SOUTH NORFOLK LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

VOLUME I

LANDSCAPE TYPES OF SOUTH NORFOLK DISTRICT

Prepared for South Norfolk Council
by
Land Use Consultants

June 2001

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SOUTH NORTHERN LANDSCAPE
ASSESSMENT
VOLUME I
LANDSCAPE TYPES OF SOUTHERN NORTHERN DISTRICT

Prepared for South Morwell Council
in
Land Use Committee

June 2001
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Volume 1 - Landscape Types
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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. South Norfolk is a landscape of subtle contrasts and restrained beauty with landscapes ranging from the exhilarating openness of the farmed plateaux to the peaceful rural quality of the valleys. This study, commissioned by South Norfolk District Council, seeks to identify and describe these variations in landscape character across the whole of the district.

1.2. The study area is shown in Figure 1: Location and Context. It covers the area of South Norfolk District as defined in the Local Plan. It should be noted that this area does not extend to the district boundary, as a significant area is included within the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Area ‘National Park’ which falls within the jurisdiction of the Broads Authority. The study area extends from the edge of Norwich in the north to Diss in the south, and from Hingham (near Wymondham) at the western periphery to Burgh St Peter in the east. River valleys are very important in defining the study area – in particular the Waveney, which forms the southern boundary, and the River Yare, which forms the northern boundary.

1.3. This document, South Norfolk Landscape Assessment Volume 1: Landscape Types of South Norfolk District, has been produced by Land Use Consultants as part of a series of studies of the South Norfolk landscape. The other related documents are South Norfolk Landscape Assessment Volume 2: Landscape Character Areas of the Norwich Policy Area and South Norfolk Landscape Assessment Volume: Implications for Policy.

THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT PROCESS

1.4. The process of landscape character assessment emerged in the 1980s and is a recognized established technique that has been developed to facilitate systematic analysis, description and classification of the landscape. Landscape character assessment involves identification of those features or combinations of elements that are present in and contribute to the character of the landscape, thereby enabling the special character and qualities of an area to be understood in order to consider the issues affecting the landscape and to develop appropriate recommendations for its future protection and/or management.

1.5. A formal landscape character assessment procedure has been developed which is described in The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage’s Interim Landscape Character Assessment Guidance 1999. This assessment follows these guidelines.

1.6. The assessment seeks to present a fully integrated view of the landscape, incorporating all the features and attributes that contribute to the special and distinctive character of South Norfolk District. These include the physical, ecological, visual, historic and cultural forces that have shaped the fabric and perception of the present day landscape.
SOUTH NORFOLK DISTRICT LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

1.7. The specific purpose of this volume of the South Norfolk Landscape Assessment is to provide a clear understanding of the range of landscape character which occurs within South Norfolk District. In particular, the assessment process aims to determine and describe the distinctive features or characteristics (‘landscape assets’) that are important to district landscape character, in order to advise South Norfolk District Council on which aspects of the NPA landscape are most sensitive or important and how the identified landscape assets can be protected.

1.8. This volume of the landscape assessment describes the district-wide landscape types to provide the framework for more detailed studies. The specific objectives of the current volume are to:

- understand and appreciate the factors which have been influential in the evolution of the South Norfolk Landscape;
- identify and classify the range of landscape characters or ‘landscape types’ which contribute to the character of South Norfolk;
- provide the starting point for an understanding of specific landscape elements which are important to the character of South Norfolk;
- provide baseline information for more detailed landscape character area assessments, including the landscape assessment of the Norwich Policy Area presented in Volume 2: Landscape Character Areas of the Norwich Policy Area.

Study Methodology

1.9. The South Norfolk Landscape Assessment methodology involved four main stages, each of which is described below, namely:

- Data Collation;
- Characterisation;
- Survey;
- Analysis.

Data Collation

1.10. Baseline Data: This stage involved the collation and mapping of a wide range of existing information on the characteristics of South Norfolk District from sources including baseline maps of geology, topography, soils and drainage. Throughout the study GIS was used as the tool for collating and presenting data.

1.11. National Context: The Countryside Agency and English Nature have produced a map showing national joint character areas. As part of this initial stage the context provided by the framework of four joint character areas was reviewed and boundaries mapped to place the district in context within this national hierarchy.
South Norfolk District falls predominantly within two of the joint character areas, as shown on Figure 2: The National Character Area Context namely:

Area 83: South Norfolk and High Suffolk Claylands
Area 84: Mid Norfolk

There are two additional National Joint Character Areas which occur to a limited extent within South Norfolk:

Area 80: The Broads
Area 78: Central North Norfolk

1.12. Local Context: Existing character assessments within the county and district, described in Appendix 1, were reviewed. At the same time an analysis of the key characteristics of each landscape type and character area described within these assessments was undertaken.

Characterisation

1.13. The process of characterisation drew together all the information outlined above, to develop a draft landscape type classification. The approach conforms to best practice as promoted by the Countryside Agency in the Interim Landscape Character Assessment Guidance 1999 in developing a hierarchical approach as follows:

- **Landscape Types** - which are generic and share common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation and human influences, e.g. Settled Plateau Farmland or Rural River Valley. These were established for the whole district and the seven distinct landscape types identified are described in this volume;

- **Character Areas** - which are single and unique, discrete geographical areas of a landscape type, e.g. Wymondham Settled Plateau Farmland or Tas Rural River Valley. These were determined only within the Norwich Policy Area and the twelve significant character areas identified are described in Volume 2: Character Areas of South Norfolk District.
The Hierarchy in South Norfolk

1.14. This hierarchy is demonstrated in the following figure.

--- Diagram of Hierarchy in South Norfolk

--- Survey

1.15. A full district-wide field survey was undertaken to establish landscape types and a field survey was undertaken to:

- refine boundaries;
- record landscape character;
- note particularly important elements of landscape character.

1.16. A systematic and rigorous approach was adopted for the survey, a photographic record was taken and information was recorded on 1:50,000 and 1:25,000 scale maps and on Field Record Sheets (an example of which is provided in Appendix 2). The purpose of the survey was to verify the information gathered by the desk study and to provide more detailed information about the character of the landscape.

--- Analysis

1.17. A process of analysis followed the field survey whereby key landscape assets were identified and each landscape type and character area were appraised to gauge the extent and importance of each identified landscape asset within them.
THE STRUCTURE OF THIS DOCUMENT

1.18. This volume begins with a summary of the evolution of the landscape of the district covering the key physical and cultural influences which have together combined to create the distinctive district-wide character of South Norfolk.

1.19. The main body of the report, comprises a standard detailed description of the seven identified landscape types.

1.20. The report concludes with a summary of the landscape assets of South Norfolk District.
SOUTH NORFOLK LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT
Volume 1: Landscape Types
Figure 1: Location and Context of Study Area
SOUTHWOLD
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT
Volume 1: Landscape Types
Figure 2: National Character Area Context
2. EVOLUTION OF THE SOUTH NORFOLK LANDSCAPE

INTRODUCTION

2.1. The South Norfolk landscape has evolved as a result of factors that have, over vastly different time-scales, affected the structure of the land and determined how humans have exploited it. This chapter describes in summary the key physical and cultural influences upon the landscape and how these have influenced present day character.

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

2.2. Physical influences are frequently the most obvious elements of landscape character. Such factors tend to be strongly interrelated therefore creating distinct patterns in the landscape. The geology of an area is a fundamental determinant of landscape character since, in association with climate, it considerably shapes patterns of topography and hydrology. Physical influences also strongly affect other landscape influences including the activities of mankind and as such can be considered to provide the framework for all landscape character.

Geology

2.3. The geology of South Norfolk, illustrated on Figure 3: Simplified Geology of South Norfolk, is relatively simple and the area is geologically young. Norfolk as a whole is underlain by a platform of ancient Palaeozoic and Precambrian rocks which dip in a north-easterly direction from 200m to 1000m below sea level. Overlying this platform, which has no outcrops within South Norfolk, are more recent Mesozoic and Cenozoic sediments, which have a much greater influence upon the current character and landform of the study area.

2.4. The Mesozoic strata comprise a variety of clay, chalk and sandstone deposits overlain by a very thick layer of Upper Chalk, which is a soft, white, friable limestone deposit formed from the remains of planktonic algae in the Cretaceous period approximately 100 million years ago. It is apparent that at this time the area of South Norfolk formed part of a warm shallow sea which, by the Lower Pleistocene era, had a coastline somewhat to the west of modern-day Norwich. Within the chalk, a variety of flints abound including the large cylindrical flint 'boulders' known as paramoudras. The Upper Chalk rarely occurs at the surface of the landscape, although there are a few outcrops within the valley landscapes of the Yare and, to a lesser extent, within the Tas Valley.

2.5. The later Cenozoic drift deposits are of particular importance to the character of the landscape. East of Norwich the chalk is overlain by Norwich Crag - a fairly extensive sand and gravel formation. In the late Cenozoic Age glaciers formed leading to a considerable lowering of sea level and extensive moulding and modification of the geological landscape. During the Anglian Stage around 300,000 years ago, the ice sheets reached South Norfolk. Of particular importance was an ice sheet moving southwards which deposited the chalky Glacial Till (sometimes termed Boulder Clay) layer, called Lowestoft Till, which occupies over three quarters of the contemporary surface geology of South Norfolk. As a result of the
subsequent action of glacial meltwater the valleys, including the Waveney and Yare, became considerably over-deepened and were therefore subsequently infilled by a variety of deposits including glacial sands and gravels.

2.6. More recent geological history of note includes the formation of peats overlain by silty clays within these over-deepened valleys, as a result of impeded drainage from the valleys due to the incursion of the sea as glacial melt led to the raising of sea levels and periodic flooding of the valleys with marine waters. Ultimately the seawater was excluded and access to the peat lead to the formation of the Broads.

**Landform**

2.7. Norfolk has a reputation for being flat. Indeed, the relative simplicity of the geology of the area has resulted in a corresponding simplicity of landform. This is illustrated on Figure 4: Topography of South Norfolk. As expected the range in elevation is quite low ranging from around 1m AOD (Above Ordnance Datum) in the valley of the River Yare to the east of the district up to areas which are over 60m AOD, particularly in the west of the district. The highest land are the small plateau areas at 70m AOD found around Carleton Rode and Poringland.

2.8. In addition to being of relatively undramatic elevation the landform is of low visual complexity, following fairly standard and repetitive forms. The majority of the district is above 30m AOD and, as described above, rises little – up to a maximum of 70m AOD. The result of this is that much of the landscape does appear to be flat. In particular there are wide flat ‘elevated’ plateau areas to the west of the district and around Poringland. The eastern side appears less flat with a gentle domed appearance.

2.9. Variety in the landscape is created by the river valleys which cut through the plateaux. The sides of the valleys are responsible for the greatest degree of variation and ‘steepest’ landform in the district, albeit that most valleys tend to be large and shallow. Additional local variation is created by the tributary valleys which cut through the plateau uplands and create gentle undulations in the landscape. Because of the flat context, such minor variations, which would hardly register in any other landscape, are surprisingly influential in creating a sense of place.

2.10. Unsurprisingly, the lower valley areas are concurrent with the glacial sand and gravel deposits whereas Glacial Till occupies the remaining, generally higher land. Interestingly however, the upland area around Poringland has a significant amount of sand and gravel.

**Hydrology**

2.11. Hydrology, which is illustrated on Figure 5: Hydrology of South Norfolk, is very important to landscape character. There are a large number of rivers in the area and the principal direction of drainage is west to east. The major rivers of the district are the Rivers Yare and Waveney. The River Yare, which (approximately) forms most of the northern boundary of the area, is the most important drainage channel, ultimately providing the channel for most drainage from this part of South Norfolk. The Yare has a high number of tributaries including the Tud and Wensum, which also flow eastwards, and the Tas, Chet and Tiffey, which have a northerly flow pattern. The River Waveney forms the southern boundary of the area. The
SOUTH NORFOLK
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT
Volume 1: Landscape Types
Figure 3: Simplified Geology of South Norfolk
Waveney flows generally eastwards, however outside of the study area doubles back on itself and flows northwards to join the Yare through the Norfolk Broads, before ultimately draining into the sea at Great Yarmouth.

2.12. In addition to these main rivers and their tributary rivers the area is drained on a smaller scale by tributary streams. These tributaries known as 'becks' are mostly small and do not register strongly as features in the landscape.

Soils

2.13. The soils are dictated by the underlying geology, landform and hydrology. Figure 6: Soils of South Norfolk demonstrates the distribution of soils in the district. As highlighted above Glacial Till covers much of Norfolk. Where this coincides with upland, level and gently sloping plateaux the resulting soil tends to be stagnogleyic – particularly Pelo-stagnogleyic soils of loamy and clayey drift over chalky till containing flints. Drainage is impeded by impervious substrata with a perched water table, which results in seasonally waterlogged slowly permeable soils mottled above 40cm in depth. This soil is not a particularly good agricultural soil, being predominantly Grade 3.

2.14. There are different soils in the valley landscapes. These are mostly Argillic Brown Earths of the subgroup Stagnogleyic Argillic Brown Earths. These are loamy or loamy over clay soils with a subsurface horizon showing clay enrichment. These are found mostly to the north of South Norfolk, particularly around the valleys of the Yare, Tas and Chet. Again the soil is of lower agricultural grade – mostly Grade 3.

2.15. There are a number of smaller areas of other types of soil. The thin corridors around water channels tend to be of Cambic Gley soils except in the south where Earthy Peat soils are found in the valley of the Waveney. There are also a few discrete areas of Brown Sands – around the valley of the Wensum and in the Waveney Valley. These areas tend to be of lower quality – typically agricultural Grade 4.

2.16. The underlying soil has had a considerable influence on the ecology of Norfolk as it has affected the distribution of agricultural and non-agricultural uses and therefore influenced the natural vegetation. For example heath is restricted to the low-grade acidic Brown Sands, for example in the Waveney Valley. Nationally important habitats of the district are shown on Figure 7 Nature Conservation Designations of South Norfolk.

CULTURAL INFLUENCES

2.17. The influence of humans is a strong determinant of the character and quality of the landscape. The influence of past land use patterns continues to influence and affect current land use and settlement patterns. An historic landscape assessment of South Norfolk has not been undertaken and is outside the scope of the present study. The following description is therefore intended to be a brief summary of the main influences which have contributed to the character of the contemporary landscape. It is acknowledged that there is considerable scope for a more detailed historical study, which would contribute greatly to our understanding of the character of the South Norfolk landscape.
2.18. South Norfolk has a rich legacy of historical and archaeological features and artefacts. Whilst many of these are hidden some, ranging from ancient earthworks to abandoned churches, are visible within the contemporary landscape. Figure 8: Scheduled Ancient Monuments of South Norfolk illustrates the most important of these features which are of recognised national importance.

2.19. Early evidence of human activity is suggested through finds of Palaeolithic hand-axes and evidence of small groups of Mesolithic hunter-gatherers dating back to half a million years ago. The indigenous inhabitants were from the Low Countries and Denmark, which were connected by a land bridge across what is now the North Sea. By the early Bronze Age it is evident that the area was settled although the distribution of burial mounds or ‘barrows’ indicates that the heavier soils of central Norfolk were avoided. During this period farming expanded and much of the ‘wildwood’ was cleared.

2.20. During the Iron Age people lived in round houses in scattered farmsteads. The people were tribal and the Iceni seem to have been the principal tribe of the area. By the late Iron Age it is evident that there had been widespread woodland clearance and there were areas of intensively-farmed landscape. The remnant woodlands including hornbeam were managed by coppicing. The Roman invasion of 43 AD led to the Iceni being given the status of client-kingdom however following the death of their ruler and the failure of a revolt led by Boudicca or ‘Bodiea’ Norfolk came under direct control of the Romans.

2.21. The Romans were responsible for the establishment of much of the landscape structure, which survives in modern day South Norfolk. The Glacial Till plateaux became farmed and numerous settlements were formed leaving remnants of ancient field systems. These settlements included the new planned and defended administrative centre at Caistor St Edmund known as Venta Icenorum or ‘market place of the Iceni’ which had a population of several thousand and was based on a regular grid layout. Other sites included the establishment of large villages at Scole and Long Stratton linked to Venta Icenorum by a Roman road known as Pye Road (now the A140) and a new village at Ditchingham.

2.22. Roman administration in Norfolk drew to an end in 410 AD. Over the next 200 years a variety of migrants including Angles, Saxons and Scandinavian tribes arrived and gradually Anglo-Saxon culture developed. The Anglo-Saxon community was complex and sophisticated with a carefully organised land structure. By late Saxon times South Norfolk, had a higher population than most of the rest of Norfolk. The major clayland valleys in particular had higher populations and the Tiffey, Tas, Yare and Chet were especially densely settled, in fact being one of the most densely-settled areas in the whole of England.

2.23. Medieval Norfolk was one of the most intensive arable counties of England. The Domesday Survey presents a picture of Norfolk around 1300 as countryside cleared of woodland which was by this time confined to heavy soils, including towards the west of South Norfolk. Grassland was also considerably reduced. In South Norfolk only the southern valleys, notably the Waveney Valley, retained a significant economic level of grassland. Deer Parks were also established and the Glacial Till of
South Norfolk was particularly favoured, however few of these are evident in today's landscape.

2.24. Mediaeval Norfolk, particularly South Norfolk, had a high population and as such an extraordinary number of churches, higher than in any other part of the country, were constructed. In total 921 were built between the 11th and 16th centuries, although from the 13th century the numbers in use declined due to village depopulation and other reasons such as the Black Death. As a result there are a large number of isolated and abandoned churches standing in South Norfolk creating a unique regional landscape character. Moated sites were also common. 70% of these were located in the glacial till regions, particularly in the south-west of South Norfolk, but also on the plateau uplands. There is, for example, a fine circular moat at Shotesham.

2.25. Many settlements of the region were unplanned, originating as market places during the medieval period, such as Wymondham. Whilst not actually part of South Norfolk, the origins of Norwich are important to the South Norfolk landscape. Originating as a cluster of small settlements along the River Wensum (in particular the south bank), Norwich grew until, following the Norman Conquest, a castle and cathedral were established (1075 and 1096 respectively). In the 15th century immigrants arrived from the Spanish Netherlands and stimulated the cloth trade and further growth. Until the end of the 19th century growth was constrained within the city walls. After this point growth spread into the wider landscape.

2.26. In particular Norwich expanded significantly during the post war periods with suburban development both south and north of the city. However growth to the southern side remained constrained by the valley of the River Yare. In this period other settlements of the region also expanded significantly.

2.27. Between the 16th and 19th centuries a number of estate parklands and gardens were developed in South Norfolk by wealthy landowners. Many of these have now disappeared from the landscape. However, as illustrated on Figure 9: Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest in South Norfolk, a number of these have survived within the district and contribute to landscape character.

Vernacular Architecture

2.28. The vernacular heritage of Norfolk, summarised here is discussed in greater detail in Peisner and Wilson (1999). The building types and materials are strongly related to the availability of materials, dependent upon the geology of the county, and the cultural identity of the settlers. The key characteristics and distinctive features of the architecture of South Norfolk are summarised below:

Round-towered churches often known as 'Saxon' towers, built during the 11th and 12th Centuries, are characteristic of East Anglia, otherwise being found in concentration only in the Schleswig-Holstein region of Germany. South Norfolk has the greatest concentration of these within the region, particularly towards the eastern part of the district around the valleys of the Rivers Yare and Waveney. The adoption of the round tower is considered to indicate imitation within the small Norfolk community and cultural links with mainland Europe. It also potentially reflects the absence of high-quality stone and other suitable building materials.
Gable ends became very important. There is a division of styles into the stepped gable of Elizabethan and Jacobean brickwork and the 'Dutch' or 'Shaped' gable, which was the hallmark of 17th and early 18th century brickwork. South Norfolk has the greatest concentration of stepped gables, although there are areas with a high number of Dutch gables also. In particular Dutch gables are common in the Tas Valley and along the Wymondham-Hingham axis.

Building Materials

2.29. In South Norfolk the distinguishing wall materials are flint, timber frame and clay lump (in the south of the district). The other characteristic Norfolk materials of clunch and carstone are not found to any great extent within South Norfolk District. Thatched roofing is also an important feature. Because of the heavy loss of woodland in Norfolk, timber is not as common as in some other areas of the country. Consequently timber quickly lost favour to other hard materials when these became available. However, South Norfolk retained woodland for longer than other parts of the county and therefore has a higher proportion of timber-framed buildings, with timber remaining a major building form in Wymondham, for example, until well into the 18th Century. Timber was often used in combination with clay lump, an unbaked clay, particularly in South Norfolk where it tended to be used for poorer quality dwellings.

2.30. Timber use gradually gave way to flint, with which it was often combined, which is found in a variety of buildings and forms and has been used from around the 3rd Century (e.g. at Caistor St Edmund). It is derived from the nodules which have washed out of the underlying chalk substrata and hence into the overlying glacial and fluvial deposits. The Saxon and Norman churches make extensive use of flint. Simplistic uses soon gave rise to more decorative expression, from the 14th century, through knapping - chipping to reveal the interior black silica, or galletting that involved placing small flint shards between the larger exposed flints.

2.31. In the late 14th century, brick began to be used, either alone or in combination with flint or terracotta. Interestingly brick was first used in more prestigious buildings and gradually made its way into vernacular buildings around the 15th Century. This led to the establishment of stepped gables, which are a property of 15th and 16th century houses in South Norfolk. The premier brickwork of Mr Gunton were based around Costessey producing the distinctive ornate 'Cosseyware'.

2.32. In Norfolk during the mediaeval period roofing materials were commonly thatch, a situation, which continued in South Norfolk with its easy access to the high quality, locally-produced, Norfolk Reed or the cheaper locally-produced straw until well into the 19th century. In particular thatched churches and gatehouses are a characteristic Norfolk style. After the nineteenth century other roofing materials became more common. Of these tile was by far the most important, particularly pantiles which were imported from the Netherlands (and later produced in Humberside). Interestingly, Welsh slate became used to some extent in a restricted area to the east of South Norfolk until after the railways were constructed when it became more common.
**Scheduled Ancient Monuments of South Norfolk**

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*To be read with Figure 8 Plan*
LANDSCAPE TYPE DESCRIPTIONS
3. LANDSCAPE TYPES OF SOUTH NORFOLK DISTRICT

INTRODUCTION

3.1. In total seven separate landscape types were identified within South Norfolk District. These landscape types are:

A: Rural River Valley
B: Tributary Farmland
C: Tributary Farmland with Parkland
D: Settled Plateau Farmland
E: Plateau Farmland
F: Valley Urban Fringe
G: Fringe Farmland

3.2. The location of these landscape types is illustrated on Figure 10: Landscape Types of South Norfolk.

3.3. Identification and description of landscape character areas was not undertaken for the whole of the district and was focussed on the Norwich Policy Area and described in Volume 2: Landscape Character Areas of the Norwich Policy Area. However, possible divisions within the landscape types were identified as part of the landscape type assessment and these are presented on Figure 11: Indicative Landscape Character Areas, which formed the basis of the character assessment presented in Volume 2.
SOUTH NORFOLK
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT
Volume 1: Landscape Types
Figure 10: Landscape Types