

Appendix 9.2

Extracts from Published Landscape
Character Assessments



Introduction

This appendix collates and where necessary provides commentary on relevant extracts from the following published landscape character assessments which cover the study area:

- *National Character Area Profile 47 – Southern Lincolnshire Edge*, 2014, Natural England
- *North Kesteven Landscape Character Assessment*, 2007, David Tyldesley and Associates

National Character Area 47 (NCA 47) – Southern Lincolnshire Edge

At a national level the site falls within National Character Area (NCA 47) – Southern Lincolnshire Edge and the majority of the study area also falls within this NCA. There would be a negligible effect on the character of the landscape beyond this NCA.

NCA 47 is located between the limestone cliff to the west and the dip slope that drops gently away to the edge of the fens in the east. The summary description of the NCA states:

“An open landscape with far-reaching views over the Trent and Belvoir Vales and up to Lincoln Cathedral. On the free draining higher ground, landcover is primarily arable, in large geometric fields divided by limestone walls, with few trees or woodland. On the wetter, heavier clay soils to the east and south-west, pasture is more prevalent; hedgerows are the predominant boundary and the landscape has a more intimate, enclosed feel, with more trees, woodland and parkland.”

In relation to the above statement, it is noted that there are no far reaching views over the Trent and Belvoir Vales or towards Lincoln Cathedral within the LVIA study area. Views of the vales are found further to the west in the NCA and views towards the cathedral are found further north in the NCA.

The summary description goes on to state that:

“The underlying Jurassic Limestone geology has a defining impact on the landscape, not just through the distinctive topography, but also through its widespread use for construction of walls and buildings and numerous limestone quarries, both active and disused. Semi-natural habitats – including calcareous and neutral grassland and broadleaved woodland – are fragmented and sparsely scattered. Wide verges along roads and tracks provide important refuges for unimproved flower-rich grassland. There are many visible reminders of early human activity in the form of Roman roads and canals, such as Ermine Street and Car Dyke, medieval ridge and furrow, deserted medieval villages and moated sites. The 20th-century heritage includes a number of airfields created during the World Wars.”

Finally, the summary description notes that:

“The primary ecosystem services provided by this area include food provision, biomass provision, water availability, sense of place and sense of history. Enhancements in management of soil, water, habitats and landscape features on agricultural land could help to strengthen the provision of many of these services.” and

“The protection of archaeology, historic buildings and traditional villages is key to preserving sense of place and sense of history.”

The key characteristics of NCA 47 are recorded as follows:

- *“Elevated arable escarpment with a distinct cliff running north–south along the western boundary, providing far-reaching views over the Trent and Belvoir Vales NCA.*
- *Productive loamy soils on the limestone plateau, giving rise to a large-scale open landscape of arable cultivation with large, regular fields and few boundaries of tightly cut hedgerows or rubble limestone walls.*
- *Heavy clay soils in the east and south-west of the area, which support more grazing land in smaller, less regular fields, along with small areas of woodland and parkland.*
- *Semi-natural habitats in small, isolated fragments, with pockets of woodland on clay soils, fen at the foot of the dip slope and flower rich limestone grassland, particularly along road verges.*
- *Sparse settlement on higher land, with spring line villages along the foot of the cliff, parklands and country estates such as Rauceby and Belton on lower ground, and larger settlements – including Sleaford, Ruskington and Metheringham – to the east of the dip slope.*
- *Active and re-used airfields prominent on the ridgetop.*
- *Long, straight roads and tracks, often with wide verges, including Ermine Street, which follows the route of a key Roman north–south route.*
- *Vernacular architecture and walling, especially in villages, of local warm-coloured limestone with dark brown pantiles.”*

Under the heading of ‘Physical and functional links to other National Character Areas’, the NCA profile notes that:

“Major road routes include the A15 linking Sleaford to Lincoln. Railways run north–south linking Sleaford to Lincoln and Spalding.”

Under the heading of ‘The Southern Lincolnshire Edge Today’, the NCA describes the landform and drainage of the NCA as an:

- *“elevated, gently sloping plateau with a sharply defined western boundary.” And*
- *“On lower land to the eastern edge, where the dip slope falls to meet the fens, deposits of glacial till result in heavier land that is slower draining and prone to waterlogging in winter. This landscape has a more enclosed, wooded feel, with smaller, less regular fields and more hedgerows, hedgerow trees, parkland and woodland.” And*
- *“Dry valleys indicate the free-draining nature of the underlying geology. The agricultural land has a dense network of ditches, particularly on the heavier land, and many have farm reservoirs.”*

The NCA notes that:

- *“Settlement is concentrated around the perimeter of the NCA, along the cliff foot, where villages have been founded on springlines, and at the foot of the dip slope”. And*
- *“Industry in the area, both historically and today, focuses on limestone and aggregate quarrying and agriculture. Major transport links include busy A roads, such as the A15 between Lincoln and Sleaford, and railway lines.” And*
- *“Publicly accessible routes and areas are less prolific than in some NCAs; there are only 0.9 km per km² of public rights of way and no country parks or National Nature Reserves.” and*

- *“The area is moderately tranquil; less-disturbed areas include the more remote parts of the sparsely settled areas, the open landscape of the dip slope and the more sheltered, enclosed, traditional landscapes of the claylands.”*

Under the heading of ‘The Landscape through Time’ the NCA provides commentary on the evolution of the landscape over time. The following extracts are relevant in the context of the study area:

- *“Roman activity is visible in structures such as..... Ermine Street”.*
- *“Saxon and medieval settlement developed in a series of small villages along the springlines on the western scarp, and on the lower claylands of the dip slope to the east.”*
- *“Archaeological and placename evidence suggests that the area was substantially cleared of woodland by the 11th century and, on higher land, largely unsettled heath was used as common grazing until it was enclosed for farmland from the late 18th century.”*
- *“Enclosure of fields from the common land under the Parliamentary Enclosures Acts of the 18th and 19th centuries resulted in a large-scale regular field boundary network away from the villages.”*
- *“The latter half of the 20th century saw widespread agricultural intensification, involving comprehensive drainage schemes, removal of drystone walls and hedgerows to create bigger fields, and an increase in arable production. It also saw an increase in the size of the major settlements and the upgrading of major transport routes. All of these served to reduce and fragment seminatural habitats.”*

North Kesteven Landscape Character Assessment

At a district level, the North Kesteven Landscape Character Assessment identifies four regional Landscape Character Types (LCTs). The Proposed Development site and the entire study area falls within the Central Plateau LCT.

The LCTs are further subdivided into Landscape Character Sub-Areas (LCAs). The western and central parcels of the site fall within LCA 7 - The Limestone Heath LCA whilst the eastern parcel of land falls within LCA 11 - The Central Clays and Gravels LCA.

LCA 7 - The Limestone Heath

Relevant key characteristics of LCA 7 – Limestone Heath include:

- *“This is a large landscape character sub-area situated in the centre of the District between the ridge of the Lincoln Cliff and the Central Clays and Gravels to the east.*
- *Its position on the upper reaches of the cliff’s dip slope gives it a feeling of relative elevation and exposure.*
- *It is predominantly an empty, open landscape with wide views to the skyline in all directions.*
- *The landform is a gently undulating plateau which dips gently towards the east.*
- *Generally the whole area is dry, with no obvious surface drainage as a consequence of the underlying limestone geology.*
- *Scattered woodland copses pepper the whole of the sub-area, which although relatively small are prominent features because of the openness of the landscape.*

- *Roadside hedgerows are often found with mature trees within.*
- *Limestone dry stone walls are apparent along roadside and some field boundaries, but are generally in poor condition.*
- *Fields are very large and rectilinear. Field boundaries are often absent, broken or delineated by a strip of rough grass or remnant hedgerow or wall.*
- *The soil colour is a striking reddish brown colour with visually prominent stone content giving it a rough texture.*
- *Intensive arable agriculture dominates land use with wheat and root crop common.*
- *The central plateau area is generally unsettled except for isolated farmsteads and occasional ribbon development along the A15. Larger settlements are situated on the edge of the sub-area characterised by having historic cores with limestone buildings but often surrounded by significant levels of 20th Century development.*
- *Utility Infrastructure, which although sparse, makes an impact on the landscape including prominent pylons and the main A15 running north to south.*
- *RAF installations have made a significant impact on the landscape sub-area with several large bases and training centres.*
- *Mineral working is a feature of the sub-area with several large limestone quarries.*
- *Pressures for change on the Plateau predominately relate to minerals operations, decline of field boundaries, particularly walls, and intensive agricultural practices.*
- *Opportunities for landscape strengthening and enhancement mainly lie in field boundary reinstatement, particularly of dry stone walls and for more appropriately designed development on the outskirts of settlements.”*

Other relevant extracts relating to LCA 7 include the following:

“The landform consists of an open, gently undulating plateau with the gradient sloping down from west to east (approx 80m down to 25m). The ridges and dips run in an east-west direction following shallow ‘dry’ valleys, and this is particularly apparent when travelling along the A15 which falls and rises with the topography.” And

“There are extensive 360 degree views throughout the sub-area afforded by the generally low relief, large field size and absence of field boundaries. The sense of relative elevation is obvious and the general lack of tree cover or other features accentuates the feeling of exposure and emptiness.”

“There are a number of small copses, mostly broadleaved, throughout the sub-area which because of the general openness of the landscape are prominent and make important features. The copses often abut the many scattered farmsteads and agricultural buildings.”

“There are several active stone quarries at a number of sites including Scopwick, Dunston and Harmston Heath, which is operated as a waste disposal site. These are generally well screened by earth bund walls and landscaping and therefore not immediately obvious in the landscape. There is also evidence of a number of small scale abandoned quarries and minerals workings which have become naturalised and overgrown.”

“Obtrusive infrastructure elements are present in the two lines of large pylons and high voltage electricity cables running across the landscape to the eastern fringe of the area and also across its south-west quadrant..... The flat and open landscape does not afford any softening landscape backdrop and so their prominence is emphasised and visually significant from relatively long distances.”

“RAF establishments are a current and important historic feature of the area within the open, exposed and largely flat landscape.”

“There are very few settlements in the central parts of this landscape character subarea and the lasting impression is of an empty landscape. There are a few isolated farmsteads and agricultural buildings and occasional sporadic ribbon development along the A15.”

“The road pattern is distinctive with the straight main road (A15) running from north to south (Lincoln to Sleaford) dividing the character sub-area in two and acting as a central communications spine, with straight and parallel minor roads dissecting the area into a grid pattern, running generally north-east to south-west.”

“The only other settlements of any size in the sub-area are Ashby de Launde and Bloxham which are attractive estate villages with old manor houses and distinctive cottages. Both are framed by attractive treescapes to give an enclosed, intimate setting in contrast to surrounding open landscape. Ashby de Launde has a prominent church steeple and water tower.”

It should be noted that the character assessment makes reference to radio masts at RAF Digby. These are no longer present in the landscape and have been removed.

The following ‘Opportunities for Enhancement’ are identified in the character assessment and are relevant in the context of the Proposed Development:

- Replacement hedgerow planting where these have been lost or degraded.
- Reinstatement and repair of the dry stone walls.
- There are steps that could be taken to improve the dominant appearance of the RAF establishments, such as additional tree and hedge planting around some buildings and around and away from the perimeter fences.
- Habitat friendly limestone grass management regimes should be investigated.

LCA 11 - The Central Clays and Gravels

Relevant key characteristics of LCA 11 – Central Clays and Gravels include:

- *“Landscape sub-area runs the entire length of the District.*
- *The western edge is defined by the Limestone Heath, whilst the Fens lie to the east along its full extent.*
- *A gently undulating lowland, edged by areas of woodland in the north.*
- *Fields are generally smaller and more varied in shape than on the adjacent limestone plateau with some grazing land as well as arable.*
- *Surface water drains into small streams running from west to east and drainage ditches run by the sides of the fields.*
- *Well kept hedgerows along roadsides and sometimes between fields.*
- *Dark brown coloured soil.*
- *Small copses of broadleaved woodland throughout the sub-area and larger areas of woodland on the eastern edge.*
- *Three distinctive lines of settlements – the limestone villages following the spring lines coming off the limestone plateau; the line of villages on the clay strip; and the villages edging the fens to the south.*
- *Road network orientated with the main roads running from north to south (Lincoln to Sleaford) with smaller roads running west to east.*

- *Pressures for change in the sub-area relate to inappropriate development on the edge of villages and the loss of hedgerows and tree cover.*
- *Opportunities for landscape enhancement mainly rest with increased hedgerow and tree planting and maintaining the character of the villages”*

Other relevant extracts relating to LCA 11 include the following:

“The landform consists of a gently undulating lowland clay vale, underlain with boulder clay and gravel deposits. The gradient slopes gently down from west to east (approx. 20m down to 5m).”

“Surface water emerging from springs at the limestone plateau edge drains into small streams which run from west to east. Often these streams run through villages as a central feature. Drainage ditches by the side of the fields are indicative of the change in porosity from the dry landscapes of the plateau.”

“This is generally a mid-scaled landscape. There are some very large fields but also fields of mixed shape and size. Although generally flat and of low relief, this sub-area differs from its immediate neighbours, it does not have the same emptiness and exposure of the limestone heath nor the uniform flatness of the Fens. The general impression of this sub-area is of a gentle, agricultural landscape which is well managed and settled.”

“There are a few scattered agricultural buildings mostly associated with farmsteads and occasional poultry units. The only industrial and commercial uses are located on the edges of the larger settlements such as Metheringham and Ruskington, which has a large food processing factory on its southern edge and is conspicuous in the landscape.”

“The main infrastructure feature in the sub-area is the main line Lincoln-Sleaford railway line.”

“High voltage power lines and pylons cross the area but whilst massive, are generally less prominent in the landscape than in the more open landscapes of the Fens or the Limestone Heath.”

“A line of villages comprising Potterhanworth, Nocton, Dunston, Digby and Scopwick, follow the spring lines rising from the limestone heath plateau and, as a result, present a linear distribution of settlement. Metheringham and Ruskington are the largest villages in the sub-area, which both have a significant level of modern development around their historic cores.”

“There are other scattered villages which do not fit into an obvious pattern, particularly the estate village of Blankney.”

“The road network is orientated with the main roads running from north to south (Lincoln to Sleaford) with minor connector routes roads running west to east. The B1188 north of Sleaford was once a major trading route known as the ‘Low Road’.”

“The spring-line settlements all have similar characteristics, with the original buildings constructed of honey coloured limestone walls with pantiled roofs. The streams often running beside the central village streets with adjacent greenspaces are an attractive feature of these villages.”

“Blankney has a distinctly different and strong identity as an estate village with dwellings built in dressed and coursed limestone in a pseudo-Elizabethan or Tudor style with mullioned windows and elaborate chimneys.”

The following ‘Opportunities for Enhancement’ are identified in the character assessment and are relevant in the context of the Proposed Development:

- Replacement hedgerow planting where these have been lost or degraded.

- An increase in grassland and pasture would help to restore a more mixed pattern of land use, returning to a more visually varied and traditional landscape.
- Maintaining the distinctive character of the villages in this unit is very important.