as a special area of conservation retaining its original character as a lowland haymeadow. Further downstream around St Ives a series of wildlife sites are found such as Holt Island. To the east of St Ives the Ouse Valley area contains a large series of

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lakes occupying former sand and gravel pits. These include Fen Drayton Lakes which is a 391ha nature reserve managed by the RSPB since 2007, situated mainly to the south of the river just into south Cambridgeshire district. North-east of this is situated the Ouse Fen nature reserve also managed by the RSPB. Ultimately the Ouse Valley culminates in the Ouse Washes the nature conservation value of which is recognised in its designations as a Ramsar site, special area of conservation and SSSI. Frequent and prolonged flooding, including summer flooding, is a challenge for the nature conservation value of this area which would benefit from alleviation.

Looking Forward

3.68 The Ouse Valley landscape has undergone many changes over the last 70 years, including a reduction in traditional grazing and haymaking on its water meadows. Floodplains are particularly sensitive environments, and susceptible to increased flood risk from the potential impacts of climate change. The area has experienced a variety of development, for example, Buckden Marina, the original A14 flyover at Huntingdon and the 2020 realigned route, housing and industrial developments, and areas of gravel extraction. All have had an effect on the character of the Ouse Valley, reducing its tranquillity. Increased use of former gravel extract pits for nature reserves at Little Paxton, Godmanchester and Needingworth have all complemented the area's visual and biodiversity value. Key issues for the Ouse Valley landscape area looking forward include:

- Effective management of the river channel and its associated floodplain and ditches to ensure its water-holding capacity is maintained
- Maximising resilience to anticipated impacts of climate change and minimising its impact on the character of the area
- Management of recreational activities to minimise environmental impacts and to protect nature conservation interests along the river
- Protection and enhancement of a 'Green corridor' along the river to promote both its landscape and biodiversity benefits, including the use of native wetland trees to maintain the traditional vegetation of the area
- Protection of the setting of historic structures such as bridges and mill buildings which contribute to the valley character.
- High quality management of historic flood meadows, particularly Portholme, to protect and enhance nature conservation assets
- Management of the extent of future gravel extraction and opportunities for landscape enhancement through sensitive restoration projects

Development proposals should:

- Maintain or enhance water quality and quantity and not lead to any adverse impact on flood risk or flood defences.
- Protect and enhance the strategic green corridor formed by the river valley, particularly where it passes through settlements.
- Minimise the environmental impacts of recreational activities.
- Protect and enhance the biodiversity of the river, its margins and the valley floor.
- Protect the setting of historic structure such as bridges and mill buildings.

South East Claylands

3.69 The South East Claylands character area is situated in the south eastern corner of Huntingdonshire stretching up to the Ouse Valley in the north and west.

3.70 Much of the topography has been shaped by water with the River Great Ouse creating a wide shallow valley to the north and west of the area. Tributary streams flow from higher land to the south west to the Great Ouse forming a gently undulating landscape in the central part of the character area.

3.71 The South East Claylands include large areas of high quality landscape with a varied and typically gently undulating landform, established hedgerows and woodland and the historic settlement patterns which are reflected through the route of the Roman Ermine Street, medieval green lanes and abandoned settlements and field patterns arising from 18th and 19th century enclosures.

3.72 The parishes that fall within or partially within the South East Claylands landscape character area are:

- Abbotsley
- Great Gransden
- Hemingford Grey
- St Neots
- Yelling
- Fenstanton
- Great Paxton
- Hilton
- Toseland
- Godmanchester
- Hemingford Abbots
- Offord Cluny and Offord D'Arcy
- Waresley-cum-Tetworth



The South East Claylands supports extensive arable farming with distinctive hedgerow trees

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Key Characteristics

- Subtle variations in topography, including valley sides, gently undulating landform and plateaux.
- Tall hedgerows with frequent hedgerow trees are a distinctive feature in the central part of the area. Woodland cover increases towards the south.
- Sparsely settled with few villages.
- Village forms may be nucleated around village greens or linear. Buildings reflect the traditional vernacular.
- Evidence of its past Medieval settlement includes green lanes, moated sites and deserted villages, indicating that the landscape was once more densely populated.
- Heavy clay soils support cereal crops and arable production.

3.73 The South East Claylands contain relatively few villages but most of them have conservation areas. Some such as Hilton are clustered around village greens while others like Yelling and the Offords are more linear in form. Farms are generally within villages or hamlets rather than being free-standing in the open countryside and examples of traditional weatherboarded farm building remain widespread. In addition to the villages the South East Claylands contains parts of the towns of St Neots and Godmanchester which have expanded from the Ouse Valley up the surrounding valley sides.



Homes in village centres are often traditional vernacular as found in High Street Abbotsley



The Green at Hilton provides a large open space with mature trees

3.74 The shallow gently sloped landscape abutting the Ouse Valley is the least wooded part of the area although there are some plantations of non-native species which form distinct features in the local landscape. Hedgerows are typically trimmed to relatively low levels and long distance views are impacted on by urban development. The landscape of the South East Claylands is under pressure from urban development, especially close to the Ouse Valley, and from major transport infrastructure schemes.

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The A14 southern bypass cuts through the area adding extensive planting to soften the impact over time



Open farmland south east of Godmanchester has little woodland

- 3.75** The central part of the area includes extensive deciduous woodland, particularly on the tops of the hills, enhancing the undulated nature of the landscape. This is complemented by abundant hedgerows and hedgerow trees including oak, ash and hawthorn. Trees and farm buildings are prominent on the horizon in many places. Wind turbines are scattered through the northern and central parts of the area and are visible in long distance views in some places in addition to the impact on their immediate locality. Many verges are wide and contain a good variety of wild flowers and grasses.



Wind turbines at Cotton Farm east of Great Paxton



Cereal crops flourish on the clay soils near Toseland

- 3.76** Towards the south of the area woodland cover increases. Heavy clay soils predominate in the area supporting cereal crops and arable farming. Where villages are sparse the connecting network of lanes are often narrow. Higher hedges with numerous trees are wider found, particularly in the southern part of the area. The relative lack of settlement in the area combined with the mature vegetation creates an intimate and tranquil feel to the landscape. In those parts more affected by agricultural change and amalgamated fields the scale of the landscape becomes larger and this sense is lost.

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Woodland is frequently found on higher land as here north of Waresley



High hedges enclose one side of the narrow Croxton Road south of Toseland

- 3.77** The South East Claylands are a sub-division of the much larger Western Claylands identified within the [Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines](#) and broad landscape management and improvement principles are included within pages 45 to 48.

Looking Forward

- 3.78** Many parts of the South East Claylands are strongly rural and largely unspoilt and their landscape character remains largely intact. In other areas, the loss of landscape features at a local level, combined with the visual impacts of distant development have resulted in some loss of character. Whilst some changes are small-scale at individual level their cumulative impact on the landscape character can be more substantial. The effects of urban development at St Neots and Godmanchester have had a more significant impact on the South East Claylands landscape, with large scale industrial buildings and residential estates dominating views in places. Key issues for the South East Claylands landscape character area looking forward include:

- Provision of substantial landscape buffers to accompany major development on the edges of towns to ensure successful integration into the landscape setting
- Conservation of historic villages, through maintenance of attractive their historic cores and the avoidance of ribbon development
- Planting of tree and woodland belts along major roads to screen visually intrusive development and promote biodiversity, subject to the needs of highway safety and maintenance
- Effective management of native woodlands and hedgerows and appropriate planting with native species suitable to meet the predicted impacts of climate change
- Careful consideration of the landscape impacts of the conversion of agricultural land to recreational or other non-agricultural uses
- Preservation of medieval and other ancient features remaining within the landscape and enhanced interpretation and public access where appropriate
- Protection of tall hedgerows with hedgerow trees which are a distinctive feature of the central area

Development proposals should:

- Promote increased planting and soft landscaping around the edges of the towns to screen visually intrusive development; particularly through planting of tree and woodland belts.
- Avoid ribbon development to conserve the form of historic villages.
- Ensure preservation and interpretation of historic features remaining within the landscape.
- Carefully consider the siting and scale of new farm buildings to minimise their impact on the countryside.
- Protect tall hedgerows and hedgerow trees as these are a distinctive feature of the central area.

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Northern Wolds

3.79 The Northern Wolds landscape character area forms a broad north-south strip on the western edge of Huntingdonshire, extending from the Nene Valley in the north to the Southern Wolds to the south east with the Central Claylands to the east.

3.80 Two processes have been particularly important in the shaping of the Northern Wolds: landform and medieval settlement. The area contains the highest land in Huntingdonshire with a distinctive ridged topography formed by streams flowing down from this higher land towards the Fens and Central Claylands. The streams have eroded pronounced valleys which are very different in character from the intervening higher land. Medieval influence is still strongly visible in the landscape of the Northern Wolds, and is reflected in the high number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments and ecclesiastical architecture.

3.81 Due to extensive nature of the Northern Wolds landscape character area, many parishes fall within or partially within it. Their landscape character is therefore influenced by or in part influenced by the Northern Wolds character, these are:



- | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Alconbury | • Alwalton | • Barham and Woolley |
| • Brington and Molesworth | • Buckworth | • Bythorn and Keyston |
| • Catworth | • Chesterton | • Conington |
| • Covington | • Denton and Caldecote | • Easton |
| • Ellington | • Elton | • Folksworth and Washingley |
| • Glatton | • Great Gidding | • Haddon |
| • Hamerton and Steeple Gidding | • Kimbolton | • Leighton |
| • Little Gidding | • Morborne | • Old Weston |
| • Sawtry | • Sibson-cum-Stibbington | • Spaldwick |
| • Stilton | • Stow Longa | • Tilbrook |
| • Water Newton | • Winwick | |



Northern Wolds landscape character area includes a series of ridges and well vegetated valleys with dispersed historic villages

Key Characteristics

- A strong topography of ridges bisected by pronounced valleys.
- Valleys are well vegetated and intimate in scale, while ridges/ plateaux feel more open.
- An historic landscape, containing many medieval features.
- Dispersed pattern of historic villages, with little modern development.
- Distinctive square church towers topped with spires form characteristic landmarks.

3.82 The landscape character of the Northern Wolds is achieved through the distinctive and repeated pattern of ridges, valleys and regularly spaced settlements. The ridges are generally used for arable farming and have a relatively open feel with long views and few hedgerow trees. In contrast, the valleys have a higher proportion of land in pastoral use and typically feel more enclosed due to smaller field sizes and less views out. The valleys are more densely vegetated with large mixed hedgerows containing a significant number of oak trees. The streams tend to be narrow with their routes identifiable by a line of trees along the banks.

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The course of Alconbury Brook can be seen in the landscape by the trees growing along it



Pastoral fields and countryside view south from Steeple Gidding Church

3.83 Villages are generally regularly spaced, linked by fairly straight roads and closely associated with the field pattern. Medieval settlement patterns still predominate in this area with some villages clustered around village greens and others being more linear in form. Most villages are situated near the tops of valley sides.



The view north to Winwick from the B660 shows how the distinctive church tower stands out on the horizon from its position at the top of a ridge. This typifies the pattern of villages located on higher land



The trees on Main Street, Winwick are typical of villages in the Northern Wolds

3.84 A notable influence on the landscape is the distinctive church towers with spires on square bases which frequently stand out on the horizon. Villages generally contain many trees and have a wooded appearance in distant views. Vernacular building styles and materials are much in evidence including timber framing, thatch and render with some limestone buildings in the north west of the area.

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All Saints Church in Buckworth with a tower with spire on a square base



Westward Farm in Winwick, an example of a pastel rendered and thatched vernacular cottage

- 3.85** Medieval influences are still visible in the landscape, reflected in the high number of scheduled monuments including the earthworks remaining from abandoned settlements such as Washingley. The landscape contains numerous archaeological sites of manors, fishponds and ridge and furrow field patterns. Where the landscape is interrupted by the A14 tranquillity is reduced locally but the visual impact is limited due to the east-west pattern of the ridged topography.



Washingley medieval motte site



The view west along the A14 shows how it sits within the valley reducing the road's visual impact on the landscape although noise pollution has a detrimental impact on the locality

- 3.86** The Northern Wolds are an attractive and relatively unspoilt part of the district with a strong historical character. Both villages and countryside are vulnerable to unsympathetic development. The Northern Wolds are a sub-division of the much larger Western Claylands identified within the [Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines](#) and broad landscape management and improvement principles are included within pages 45 to 48.

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Looking Forward

3.87 The Northern Wolds are an attractive and relatively unspoilt area of countryside with a strong historical character. They are a sub division of the much larger Western Claylands identified within the Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines, and broad landscape management and improvement principles are included within pages 54 to 57 of the Guidelines. The historic nature of many of the landscape features in this area, for example roads, hedgerows and villages, means that their removal or alteration not only has a visual impact on the landscape, but also erodes its fabric, and therefore its intrinsic character. Non-scheduled archaeological features are at risk of being lost through ploughing, and many earthwork features, such as those of Washingley Castle are hidden by overgrowth. Key issues for the Northern Wolds landscape character area looking forward include:

- Protection and enhancement of the distinctive characters of the valley and plateaux landscapes through retention of the established pattern of smaller fields and meadows in the valleys, and the maintenance of long views from the upland areas
- Protection of key views towards the distinctive skyline of ridge tops, church towers and woodland
- Preservation of archaeological features, with improved public access and enhanced interpretation where appropriate
- Retention of historic settlement character through maintenance of village greens and other distinctive features and good siting and design of new buildings
- Protection of the parkland setting to Kimbolton village and School
- Protection of the existing watercourses in the area and enhancement of their biodiversity value
- Protection of ancient hedgerows and oak trees within the valleys

Development proposals should:

- Protect key views towards the distinctive skyline of ridge tops, church towers and woodland.
- Protect and enhance historic settlement character through careful siting and design of new buildings.
- Improve the nature conservation value of the streams and immediate valley sides.
- Preserve both designated and undesignated historic assets with improved public access and interpretation where appropriate.
- Protect and conserve the archaeological heritage dispersed throughout the landscape.
- Protect and enhance the distinctive characters of the valley and plateau landscapes through maintenance of field patterns and long distance views from the upland areas and protection of ancient hedgerows and oak trees within the valleys.
- Protect the parkland setting to Kimbolton village and School.

Grafham Water

- 3.88** The Grafham Water landscape character are is defined and dominated by the reservoir and its immediate landscape setting. The area is completed surrounded by woodland and fields leading into the Southern Wolds landscape character area.
- 3.89** Grafham Water was constructed in the 1960s as a pumped storage reservoir to provide drinking water with a large dam at the eastern end of the reservoir. Grafham Water is managed by Anglian Water. It has a strong sense of identity and is unique within Huntingdonshire being predominantly open water and is the third largest reservoir in England by area. Prior to flooding, the key land uses in the area were arable land and woodland, and these land uses continue on the land surrounding the reservoir.
- 3.90** It is the largest Site of Special Scientific Interest in Huntingdonshire at 806ha and has been designated for over 30 years. The Grafham Water area hosts one of the most important clusters of ancient woodlands in Cambridgeshire, along with reed beds and regionally important populations of several wildfowl and amphibian species. Around 170 species of bird are recorded each year.
- 3.91** The character area does not include any settlements within it but is most closely related to the settlements of Grafham and Perry. Several parish boundaries fall within the landscape character area, these are:
- Buckden
 - Diddington
 - Easton
 - Grafham
 - Great Staughton
 - Kimbolton
 - Perry
 - Southoe and Midloe



Grafham Water landscape character area is typified by a blend of woodland, arable farmland and the reservoir itself

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Key Characteristics

- Landscape dominated by the open water of Grafham Water reservoir which is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its large and varied bird populations.
- Woodlands and fields give the landscape around the reservoir a rural quality.
- Basin topography creates an inward looking landscape. The open expanse of the reservoir is not visible from the surrounding landscape.
- Recreation is a key activity, with facilities for sailing, fishing, walking and cycling.
- Contains buildings associated with the reservoir, e.g. water treatment works, pumping stations.

3.92 Grafham Water is a landscape with a strong 'sense of place'. It is a unique landscape within Huntingdonshire, dominated by open water. It has an elevated position, at 50m AOD, high above the surrounding land level. The shallow ridge which surrounds the lake is high enough to enclose views of the water. There are nine miles of track running around the reservoir for visitors to explore and enjoy the wildlife and access recreational opportunities with several parking areas and visitor centres.



Watersports are a common sight at Grafham Water with dinghies, windsurfers and fishing all providing quiet recreational opportunities maximising the benefit of the reservoir to communities



The extensive car parks are many people's first experience of Grafham Water; the maturing tree planting, extensive grassland areas and bunding help to reduce their visual impact on the landscape in longer distance views

3.93 The basin topography creates an inward looking landscape although the ridge surrounding the lake is only shallow to match the scale of the water body. From any viewpoint on the reservoir or the shore the dominant element is the open water. Built structures are associated with water management and recreational uses and include the reservoir dam and towers, water treatment works, visitor centre, sailing club and watersports centre. The visitor centres contain extensive parking and amenity grassland facilities to support recreational uses.

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Bluebells in Littless Wood



The shoreline at Mander Park provides easy access to the water and a landing stage

- 3.94** Tree planting on most of the accessible shorelines attempts to blend the water into the surrounding landscape with ancient woodland persisting in places. Some of the shoreline contains scrubland to provide nesting and feeding sites for many bird species but parts remain unvegetated giving an abrupt edge between water and land. Grafham Water is designated as a site of special scientific interest for its large and varied bird populations; at the western end it includes an 80ha nature reserve including bird watching hides, an 18ha bird sanctuary and a wildlife lagoon with several nesting islands.



Gaynes Cove at Plummer Park provides a well treed environment for the bird populations benefiting from shading of the water reducing summer temperatures for fish and birds



Mander Park bird watching hide provides an opportunity for people to interact with nature without causing disturbance; the wooden building blends well into the surrounding trees and shrubs minimising its impact on wider views

- 3.95** Anglian Water have installed solar panels and several wind turbines within the site. The solar panels will meet over a quarter of the site's energy demand (enough to power the equivalent of around 3,000 homes). This enables the site to supply clean, green renewable energy and help power equipment and reduce the site's carbon footprint.

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Grafham Water sailing club's buildings, storage yards and the watersports centre offer significant recreational opportunities



Solar panels south of Marlow Park

- 3.96** Grafham Water is a highly distinctive character area which provides a focus for quiet recreation and nature conservation alongside its practical purposes of water storage, treatment and provision. Grafham Water is identified within the [Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines](#) and broad landscape management and improvement principles are included within pages 52 to 54.

Grafham Water Green Infrastructure Priority Area

- 3.97** The Grafham Water Green Infrastructure Priority Area offers opportunities to improve links between Grafham Water and areas of woodland such as Brampton Wood. Improved wildlife corridors would offer potential for biodiversity benefits and improved public access routes would aid recreation and health. It would be important though to ensure that improvements to public access do not give rise to adverse impacts on areas of ancient woodland.

Looking Forward

- 3.98** Although the Grafham Water landscape is an artificial one, it is important that efforts continue to integrate the area effectively into its surroundings. Opportunities exist to create added interest and a more 'natural' appearance to the reservoir edge through strategic planting and management, and to improve its conservation value. It is a highly distinctive character area which provides a focus for countryside recreation. The landscape offers significant opportunities for enhancement and broad landscape management and improvement principles are included within the Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines (pages 61 to 63). Key issues for the Grafham Water landscape character area looking forward include:

- Changing water supply and water demand levels in response to alterations in weather patterns arising from climate change and their potential impact on reservoir levels
- Improving the reservoir edge through planting to soften the edges, both visually and physically. This could be achieved through earthmoving and large-scale planting to create variation in the line of the water's edge.
- Aiding the conservation value of the shoreline and reducing erosion of the banks through planting of aquatic and marginal plants
- Planting of additional woodland to emphasise the landform, enclose views and create a series of smaller scale places around the reservoir coupled with provision of additional wildlife habitats
- Improvements to the landscape around the car parks and visitor centres to add local distinctiveness through further planting
- Protection and enhancement of the reservoir margins to reinforce the buffer between the water and surrounding agricultural land

- Enhancement of the stream corridors flowing into the reservoir to improve their biodiversity value and emphasise their visual significance in the landscape
- Effective management of existing footpaths, cycleways and bridleways in the vicinity of Grafham Water and establishment of appropriate additional routes to support active recreation and further link Grafham Water with the surrounding area

Development proposals should:

- Enhance the landscaping of the car parks and visitor centres to improve views to the water and create smaller scale spaces to provide a sense of enclosure in places around the reservoir.
- Enhance the conservation value of the reservoir through protection, extension and improvements to wildlife habitats.
- Ensure careful siting and design of built development to minimise the impact on long distance views across the area.
- Incorporate renewable energy where visually appropriate.

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Southern Wolds

3.99 The Southern Wolds landscape character area incorporates the lower valleys of the River Kym and Ellington Brook. It completely encircles the Grafham Water landscape character area. The Southern Wolds forms a transition area between the Northern Wolds which lie to the north west and the Ouse Valley which is to the east. the Central Claylands is also situated to the north of part of this area.

3.100 The topography of the Southern Wolds is similar to that of the Northern Wolds in comprising ridges and valleys but given the greater scale of the rivers here it consists of just two broad valleys with very gently undulating ground divided by the steep ridge that contains Grafham Water. Settlements are more scattered in this area and parishes larger suggesting a more dispersed pattern of historic development. However, there are several ancient monuments including medieval moats and sites of Roman buildings.

3.101 Several parishes fall within partially within the Southern Wolds landscape character area, these are:

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| • Alconbury | • Brampton | • Buckden |
| • Diddington | • Easton | • Ellington |
| • Grafham | • Great Staughton | • Hail Weston |
| • Kimbolton | • Little Paxton | • Perry |
| • Southoe and Midloe | • Spaldwick | • St Neots |
| • Stow Longa | | |



The tree lined course of the River Kym meanders broadly west to east through the Southern Wolds

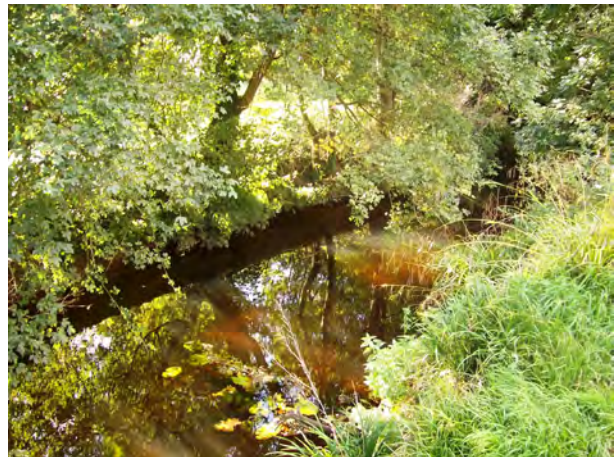
Key Characteristics

- Relatively gentle topography, including the broad valleys of the river Kym and the Ellington Brook.
- A well-wooded landscape, with hedged fields, and some more recent plantations.
- Scattered villages and few isolated farms.
- Significant modern influences on the landscape, including conifer plantations, power lines, housing estates, industrial areas, airfield, prison and the Anglian Water buildings around Grafham Water.

3.102 For most of the area the River Kym meanders through a broad, shallow valley but around Kimbolton the valley sides become steeper creating a bowl around the village. Large fields of arable crops are interspersed with woodland and copses and separated by substantial hedgerows. This part of the Southern Wolds has a very rural character and benefits from long views over the surrounding countryside.



Northern - Southern Wolds boundary view north eastwards over Ellington brook valley



The broad valley of the River Kym shapes the southern part of this landscape character area

3.103 The strongest visual characteristic of the Southern Wolds is the extent of woodland cover, particularly on the central ridge which divides the Kym and Ellington valleys. There are a number of woodland types within the area, including ancient woodland for instance at Brampton Wood, conifer plantations and substantial hedgerows and hedgerow trees. These promote a sense of enclosure contributing to the tranquillity of the area. The valley associated with Ellington Brook is dominated by the A14 which runs along its centre. The brook itself is narrow and meanders tightly within a wide floodplain; it is visible in the landscape as a line of trees and vegetation. The valley floor is drained by a network of ditches draining into Ellington Brook. Woodlands are small in this part and contain both coniferous and deciduous trees.

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West Perry Wood is typical of the larger woodlands which give a distinctive identity to the central ridge of this character area



Woodland covers an ancient monument with arable land below.

3.104 There are several villages in the area with differing characters. Spaldwick and Ellington have much in common with the villages of the Northern Wolds, including their distinctive church spires while the eastern village of Buckden has more in common with the settlements in the Ouse Valley. The most frequent building materials are red and buff brick. The largest settlement is in the south east area where the villages of Eaton Ford and Eaton Socon grew up the valley side of the Great Ouse and amalgamated to become the western part of St Neots. As well as several settlements, agricultural buildings and farms are found throughout the area.



The George at Spaldwick is a timber framed and plastered property dating from the 16th and 17th centuries



Many former agricultural buildings have been converted to homes providing a wide range of character properties

3.105 A key difference between the settlements in the Southern and Northern Wolds is the extent of modern development; most villages in the Southern Wolds contain at least one substantial area of development built since the 1950s. The quality of integration of this with the more historic parts of villages varies; where non-local materials predominate and screening on the settlement edge is limited these areas can give rise to significant intrusions into the landscape. One of the most obvious examples of this is the Newtown area north of the historic part of Kimbolton which has seen substantial development since the 1970s. Another more recent example is Lucks Lane in Buckden.

- 3.106** The landscape has also been significantly influenced by the introduction of WWII airfields. Kimbolton airfield is now partially redeveloped as industrial estates and Little Staughton largely used now as a solar farm.



Lucks Lane development in Buckden is the most significant addition to the village providing a mixture of house types and sizes with 21st century design principles while reflecting the local vernacular of buildings



Some original military buildings remain at Little Staughton Airfield but most is now used as a solar farm

- 3.107** The Southern Wolds are a sub-division of the much larger Western Claylands identified within the [Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines](#) and broad landscape management and improvement principles are included within pages 45 to 48.

Looking Forward

- 3.108** Settlements in the Southern Wolds, particularly those close to major transport routes, are under pressure from development. A particular concern is the harsh edges of many new developments, which are often poorly integrated into the surrounding landscape. It is important that this is addressed in any future developments, and also that improvements are made where possible to improve the quality and reduce the adverse visual impact of existing developments. The gradual loss of traditional features of the agricultural landscape are also affecting the landscape character of the Southern Wolds. Key issues for the Southern Wolds landscape character area looking forward include:

- Preservation and management of existing deciduous woodlands to maintain and enhance biodiversity
- Promotion of opportunities to integrate soft edges to existing developments and reduce the landscape impact of visually harsh or intrusive settlement edges
- Management of streams and rivers and their associated valley floors to maximise their ecological value
- Protection and restoration of riverside meadows
- Protection of the rural character of long distance view from the Kym Valley

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Development proposals should:

- Ensure high quality landscaping to soften the impact of any new building on the edges of settlements to improve integration with the surrounding countryside.
- Enrich the area by reinforcing its special qualities and acknowledging its local character.
- Protect the rural character of long distance views of and from the Kym Valley.
- Promote opportunities for conservation and wildlife initiatives to support the area's contribution to biodiversity.
- Improve the nature conservation value of the rivers and their immediate valley sides.

Nene Valley

- 3.109** The Nene Valley landscape character area covers land associated with the River Nene just in the north west tip of Huntingdonshire, although the Nene valley stretches beyond the district boundaries into Northamptonshire.
- 3.110** A number of influences have contributed to the form and character of the Nene Valley. The earliest is the process of erosion and deposition by the river, which created a flat floodplain with gravel terraces on the valley sides.
- 3.111** The river has been used as a transport corridor for thousands of years - both as a waterway and also as a good route for roads. The Roman road of Ermine Street (now the route of the A1) followed the valley with an important bridging point at Wansford. The current bridge at Wansford dates back to 1577. A section of the railway line between Peterborough and Oundle followed the valley, and part is still in use as the Nene Valley Steam Railway.
- 3.112** Large estates have influenced the landscape and architecture of the valley, including the extensive parkland around Elton Hall and the estate cottages in Wansford. The local availability of limestone has had a strong influence on the vernacular architecture of the area. The parish boundaries that fall within this landscape character area are:
- Alwalton
 - Chesterton
 - Elton
 - Sibson-cum-Stibbington
 - Water Newton



The river valley meanders through the landscape

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Key Characteristics

- Valley floor of River Nene.
- Arable and pastoral land use (some traditional water meadows remain).
- Distinctive limestone villages reflecting local geology.
- A1 is a predominant feature in the area.
- Nene Valley steam railway provides a recreational function, and distinctive landscape feature.
- Archaeology includes Dubroviae Roman town.
- Parkland around Elton Hall.

3.113 The valley contains a flat floodplain with gravel terraces on the valley sides. It contains a distinctive combination of vegetation, agricultural land, flat topography and limestone villages. The valley floor is well-vegetated with the River Nene visible from long distances due to the trees which line its banks. Adjacent to the river trees include poplar, willow and alder with oak, ash and horse chestnut predominating in hedgerows and copses on the drier ground. Views northwards across the Nene Valley have the backdrop of the wooded hills of the Oolitic limestone belt.

3.114 The river itself varies between 5-10m in width and meanders within the floodplain with reeds and rushes in some stretches. The watermeadows and unimproved grassland meadows along the valley support a rich variety of flora and provide valuable wildlife habitats. The majority of fields are small in size giving an intimate feel to the landscape. Much of the valley floor is in pastoral use. Land is also used for grain and vegetable crops.



Watermeadows at Duck Street, Elton



Old Mill House in Elton typifies the use of limestone and Collyweston slates of older buildings in the area

3.115 The Nene Valley contains several attractive villages including Elton, Wansford, Stibbington and Water Newton. They are distinctive from other villages in Huntingdonshire in that the older buildings use the yellow Oolitic limestone for walls and split limestone known as Collyweston slates for roofing. Walls, bridges, churches and water mills are all built from limestone too with use of other building materials being rare. Some villages such as Elton have a village green and most have retained their historic form. Villages in the Nene Valley contain a high proportion of listed buildings such as the grade II* Haycock Inn at Wansford.

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Historic parkland at Elton Hall



Haycock Hotel at Wansford is built of limestone

- 3.116** Large estates with distinctive patches of parkland vegetation with scattered or small groups of trees isolated in grassland have influenced the landscape and architecture of the valley. The largest of these is the extensive parkland around Elton Hall where the mature vegetation screens views out of the valley and gives it a strong sense of enclosure.



Trees lining the River Nene help its route show up in wider landscape views



The former mill at Water Newton has been converted to apartments

- 3.117** The Nene Valley landscape character area contains a distinctive combination of vegetation, agricultural land, flat topography and limestone villages. The Valley floor is well vegetated, with the River Nene visible from long distances by the trees which line its banks. Adjacent to the river, trees include poplar, willow and alder, whilst oak, ash and horse chestnut predominate in hedgerows and copses on the drier ground. Views northward across the Nene Valley have the backdrop of the wooded hills of the Oolitic limestone belt.

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The Nene Valley Railway crosses the landscape character



River Nene under the bridge at Wansford

- 3.118** Close to the A1 the character of the landscape is dominated by the road and its associated infrastructure. Additional development associated with this would further alter the character of the area and reduce its tranquility. A section of the railway line from Oundle to Peterborough still follows the valley; it is used as a recreational line by the Nene Valley steam railway which provides a distinct landscape feature in itself.
- 3.119** The topography and tree cover make the Nene Valley area an attractive and intimate landscape enhanced by the distinctive limestone building materials which distinguish this area from any other in the district. The Nene Valley is identified within the [Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines](#) and broad landscape management and improvement principles are included within pages 55 to 57.

Nene Valley Green Infrastructure Priority Area

- 3.120** The Nene Valley corridor is a key wildlife corridor connecting Northamptonshire through the northernmost tip of Huntingdonshire and into Peterborough. It offers significant opportunities for biodiversity and landscape enhancement along with promoting greater public access to nature. Within Huntingdonshire projects mostly focus on creating a biodiversity rich landscape. More recreational focused projects are concentrated within Peterborough.

Looking Forward

- 3.121** The Nene Valley has remained relatively undisturbed by recent development, but both the landscape and ecology are vulnerable to changes in management and land use. For example the ploughing of watermeadows and abandonment of drainage dykes will lead to a loss of habitats and visual quality, as well as the loss of distinctive landscape character. The Nene Valley villages have retained their distinctive character through the use of limestone as the main building material. Future development should reflect these existing materials so that the distinctive character of the villages is not undermined.
- 3.122** The character of the Nene Valley is also threatened by one of its oldest features, the A1. Alterations to the road and the introduction of service stations, bridges etc. and adjoining developments would alter the character of the valley and reduce its tranquillity through increased noise and visual intrusion.

3.123 The combination of the topography and vegetation of the Nene Valley create an attractive and intimate landscape, which is enhanced by the distinctive architecture of the limestone villages. Key issues for the Nene Valley landscape character area looking forward include:

- Preservation and high quality management of the remaining watermeadows, unimproved grassland and drainage systems
- Management of river banks to improve their ecological value, enhancement and creation of wetlands and ponds and re-establishment of aquatic plants to support native river bank animal species
- Management of established woodland and parkland to maximise ecological value and retain their landscape character
- Careful design and screening of any developments associated with the A1
- Selective promotion of recreational access to the River Nene and its immediate environs to support public access to the natural environment

Development proposals should:

- Enrich the area by reinforcing its special qualities and acknowledging its distinct local character.
- Use appropriate building materials to retain the distinctive local character of villages.
- Protect and enhance woodland, parkland and the river banks to maximise ecological value.
- Maintain, and where possible improve, views to the River Nene and protect the existing vegetation as a green backdrop.
- Promote opportunities for wildlife and conservation initiatives to support and enhance the area's biodiversity.
- Ensure any additional services or improvements along or to the A1 are carefully designed and screened to minimise their impact on the tranquil landscape character.
- Encourage public access along the Nene Way through improvements to the landscape and nature conservation of the valley.