

Debenham Neighbourhood Plan

Landscape Character Assessment – Natural Environment

Baseline Evaluation



2016

Debenham Landscape Character Assessment – Natural Environment

The following constitutes the way in which the landscape character assessment in the Neighbourhood Plan has been developed.

Baseline Evaluation

Baseline conditions are defined by landscape character and respective sensitivity, together with visual amenity (as represented by views) and the sensitivity of visual receptors (or potential viewers), in accordance with the criteria set out below.

Definitions of landscape Sensitivity

Level of Sensitivity

Definition of Sensitivity Examples

High	Typically of high importance and rarity, national scale and limited potential for substitution, (eg National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). Landscape unlikely to tolerate significant change.
Medium	Typically of moderate importance and rarity, Regional scale, and limited potential for substitution, (eg Registered Historic Parks and Gardens and Conservation Areas). Landscape likely to tolerate some change.
Low	Typically of low importance and rarity, local scale such as undesignated or degraded landscapes. Landscape has the potential to tolerate change.

Definitions of Visual Sensitivity

Level of Sensitivity

Definition of Sensitivity Examples

High	Views from important landscapes where appreciation of affected views may be the principal activity. Residential properties.
Medium	Views from Public Right of Ways, cycle trails, public open space or regionally/ local important landscapes where attention may be focused on an affected view.
Low	Views from roads and railways which are transient due to travelling through the landscape. Places of work or commercial properties, where attention is unlikely to be focused on affected views.

Assessment

The criteria and threshold matrices used to assess the magnitude of impact and significance of landscapes and visual effects are set out below.

Assigning Magnitude of Landscape Impact

<u>Level of Magnitude</u>	<u>Definition of Magnitude</u>
High	Total loss or major alteration to key landscape characteristic such that the landscape character will be fundamentally changed.
Medium	Partial loss or alteration to key landscape characteristic such that the landscape character will be partially changed.
Low	Minor loss or alteration to key landscape characteristics such that the landscape character will be similar to the baseline conditions.
Negligible	Very minor loss or alteration to key landscape characteristics such that change in the landscape character will be barely distinguishable from the baseline conditions, approximating to the 'no -change' situation.

Assigning Magnitude of Visual Impact

<u>Level of Magnitude</u>	<u>Definition of Magnitude</u>
High	Major change in existing view.
Medium	Partial change in existing view.
Low	Minor change such that it is largely unchanged.
Negligible	Very inconspicuous change approximating to No – change'.

A combined assessment of sensitivity and magnitude is undertaken to determine how significant an effect is, as shown below.

Significance Matrix

<u>Magnitude</u>	<u>Sensitivity</u>		
	<u>Low</u>	<u>Medium</u>	<u>High</u>
High	Moderate	Moderate/Major	Major
Medium	Minor/Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/Major
Low	Minor	Minor/Negligible	Moderate
Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

Effects may be positive or negative. Applying the precautionary principle, this assessment identifies potential effects as negative although it should be noted that any development may not be regarded by all as having an adverse effect. Only those effects that are recorded as major negative are considered to be significant in respect of the decision making process (see italics and underline significances identified above.)

Base line

Landscape Designations

Defining the landscape character of an area will shape future development, and affect the setting in which people live and work in Mid Suffolk. The majority of the landscape of the Debenham Neighbourhood Plan area is classified as arable land. This is the same for the surrounding parishes. There are areas classified as grassland, most of which are connected to the suburban areas. There are areas of land classified as woodland in the parish area. The Debenham Neighbourhood Plan area features Grade 2 and 3 agricultural land. This means that the land is very good and good to moderate for agricultural use.

Government policy for England is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in March 2012 (paragraph 112). Decisions rest with the relevant planning authorities who should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of higher quality.

The Agricultural Land Classification system classifies land into five grades, with Grade 3 subdivided into sub- grades 3a and 3b. The best and most versatile land is defined as Grades 1, 2 and 3a by policy guidance (see Annex 2 of NPPF). This is the land which is most flexible, productive and efficient in response to inputs and which can best deliver future crops for food and non-food uses such as biomass, fibres and pharmaceuticals.