

Landscape Character Areas



Viburnum lantana (wayfaring tree)
occasional, edges.

Note: beech should be planted in single species groups of at least 500 sq. m. when used in woodland block; do not use in random mixes.

Hedgerows, woodland edges and scrub

Crataegus monogyna (hawthorn)

Corylus avellana (hazel)

Prunus spinosa (blackthorn)

Acer campestre (field maple)

Rosa canina (dog rose)

Ligustrum vulgaris (wild privet)

occasional.

Viburnum lantana (wayfaring tree)

occasional.

Trees in hedgerows/avenues

Fraxinus excelsior (ash)

dominant, hedgerows.

Fagus sylvatica (beech)

mostly avenues; some hedgerows.

Acer campestre (field maple)

sub-dominant, hedgerows.

Avenues – all as single species, not mixed.

Hedgerows – mixed.

AREA 3: WESTERN CLAYLANDS

As in the South-eastern Claylands, dense woodland and heavy soils deterred prehistoric farmers, and even Roman settlements are not commonly found in these regions. Population pressure and the use of improved ploughs, however, led to many medieval settlements which have

since been deserted or have shrunk to tiny hamlets or single farms. Ridge and furrow (a survival of medieval ploughing), deserted medieval villages, such as Wintringham, Weald and Washingley, and other substantial medieval settlement earthworks, such as those at Steeple and Little Gidding, Hamerton, and Winwick, together with numerous moated sites and ruined churches (at Denton and Woolley) are now all features of this sparsely populated landscape.

This gently undulating landscape is subdivided by the shallow Ouse Valley (landscape area 4). It consists of large-scale arable farmland with open fields, sparse trimmed hedgerows and watercourses often cleared of bankside vegetation. There are scattered woodlands and approximately half of these are ancient semi-natural woodlands of considerable importance in the County context. The biggest concentration of woodlands is in the south-west corner of the County. Elsewhere individual woods are of importance in visual and nature conservation terms, but they tend to be isolated incidents in an area dominated by arable farmland.

The landscape of this part of Cambridgeshire has been greatly affected by modern agricultural practices. Increased mechanisation has led to the removal of hedgerows and amalgamation of fields. Many of the remaining hedges are 'gappy' and trimmed almost out of existence by regular cutting. Dutch Elm Disease has taken a considerable toll of hedgerow trees, and the extensive replanting which is still young has yet to make any major impact, although with over one million grant-aided trees having been planted since 1974 significant change is likely over the next



Western Claylands:
Boxworth.

few decades. Marginal land has been brought into production by drainage and other soil improvements. Larger farm units have created a need for large storage buildings, which can be prominent in the landscape.

Small villages and hamlets are scattered throughout the area, usually in sheltered places with existing trees. Small grass paddocks typically occur on the edges of the villages. Church spires and towers enliven the skyline.

Existing and former wartime airfields at Alconbury, Wyton, Molesworth, Glatton, Warboys, Upwood, Kimbolton, Graveley, Staughton, Sibson, Bourn and Great Gransden have a significant impact on the area.

PRINCIPLES FOR LANDSCAPE IMPROVEMENT AND MANAGEMENT IN THE WESTERN CLAYLANDS

It would be unrealistic and inappropriate to attempt to restore the pre-war landscape of smaller fields with tree-lined hedges. Instead a new landscape pattern that responds to the demands of both modern agricultural practice and the need for landscape enhancement is necessary. The vision is one of a fairly large-scale landscape with large rolling fields enclosed by and sweeping around blocks and belts of woodland and broad hedgerows. In the valley bottoms, the objective should be to create smaller-scaled stream-side landscape zones with trees, copses, meadows and other features.

Where remnants of the old ridge and furrow survive as grassland or in woodland they should be preserved.

Creation of the new landscape structure should be directed towards the following principles:

1. Management of existing woodlands: the careful management of ancient semi-natural woodlands and selective re-stocking and creation of 'edge areas' elsewhere (see Farmland Model A4b on

p. 36) is essential.

2. Creation of new woodlands: ideally these should be at least 2 hectares in size and located so that they make a major impact in relation to:

- viewing points;
- wildlife potential;
- landform and skylines.

The new woodland blocks may be planted to reflect landforms, thus developing a new character of wooded

WESTERN CLAYLANDS Before

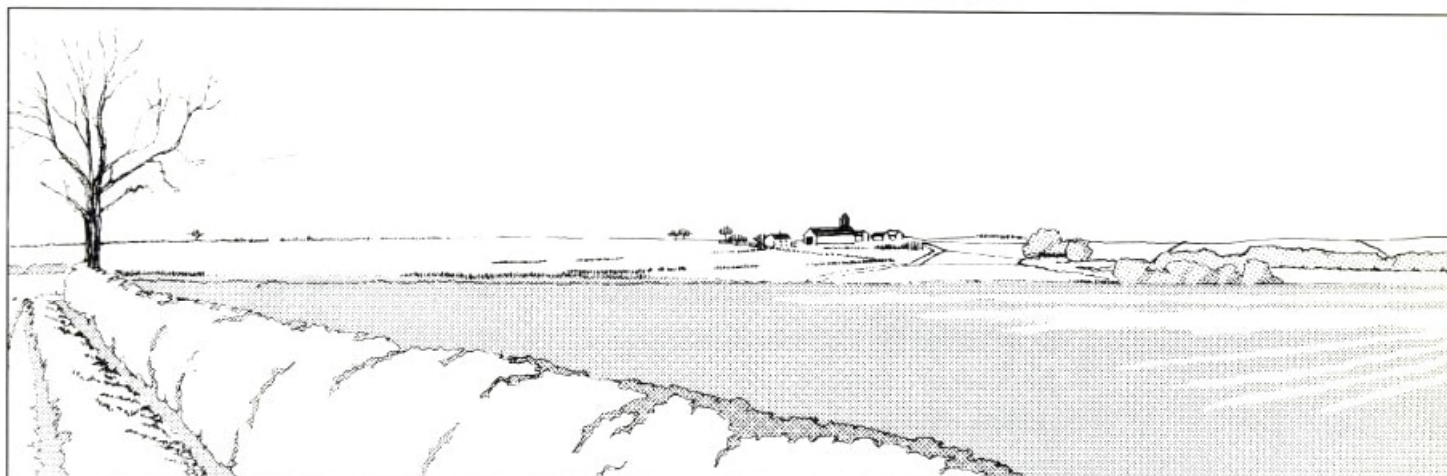
Dead tree.

Very little sense of landform or enclosure.

Poor, sparse hedgerows.

Large, modern farm buildings prominent on the skyline.

Small scrubland on land difficult to cultivate.



WESTERN CLAYLANDS After

Dead tree retained for hole-nesting birds. Saplings selected from hedge and allowed to grow untrimmed.

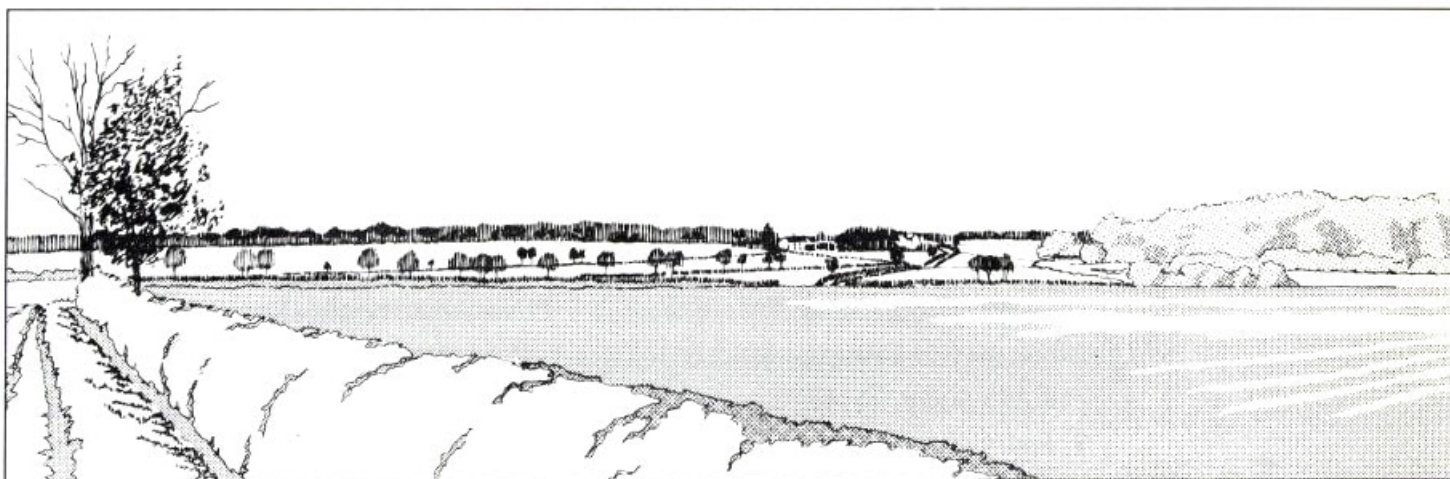
Tree line on horizon helps to tie features together and enclose the space.

Hedgerows emphasise landform and give character; tree planting in hedge.

Farm buildings well screened by planting.

Woodland on horizon provides good backdrop.

New woodland forms strong feature.



skylines, distinctive clumps and woodlands following the folds in the land. Elsewhere, woodlands may be planted to reflect the existing or former field patterns, thus being derived from the inherited pattern (see Farmland Model A5 on p. 37). In practice, a combination of these two approaches would emerge, reflecting both old and new landscape patterns.

3. Planting of woodland belts:

probably based on existing hedgerows, linking woodland blocks, the belts should be carefully aligned to reinforce landforms and would enclose large areas of rolling farmland (see Farmland Model A4b on p. 36).

4. Creation of landscape corridors in valley bottoms: this will necessitate setting aside 5–15m or more either side of streams to create semi-wooded corridors of diverse habitats (see Farmland Model A6 on p. 38).

5. Hedgerows: selected hedgerows should be reinforced or managed for particularly significant impact, based upon their visual and wildlife potential. Historically significant hedgerows should be carefully conserved, and new hedges planted to emphasise the existing landscape.

6. Road margins: verges should be managed for floral diversity; hedgerows with trees should be concentrated on lower slopes to prevent loss of views from higher land and planted to create a bold sequence of enclosed and open characters appropriate to the large scale of the landscape (see Farmland Models A4a and A4b on pp. 35–6).

7. Footpath corridor improvements: a

small number of long-distance routes and also circular/linking routes related to villages and towns should be located, and landscape improvements implemented along their alignments; ideally these features will be integrated with other new features as in 1 and 4 above (see Farmland Model A7 on p. 39).

8. Village approaches: increased tree cover with trees along road margins, woodland belts alongside roads, planting at edges of villages and hedgerow planting is desirable; it is important to ensure key views are not lost.

9. Old airfields: there may be unsightly buildings which require fresh landscape treatment.

10. Urban fringe: where the claylands border the Ouse Valley towns (St Ives, Huntingdon, St Neots) a substantial increase in tree and hedge cover is needed with trees along road margins, and woodland belts alongside roads and the edges of developments.

PLANT SPECIES GUIDELINES FOR THE WESTERN CLAYLANDS

Clay soils (except valley bottoms and wet sites)

Mixed woodlands

Quercus robur (oak)

dominant tree.

Fraxinus excelsior (ash)

dominant tree.

Prunus avium (wild cherry)

less common.

Acer campestre (field maple)

glades, near edges.

- Corylus avellana* (hazel)
dominant shrub, edges, glades, scrub.
Crataegus monogyna (hawthorn)
near edges, mixed thickets.
Sambucus nigra (elder)
occasional, understorey and edges.

Hedgerows, woodland edges and scrub

- Crataegus monogyna* (hawthorn)
Corylus avellana (hazel)
Prunus spinosa (blackthorn)
Rosa canina (dog rose)
Acer campestre (field maple)
Malus sylvestris (crab apple)
Cornus sanguinea (dogwood)
occasional.

Trees in hedgerows

- Quercus robur* (oak)
dominant.
Fraxinus excelsior (ash)
sub-dominant.
Acer campestre (field maple)
sub-dominant.

Avenues

- Quercus robur* (oak)
Tilia sp. (lime)
Aesculus hippocastanum (horse chestnut)
environs of villages only.
Avenues – all as single species, not mixed.

Stream sides, wet clay soils

- Alnus glutinosa* (alder)
dominant, in copses and small groups.
Salix alba (white willow)
sub-dominant, not in mixes.
Salix fragilis (crack willow)
typical pollarded tree.
Salix caprea (goat willow)
scrubby copses.

- Fraxinus excelsior* (ash)
occasional where not waterlogged.
Quercus robur (oak)
occasional where not waterlogged.
Corylus avellana (hazel)
occasional on stream banks if not waterlogged.
Populus tremula (aspen)
in thickets; not in mixes.
Viburnum opulus (guelder rose)
occasional as individuals and small groups.
Cornus sanguinea (dogwood)
occasional as individuals and small groups.

AREA 4: OUSE VALLEY

Rivers provided a major means of communication until very recent times, and also a good water supply. Light, well-drained gravel soils were ideal for prehistoric agriculture and also attracted Roman and Anglo-Saxon farmers. Roman, medieval (and most modern) towns were situated on river crossings (e.g. Huntingdon/Godmanchester, St Ives, St Neots) and river valleys have always been the most populated areas.

The meandering River Ouse in its shallow valley bisects the claylands that form the western edge of Cambridgeshire. The margins of the river consist of a mosaic of flood plains and grazing meadows, working and disused gravel pits and lakes, sprawling housing areas and industrial estates. Elsewhere, the Ouse Valley is characterised by thick hedges, trees and fields.