

Heckington Fen Solar Park

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Appendix 6.5: Extract from the North Kesteven Landscape
Character Assessment

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NORTH KESTEVEN LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT



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for

North Kesteven District Council

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FINAL DRAFT

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9. The Fens Regional Landscape Character Type

9.1 Fenland Landscape Character Sub-Area

Key Characteristics

- *The Fenland landscape sub-area occupies the whole of the eastern part of the District from the Lincoln gap to the boundary with south Kesteven near Swanton.*
- *Low lying with very flat relief.*
- *Occasional small islands of slightly higher land.*
- *Very large, rich arable fields divided up by drainage channels*
- *A hierarchy of rivers drains and ditches creating linear patterns across the landscape.*
- *The geometric road pattern follows the drainage pattern with small roads raised above the level of the fields, running from west to east.*
- *Generally extensive vistas to level horizons and huge skies, apart from in the north easterly direction where the Lincolnshire Wolds provide a marked "Upland" horizon.*
- *Sparse woodland cover though some occasional trees surrounding farmsteads and some shelter, belts particularly of poplars.*
- *Intensively farmed and managed it is almost entirely a man-made landscape.*
- *Except for scattered farmsteads and farm buildings the sub-area is unsettled.*
- *Prominent power lines and large-scale agricultural buildings.*



Detailed Description

Boundaries and Extent of the Landscape Character Sub-area

- 9.1.1 The Fenland landscape character sub-area runs along the whole of the eastern part of the District. It is characterised by its low lying and very flat landscape with very large fields divided from one another by drainage channels. A hierarchy of rivers, drains and ditches provide a strong linear pattern on the area which is also followed by the road pattern.
- 9.1.2 To north and east the area is bounded by the River Witham. At the northern end the fenland area narrows as it meets the Lincoln gap creating a funnel shaped area of fenland. To the west the Car Dyke and woodland fringes make a distinctive boundary north of Billingham. There is also a finger of fenland extending up towards Digby, after which the southern boundary follows the edge of the Central Clays and Gravels sub-area which is marked by a line of numerous villages from Anwick to Swaton on the southern district boundary.



Fenland and dyke adjacent to the Bardney Road

Topography and Landform

- 9.1.3 The fens have a very strong and distinctive character and despite its absence of variation might be considered to present a sense of drama and melancholy.
- 9.1.4 The landform consists of very flat alluvial land with the gradient below 10m down to sea level itself. The land has been reclaimed and drained from the natural marshes and wet woodlands from which the 'reclaimed' fens of today actually take their name. The Fenlands have been drained and farmed over a period of hundreds of years and therefore present an almost totally man-made landscape. It is crossed by an extensive and intricate series of arrow straight drainage channels (dykes), emptying eventually to the River Witham, which itself has been engineered and straightened over most of its course as it frames the eastern edge of the character area.
- 9.1.5 Although the sub-area itself is very open, the northern element is edged by the Lincolnshire Wolds to the north-east and the limestone edge to the west creating a funnel shaped enclosure in this section. There are key vistas of Lincoln Cathedral as the Witham valley narrows through the Lincoln Gap. This section also has distant views of the power stations on the River Trent and their sometimes dramatic vapour columns. However, further south the views eastwards become extensive to a level horizon and to the west the adjacent landscape sub-area is similarly low-lying clay vales, and so the resultant impression of a vast flat landscape is even greater. The large scale of the landscape with open panoramas and enormous skies can create a strong sense of isolation which is compounded by the lack of settlements in the area.
- 9.1.6 There are two 'islands' of slightly higher land within this landscape which are edged by large drainage channels, including the major Billingham Skirth and the Kyme Eau. North Kyme and South Kyme, the only settlements of any size in the sub-area, are located on these islands.
- 9.1.7 The finger of fenland which runs to the west of the clay strip of the central clays and gravels area has very similar characteristics to the main area of fenland in that it is very flat land with large, rectilinear fields and very little tree cover. There is however

a more sheltered impression afforded by its marginally higher land to the east and west.

- 9.1.8** The soil throughout the whole of the landscape sub-area is of the highest grade, peaty and very dark brown in colour and presents a nationally significant agricultural resource.

Land Use, Land Cover and Vegetation

- 9.1.9** The land is almost exclusively set to arable farming, managed within the very large, distinctively flat fields. The relatively low concentration of significant agricultural complexes suggests large farm holdings with intensive modes of operation.



Dorrington Fen showing the typical dark soil of the Fenland

- 9.1.10** Tree and woodland cover is scarce with minimal significant woodland cover. There are occasional individual trees and some trees belts around the isolated farmsteads. These are often distinctive and often consisting of poplar trees visible for significant distance over the flat and otherwise interruption free landscape. Hedgerows are almost entirely absent as the fields are separated by functional drainage dykes. Most of the dykes are well managed and cleared, however some have become colonised with sedge and reed, presenting a valuable habitat resource and biodiversity interest.
- 9.1.11** Industry and commercial use is largely absent in the sub-area itself though the sugar beet factory at Bardney (outside of the District boundary) is very prominent in the wider landscape. Like other areas of the district the impact of electricity infrastructure is also significant with rows of pylons very dominant in the open landscape and presenting a powerful man-made statement across the horizon in the south of the sub-area.

Settlement Distribution and Road Pattern

- 9.1.12** The road pattern consists largely of narrow, straight roads, running in an east-west direction, and is heavily influenced by the drainage patterns of the area. They are raised above the level of the land on earth embankments and edged with

characteristic drainage channels. The largest road in the sub-area is the A17 which cuts across its southern half and takes an uncharacteristic sweeping line. The only significant road running from north to south is the A153 which joins the B1395 south of North Kyme. Apart from the dramatic skyscape, movement of vehicles along these roads will often be the only dynamic element in the landscape.

- 9.1.13 The only two settlements of any significance in this part of the Fenland are North and South Kyme which are located on slightly higher islands of land raised above the surrounding fens and edged by drainage channels. There are a small number of scattered small, hamlets based either on farmsteads or along the edge of the River Witham such as Tattershall Bridge and Walcott Dales.

Settlement Character

- 9.1.14 The character of the built environment within the Fenland area is varied in style and age. Combined with the paucity of settlement within the character area it is suggested that there is no strong settlement character which relates clearly to the exceptionally distinctive landscape.



Kyme Tower to the west of South Kyme village

- 9.1.15 The two Kyme villages were able to be established because of their slightly raised position above the fenland levels. North Kyme is a linear village which has the A153 running through it. It has a small market place with an important medieval stone cross. South Kyme is an attractive village with many original brick buildings. The Kyme Eau, a canalised section of the River Sleas flows through the settlement presenting a striking and distinctive Fenland element to the village itself. To the west of the village is the Kyme Tower, a remnant of a medieval castle which is a distinctive local landmark. Close by are the remains of a priory which dates from the 12th century and the attractive Victorian parish church which add reference points, historical interest and visual prominence to the settlement and landscape.

Fenland	
Pressures for change and landscape detractors	Opportunities for Enhancement
<p>Agriculture: The large scale and intensive nature of the agriculture practised on the fens has resulted in a strongly distinctive but uniform landscape with few focal points or strong variations in character.</p> <p>Large scale agricultural buildings and storage of agricultural machinery and produce can be very prominent in the open landscape. In some cases species such as leylandii have been used to screen agricultural development or to provide shelterbelts and these have become functional but clearly incongruous features in the landscape.</p>	<p>Some enhancement measures could be introduced which would not detract from the distinctive and open nature of the fen landscape and its large-scale vistas, for example small stands of tree planting along roads or ditch-lines where trees are already a local feature, but may have been under managed.</p> <p>Additional tree planting, using native species, could soften the impact of agricultural buildings in the landscape. Only native tree and shrub species should be used in shelterbelts. In particular species such as alder and willow, mainstays of the original landscape and habitats of the fens should be re-introduced.</p>
<p>Drainage and Flood Infrastructure: The dykes and embankments have frequently been 'improved' to aid flood protection and in some cases close management and maintenance has resulted in the further reduction of aquatic and marginal vegetation.</p>	<p>Natural vegetative cover could be allowed to grow up in certain areas, e.g. along embankments, dykes or field margins where it would not interfere with flood management or drainage priorities. This would result in additional visual interest in the landscape, and could also increase the biodiversity value of the area, particularly in respect to linking woodlands and the larger watercourses.</p>

PART 3 – DESIGN STATEMENT

11. Design Statement – Landscape and Countryside Design in North Kesteven

General Principles

- 11.1 This section addresses landscape considerations which should be met in respect to development which is appropriate, or likely to be permitted, within the open countryside.
- 11.2 This report records the diverse landscape character of the district. It is clear that the whole of the North Kesteven landscape is sensitive to change. The wrong type of development in the wrong location, or a badly designed development, or even a badly designed landscaping scheme for an otherwise well sited and designed development, can damage the integrity of its landscape character, often disproportionately to the scale of the development that caused the change. The need for good design is certainly not confined to only the 'best' landscapes, such as the Lincoln Cliff formally designated as an Area of Great landscape Value. All landscapes, throughout North Kesteven, are important to those people who live or work in them or visit them. It is a fundamental aspect of sustainable development to hand on a healthy, well cared for and locally distinctive landscape to future generations, whilst meeting the needs of our rural communities and businesses today.
- 11.3 Where it is appropriate to carry out development in the countryside particular care is required to ensure that built development and associated landscaping and land use changes fit well with the character of the different parts of North Kesteven. Such considerations should be taken by any individual, commercial interest, statutory undertakers, government or other public body, including the Ministry of Defence, where proposing, designing, commenting on or controlling development, land use change and rural activities. In most cases, development in the open countryside will benefit from being carefully designed and utilising the skills of architects, landscape architects, engineers and planners as necessary.
- 11.4 Whilst respecting established character and vernacular tradition should be encouraged, innovative design that fits well in the North Kesteven landscape can be also be viewed positively. The Council should not wish to inhibit modern and innovative designs where they are appropriate, particularly in respect to sustainable design and construction. However, for most development it will be helpful to check that it is compatible and complementary to the key characteristics of the North Kesteven landscape character sub-areas. Wherever possible, new development should help to strengthen, reinforce or where necessary, restore distinctive landscape character.
- 11.5 For most proposed development or changes in the countryside, specific and careful consideration of the aspects set out in the checklist below will help to facilitate improved design. The table offers a systematic and broad structure to the assessment of how development might fit into the landscape, bearing in mind the local landscape character and its sensitivity to change.
- 11.6 Developments that are subject to Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) will require an Environmental Statement to be submitted in accordance with the *Town*

and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999. These statements should include a thorough assessment of landscape and visual impacts in accordance with the recommended procedures set out in national guidance such as 'Environmental Impact Assessment: A Guide to Procedures'(January 2000) wherever the effects are likely to be significant. Given the sensitivity of some parts of the North Kesteven landscape, it is likely that all EIA developments will need to include landscape and visual impact assessments in the relevant environmental statements, for which the Landscape Character Assessment can set a clear baseline.

11.7 Where non-EIA development is proposed, projects that are likely to have significant landscape and / or visual impacts should be subject to similar assessments in accordance with the EIA guidance even where a statutory environmental statement is not required. The District Council should be able to advise on the need for, and scope of, such assessments in advance of the preparation and submission of a planning application.

11.8 Key points for consideration in assessing how a good landscape character fit can be achieved for new development are set out as follows:

Landscape Design Considerations

Location and siting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would the proposal be sited in a way that provides the best fit in the landscape so that it would look as if it belonged there, for example is it well related to other buildings or features in the landscape? • Would it present an isolated and incongruous interruption where there is open character to the landscape? • Is it well related to landform in a way that buildings have traditionally related to the topography?
Aspect and orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would the proposed buildings be consistent with the way other buildings are orientated, for example inward looking to a crew yard or village green, outward looking to a view from a ridge, or fronting or at right angles to a road or lane?
Scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would the proposal be appropriate in scale to its setting, for example would it dominate other buildings or landscape features around it, detract from views of a church spire, or look incongruously too big or too small?
Layout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would the layout of the proposal be compatible with the surrounding development, traditional layouts and / or landscape character, for example would any existing buildings and the proposed buildings be well related to each other? • Would there be a rational explanation as to why they are laid out in the way they are, would the layout reflect that typically found in the area or vicinity, would it relate well to the layout, inter-relationships and juxtaposition of buildings and / or other features in the setting?
Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would the proposed design be compatible with the landscape and/or settlement character, for example would it be in harmony with other features or strikingly discordant? • Would it reflect the traditional approach to design, for example in mass, shape, height, width, depth, openings, fenestration, roof pitch, doorways, porches etc?

Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would the proposal be built in external materials that reflect those traditionally used and which make up an important characteristic, avoiding stridently contrasting or other inappropriate materials, colours and finishes, would the colour, texture and reflection of the materials of buildings or infrastructure make the development more conspicuous or out of place? • Does it avoid using reflective materials for large agricultural building's external walls and roofs?
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would the proposed means of access fit well with the landscape setting and the new and existing development? for example would it be a dominant feature, would it require excessive 'cut and fill' because it was not well related to landform, would it be built of appropriate surfacing materials that blended with the surroundings and other land surfaces? • Would it avoid using features which serve to 'urbanise' the setting, such as using concrete kerbs and utilitarian lighting? • Would highway design requirements, including signage be disproportionately intrusive in relation to the scale of development?
Boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would the proposal require new boundaries to be erected and, if so, what would be the most appropriate type? • Would a hawthorn hedge, plateau limestone walling, estate fencing or brick wall be most appropriate, would any fencing be compatible with the traditional style of agricultural enclosure in the landscape around it? • Which type of gate would best fit in with other landscape elements? • Would it avoid utilising flimsy fences, 'ranch-style' fences, close-boarded fences and crude post and plank fences and, unless the scale and design of the development particularly justify it, very large, over-ornate metal fences and gates? • Is field hedging locally characteristic in species or pattern, and can it be strengthened? • Should hedgerow trees be encouraged and dying or diseased trees replaced, or retained for habitat value? • Can field boundary margins be managed better for landscape value and habitat enhancement?
Landscaping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of landscape treatment would best fit the location and achieve the <i>purpose</i> of the landscaping scheme? - is the objective to help to : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Screen the development from particular views, or ➤ Reinforce existing landscape features to improve the fit of the development in the landscape, or ➤ Provide a largely cosmetic landscaping scheme?
Plant species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would the mainstay of the landscaping scheme or any boundary or other treatment comprise species of trees and shrubs that are locally indigenous, native species already dominant in the area? Not only will this afford best landscape fit, it will be preferable from an ecological point of view and those species will grow well in the location. • Several farm complexes around the district utilise effective, but visually incongruous and prominent Leylandii type screening. These present an alien feature in the landscape and present non-seasonal sometimes massive intrusions in the landscape. Does the proposal avoid use of Leylandii and similar species? • Non-native coniferous species should not be encouraged through the planning or land management controls and interventions. • Can a new landscape scheme serve to replace incongruous features, such as Leylandii hedging?

Landscape links and 'stepping stones'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would it be possible to use new planting to help to link the proposal to existing landscape features such as woodlands, copses or hedgerows? • Could lost landscape features be replaced, can the development contribute to the provision or restoration of landscape features which are important to wildlife as corridors or stepping stones, such as ponds, hedges, trees, woodlands, wetlands or semi-natural grasslands? • Can local Biodiversity Action Plan objectives be facilitated through landscaping schemes?
Vistas and Outlooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would development or landscaping serve to interrupt or otherwise obscure important vistas or inter-visibility between landmarks? • In particular, would views from and up to the Lincoln Cliff to and from the west, and vistas of the characteristic church spires across North Kesteven be afforded proper protection? • Can landscaping in particular serve to reinforce important vistas, such as tree avenues, or focusing the eye towards important buildings or views?
Drainage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would it be possible to create new sustainable drainage systems that will improve water quality and help create new wetland habitats? • Does ditch maintenance or creation complement landscape character and pattern, and afford biodiversity opportunity, particularly on the Fens and across the Witham and Brant Vale? • Can dew ponds be (re)introduced to the Limestone Heath?
Ancillary Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would the proposal include, or lead to pressure for, ancillary buildings or structures, and if so will they clutter the site or spoil the overall design and layout, would they fit well in the landscape, has sufficient consideration been given to their design and integration? • Has the need for likely future requirements such as storage and expansion been taken account of?
Outside Storage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would the proposal require goods, materials, vehicles, trailers etc to be stored outside, would the development be likely to generate clutter, if so would these things be controlled, well screened and discretely located?
Lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider fully, and control as necessary level and direction of external lighting to new development. • Does the scheme minimise 'light pollution' and safeguard the characteristic dark skies of the district away from the Lincoln area? • Avoid the use of internally illuminated signs within rural settings and important built environments.
Visual Amenity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would the proposal adversely affect the visual amenity of people who live, work, visit or pass through the area, would important viewpoints be affected, how conspicuous would the development be and what could be done to reduce this?

11.9 Beyond agriculture and certain minerals and highway developments, some of the most significant forces for landscape change beyond the confines of established settlements in the district are associated with the Ministry of Defence's presence in the district and with new environmental infrastructure, particularly flood defence works. These may present a need for more specific and innovative approaches in respect of landscape conservation. Likewise, the particular importance of the Lincoln Cliff demands specific consideration in terms of landscape conservation.