

Appendix 17.2

Published Landscape Character Assessments

National Landscape Character Assessment

National Character Area 91: Yardley Whittlewood Ridge

The south-eastern part of the study area is covered by NCA 91 Yardley Whittlewood Ridge. Key Characteristics relevant to the study area are:

- *A broad, low and gently undulating limestone plateau, more distinctly elevated in the west, rising above adjacent claylands and more commonly referred to as 'the Ridge' locally.*
- *Limestone overlain by irregular drifts of boulder clay gives rise to variable soils (free-draining chalky soils to less permeable clay). Deposits of silt, sand and gravel are present in the river valleys.*
- *Watercourses include short sections of the rivers Til, Tove, Great Ouse and Kym as they flow across and out of the NCA. The Grand Union Canal utilises the valley cut by the River Tove dissecting the ridge at Stoke Bruerne.*
- *Well wooded with blocks of semi-natural ancient woodland, wood pasture and historic parkland including Royal Hunting Forests around Yardley Chase, Salcey Forest and Whittlewood Forest, although many areas have been supplemented with conifer plantations.*
- *Fields are medium sized with mature, species rich hedgerows and numerous hedgerow trees, usually oak or ash. Pasture and mixed farming dominate in the west, giving way to an increasingly arable landscape further east towards the claylands.*
- *A diverse variety of semi-natural habitats, including ancient and lowland mixed deciduous woodland, wood pasture and parkland, hedgerows, veteran trees, lowland meadow, flood plain grazing marsh, fens and reedbeds which support a range of rare species of butterflies including white admiral and wood white, as well as dormouse, barbastelle and noctule bats, and numerous scarce moths and specialist beetles.*
- *Rural, tranquil and sparsely populated with a scattering of small nucleated settlements and attractive limestone villages. There are several large well-managed estates with historic country houses and associated parkland and veteran trees providing opportunities for quiet recreation.*
- *Locally quarried limestone is commonly used as building material in villages, particularly for churches. Thatch, red bricks and pantiles are also used.*
- *Transport corridors include the M1, A5, West Coast and Midlands main line railways and the Grand Union Canal. Numerous recreational assets include Salcey Forest and its Tree Top Way, Castle Ashby, the Silverstone Circuit, the Santa Pod Raceway (drag racing), Stoke Bruerne Canal Museum and nearby Towcester Racecourse.*

National Character Area 88: Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands

The small proportion of the south-eastern part of the study area is covered by NCA 88 Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands. Key Characteristics relevant to the study area are:

Gently undulating, lowland plateau divided by shallow river valleys that gradually widen as they approach The Fens NCA in the east.

- *Underlying geology of Jurassic and Cretaceous clays overlain by more recent Quaternary glacial deposits of chalky boulder clay (till) and sand and gravel river terrace deposits within the river valleys. Limerich, loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage predominate, with better-drained soils in the river valleys.*
- *The River Great Ouse and its tributaries meander slowly across the landscape, and the River Nene and the Grand Union Canal are also features. Three aquifers underlie the NCA and a large manmade reservoir, Grafham Water, supplies water within and outside the NCA.*

- *Variable, scattered woodland cover comprising smaller plantations, secondary woodland, pollarded willows and poplar along river valleys, and clusters of ancient woodland, particularly on higher ground to the northwest representing remnant ancient deer parks and Royal Hunting Forests.*
- *Predominantly open, arable landscape of planned and regular fields bounded by open ditches and trimmed, often species-poor hedgerows which contrast with those fields that are irregular and piecemeal.*
- *Wide variety of semi-natural habitats supporting a range of species – some notably rare and scarce – including sites designated for species associated with ancient woodland, wetland sites important for birds, great crested newt and species of stonewort, and traditional orchards and unimproved grassland supporting a rich diversity of wild flowers.*
- *Rich geological and archaeological history evident in fossils, medieval earthworks, deserted villages and Roman roads. A number of historic parklands, designed landscapes and country houses – including Stowe House and Park, Kimbolton Park, Croxton Park, Wimpole Hall and Wrest Park – combine with Bletchley Park, Second World War airfields, the Cardington Airship Hangars and brickfields to provide a strong sense of history and place.*
- *Diversity of building materials including brick, render, thatch and stone. Locally quarried limestone features in villages such as Lavendon, Harrold and Turvey on the upper stretches of the River Great Ouse.*
- *Settlements cluster around major road and rail corridors, with smaller towns, villages and linear settlements widely dispersed throughout, giving a more rural feel. Small villages are usually nucleated around a church or village green, while fen-edge villages are often in a linear form along roads.*
- *Major transport routes cross the area, including the M1, M11, A1, A6, A5 and A14 roads, the East Coast and Midlands mainline railways, and the Grand Union Canal.*
- *Recreational assets include Grafham Water, the Grand Union Canal, Forest of Marston Vale Community Forest, Chilterns AONB, woodland and wetland sites, an extensive rights-of-way network and two National Cycle Routes. The cities of Cambridge and Peterborough and several of the historic market towns in the NCA are popular tourist destinations.*

County Landscape Character Assessment

A Character Type 18: Broad River Valley Floodplain. Character Area 18b: The Nene – Weedon Bev To Duston Mill

A small proportion of the north-western part of the study area is covered by A Character Type 18: Broad River Valley Floodplain. Key Characteristics relevant to the study area are

- *Broad, flat and predominantly wide floodplain surrounded by rising landform of adjacent landscape types;*
- *deep, alluvial clay and silt with sand and gravel, masking the underlying geology;*
- *river channel with slow flowing watercourse with limited bank side vegetation in areas;*
- *predominance of unimproved pasture with pockets of both neutral and improved grassland and scattered arable land in fields of varying size; arable land becomes more frequent within the western section of the Nene Valley;*
- *limited woodland cover confined to occasional broadleaved copses scattered throughout the floodplain;*
- *hedgerow trees, although infrequent, are an important feature where they do occur, creating localised well treed areas;*
- *hedgerows are generally overgrown and reinforced with post and wire fencing with intermittent sections showing evidence of decline;*
- *settlement is very limited within the floodplain with a sequence of small nucleated villages on the lower valley slopes, along the western section of the River Nene;*
- *wider settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads and individual dwellings;*
- *urban influences arising from the proximity of large urban areas and associated road infrastructure on the perimeter of some sections of the floodplain;*

- *minor roads generally cross the floodplain landscape at right angles to the river, with major roads also following the valley course and marking the boundary of the type;*
- *evidence of long periods of gravel extraction and restoration within the Nene Valley, particularly along the middle section of the Valley, with patterns of restored landscapes with numerous areas of wetland and lakes; and*
- *significant recreational activities within the Nene Valley landscape, mainly focused on the restored lakes.*

Specific comments relating to the study area within Character Area 18b: The Nene – Weedon Bev to Duston Mill include:

The Nene – Weedon Bec to Duston Mill Character Area extends from Weedon Bec to Duston Mill, on the western edge of Northampton. The River Nene provides the main feature within the widening floodplain. Large arable fields characterise the area, together with both improved and scrubby pastoral land, largely grazed by sheep, but also with some evidence of horse pasture. Whilst in places both arable and pastoral land uses occur adjacent to the riverside, in general, arable fields are confined to the lower slopes. This is one of the most heavily settled areas of the Nene Valley, with riverside settlements including Upper and Nether Heyford and Kislingbury. These nucleated, compact settlements located on the lower valley slopes adopt a clustered position around the junctions of minor roads and often have slightly degraded approaches, in particular the northern approach to Nether Heyford. Beyond this lies a largely rural landscape with scattered farms and mill buildings. The dominance of the river channel varies throughout the character area. In places, the river edge is more wooded with species of oak, ash and willow, and appearing only as a boundary feature. In other areas, however, the channel is largely open with overhanging willows and reeds set within attractive rural surroundings. In general, views along the river valley are wide and panoramic, limited only by scattered areas of intervening vegetation. Beyond this, the surrounding landform of the rising valley sides creates a relatively intimate landscape. A dense footpath network occurs throughout the area, including the Midshires Way, Nene Way and Grand Union Canal Walk, all of which converge at Nether Heyford.