



THORNDON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

2018 - 2036

Special Landscape Area
Assessment

April 2020

Thorndon Parish Council

Thorndon Neighbourhood Plan
Assessment of Special Landscape Area

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Background to the Thorndon Special Landscape Area

Special Landscape Areas have been designated in Mid Suffolk District Council's Development Plan for a number of years after they were initially designated in the Suffolk County Structure Plan in the 1980's. They tend to relate to historic parks and river valleys or other areas of undulating topography and natural vegetation, particularly broadleaved woodland. In such areas these landscape elements combine to produce an area of special landscape and quality, in contrast to the more intensively farmed areas of Suffolk where trees and hedgerows have been removed.

In Thorndon, the landscape character is reflective of the county as a whole. Much of the southern part of the parish is flat and open landscape with large fields that are heavily cropped. In the north-western corner of the parish is the River Dove valley, a tributary of the River Waveney and an area currently designated as a Special Landscape Area, as illustrated on Map 1 below.



Map 1 – Currently Designated Special Landscape Area

The Preferred Options consultation on the Joint Mid Suffolk and Babergh Local Plan (July 2019) indicated that the Special Landscape Area designation is not to be carried forward.

The National Planning Policy Framework (Feb 2019) para 107a states that:

Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan)

It does not define what is meant by a Valued Landscape. However, the Guidelines on Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA)¹ defines landscape value as:

'The relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society. A landscape may be valued by different stakeholders for a whole variety of reasons'

The Special Landscape Area Character

National Landscape Character Areas

Thorndon is within the National Landscape Character Area – NCA 83 South Norfolk and High Suffolk Claylands. The NCA Assessment² notes the following:

"'High' Suffolk originally derives its name from the contrast between this formerly well-treed area and the openness of the adjacent areas to the east and west. Today it is probably better understood as meaning the high and predominantly flat clay plateau that dominates the character of the NCA. The plateau is incised by numerous small-scale wooded river valleys with complex slopes that in places are much unexpected for East Anglia."

The Assessment also identifies the following Statement of Environmental Opportunity which is particularly relevant to the area covered by the Special Landscape Area in Thorndon:

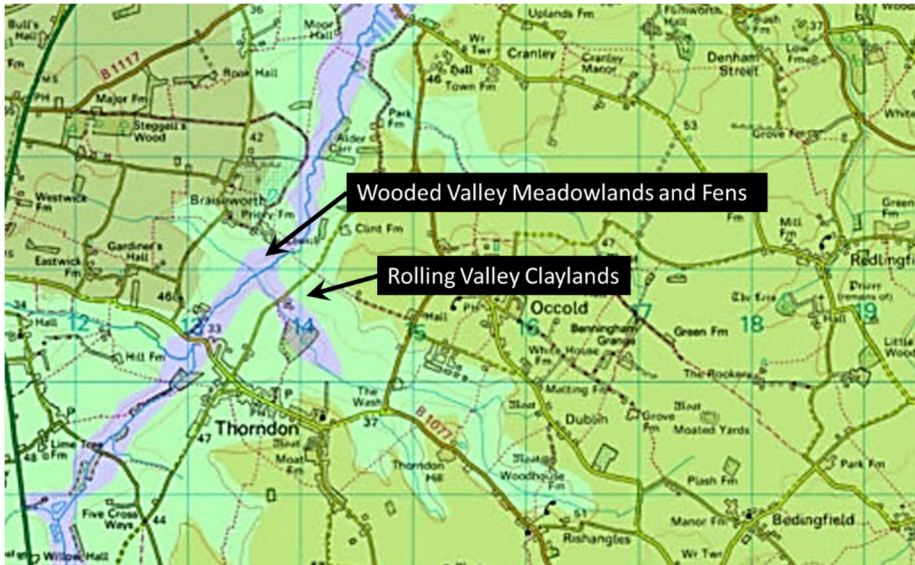
*"**SEO 3:** Maintain and enhance the river valleys and their grazed flood plains which provide linkages through the landscape, including their valley fens and riparian habitats. This will support the operation of natural processes and their contribution to biodiversity, geodiversity, soil quality, water availability and regulating water flow and their function in contributing to the traditional rural character of the area."*

Suffolk County Landscape Character and Guidance

The Suffolk County Landscape Character Assessment identifies the area within which the Thorndon SLA is positioned as two landscape typologies., namely Rolling Valley Claylands and Wooded Valley Meadowlands and Fens, as illustrated on Map 2.

¹ Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013 (third edition).

² NCA Profile: 83 South Norfolk and High Suffolk Claylands (NE544)



Map 2 – County Landscape Character Areas

For **Rolling Valley Claylands**, the Assessment found that:

“Especially in the areas of plateau claylands these landscapes can provide a welcome change from what can be the open, arable vistas. They usually have more complete hedgerow networks, and the visual impact of these is enhanced within the more contained landscape of the valleys.”

For **Wooded Valley Meadowlands and Fens**, the Assessment found:

“Despite the fact that the edges of this landscape are often formed by main roads or urban fringe, such as at Beccles, overall the impression is of a quiet hidden landscape, usually undisturbed by the human activity taking place to the north and the south.”

Special Landscape Area Assessment

The Special Landscape Area in the Thorndon Neighbourhood Plan area follows the valley of the River Dove from where the Area commences near Hill Farm in Stoke Ash to where it leaves the Parish in the north and enters Eye Parish. The boundary in Thorndon is drawn arbitrarily with the exception of the exclusion of the former Kerrison Conference Centre.

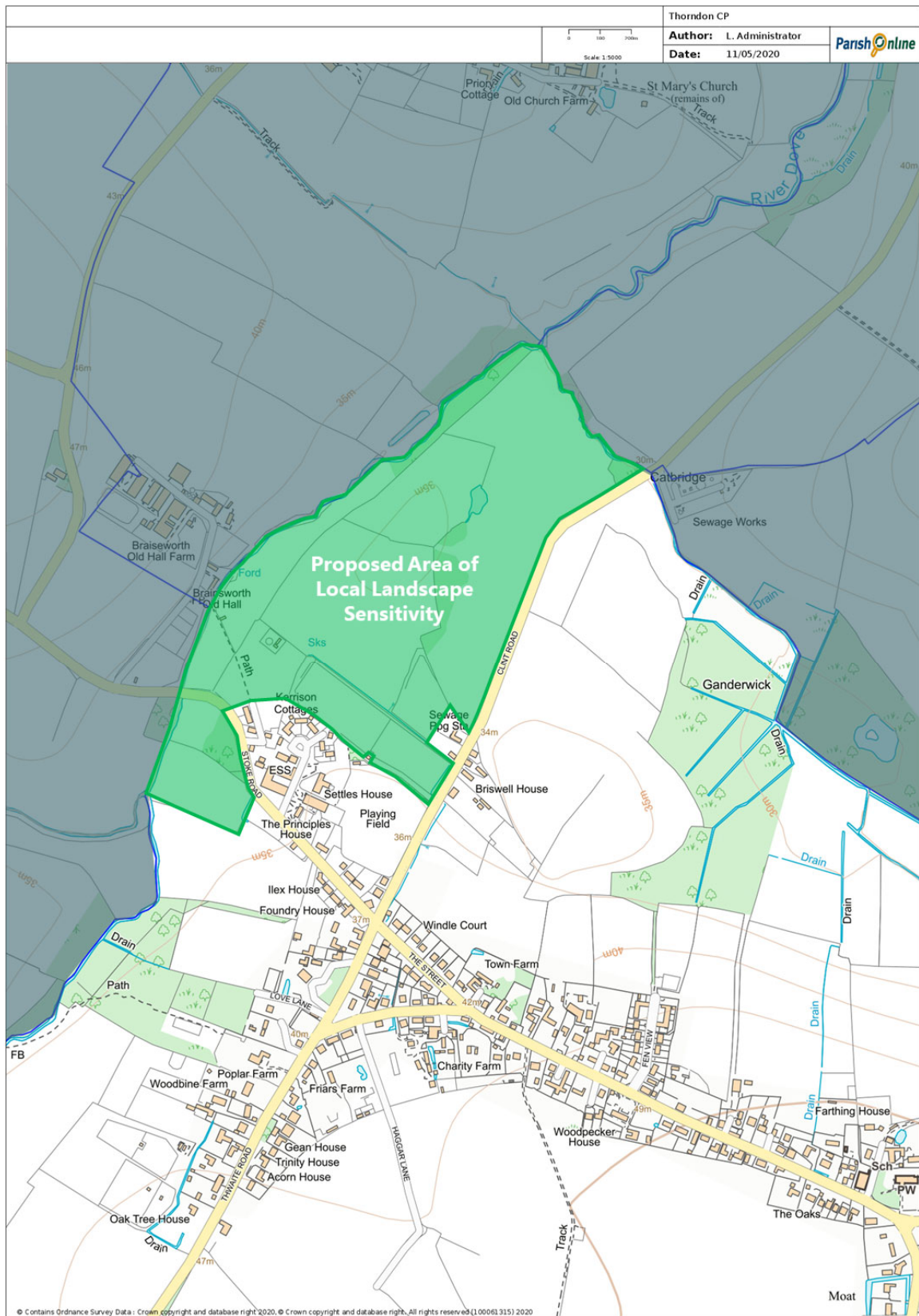


The SLA within Thorndon has been reviewed and tested against the relevant criteria set out in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA 3rd Edition). The results of this assessment are set out in the table below:

	Assessment
Landscape Quality (condition): A measure of the physical state of the landscape.	The landscape of the Special Landscape Area in Thorndon is in good condition and displays the qualities of the Landscape Character typologies identified in the Suffolk Landscape Character Appraisal. Hedgerows and tree lined field edges are largely intact, while the grassland represents a unique characteristic in this part of Suffolk.
Scenic Quality: The term used to describe landscapes that appeal primarily to the senses.	The higher part of the area, which has open access, allows for views across the landscape punctuated by the many fine and mature trees.
Rarity: The presence of rare elements or features in the landscape or the presence of a rare landscape type.	The landscape is typical of the Wooded Valley Meadowlands and Fens typology providing a sense of quiet and rural isolation.
Representativeness: Whether the landscape contains a particular character and/or features or elements which are considered particularly important.	This landscape contains a number of habitats namely the River Dove, ponds and ditches, as well as veteran trees and ancient hedgerows.
Conservation Interest: The presence of features of wildlife, earth science or archaeological or historical and cultural interest can add to the value of the landscape.	The natural and cultural heritage found in the wider landscape is highly valued. The area also has high potential for archaeological sites and finds given its proximity to the A140 Roman Road to the west. There are no designated heritage assets in the Special landscape Area.
Recreational Value: Evidence that the landscape is valued for recreational activity where experience of the landscape is important.	Much of the land is set-aside and is managed grassland where the public are allowed free access.
Perceptual aspects: A landscape may be valued for its perceptual qualities, notably wildness and or tranquillity.	This area has a character that is predominantly rural and tranquil in nature associated with running water, birdsong, lack of built development and closeness to nature.
Associations: Some landscapes are associated with particular people, such as artists or writers or events in history that contribute to perceptions of the natural beauty of the area.	There are no known associations with people or events in history.

The area covered by the SLA in Thorndon is therefore considered to constitute a valued landscape and it is appropriate to designate it as an "Area of Local Landscape Sensitivity" within the Neighbourhood Plan. Because of the anomalies of the original SLA boundary, a new boundary is identified to include all the set aside land and the extent of the distinguishable river valley with the parish.

The proposed extent of the area within the Parish is shown on Map 3.



Map 3 – Proposed Area of Local Landscape Sensitivity

