8. **B1: TAS TRIBUTARY FARMLAND**

**LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES**

8.1. The Tas Tributary Farmland is a large area of land situated between the Tas Rural River Valley and the surrounding Plateau areas at an elevation of between about 30m AOD and up to 50m AOD. Only a small part of this character area (to the east and west of the Tas Valley) lies within the Norwich Policy Area. However, this area constitutes a significant part of the NPA.

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

- Open, gently undulating to flat and sloping landscape incised by shallow tributary valleys, the tributary streams of which are not prominent landscape features.
- **Large open arable fields** of cereal, sugarbeet and occasionally sweetcorn.
- **Framed open views** across the countryside and into adjacent character areas.
- **Small blocks of deciduous woodland** of high ecological and visual quality. These create wooded horizons which add variety to and create intimacy within the landscape.
- **Damp grasslands of ecological importance** located within the tributary valleys.
- **Scattered remnant hedgerow trees**, particularly oak, sometimes including intact avenues lining the roads or marking former, denuded, field boundaries.
- **Transportation corridors** including main connecting roads.
- **Network of recreational footpaths**.
- **Ditches, low banks and wide grass verges** associated with the network of rural roads.
- **Settlement characterised by a small number of large villages** including the administrative centre of South Norfolk – Long Stratton - with smaller hamlets, scattered farmhouses and agricultural buildings.
- **Mixed vernacular** of timber-frame, stepped and Dutch Gables, thatch and round-towered churches.

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER DESCRIPTION**

8.2. The Tas Tributary Farmland Character Area is found between the Tas River Valley and the plateaux lying at an elevation of between 30m AOD and 40/50m AOD. It is
almost entirely underlain by Glacial Till incised by a number of alluvial bands occupying the minor tributary valleys. This has resulted in a landscape of gentle slopes leading down to shallow tributary valleys, the streams of which are frequently hidden within the landscape. The soils are predominantly Grade 3 Argillic Brown Earths, although there are a few discrete areas of Grade 2 (the highest agricultural grade found in the district). Consequently, the predominant land use is farmland, almost exclusively arable farmland with characteristic crops of cereals and sugarbeet. There are also a small number of pockets of pastoral land, often bounded by wooden fences.

8.3. The large scale arable landscape has an open to semi-enclosed character and there are very few hedgerows remaining. Where hedgerows are present they are frequently overgrown of mixed hawthorn, field maple and blackthorn. Hedgerow trees are sparse and appear as lone landmarks in the farmed landscape. There are also a number of remnant intact avenues of mature oak standard hedgerow trees which punctuate the open arable landscape and provide an important vertical element.

8.4. Small deciduous farm woodlands including oak and some elm within this character area are frequently associated with the sloping sides of the tributary valleys. There are also a few larger mixed woodlands. These woodlands create a wooded horizon throughout much of this character area. However, the landscape retains a predominantly open character throughout. Many of these woodlands are classified as being ancient and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. These include Little Wood – an important ancient hornbeam ‘copice-with-standard’ woodland and a remnant of the original woodland cover of the District. There are also some areas of important grassland – particularly Fritton Common, which is an SSSI designated large grassy common of important acidic grassland.

8.5. Medieval deer parks and a number of historic parklands were once a characteristic of this area, including examples at Bixley, Stoke Hall, Kirkstead Hall, Brook House, Woodton and Boyland, but these have now disappeared.

8.6. Settlement is dispersed across the wider landscape comprising small hamlets and farmsteads, frequently clustered within small areas of woodland. The dispersed settlements are connected by a series of small rural lanes, often bordered by fairly wide verges and substantial ditches. There are also a number of agricultural buildings, which occur at intervals across the landscape. The small settlements include Swainsthorpe with its fine round-towered church of St Mary. Outside of this settlement on the Ipswich Road is the noteworthy Dun Cow Inn with its attractive shaped ‘Dutch’ gables. Generally there are a mixture of stepped and Dutch gables in this area. Part of the settlement of Newton Flotman, including numerous fine brick built buildings, falls within this character area, with the remainder crossing into the Tas Valley. The settlement of Saxlingham Nethergate is characterised by its many timber-framed houses and thatched cottages.

8.7. The principal settlement of this character area is Long Stratton. This large village/small town is clustered along the main Norwich-Ipswich road (A140) which is based upon an earlier Roman Road that linked Scole to Long Stratton and Caistor St Edmund. Modern estates have been developed to the west of the village. There are
a number of buildings of vernacular appeal including an interesting ice house, visible from the main street. The South Norfolk District Council Offices at South Norfolk House are also of (more modern) architectural interest.

8.8. This character area has been affected by the presence of transportation corridors. These include the Norwich Road (A140) and the London-Norwich Railway. In the north the area is also affected by views of and noise from the A47 (Norwich Southern Bypass). Pedestrian links are also important, including sections of the Tas Valley Walk and Boudica’s Way – recreational routeways that pass through this character area.

8.9. There are views to Norwich and the Norwich Southern Bypass from the northern area of the Tas Tributary Farmland and also into the Tas Rural River Valley Character Area, including towards the earthworks of Venta Icenorum (Caistor St Edmund) and Dunston Hall. The eastern part of the area has been affected by the impacts of modern infrastructure, especially by the large double line of pylons and electricity substation, west of Dunston Hall.

8.10. The character of the Tas Tributary Farmland is illustrated on Figure B1: Tas Tributary Farmland

**LANDSCAPE ASSETS**

✓ ✓ ✓ very characteristic/important ✓ ✓ characteristic/important ✓ noticeably present/important

- Asset not present or present but by virtue of extent or quality does not contribute significantly to landscape character

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSET/LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationally important ecological assemblages</td>
<td>✓ ✓ Hornbeam coppice habitats and ancient woodlands of particular importance plus some grasslands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of Scheduled Ancient Monuments</td>
<td>- None.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of round-towered churches</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of isolated churches</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>DISTRICT/COUNTY:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong regional vernacular character</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of historic parkland particularly EH listed</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wooded appearance</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Distinctive valley landform

- Waterways visible within the landscape
- Watermills present
- Windmills present
- Moats present

**LOCAL:**

- Pastoral Farmland with visible grazing animals
- Important Views that provide sense of place
- Willow pollard and/or poplar-lined watercourses
- Drainage ditches
- Wide grass verges alongside roads
- Good hedgerow network
- Mature hedgerow trees
- Presence of river crossings
- Sunken Lanes
- Water bodies
- Distinctive plateau landscape
- Area of or including significant strategic breaks between settled areas

See summary table for greater explanation of Landscape Assets.

### SENSITIVITIES AND VULNERABILITIES

#### 8.11

The principal sensitivities and vulnerabilities of the landscape to change are considered to be:

- further loss of vegetation structure including woodland and hedgerows from the landscape which would lead to a greater sense of openness and could tip the balance in favour of bleakness;

- gently sloping topography and open landscape making this area sensitive to intrusion by tall and large elements, including farm buildings and pylons;

- potential for adverse effects upon views in the north of this character area to/from Norwich and the Bypass.
LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

8.12. The strategy for the Tas Tributary Farmland is to maintain the open and agricultural character of the landscape, protect the ecological value of the area and maintain and enhance the area’s recreational opportunities. Enhancement of the landscape should include active management of the woodlands and grasslands, conservation and restoration of key hedgerows and replanting of hedgerow trees, particularly adjacent to roads. In particular:

- consider strategies and explore screening options to reduce the visual and aural impact of the A140, A47(T) and other transportation corridors (railways) on the rural ambience of this area and adjacent character areas – particularly the Tas Valley;
- develop a targeted woodland strategy to reinforce the wooded horizons and create additional woodland habitats, whilst maintaining openness.

DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

8.13. Any development permitted should respect the character and features of the Tas Tributary Farmland and its landscape assets including:

- respect the existing small-scale and dispersed settlement pattern and avoid developments that would affect the vernacular qualities of existing settlements (e.g. urbanising influences upon the rural lanes) or would lead to impacts upon the character of settlement distribution;
- maintain positive views of the Tas tributary Farmland from the Norwich Southern Bypass and to/from the City of Norwich;
- consider the impact of any development upon the skyline and sense of openness of the character area;
- maintain positive views to/from Venta Icenorum in the Tas Valley;
- consider the impacts of any development upon the nature of the current and desired physical relationship of Long Stratton to Norwich and upon Long Stratton’s perceptual role at the geographical and administrative heart of South Norfolk.
- The area includes attractive isolated churches with the regionally-characteristic round-tower such as St. Michael's at Ashleworth.

- The small tributary streams are screened in the wider landscape by the presence of bankside vegetation as this example near Bunwell Hill illustrates.

- Characteristic sloping arable farmland with an intact 'avenue' of remnant oak hedgerow standards and displaying a characteristic wooded horizon near Calston St Edmund.

- Typical open arable landscape near Hempnall denuded of hedgerows with a rural road bordered by a wide verge and ditch.

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**Figure B1: Tas Tributary Farmland**

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**Figure B2: Tiffey Tributary Farmland**

- The landscape is sparsely settled comprising isolated farm buildings set within the farmland between the villages. Example from near Wicklewood.

- The tributary valleys, including this area near Moneyhill Farm, have created areas of undulating landform with more intimate wooded areas.

- The area has a distinctive intricate network of rural lanes but roadside and field hedgerows have been denuded or are gappy, as this scene near Hingham illustrates.

- Wicklewood Windmill is a distinctive local landmark that contributes to local landscape character.