



# **Freckenham Neighbourhood Plan**

## Parish Landscape Study: Character and Sensitivity Appraisal

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# 1. Landscape and history

## History

1. Freckenham is a rural parish in the district of West Suffolk (formerly Forest Heath) which sits along the boundary with Cambridgeshire. It lies just to the southwest of Mildenhall, approximately halfway between Thetford and Cambridge. The parish has the form of a thick T or Y shape, and stretches about 3.3 miles from north to south. Much of the east and north of the parish consists of flat, fairly featureless farmland - settlement is nucleated and sits in the western part of the parish, where the character is more wooded. The village sits either side of the Lee Brook which flows north into the upper courses of the River Lark.
2. It is located in a transitional landscape where a range of geological soil profiles meet, which is the key to its existence and appearance today. It sits between the Suffolk Brecklands to the east, on the edge of the Cambridgeshire chalk upland to the south, and on the southeastern edge of the Fens. Settlement was historically possible in this area as it offered access to a range of resources and transport. The fenland water courses were essential for keeping stock, for trade and transport and fishing; timber would have been available from the claylands to the south, and plenty of grazing was on hand to the east. The Breckland soils were a source of flints for building and reeds or sedge would have been available for thatch. Its position close to the Newmarket turnpike road, a trade route from London to Norwich, also likely contributed to its development and historic wealth in latter centuries.
3. The underlying chalk geology in this area produced a low, gently undulating plateau across the Brecklands, often covered with sandy soils of glacial origin. These soils were historically dry and poor in terms of fertility and did not fall under the plough for cereals in the way that much of the north Suffolk claylands did. The lack of disturbance is perhaps why the remains of human activity endured in Suffolk's sandland areas. Remains have been found in and near Freckenham which indicate a long history of human settlement. Neolithic remains such as shaped flints bear evidence to early man's activities in the area; a flint axe was found at Surprise Hill, half a mile east of Freckenham House in 1884.<sup>1</sup> A group of sites have been found at nearby West Row Fen dating to the early Bronze Age which indicate farming communities were living in the in the area at this time. There have also been Anglo Saxon finds - an iron sword was dredged from the River Lark in 1932. Icenic coins were found in 1885, dating from Queen Boudicea's reign, in the Mortimer Lane area.
4. The fenland landscape to the west and north was very different. It is a large shallow, marshy low-lying plain that was subject to repeated flooding by the north sea, and by water flowing down from the uplands and overflowing the rivers. It was drained in the 17th century and today it is a flat, dry, low-lying agricultural region stretching from Cambridgeshire to Norfolk and Lincolnshire. Whilst some areas to the north were once permanently flooded, others were flooded only during periods of high water. Here, along the south east edge of the Fen, it is likely that the landscape would have had marsh, bog, mud and meres with open water only at times of flooding. The rivers would have provided transport routes - in Roman Times Freckenham is surmised to have been a river port. The village sign shows a boat sailing past the church, something that is hard to imagine today! As well as navigation and trading opportunities, the river would have provided access to fish and eels, important foodstuffs in centuries gone by.
5. By the early medieval era Freckenham was the subject of feudal ownership, passing between individual lords and clergy a number of times. The settlement, on the higher land, possessed strategic value, surrounded as it was on three sides by Fen. Defence obviously was a key factor as a motte and bailey castle was built in the Norman era, by the bishop. The remains of its earthworks are found to the northeast of the church (now a Scheduled Monument). The most historically significant buildings are the Manor and church complex, on the high ground north of the river. The complex is somewhat isolated from the rest of the village to the northwest, which developed around the confluence of early roads linking to surrounding settlements. The Chancel of the present stone church can be dated to about 1196, and its tower was added later in the 15th century and is a strong landmark within the open, flat surrounding landscape. The current Manor House, built in the late 17th century, is likely in the vicinity of the earlier manor, where a series of medieval manorial lords would have controlled the village and its activities.
6. From the medieval period until the twentieth century the agricultural economy of the area probably consisted of a mix of arable and pastoral land use, highly dependent on the heath and commons. 'Breck' is a medieval word defining areas of heathland that were sporadically cultivated before their poor fertility meant they were abandoned to retreat back into heathland. The heathlands were very useful for the common grazing of sheep and also for warrening (keeping rabbits for meat and fur). Two warrens documented

<sup>1</sup> Freckenham parish council history page

before 1650 are mapped <sup>2</sup> in the south of the parish. The 'new town' like settlement of Red Lodge was built on what were the old warren lands of the parish.

7. The draining of the Fens took place between about 1600 and 1700 and this must have brought about considerable change in Freckenham. No longer did people have access to the resources the rivers and marshes offered but instead a large expanse of fertile soil suddenly became available. The land was farmed since medieval times in an open field system whereby a few large fields, of several hundred acres each, were divided into many narrow unfenced strips of land under the control of the local Manor. The lack of woodland and enclosures endures to this day, and the open large-scale character of the landscape is particularly distinctive.
8. The large fields created were ideally suited to 20th century large scale farming, and with the arrival of modern farming technology, such as irrigation and inorganic fertilisers, they became very important for food production. Their high value for farming has meant that little land is lost to woodland or field margins, and vast field sizes have endured. Since their draining and conversion to intensively farmed land, the peat has continued to dry and shrink, and the once evident distinction between the landscapes of the Brecks and Fens has become less clear, given the identical way they are now farmed.
9. The landscape underwent further change from the early 19th with 'enclosure' or 'inclosure', the process by which open, commonly farmed land was hedged or walled into individual fields. Much of Suffolk was enclosed in a piecemeal fashion before the 18th century, and the resulting pattern was a network of small scale fields with organic shapes. In contrast, here in northwest Suffolk, enclosure took place later and was the result of Parliamentary Acts between 1790 to 1840. Here the process turned the open field systems and heathlands into very large rectilinear fields. These were divided by the straight hedges, tree belts and tracks still seen today. The Drainage Act of 1759 also affected fenland edge to the north of the village, whereby land around Mildenhall was reclaimed and converted into similar large scale fields.
10. With WWI & II the Brecklands became a focus for military use. The light soils and simple open landform was ideal for the creation of airbases and nearby Mildenhall and Lakenheath have been used by both British and American forces. The sight of large planes circling remains a common one in the parish. The landscape was also similarly suitable for forestry and the large-scale pine plantations of Thetford forest were planted from the 1920s to develop a strategic timber reserve. The forest continues to dominate

the character of the landscape around Thetford and is now important for recreation, tourism, and wildlife as well as timber.

11. The parish's position close to historic regional transport routes has no doubt also helped its development. It is thought that a trackway connecting to the Icknield Way passed near the village, one of England's oldest roads and probably created by the local Iceni tribe as a trade route with other parts of the country. The north south route represented by the A11 today was always important - the Bull Inn at Barton Mills was known to be the biggest Inn in the country in 1674.
12. The combination of factors also means the area now supports infrastructure corridors, commercial scale land use along the A11, and land uses such as solar farms are now seen and being planned for. But the qualities of flatness and openness mean that the landscape is inherently visually sensitive to change. New development or infrastructure can be visible over long distances and can be very hard to assimilate.

### Topography and hydrology

13. The parish generally slopes from the highest land in the southeast (around 19m Above Ordnance Datum) towards the river Lark to the north at just below the 5m contour. The parish boundary is also low-lying (mostly under 10m AOD) along the southern edge where the small river Kennett forms the boundary. The Kennett meets a stream that rises in the parish of Chippenham to the south at a confluence on the parish boundary south of the church. The watercourse, now called the Lee Brook, then flows due northward, through the centre of the village and takes a very gently winding route to the Lark, accompanied by an old right of way - Mortimer Lane.

### Geology and soils

14. There area is underlain by chalk bedrock but on the surface there is a varied soil profile across the parish. Soil maps show a mixed patchwork of light soil types across the parish where acidic, sandy Breckland soils to the east meet the lime rich soils associated with the Cambridgeshire chalkland ridge and fenland edge to the west. The northern tip of the parish is a wet peaty fen soil along the edges of the river Lark.

### Settlement

15. The settlement is clustered along the roads and lanes either side of the Lee brook, a tributary stream of the River Lark. It occupies the small valleysides between the 10m and 15m contour around the brook - the only part of the parish which has noticeably elevated

<sup>2</sup> Rosemary Hopper (p68) in An Historical Atlas of Suffolk, Dymond and Martin 1999.

and with gently rolling landform. Small areas within the village top the 15m contour and these historically had high status - on one is found the old castle, with the church close by - together with the Manor House and Old Rectory, they make an historic group on the top of the escarpment. Freckenham House, added much later, occupies another of the 'hilltops'.

16. Some surprisingly steep slopes are found around the oldest part of the village, the rolling topography forming a distinctive setting for views of the church tower. This scenic arrangement provides considerable relief from the vast flat landscapes that surround the village and such views are a strong contributor to sense of place.
17. The flat featureless land around the settlement is generally unsettled, save for a few outlying farmsteads in the north of the parish. These are generally not historic farmsteads. Only one - Lee Farm - is recorded on the early OS maps.
18. The village has a real mix of housing types and styles. The vernacular materials - flint and pale bricks, see on the older cottages and houses, are mixed in amongst more modern, generic material palettes. There is everything from large, imposing historic houses to very modest single story structures with little ornamentation. Some planned village extension took place to the east along Mildenhall Road, and north along North Street, in the mid 20th century by the local authority, but otherwise the village has escaped modern housebuilders' estates. It generally has a feel of incremental development over time.
19. Older vernacular buildings are built in flint or pale gault bricks. Roofs are a mix of thatch, slate and pantiles - hipped roofs are common. Clunch or chalk blocks are in evidence on the old farmsteads, the chalk probably quarried from the site of the old marl pit, between Church Road and Mildenhall Road.<sup>3</sup> These contribute particularly positively to the street scene.

### Road network

20. Roads in the wider area are often long and straight, and indeed those connecting the village to surrounding settlements are generally linear. However, roads within the settlement itself are much more organic in form and wind around the sloping valleysides. Such organic forms hint at the ancient age of the village. Once out into the countryside the roads then quickly straighten up.
21. The remnants of a railway line crosses the parish about 1.5km north of the village, the Mildenhall to Cambridge Line was closed in 1962 and now just traces can be seen on

maps and on the ground. The prevailing linearity of the patterns in the landscape mean it does not stand out noticeably.

### Summary

22. Freckenham sits in a shallow fold in an otherwise flat open landscape where three soil/ landscape types meet. The variety of its soils and environmental profiles historically meant access to a wide range of resources, transportation methods and options for farming. These environmental advantages lead to the gradual evolution of the village seen today, which has grown up around the scattered historic farms and houses. Distinctiveness is strongest where historic buildings remain dominant features in the street scenes, and where there is interaction with topography and open space. Preservation and /or enhancement of these open spaces, and the historic buildings and their settings, is of primary importance to retain the special character of Freckenham in the future planning of further development.



## 2. Introduction to the assessment

1. Freckenham Parish Council appointed a Neighbourhood Plan Group in 2018 and, at the time of writing, are in the process of preparing their Neighbourhood Plan. The Group commissioned this landscape assessment in February 2020 to assist them in the development of their Plan and its policies.
2. The aim of the study was to take the parish NP group through the following steps:
  1. To provide a parish character assessment as a framework for understanding and defining landscape and settlement character. The findings will highlight aspects of value, important views and identify the important contributors to character in each area. The information will be useful for a range of purposes including future change management within the landscape. One such force for change is a proposal for a large scale solar farm in the parish.
  2. To appraise the sensitivity of land around the village edges to future residential development. The purpose of these is to aid Site selection for potential allocation within the Neighbourhood Plan - directing future development to the 'right' places where sensitivities are lower, and protect areas of high sensitivity.
  3. To provide a sound evidence base to directly underpin other emerging Neighbourhood Plan policies and develop a landscape-led approach.
  4. To Provide a key views assessment to help form policy to protect particularly valued or views within the village
  5. To form the basis of any future pieces of work such as design guidance for new development.
- different landscapes to withstand different types of development pressures and draw out the particular issues to which any future development should respond, such as:
  - Promoting understanding of sense of place and allowing development to respond to local building forms and patterns of development;
  - Integrating any new development successfully into its landscape setting;
  - Considering the scale of proposed development in relation to the topography; adjoining built form and local views, etc.
5. 'Landscape' is understood as a result of the interaction of the natural, physical components of the environment with the human element - historical and cultural, land use and human interventions over time. Assessment of character should map and describe the variations in physical, natural and cultural attributes that relate to the landscape, as well as its experiential characteristics, such as tranquillity. It is not just experienced visually, but through sounds, smells, memories and cultural associations. Landscape Character Assessment presents descriptions of these attributes in a consistent, robust and structured way so the characteristics of different areas can be understood and compared. The process analyses differences in topography, soils, hydrology, woodland and tree cover, land use and farm type, settlement patterns, and perceptual experience, etc. which combine to create unique and distinctive sets of characteristics.
6. Landscape character assessment can be applied at different scales from the national to the local, parish level. In classifying landscapes, two categories may be identified:
  - Landscape character **types** - these are landscapes with broadly similar combinations of geology, landform, vegetation, land use, field and settlement patterns. They repeat across a landscape so that landscapes belonging to a particular type such as 'Valley Meadowlands', may be found in different places across Suffolk.
  - Landscape character **areas** - these are unique areas that occur in only one place and are therefore geographically specific. They have their own individual character and identity.

### What is Landscape Character Assessment?

3. Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is the process of identifying and analysing variation in the character of the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features (characteristics) that make landscapes distinctive and create a sense of place. The methodology for undertaking LCAs is well established and is set out in '*An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment*' (published by Natural England, 2014).
  4. LCA helps to inform, plan and manage change and is be useful when undertaken at a scale appropriate to neighbourhood plan-making. It helps an understanding of the ability of
  7. This study identifies landscape character areas but references the relevant types identified in the County character assessment.
  8. This study also includes elements of townscape assessment where the landscape and built form interface. Townscape character assessment looks at the variations in the character of the built form of settlements and highlights indicators of value. The definition of townscape, described in GLVIA3<sup>1</sup> is: "*the landscape within the built-up*"
- <sup>1</sup> Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (GLVIA3) (Landscape Institute

## 2.0 Introduction continued:-

*area, including the buildings, the relationship between them, the different types of urban open spaces, including green spaces and the relationship between buildings and open spaces.” (Paragraph 2.7) Guidance on the undertaking of Townscape assessments are less formalised but the Landscape Institute published a guidance note in 2017<sup>2</sup>.*

### Why is understanding character helpful?

9. Freckenham Neighbourhood Plan group wish to put an understanding of landscape at the heart of their Neighbourhood plan. This means they wish to make decisions for its future that are fully informed by an understanding of the following factors:
  - how the village developed historically, its position in the landscape, and how this should influence any future growth;
  - the factors that makes Freckenham distinctive and different from other villages. What aspects make up its ‘genus loci’, or sense of place;
  - how its heritage, and open spaces and vegetative features contribute to character and how these, and other aspects of value, should be subject to protection;
  - how the built forms and materials that contribute positively to sense of place could inspire future building layouts and design.
  - how any important views within the village contribute to sense of place and identify future measures for their protection.
10. Taking this landscape character-led approach to the Neighbourhood Plan will ensure that local distinctiveness is maintained and enhanced, highly valued places and views are identified and help ensure development goes in the ‘right’ place. The assessment also will help identify opportunities for landscape enhancement across the parish that could be the subject of future projects.
11. The assessment also sought alignment with the other document relating to protecting aspects of value in the village - namely Freckenham Conservation Area appraisal.

### What is landscape sensitivity?

12. The last part of each character description deals with the sensitivity of each character area. It aims to provide an understanding of the specific landscape and visual issues in each rural character area or village fringe.

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and Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013)

<sup>2</sup> Townscape Character Assessment LI Technical Information Note 05/2017. Revised April 2018. Townscape Character Assessment Technical Information Note.

13. Freckenham has four tightly drawn settlement boundaries in the Local Plan, giving few opportunities for development within the existing village envelope. The boundaries have been drawn to generally exclude rear domestic curtilages and the open spaces between the clusters. The scattered settlement along Elms Road, Church Street, and on the south side of Mildenhall Road is even excluded from the settlement. It leaves almost no opportunity for infill development to take place.
14. Pressure for new residential development will, therefore, be felt on the rural fringes or between existing settlement clusters. Sensitivity appraisal allow different parts of the village fringe to be understood and compared in terms of sensitivity and whether there is any potential capacity (in landscape terms) for allocating sites for development. The emerging Neighbourhood Plan seeks to ensure that sufficient housing delivery is enabled, but in appropriate locations that do not harm the special character of the village, its valued views or special features.
15. Whilst in the village fringes the main pressure for change is likely to be for residential development, out in the farmland the focus for pressure is currently a large scale solar farm. The village wish to respond to upcoming consultation on national infrastructure-scale energy farming - planning for a very large solar farm is in its early stages on land across the north of the parish.
16. In summary, appraisal of sensitivity will help to:
  - a) provide the Neighbourhood Plan group an aid for making sound decisions in relation to spatial planning and policy formation, in relation to landscape;
  - b) provide evidence to help the parish respond to future planning applications;
  - c) help identify and justify land for allocation, and aid site planning on any such land;
  - d) aid transparency; it is important that residents and land owners understand why decisions have been made, particularly in relation to allocation, and understand where development might be supported and where it might be discouraged;
  - e) identify opportunities for the enhancement, management and conservation of the landscape and views.
17. It is important to note that the results of the study are not intended to suggest specific development site areas or define future settlement boundaries. The study also takes no account of other factors that would influence allocation, for example such as availability of

### 3. Character context

land, flood risk, sustainability issues or whether highways access is possible.

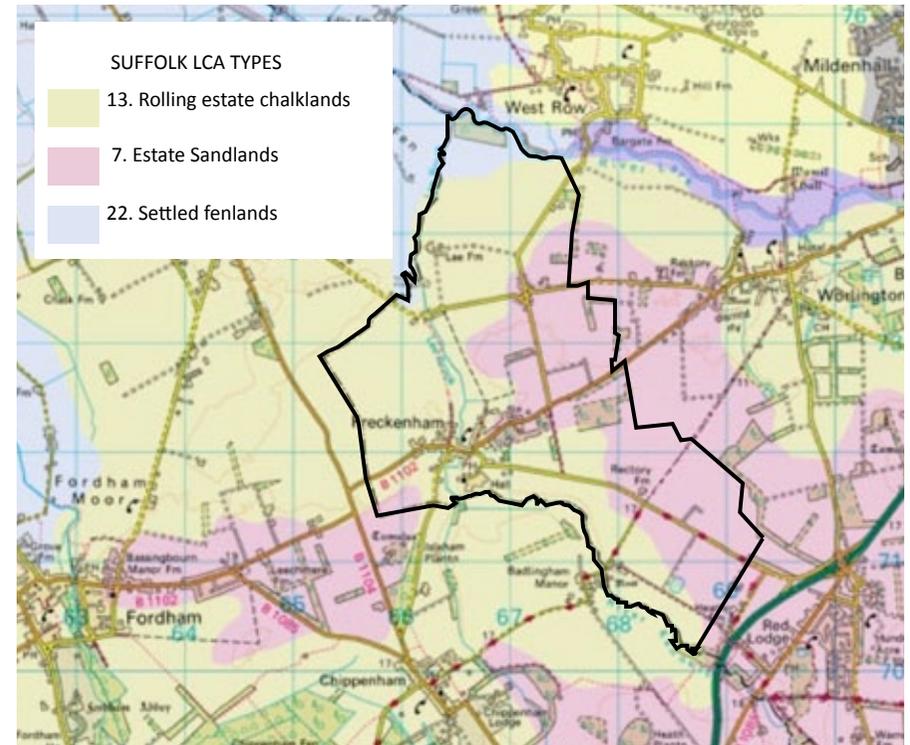
- 18. The approach was simplified to consider sensitivity to new residential development in the village character areas, and to larger scale landscape change in the rural character areas (such as solar farming). A general approach was taken because there was not scope to develop the study to assessing specific development scenarios or individual sites. Parish level character assessments fit into a wider structure of landscape characterisation that has been developing over the last 25 years in the UK. The English landscape is assessed and mapped at larger spatial scales - there is a National Character assessment and also a County level assessment available in Suffolk. Both these are relevant and provide the context into which this parish level study fits.
- 19. The assessment that sit 'above' a parish level assessment should certainly help inform a finer grain analysis of character, but the lines of diversion won't necessarily overlay exactly and are only indicative of the change of the physical and cultural patterns between areas.

#### National level

- 20. At the largest scale there are 159 National Character Areas (NCAs). The descriptions for these are available on the Natural England website. Unusually, Freckenham parish falls across three NCAs - 'No. 84 :The Brecks' to the east, '87 : East Anglian Chalk' to the southwest, and the very northern tip of the parish falls into 'No.46: The Fens'. (See separate Appendix document for a map and list of Key Characteristics).
- 21. The parish's position at the confluence of three different NCAs immediately alerts us that the landscape here is likely to display variance and transition where flat, lightly wooded fenland landscapes meet the equally flat but more regularly wooded Brecklands, and merge into the gently rolling chalky uplands to the southwest.

#### County/district level

- 22. Freckenham sits along the boundary between Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. The Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines (1991), although not directly applicable, are nevertheless useful - they promote a vision for landscape enhancement and contain a set of sound design principles in relation to new development in each of the landscape types it identifies. This assessment would put Freckenham into character type 2 'Chalklands'.
- 23. The next level of detail is available from Suffolk County Council's Landscape Character Assessment (updated 2011). It is a good and comprehensive assessment and describes 31 character types within Suffolk as a whole.
- 24. As might be expected, the parish is on a transitional position with three character types found



in the parish - the east is generally considered 'Estate Sandlands', the west 'Rolling Estate chalklands' and with fingers of 'Settled fenlands' coming in from the North.

- 25. Again, the Suffolk map above clearly shows the parish is in a transitional landscape zone where one area merges into the next. It is not likely these lines are as sharply defined on the ground as this map might indicate, the lines were drawn at 1:50,000 and often simply follow a contour rather than an actual features on the ground. Parish characterisation would aim to clarify the point of change but in reality there is often a transition zone between one character area and another.

### 3.0 Character context continued:-

This is a summary of the key characteristics of the three relevant landscape types, reproduced directly from the Suffolk County LCA:

#### 13. Rolling Estate Chalklands

- A landscape of chalky soils, large regular fields, with paddocks and shelterbelts
- Very gently rolling or flat landscape of chalky free draining loam
- Dominated by large scale arable production
- “Studscape” of small paddocks and shelterbelts
- Large uniform fields enclosed by low hawthorn hedges
- Shelter belt planting, often ornamental species
- A “well kept” and tidy landscape
- Open views
- Clustered villages with flint and thatch vernacular houses
- Many new large “prestige” homes in villages

#### 7. Estate Sandlands

- A landscape of large geometric fields, plantation woodlands and remnant heathland
- Flat or very gently rolling plateaux of free-draining sandy soils, overlying drift deposits of either glacial or fluvial origin
- Chalky in parts of the Brecks, but uniformly acid and sandy in the south-east
- Absence of watercourses
- Extensive areas of heathland or acid grassland
- Strongly geometric structure of fields enclosed in the 18th & 19th century.
- Large continuous blocks of commercial forestry
- Characteristic ‘pine lines’ especially, but not solely, in the Brecks
- Widespread planting of tree belts and rectilinear plantations
- Generally a landscape without ancient woodland, but there are some isolated and very significant exceptions
- High incidence of relatively late, estate type, brick buildings
- North-west slate roofs with white or yellow bricks. Flint is also widely used as a walling material

#### 22. Settled Fenlands

- Flat landscape of peaty soils
- Land at sea level, but small sandy islands and ridges up to 4m
- Piecemeal enclosure of open common Fen
- Small, narrow fields that are divided by straight, water-filled drains
- Small poplar plantations and occasional Scots Pine belts
- Smaller scale farming than in the Planned Fenlands
- Comprehensively settled with farmsteads often forming clusters

Note: the LCA provides a short guidance document for each of its landscape types and this should be referred to for understanding local pressures and managing future change: [www.suffolklandscape.org.uk](http://www.suffolklandscape.org.uk)

## 4. Methods

### Landscape Characterisation

1. Given the obvious different character found in the rural parts of the parish, compared to the village fringes, two sets of character descriptions were developed. This also allowed the different pressures for change in each area to be identified and responded to in appraising sensitivity.
2. Methods follow nationally accepted best practice and available guidance on undertaking Landscape Character Assessment <sup>1</sup>. The character areas were initially mapped via digital methods from desktop study. Through overlaying digital maps of character, topography, soils, field patterns, land use, aerial mapping etc, areas of common or divergent character emerged. These maps are each provided in the separate appendix document.
3. This initial desktop stage resulted in a set of draft character area boundaries, which were then tested and adjusted, if necessary, following visual survey in the field. The study was carried out using mapping at the scale of 1:10,000.
4. In addition to the existing character assessments, the following specific sources of information were used to help develop parish character area boundaries:
  - Topography data from OS maps
  - Soils and geology data from Landis
  - Designations for heritage and ecology information from government GIS website Magic Map <sup>2</sup>
  - Historic mapping from National Library of Scotland website
  - Google's aerial photography
  - Historic England designation maps
  - Suffolk Landscape Character map
  - Suffolk Historic Landscape character assessment map
5. Whilst not always the exact point of change of character, for ease, the boundaries assigned generally follow some line in the landscape or feature such as hedge lines or roads.
6. Nine areas were mapped and identified in total - 4 rural areas and 5 relating to the village. The rural areas were prefixed R then given a number. The village areas were prefixed with V and given a letter, to avoid confusion. These were submitted to the Neighbourhood

<sup>1</sup> 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment', Natural England, 2014

<sup>2</sup> [magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap](http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap)

Group for comment before the descriptions for each area were written up.

7. The descriptions cover broadly the same topics, but are slightly adapted to be relevant for the two different character types. A broad description is given for the 4 rural character areas, whereas character is set out under separate headings for the village areas. This is to provide a greater level of detail for the appraisal of sensitivity around the village fringes which could come under sustained pressure in future years. The descriptions are supported by a set of representative illustrative photographs.
8. The boundaries between the character areas indicate the approximate line of departure between sets of characteristics but in reality when considering a piece of land near to a boundary, the character description and guidelines for two or more areas may be relevant.
9. The following topics are considered:

#### Constituent landscape types/areas

Provides reference to the relevant area description for any existing available character assessment.

#### Location, landscape setting and physical characteristics

Describes where the area sits within the parish and within the landscape, and gives a summary of its physical character.

#### Topography, soils and hydrology

Describes the landform, its elevation in metres above ordnance datum (AOD) and the soil types that dominate; whether there are water courses or ponds in the area; the direction that drainage basins fall toward.

#### Landcover and land use

Describes how the land is being used, the types of farming or cropping, and whether it is being managed for another activity, such as shooting. It describes the pattern of enclosures. It includes the amount and types of vegetation found; whether any semi-natural environments are found. Common hedge and tree species are listed.

#### Scale and enclosure

What is the scale of the landscape? What patterns the landscape demonstrates in terms of the size and form of its fields, e.g. whether organic or geometric in shape, and the presence or absence of boundary hedges. These factors lead to a sense of intimacy from a fine grained landscape, or openness when enclosure patterns have

been lost. What materials are seen in the built form, roof coverings, enclosures. What vernacular detailing is present.

### Settlement

Describes the amount, type, densities and pattern of settlement found, approximate age of the housing stock; the shape or form and 'grain' of the settlement. The degree to which an area's pattern of subdivisions is small and frequent (fine grain), or large and infrequent (coarse grain). How today's patterns relate to the historic pattern.

### Access opportunities /ROW (Rights of Way) and the Road network

Describes the road network and what the gateways into the village are like. Describes the extent and value of any rights of way.

### Heritage, landmarks and features of value

Lists aspects of value, which could include:

- Listed buildings/structures and their settings
- Scheduled Monuments
- Greenspaces which are designated in the Local and/or Neighbourhood Plan
- Non-designated heritage buildings, open spaces, or other features, which contribute positively to the character of an area
- Areas designated and protected for geological or biological conservation, such as SSSI's and County Wildlife Sites; ancient woodland and veteran trees.
- Registered Parks and Gardens; parkland.

### Visual and perceptual experience and views

Description of the visual experience - whether views are generally open or intimate, whether long or short; how scenic they are. Whether the area feels noisy or tranquil, busy or remote and isolated. Whether the landscape feels well cared for and in good condition, or where there are aspects that are degraded or cause visual intrusion. Are there any Key views in the area?

### Condition, issues and opportunities

In what condition are the landscape and its features? How strongly does the historic character endure to this day?

Is any aspect under threat? What should be the objectives for conservation or enhancement? Are there possibilities for future creation of ecological habitat, or expanded recreation etc?

## Landscape sensitivity

10. Methods for assessing landscape sensitivity have only fairly recently been published. *"An approach to landscape sensitivity assessment – to inform spatial planning and land management"* was published in June 2019 (Christine Tudor, Natural England). The guidance urges studies to be simple, transparent, robust and defensible. An idealised process schematic is shown at the end of this document.
11. The guidance provides the following definition of sensitivity (p5):
 

*'..Landscape sensitivity may be regarded as a measure of the resilience, or robustness, of a landscape to withstand specified change arising from development types or land management practices, without undue negative effects on the landscape and visual baseline and their value... a process that assesses the resilience / robustness of landscape character and the visual resource – and what we value - to a defined change, or changes..'*
12. The assessment relies on the premise that development or change should be more readily acceptable in the least sensitive areas, and where appropriate forms of mitigation would be possible. Development would be least acceptable in areas of higher landscape value and where visual sensitivity is high, and/or where conditions are such that the landscape would be sensitive to available mitigation measures.
13. Conditions indicating HIGH sensitivity are where **landscape value** is high and where **visual sensitivity** is high, for example in the following scenarios:
  - Where impacts might result to recognised indicators of value - the setting of heritage features (such as listed buildings) or key landmark buildings
  - Where impacts might result to natural or topographic features that contribute notably to local character and sense of place
  - Where impacts might result because land is very visually prominent, and openness is an essential contributor to character
  - Where settlement has stark edges and assimilation of new development would be hard
  - Where commonly valued 'Key' scenic views, that are important to the experience of a settlement, are vulnerable
  - Where a large number of people might be affected, and/or viewers would be

considered sensitive (i.e. views experience directly from homes or busy recreational areas)

- Where a sense of tranquillity is strong

14. Conditions indicating LOW sensitivity are where **landscape value** is low and where **visual sensitivity** is low, for example in the following scenarios:

- Where there is a lack of any designations for landscape, ecology or heritage,
- Where there is little visual amenity or aesthetical value in the views affected
- Where the landscape does not fall into any key views of the village and/or has little scenic value
- Where land is contained or well vegetated and where development could be assimilated without wider impact
- Where development would fit well with the historic pattern of settlement development
- Where development might offer the opportunity for the enhancement or reinforcement of character.
- Where there are few receptors - few opportunities for people to view change
- Where a sense of tranquillity is absent
- No key views affected

15. In most cases, the conditions aren't so clear cut and professional judgement has to be applied to determine values.

16. Landscape value and Visual Sensitivity were attributed along the following scale: LOW / MODEST / MODERATE / HIGH / VERY HIGH. The scales are useful for comparative purposes, but more useful is the detail in the supporting text that pick out the sensitivities for each area. Further example circumstances indicating higher and lesser value are given in the tables in appendix 2 and 3 to this document.

#### Key Views assessment

17. A further tool for use alongside this study and which would help in assessing land at the site level is the Key Views Assessment which was undertaken in parallel with this study.

It is presented as a separate document. A 'key' view is one that would be generally recognised as having notable qualities or features, landmarks, or a particularly attractive composition that might cause people to pause and appreciate the scene. It is likely to feature in people's perceptions of what Freckenham looks like in their memories. By analysing what makes them special, and identifying how they contribute to sense of place, a framework for their protection can be justified to aid policy making and decisions at the Site level.

#### Mitigation Notes

18. The sensitivity appraisal concludes with Mitigation Notes. These suggest any appropriate measures to aid successful mitigation of any development impacts that could occur. Where appropriate and successful mitigation can be undertaken the landscape has more ability to assimilate development - and is, therefore, less sensitive. Mitigation is important as it must be recognised that regardless of the policies which might discourage development in areas of high sensitivity, applications may still come forward. Provision of mitigation guidance provides a basis for the determining authorities and the parish group to negotiate better design outcomes.
19. The culmination of the sensitivity appraisal is a set of two 'heat' maps at the end of the report, which show comparatively the landscape value and the visual sensitivity for each character area. However, such attribution of values are rather blunt - the detail and context of each judgement is more important and should be read in conjunction with the maps.

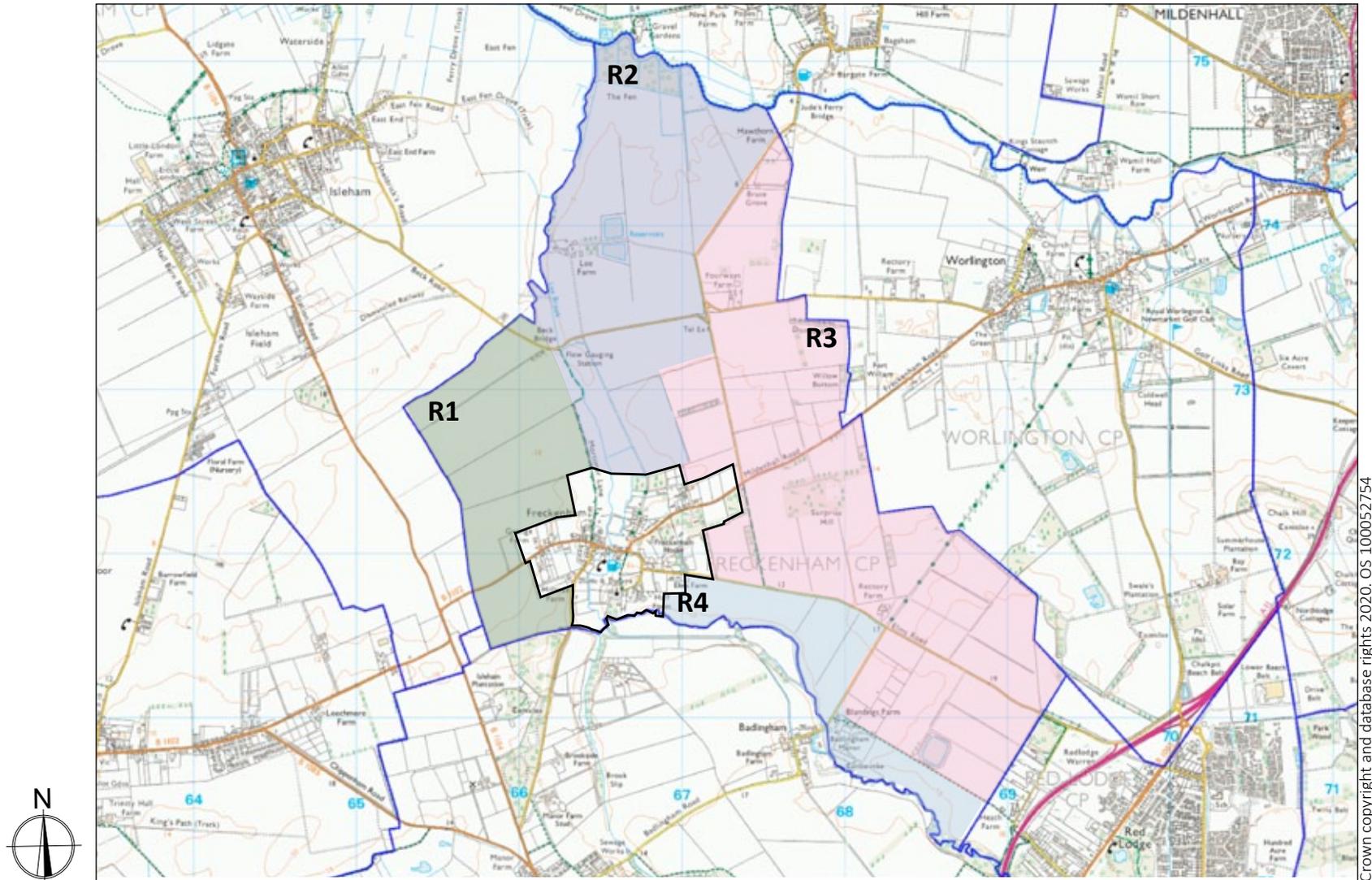
# 5. Rural Character Areas

 Prefix R : 1 to 4



# Map 1 Rural Character Areas

-  Rural Character Area R1 - west
-  Rural Character Area R2 - north
-  Rural Character Area R3 - east
-  Rural Character Area R4 - south



# Map 1b

Rural Character Areas on aerial view

-  Rural character areas and parish boundary
-  Village Character Areas



Image from Google maps

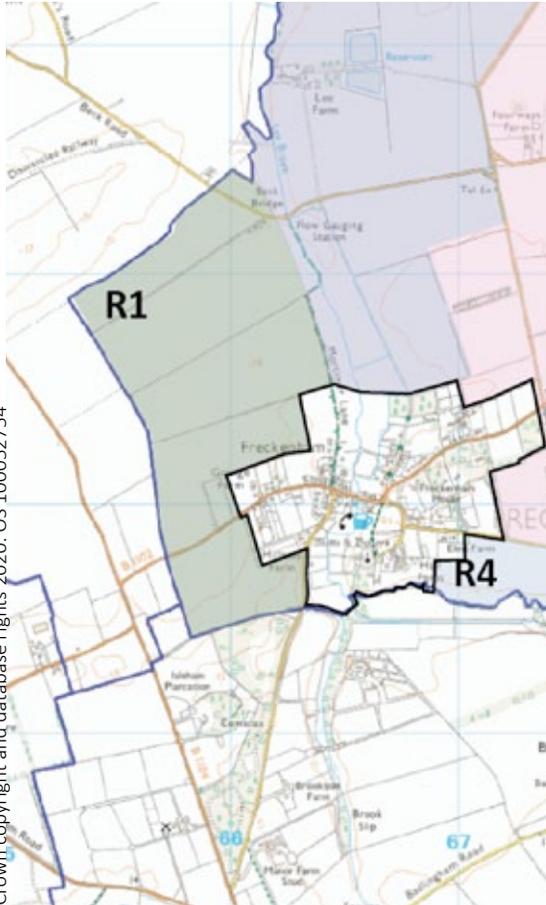
NB. Photographs presented are a mix of the authors own and images from Google Streetview

## Rural Character Area R1 - description

Constituent landscape types/area

National Character Unit: East Anglian Chalk

Suffolk Character Assessment: 13. Rolling Estate Chalklands



### Description

This character area comprises the west side of the parish, land mainly to the north of Fordham Road but with a smaller area to the south. The village has expanded westwards into this area over time. The topography is very flat and lies between 8m and 11m AOD - any direction of slope barely indiscernible. The area is entirely farmland laid out in a series of very large, parallel, rectilinear fields. Soils are pale coloured, chalky free draining loams and are highly valuable for farming. Crops grown are arable and horticultural; potatoes, vegetables, and sugar beet. This means features such as irrigation rigs are common sights at certain times of year. There are no water courses or drainage ditches.

This is the southern edge of a very expansive landscape stretching north and west into the Fens with very infrequent boundary vegetation to add texture or hinder views. Big skies dominate overhead. Hedges are generally absent with a scattering of distant grown-out hawthorns the only remnants of old hedge lines. They are dotted along the far horizons to just push into the skyline, joining up with distant woodlands. Only a change in cropping cover indicates field boundaries which date from Parliamentary Enclosure Acts.

Fields were formed from land that was previously farmed as strips in large common or 'open' fields. Field shapes are frequently rectangular with straight boundaries, as a result of having been laid out to measured plans by surveyors. Historically, there were a number of smaller strip fields lining Fordham Road on early OS maps, and a windmill south of Fordham Road at the end of the 19th century, but these have been mostly assimilated into the adjacent system over time, with just a single small holding remaining on the village edge.

The scale of the area under the same land use means there is little variation in the views to the northwest of the village, and little to interrupt long views between the settlements; there is no built form in this area - no farmsteads. Fordham Road leaves the village with the slightest of curves to join the road network west of the village which echoes the field patterns and features long, straight roads joining one another at right angles.

A right of way bounds the character area on its east side; a historic route connecting Freckenham, from Mortimer Lane, to Isleham, otherwise there are no footpaths or opportunities for recreation.

The landscape character is strongly rural but at the same time offers occasional long range views to infrastructure or commercial land use a few miles away. The scale of the visual experience can be slightly overwhelming but the sense of openness and the long views are highly valued by the residents of Freckenham.

### Condition, Issues and Opportunities

- The condition of the landscape is somewhat poor. Whilst a dense network of hedges is not characteristic on these historically long-standing large open field systems, the remnant hedgerows could be restored to provide wildlife corridors, help prevent soil erosion and provide visual relief at intervals.
- Top soil retention and quality, water extraction and water quality are ongoing issues facing farmers. Climate change will continue to provide challenges to sustainable but productive farming practices.

## Rural Character Area R1 - Photographs

Photo: LBW



View to wooded village edge from the B1104 across the very open character area. Huge skies and the large-scale agricultural patterns dominate.

Photo: LBW



Village edge opens immediately onto expansive open farmland.

## Rural Character Area 1 - Landscape and Visual sensitivity

Approximate scale of sensitivity					
Landscape Value	Very high	High	Moderate	Modest	Low
Visual Sensitivity	Very high	High	Moderate	Modest	Low

**Potential pressures:**

Farm buildings / green energy projects / farming under plastic

**Justification of value and visual sensitivity judgements:**

Landscape value is limited to as ‘MODEST’. Whilst its value and importance for food production is recognised, the landscape here is lacking in terms of designations, heritage, woodland or watercourses. The lack of features, to provide interest and texture, or the opportunity to rest the eye, limit it’s scenic value and its huge field sizes make for a very simple and monotonous character. It is also likely to be ecologically poor. Yet the landscape is a relic of historic open field system farming practices and late enclosure and is at least distinctive.

The openness and the uniformity of the visual experience are the defining visual characteristics. This area of the village is known for its long views, big skies and its spectacular sunsets. Visual sensitivity is judged at ‘VERY HIGH’ because this land parcel is prominent from principal routes; very long views are possible and any change here would be perceived at long range - from several roads, the northern edge of Freckenham and from the edges of other parishes. Any feature with any verticality, or discordant colours would be very noticeable. The extent to which landscape change can be accommodated without it being very noticeable is limited.

**Mitigation notes:**

This landscape is very sensitive to change and development will be hard to integrate. Improving its condition, with structural tree and native hedge planting, would improve its capacity to assimilate change. In terms of scale of development, even single buildings or other small changes could be very noticeable and have a big impact, because of the lack of elements to provide integration.

Any change or development proposed here should be in association with carefully

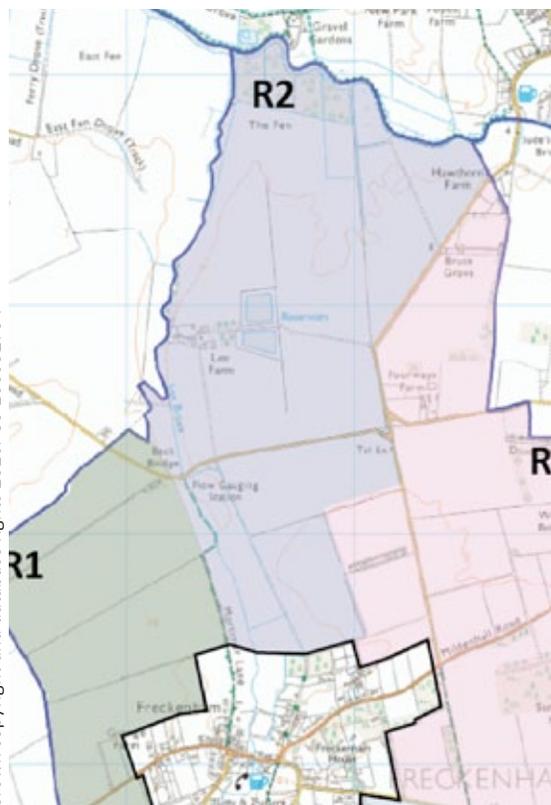
conceived planting - although with awareness that inappropriate new planting can introduce visually intrusive elements in this flat and open landscape. Development associated with existing village edge will be easier to integrate than if isolated. Colour is very important and large new buildings, for example new farm sheds, should be appropriately coloured depending on whether seen against the land or sky.

Unconnected with development, planting of field boundaries with hedges and some trees, in association with more ecologically diverse field margins, would provide significant ecological benefit as well as visual interest.

## Rural Character Area R2 - description

### Constituent landscape types/area

National Character Unit: East Anglian Chalk  
Suffolk Character Assessment: 13. Rolling Estate Chalklands



### Description

This character area comprises the northern part of the parish from the village edge at the end of Mortimer and North Lanes as far north as the parish boundary along the River Lark, west of West Fen Road. It is a zone where the wide open farms of the fenland edge merge into to the more regularly wooded Breckland landscapes to the east.

The Lee Brook flows from the heart of the village northwards to define the west side of the character area, towards its confluence with the River Lark. Its narrow, straightened course is occasionally dotted with native shrubs such as hawthorn and elder but often appears more as a fenland drain, in the northern part of the area, than a natural watercourse.

The topography feels flat, though land slopes very gently northwards from about 12m AOD in the southeast of the area to only about 4m AOD along the river. The area is under farmland, laid out in a series of large square or geometric fields; patterns are simple and linear, as common to these geometric late-enclosure landscapes. Historic maps show a line of smaller fields backing onto the brook, these were probably pastures, but these have now been merged and are farmed for crops. There is a strong sense of openness.

In the far northwest the fringes of the River Lark are marshy and form a small piece of naturalised wooded Fen, cut through with drains. Much of the river margins in adjoining parishes is drained and farmed right up to the banks of the river, to maximise land take. The wet woodland here has survived clearance for farming and has landscape and ecological value in an otherwise ecologically poor landscape.

Apart from the peaty river margins, soils are freely draining, slightly acid but base-rich, and became highly valuable for farming in the 20th century once watering became possible. Crops grown are potatoes and vegetables, sugar beet and outdoor pigs, and cereals used as break crops. Land can be under plastic and irrigation rigs which provides common sights and sounds at certain times of year. There is a single large farmstead - Lee Farm - which is flanked by reservoirs for irrigation. A new farmhouse at Lee Farm stands somewhat over prominently in the landscape, and its new red brick walls and entrance gates at the end of its long drive are a little out of character in terms of scale and materials. Farms tend to be set back from roads, surrounded by their own land.

The transitional character of the landscape (between the Brecks and Fens) is expressed in the visual experience here. Overall the character is very open and long views are possible. To the east views terminate along a horizon lined with Breckland plantation woodland and hedges, whereas views out to the fenlands to the west are more open and far reaching to the distant horizon, broken by only occasional lines of trees. In this character area hedges are usually present enclosing the roads and lanes, sometimes gappy, although they don't tend to be seen separating fields which have an open, large-scale character, with big skies overhead.

The area was once bisected by the Cambridge to Mildenhall railway line which leaves little trace on the ground except around the junction of West Row Road and Isleham and Beck Roads. The road bridge over what was once a railway line provides an artificial high point in the landscape at the staggered junction.

## Rural Character Area R2 - Photographs

Photo: LBW



The straightened channel of the Lee Brook flows northwards the Lark through open farmland

Image from Google Streetview



Patterns are simple and linear, this lane is semi-enclosed by vegetation with pines at intervals; farmland under plastic

### Condition, Issues and Opportunities

- The condition of the landscape is reasonable but could be improved. Whilst a dense network of hedges is not characteristic on these long-standing large open field systems, remnant hedgerows could be restored, and new pine lines and woodland belts could be added along boundaries to benefit to both wildlife and visual amenity.
- Instating grazing pastures along the brook and rivers, the banks dotted with willows and alder, would be better for preventing fertiliser run-off, enhancing biodiversity and restoring historic landscape character and management.
- Top soil retention and quality, water extraction and water quality are ongoing issues facing farmers. Climate change will continue to provide challenges to sustainable but productive farming practices.

## Rural Character Area R2 - Landscape and Visual sensitivity

Approximate scale of sensitivity					
Landscape Sensitivity	Very high	High	Moderate	Modest	Low
Visual Sensitivity	Very high	High	Moderate	Modest	Low

**Potential pressures:**

Equine land use / farm buildings / green energy /

**Justification of value and visual sensitivity judgements:**

Landscape value is judged as ‘MODERATE’. The farmland is generally featureless and open but here there are a few roadside hedges, and there are water courses along both the west and north of the character area. Along the Lark to the north there is a small area of Fen under wet woodland which provides ecological value. These trees, and others in the adjoining character area to the east, form wooded skylines. Otherwise the landscape is lacking designations or heritage features. Some cultural value is reflected in the endurance of the historic open fields and late enclosure patterns.

Visual sensitivity balances out at ‘HIGH’. Factors indicating higher sensitivity are the open, generally featureless character of the farmland, meaning views can be long, especially to the west. In such conditions, the extent to which landscape change can be accommodated without it being very noticeable is limited. However, the adjacent character area to the east is more wooded which partly contains longer views into the area, and the roads that bound it tends to be hedged which also prevents views in. Additionally the number of viewers is relatively limited, there are no footpaths or accessible spaces nearby, the area is not easily seen into from settlement edges or the principal road network.

**Mitigation notes:**

This landscape is relatively sensitive to change and integration of development will be dependent on scale. Where tree structure exists or where there is existing built form,

further small-scale changes such as new farm buildings, can be accommodated, provided overall heights are limited, and materials and colours are appropriate. Existing hedges can be managed at greater height and width and field margins can be planted with rows of pines or narrow plantations. Overall the linearity and geometry of the landscape can be reflected with new planting to strengthen the Breckland edge character. Improving its condition, with native hedges, would improve its capacity to assimilate change. Planting of field boundaries with hedges and tree lines, in association with margins would provide significant ecological benefit as well as visual interest.

Large scale changes would be much harder to accommodate. Part of this area is under consideration for a large scale solar farm. This character area has much less capacity than the more wooded and contained landscape to the west and south, the openness means that large scale landscape change would be very noticeable from the wider landscape and impacts would be felt across a wide area.

## Rural Character Area R3 - description

Constituent landscape types/area

National Character Unit: 85. The Brecks

Suffolk Character Assessment: 7. Estate Sandlands

### Description

This is the largest of the rural character areas and comprises the eastern part of the parish, where it meets Worlington along a stepped and staggered parish boundary. It includes land close to the A11 corridor, adjoining Red Lodge in the south, the village edges on Elms Road and Mildenhall Road, and then north to Hawthorn Farm; the parish boundary falls just short of Jude's Ferry Bridge and the Lark, where the parish of West Row begins. Apart from the southeast corner, where the influence of the nearby built up area of Red Lodge and the A11 is felt, the area has a rural and distinctively 'Breckland' feel.

The topography feels flat, though land slopes very gently northwards from about 19m AOD in the far southeast to about 8m AOD in the north; the gradual slope is imperceptible.

Soils are mixed in this zone but always light and free draining. Fingers of acidic sandy Breckland soils from the east reach into areas of freely draining, base-rich loams. These dry soils were historically of limited use for agriculture and were cropped only at intervals, but became important once irrigation became possible. Land use is almost entirely farmland - crops grown are potatoes and vegetables, sugar beet and outdoor pigs, and cereals used as break crops. There is a block of equine land use south of Elms Road.

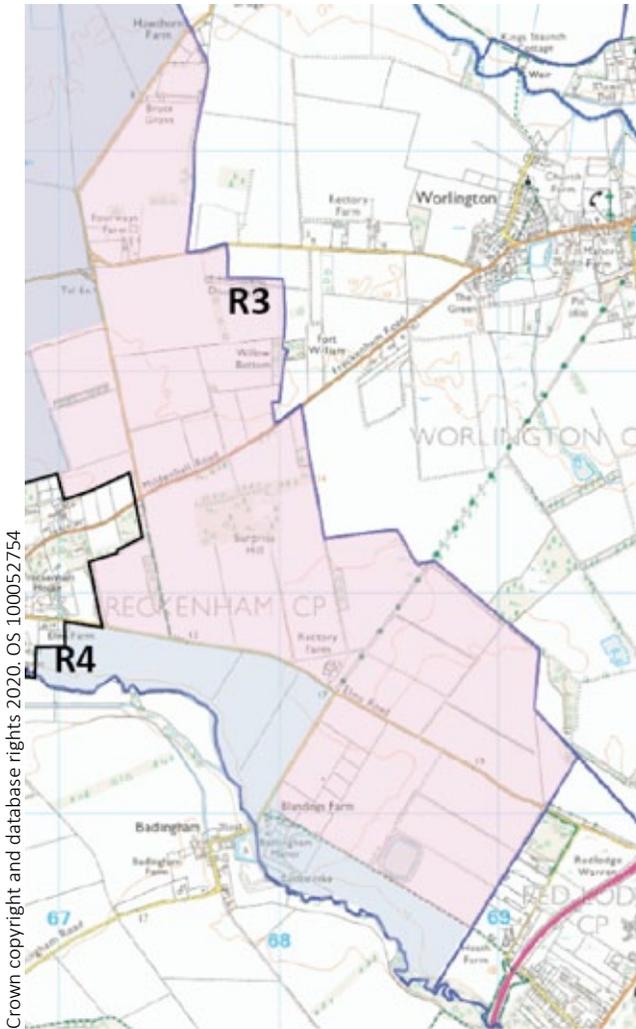
The field patterns are regular and geometric, with some variation in size and shape. Field sizes are relatively large, though they do not feel as expansive as in character areas R1 and R2 owing to the regular vegetated boundaries. They tend to be smallest and narrowest adjacent to roads and settlement edges; the grain to the pattern of the landscape tends to be finer around the villages, and larger scale and more expansive in more isolated parts. Aside from the nucleated villages, settlement in the Brecks is scarce - just an occasional farmstead is found.

The character area has notably more woodland than the landscapes to the north and west of Freckenham village. Woodland is regularly seen in strip plantations, shelter belts and pine lines, dividing up the farmland. The largest woodland is a rectilinear coniferous block at Surprise Hill in the centre of the character area. The Breckland pine lines originated as sheltering hedges which have since grown out and which are now key characteristics of Breckland skylines, lining roads and field boundaries. Field hedges and roadside hedges are common. The tree lines and the verges of roads and tracks form the ecological networks across the intensively farmed landscape. Reservoirs are also found here.

Roads are found at regular intervals; long and usually direct, they criss-cross the countryside linking the villages in straight lines.

There is little in the way of built heritage but the surveyor-planned landscape appearance of the Brecklands is a result of centuries-old land management and late enclosure and historically important in its own right.

There are few footpaths or recreational opportunities. A track beside Rectory Farm that connects to Worlington is mapped as a public access route and a section of footpath links the Elms and Mildenhall Roads.



## Rural Character Area R3 - Photographs



Lines of Scots Pine separate large and regular fields. The pines create distinctive jagged skylines.



Roads are straight, tend to be hedged and sometimes offer glimpses of silos or pig huts in large fields backed by woodland.

### Condition, Issues and Opportunities

- The condition of the landscape is moderate. There are frequent hedges but they tend to be maintained at low height and are often gappy.
- Seek opportunities to conserve and enhance existing hedges and support the replanting thorn hedges along all field boundaries. Work towards recreating habitat mosaics across the landscape. Potential opportunities may arise within new agri-environment schemes.
- Conserve the pine lines and woodland belts to reinforce Breckland character where decline or senescent. Without planned and targeted replacement, their loss results in the erosion of landscape character.
- Seek opportunities for public access through farmland.
- Top soil retention and quality, water extraction and water quality are ongoing issues facing farmers. Climate change will continue to provide challenges to sustainable but productive farming practices.

## Rural Character Area R3 - Landscape and Visual sensitivity

Approximate scale of sensitivity					
Landscape Sensitivity	Very high	High	Moderate	Modest	Low
Visual Sensitivity	Very high	High	Moderate	Modest	Low

### Potential pressures:

Equine land use / farm buildings / green energy / minerals

### Justification of value and visual sensitivity judgements:

Landscape value is judged as 'MODERATE'. Whilst the character area has no designations or ecologically important areas, it's representative of the Breckland landscape and has strong sense of place. Its Breckland heritage is reflected in the linear geometry, and the distinctive lines of trees and vegetation communities that indicate the light, acid, sandy soils underfoot. Historically heathland, the wider Brecklands were under a rotational farming cycle. Where fragments of heathland remain, (elsewhere in the Brecks) it has important and distinctive ecology. The Brecks also have recreational value associated with the forests and heaths, which don't feel far away. The overall feel is generally tranquil but the long straight roads can be busy and host speeding traffic. The noise of the A11 affects the eastern side of the character area.

In visual terms, the character area is also MODERATELY sensitive. Views tend to be contained in the middle distance by regular woodland structure; pine lines, woodland blocks and shelter belts, as well as roadside hedges. But there is still potential for sizeable impacts in the more open parts - long views are sometimes possible where hedges have been lost. Parts of the area are visible from the edges of the village on its west side and on the approaches along both Elms Road and Mildenhall Road - the parts of R3 with highest visual sensitivity. They form part of the rural edges of the village and provide its rural setting.

### Mitigation notes:

Some types of change are likely to be accommodated without significant harm, especially if related to the agricultural purposes of the landscape. It's regular geometry can be

adjusted relatively easily and its character is robust enough to withstand limited change, where well wooded. It is more sensitive where it is more open.

Where its lacking, new boundary planting in the form of plantations, hedges and pine line are appropriate to improve the condition of the landscape. The linearity and geometry of the landscape can be reflected with characteristic new planting to strength the Breckland character. Planting behind development can be as effective as planting in front of it (long term), to maintain distinctive skylines and absorb development below.

But whilst regularised, simple landscape have better capacity than more ancient landscapes, it's a question of identifying appropriate scale and location to avoid an unacceptable visual impact and erosion of character.

Part of this area is under consideration for a large scale solar farm. The landscape does have some capacity, in landscape character terms, for solar arrays, provided it is associated with existing woodland structure. By using and extending the existing woodland structure to help assimilate and provide screening, arrays contained in land parcels surrounded by belts of woodland would, over time, become well assimilated although the loss of openness would have to be accepted. Impacts at first however could be sizeable - large scale land use change could result in substantial visual impacts that local communities will find challenging.

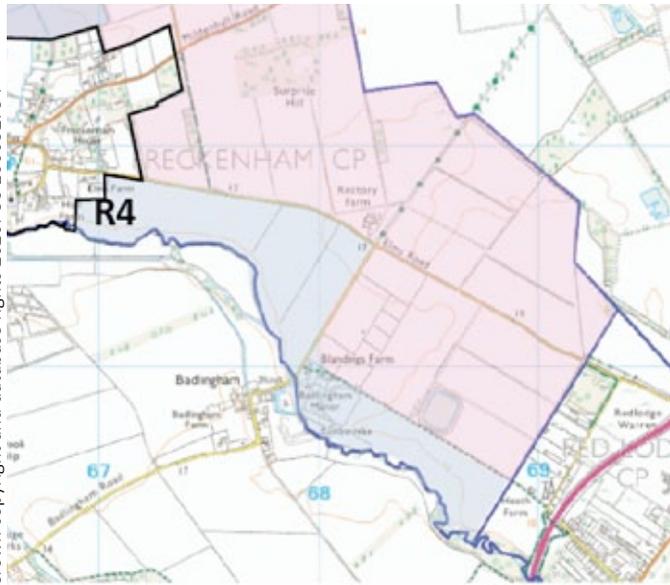
# Rural Character Area R4 - description

Constituent landscape types/area

National Character Unit: 85. The Brecks

Suffolk Character Assessment: 13. Rolling estate chalklands

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## Description

This is the smallest of the rural character areas and comprises the southwestern edge of the parish. The boundary follows the winding course of the River Kennett which separates Freckenham from Chippenham. It is a narrow, belt of land - one field deep - east of the village. The land slopes gently towards the river in a southwesterly direction from a high point of about 17m to about 9m. The shallow valley form is perceptible in views towards the south from the higher ground.

Soils are generally freely draining lime-rich loamy soils but getting sandier further east.

Land use is a mix of farmland and equine paddocks - horse racing shapes much of the character of the Rolling Estate Chalklands. To the south there is a reservoir in the adjoining character area which supplies the fields here, where high value vegetable crops are grown. In terms of settlement there is a cluster of dwellings that are associated with Blandings Farm, along with equine use at Brookside Stud adjacent. This echoes the equine land use on the other side of the river at Badlingham Manor in Chippenham parish.

The river corridor takes a natural, winding route through the landscape, bringing organic form to this otherwise relentlessly geometric landscape. The southern field boundaries are therefore soft and natural in shape, but the other boundaries conform to the planned geometry and are laid out perpendicular to the road network. Field sizes here are fairly large.

Woodland blocks are also absent but the river corridor is vegetated by trees at intervals. Willow and poplar can be seen in the skyline dotted along the river. A widely spaced avenue of trees has been planted along both the Elms Road and the lane to Badlingham, giving an 'estate' feel to the landscape. Hedges are sometimes present, but are often gappy and are maintained at a low height.

There is an important off-road walk around the eastern half of the farmland parcel. Starting from the village edge at Elms Farm it runs eastward, next to Elms Road, then turns south with the junction before turning westward toward the village along the river. It offers an attractive circular route with views to the historic village edge.

## Condition, Issues and Opportunities

- The condition of the landscape is moderate.
- Much opportunity for hedge network to be improved; existing hedges gapped up and allowed to grow bigger, and reinstatement of new hedges or shelter belts along field boundaries where lacking. There is the potential for creating a more effective ecological network, in association with the river corridor, linking to the plantations on the higher grounds to the north.
- Instating grazing pastures along the brook and rivers, the banks dotted with willows and alder, would be better for preventing fertiliser run-off, enhancing biodiversity and restoring historic landscape character and management.
- Maintain key views to the Church tower on the approach to the village.
- Seek additional opportunities for enjoyment of river through public access along it.
- Maintain the distinctive avenue of trees which marks the approach to the village.

## Rural Character Area R4 - Photographs

Image from Google Streetview



Photo: LBW



The River Kennett - little much more than a stream at the Badlingham Bridge and often dry in summer.

Footpath encircles these fields providing pleasant circular footpath route

Image from Google Streetview



Line of river in shallow valley indicated by willows. Trees at regular intervals along Elms Road give an estate feel

## Rural Character Area R4 - Landscape and Visual sensitivity

Approximate scale of sensitivity					
Landscape Value	Very high	High	Moderate	Modest	Low
Visual Sensitivity	Very high	High	Moderate	Modest	Low

**Potential pressures:**

Equine land use / farm buildings / green energy / mineral workings

**Justification of value and visual sensitivity judgements:**

Landscape value is judged as ‘HIGH’ and visual sensitivity at ‘MODERATE’.

The gently sloping side of the River Kennett valley has strong rural character and communicates a subtle valley form in the landscape, just appreciable to the eye, in which the village of Freckenham is nestled (villages tend to sit in the valleys in the Estate Chalklands type). The character area plays a key role in the approach to the village - the avenue of trees herald the village ahead and glimpses of the church tower emerging from trees provides the feel of a historic settlement, well integrated into its setting. Elms Road offers some of the best views to the Church, Manor and complex of flint barns.

Where R4 meets the village edge land is particularly sensitive because it is long standing - the oldest houses in the village sit alongside the rural edge here and they enjoy a clear relationship with the countryside adjacent.

The trees that line the river, mostly willow, hint at the presence of the water course and enhance the sense of naturalness in an otherwise intensively farmed and managed wider landscape.

Visually, the character area parcel has moderate sensitivity. It is prominent on the approach into the village from the east, and any changes would be hard to screen.

However, it is not seen from the main village itself owing mainly to the amount of tree cover in the east of the village.

**Mitigation notes:**

Development in this parcel could cause harm if it noticeably interrupts the integrity of the unspoilt valley side, interferes with views across the valley, or to the church tower. Improving the condition of the landscape would improve its capacity to withstand change. The vegetated riparian corridor and the well wooded nature of the adjacent character areas provides a structure to tie new native tree and hedge planting into. If new development was designed with appropriate vegetated boundaries it could be assimilated but taking small ‘bites’ out of it would be harmful. Fast growing screening species such as willow and poplar could be appropriate in this character area.

## Summary of sensitivities in the rural character areas

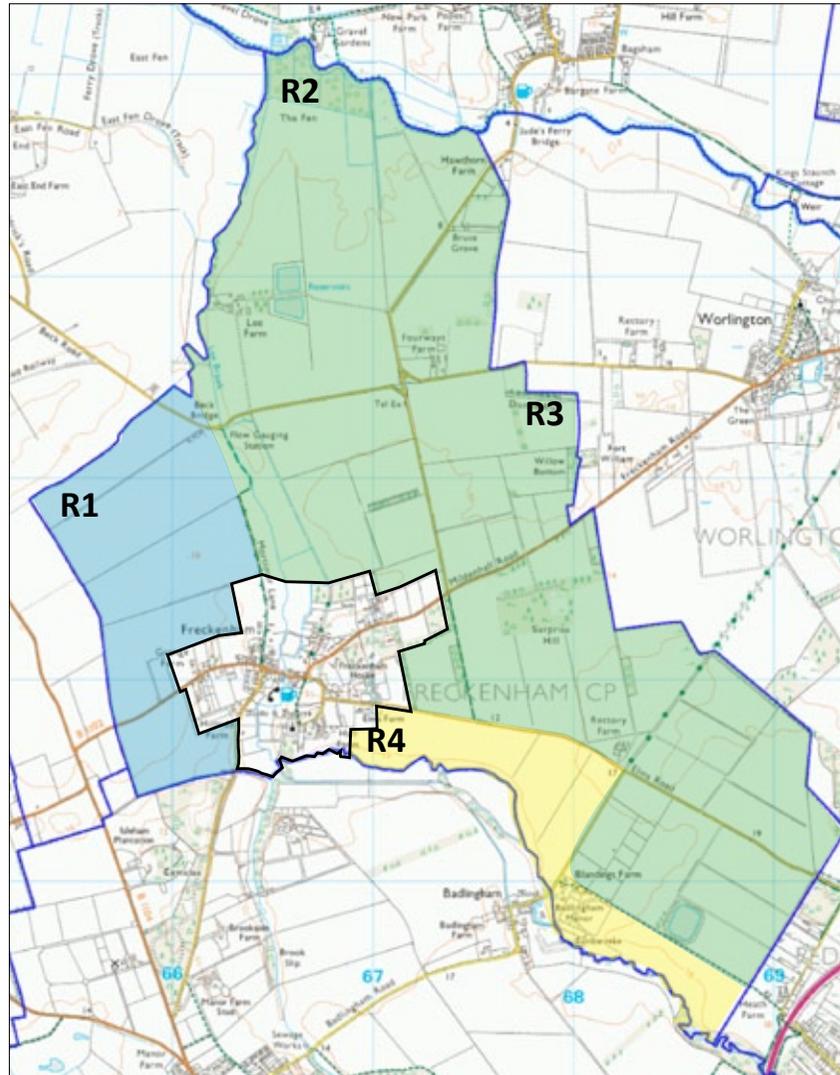
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1. The three landscape types described in the Suffolk Landscape Assessment, found across the rural parts of Freckenham parish, indicate the often subtly changing nature of the landscape from north to south and east to west. All the types found are planned, geometric landscapes where surveyors from centuries past have divided up the land with maps and rulers. Vegetative features have followed suit and are found generally in linear and geometric arrangements. Natural features are few and far between - woodland is not ancient, but instead in plantations of limited species diversity. It is a landscape where human impact is more tangible than in much of Suffolk, where ancient patterns and at least semi-natural woodlands are found to a greater degree. Ongoing human activity and intensive agriculture is plain to see in the open fields around the village, which grow high value goods - potatoes, vegetables, pork as well as keeping and breeding horses connected with the racing industry at Newmarket. The water courses here provide some of the only natural features, but these too have also been adapted in part. Attributing landscape value in these open and altered landscapes is complex.
2. Value is found in the shallow valleys, the enduring late enclosure patterns, the distinctive cultural heritage of the Fens and Brecks and the isolated, rural feel. They can feel tranquil away from the A11 corridor and when military aircraft aren't circling. These landscapes are highly distinctive but sometimes challenging; common perceptions of what makes a landscape scenic - i.e. complexity, naturalness, variety, richness, organic forms - are not easy to experience. To those unused to the scale and expansiveness of land and sky they can be slightly overwhelming. Landscape value exists in terms of strong sense of place rather in terms of the existence of natural features or habitats. It is therefore sensitive to changes that threaten its character - which is more likely at parish or landscape scale, rather than at the scale of individual sites.
3. Visual sensitivity is rather easier to understand. Where the landscape is open, it is visible from the network of roads that cross the area and from settlement edges. Long range views can be experienced meaning potentially sizeable adverse impacts can result from poorly conceived land use changes or development.
4. In the rural areas, change can be assimilated in the east of the parish to a greater degree than in the west. The regularly wooded and hedged landscape, in regular 'compartments', features ready made screening opportunities and the ability to be adapted in a sympathetic way. Visual sensitivity is more limited. Conversely the open 'prairies' to the west have no such structure to integrate with and are highly visually sensitive. Change or additions to these open fenland edge landscapes would highly visible from a wide area and any screening would also have visual impact.
5. With specific regard to the proposal for two large PV arrays in the parish, the character area with least capacity is in R1. Here, north of the village, there is very little vegetative structure to help the array become assimilated. Impacts would be felt over a very wide area including the northern edges of the village, and the footpath that heads north from Mortimers Lane. Mitigation proposals could also have considerable impact in such a flat open landscape.
6. Similar issues of long range, unimpeded views exist in R2 although roadside hedges would at least provide some screening for those passing through the landscape. It is also more distant and therefore less visible from the village edge. Better conditions are found in R3 where there is more regular structure and where the visual experience can be more contained. However, the south of R3 is less wooded and more open - this is the focus for the arrays to the east of the village.
7. A specific Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, accompanied by digital modelling, would reveal the magnitude of likely impacts of various site options, and help shape both a siting and mitigation strategy for a solar farm. Owing to the scale of the proposals a multi-parish approach would be best.

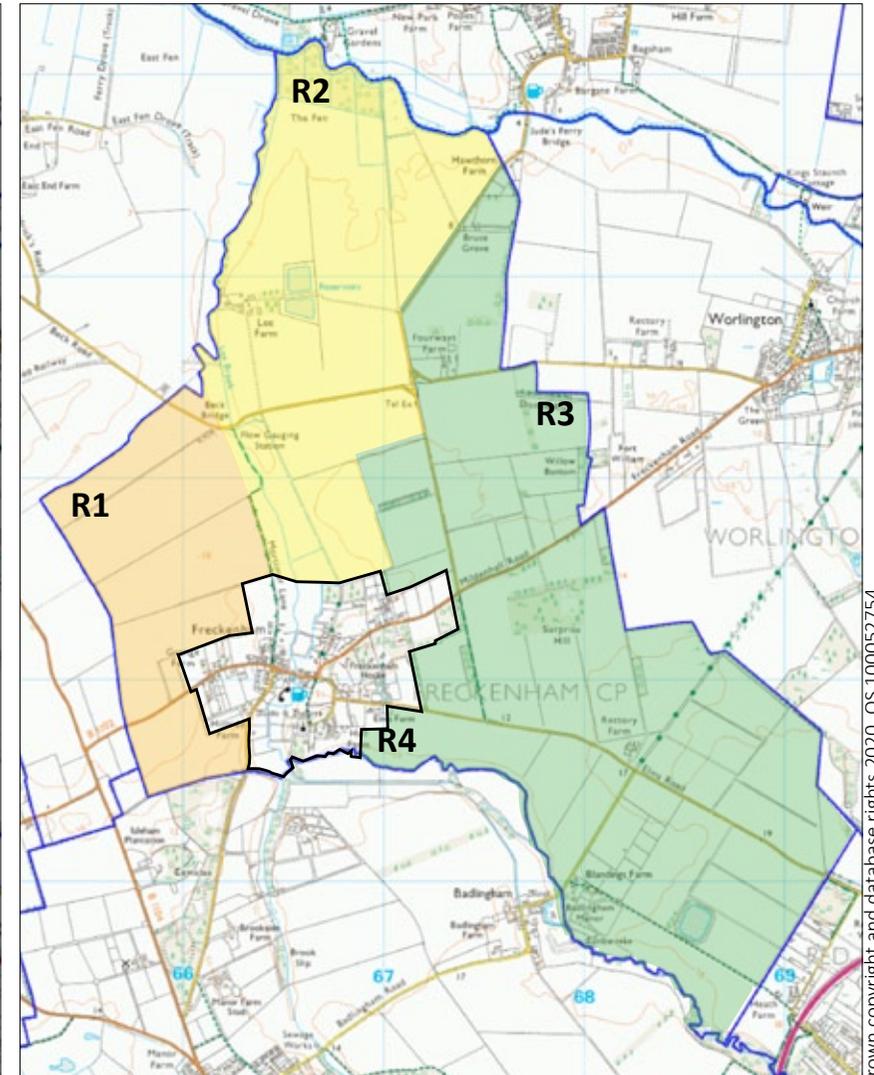
## Comparative sensitivities across the rural areas



### Landscape Value



### Visual sensitivity



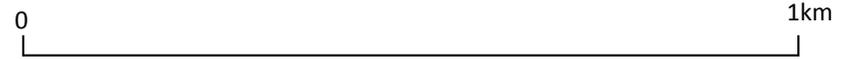
These 'heat' maps are for comparative purposes only - please refer to the detail in the text for more information.

# 6. Village character Areas

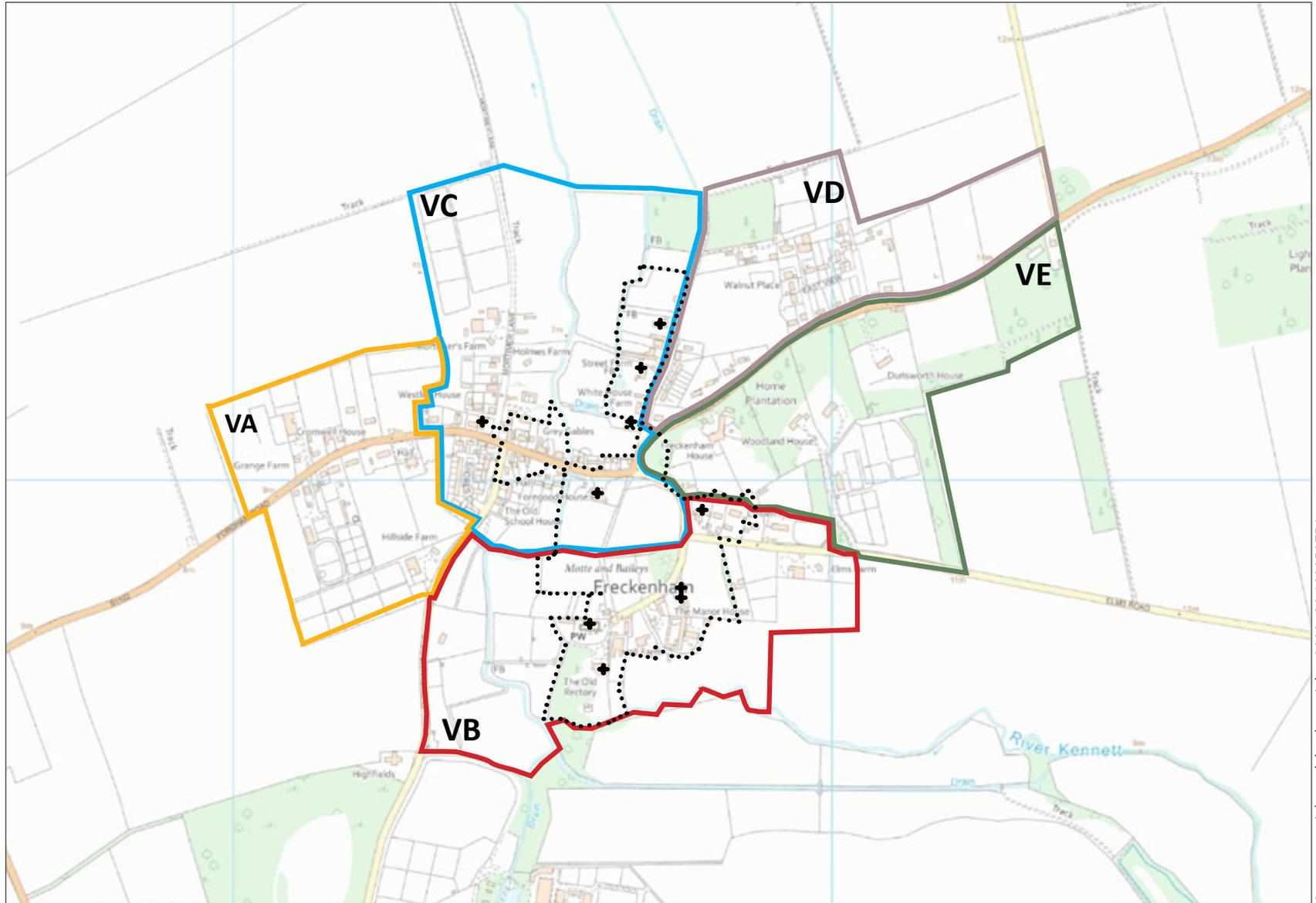
 Prefix V : A to E



# Map 2a Village Character Areas



-  Village Character Area VA
-  Village Character Area VB
-  Village Character Area VC
-  Village Character Area VD
-  Village Character Area VE
-  Conservation Area
-  Listed Buildings



# Map 2b

Village Character Areas and settlement clusters on aerial view

-  Character Areas
-  Local Plan settlement clusters

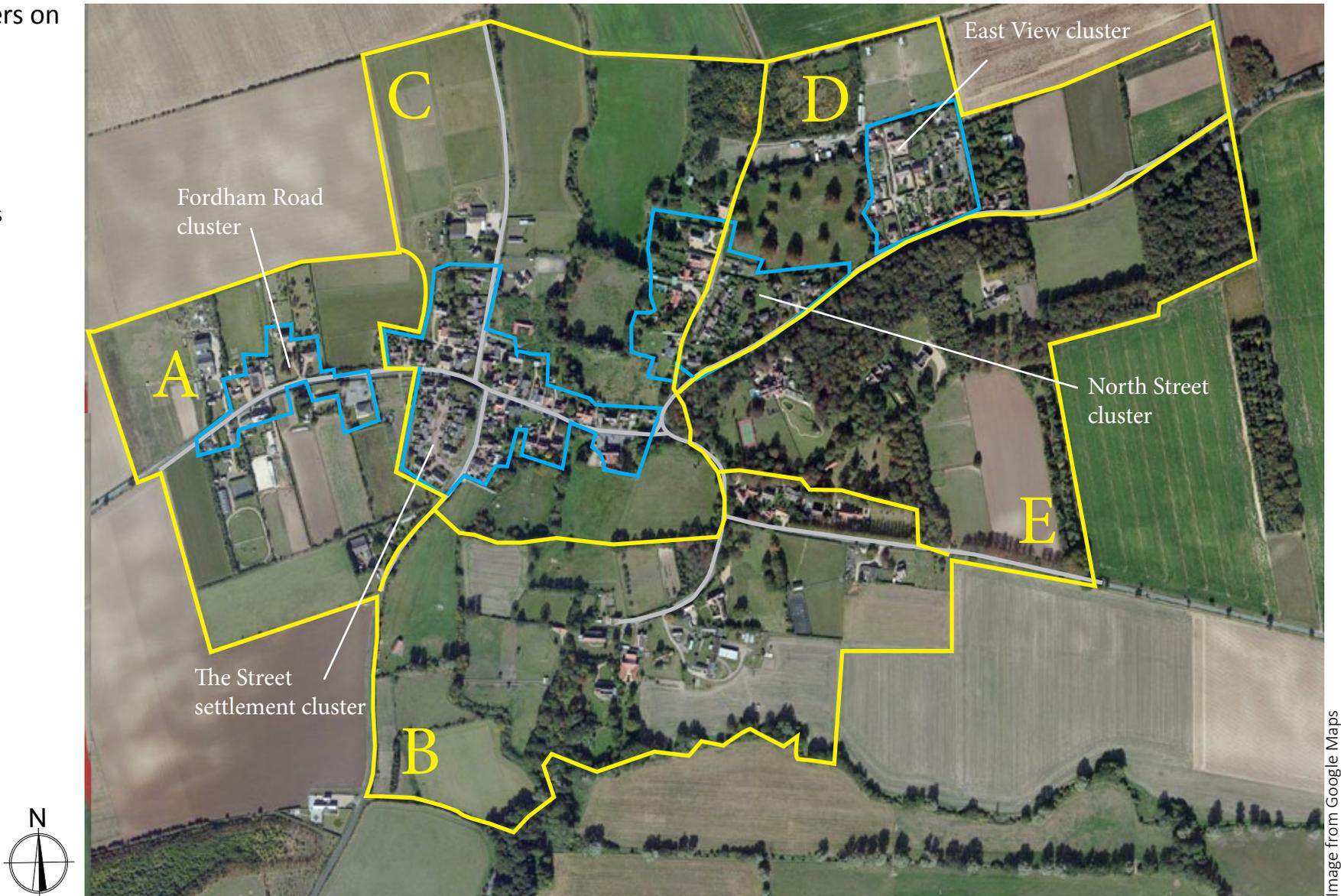
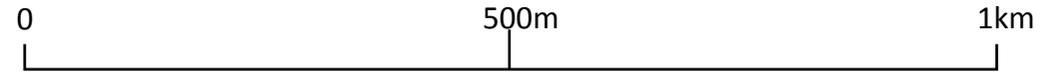


Image from Google Maps

## Village Character Area VA - Fordham Road



This area encompasses the Fordham Road Local Plan settlement cluster and its fringes. It forms the western side of the village with properties located either side of Fordham Road and includes one property on Chippenham Road. It includes a number of houses, the Village Hall, small holdings within deep strip plots as well as equestrian land.

### **Elevation/topography/position in the landscape**

Land feels flat and sits between the 9m and 12m contour. It slopes very gently to the east giving a slight sense of elevation over the shallow Lee Brook valley to the east.

### **Land Use & Settlement**

Land use comprises domestic, horticultural and equestrian properties arranged in longitudinal plots. The Village Hall is also found here. Rear curtilages can be deep behind the properties which are arranged along the roadside; linear, strip patterns dominate. 'Backyard' farming takes place.

The village has expanded west incrementally during the 20th century, each dwelling is different. The house types are mixed but unshowy, and consciously low rise - mostly bungalows or storey-and-a-half with dormer windows. They tend to be set back off the main road in varying distances.

Overall the feel is somewhat utilitarian which arises from houses that were likely built to support people operating on the land; small holding/horticultural businesses, allotments, and studs are still found here. Frontage boundary treatments vary from low walls to timber fences to hedges of varying species.

### **Aspects of value and heritage**

No listed buildings or Conservation Area are found in this character area.

### **Interface with open spaces and rural edges**

Curtilages interface with countryside in a linear and abrupt way with sometimes limited enclosure from boundary vegetation along rear or side boundaries. This means long views out are possible where enclosing vegetation is not present. At the gateway to the village a good vegetated edge can be seen to the south but the small farm/small holding to the north is more open and opens directly onto the farmland, blurring the distinction between village and country.

### **Visual experience / Enclosure and openness**

Little sense of enclosure; there are big open skies overhead. The expansive surrounding landscape is appreciable - views to the vast flat open farmlands to the north and west are possible. The western approach to Freckenham contrasts markedly with the east side of the village which has a high degree of tree cover and sense of enclosure. Views to the south are shorter in length owing to a block of woodland in Chippenham parish.

**Vegetation character**

There are few large native trees here. Non-native, coniferous species for screening and shelter - tall and over prominent sometimes. Hedges are also often ornamental species - for example laurel - and domestic in scale. Few mature native trees are present.

**Historic continuity**

Few historic features or buildings in this area remain. There were windmills here on the Chippenham Road but no signs can be seen today.

Shores Close, the Village Hall and the allotments were built on land left to the village in trust by Katherine Shores in 1710 to provide income to buy cloth for gowns for the poor women of the parish. The income from this trust continues to benefit the village.

Some historic value in the small-scale strip patterns which endure around the village edge, into which settlement has spread.

**Opportunities / Objectives**

- Look to improve the integration of the village edge with mixed native hedge and tree planting.
- Conserve the distinctive ‘backyard farming’ strip patterns and prevent loss through further development
- Consider marking the entrance to the village with a more formal gateway - white gates are used in neighbouring villages

**Landscape Value and Visual Sensitivity:**

	Approximate scale of sensitivity				
Landscape Value	Very high	High	Moderate	Modest	Low
Visual Sensitivity	Very high	High	Moderate	Modest	Low

**Justification of value and visual sensitivity judgements:**

Landscape value is limited owing to the lack of significant natural features, variation or ancient patterns - the landscape is result of relatively recently human arrangement. However, there is some cultural landscape value in the small strip-shaped holdings. An undeveloped field to the northeast (opposite the village hall) provides a gap between two settlement clusters, but views in to it are not experienced, because of its roadside hedge.

The outer (western) village edge is particularly visually sensitive - there is nothing to interrupt views across the expansive flat area of countryside to the north and west. The edge is abrupt and stark and, on the north side of Fordham Road, there is little opportunity to integrate with existing vegetation. New development here would be prominently visible on the approach to the village and seen from the roads linking to Isleham and Chippenham. Inadequate planting proposals or tall built form would produce unacceptable impacts.

There is better capacity on contained land parcels where settlement to either side would help assimilate new dwellings. However, rear boundaries that are open to countryside could result in long range visual impacts, at least in the short term.

**Mitigation notes:**

Any design of new development here should conserve or reflect the linear patterns found.

Any development proposals should retain any existing natural vegetative features, be of modest height (perhaps storey and a half) and be accompanied by new native boundary hedge and tree planting to provide screening where absent. Development of parcels already contained by vegetation are preferred.

Recommendation: Any proposals of more than a single house, in areas of high visual sensitivity, would have to provide evidence that Landscape and Visual Impacts had been appraised and taken into account. Proposals to be accompanied by strategy to mitigate any adverse impacts identified.

## Village Character Area VA - Photographs

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Typical low rise modest houses in spacious plot. Big skies overhead.



Openness allows long views on village edge



Village hall and allotments



Settlement arranged in a simple and linear way

# Village Character Area VB

This area encompasses the southern fringes of the villages, centred on a collection of historic buildings and features - the oldest and most distinctive part of the village. To either side of the central historic zone lie small-scale meadows that edge the Chippenham Road in the west, through to farmland that opens up to the east. The boundary follows the parish boundary along the River Kennett, and to the north it includes dwellings on Elms Lane, east of its junction with Church Road. No part of this area is within a Local Plan settlement cluster so is 'Countryside' in planning terms.

**Elevation/topography/position in the landscape**

Settlement in this character sits on the upper slopes of the shallow valleyside of the River Kennett with its confluence with the Lee Brook to the south of the village. Land is gently rolling and sits between the 5-15m contours. The historic features are found on the most elevated points on a chalk outcrop, the church in particular occupies an imposing position on the top of the valleyside. The variation in the topography is more distinctive than other parts of the parish; its gently rolling forms are a strong contributor to sense of place and provide contrast with the vast expanses of flat open land to the north and west of the village.

The route of the river here takes a couple of sharp turns indicating it may have been subject to alteration in past centuries.

**Land Use and Settlement**

Much of this area is open space, gently rolling meadows in the west and north of the area, a network of small pastures lined with trees, and arable edges to the eastern side. The small scale, organic patterns of the meadows is an indicator of their historic nature. They are part of important views across the meadows to the church from Chippenham Road. The meadows have a traditional feel where grazed by sheep but equine use is less aesthetically pleasing as is often accompanied by tape fences and shelters etc.

Settlement is scattered along the half-circular plan of Church Road along with Hall Farm which is undergoing some residential conversion. The most notable building along the streetscene is the grand Grade II\* Manor House set behind ornate gates. There are also houses along the west end of Elms Road set, to the north side set back within trees, along with some equine land use.

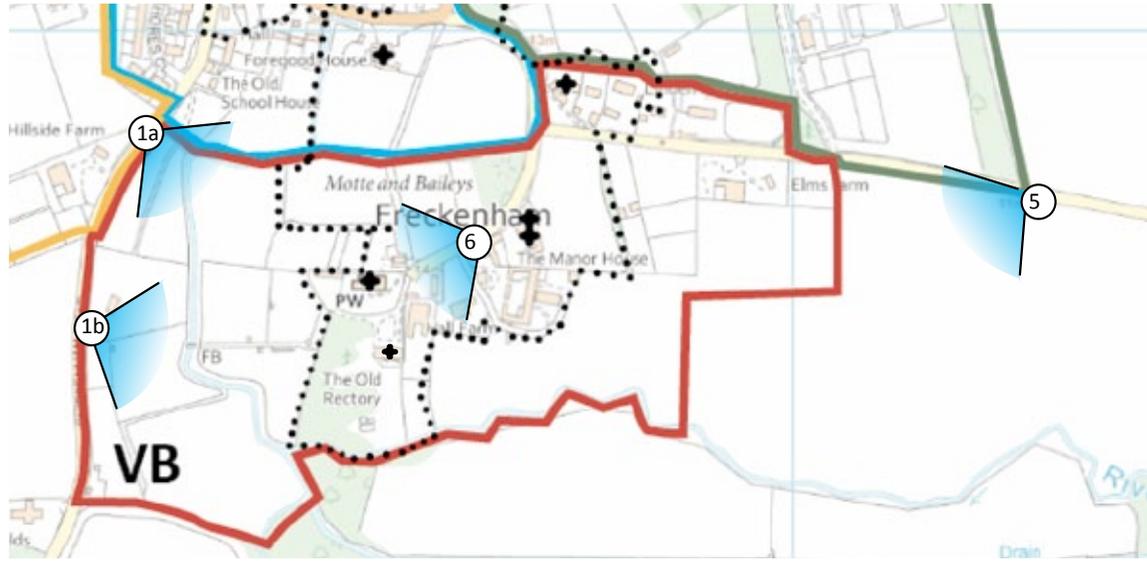
**Aspects of value and heritage**

This area has high landscape and heritage value. The Manor, Old Rectory, church and site of the old motte & bailey castle (all listed) form a historic group on the top of the escarpment and are the focus for the Conservation Area. The site of the castle is a Scheduled Monument - it is covered in vegetation and not accessible to the public.

The landscape is valued as it provides important setting to these features and falls within scenic views of the church tower.

**Interface with open spaces and rural edges**

Edges are open and loose, the interface between settlement and the countryside is soft and indented, only the more modern properties feature straight lines.



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**Visual experience - Enclosure and openness**

The combination of topography, mature vegetation and small scale enclosure create a relatively fine-grained and contained landscape. The east edge is more open and has a visual relationship with the farmland beyond. A historic feel is strong. There is limited intrusion of modern elements although a recent barn conversion on Church Lane stands out as a recent completion. The area feels well looked after.

Keys views 1 and 6 are located in this character area and identify important views towards the church. Key View 5 is located to the east, and also comprises a view of the edge of this character area including the church tower.

**Vegetation character**

Well vegetated feel, mature native planting encloses lanes and fields. Willow and poplar are dotted along the small river and help give visual clues about the presence of the water course and give an appreciation of the valley topography. Trees form the skyline and provide visual containment.

**Historic continuity**

Strong sense of time-depth from prominence of historic buildings and their curtilages, land form and lack of modern elements. Unspoilt views are experienced in and out of the area.

**Opportunities / Objectives**

- The Site of the early medieval castle (Scheduled Monument) is overgrown and hidden from view and not accessible by the public. This could be opened up and with interpretation opportunities to tell the story of the castle and the village.
- Opportunities could be sought to reinstate traditional management of the low lying meadows via sheep rather than horses. Management of the meadow hedge systems could also be improved - the hedges are often gappy and not in the best condition.
- Seek opportunities for enhancement to biodiversity through agri-environment schemes.
- The grazed meadows that fall with the views of the church tower from Chippenham Road (Key Views 1a & b) should be protected from development. Explore opportunities to protect them through the Neighbourhood Plan and/or future Conservation Area boundary reviews.

**Rural Character Area VB**

**Landscape Value and Visual Sensitivity:**

	Approximate scale of sensitivity				
Landscape Value	Very high	High	Moderate	Modest	Low
Visual Sensitivity	Very high	High	Moderate	Modest	Low

**Justification of value and visual sensitivity judgements:**

This character area has HIGH landscape value and MODERATE visual sensitivity.

The combination of heritage features, their unspoilt settings and the general lack of modern built form helps communicate the historic character and importance of the area. This area has little capacity to accept village expansion.

A small amount of new development, for example one or two individual designed houses, could potentially be acceptable, as the area supports high tree cover to help assimilation. Any development which harm the important views to the Church would not be acceptable.

Planned housing estates, even small ones, would not be appropriate in this area.

Protection against new development is already conferred in the central part of the Area by the Conservation Area and as setting to Listed Buildings, and protection should be expanded in the Neighbourhood Plan to include protection of visually important meadows to the west.

**Mitigation Notes:**

New design would have to be very sympathetic to its context, of exceptionally high quality and finished in suitable natural materials. Obtrusive or poorly designed development would be very noticeable and detract from the character of the area.

Proposals would have to be accompanied by effective planting schemes.

## Village Character Area VB - Photographs

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Grade II\* listed Manor House



Distinctive views of Church over network of tree lined meadows



Winter view down Church Lane with Castle Mound on the right



The churchyard from the east

Photos: LBW



buffered from the expansive farmlands beyond by the smaller scale meadows that line the watercourse and back properties. The edges and interfaces are also well vegetated.

**Visual experience - Enclosure and openness**

The visual experience is generally fairly contained within the village. The combination of built form and prevalent boundary trees in gardens and along the meadows combine to generally prevent views out to the wider landscape. Glimpses through undeveloped gaps into the scenic meadows reinforce the sense of a historic rural village. Longer views are possible from the village edge, Key View 4 is located on the footpath north of Mortimer Lane.

**Vegetation character**

There is a small woodland developing in the northeast corner of the character area but otherwise woodland is absent. However, skylines are edged by trees - the meadows are lined with native trees and the long established village curtilages feature some mature trees.

**Historic continuity**

The scattered Listed Buildings, the organic patterns of the streets and the small scale, field pattern provide a good sense of a historic village. The feeling is strongest where older properties display local materials seen such as flint and chalk clunch walls. Old farmstead buildings right on the street bring distinctive points of interest to the street scene.

**Opportunities / Objectives**

- Vernacular clunch, flint or old brick buildings and walls must be protected from loss.
- New external finishes should be traditional, natural materials such as stone flags, granite curbs and sets and bound gravel finishes are preferred for paving over concrete setts and flags
- Protect and retain areas of recreational greenspace.
- Allow the river to contribute further to visual amenity - perhaps selective vegetation removal to provide views and greater public access.
- Conserve existing remnant landscape features on the fringes, such as smaller pastures and historic narrow lanes.
- There used to be a pleasant circular walk from Mortimer’s Lane round to

## Rural Character Area VC

**Landscape Value and Visual Sensitivity:**

	Approximate scale of sensitivity				
Landscape Value	Very high	High	Moderate	Modest	Low
Visual Sensitivity	Very high	High	Moderate	Modest	Low

This character area has HIGH landscape value.

The value lies in the integrity of the historic street pattern, the setting of its listed buildings and the scenic sinuous gentle undulations of the landscape. The Conservation Area boundary indicates the areas of particularly high value.

The network of small scale meadows that back the village are also important contributors to character and also valuable because of the amenity they offer - recreation and footpath routes (which are generally scarce in the area). They are also likely to have biodiversity value.

Visually the area is of MODEST sensitivity. Views are fairly short in length and confined so visual impacts would be limited. Views into this area from the wider landscape are generally not possible.

This parcel has limited scope for streetfront development owing to the tight settlement pattern and lack of space. Where breaks exist, they often provide subtle separation between the settlement clusters.

The small meadows are likely to come under pressure for development in the future but generally they should be conserved for their contribution to character and historic landscape character. The Conservation Area confers some protection.

**Mitigation Notes**

There is likely to be limited capacity for individual plots, or building conversions, where they don’t harm the integrity of the meadow pattern or block views into them. Design would need to be sympathetic to heritage and reflect the prevailing settlement pattern.

Use of vernacular materials is welcomed. Avoid suburbanisation of the village character through inappropriate driveway treatments, fence types or planting schemes.

## Village Character Area VC - Photographs

Images from Google Streetview



Houses along The Street show great variety in, for example, form, materials, colours, roof types, set-back distances.

Photos: LBW



Vernacular materials on display; Flint cottage with brick quoin detailing; barn on North St.



The Golden Boar inn, backed by meadows

## Village Character Area VD- Mildenhall Road

This area encompasses the east side of North Street and the land to the north of Mildenhall Road as far east as the turning to West Row. It forms the northeastern edge of the village. Historically unsettled, it developed post WWII mainly as a result of local authority house building.

### **Elevation/topography/hydrology. Position in the landscape**

It is generally flat-feeing topography, lying either side of the 10m contour.

### **Land Use and Settlement patterns, type and density**

There are two clusters of settlement, separated by a meadow; the separation is recognised in the Local Plan's settlement boundaries.

The meadow is very attractive and is dotted with mature lime trees. There are further small pastures (equine) to the north, and open farmland on the eastern fringes of the village.

The built form here shows more uniformity than the rest of the village (where growth took place in a piecemeal fashion over the centuries). The houses to the east of North Street and along Mildenhall Road, were added in phases in the 20th century, often by the local authority. Typical of most villages post WWII, identical groups of houses and bungalows were built and they tend to be set behind wide grass verges with footways. Density is moderate. Growth progressed eastwards and the village extents are currently marked by the curtilage of a bungalow, whose garden vegetation forms a well defined edge. The bungalows arranged to the rear of East View are somewhat poorly organised and are set off along narrow lanes with less greenspace than is seen along the main road.

### **Aspects of value and heritage**

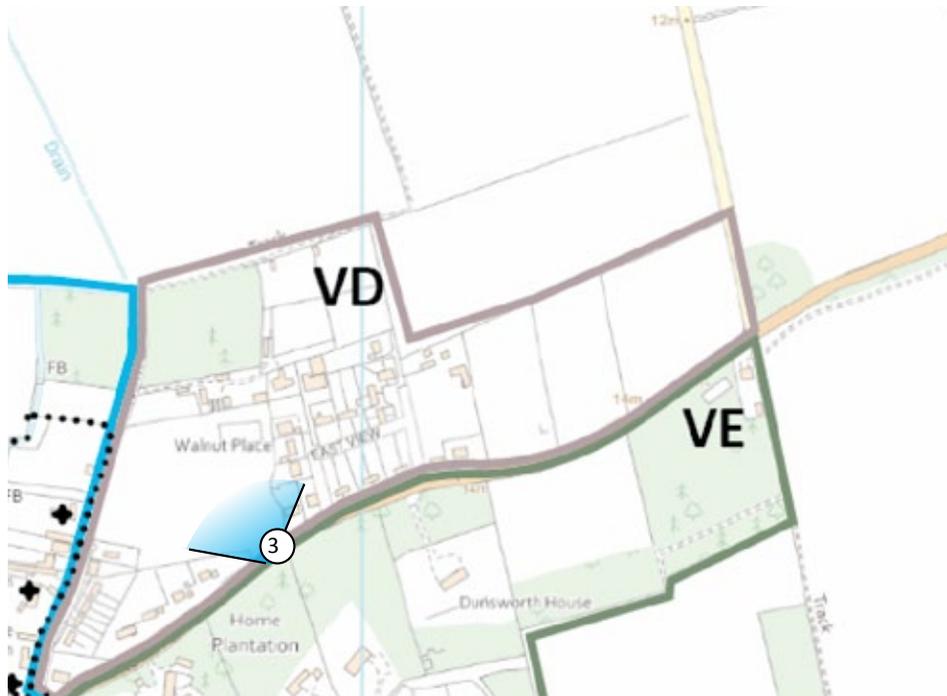
There are no listed buildings and the Conservation Area (CA) does not cover land within this character area.

The meadow west of East View has high landscape value as it dotted with a number of fine mature Lime trees, giving a scenic view as if into parkland. Freckenham Conservation Area Appraisal map identifies the trees as 'Important Trees' and they are subject to Tree Protection Orders. The meadow is worthy of protection for its contribution to character and for the scenic views it offers.

The woodland east of North Street is community woodland.

### **Interface with open space and rural edges**

Boundaries and edges of curtilages are straight and aligned at right angles to the road. Geometric patterns continue into the surrounding countryside. Small Strip fields are found on the edges of the village.



**Visual experience - Enclosure and openness**

Contained visual experience to the south - views are immediately curtailed by continuous trees that define the edge of character area VE. Longer views out to the open landscape north become possible from the edges of the village.

Key View 5 is located on the Mildenhall Road and looks into the meadow between North St and East View.

**Vegetation character**

There is only a small area of woodland to the north of North Street, perhaps a result of natural regeneration; it was once part of an orchard according to early OS maps.

Yet woodland is a strong contributor to character as it forms a continuous ‘wall’ south of Mildenhall Road. The area also has a ‘green’ feel as the dwelling curtilages are often enclosed with mature hedges and trees - a mix of coniferous and deciduous species with a semi-ornament character overall.

**Historic continuity**

Some sense of historic landscape from mature trees but overwritten by the 20th century. The meadow has a strong sense of history; it is shown in 1885 maps in the same form, along with the orchards to the northwest which are no longer present.

**Opportunities and Objectives**

- Protect the setting of the adjoining Conservation Area on North Street.
- Seek ways of protecting the character of the meadow and its trees through Neighbourhood Plan or through existing mechanisms
- With land owner agreement reinstalling orchards seen on historic maps could provide a community resource.
- Restore the original triangular shape and character of the circular kerbed green.
- Enhancement of the community woodland - manage for biodiversity, promote access, and provide signage - in partnership with landowner.

## Rural Character Area VD

**Landscape Value and Visual Sensitivity:**

	Approximate scale of sensitivity				
Landscape Value	Very high	High	Moderate	Modest	Low
Visual Sensitivity	Very high	High	Moderate	Modest	Low

**Justification of value and visual sensitivity judgements:**

This character area has MODERATE landscape value. It is elevated above the ordinary by the meadow found west of East View which forms an attractive, distinctive and scenic element on the village edge. It is remnant from a 19th century planned landscape and should be protected from development for its very positive contribution to local character and its outstanding trees.

Visual sensitivity LOW; this area is not seen from the village core and views back to the northern peripheries of the village are not easily experienced. Screening to the south is continuous from the woodland blocks.

Given the simple pattern here is considered there is some capacity for medium scale development directly east of the village edge, provided it is sympathetic to context and accompanied by boundary planting. There are no features of particular high value that would be lost and the existing character of the village edge could be replicated.

**Mitigation Notes**

Development on the east edge would result in little overall change to the character of this corner of the village, as long as supported by new structure planting to screen the longer range views to the north. The relatively small size of the fields is appropriate to assimilate development and the existing linear vegetative features would overlap and help provide screening from day one. Additional new boundary trees and hedges would enhance character.

## Village Character Area VD - Photographs

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Sets of local authority housing



Local authority built housing on North Street



Images from Google Streetview

Village edge seen from Mildenhall Road approach



Photo: LBW

Spatial planning within East View lacking coherence

## Village Character Area VE - Elms Road

This area encompasses the wedge of land between Elms Road and Mildenhall Road that forms the eastern edge of the village. Historically unsettled, it is now inhabited by a small number of large prestigious dwellings set in extensive grounds. Its well wooded character creates a strong sense of containment and enclosure which contrasts markedly with the openness at the other end of the village. It provides a distinctive well vegetated character to Elms Road and Mildenhall Road, and the attractive green character around the old marl pit is a positive aspect of the village, that can be glimpsed from the heart of the settlement.

### Elevation/topography/hydrology. Position in the landscape

The majority of the area feels flat and lies between the 10m and 12m contour except for a sudden distinctive dip in the far west at the point the Church Road and Mildenhall Road meet. The old marl pit is now part of a domestic curtilage and is now densely vegetated, and is the remains of a quarry which would have provided chalk for building in the local area.

### Land Use and Settlement patterns, type and density

Approximately half this area is under woodland or trees in grass, it has a very densely wooded character. Trees are arranged in rectilinear blocks and belts with compartments of open space which contain large houses and/or are under equine use. The curtilages of the properties are formed of trees on three sides and are consequently generally screened view.

### Aspects of value and heritage

There are no listed buildings in the character area. The 1885 map shows there was no built form here in the late 19th century.

Freckenham House is one of the only houses visible from the road and is a large imposing property that dates from the Edwardian period. It has a jointed facade and is finished in an unusual gravel panels which match its entrance gate walls.

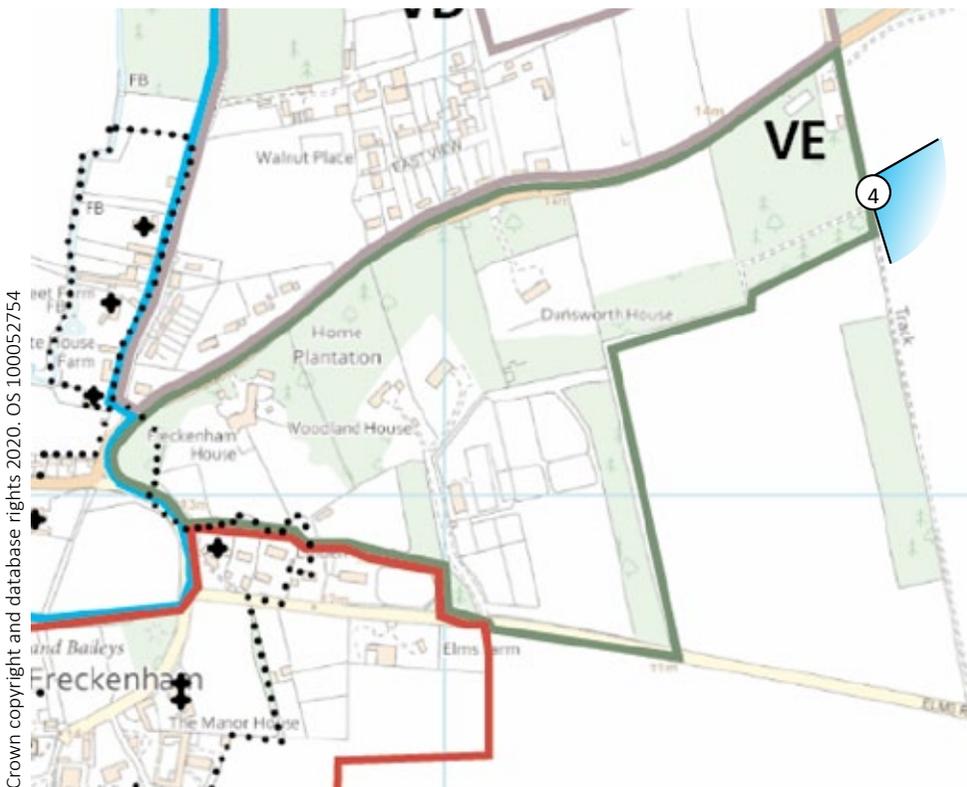
According to the Conservation Area Appraisal map (see separate appendix document), much of the woodland is under an area TPO (Tree Protection Order).

### Interface with open space and rural edges

Straight-edged woodland generally abuts the roads and the edges with open countryside to the east. The interfaces are therefore abrupt and well defined. The woodland acts to assimilate the built form with it and prevents inward and outward views between village and countryside.

### Visual experience - Enclosure and openness

Contained visual experience from prevalent trees belts, plantations and mature curtilage trees. Views in and out of the area are not possible as a result - the properties within the trees are not visible. Key View 4 is located on the eastern edge of the area.



**Vegetation character**

About half of this character areas is wooded, with both coniferous Breckland plantation in the east as well as mixed deciduous and ornamental species in domestic plots to the west of the area which line the routes into the heart of the village.

**Historic continuity**

No listed buildings or historic features are found here.

This area was historically not settled. Land between Mildenhall and Elms Roads, and to the west of Dunsworth House, was owned by the residents of The Dell. The owners sold the land for the construction of Freckenham House and other plots - most of the houses in this area date from the 1970s and 1980s. Only glimpses of the houses from the peripheries are possible.

**Opportunities and Objectives**

- Conserve vegetated character existing groups of mature trees and hedgerows for their landscape and ecological value.
- Conserve the character round the old marl pit for its positive landscape contribution, and the vegetated nature of the approach to the village along the tree lined lanes.

## Rural Character Area VE

**Landscape Value and Visual Sensitivity:**

	Approximate scale of sensitivity				
Landscape Value	Very high	High	Moderate	Modest	Low
Visual Sensitivity	Very high	High	Moderate	Modest	Low

This character area has MODERATE landscape value and LOW visual sensitivity.

The landscape value here lies in its stock of protected trees and attractive meadows enclosed by tree belts.

The interior of this area is not visually sensitive - it is generally screened from view by dense tree cover around its peripheries, and internal compartments are also divided up and enclosed by trees.

Development within mature trees, or screened by tree belts, can be assimilated well with little impact on visual amenity. This area therefore has some capacity to assimilate further development with little impact on the character of the village. However, it needs to be carefully planned to ensure development seeks to retain as many trees as possible, especially around the boundaries which contribute to the character and amenity of adjoining character areas

**Mitigation Notes**

Retention of the distinctive wooded character is of primary importance. Secondary mitigation measures are less important where good screening is already in place.

## Village Character Area VE - Photographs

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Photo: LBW



Large properties, sometimes enclosed by walls, sit within mature trees which provide a sense of enclosure and containment on arrival to the village from the east



Images from Google Streetview



Tree backed meadow attractive on approach into village



Entrance to Freckenham House within well vegetated grounds

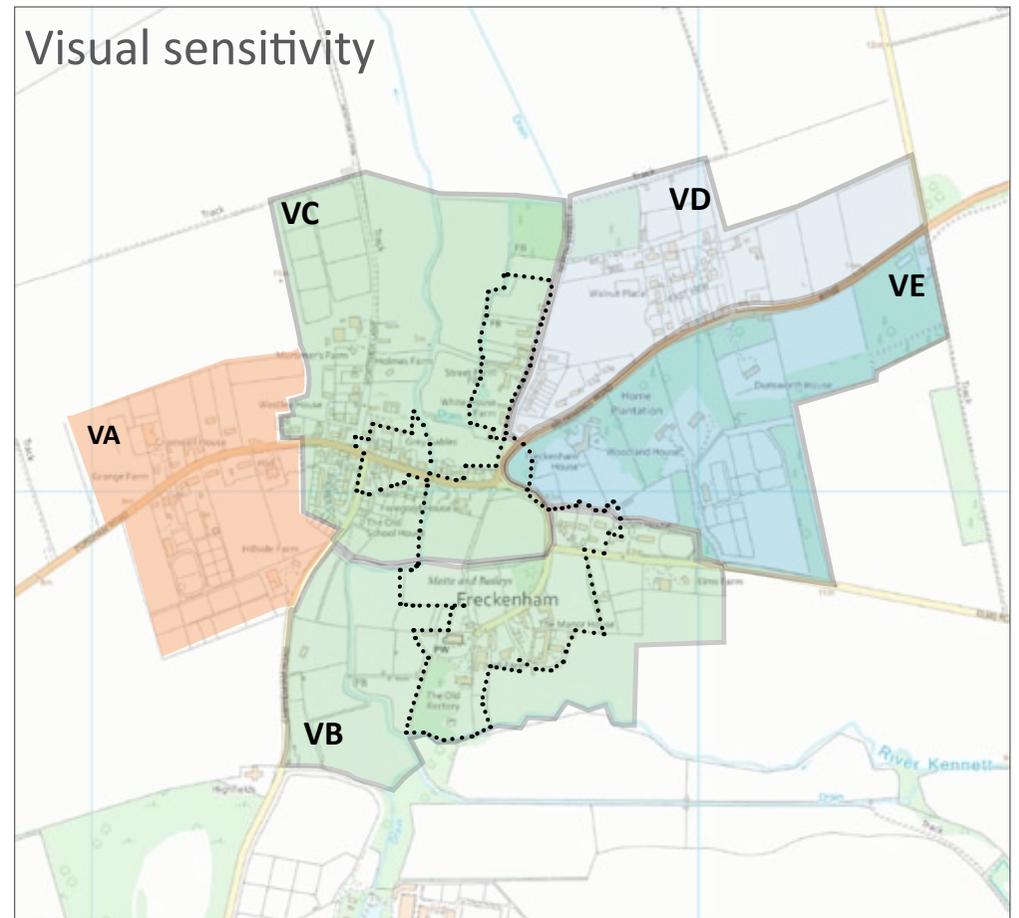
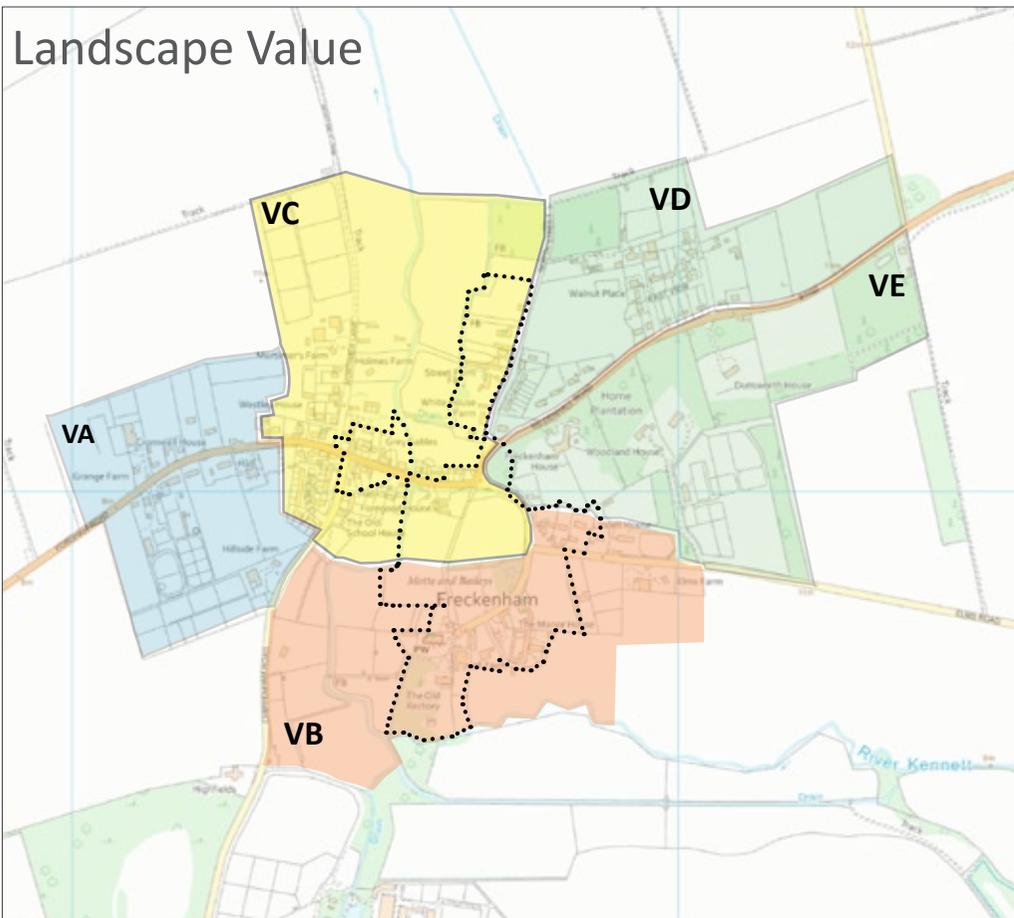
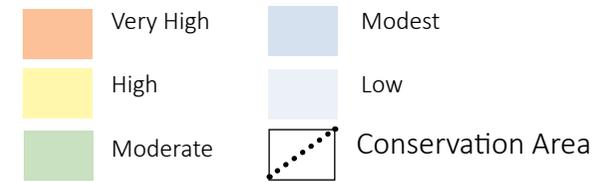
## Summary of sensitivities in the village character areas

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1. Freckenham retains a strong rural character in its village. It has escaped expansion by modern estates by the volume housebuilders, and its character has changed little in recent decades. The essence of its sense of place is its position along the shallow valley of the River Kennett and Lee Brook, giving rise to gently rolling topography and curving streets equally populated by historic built form and 20th century infill and additions - of varying quality. The sense of enclosure and containment, and its small scale, organic pattern contrasts markedly with the large scale Breckland and fen-edge landscape that surrounds it. The growth of the village from its medieval roots, has been gradual, leading to a mix of architectural styles, forms and materials. Where historic houses, farm buildings or walls are present, in vernacular flint or clunch, they contribute very positively to character and distinctiveness, although one or two buildings have been adapted in unsympathetic ways.
2. Overall the village reads as a nucleated settlement, its form dense in the centre and loosening out on the peripheries. The Local plan puts tight boundaries around four clusters of settlement. Settlement along Church Lane and Elms Road are excluded altogether from the Local Plan settlement boundaries.
3. The 4 clusters are separated by only narrow gaps which are not necessarily read as spaces 'on the ground' as they can be quite vegetated, but they nevertheless provide a break between each cluster. The gap west of East View is the most significant in landscape terms. It offers a particularly scenic view into a parkland meadow, dotted with very old lime trees.
4. The village would be sensitive to (and should avoid) :
  - Any development that causes loss of significant green gaps that separate the clusters and provide occasional glimpses out, especially where connected to the wider landscape. The parkland meadow west of East View contributes particularly positively and should be protected a visually important open space.
  - Any development that sits outside the stark edges of the western peripheries of the village in character area VA. The settlement edges are abrupt and lightly vegetated and development here would be hard to assimilate. If undertaken, development here must be limited (house numbers/overall heights) and accompanied by boundary tree planting/hedgerow to reduce visual impacts from the wider landscape to the west and north, and create an appropriate substantial soft edge.
  - Any development that harms the small network of meadows that line the water courses and surround the church to the north and east. The enclosures that fringe character area VB and VC are of historical interest and forms a distinctive setting to the settlement. They buffers the village, to the north and south from the vast scale of the wider landscape. Their retention is important to retain the character of the village.
5. Development may be appropriate where:
  - Any development that harms views of the church tower which is a strong local landmark. Farmland or meadow that falls under views of the tower should be protected from modern development unless it is of very sensitive design.
  - Any development that causes loss or erosion of the very vegetated character of the eastern edges of the village. The interior of this area has capacity for further individual developments but the green walls contribute to sense of place and provide a sense of arrival to the village when they open up on to The Street.
  - Further suburbanising influences such as block paved roads or drives, proliferation of signage or urban style furniture or lighting along the street scene, over zealous highways standards interrupting characteristic narrow lanes, inappropriate suburban planting schemes.
5. Development may be appropriate where:
  - It can be integrated with the more recently formed and simple village edges. The small scale, historic edges of the core of the village have higher value and change here could be harmful and prominent.
  - Its scale, form, materials and design quality are appropriate to its context, and justification for all such factors is provided. To echo the pattern of the village continued diversity and small scale expansion is more appropriate than the planning of large new estates of repeating house types which would have an unacceptable impact.
  - The approach is bespoke and sensitive to heritage where necessary. New, quality contemporary interpretations of domestic architecture are welcome, especially when they go hand in hand with truly sustainable building solutions. Such additions continue the story of the village. Sympathy within heritage setting is particularly challenging. However, principles ensuring sympathetic scale, position, settlement pattern are a constant.

# Comparative sensitivities across the village

These 'heat' maps are for comparative purposes only - please refer to the detail in the text for more information.

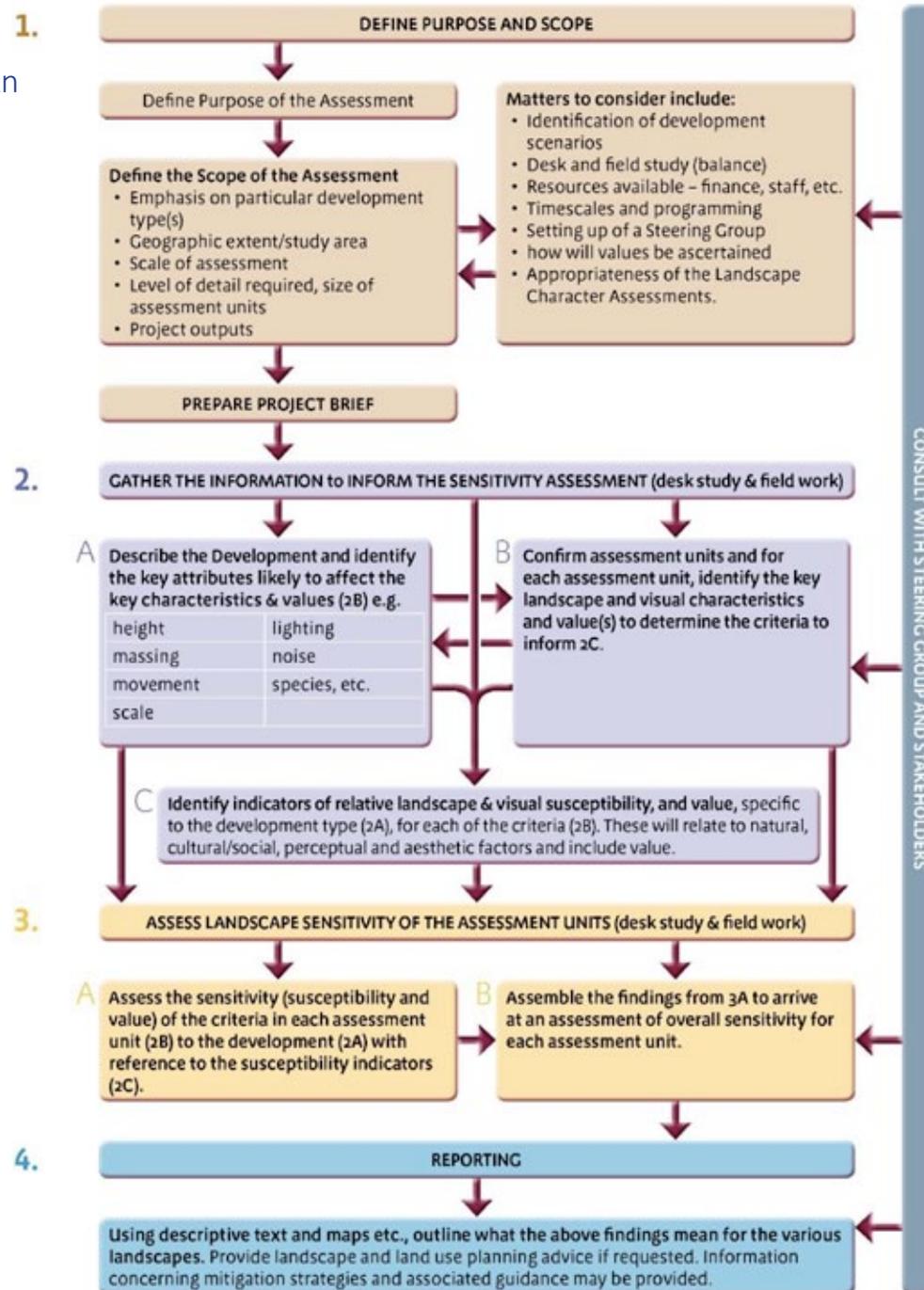


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# Appendix

Appendix 1:

Process diagram reproduced from page 12 of 'An approach to landscape sensitivity assessment' Natural England, Christine Tudor (2019)



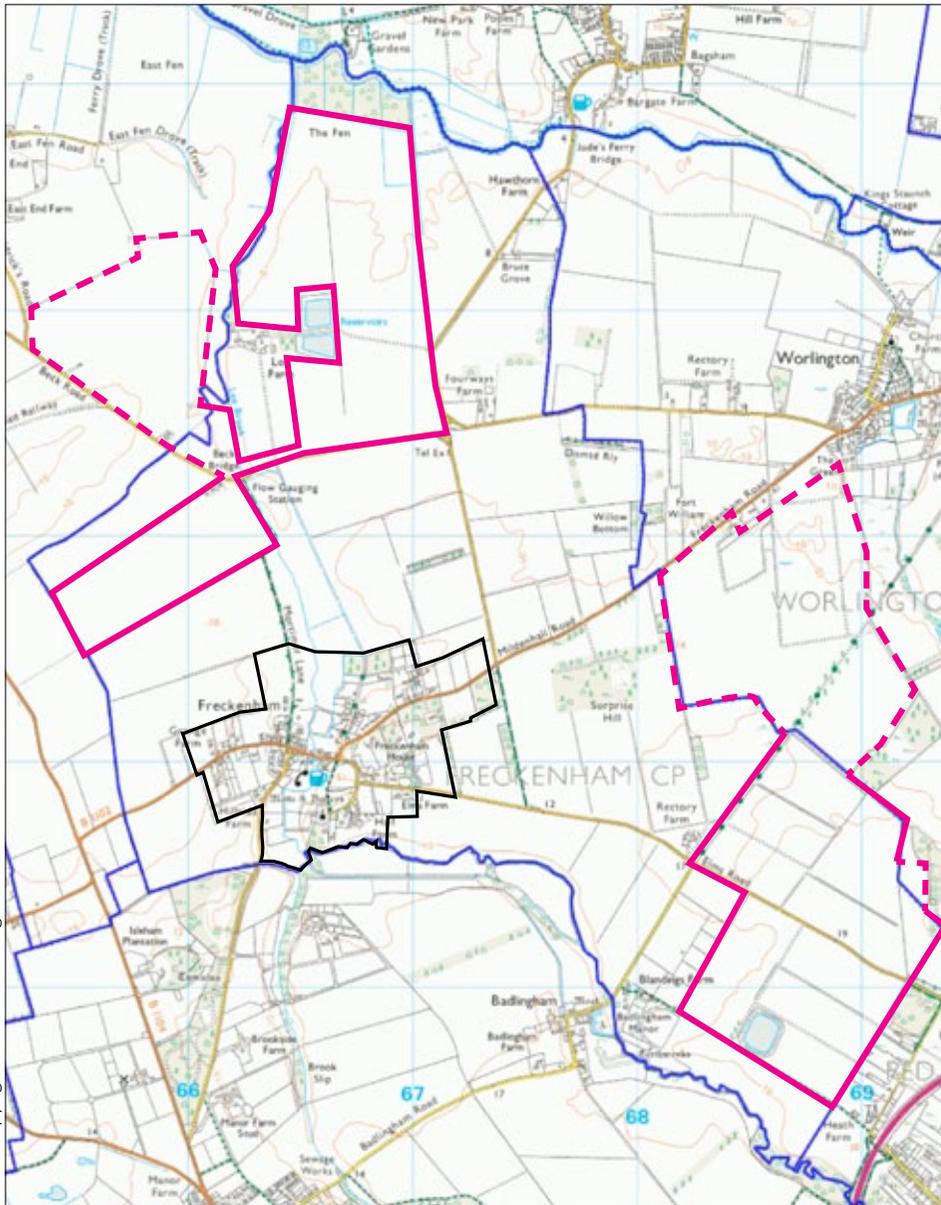
APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF INDICATORS OF VALUE & SENSITIVITY: Landscape

PHYSICAL / LANDSCAPE FACTORS		Lower value and/or sensitivity	←-----→	Higher value and/or sensitivity
Designations and aspects of value	Whether the land parcel, or any of its features, are covered by any designations or protective policies. Indicators of cultural value. Includes attributing value to the historic landscape and heritage assets within it. Where the landscape forms the setting for heritage features such as Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments, or ancient woodland, or simply where there is evidence for historic continuity. Also cultural aspects of value and associations - recreational or community related.	No landscape, heritage or habitat designations.  No particular cultural value.	One, or more, features or areas with non-statutory designations e.g. 'Special Landscape Area' or 'Non-designated heritage asset' Some cultural value.	One, or more, features or areas with statutory landscape, heritage or habitat designations present. High value for cultural reasons.
Landform	The extent to which landform plays a role in defining character and sense of place, and how vulnerable the character is to the loss of visible landform.	Topography and landform play little role in defining character	Topography and landform play some role in defining character	Appreciation of topography and landform playing key role in defining character and sense of place
Pattern/ enclosure and condition	This refers to vegetative and field patterns and intactness of habitats. For example, a landscape comprising a complex array of different habitats and/or land cover features such as long established intact hedgerows or ancient woodland will have a higher value than a simple open landscape where structural elements have been lost. Components with a semi-natural character would be highly valued. Condition relates to state of repair of the characteristic features and their resultant role in representation of character.	Simple, large-scale, open; little evidence of historic field patterns; Straightened boundaries and field amalgamation; hedges often absent - remnant boundary vegetation only. Landscape in poor condition. Little indication of time-depth / historic continuity	Medium scale field sizes, evidence of partial boundary loss. Condition of hedges sometimes poor. Some hedgerow trees endure. Some indication of time-depth/ historic continuity	Small scale, fine grain; historic field patterns strongly in evidence; limited amalgamation, intact network of hedges; regular hedgerow trees. Landscape in good condition. Strong indication of time-depth / historic continuity
Settlement edges, and gateways	Consideration of the nature and form of the adjacent settlement edges and gateways. Long established, settlement edges where low density, historic settlement prevails, untouched by modern influences, are more valued than those where the historic settlement edge is no longer evident, owing to modern development and where 20th century development has resulted in a stark interface.	Abrupt interface between edge of settlement and countryside; boundary vegetation absent or sparse, aspects of modern development present	Settlement edge varied and indistinct, some modern elements present.	Porous edge to settlement, breaks allow interface between settlement and countryside; buffered by historic landscape pattern; native vegetation softens edges.

APPENDIX 3: SUMMARY OF INDICATORS OF VALUE & SENSITIVITY: Visual and Perceptual

VISUAL AND PERCEPTUAL FACTORS		Lower value and/or sensitivity ←-----→ Higher value and/or sensitivity		
<b>Visual prominence Vulnerability of key views</b>	<p>How generally visible the land is from the surrounding landscape, settlement edges, highways or rights of way. Land that is visually prominent, owing to the combined effects of landform, tree cover or settlement is more visually sensitive than land which is enclosed and hard to see into.</p> <p>Views from major routes are deemed more sensitive than land that is only visible from the minor lanes.</p> <p>Includes consideration of the extent to which footpaths users are likely to be affected by views of residential development.</p> <p>Higher sensitivity is attributed to land easily seen as part of one or more of the key views, lower sensitivity is attributed where land is not seen within any of the key views.</p>	<p>Conditions combine to make views of land generally difficult to experience.</p> <p>Limited visibility from principal routes.</p> <p>No views from footpaths.</p> <p>Land parcel not easily seen within key views</p>	<p>Some views available where conditions allow.</p> <p>Moderately visible in views from principal routes.</p> <p>Views from a few points on footpaths and/or at longer range</p> <p>Part of land parcel seen in some key views</p>	<p>Visually prominent, forming part of view from many points.</p> <p>Integral part of view from one or more principal routes.</p> <p>Direct views from multiple footpaths, or at close range.</p> <p>Land parcel is prominent in one or more key views</p>
<b>Types of receptors experiencing visual change</b>	<p>Sensitive viewers would be residents, tourists and those experiencing views from Listed Buildings or from within a Conservation Area. Less sensitive are viewers engaged in travel or at their place of work, for example.</p>	<p>Users of low sensitivity; e.g. road users, people at work</p>	<p>Moderately sensitive; e.g. some views from dwellings or small number of Listed Buildings</p>	<p>Highly sensitive; visitors, direct views from Listed Building and/or Conservation Area</p>
<b>Tranquillity / activity</b>	<p>Aspects including traffic noise, movement from people or vehicles, sense of remoteness and tranquillity. Landscapes with a higher degree of remoteness and tranquillity will have a higher sensitivity to residential development.</p>	<p>Rarely tranquil, regular human activity seen and/or heard</p>	<p>Moderate tranquillity; some human activity seen and/or heard</p>	<p>Relatively remote and tranquil, little human activity seen or heard</p>
<b>Aesthetic perception</b>	<p>This is the more subjective of the judgments. It covers sensitivity in terms of aesthetic attributes such as interplay of landform and landscape structure, texture, naturalness, the presence or absence of detracting features or human activity. More sensitive landscapes have a more aesthetically pleasing combination of features, likely indicated by complexity, variety, and naturalness, and absence of human scale features.</p>	<p>Simple and uniform in texture; sense of naturalness eroded; human scale features apparent.</p> <p>Unlikely to be considered scenic.</p>	<p>Moderately varied texture, reasonably good degree of naturalness; some features of human scale. Moderately scenic.</p>	<p>Complex and varied texture, high degree of naturalness with few features of human scale.</p> <p>Scenic.</p>

APPENDIX 4: Site areas for two of the four proposed arrays in the Sunnica proposal (as of September 2019).



-  Site area within the parish
-  Site area outside the parish

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