

Laxfield - Landscape Character & Habitats [Natural Environment]

The parish landscape is gently undulating, with a heavy clay plateau to the north of the settlement and rolling valleys along the River Blyth, which rises from a number of streams around the parish and flows north-east towards Halesworth.

Arable farming dominates the landscape, with predominantly large open fields but with stretches of hedging and generally small patches of woodland providing strong visual impact and breaking up the wide open views. Hedges are predominantly of hawthorn, blackthorn, dogwood and field maple with boundary trees – oak, ash and field maple in particular - also present; there were at one time also many elm trees, which have more recently been lost to Dutch Elm Disease. Laxfield Wood (which lies towards the southernmost part of the parish) is a small remnant of ancient woodland.

The historic settlement pattern outside the main Laxfield settlement boundary consists of dispersed farmsteads, with some areas of clustered development of various sizes – for example at Banyards Green, and at the junction of Rowe’s Hill and Badingham Road. This sparse settlement pattern is an important part of the intrinsic character of the landscape of the parish.

There is a network of footpaths around the parish, although some of these seem to have been truncated and no longer have an obvious destination. 50% of survey respondents felt that we need more footpaths and bridleways, while around 70% felt that the existing paths and bridleways should be better signposted.

Local roads are predominantly rural lanes (often single track with passing places) flanked by ditches and hedges

Landmarks and Key Views

All Saints Church, with its unusual stone-faced tower, is Laxfield’s main landmark. Other key features include the Guildhall, the Chapel and the two pubs.

The Heritage and Settlement Sensitivity Assessment for Babergh and Mid Suffolk Districts, produced as part of the evidence for the Joint Local Plan, identifies four key views in the settlement of Laxfield:

1. View along High Street towards the church and market place: This shows the linear nature of the settlement and the historic positioning of the built form within their plots.
- 2 & 4 Views along Vicarage Road and Bickers Road towards the Church of All Saints, highlighting the church’s dominant position within the settlement
2. View from Gorams Mill Lane looking south to the church: This view in particular emphasises the immediate interrelationship between the open landscape and the historic church.

Local residents also feel very strongly that the view from the High Street of Mobbs Meadow is important, emphasising the natural environment surrounding the village which many people value highly. It is also worth noting that over 90% of respondents to the surveys felt that the open views around the parish – not just the village itself – are important assets.

'Gateways' to the Village

There are four entrances to the village - the principal gateways are on the main route through the village, the B1117:

1. Station Road
2. Vicarage Road

Two less significant gateways are:

3. Bickers Hill Road
4. Framlingham Road

None is currently marked in any significant way, and this represents a missed opportunity.

Biodiversity and Habitats

A number of valuable habitats can be identified across the parish:

Orchards - Traditional orchards often have a rich mix of habitats such as standing fruit and nut trees, decaying and dead wood, grassland, scrub, ponds and hedges. This variety of habitats allows different species to take advantage of a range of food types and hiding places. For example, an apple tree may be only 60 years old, but have the rot holes, decay and habitats of a veteran tree and so be attractive to several types of invertebrate.

Hedgerows - defined as any boundary line of trees or shrubs over 20m long and less than 5m wide, and where any gaps between the trees or shrub species are less than 20m wide. Hedgerows act as wildlife corridors, linking habitats and enabling bats, small mammals and insects to move around under cover from predators. Thick dense cover at the base of hedges is very important in protecting nesting birds from predators, while mature and dying trees provide habitat for a wide variety of invertebrates, fungi and lichens.

Mixed deciduous woodland – provide a diversity of conditions and environments which support a wide range of plants, invertebrates, birds and mammals: dappled shade and open clearings, for example, support many plants including native Bluebell, Early Purple Orchid, Wood Anemone, Herb-Paris and Unspotted Lungwort (the only British native restricted solely to Suffolk) while dead wood provides essential habitats for a wide variety of invertebrates

Arable field margins - herbaceous strips or blocks around arable fields that are managed specifically to provide benefits for wildlife. They are valuable wildlife corridors, as well as offering nesting sites for ground-nesting birds and hunting areas for barn owls and other birds of prey. They can also provide refuges for small mammals and invertebrates and safe over-wintering for insects and spiders.

Lowland meadows – although the classic species-rich hay meadows (often termed 'Old meadows') are not found around Laxfield, valuable unimproved grassland areas can be found in the churchyard and on road verges. In addition to a wide range of flowering plants and mosses, unimproved grasslands are habitats for invertebrates, birds and small mammals

Rivers and streams – the River Blyth and the streams which form its headwaters provide a variety of important habitats for aquatic plants and fish; shingle beds and sand bars are important for a

range of invertebrates, while marginal and bankside vegetation provides habitat for a wide range of flora and fauna. Rivers and streams also act as wildlife corridors.

There are three County Wildlife Sites within the parish: Laxfield Cemetery, Mobbs Meadow (also known as Laxfield Meadow) and Laxfield Wood.

94% of respondents to the Household and 84% to the Young Adults surveys agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I value the wildlife and biodiversity around the village". Similar numbers also felt that the hedgerows and mature trees in the parish need to be protected.

Green Spaces

Laxfield residents feel very strongly about the green spaces in the village: the trees and wide green verges of the High Street are a key part of the village character, and around 90% of survey respondents felt that it is important to retain the way the High Street looks. Mobbs Meadow, and the view of it from Church Plain in particular, is treasured by many local residents.

Other key green spaces include several allotment sites and the very large (eight acre) playing field, as well as the village pond. There is strong support for protecting key sites that are not otherwise safeguarded by classifying them as Local Green Spaces.

Online research in addition to documents on the Google Drive:

<https://www.suffolkbis.org.uk/biodiversity/speciesandhabitats/habitatslist>