

**Reach Neighbourhood Plan**  
*Landscape Appraisal*

*Final Report*



**May 2020**

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Figure 1 – Landscape Character

Figure 2 – Designations

Figure 3 – Analysis

Figure 4 – Evaluation Areas



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Alison Farmer Associates was appointed by Reach Neighbourhood Plan Project Group to undertake a landscape appraisal of the Parish, in order to provide a robust evidence base to support the development of policy within the emerging Neighbourhood Plan. In particular the Neighbourhood Plan Group required land surrounding the settlement to be assessed in detail to establish the sensitivity and capacity of peripheral areas to accommodate housing / tourism related development.
- 1.1.2 Reach Neighbourhood Plan area covers the same area as the Parish and is relatively small in extent. It includes an area of rising chalk escarpment to the south and open fen to the north. At its centre is the village of Reach, a fen-edge settlement, which sits on a protrusion of chalk escarpment jutting into the fen, between Swaffham Prior to the south and Burwell to the north.

## 1.2 Objectives

- 1.2.1 The key objective of this study is to provide a robust understanding of the character and qualities of the Neighbourhood Plan Area in order to make sound judgements as to the sensitivity and capacity of land to accommodate housing/employment development. This study also presents guidance on opportunities for landscape enhancement and green infrastructure which collectively help to shape a vision for the Parish.

## 1.3 Methodology and Approach

- 1.3.1 This assessment has been carried out in accordance with Guidelines on Landscape Character Assessment<sup>1</sup> and Guidelines in Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment<sup>2</sup> and recently published guidance on Landscape Sensitivity<sup>3</sup>. Reference has also been made to other recent sensitivity and capacity assessments which reflect best practice. The approach has included a client meeting and familiarisation site visit, desk study and further detailed site assessment during January 2020.

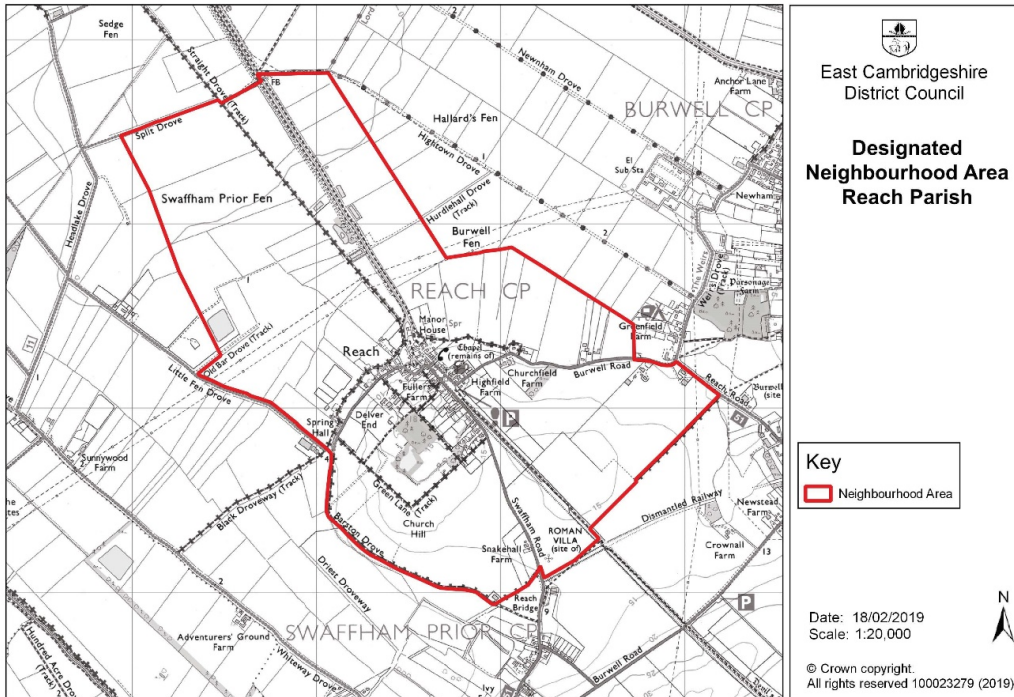
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<sup>1</sup> Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002) The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage and An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (2014) Natural England.

<sup>2</sup> Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013 (third edition).

<sup>3</sup> An approach to landscape sensitivity assessment – to inform spatial planning and land management, Natural England, June 2019





**Reach Neighbourhood Plan Area (Source: East Cambridgeshire District Council Website)**

- 1.3.2 This assessment is a landscape capacity-led approach which considers the settlement within Reach Parish holistically and within its landscape setting. The approach also adopts emerging thinking on ecosystem services (including the importance of peat in combating climate change) and the benefits which are afforded by the special qualities of the area, and opportunities to enhance and develop these further. Analysis is used to provide robust evidence to support judgements on the sensitivity of land and its capacity to accommodate housing development from a landscape/settlement perspective.
- 1.3.3 The appraisal reviews existing documentary evidence on the settlement and its landscape and considers the historic evolution, describes landscape setting, key views, gateways and landmarks as well as valued characteristics and spaces. Opportunities for environmental initiatives which seek to enhance local identity and settlement distinctiveness are highlighted where relevant.
- 1.3.4 The following definitions of terms are used in this study:

**Sensitivity** is defined as the ability of the landscape to accommodate a particular type of change (in this case housing or tourism related development) without adverse effect and is determined by consideration of local character and visual sensitivity.

**Value** is defined as the relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society. In this study, value has been assessed with reference to Guidelines on Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA 3<sup>rd</sup> edition).

**Capacity** of an area considers the extent and nature of development which may be accommodated and includes consideration of opportunities for enhancement or mitigation which may improve the degree of fit and increase capacity of the landscape to accommodate change.

- 1.3.5 Where land/sites have been assessed in terms of sensitivity and capacity it is from a landscape perspective only and no consideration has been given to matters such as access or land ownership. It is possible therefore that, land identified as suitable for development without significant adverse landscape effects, may subsequently be discounted for reasons other than landscape.

## 1.4 The Neighbourhood Plan

1.4.1 Under the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended), East Cambridgeshire confirmed the Neighbourhood Plan Area for Reach on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

1.4.2 The Reach Neighbourhood Plan Project Group was established on 16 January 2019. As part of the Group's evidence gathering, a residents' survey was undertaken in February 2020 which sought the views of the local community. 53% of the over 16 population of the village completed the survey, a very positive return rate for surveys of this kind. The following results are relevant to this study:

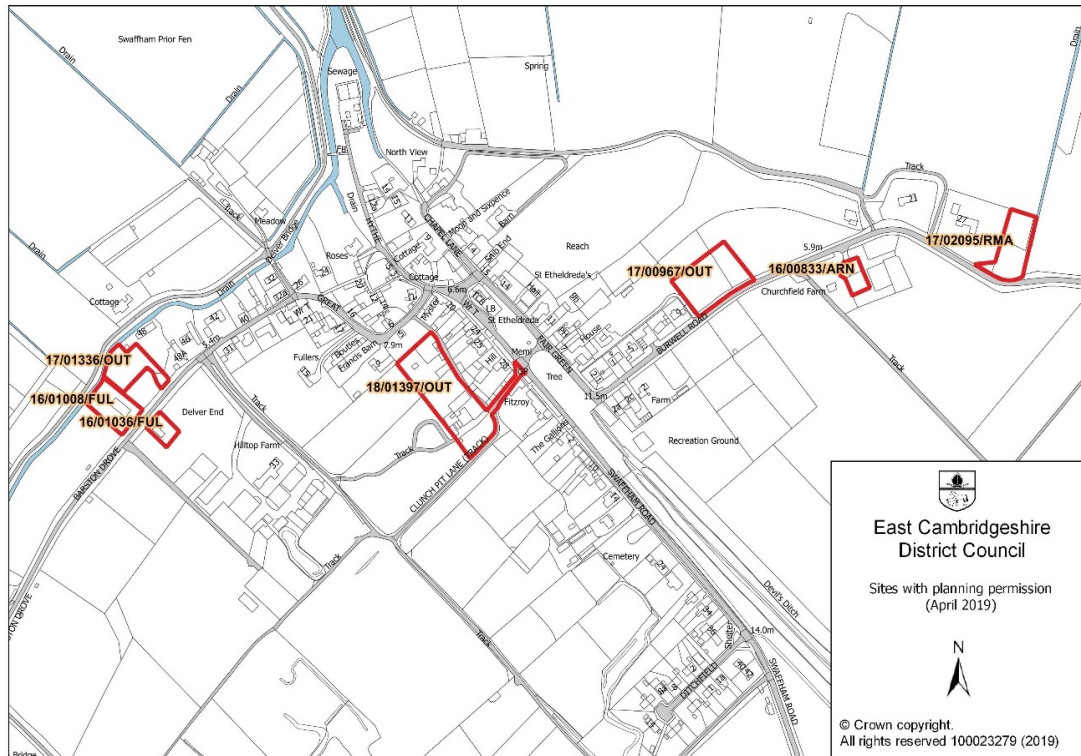
- 97% of respondents said that Reach was a good place to live. The network of footpaths/greenways/green space around the village and associated easy access to surrounding woodlands, orchard and open countryside (notably the Wicken Fen Vision lands), Reach Lode and the Devil's Dyke were most frequently mentioned as contributing to this high rating.
- 75% of respondents wished to see fewer than 10 houses built in the village over the duration of the Plan. 56% said that new development should be within a carefully expanded development and 85% said that all new development must demonstrate that it maintains or enhances wildlife habitats,
- 58% thought that maintenance of traditional building densities was very important and a further 22% thought that maintenance of such densities was quite important.
- 88% of respondents considered keeping a zone of separation between Reach and the neighbouring settlement of Burwell was very important and a further 8% thought it quite important. Similarly 81% felt that keeping a zone of separation between Reach and the neighbouring settlement of Swaffham Prior was very important and a further 14% felt it quite important.
- 82% of respondents considered the small size of the village and its relationship with the landscape very important.
- 96% of respondents thought the village green at the heart of the village very important.
- 90% of respondents thought that collectively the Devil's Dyke/Fair Green/Hythe and Reach Lode core were very important. 90% of respondents wanted the redundant plant work in the sewage works on the Hythe removed.
- 93% of respondents thought that ready access to open countryside was very important.
- 80% thought it very important to create safe access routes to Burwell and Swaffham Prior for pedestrians, cyclists and horse-riders.

- 99% of respondents considered the village's woodlands to be an important asset to the village and 75% expressed a willingness to be actively involved in further tree planting and other measures to enhance the natural environment.
- 91% of respondents thought that views approaching and leaving Reach were important. Gateways are considered in more detail in section 4.5 below.
- 59% of respondents wanted to promote Reach's attractions but there was also significant concern that such promotion might destroy the essence of what makes Reach attractive. A particular concern was that car-borne visitors may undermine the village's notable tranquility and add to existing on-street parking issues.
- A very small majority of respondents did not want the Neighbourhood Plan to make provision for employment in Reach.

## 1.5 Local Plan Context

- 1.5.1 East Cambridgeshire District Council (ECDC) has withdrawn the Local Plan 2019, following review. All references therefore revert to the Adopted Local Plan (2015). The Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA 2014) does not contain any potential sites within the Parish of Reach.
- 1.5.2 In terms of current and approved planning applications the following are of relevance to this study:

Application No	No of dwellings	Comments
17/01336/OUT	1	Erection of dwelling and associated detached garage. Water Hall Cottage, 48 Great Lane, Reach.
18/01397/OUT	2	Demolition of existing agricultural buildings, construction of two detached bungalows, associated parking and infrastructure. Site Southwest Of Hill Farm, Fair Green, Reach.
17/00967/OUT	3	Erection of 3 dwellings. Land opposite 20 Burwell Road, Reach.
16/00833/ARN	1	Change of use of agricultural building to a dwelling house. Churchfield Farm, Burwell Road, Reach.
17/02095/RMA	1	Reserved matters for replacement single-storey dwelling. 27 Burwell Road, Reach.



- 1.5.3 Development is typically small scale infill or replacement dwellings. The 2015 Local Plan proposes only infill development for Reach village with no new housing allocations on the periphery. It also proposes no new employment allocations. Following withdrawal of a revised draft Local Plan in 2019, ECDC has set the housing requirement for Reach to 2031 at nil. Nevertheless, the small-scale planning applications noted above can have a cumulative effect over time. In terms of employment/commercial development, it is possible the Parish will have applications for further solar farm development in addition to the community solar farm at Spring Hall Farm and whilst larger businesses are unlikely to seek to be located within Reach, due to limited accessibility, there is some existing accommodation suitable for smaller scale enterprises. Furthermore, tourism related development is also likely given the location of the village on the edge of the Wicken Fen Vision area, good cycle connections and its exceptional natural and cultural heritage. This assessment therefore considers the sensitivity of the landscape surrounding the village to these different types of development.

## 1.6 Green Infrastructure

- 1.6.1 The Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011) identified a number of important projects which are also supported by East Cambridgeshire Local Plan policy COM5.
- 1.6.2 Of most relevance to the Parish of Reach is the Wicken Fen Vision which includes the northern half of Reach Parish. This is discussed in more detail in section 3.1 below.

## 2: The Evolution of Reach Parish

### 2.1 Early Origins and Evolution

- 2.1.1 The Parish of Reach sits at the junction between the chalk hills/scarp and fen at the tip of a small peninsula that juts out into the flat agricultural landscape. Almost one third of the Reach Neighbourhood Plan area is underlain by peat soil which occurs on the fens in the north at around or below sea level. In contrast the chalk gently rises behind the village to c.15m AOD. Under the chalk is gault clay and where the chalk and clay meet at the surface, natural springs occur, which have influenced early settlement along the chalk/fen edge.
- 2.1.2 Within the Parish there is evidence of Roman settlement in the form of a Roman villa site adjacent to Swaffham Road on approach to the village. Reach Lode (a man-made waterway across the Fen connecting the chalk scarp with the River Cam) is also considered to date from this period. It is thought to be the oldest of the lodes built in the area. At its terminus, at the tip of the chalk peninsula, a port was established in a area known as The Hythe. There is growing evidence to suggest that this area is artificial, comprising a potentially significant area of under-recognised archaeology at the centre of the Parish. Other patterns in the landscape that may reflect Roman activity are the small field boundaries on the fen edge, many containing Roman artefacts.
- 2.1.3 During the Anglo-Saxon Period the Parish of Reach was significantly affected by the construction of the Devil's Dyke. This was a linear earthen bank and deep ditch which is thought to have been constructed for territorial demarcation or defence purposes, although the threat which precipitated its construction is a matter of conjecture. The dyke crossed three important Roman roads, including the ancient Icknield Way, controlling trade and movement in and out of the area and made maximum use of higher ground. Devil's Dyke is over c.11 km long and is the largest of a series of ancient Cambridgeshire dykes, running in an almost straight line from Woodditton to Reach. In some places the bank measures 9 metres high and 36.5 metres across reflecting its substantial scale and endeavor. Significantly the dyke aligns with the port and terminus of Reach Lode and divides the southern part of the present day Parish into two halves.
- 2.1.4 Reach's history and layout has also been strongly influenced by administrative boundaries. During the Anglo-Saxon period the settlements of Swaffham Prior and Burwell, to the southwest and northeast respectively, began to establish. Their respective Parish boundaries extended as far as Devils Dyke which formed a natural boundary. As a result the southern half of present day Reach Parish fell within Swaffham Prior and the northern half within Burwell Parish. Importantly Reach was not defined as an ecclesiastical Parish of its own during this period.
- 2.1.5 The division of the Parish in two halves continued in medieval times with two separate hamlets establishing either side of the Dyke known as East and West Reach and associated with Swaffham Prior and Burwell Parishes respectively. Both parishes

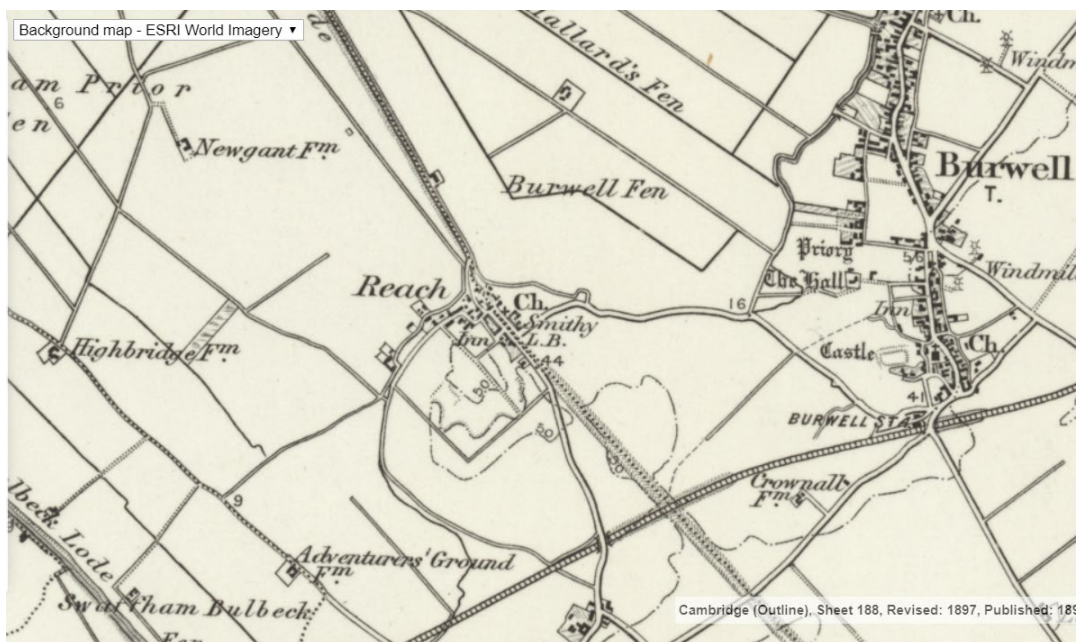
relied on Reach Lode for the export of surplus goods and the import of materials such as hard building stone, and later coal and timber. Situated at the confluence of Devil's Dyke and Reach Lode, the settlement of Reach was the centre of considerable trade associated with its inland port on The Hythe. The Hythe is thought to have consisted of an area dissected by docks, to provide a greater water frontage as a means of handling a greater number of vessels at once. A mat of osiers was laid down at the head of Reach Lode, and rammed chalk was then used to construct a surface for loading and unloading. Over time, Reach Lode formed part of a wider network of lodes connecting the fen edge settlements with the River Cam in the north. Other lodes in the vicinity include Swaffham Bulbeck Lode to the south and Burwell Lode to the north.

- 2.1.6 In terms of local resources Reach had access to the fen landscape which provided sedge, and peat as well as summer grazing and the common grazing on the chalk used for the grazing of sheep. Another key local commodity was clunch – a chalky building material which was quarried from the chalk hills to the south of the village. The remnants of former clunch pits are still discernible today as notable changes in level and vertical chalk cliffs. An annual fair was held in Reach in 1201, and was granted a charter to hold an annual fair at Rogationtide by King John. Such was the success of Reach Fair that it became one of the most important in Eastern England and is still held each year on Fair Green on the May Bank Holiday.
- 2.1.7 In the Medieval Period access to Reach from Swaffham Prior and Burwell is thought to have been via a fen edge road which is still evident today and called Barston Drove and is traceable back to 1319. This road provided the main axis for the establishment of the village and although the terminus of the Dyke was flattened to form the village green (Fair Green) during the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Enclosure Award of 1800 indicates little built form extended to surround the green until much later (18<sup>th</sup> century). In the north of the village, the open fields close to the route of Barston Drove have revealed traces of the former settlement of East Reach, with the Chapel of St John located on the higher land between the former village (now open fields) and Fair Green. A ruined arch of the chapel remains as a prominent feature in the grounds of the current church of St Etheldreda. In terms of West Reach, Barston Drove continued as Little Lane forming the main road into the settlement as far as Drying Green. Growth of the village resulted in the alteration of the original back lane and tofts to become the main road (Great Lane) into the village, with Little Lane becoming less important.
- 2.1.8 The draining of the fen landscape since the 17<sup>th</sup> century had a dramatic effect on all the fen edge settlements and parishes. A series of rectilinear ditches ("cuts") and dykes were constructed to reclaim the rich peat soil for farmland. Different phases of reclamation can be discerned in the fen surrounding Reach. However, it was not until the early 1960s that wholesale drainage of the fen edge was achieved when Cambridge Water began abstracting the chalk aquifer in earnest. Drainage over the last four centuries has caused shrinking of the peat and soil erosion, as a result of the peat topsoil drying out, and this has resulted in a lowering of ground levels such that Reach Lode now sits elevated above the fen landscape by up to 3 metres in some locations. Similarly, before any attempt at drainage, the fen was intersected by innumerable small streams whose general trend was north-easterly. Some of these old watercourses laid down in their beds a certain amount of silt, and as the peat fen has



shrunk with drying and wind erosion, occasionally the old river courses can be picked out as roddons - raised, lighter-coloured areas of soil meandering across the fields.

- 2.1.9 In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Reach village church, St Etheldreda's, was constructed (1860) on the site of the former chapel of St John, and in 1884 the railway between Cambridge and Mildenhall was constructed to the south of the village. It was also in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that coprolite mining developed in Cambridgeshire. Notable areas of this natural fertilizer were found within Reach Parish, and were open mined by large numbers of labourers - extraction areas remaining evident on aerial photographs. The lack of a railway station or halt at Reach had a profound effect on the settlement, severing it from its hinterland. As activity at the port decreased and its maritime importance declined, Reach became an agricultural community. The line closed in 1964.
- 2.1.10 In 1961 Reach became a separate civil parish, East Reach and West Reach forming a single settlement. However it is notable that between 1880's and 1950's virtually no new housing was built. It was not until 1951 that cul-de-sac housing at Ditchfield was built and in 1968 the sewage works for the village was constructed on part of The Hythe nearest to the village.
- 2.1.11 The sequence of maps below illustrates how settlement has evolved over the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Importantly the street plan, despite the distortion of Great Lane (noted above), is still effectively that of the mediaeval village, and the network of lanes and paths crossing Church Hill are also of antiquity. Similarly, the roads and paths to the east of where the Dyke stood are old. The present Burwell Road, called on the Enclosure Map Scotred Lane, which runs nearly straight from the Green to join up with the old fen-edge road, may have originated as a result of the levelling of the Dyke.



Map 1: Extract from 1898 map. (source – Historic Maps Scotland)

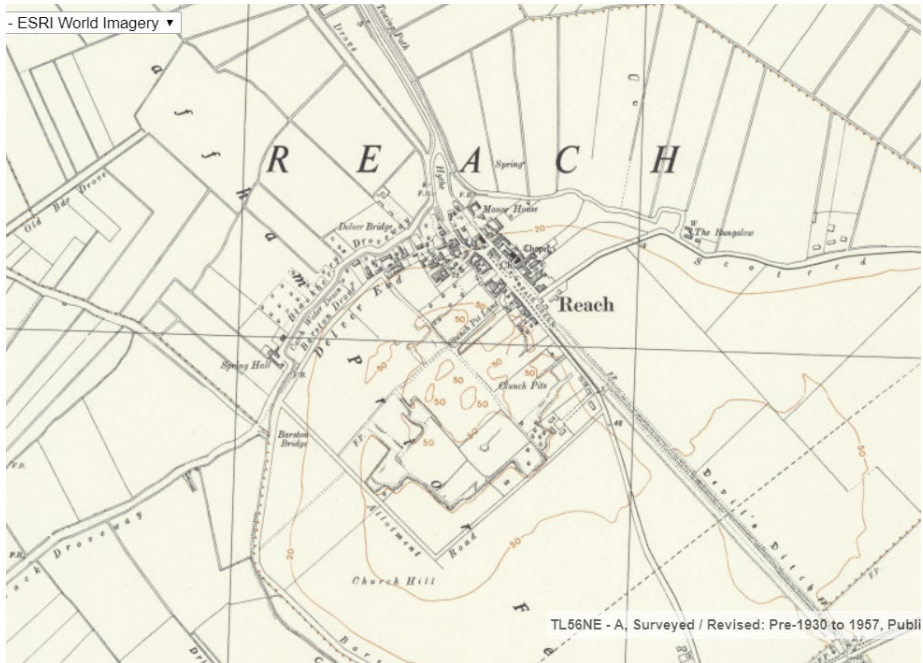


2.1.12 In the above map the settlement at Reach is defined by the Devils Dyke and Lode, with the largest area of settlement west of both of these features. The smithy, Church of Ethelreda and inn are all noted, with the settlement mainly located and aligned either side of Devils Dyke and along Barston Drove. The linear and geometric drainage system of the fenland contrasts with the organic routes along the fen edge and through the settlements. The Cambridge and Mildenhall railway line cuts across the landscape as does the Devil's Dyke to the south east of the village.



**Map 2: Extract from 1902 map. (source – Historic Maps Scotland)**

2.1.13 In this map the route of Devils Dyke, through the centre of the village and terminating at the Hythe, is clearly defined and the large open space of Fair Green, reflects its terminus. Settlement has extended along Barston Drove from The Hythe. Catchwater drain runs along the edge of the fens and chalk peninsula, and there is evidence of small orchards at the edge of the settlement and small enclosures/tofts behind dwellings. The clunch pits on Church Hill to the south west of the settlement are clearly evident.



**Map 3: Extract from 1959 map. (source – Historic Maps Scotland)**

2.1.14 In this map the settlement has changed little, with its distinctive features of the lode, Dyke and Fair Green still dominating. The linear fen drainage system also defines the edge of the chalk.

## 3: Landscape Character

### 3.1 Existing Character Assessments

3.1.1 The Parish of Reach is included within several landscape character assessments and at a range of scales including National Character Areas (NCA's)<sup>4</sup>, Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines<sup>5</sup> and the East of England Typology<sup>6</sup>. All three assessments classify the Parish into two landscapes, namely the fen and chalk hills. These two landscapes have very different landscape characteristics which are clearly summarised in the NCA. Relevant characteristics have been set out below and supplemented with additional information from site assessment:

3.1.2 Key characteristics of NCA 87 East Anglian Chalk include:

- Distinctive chalk ridge/scarp of open, smooth, rolling hills.
- Along the fen edge the chalk forms higher ground with expansive views to the north.
- Large regular fields enclosed by low hawthorn hedges, with few trees, straight roads and expansive views to the north.
- Chalk springs and streams along the foot of the chalk ridge with biodiversity and heritage interest.
- Large-scale cereal production dominates the predominantly agricultural landscape and within and around Reach there are some areas of pony paddock and stables.
- Traversed by linear historic features.
- Remnant chalk grassland along road verges, ancient linear dykes and disused railway lines, chalk pits supporting chalkland flora and vestigial populations of invertebrates.
- Hill top woodlands emphasise topography.
- Vernacular includes brick and 'clunch' (building chalk) under thatched and clay tile roofs, with some earlier survival of timber frame and areas of former chalk pits.

3.1.3 Key characteristics of NCA 46 The Fens include:

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making/national-character-area-profiles>

<sup>5</sup> Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines, A Manual for Management and Change in the Rural Landscape, Cambridgeshire County Council, 1991

<sup>6</sup> <http://landscape-east.org.uk/east-england-landscape-typology>

- Large-scale, flat, open landscape with extensive vistas to level horizons.
- Level, open topography shapes the impression of huge skies which convey a strong sense of place, tranquility and inspiration.
- Land boundary of the Fens is typically drawn along a series of catchwater drains, dykes, canalised rivers and lodes. These historically formed the early transport opportunities across the fens, commencing after the Roman conquest of Britain but increasingly in the late Saxon and medieval periods.
- Drains and ditches form important ecological network for invertebrates, fish and macrophytes.
- True fen mainly occurs at remnant conservation sites, such as Wicken Fen – one of the richest wildlife sites in the UK.
- Woodland cover is sparse, isolated field trees and shelterbelts of poplar, willow and occasionally leylandii hedges around farmsteads.
- Open fields, bounded by a network of drains and the distinctive hierarchy of rivers (some embanked), have a strong influence on the geometric/rectilinear landscape pattern.

### ***Local Landscape Character***

- 3.1.4 At a local level the East of England typology defines the boundary between the chalk and fen landscape (refer to Figure 1). Furthermore, in its description of the chalk and fen landscape types, it highlights that the chalk landscapes contain a low density of settlement which is rural in character comprising discrete historic villages and a scattering of large farms. In terms of the fen landscape, it notes that they are sparsely populated and have a horizontal and geometric character reinforced by straight roads, ditches and linear lines of vegetation. The Fens are described as a quiet, remote landscape where the sky plays a particularly dominant role in creating mood and interest.
- 3.1.5 The fen landscapes within Reach Parish is visually influenced by the double line of pylons which extend from Burwell substation. These elements have an urbanising influence on an otherwise remote and increasingly natural landscape, particularly the landscape north of Reach Lode where there are views of both pylons and the substation together.
- 3.1.6 Of particular relevance to the Fen landscape is the implementation of the Wicken Fen Vision Area, a 100 year Plan which includes the north western half of Reach Parish including Tubney Fen and Hurdle Fen (refer to Figure 1). Approximately two thirds of the Parish falls into the Vision area. The Vision seeks to create a mosaic of habitats and natural processes through careful management of water and grazing in order to protect, extend and built resilience of the existing National Nature reserve at Wicken Fen and to enable access to natural greenspace for the growing population in the Cambridgeshire area.

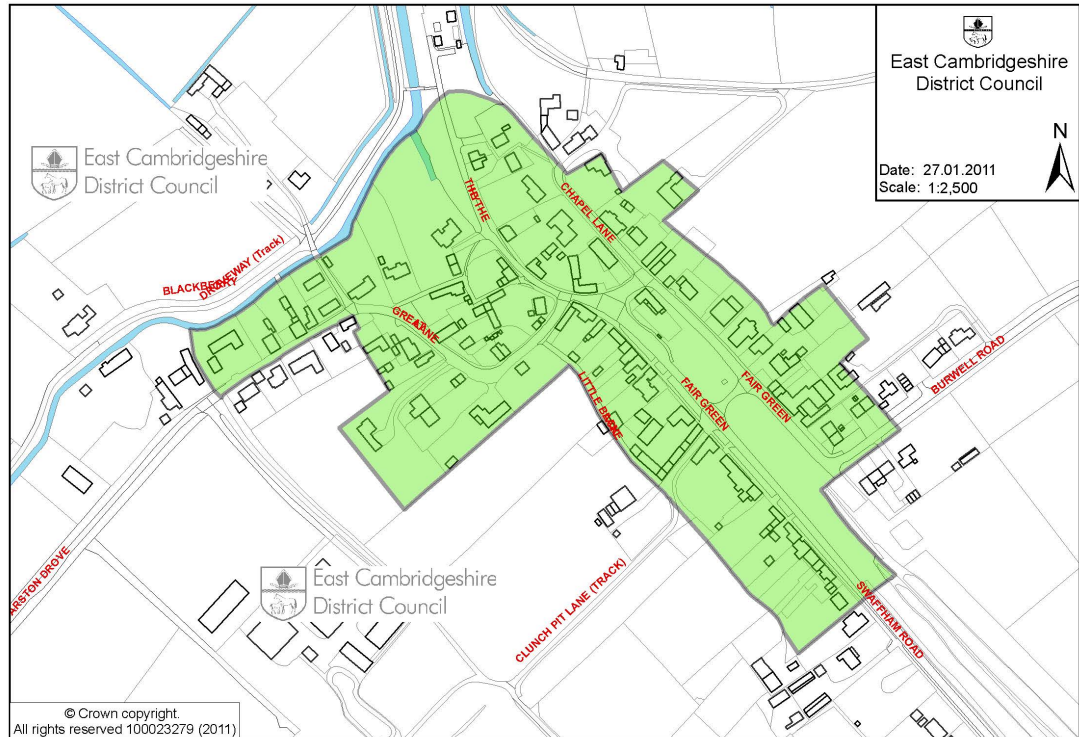
- 3.1.7 The Wicken Fen Vision seeks to restore a mosaic of wet grassland areas and open water in areas which sit below sea level, while those slightly higher areas on the fen edge offer opportunities for the development of a matrix of seasonally wet grassland, agriculture, orchards and woodland. In addition to the conservation and recreation benefits, the associated de-intensification of agriculture will significantly reduce carbon loss from the peat soils of the low-lying areas and has the potential to make an important contribution to UK carbon reduction targets. A third of all soils in the Parish of Reach are peat based and are a valued resource in storing carbon and combating climate change .
- 3.1.8 A number of parcels of land within Reach Parish have already been purchased by the Natural Trust for the purposes of implementing the Vision and these are illustrated on Figure 1. In addition the National Trust has created a main recreation route for walkers, cyclists and horse riders, through the Vision landscape connecting Anglesey Abbey with the Wicken Fen Reserve. Part of this route passes through the northern part of Reach Parish.
- 3.1.9 The Vision has been recognised as a key initiative in the Green Infrastructure Strategy for Cambridgeshire. The implementation of this strategy is supported by East Cambridgeshire Local Plan policy COM5. Clearly the location of Reach on the edge of the Vision area means it is well placed to act as a gateway to the fen landscape and has the potential to contribute to the goals and implementation of the Vision as well as the GI strategy for Cambridgeshire.

## 3.2 Cultural and Natural Assets

- 3.2.1 Reach Conservation Area covers the majority of the village and is illustrated below and on Figure 2. Currently there is no Conservation Area Appraisal.
- 3.2.2 It is notable that The Hythe itself, at the head of Reach Lode where the Catchwater drain joins the lode, does not form part of the existing Conservation Area. The report presenting the case for recognising and preserving The Hythe as a site of heritage and archaeological importance<sup>7</sup> states *'this situation appears to have arisen because it was judged that a peninsula of Chalk cleared of standing archaeology and occupied by a sewage work probably had little of interest left to protect.'*

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.wildreach.co.uk/wildlife-resources/the-hythe/>



3.2.3 Devil's Dyke is listed as a Scheduled Ancient Monument, while the chalk grasslands which it contains is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

### 3.3 Areas of Open Space

3.3.1 The Local Plan does not define any Areas of Open Space within the Parish. However, this assessment has identified a number of areas of open space within and in close proximity to Reach village which are well used by the local community. They are listed below and illustrated on Figure 3.

1. Fair Green
2. Drying Ground or Green
3. The Hythe
4. Reach Pocket Park
5. 24 Acres
6. Reach Plantation
7. Recreation ground
8. Reach Wood

3.3.2 Reach Pocket Park has a pond with willows and damp grassland while the 24 Acres is part of the Wicken Fen Vision and comprises a:

- Community Orchard
- Cricket Pitch
- Manège
- Community Woodland

- 3.3.3 In 1998 Reach Plantation was planted off Burwell Road, a community woodland and joint enterprise with the Forestry Commission and Cambridgeshire County Council, The woodland comprises a plantation of beech, maple and hazel.
- 3.3.4 In 1994 Reach Wood, a new woodland of 4.6 ha was planted on Church Hill, in the area of the former clunch pits. It comprises beech as the dominate species and contains various public footpaths that link into the wider public rights of way network. To the south west the ground falls away to form a steep chalk cliff with regenerating ash and thorn scrub. Very good views of the surrounding fens are afforded from several vantage points.
- 3.3.5 In 2013 a community orchard was planted on the 24 Acres. It contains 150 fruit trees, mainly local varieties. Later the same year, a community woodland was planted on 2.1 ha of adjacent land. It contains a mix of 25 species appropriate to calcareous soils of lowland England and in keeping with the principles of the Forestry Commission's Bulletin 112 'Creating New Native Woodlands'. Oak, lime and beech are intended to be the dominant species. Paths through the wood lead to Reach Lode and Wicken Fen
- 3.3.6 NPPF (2019) Section 8 (paragraphs 99 and 100) enables local communities, through the development of the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans, to identify green areas for special protection that are particularly important to them.
- 3.3.7 Local Green Space (LGS) designation must include land which is locally special offering unique benefits to the local community. It may not be appropriate for some areas or open space to be designated. The NPPF sets out the criteria for designating LGS Sites which can include areas which are:
- a. *in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;*
  - b. *demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquility or richness of its wildlife; and*
  - c. *local in character and is not an extensive tract of land'.*
- 3.3.8 Areas of Local Green Space within the Parish have been assessed in relation to these criteria (refer to section 4.6 below).

### **3.4 Community Engagement in Landscape and Environment**

- 3.4.1 Reach is a community actively engaged in its landscape and surroundings. Local environmental projects/initiatives include:
- Community woodland as part of the Wicken Fen Vision
  - Wild Tracks website promoting local walks and interpretation of the natural and cultural history of the area
  - Annual Fair



- Farm shop at Snakehall Farm selling local produce
- Local artisans who are inspired by the local environment and who capture the local sense of place e.g. village tea towel design and local photography



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## 4: Detailed Analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 This section builds on previous sections of this report and seeks to establish more detailed baseline data on settlement character and landscape context.
- 4.1.2 Consideration is given to identifying key landmarks and key views in and out of the settlement as well as gateways. It has also considered areas suitable for Local Green Space. The analysis of the Parish is illustrated on Figure 3.

### 4.2 Topography

- 4.2.1 The topography of the Parish is low lying, the highest areas reaching 15m AOD. The fenland landscape is flat or very gently sloping to the north while the chalk comprises gently rising slopes with the highest point located at Church Hill to the south of the village. These changes in topography are illustrated in Figure 3.
- 4.2.2 In general the settlement sits between the 5m and 15m contours to the north of Church Hill. Exceptions occur around The Hythe where more recent housing occurs on land below the 5m contour and on more elevated land off Swaffham Road at Ditchfield. In terms of the latter it is the only part of the village which is visible when approaching along Swaffham Road.

### 4.3 Built Landmarks and Landscape Features

- 4.3.1 Key built landmarks which contribute to sense of place and orientation have been identified and are illustrated on Figure 3. They include the following:
- a) Chapel Arch remains
  - b) Pub
  - c) War Memorial
  - d) Village sign
  - e) White Roses
- 4.3.2 A number of landscape features have also been identified as important elements contributing to local sense of place. These include:
- f) Devils Dyke
  - g) Established lime trees along Burwell Road<sup>8</sup>
  - h) Catchwater Drain
  - i) Chalk pits
  - j) Fair Green

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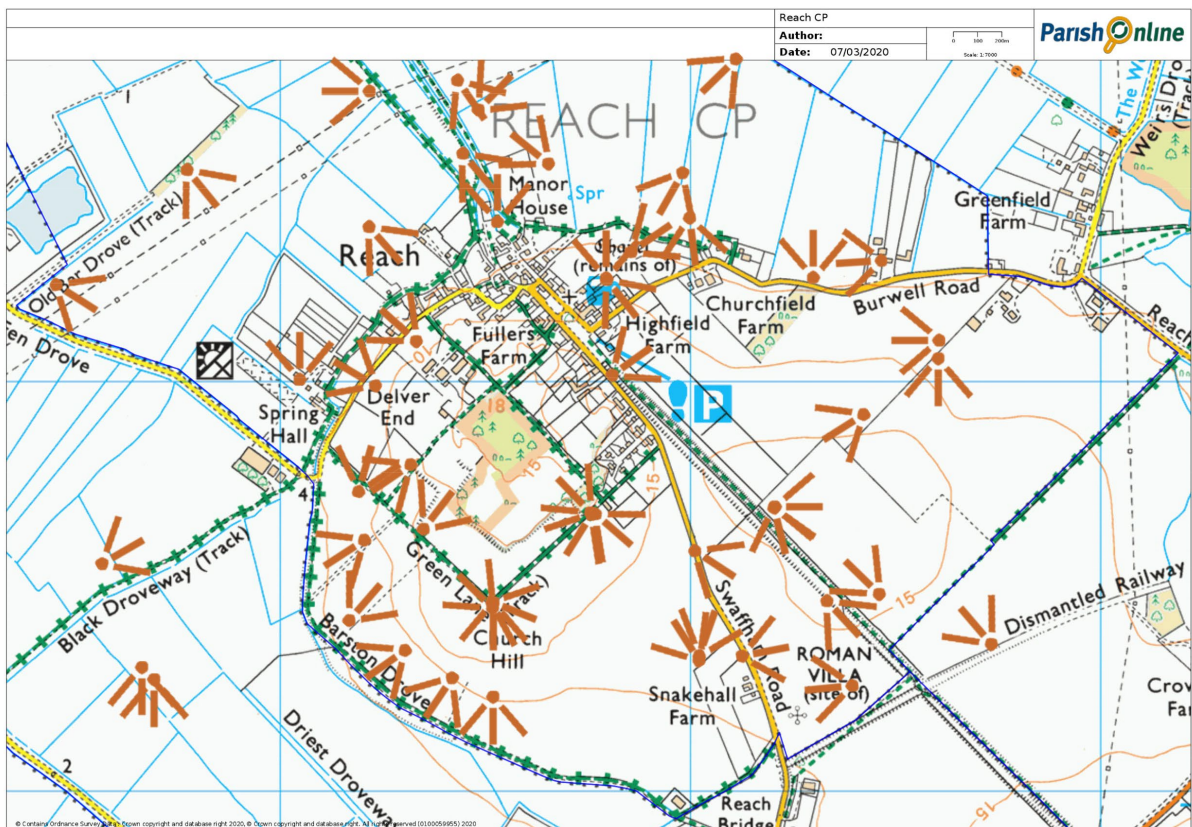
<sup>8</sup> New lime tree planting has also taken place along all approach roads into the village (including planting to commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee)

4.3.3 These built and natural landmark features are important as they provide orientation and reinforce sense of identity.

#### 4.4 Important Views

4.4.1 Views are critical in defining and reinforcing sense of place and local distinctiveness, connecting places where people live with the wider environment, providing opportunities to appreciate special qualities and connecting to local landmarks which can aid orientation. They also help express the relationship between settlement and wider landscape setting and a sense of arrival and gateways.

4.4.2 Reach Parish Community identified a number of important and locally valued views as a part of their residents' survey. These views have been plotted on the map below and illustrate a wide range of views into and out of the settlement.



4.4.3 77% of respondents to the survey thought views into and out of the village were very important with only 5% regarding views as not important. Views from the Wicken Vision land, Devil's Dyke and from higher ground around Church Hill were frequently identified. Many respondents welcomed the openness of the landscape around Reach and the general absence of visually intrusive development in the fens surrounding the village. A number of respondents were keen to ensure that any development on the fen edge was sensitively managed given its potential for visual

intrusion. There was a frequently expressed opinion that all views should be protected and the landscape around the village should be considered as a whole.

## 4.5 Gateways

4.5.1 The gateways into Reach can be defined as an 'initial gateway' where there are views to development and or development occurs on one side of the road, and the 'main gateway' where development occurs on both sides of the road and/or a distinctive space is arrived at.

4.5.2 There are three main approach routes into Reach. The first is from the fen landscape along Little Fen Drove, the second from Swaffham Prior along Swaffham Road and the third from Burwell along Burwell Road. The latter two are the main roads used to access the village. It is notable that along all three approach roads the presence of individual farms and farm buildings is a characteristic before reaching the village proper and that the presence of roadside lime trees (as noted above) also contributes to the sense of arrival.

### Little Fen Drove

4.5.3 The village of Reach is not visible when approaching along this route. The rising land of the chalk ridge is apparent but the settlement is located to the right and screened from view by vegetation along the margin of the fen and chalk landscapes and along the Catchwater Drain. Even where the road bends sharply to the left the village is still not apparent. The gateway is reached where development becomes evident with Hilltop Farm on the hillside and cottages along the lane.

### Swaffham Road

4.5.4 On this approach the bridge over the disused railway marks the edge of the Parish and the rural buildings and farm shop associated with Snakehall Farm has a strongly rural character. Beyond this there are glimpsed views towards houses at Ditchfield. The initial gateway is reached at these houses and where the embankment of the Devil's Dyke curtails and funnels views, closing the landscape in towards the village in contrast to the wider open landscape of the chalk to the east and south. The main point of arrival is reached at the cemetery where views start to open out towards the central village green.

### Burwell Road

4.5.5 The approach to Reach along this route is rural with filtered views northwards across the fens and south to gently rising farmland. Although there are a number of individual properties and farms along this route they are generally set back behind hedges and are not visually prominent. As a result a sense of arrival is not reached until properties start on the northside of the road (the gateway is therefore likely to migrate northeast as new housing is built on site 17/00967/OUT). The main point of arrival is reached where development occurs on both sides of the road and where views start to open out towards the central village green.

## 4.6 Important Open Space

4.6.1 The analysis below considers opportunities for the designation of additional areas of local green space which fit the criteria as set out in paragraph 3.5.3 above. These areas are illustrated on Figure 3 and all present a good case for designation against the formal criteria.

Ref (Figure 3)	Open Space	Comments
1	Fair Green	Flattened terminus of Devil's Dyke. Hosts village Fair every year. Local play equipment and an important open space in the centre of the village.
2	Drying Ground or Green	Possible site of lost chapel of St Etheldreda. Site has high archaeological potential and is unexcavated. Forms a setting to the oldest property in Reach – White Roses (15 <sup>th</sup> century) and is an important area of open space within the village.
3	Reach Hythe	First created in Roman Period and site of Reach's trading port. Site has high archaeological potential. At Delph or Delver End there were a series of basins or docks: at least four are still discernible, though only that between the Hythe and White Roses still has water in it permanently. The Hythe itself, like many of the docks, is an early mediaeval structure. Accessible to the public in part.
4	Church Hill Clunch Pits	Clunch from these pits provided building material for the building of the Lady Chapel at Ely Cathedral. Some alteration to the pits including landfill. Potentially this area is as historically important as Barnack, Peterborough in terms of providing building material for historically significant buildings in East Anglia. Publicly accessible via public rights of way and associated with community woodland (see 9 below).
5	Reach Plantation	Open Access Land. Joint enterprise between Forestry Commission and Cambridgeshire County Council. Forms part of Cambridgeshire County Council's County Farms Estate. Community woodland – management includes a new woodland ride and coppicing to improve structure and biodiversity. Permissive paths access the area.

6	Reach Pocket Park	Part of Cambridgeshire County Council's County Farm Estates. Woodland and unimproved pasture 0.82 ha on the fen to the north of the village adjacent to Reach Lode. Includes areas of open water and willows. Managed by grazing leased to local farmers. Accessible by footpaths. The NT also own the Reach Lode South West Pit on the edge of the Park which is valued for recreation and conservation.
7	24 Acres	Owned by National Trust. Half is leased to Reach Parish Council for community orchard, cricket pitch, menage and woodland. Open access to the community. Permissive access to Reach Lode and Wicken Fen.
8	Recreation Ground	Play area and football pitch adjacent to the village.
9	Reach Wood and Meadow	Owned by the Woodland Trust. Access by footpaths.

## 4.7 Rural Lanes and Open Gaps

- 4.7.1 An important characteristic of Reach village is its perceived isolation which is in part due to its location on a peninsula jutting into the wider fen to the north but also due to the narrow, rural winding lanes which lead to it from Burwell and Swaffham Prior as well as the route to the northwest which connects with the fen. These rural lanes are an important part of the character of the Parish.
- 4.7.2 The layout and geometry of the lanes reflects the substantial influence of Devils Dyke as a major earthwork and the division of the Parish and settlement between the Parishes of Swaffham Prior and Burwell. The lanes are flanked by soft grass verges and hedgerows (blackthorn and hawthorn) and occasional hedgerow trees. Footpaths along the lanes only occur within the village and often on one side only. Curtilage treatment onto the lanes is frequently hedgerow on the outer parts of the village becoming low brick walls within the centre of the village. Throughout the village the lanes remain narrow, sinuous and without kerbs, often associated with narrow strips of grass. In a number of places dwellings sit hard up against the lane or narrow grass verge. These characteristics give the street scene a strongly rural character despite being within the village.
- 4.7.3 Today the lanes between Swaffham Prior and Burwell via Reach form part of Sustrans Cycle Route 51 but the road is narrow and twisting and, as the residents' survey shows, villagers do not consider the routes to neighbouring villages as safe.
- 4.7.4 Reach lies in relatively close proximity to Burwell and Swaffham Prior and in recent years new development has occurred along the rural lanes that connect between these settlements and Reach. However, as noted above, the rural character of these lanes

contributes to perceptions of Reach being an isolated village. Furthermore, the residents' survey reveals that villagers view maintaining the zones of separation as very important. These lanes and the open gaps that remain between dwellings are therefore highly sensitive to ad hoc and incremental development which may undermine these qualities. The areas where open gaps are important in retaining sense of separation and isolation are illustrated on Figure 3. Incremental development which substantially reduces these gaps, blocks important views to the surrounding landscape or intensifies urban character should be avoided.

## 5: Assessment of Local Landscape Areas

### 5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 This section of the report considers the landscape immediately adjacent to the settlement in detail and especially its sensitivity and capacity to accommodate development. Four Local Landscape Areas are defined on Figure 4 and reflect variations in landscape setting/character and village character.
- 5.1.2 Each area is described in terms of character and context followed by an evaluation of sensitivity and capacity to accommodate development in the context of existing settlement and its setting. The assessment draws on all baseline data set out in this report.
- 5.1.3 Overall, this assessment has revealed that no areas surrounding the village can accommodate large scale development without adverse effects. Nevertheless, areas 2 and 3 have greatest capacity to accommodate small scale housing or tourism related development. Where it is concluded that areas have some capacity for development it should not be assumed that these areas are free of sensitivity. The detailed assessment for each area, contained in the tables below, sets out the sensitivities relating to each area and highlights opportunities for mitigation and wider landscape enhancement. In this way consideration is given to the delivery of positive environmental gain in accordance with the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan<sup>9</sup>, which states the clear objective to '*embed an environmental net gain principle for development, including housing and infrastructure*'. In particular the approach adopted in this assessment avoids the consideration of individual sites in isolation but looks at a broader context within which development can deliver positive change of benefit to the wider Parish and local community and at a landscape scale.

### 5.2 Local Landscape Areas Sensitivity Assessment Table

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<sup>9</sup> A Green Future – Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment, May 2019

### Local Character Area 1: North of Fair Green and Burwell Road

<b>Relevant Planning Sites</b>	17/00967/Out, 17/02095/RMA
<b>Physical Character</b>	Northern edge of settlement forming the interface between the chalk scarp and fen landscape and sitting between the 5 and 10m contours. Medium scale arable fields defined by hedgerows lie adjacent to settlement edge.
<b>Existing Settlement Edge</b>	Fringes of settlement defined by vegetated rear gardens and stone/brick walls. Buildings appear organic in form and layout arranged in different angles and with differing roof heights. Built form appears to nestle into the rising landform and gentle undulations. More modern housing at The Hythe appears large in scale in comparison. The line of mature lime trees along the Burwell Road make an important contribution to the edge of the settlement and approach to the village. The arch ruin of St John's Chapel sits on the edge of the settlement and is visible from surrounding farmland and track at the foot of the chalk.
<b>Views and Visibility</b>	The rising slopes of the chalk afford views across the open fen landscape to the north. The old drove route (Barston Drove), which connected to Burwell along the interface between the fen and the chalk, also affords views back to the village, reinforcing perceptions that the village sits on the lower slopes of the chalk above the fen landscape. The ruined arch of the chapel is a local landmark.
<b>Designation/Condition</b>	<p>The majority of built form falls within the Conservation Area and the Conservation Area forms the edge of the settlement. As a result the historic fabric of the village remains strongly connected to its landscape setting. Historic mapping illustrates that the patterns and routes within the wider setting also remain remarkably unchanged and in good condition. There is evidence that the original settlement of East Reach extended into the field north of the ruined chapel and considerable archaeological fragments have been thrown up by ploughing over the years.</p> <p>The Hythe area is historically significant and retains high archaeological potential despite the effects of the former sewage works and associated structures/fencing/signage.</p>
<b>Perceptual Qualities</b>	The open expansiveness of the fenland landscape reinforces the relatively isolated/remote context of Reach village. The pattern of routes, enclosures and high concentration of historic buildings and their positions in relation to local topography give this area a tangible time depth.

<b>Function</b>	The fenland part of this area falls within the Wicken Fen vision area and contains the Reach community woodland, orchard, manège and cricket pitch. Burwell Road forms one of the main approach roads to the village. This area therefore plays a role in defining the approach and gateway to the settlement, as well as an important historic setting to the village.
<b>Sensitivity/Capacity</b>	This area is sensitive to development within the wider fen landscape where it may undermine rural qualities or open expansiveness. It is also sensitive to development behind the existing built edge on the chalk, which may interrupt the strong visual, physical and historical connections between the edge of the village and its wider fenland setting. For these reasons development should be avoided in the vicinity of The Hythe and on the slopes leading to the rear of the village and Conservation Area. There is also very limited capacity to accommodate further development on the north side of Burwell Road as this is likely to extend the gateway of the village to the northeast, alter perceptions of village form and compact character and would extend development onto lower land closer to the fen. It would also be visually prominent from key community assets. Overall this area is considered to be highly sensitive to development.
<b>Environmental Opportunities</b>	There are opportunities to improve footpath links between the community woodland, orchard manège and cricket pitch and heart of the village. A route linking the two via the Chapel Ruin/village hall would be desirable. There are substantial opportunities to undertake research of The Hythe area and restoration works to clear scrub which is colonising some of the water channels. Opportunities should be sought to develop a vision for this area in association with Anglian Water, involving the decommissioning of the former sewage works, restoration of the landscape and inclusion of the area within the Conservation Area. The area has considerable scope for public open space and improved interpretation, enhancing understanding of the fenland, Reach Lode, the village and Devils Dyke.



## Local Character Areas 2: South of Burwell Road

<b>Relevant Planning Sites</b>	16/00833/ARN
<b>Physical Character</b>	Eastern fringes of village on the chalk between c.6 and 12m contours. Gently rising land to the south and rural approach to the village from Burwell. Land use comprises small scale paddocks defined by post and rail fencing and hedgerows and larger scale arable beyond.
<b>Existing Settlement Edge</b>	Farm buildings on the edge of settlement including Churchfield Farm and Highfield Farm - these tend to be set back from Burwell Road behind mature hedgerow.
<b>Views and Visibility</b>	This area is visible from gaps in hedgerows along Burwell Road, the recreation area and from the Devil's Dyke public right of way which affords elevated views into the rear of properties and Highfield Farm on the edge of the settlement.
<b>Designation/Condition</b>	This area does not lie within the village Conservation Area but does lie adjacent to the Devil's Dyke scheduled monument. The field boundaries are well defined by mature hedgerows.
<b>Perceptual Qualities</b>	Rural farmland on the edge of the village, the smaller scale paddocks, and rear property vegetation create a soft edge to built form. The more recent housing along Burwell Road (whilst in Area 1) has a uniformity to it and lacks the distinctive qualities of other parts of the village.
<b>Function</b>	This area performs a number of functions including public open space/recreation ground, setting to the Devil's Dyke scheduled monument and makes an important contribution to the rural approach to the village.
<b>Sensitivity/Capacity</b>	The area is sensitive to the intensification of development around Churchfield Farm which would undermine the rural approach and extend the gateway considerably to the northwest. There is however some scope for this area to accommodate development along the south eastern side of Burwell Road only. New development should not extend further than the existing building line to the north to avoid extending the village to the northwest. Great care will be needed to create an appropriate new gateway with buildings which reflect the local vernacular of the village in terms of scale and materials. There may also be some capacity for small scale back land development behind Burwell Road dwellings to the south only, accessed via a private lane/track. It will be important that development in this area is rural in character reflecting farm buildings and does not adversely

	impact on the setting of Devils Dyke. For these reasons, cul-de-sac housing development, and house styles which show a uniformity, should be avoided.
<b>Mitigation</b>	Retain separation between Churchfield Farm and the start of the village. Care should be taken to mitigate views of new development from Devils Dyke through appropriately scaled buildings, mitigation planting and appropriate curtilage treatments.

### Local Character Area 3: Southwest of Burwell Road to Church Hill

<b>Relevant Planning Sites</b>	18/01397/OUT
<b>Physical Character</b>	Chalk landscape between the centre of the village and Church Hill. Gently rising slopes between the 10-15m contours. Land at Church Hill shows signs of former chalk pit with vertical chalk faces and abrupt changes in level.
<b>Existing Settlement Edge</b>	Abrupt built edge at Ditchfield – the only part of the village visible on approaching along Swaffham Prior. Housing slopes gently down hill along the main street within the village. There are some areas of back land development behind the properties on Fair Green and Great Lane associated with Hilltop Farm and Fitzroy Farm and accessed via narrow tracks at 90 degrees. Trees behind properties on Fair Green and Great Lane form an important wooded backdrop and reinforce the predominately linear form of development along the lanes and rising land behind. Behind the buildings in the village are small scale meadows and horse paddocks and areas of woodland.
<b>Views and Visibility</b>	Elevated views from the chalk slopes above Barston Drove looking across the fens to the northwest and southwest. Views from the main streets between buildings and up narrow tracks to rising land behind the village and mature trees – these views reinforce the rural character of the village as a whole and rural setting of many of the listed buildings. Bends in the roads through the village enable vistas to key buildings and landscape beyond. There are longer distance views back towards the settlement from Little Fen Drove where the slopes of the chalk hillside to the south of Hilltop Farm reinforce the setting of Reach.
<b>Designation/Condition</b>	<p>This part of the village has the highest concentration of listed buildings. The Conservation Area includes the majority of the built form with the exception of development at Ditchfield. The majority of properties interface directly within the small scale pastures and rising land behind the main street.</p> <p>Community woodland is located on the highest land to the south and will, as it matures, form a skyline feature and emphasise the rising landform on which Reach sits when viewed from Little Fen Drove and Barston Drove.</p> <p>Chalk pits on Church Hill have resulted in large hollows within the hillside and areas of exposed chalk cliff, form an important part of the village history and offer important wildlife habitats, although are not designated for their geological or botanical interest.</p>

<b>Perceptual Qualities</b>	Elevation of the land behind the settlement reinforces the location of Reach as a fen edge settlement on a peninsula of chalk jutting out into the wider fen. It also reinforces perceptions of isolation. Where there is evidence of past quarrying the landscape has a 'worked' and abandoned character. The pastures and woodland adjacent to the settlement, coupled with rising land, create a small scale and intimate landscape which contrasts with the fen and wider chalk farmland.
<b>Function</b>	This area has a significant number of footpaths providing easy access to open space and circular walks from the centre of the village. The rising land of Church Hill and associated trees/woodland acts as an important backdrop to properties within the village. The open agricultural slopes to the south of Hilltop Farm are important in reinforcing the rising chalk landform adjacent to the fen.
<b>Sensitivity/Capacity</b>	The open slopes south of Hilltop Farm are visually sensitive to development due to their visual prominence and because they reinforce the isolation of Reach on the peninsula of chalk jutting into the fen. Land behind the existing development in the village may have some capacity for small scale 1-2 bespoke dwellings accessed via a single private track. Development should reflect the more agricultural character of built form behind the main street, and larger scale housing extending onto the clunch pits should be avoided, as it would adversely affect the strong settlement character and form. It will be important to ensure that new rooflines do not appear above the existing properties on Fair Green and do not adversely affect the setting of listed buildings or the Conservation Area. Land to the south of Ditchfield is highly sensitive to further housing development as it would undermine the historic location of Reach tucked into the northern face of the chalk overlooking the fen and would elongate development onto the wider chalk landscape. There may however be scope for the establishment of a low key car park in this area to alleviate increased traffic into the village should the popularity of the village/Wicken Fen increase in terms of visitor numbers.
<b>Mitigation</b>	There are opportunities to mitigate the settlement edge at Ditchfield through hedgerow and tree planting to soften views on approaching the settlement from Swaffham Prior. There are also opportunities to improve the street scene through the undergrounding of overhead wires and planting of street trees at the entrance to Ditchfield and on rising land behind the village properties.

#### Local Landscape Area 4: Barston Grove and Catchwater Drain

<b>Relevant Planning Sites</b>	17/01336/OUT, 20/00494/VAR
<b>Physical Character</b>	Lower slopes of the chalk and their interface with the fen comprising land below the 10m contour. Barston Drove runs along the 5m contour. Lower farmed slopes and linear features including Barston Drove, Catchwater Drain and Blackberry Drove, all of which follow the contours on the lower slopes and chalk fen interface.
<b>Existing Settlement Edge</b>	Properties sit along Barston Drove around the 5m contour and have a soft and well vegetated edge character due to scrub and trees along the Catchwater Drain and chalk fen edge. Springhall Farm sits discretely on the outskirts of the village and reinforces the rural character of the village setting. Associated with this farm is a small scale solar array.
<b>Views and Visibility</b>	This part of Reach village is not widely visible from the surrounding Fen landscape to the northwest with only glimpsed views to individual properties. Large farm buildings associated with Springhall Farm are more visible but in keeping with the wider rural landscape. The solar array associated with Springhall Farm is not visually prominent due to its small scale, location on lower land and is screened from key views by existing roadside and property vegetation.
<b>Designation/Condition</b>	The Conservation Area includes the majority of properties along Barston Drove. Pattern of linear routes remain intact and are historically important and associated with The Hythe and establishment of Reach.
<b>Perceptual Qualities</b>	Remote and deeply rural character.
<b>Function</b>	Setting to the Conservation Area and rural approach to the village.
<b>Sensitivity/Capacity</b>	The lower elevation of this area and visual screening afforded by existing vegetation gives this area some capacity for development along Barston Drove. There may be some scope for 2-3 individual dwellings along the lane however care would be needed to retain the rural character of the lane (including retention of native hedgerows) and to avoid extending the gateway beyond Hilltop Farm. Any new development would need to reflect the small scale cottage vernacular typical of this lane and edge of village location. Development in this part of the village would need to consider potential for increased traffic through the village.

<b>Mitigation</b>	Ensure that the rooftops of new properties are not visually prominent from the surrounding landscape, especially from the chalk hills to the south and that dwellings are set below the 10m contour. Care will be needed to ensure building heights are appropriate for the location and may require consideration of 1 or 1.5 storey development only. Similarly mitigation planting will be important to ensure new buildings are seen with a treed backdrop and views are filtered.
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## 6: Summary of Findings

### 6.1 Special Qualities to Conserve and Enhance

6.1.1 The following conclusions can be reached as to the special qualities of Reach Parish which, wherever possible, should be retained and enhanced. Special qualities include:

- Distinctive fen/chalk landscape setting
- Village is tucked away behind rising land of Church Hill
- Isolation and rural backwater reinforced by access along narrow rural lanes
- Compact, small scale, organic and loose village form with strong visual connections to the landscape between properties
- Settlement follows landscape topography
- Narrow rural lanes with soft verges and few kerbs/pavements
- Tangible time depth and legibility which is rare
- Local produce – community orchard, farm shop and solar farm
- Farms on outskirts of village form part of its setting and approach

### 6.2 Changes to Avoid

6.2.1 This detailed analysis has noted some changes which have resulted in loss of the distinctive qualities of the settlement. It is useful to highlight these as it may inform decisions regarding any future development or environmental initiatives/management of the settlement setting.

- Creation of abrupt edges to development with little vegetation or landscape on the edge of settlement
- New infill housing which appears out of scale in terms of height and mass and blocks important gaps between buildings/connections to the landscape
- Housing development with single housing types which contrast with the organic and eclectic styles and orientation of buildings in the village
- Planting of leylandii hedging and trees or other urban curtilage treatment such as fencing
- Large scale pylons which interrupt the views from the chalk scarp across the fens
- Ad hoc incremental development along rural lanes between Reach and Burwell and Reach and Swafham Prior
- Development within the setting of important heritage assets including Devil's Dyke and The Hythe which undermines the landscape setting and historic significance

## 6.3 Management and Development Guidelines

6.3.1 The Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines aims to safeguard the character of the countryside and settlements by ensuring new development integrates positively with the existing character. It therefore provides a framework of broad principles that all development in the countryside will be required to follow.

6.3.2 The landscape principles for improvement of the Chalk landscape state that:

- The promotion of species-rich grassland on thin chalk soils would provide visual and wildlife value. Road verges should also be managed to promote plant diversity and interest.
- Conservation of the linear dykes with selective removal of scrub growth and re-establishment of sheep grazing, if possible, would enable the massive scale of these historic earthworks to be appreciated and promote chalk grass and flora communities. Some areas of scrub should be retained for habitat and visual diversity. The significance of the dykes in the landscape could be reinforced by managing adjacent strips of agricultural land as grassland or scrub.

6.3.3 The landscape principles for improvement of the Fen landscape state that:

- In many areas the essential character is the open view of land, sky and the field drains. Any landscape proposal must suit the massive scale of the landscape and be in keeping with the local character of the particular area.

6.3.4 Alongside the above guidance, the following management and development guidelines have been identified as a result of this detailed settlement and landscape analysis. These guidelines are provided to inform land management decisions, inspire local community initiatives, inform development proposals, and assist decision makers.

6.3.5 Management guidelines seek to reinforce local character and improve legibility. They include:

- Enhance biodiversity of lane verges throughout the Parish, including in the centre of the village, through appropriate management in collaboration with landowners and highways. Barston and Straight Drove are particularly valued for chalk grassland species and would benefit from positive management.
- Plant new hedgerows/hedgerow trees on the southern edge of the village to reduce the visual prominence of housing at Ditchfield.



- Seek opportunities to reduce the visual effects of pylons and of the Burwell Sub-Station through appropriately located woodland planting and linear lines of trees which can create a layering of vegetation and screen views. Any planting needs to take account of key vistas and views identified by the local community and the protection of peat soils which may be susceptible to desiccation and carbon loss.
- Undertake research and conservation work at The Hythe and consider the suitability of pursuing an extension to the existing Conservation Area boundary. Given this areas historic significance and the lack of encroachment from development within the village, consideration should also be given to the refinement of the Settlement Boundary as set out in Local Plan in order to exclude land which forms an immediate setting.
- Undertake survey work to establish if the chalk cliffs in the former chalk pits should be identified as County Wildlife Sites, Regionally Important Geological Sites or have archeological significance.

6.3.6 Development guidelines seek to inform new development and include:

- New development should strengthen approaches and gateways to the village.
- Avoidance of ad hoc development along Swaffham Road and Burwell Road especially where it reduces the gaps and views to the wider landscape and causes a loss of native hedgerow and rural lane character.
- Avoid curtilage treatment that urbanises the rural lanes on approach and within the village e.g. close board fencing, metal railings, concrete kerbs/urban pavements, fencing/gates and proliferation of ad hoc ancillary development such as bin or bike stores.
- Avoid development which extends above the 15m contour and or extends the gateways into the village. Changes of this sort are likely to alter perceptions regarding the position and historic form of the village.
- Development of small scale solar farm should only occur on the fen and should not be installed on the more visible slopes of the chalk scarp. Solar farm developments should be small in scale and should not be visible in views from the north facing slopes of the chalk, or Devils Dyke, especially where the landscape provides a setting or approach to the village.

## 6.4 Conclusions






6.4.1 The village of Reach is an exceptional place for its history, tangible time depth, connection to the landscape and strong community. Local residents demonstrate strong connections to place, expressed in local events such as the annual fair and community woodland project, but also through their interpretation of the village and landscape which is manifest in the arts and writing.

- 6.4.2 Its location at the junction between the fen and chalk has shaped its history and importance and its present day position as a quiet backwater on the edge of the National Trust's Vision area means that it continues to hold a pivotal position in the landscape.
- 6.4.3 Nevertheless, its special cultural and natural heritage and the fact that it has changed little over the last 100 years, whilst giving it value, also make it vulnerable to change. It is possible that in future Reach will become a gateway to the National Trust Vision area and as the population in the Cambridge area grows, the Parish may experience increased visitors. This may lead to development pressure not necessarily in relation to housing but associated with tourism. Certainly the village and its landscape offers opportunities for visitors to engage with the natural environment, but any change will require a bespoke and sensitive approach to avoid undermining the special qualities which are so readily expressed. Development whether for housing or business/tourism will require a careful and strategic approach, whereby a vision and masterplan for the whole of the village is conceived. This assessment goes some way to informing this and has identified that there is some scope for development on land to the south of Burwell Road and the lower slopes behind Fair Green and Barston Drove. However, the narrow nature of the lanes which lead to Reach reflect its isolated and rural location. They are vulnerable to increased traffic. Any development therefore must be guided by a need to minimise additional vehicle use on the lanes and through the village.
- 6.4.4 The rural and historically significant village of Avebury in Wiltshire illustrates how a small settlement can be a notable tourist destination associated with the National Trust and yet retain its special qualities. Whilst it is not suggested that Reach becomes an 'Avebury' there are clearly lessons from Avebury which could benefit Reach in terms of understanding the whole and managing any future increase in visitors. The experience of the National Trust at Avebury, and their proximity to Reach in relation to the Wicken Fen Vision, may be invaluable to the village in writing the next chapter of the Parish.
- 6.4.5 Some suggested initiatives which may wish to be considered include the following:
- Consider the development of Reach as a gateway to Wicken Fen and a destination when visiting the NT Vision area
  - Promote Reach as an isolated destination only accessible via sustainable modes of transport
  - Consider the creation of a car park for visitors outside of the village
  - Support the creation of community cafe / cycle hire (linked to cycle hire at Wicken Fen)
  - Improve interpretation of the historic landscape and improved access to The Hythe
  - Consider establishing field centre/environmental education programme and YHA – linked to NT
  - Consider branding Reach – heritage, environment and local arts/produce
  - Consider provision of increased overnight accommodation

# Reach Neighbourhood Plan Landscape Assessment

## Figure 1: Landscape Character

### Key

-  Parish Boundary
-  Land in National Trust Ownership
-  Wicken Fen Vision
-  East Anglian Chalk
-  The Fens

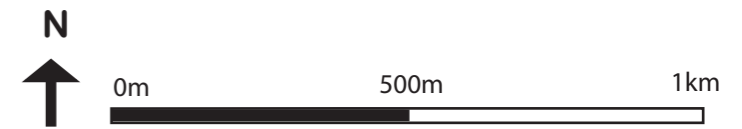
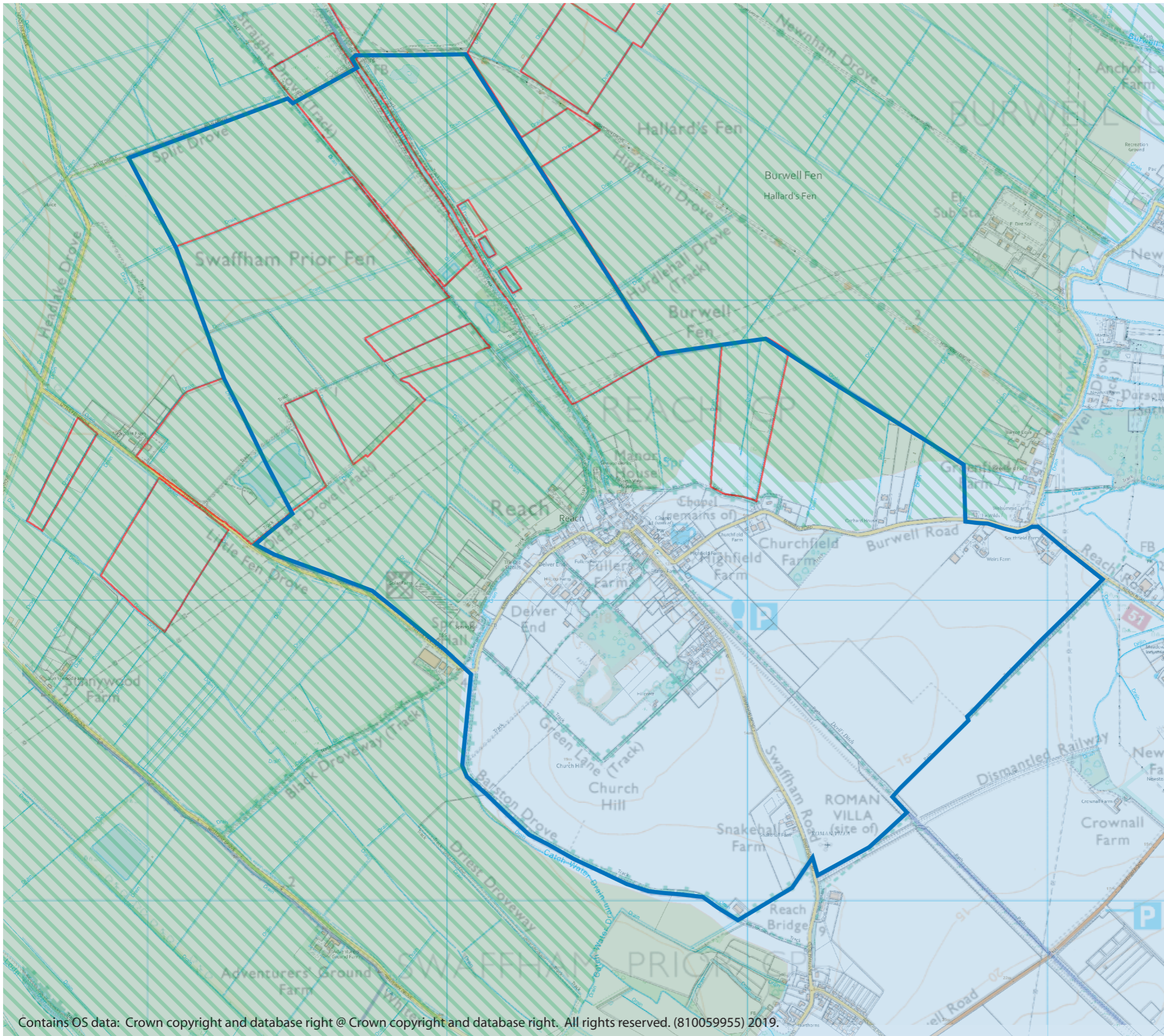
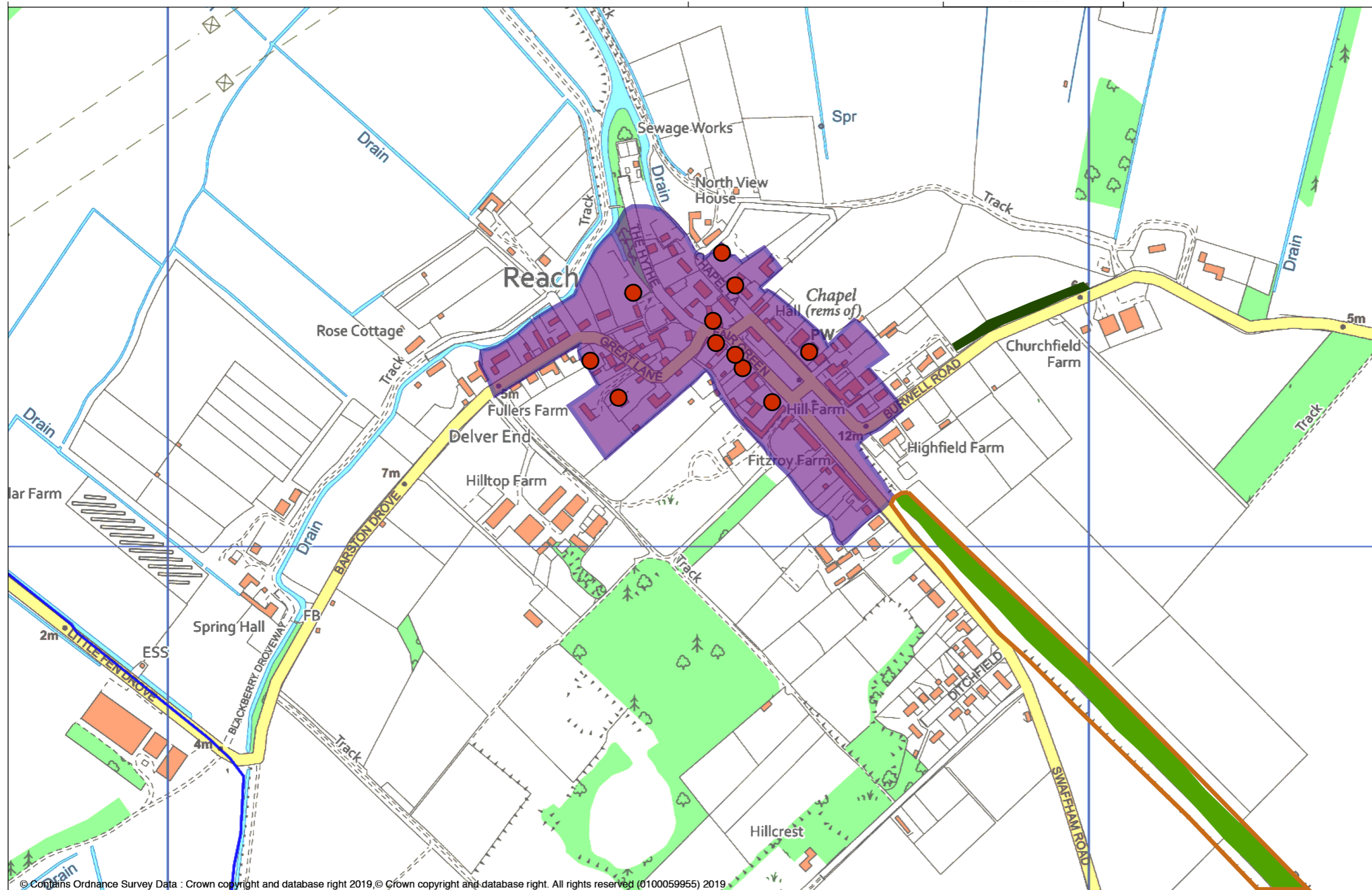




Figure 2 Designations



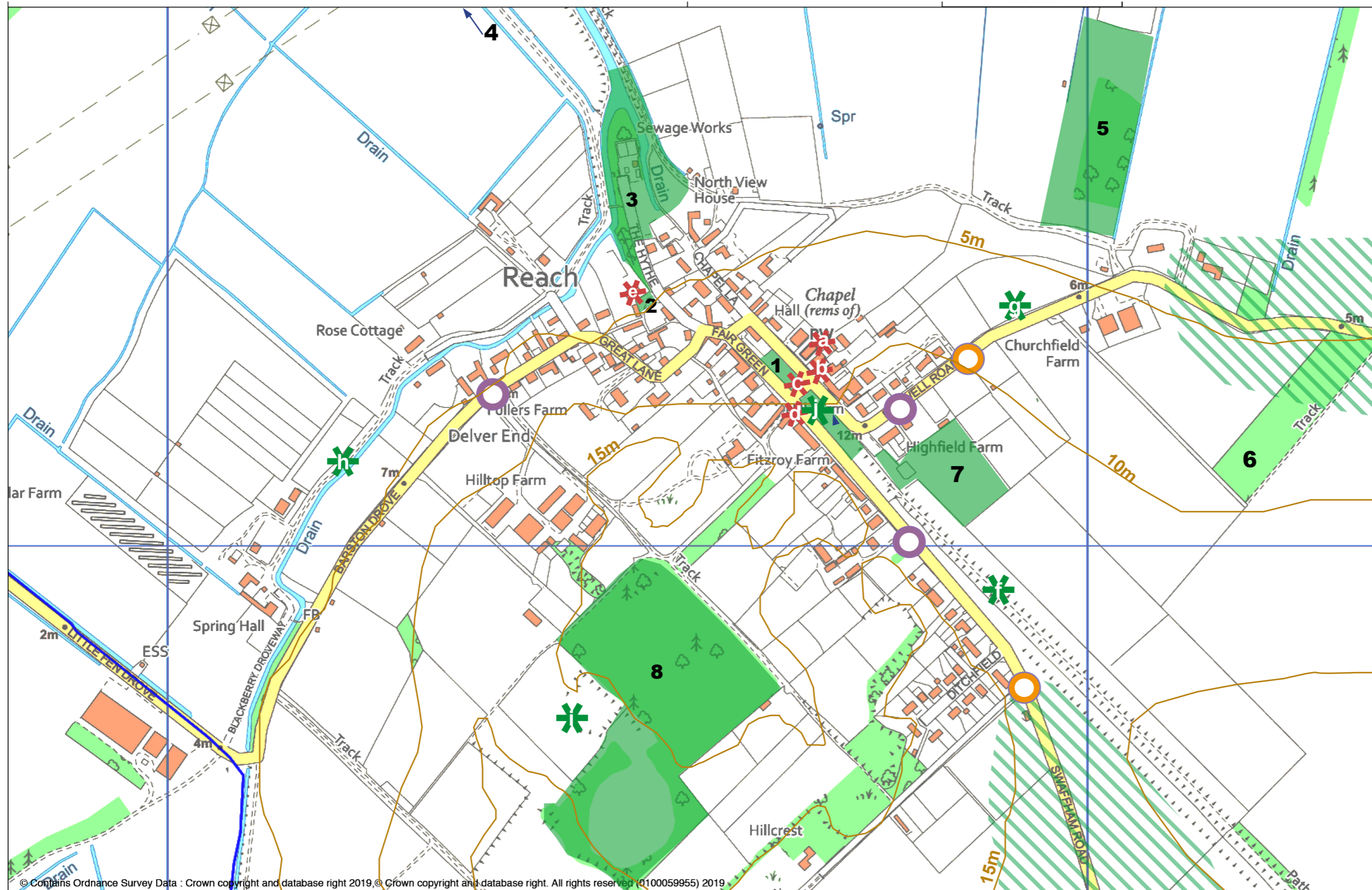
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**Key**

- Conservation Area
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Tree Preservation Orders
- Woodland
- Listed Building
- Scheduled Monument










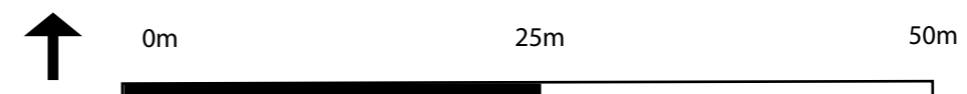
Figure 3 Analysis



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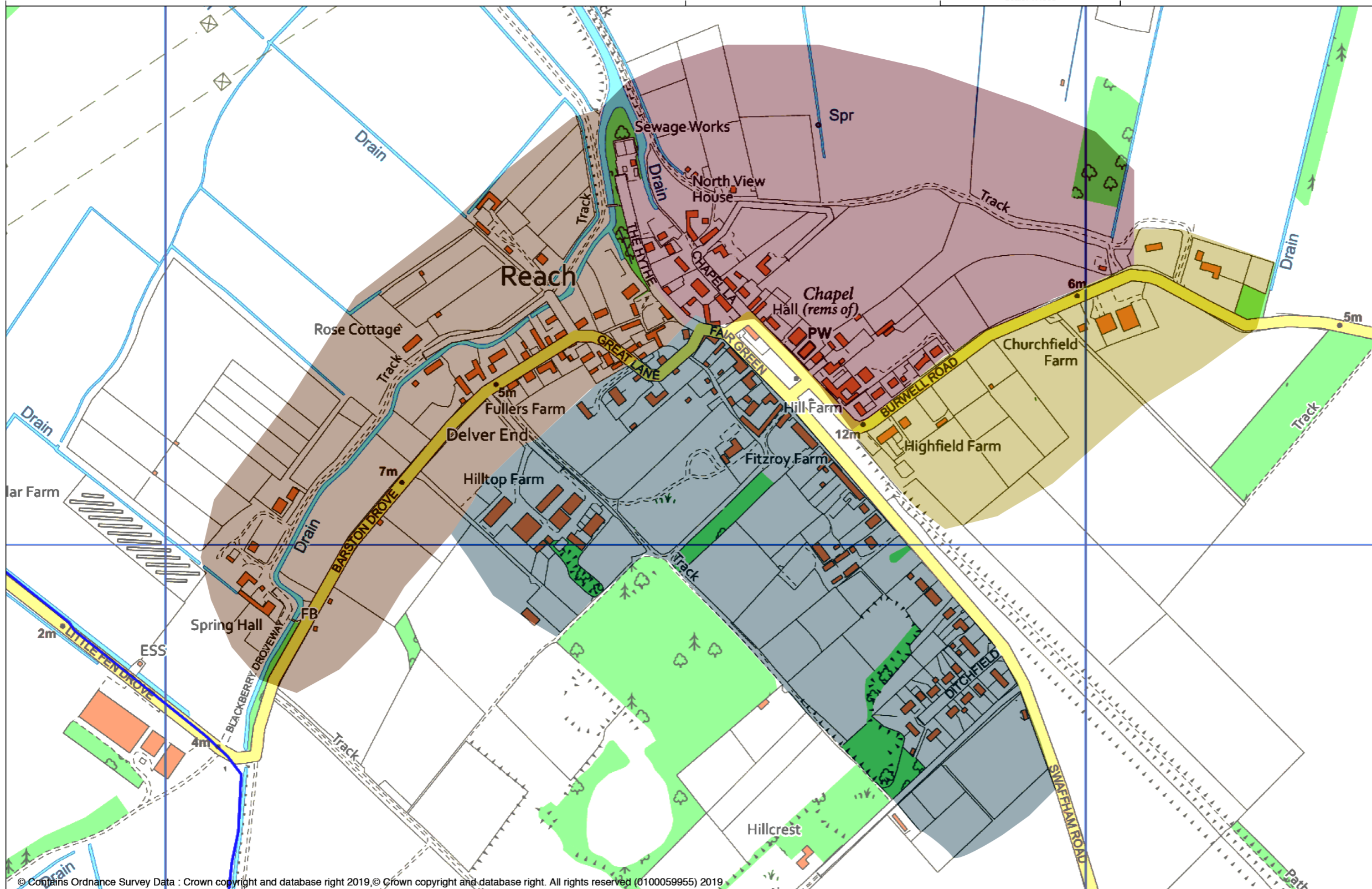
Key

-  Initial Gateway
-  Main Gateway
-  Key Contours
-  Important Gap
-  Built Landmarks  
(letters refer to Section 4.3 of report)
-  Landscape Features  
(letters refer to Section 4.3 of report)
-  Important Open Space  
(Inumbers refer to Section 3.3 of report)





Reach Neighbourhood Plan  
Landscape Assessment  
Figure 4 Evaluation Areas



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**Key**

- Evaluation Area 1
- Evaluation Area 3
- Evaluation Area 2
- Evaluation Area 4

