



THE DEDHAM VALE LANDSCAPE

An Area of
Outstanding Natural Beauty

COUNTRYSIDE
COMMISSION

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A landscape assessment prepared
for the Countryside Commission
by Landscape Design Associates

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FOREWORD

If asked to describe the English countryside to someone who has never visited these shores many people's thoughts might first turn to green pastures, with grazing cows and sheep, and a river meandering lazily amid stout but graceful willows. They might elude to leafy lanes, fine oaks and magnificent elms and to a cornfield at harvest. Such pictures were immortalised for us by John Constable painting in the Dedham Vale 200 years ago, and fascinatingly persist in our nation's mind's eye as archetypal English lowland landscape — familiar, idyllic images we feel comfortable with and which can be bought from many a gift shop.

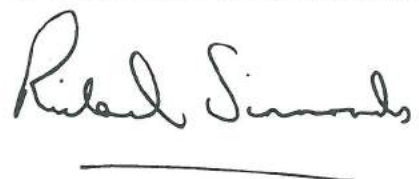
Constable painted what he saw, and he was in fact depicting a working, even an industrial landscape as barges plied the canalised River Stour and farming required the toil of intensive labour. As an artist he observed and captured the subtle qualities and inherent beauty of these everyday scenes of his home.

We still seek those peaceful scenes today, by the coachload. Whilst once they were common such familiar 'rural charm' is now scarce, although astonishingly parts of Dedham Vale have changed little since Constable's time. This has been aided by constructive planning policies that followed designation of the Vale as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1970, and by effective countryside management and, not least, by local commitment. At the time of designation, housing development threatened to destroy the area's much loved character and new agricultural requirements equally posed a

threat to the valley pastures, marshes, hedges and trees. Now the great numbers of visitors attracted to the Vale could spoil the very thing they come to see.

The Dedham Vale landscape celebrates a landscape of national significance whose cultural associations contributed to its approval as an AONB. The landscape continues to inspire artists and writers and it is these enduring links that heighten our understanding of its special qualities and its integrity. Together with identifying today's pressures for change this study will, we hope, guide the policies needed to safeguard an area that holds such a valued place in our heritage.

The Countryside Commission very much hopes this publication will be read and enjoyed by residents, visitors, decision makers, and anyone with an interest in landscape and art giving us all a better appreciation of the Vale's distinctive if undramatic countryside. This awareness is vital if we wish to see the right decisions taken to ensure that the Dedham Vale remains beautiful and continues not only to be admired but to be worked in and lived in, and enjoyed by many.



RICHARD SIMMONDS
Chairman
Countryside Commission

PREFACE

This report presents the results of a landscape appraisal of the Dedham Vale AONB. It celebrates the special quality and varied character of this lowland river valley landscape, and identifies its importance nationally.

The aim of the report is to raise awareness and appreciation of the outstanding scenic qualities of the area, confirming the national status of the landscape and the need to protect it from future unsympathetic change. Landscape assessment provides a means to analyse the landscape, specifically identifying the qualities and characteristics which make it distinctive. This report draws on the conclusions of such an assessment carried out in accordance with the Countryside Commission's guidelines [1] and developed by our own field assessment experience. The detailed technical report describing the results of this assessment is available from Suffolk County Council. The method of assessment involved the study of background material and mapped information, including geology, topography, hydrology and ecology. Field study and consultation was supplemented by research into landscape change and the perception of the landscape. Perception is of particular importance to

Dedham Vale because its landscape has the notable propensity to satisfy people's expectation of a classic English lowland landscape, as indeed John Constable hoped it would.

This report sets out our conclusions about the Dedham Vale AONB, beginning with its perception by both artists and the public. We then describe the underlying forces that have shaped the landscape and which still leave their mark today. Next, we examine the variation in landscape character within this relatively small AONB, followed by a description of those features which are characteristic of the area. Finally, we look at how the landscape is currently changing and conclude by reaffirming the national importance of this special area.

This report also contains an appendix of landscape guidelines which set out the ways in which local people, visitors and professionals can positively direct future change.

Landscape Design Associates
May 1997

I. INTRODUCTION TO DEDHAM VALE

Dedham Vale was designated by the Countryside Commission as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1970. Since then it has been extended twice and now covers an area of 90 sq km. Located in the east of the country, close to the coast between Ipswich and Colchester, it stretches from Manningtree inland to within two km of Bures. The AONB boundary encloses the lower section of the River Stour and thus protects an area of exceptional lowland river valley.

In this, one of the smallest AONBs in the country, there is an extraordinary range of different spatial scales and special features, giving rise to distinctive landscape characters. The Vale embraces rolling fields on the valley slopes, lush and sheltered valley-floor meadows and open marshes, intimate tributary valleys and nucleated villages of great charm and vibrant colour. These are just a few of its special qualities.

The association of John Constable with Dedham Vale has been a significant factor in the debate of the worthiness of the Vale for designation. Constable captured in his paintings the gentle panoramas of the Vale, the distinctive pattern of valley-floor vegetation, distant church towers — views which have little changed to this day. The landscapes most featured in Constable's paintings centre around the village of Dedham and Flatford Mill and thus form only a small part of the full designated area. Nevertheless, this association with John Constable often results in the AONB being referred to as 'Constable Country'.

The formal designation of Dedham Vale can be traced directly to the mounting pressures for development in the area in the mid 1960s. At this time Ipswich and Colchester had both been identified as

major growth centres, and the villages of East Bergholt, Dedham, and Stratford St Mary within the Vale had also been selected for new housing provision. Recommendations for the study area to be designated as an AONB were developed on the basis of these increasing pressures and with the desire to retain the quality of the landscape captured in artists' paintings.

Following the designation, parts of the landscape surrounding the AONB have also been designated at a regional level for their quality as Special Landscape Areas. In addition nearly the whole AONB was, in 1988, designated as an Environmentally Sensitive Area. This latter designation ensures that traditional farming practices, which contribute significantly to the character of the Vale, are continued.

Dedham's distinctive and characteristic 'Vale' landscape, which lies within the Claylands of South Suffolk and North Essex, has been acknowledged by those who have lived there for generations, those who have recently settled there, and by those who know the area from brief holiday visits. An often intangible dimension to this landscape, is the way in which it affects these people on an emotional and even a sub-conscious level. Dedham Vale provokes a remarkably strong emotional response which is readily expressed in the work of artists and writers. The reason for this may well lie in the perceptions of this area as a tranquil and unspoilt rural idyll, stimulating people's subconscious yearning to return to their pastoral roots. Nowadays, the connection of this feeling to Dedham Vale in particular is, no doubt, inspired by familiar images of Constable's portrayal of its landscape, as much as by the landscape itself.



Dedham Vale; open arable land abutting the more sheltered valley pasture.

2. PERCEPTIONS OF THE VALE LANDSCAPE

The work of writers and artists and their response to the environment provides a special insight into the qualities of any landscape and this is particularly so for Dedham Vale.

Artists and writers continue to encapsulate the memorable qualities of this landscape, and a study of their work highlights some of the characteristic features which are remarkably enduring in their fascination.

A typical English lowland

Landscape has a profound capacity to influence and govern our feelings, and lies at the heart of traditional cultural development in most societies. It provides spiritual sustenance for artists and writers, a resource to interpret and inspiration for new ideas. One of England's greatest painters, John Constable (1776–1837), was born and raised at East Bergholt, and he acknowledged the landscape of Dedham Vale as his source of inspiration. For him it was the light, textures, rhythms, shapes, colour and the very language of the natural world which were the source of all the metaphor and imagery of painting [2]:

“Painting with me is another word for feeling, and I associate my careless boyhood with all that lies on the banks of the Stour; those scenes made me a painter.”

What is common to all artists and writers influenced by Dedham Vale, is their desire to understand ‘the place’, whether they see it as a complete scene composed of both valley floor and sides, or whether the subtlety and detail of the immediate environs has occupied their thoughts.

The significant number of artists and writers associated with this small lowland valley, both past and present, indicates the power of its influence and in turn the power of paintings and writing to affect their observers. People come to Dedham Vale not just to paint or write themselves, but because they are inspired by past paintings, literature or descriptive writings, which send them in search of scenes of an English idyll.

The perception of Dedham Vale as a unique pastoral retreat is no doubt influenced by the familiar images of Constable's landscape — its intimate, domesticated character, and the subtle and harmonious balance of all the ingredients of the classical English lowland. Rolling hills and gentle valleys, trees, riverbank willows, floodplain meadows, ancient lanes, traditional villages and farm buildings and the meandering river together make up the landscape which Constable expressly referred to when he wrote [3]:

“The gentle declivities, the luxuriant meadow flats sprinkled with flocks and herds, and well cultivated uplands, the woods and rivers, the

numerous scattered villages and churches with farms and picturesque cottages, all impart to this particular spot an amenity and elegance hardly anywhere else to be found.”

Seasons and the sky

Dedham Vale is a landscape whose character changes considerably with the different seasons. In winter its topography, gently sloping valley sides and width of valley floor are clearly visible and occasionally blanketed in snow, simplifying their form. In spring and early summer the experience is more enclosed with leafy green lanes, hedgerows and scattered copses of woodland giving rise to a luscious rural scene. By late summer and the harvest season the colours of the landscape have changed to golden brown fields of corn and the olive dusty greens of the trees and hedges.

Artists and writers have exploited these details and variation in mood and season in Dedham Vale. Images of winter snow, river floods, high summer and the harvest landscape are all evident.

The artist John Nash, (1893–1977) who lived at Wormington in Dedham Vale for much of his life was, like Constable, strongly influenced by the landscape, and he particularly depicted local scenes in the snow. His close friend and writer Ronald Blythe wrote [4]:

“John had a passion for snowscapes and the two kinds of life they displayed: the immaculate life of the snow itself, and the brown-green vegetable life thrusting through it.”

Nash's paintings of the snowscape capture the gentle flow of landform so typical of the Vale, laid bare by the lack of winter vegetation.

Sir Alfred Munnings (1878–1959), artist, writer and keen conservator of the Dedham landscape, painted a number of local winter scenes. An icy riparian scene between Flatford and Dedham is depicted in *The Frozen River*, snow having settled on the cut stumps of newly pollarded willows. *My Garden in Winter* looks out from the artist's house in Dedham towards the valley sides. The flooding of the Stour was also a topic for study by Munnings and also for a much earlier painter, Ramsey Richard Reingale, a contemporary of Constable, who painted a view of Dedham Vale during the floods of 1799.

Blankets of snow or flood water in winter contrast with paintings of rich, high summer detail and harvest scenes, where lush vegetation and intensity of light and colour are paramount. Some of the most vivid harvest scenes come from John Nash, who painted intense yellow cornfields in early evening light, and used the lines of haystacks and furrows to emphasise perspective and landform.



My Garden in Winter by Sir Alfred Munnings. View from the artist's bedroom window in Castle House. (© The Sir Alfred Munnings Art Museum, Castle House, Dedham, CO7 6AZ.)



Dedham from Langham by John Constable. Sketching in oils on a summer morning, Constable records only the essentials — the quality of light and the structure of the sky, and the landscape. (With kind permission of the Tate Gallery.)

The image of summer plants is also captured by the writer, Adrian Bell, a close friend of Nash. In his book *Men and the fields*, he enriches his descriptions of rural life with expressions of nature's moods and light [5]:

"The intensity of light is almost tropical. From the time the sun is showing over the corner of the wheatfield, making black channels in between the drill rows, to the time it sets, shining low over that field, ...it comes round on the north face of the buildings, burning the lichen from the tiles of the roof, and returning them to their original red."

Similarly, Hammond Innes in his book entitled *East Anglia*, described the old Wool Country of which Dedham is a part, and celebrated the influence of seasonal change on the landscape [6]:

"But the surface of this rolling country is heavy clay, gold in summer, yellow and brown in autumn, and in winter green as downland hills, for this is the rich corn land of England where the plough makes the pattern of the seasons."

John Constable was attracted to the high summer scenes of Dedham Vale and many of his paintings depict the qualities of this time of year. He paid great attention to detail in each scene, and in composing *The Cornfield* painting he sought advice from a botanist friend, Henry Phillips, about his use of foreground plants. Phillips replied [7]:

"I think it is July in your green lane. At this season all the tall grasses are in flower, bogrush, bulrush, teasel. The white bindweed now hangs its flowers over the branches of the hedge; the wild carrot and hemlock flower in banks of hedges, cow parsley, water plantain..."

For Constable it was also the quality of the East Anglian sky that caught his imagination. He had been trained by his father to scan the clouds for signs of different forces of wind, and later had read books relating to the science of cloud formations. Thus, he painted clouds as real features rather than a means of reflecting mood, which had been their main function in earlier periods of landscape painting. In a letter Constable described the paramount importance of the sky in any landscape; he wrote "the key note... the sky is the source of light in nature — and governs everything" [7]. In sketches such as *Dedham from Langham* the detail is dropped while the essentials of the scene, the quality of light and the structure of the sky and landscape, are captured in vital dabs of paint.

The influence of the sky in today's landscape of Dedham Vale is still significant, particularly on the floodplain and at Cattawade Marshes. The interesting cloud patterns that attracted Constable's attention, continue to attract artists today.

Buildings and settlements

Local vernacular buildings in Dedham Vale form an intricate part of the landscape and express the natural environment as if having risen from the soil itself. Buildings sit in harmony with their landscape context, and are frequently used by artists in paintings to provide focal points and colour, and are described vividly in writings on the area.

Church towers in the Vale were utilised by Constable to best advantage. Often described as a master of composition, he sometimes moved them from their true location to get the picture he wanted. The churches, which stand as landmarks and icons to an earlier period of prosperity, have been attractive features for other artists including Sir Alfred Munnings, who was moved to paint Dedham Church in the early 1930s. Cedric Morris (1889–1982), a self-taught painter who moved to Higham in 1929, also painted a number of scenes in the Vale, including one of Stoke-by-Nayland church.

In contrast, the buildings that John Nash chose to paint were local farm buildings and barns. Many of his paintings show these buildings in disrepair, depicting hard times when people struggled to hold together the semi-ruined agriculture of the Vale before the Second World War. His pictures pay close attention to detail, illustrating the use of locally specific building materials and fencing.

Surprisingly, few artists in the past painted the unspoilt villages although, with the increase in tourism, contemporary artists are now attracted to this aspect of the Vale.

In descriptive writing, the buildings and villages have attracted attention. Hammond Innes in his book *East Anglia*, described the vernacular as [6]:

"bright pargeted plaster, gaily coloured villages, the great wool churches raising square flint and stone towers to the cloudless sky."

The architect Raymond Erith (1904–1973), who lived in Dedham from 1936 and was resolutely committed to the classical style of architecture in the face of the emerging Modernist Movement, drew inspiration from the landscape and its buildings throughout his life. The way he combined classicism with the local vernacular can be seen in his building throughout the Vale. In 1965, he played a leading part in the successful campaign to save Dedham Vale from large-scale speculative development, which ultimately led to its declaration as an AONB in 1969. He described the Vale as "a simple, self sufficient countryside where for centuries nature has been used but not exploited" [8].



The Barn, Wormingford, 1954 by John Nash. A rich summer light captured in oils picks out the detail of the barn and fences. (With kind permission of the Royal Academy of Arts, London.)

A working landscape

The 18th century historian and topographer, John Norden, enthused at the agricultural richness of Dedham Vale, which he described as [9]:

“Most fatte, fruteful and full of profitable things, exceeding (as far as I can finde) anie other shire for general commodities and plenty... this shire seemeth to me to deserve the title of the Englishe Goshen, the fattest of the Lands, comparable to Palestina that flowed with milke and hunnye.”

Agricultural practices have changed considerably over the centuries and have shaped the landscape accordingly. Changing markets and increased mechanisation have not only altered field sizes and agricultural production, but also the number of people visibly working in the landscape. Today a large proportion of the people in the Dedham Vale landscape are tourists rather than those associated with the agriculture practices. This however, was not always the case, and visual images and descriptive writing of people working the landscape are of great historical importance.

Ronald Blythe is perhaps best known for his book *Akenfield*, [10] which describes the life and people of a Suffolk village through the eyes and words of its inhabitants. Although Akenfield village lies a few miles to the north of the AONB, much of the book could have applied equally well to villages within Dedham Vale, and it provides a vivid account of people’s relationships to the landscape.

Similarly, Adrian Bell’s book *Men and the fields*, [5] which was illustrated by John Nash, was a work of homage to the farms and farm workers of England who struggled through the agricultural recession up to 1939. Ronald Blythe [4] described the book as:

“a lyrical realism, a deep knowledge of farming plus a pleasure in the designs, which for many centuries, it had carried across the English Landscapes... For Adrian it was a peopled countryside, for John a land of plants and shapes who’s human occupation was exploited in terms of work a day litter, bindles, fencing, shepherds huts, grand diggings and carts.”

These writings highlight the peopled nature of the landscape at that time and contrast with the more



Stour Valley and Dedham Church, about 1815 by John Constable. Labourers shovel manure for ploughing into the fields before sowing of winter wheat. (Warren Collection. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.)

uninhabited, remote qualities often sensed today. Ronald Blythe has experienced the changes in agriculture of the Vale, and reflected that on walks with John Nash, they could not go anywhere without being overlooked from someone working in the fields. Today, of course, farm machinery does most of the work, and the fields are often deserted.

In John Nash's paintings his people are not obtrusive, but are part of the rural countryside, part of nature itself. The depiction of people in the landscape in such a way was also a feature of Constable's paintings centuries earlier. His paintings are notable as some of the first that show ordinary men and women labouring on the land, although he showed little interest in characterising them. Instead he portrayed rural harmony in the Vale; descriptions of the working relationships between man and landscape, unsentimental accounts of traditional practices, and features such as field edges, hedges, the plough and activities which combine to satisfy our popular perception of rural life.

The River Stour

For many people, visitors and artists alike, the River Stour is the central thread of Dedham Vale and must comprise some of the most familiar river territory in English art. Constable's paintings are, of course, the most famous. It is likely that Constable's training at his father's watermill, Flatford, and the elder's involvement in the Stour Navigation Commission, gave Constable a particular interest in painting the valley floor and immediate environs of the river. His early works, such as *Dedham Vale*, *Morning* and *Autumnal Sunset*, which were painted on the valley sides around East Bergholt, tended to be panoramic. However, their main focus was always towards the valley floor in the distance. Constable's greatest and best known works were a series of paintings between his marriage in 1816 and his wife's premature death in 1828. All but two of these depict scenes on the river. *Dedham Vale*, painted from near Langham, shows the view eastward along the lowest section of the valley towards the estuary, with pollard willows, open meadows and river bank trees, which are still characteristic features to this day.

Although Constable's paintings often show tranquil and rural images he also depicted riversides and the river as a place of activity, with barges, carts and boat building – a working landscape. In contrast, later artists illustrated a quieter phase on the river, once barge transport had ceased as a result of the new railway. The remote and meditational qualities of the river are expressed in Sir Alfred Munnings' painting *Barge on the Stour*. On the bank of the river, there lies a rotting barge, a remnant from earlier times, and within the riparian scene there are typical images of the Stour — pollarded trees, open grazing meadows, lush bankside vegetation and views to church towers. Some versions of the painting show two young girls enjoying the river in a rowing boat.

The classic image of pollarded trees of willow and oak in the Stour valley and their qualities are beautifully described in Adrian Bell's book *Men and the fields* [5]:

“to sit on the bank and rest a minute opposite the pollarded oak is to be in old England. The oak is small but aged, split so that it is no more than a thick curl of bark, and ending in little sprouting fists. It has a hairy growth of twigs all over the trunk”.

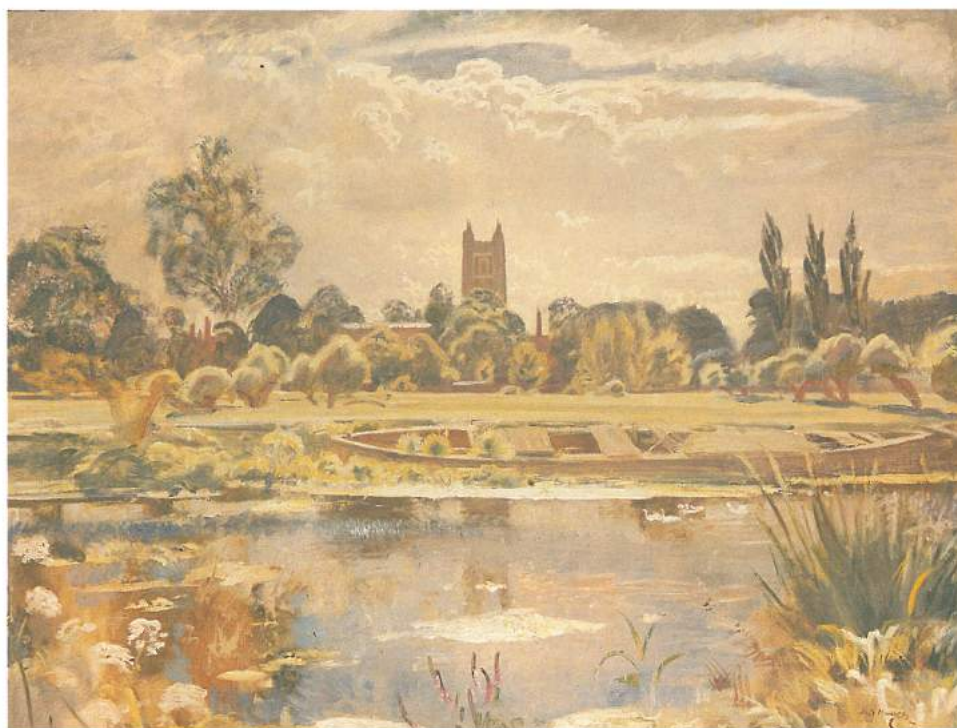
Adrian Bell also describes the old elm trees which were once a characteristic feature of the Vale before the onslaught of Dutch elm disease, and which were beautifully drawn and painted by Constable [5]:

“North from the farmhouse stands a great elm... the whole tree silhouetted against the evening light has the shape of a fan, of an immense piece of filigree.”

Although the Stour is the most described river in the Vale, its tributaries have also attracted some attention, albeit of a lesser nature. One of the most beautiful places along the Assington Brook tributary is Arger Fen and Tiger Hill, which have been described in detail by Ronald Blythe in his article *A Suffolk Valley Wood* [11]:

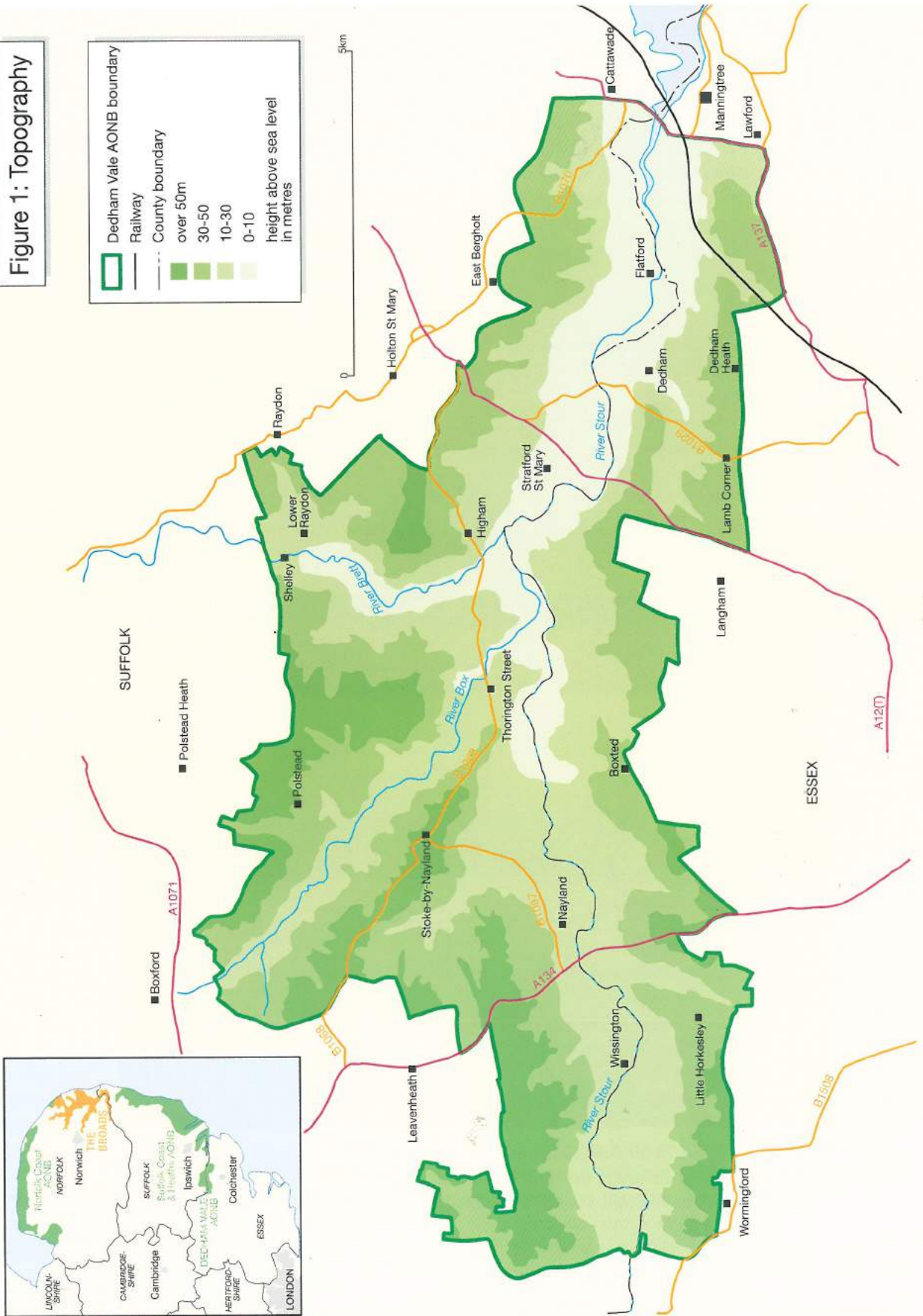
“Arger Fen and Tiger Hill covered a deep little valley... A swift gravelly stream hurried through this ever-fascinating wood on its way to the Stour, and ran bridge-less across the road itself so that everybody had to splash through it.”

Artists today are still attracted to the rivers for their tranquil, scenic qualities, detail of rich summer vegetation or the sparkle of water in a wider valley scene.



Barge on the Stour, by Sir Alfred Munnings. Dedham Church and pollarded willows stand out from the valley floor. Painted in the early 1930s when old barges laid on the bank. (© The Sir Alfred Munnings Art Museum, Castle House, Dedham, CO7 6AZ.)

Figure 1: Topography



3. THE SHAPING OF THE DEDHAM VALE LANDSCAPE

Physical influences

The present day landscape of Dedham Vale is a product of both physical and human influences which have shaped its structure and appearance (Figure 1). Geology, river erosion, past and present land use and man-made structures act collectively to form an attractive rural valley. The gentle, softly proportioned slopes typical of the valley can largely be attributed to a complex pattern of drift and solid geology which has been eroded and moulded by the River Stour and its tributaries.

Over much of East Anglia the underling solid geology is chalk. In Dedham Vale, however, later Eocene and glacial deposits conceal the chalk geology rarely allowing it to influence present day landform or vegetation (Figure 2). The later Eocene and glacial deposits, which are exposed on the valley sides and surrounding landscape of the Vale, therefore have a greater influence on the character of this landscape.

The Eocene deposits include Thanet and Reading Beds, London Clay and 'Crag' sands and clays. These deposits were laid down during a period when Dedham Vale and the surrounding East Anglian landscape was invaded by the sea, and are important for their fossil content.

Initially the sea cover was very shallow in this area and deposited layers of loams, sands and clays to form the Thanet and Reading Beds. During continuing settled and tranquil sea conditions London Clay was then laid down over the Thanet and Reading Beds. In time, increasingly unsettled periods developed, and movements of the sea floor resulted in the deposition of shore deposits. These are also known as 'crag', composed of shelly sands and pebbly gravels, and are most significantly found in the north east of the AONB.

As the sea-level dropped during the Anglian glaciation the Eocene deposits were exposed. This glacial period was a time when the advancing sheet of

ice carried clays, sands and gravels from further north and deposited them as boulder clay over the Eocene beds throughout East Anglia. In Dedham Vale the River Stour has eroded down through the boulder clay and other geological deposits to expose them as a pattern of banding, repeated to a lesser extent in the tributary valleys.

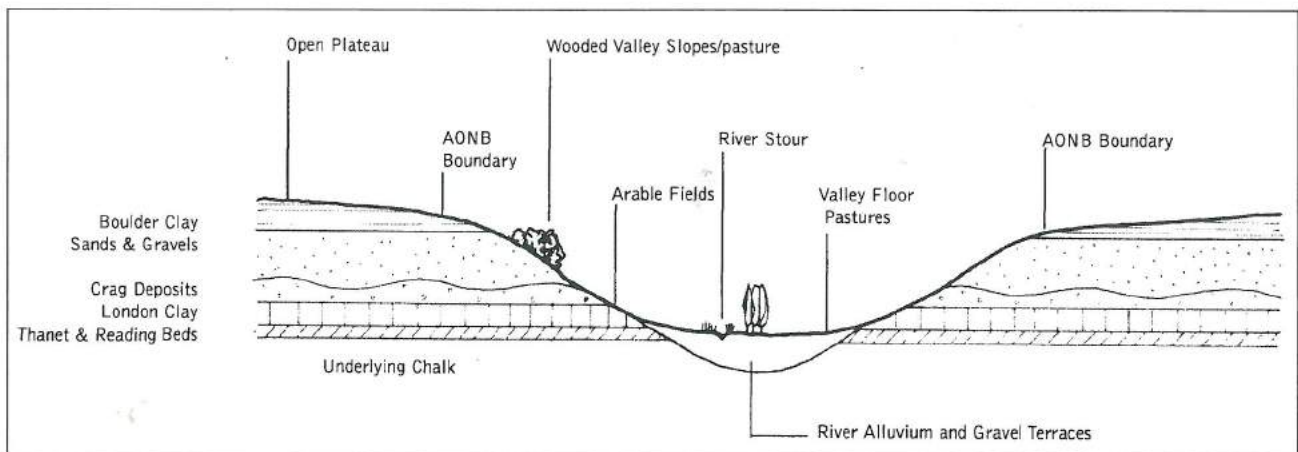
The interaction of geology and climate, along with human influences, has given rise to a variety of soils. The sands and gravels on the valley slopes have resulted in deep, well-drained fine loamy and sandy soils, which are locally flinty. These soils support small woodlands and mixed pastoral and arable land use.

The more clayey soils on the upper slopes and plateau surrounding the valley support a more arable landscape of large fields and fewer trees. Similarly, the lower valley slopes within the Vale support arable land use within a relatively large field pattern; this can be seen at the western end of the valley floor around Wissington.

The Dedham Vale landscape forms only the lower part of the wider River Stour catchment basin. The River Stour itself rises near the Cambridgeshire border, north of Haverhill, and runs through the Vale's length, historically acting as a physical and cultural boundary which clearly defined the border between Essex and Suffolk. Today the river meanders lazily in an easterly direction, to the Stour estuary, passing through the valley floor pastures. It is joined by two main tributaries, the rivers Box and Brett, which flow in from the north.

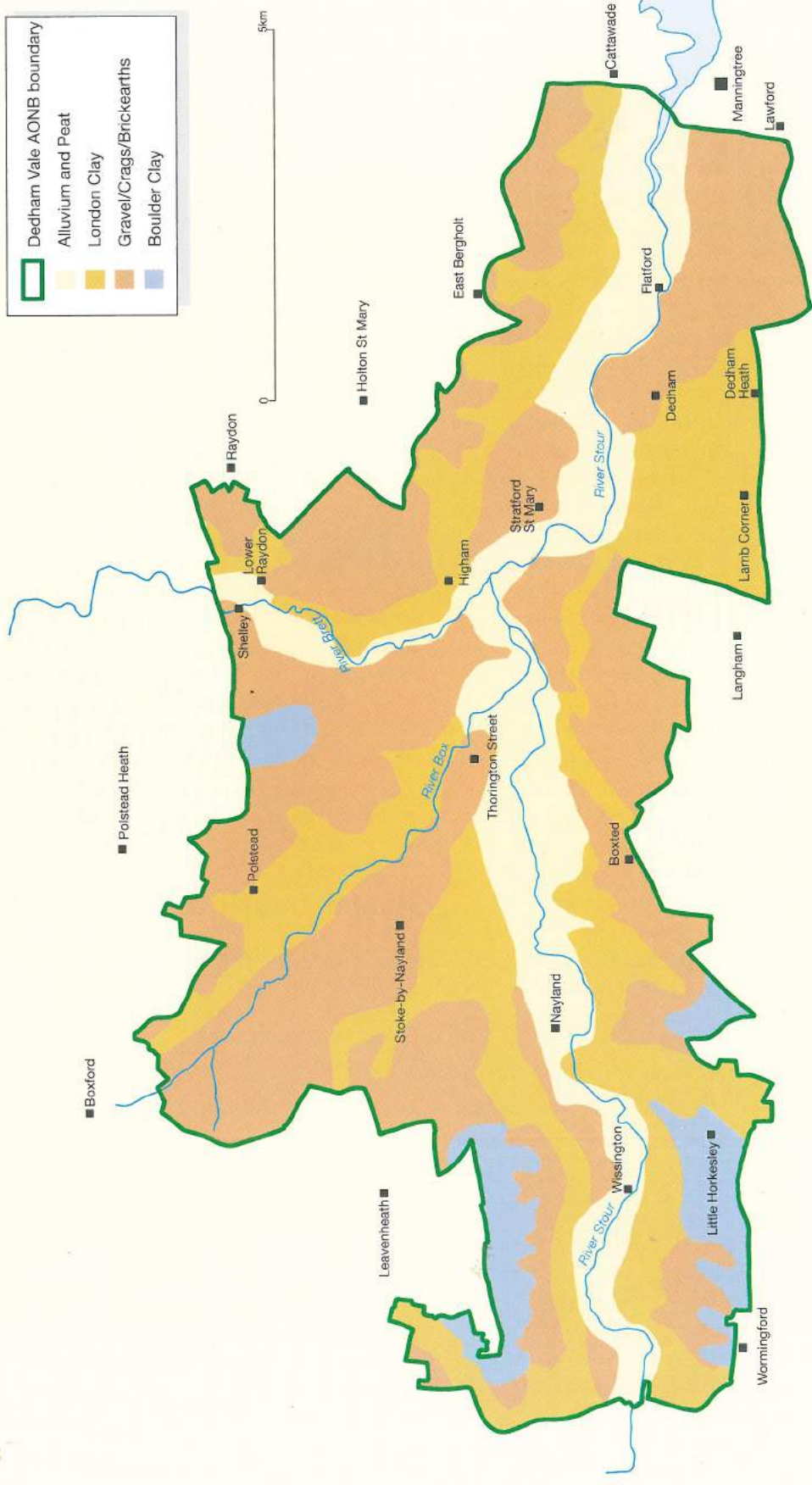
Human influences

Many people see Dedham Vale as an important historic landscape because of its associations with John Constable, however, much of the patterns and features he painted dated from an earlier period in history. These features include settlements, churches, lanes and



Geology cross-section.

Figure 2: Geology



field boundaries, which are thought to originate from the Saxon and medieval period, and together form a visual pattern that significantly influences the character of the Vale.

The influence of natural forces on human activity are reflected by these historic elements which have been determined, at least in part, by topography, soils and geology. The landscape is also constantly evolving and historic patterns from one period are invariably fragmented by later occupation and land use.

Examples of the interplay of human and natural influences include the old heaths of Dedham Vale. Many of the sandier valley slopes have place names which include the word 'Heath', such as Dedham, Polstead and East Bergholt Heath, although only small remnant patches of grass heath still exists today, as found at Tiger Hill (part of Arger Fen SSSI). Earlier and more extensive areas of heathland are commented on by Oliver Rackham (1986) [12], who believes that the wooded valley sides were used as wood pasture, with overgrazing causing them to turn to heath. He recounts the example of Dedham which, in the 14th century, had a large common, part of which was wooded and called Birchetum (wood composed of Birches). In the 16th century the manorial bylaws included special clauses protecting the 'Lynde Trees upon Dedham heath'. Lime trees could not have naturally invaded heathland and could only be relics of a former wood. These limes can still be seen in some of the hedgerows today.

The River Stour has been significantly modified by man for use as a waterway and as a source of energy for mills. It now runs in partially engineered channels and diversions, which keep the water levels artificially high throughout its length in the Vale.

The most significant historic elements identified in the Vale are however settlement patterns, field patterns, and ancient lanes, and these are discussed within the chronological summary given below.

Prehistoric and Roman period

Evidence of Prehistoric and Roman occupation in Dedham Vale is not extensive. However, the few sites and artefacts identified do indicate that people occupied the Vale from the Palaeolithic and Neolithic period. Evidence in the form of flint artefacts, the oval enclosure at Stratford St Mary, burial mounds and ring ditches leave tell-tail signs. During these early phases of occupation people would have exploited the river valley and cleared areas of woodland on the valley floor and sides. In the Roman period, the population in the Vale increased. The majority of the settlement would have comprised individual farmsteads along the river valley. People would have worked the land and supplied goods to the nearby market towns of Ipswich and Colchester. A crossing point of the Stour is known to have been established at Stratford St Mary during this period.

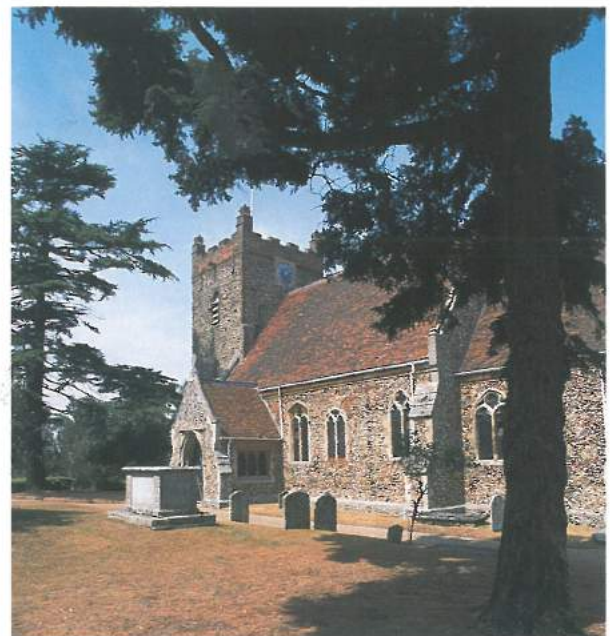
Fixing the mould of the countryside

It was during the Saxon and medieval periods that the most typical and characteristic patterns and features of Dedham Vale developed, influenced by major phases of prosperity and change relating to the Old Drappers' woollen industry which flourished between 1300 and 1600. East Bergholt was the largest centre for weavers, although the Woollen Cottage Industry was spread throughout the Vale. The following paragraphs describe the major features and patterns that are likely to date from these periods and which are still visible in the landscape today.

Settlement

The majority of settlements within the Vale date to the Saxon period, some being mentioned in *Doomsday* in 1086. The spatial arrangement of buildings is distinctive, generally clustered around small, triangular greens or common land called 'tyes'. These were not the only commonland in this period, tracts of heath or woodland pasture also existed on the upper slopes of the Vale. Although no longer in existence, the location of these heaths can be ascertained from place names such as Dedham Heath, Polstead Heath and Levenheath.

The significant medieval stone built churches of the Vale replaced earlier timber Saxon churches during the increased wealth of the 13th century. Built from stone and brick, many of the churches are also finished in knapped flint reflecting the local geology and traditional building techniques found in this area of the country.



Wormingford Church.

Within most of the villages there are a mixture of buildings from different periods including more recent grand, often brick faced 'town houses'. Other buildings include small, old timber-framed cottages and those which have been plastered and painted shades of pink, white, blue or yellow. Many are designated as grade I and II listed buildings and most fall within the various village conservation areas which cover the settlements of the Vale.

Field patterns

A mixture of field patterns occur within the Vale reflecting planning, re-planning, expansion and piecemeal alteration. Patterns vary, from early enclosure on the valley sides, draining of the floodplain, enclosure of former common, to more recent hedgerow removal and field enlargement. Although a great mixture of patterns exist, the valley sides generally reflect a small-scale enclosure pattern, associated with villages, while larger fields are visible in areas of former common such as Dedham and Parney Heath on the upper slopes of the Vale. The small-scale field pattern and commonland are thought to date to the medieval period, reflecting a typical medieval economy, where each Parish had access to different landscape resources.

The pattern of enclosure has also been significantly altered by land ownership over the centuries. The development of medieval deer parks such as Giffords Hall, and 17th century halls and parkland, such as Smallbridge and Tendring Hall, have also left their mark in woodland distribution, pasture fields and enclosure patterns. At Giffords Hall there remains a significant area of ancient woodland possibly dating back to the original parkland.



Ancient coppiced hazel and eroded woodbank demarcate the edge of an old woodland.

These parks were managed for timber and underwood resources as well as for game. Often the park was a wood with clearings or 'launds' of pasture land. Divided into compartments some areas were coppiced, enabling fresh growth in newly cut areas to be protected from grazing animals, without the need to exclude them completely from the entire wood or park. Each compartment would be ditched and banked to facilitate this. Remains of much eroded old ditches and banks, often with old coppiced hazel stools running parallel, can be seen in Dedham Vale today. Those between Scotland Street and Polstead Village may well reflect such boundaries and woodland compartments.

Ancient lanes

The sinuous pattern of lanes and roads within the Vale is likely to reflect very early patterns of movement within the valley, dating back to prehistoric times. Mainly however, there is more concrete evidence relating to the use of these lanes in the Anglo-Saxon period. Many of the lanes cross the Vale at right angles to the river and may relate to the moving of livestock from the valley floor pastures to the heaths/common land on the upper slopes. Crossing points of the river were established and are little changed today, leaving some areas of the Vale relatively inaccessible. The sinuous network of lanes also linked Anglo-Saxon settlements known to have become markets in the medieval period, and thus are likely to have carried traffic between these centres. A large proportion of the narrow lanes within the Vale are included under the 'protected lane' designation, in recognition of their historical importance and positive contribution they make to the character of the landscape.

Moving towards the modern world

More recent changes to the Dedham Vale landscape are associated with trade to the continent, industry and navigation. Most notably in 1705 the River Stour was made navigable from Sudbury to Manningtree by Act of Parliament, thus making the river one of the earliest known statutory navigations in England. Barges were built on the banks of the Stour and used to export grain and flour from the mills and to import coal. John Constable's painting from this time acts as an accurate historical record of the wealth of human activity along the river, and in the Vale as a whole. In this period corn became an important commodity, with the mills on the rivers being used to grind the corn before it was exported up the Stour. However, competition from the railway, which opened as far as Sudbury in 1849, began the decline in navigation along the River Stour which rapidly became choked in vegetation.

The River Stour Board played a major role in



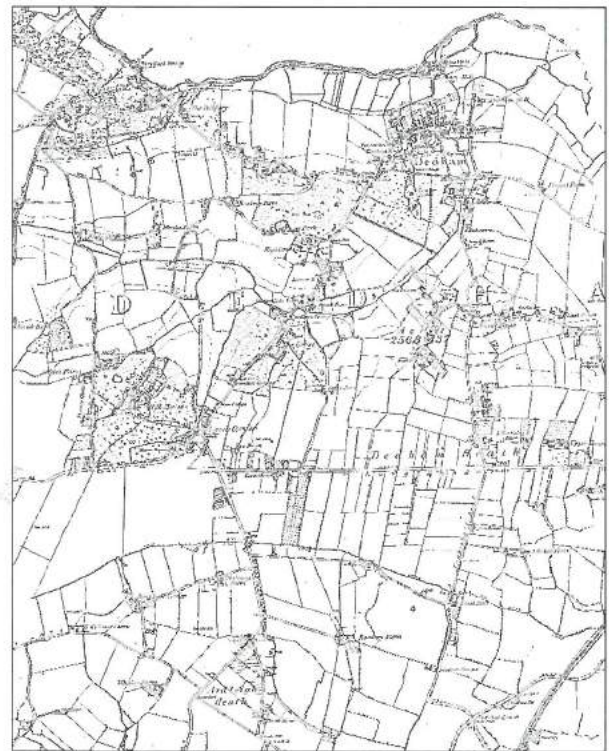
Men loading a barge on the Stour, by John Constable. The buildings of Flatford Mill are shown, and in the foreground part of the dry dock where the barges were built. (By courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria & Albert Museum.)

improving drainage of the river by dredging the channels. In 1928 the South Essex Waterworks Company promoted a bill to extract water from the Stour and installed a pumping house. The water extraction however, caused the tide to come further up to Flatford Mill creating a more brackish habitat, and altering the landscape still further.

Change has continued to occur since this time and further forces for change and pressures on the landscapes have emerged during the 20th century. These have included changing agricultural practices, pressures for development and tourism, trends which are described in detail in chapter six.



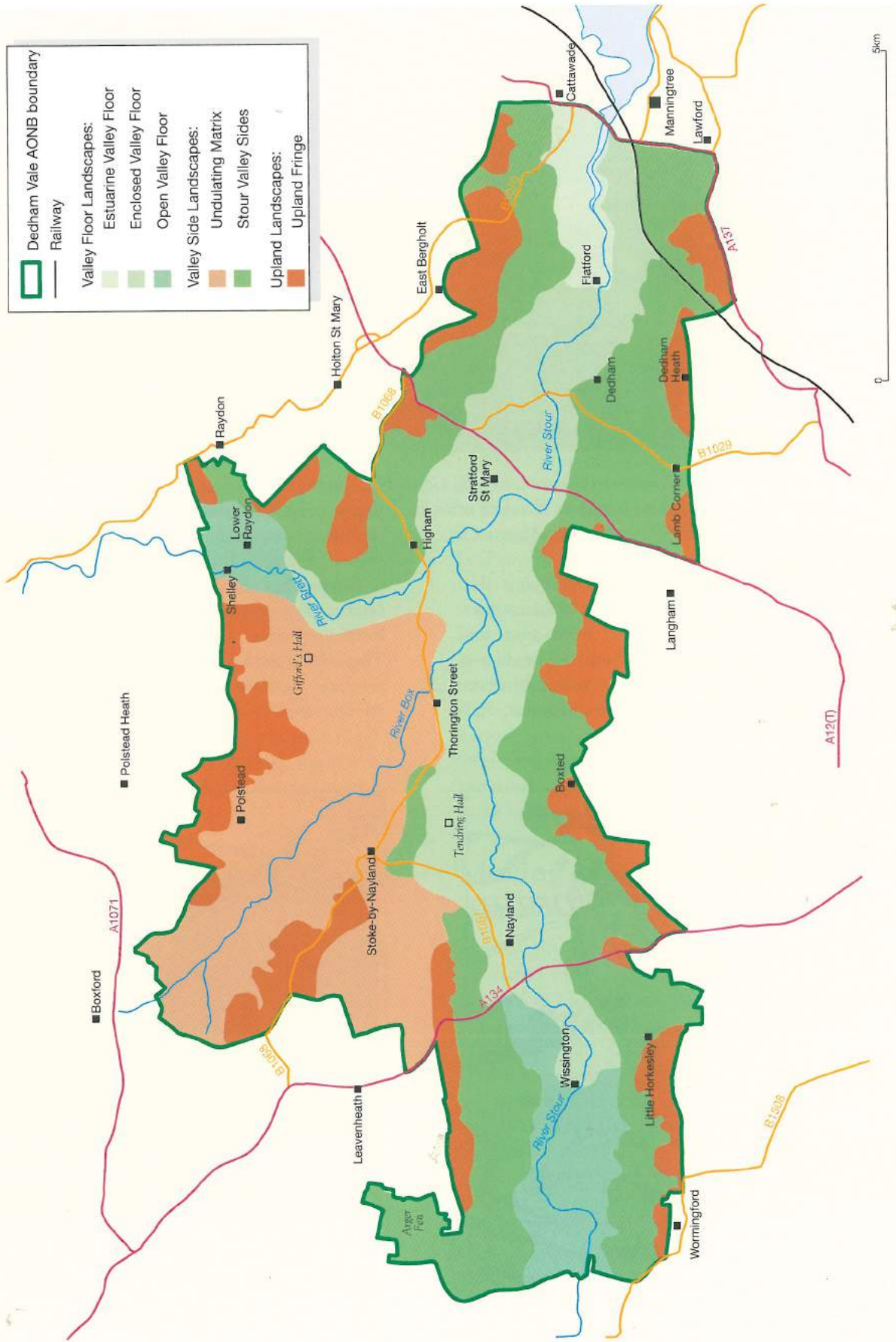
1777 map — Chapman & Andre



1880 map — First edition Ordnance Survey © Crown Copyright

Regular field patterns laid over the former Dedham Heath show up clearly in a comparison of map extracts from 1777 and 1880.

Figure 3: Landscape Character Types



4. VARIATIONS IN LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

A visitor to the Dedham Vale landscape will undoubtedly be attracted to the lowland river valley qualities of the Vale, and its small-scale villages of colourful cottages and narrow streets. Its beauty and charm is the product of a range of landscape experiences, taking the observer through an unfolding sequence of images from open upland surrounding the Vale to enclosed and intimate valley floor pastures. This whole range of variation in the landscape needs to be recognised in order to understand what contribution it makes to the enjoyment of the observer, and to the quality of the AONB.

Repetitive features and patterns through the Vale are characteristic and help to unify the landscape. Nevertheless, subtle variations in proportions, along with qualities and combinations of landscape elements, lead to the identification of areas of different character, with boundaries that are rarely clear cut on the ground. In Dedham Vale it is this subtlety of character and lack of abrupt boundaries between character areas, which forms one of the areas intangible qualities.

The landscape assessment has identified three main variations in character within the Vale, which are further subdivided (Figure 3). Each character type represents a stage along a continuum where similar landscape elements assume an increasing or decreasing dominance. The three main character types are: the valley floor landscapes, the valley side landscapes and the upland landscape, and each is subdivided and described below.

The valley floor landscapes

The lush, damp riverside pastures, meadows and marshes set within the gentle slopes of the valley sides epitomise the Dedham Vale landscape for most people,

and express many of the aspects and elements depicted by the artist John Constable.

Landscape elements such as pollarded willows, lines of bat willows, expanses of water and meadows and pastures, determine character, and are common throughout the flat or gently undulating valley floors of both the River Stour and Brett. However, within this apparent uniformity, the influences of land use management, flood control measures, the maturing river and the influence of the sea have created floodplain landscapes of distinct character. It is these influences which allows this landscape to be further divided into three landscape character types.

Estuarine valley floor

"Open views over the salt marshes, much to keep the bird watchers happy, a few fishermen and a couple in an inflatable gently cruising upstream."

Iran Cane, *Dedham Lock Revisited*, Lock Lintel (1995)

This area of the Vale encompasses an homogenous, flat and simple landscape of estuarine grazing marshes and



A channel off the Stour near Cattawade.



The open expanse of the marshes.

valley floor pastures. It has an open and exposed character, with a strong sense of remoteness, contrasting with the built-up, active boat yards and industry along the mud flats of the tidal river further east. As a low-lying landscape it sits within the visual context of the gently sloping valley sides, which are cloaked in small woodlands, arable and pasture fields.

The River Stour and the remnant arm of the tidal estuary flow through this landscape, so that water is a dominant visual element, influencing land use and vegetation alike. To the east, the water channels are at their broadest, reflecting and emphasising the East Anglian sky and light. Further west the high watertable gives rise to substantial areas of marsh which conceal the water courses in a sea of golden reeds. These marshes are collectively known as the Cattawade Marshes and are managed by a traditional grazing regime. They include fen habitats and are important ecologically for the diversity of their breeding bird communities. As a result this area has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The call of marshland birds adds an ambience to anyone's experience of the area.

The two main water channels found in this landscape are very different in character. The River Stour, which flows in the north meanders naturally in loose curves, or, as at the locks of Brantham Mill, shows signs of manipulation. The southern water channel is, in contrast, a remnant arm of the estuary, cut off by the construction of the Cattawade Barrage in 1972, but still reflecting its former tidal regime, with muddy and salty shores.

The rough texture of the flat grazed pastures contrasts with that of reeds along the channels and the smooth, open stretches of slow moving water. Patches of wetland scrub are often too low to have any visual influence in the wider landscape, and only encroaching patches of stunted blackthorn dotting the pastures and meadows, detracts the eye.

There are few vertical features in this landscape, such as trees and man-made structures, except for a single disused barn and a line of pylons that cross the floodplain at Judas Gap. Settlement is also lacking; only the houses at Manningtree and Brantham are visible in the distance. There are a few houses huddled on the northern hillside, within the AONB which form focal points of interest when viewed from the floodplain. The most distinctive views to man-made structures are, however, those westward to the square tower of Dedham Church, which towers above the valley floor and is best seen in the early morning light.

This landscape is appealing because of its seclusion, and wilderness qualities, despite the close proximity of busy roads, settlement and industry.

Enclosed valley floor

"The gentle declivities, the luxuriant meadow flats sprinkled with flocks and herds...the sound of water escaping from mill dams, often rotten planks, slimy moss and brickwork..."

John Constable

This is a true valley floor pasture and meadow landscape; sheltered, lush and green, it is the essence of Dedham Vale. Significant numbers of trees enclose the valley floor, lining the river or occurring in hedgerows, to frame outward views to church spires and villages in the locality. Shades of green and brown predominate, broken by the odd splashes of colour from brick and painted buildings which, besides providing interest, give this landscape a strong link to its history and rural economy.

The River Stour and River Brett amble through the landscape in loose meanders or short canalised sections of river, forming a focus to the valley. Their courses are marked by riverside vegetation, with characteristic old pollarded willows, alder and poplar trees. The river banks and drainage ditches are often well vegetated and more sheer than the silt banks of the marshes further east. They are commonly lined with brown reeds, which in winter emphasises the course of water through the green pasture fields.

The majority of this river alluvium landscape is clothed in a patchwork of valley floor pastures, which bear a spread of buttercups in summer. Arable land use is limited and typically occurs towards the valley sides. The field sizes are mainly medium to small in scale, and are enclosed by old sinuous elm and hawthorn hedge boundaries.

Where water management allows flooding, marshes and meadows occur, associated with small blocks of alder carr and woodland. Many of the larger blocks of woodland on the valley floor have developed from natural regeneration with only one area of ancient woodland at Boxted Hall. The structure of these woods



Mature oak pollards along a narrow lane leading towards the Stour.

contrasts with the more regimented poplar and Cricket-bat Willow plantations, planted this century on the valley floor, between Thorington Street and Nayland.

Settlement in this landscape has historically been restricted to the very edge of the valley floor, on slightly higher and better drained ground. Thus the old settlements of Dedham, Stratford St Mary and Nayland, form a regular pattern of nucleated settlements along the floodplain edge, set within a beautiful and traditional landscape. Composed of narrow streets lined by small terraced houses, often rendered and painted varied tones of pink, white, ochre and blue, these settlements share a mature and familiar character. Dedham notably contains a number of Georgian and brick built buildings giving a grand character to the High Street. All three settlements possess substantial churches which stand out above the trees of the valley floor to act as prominent landmarks, characteristic of Dedham Vale.

In addition to nucleated settlement, the valley floor also contains isolated farm buildings and other buildings associated with the watercourses. The oldest of these are the barns and mills associated with mill ponds. The barns are built in the local vernacular of a low brick plinth, which supports the straining and bulging walls of stained timber slats. In contrast to these old buildings, the more recent water-works located on the old site of Langham Mill, and on the edge of



Nayland, at the edge of the floodplain.

Stratford St Mary, are built in an Art Deco style of the 1920s–30s, and are of architectural interest. They create an attractive incident on the floodplain and in the village, contrasting with the more rustic styles of both mills and settlement found elsewhere on the valley floor.

The roads that connect the settlements tend to follow a route at the edge of the valley floor, or cross the River Stour at right angles at Dedham, Stratford, and west of Langham. They are narrow, ancient lanes, tree shaded in summer, and change direction regularly as they snake around old field boundaries.

The tranquil nature of this landscape is remarkably



The Stour at Dedham, by Christopher Assheton-Stones.

conserved despite the significance of the A12 trunk road which bisects the valley. Generally this major routeway is not prominent or visible from the wider landscape, although noticeable from the edge of Stratford St Mary and near Dedham.

The visual qualities of this landscape vary from season to season, the influence of water being most apparent when the water channels flood, forming a smooth reflective sheet which takes time to drain from the fields. Similarly, in winter the skeletal shape of the land form is evident, but is concealed in summer by vegetation, which enhances the valley floor's intimate scale. This is a quiet landscape in winter, which often becomes busy and congested with tourists in the warmer months of the year.

Open valley floor

"Take the landscape round here at Wormingford... some would find it pretty tame. There are no hills worth speaking of. Yet there is a subtlety about this Wormingford Landscape which I feel and see, but which remains very difficult to define. I never look for more than the reality, the farming, the trees, the river".

John Nash, in *John Nash at Wormingford* by Ronald Blythe.

This valley floor landscape occurs in two relatively small areas of Dedham Vale, one in the far western area of the Stour Valley, the other in the northern part of the Brett Valley around Shelley and Lower Raydon. It also extends beyond the AONB boundary. This is an open, and simple landscape where the emphasis of the river is not strong, although the character of a pastoral river landscape remains.

Similar to other parts of the valley floor landscape, the landform undulates gently, and is defined on either side by wooded valley slopes. However, its character differs from other areas of the Vale due to the noticeably wider valley floor, shallower valley sides, fewer trees and an overall more open character with unrestricted views. This variation provides a contrast with the enclosed character of the valley floor found further downstream, giving it a distinct sense of place, and bringing variety to the AONB.

Within this landscape there is a mixture of both pasture and arable land use. Pasture is generally restricted to the immediate margin of the river, although in some cases arable fields spread up to the edge of the water channel. In many places, particularly around Shelley, the valley floor pastures are used for horses, giving rise to a strong paddock influence with drinking troughs and brightly coloured jumps within the fields.

Small patches of wet woodland composed of willow, alder and blackthorn occur on the edges of the water courses. Occasional isolated mature trees are found elsewhere on the floodplain and include species such as willow, alder, ash or oak.

The margins of the river courses vary in ecological diversity; some are sensitively managed with wide margins supporting quantities of rushes and reeds, while in other areas the river course has steep-sided banks, with arable land pushing in close on either side. The lack of significant vegetation along the rivers means that their courses are generally not clearly defined within the overall scene.

Few visual distracting elements exist in this landscape and this is further emphasised by the limited number of dispersed farm complexes on the floodplain,



Open views across the Vale from Wormingford.

some of which have historical links to the medieval period, and form notable focal points.

Overall this landscape is relatively inaccessible by road, with only one major crossing point at Smallbridge Farm on the Stour and a crossing point at Shelley on the Brett. The roads otherwise follow the base of the valley sides, or consist of private tracks which extend out onto the floodplain to access isolated farmsteads.

The valley side landscapes

These landscapes flank the main River Stour composed of gently, rounded slopes. These slopes are made up of mainly free-draining sands and heavier London Clay, and they support a mixture of pasture, arable and woodland. The valley side landscapes are dissected to the north and south by a variety of tributaries to the Stour, giving rise to a complex and undulating landform.

This group is sub-divided into two landscape character types. The first, the undulating matrix, forms a complex and dissected landscape to the north of the Stour. The second, the Stour valley sides, immediately flank the main Stour valley as a narrow landscape strip, which is quickly experienced when travelling from the upland fringe to the valley floor.

Undulating matrix

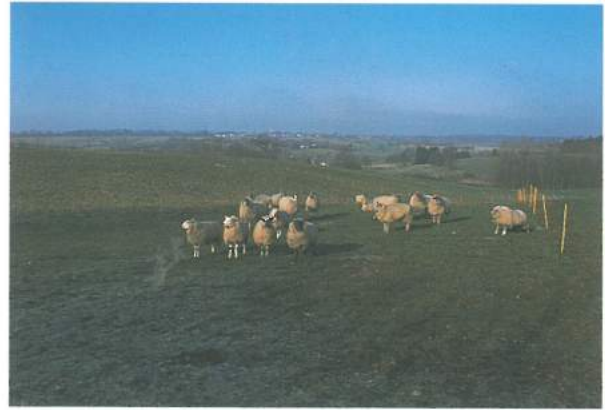
"It is hilly, lightly wooded, the copper-leaved oaks gathered in copses full of copper coloured pheasants. By November berries on the holly are red and the hedges red with rose hips."

Ruth Rendell (1989).

This landscape lies to the north of the main River Stour and is peaceful, small scale, semi-enclosed and rural in character. It possesses a mixture of land uses and visual variety and has hence been termed a matrix of land use and landscape features. It feels well managed, rich and fertile.

Sands and gravels, with London Clay form the drift geology of the area, and give rise to a gently rolling landform, with generously curved hills and slopes, extending down to the Brett and Stour valleys. Tributary streams, including the more substantial River Box, flow to the Stour in a south-easterly direction, dissecting the landscape to provide a pattern of valleys and ridges. The focus of this landscape is inward, with only limited views to the main Stour Valley, and it is easy for the visitor to become disorientated in the complex landscape which results.

As with other areas of the valley, this landscape supports a mixture of arable and pasture land use enclosed mainly by elm, thorn and field maple hedgerows. Associated hedgerow trees are also common, and include ash, holly, oak and field maple,



Sheep grazed pastures. View towards the Box Valley and Stoke-by-Nayland.

providing a green and well-treed character. On the steeper valley slopes, which are less easy to plough, small blocks of woodland and dry pastures are more prevalent and, together with hedgerows, provide a strong sense of enclosure. Woodland is composed of both native broad-leaved and mixed planting, often with associated scrub and bracken. Some of the woodlands have been coppiced in the past, and old hazel coppice stools are occasional features in the woods and along the edges of old sinuous lanes. It is possible that these coppice woodlands formed part of woodlands owned by estates and were associated with areas of parkland.

Parkland landscapes have left their mark on this landscape in the form of remnant parkland trees, woodland and pasture. This is apparent around Giffords and Tendring Hall, the latter being designated a Grade II Historic Park. Much of the parkland, including that at Tendring Hall, Giffords Hall, Boxted Hall and Shelley Hall, is covenanted to the National Trust and the influence of individual landowners is a prominent design characteristic of the landscape. This is particularly noticeable at Giffords Hall, where holly hedges and trees are commonplace.

More recently, the development of golf courses have had a profound effect on landscape character, near Stoke-by-Nayland and around Whitestreet Green. Here numerous evergreen/conifer trees dot the golf course, and can be seen over considerable distances, visually cluttering the landscape.

One of the most notable features of this landscape are the settlements of Stoke-by-Nayland, Polstead and Whitestreet Green, which occur as nucleated villages and hamlets on the upper slopes. Each settlement has characteristic tight streets, lined by small terraced houses of varying height and colours. Vernacular features include thatched roofs and timber-framed buildings as well as low brick walls with flints, which delineate front garden plots. Both Stoke-by-Nayland and Polstead boast substantial churches which, due to their prominent locations, stand out as landmarks over



Stoke-by-Nayland Church by Cedric Morris 1940. (With kind permission of the National Museum and Gallery, Cardiff).

considerable distances. Polstead Church has an idyllic setting on the hillside with views across the v-shaped Box Valley to the church of Stoke-by-Nayland, and Stoke itself sits on a spur of land that separates the Box Valley from the Stour.

Other settlement occurs either as linear development along roads or as a dispersed pattern of farmsteads typically located on the middle slopes of the valley sides, with small tracks leading to each property. However, the major connections linking settlements are narrow and sinuous lanes, with high hedges and sometimes banks and overhanging trees. The lanes traverse the landscape at right angles to the rivers, winding up the steep valley sides, or continuing along the top ridges between the valleys themselves, and create a distinctive pattern.

Stour valley sides

“Arger Fen and Tiger Hill... a deep little valley (with) a sequence of glades, sluices, stands of ash and beech, gardens, flowering banks, scrubs, conifers, rabbit runs, tracks – anything a visiting woodlander can ask for.”

Robert Blythe, *A Suffolk Valley Wood* (1984).

This area of Dedham Vale forms a linear, and steeply sloping landscape, flanking the main Stour Valley and the eastern side of the Brett Valley. The valley sides do not form a straight fringe but rather dip in and out,

creating an undulating edge of curved slopes which, when viewed obliquely, create a series of small overlapping ridge lines. Sandwiched between the valley floor landscapes and upland fringe, this landscape characteristically has framed views across the Stour and Brett valleys.

This is a varied landscape with an attractive pattern of land use on well-proportioned curving slopes. It varies in width from two to less than half a kilometre, and is often experienced only fleetingly when travelling through the area on the small sinuous lanes, which run from the upland to valley floor landscapes.

The valley sides of Dedham Vale are composed of a mix of London Clay and sands and gravels, which give rise to a variety of land uses and tree species. The scale and pattern of the landscape also varies, but is largely dependant on land use management and tree or hedgerow removal. The field enclosure pattern is small to medium in scale, interspersed with significant blocks of mixed woodland which, in places, relates closely to areas of old parkland, as at Lawford, Langham and Tendring. Small groups of pine trees are typical, occurring mainly on the upper sandy slopes, and are often seen against the skyline when viewed from the valley floor. Around Dedham, on the southern slopes that overlook the village, Lombardy poplars stand out as distinctive landmarks on the valley sides.

The density and maturity of woodland in this landscape (much being classified as ancient woodland),

gives rise to a well-established character. Mature oak trees are common in hedgerows or as isolated trees in fields on the lower slopes, with elm, thorn, oak, hazel and field maple in hedgerows. Further up the valley sides holly, pine, and ash become more common, with yew and laurel occurring around settlements and areas of remnant parkland. In areas where the sandy soils are well drained, acidic soil indicators such as bracken and gorse line the road verges and hedges, and this is typical in both the east and the west of the AONB.

The Stour valley sides are dissected by four small-scale tributary valleys: the Black Brook, Little Horkesley Valley, Tiger Hill/Arger Fen, and that adjacent to Dewlands Farm. Each of these lie concealed within the broader valley side landscape, forming intimate and secluded retreats which contrasts with the wider valleys of the Vale.

In the Tiger Hill/Arger Fen and Dewlands Farm tributary valleys the small, tight landform creates an enclosed and intimate landscape, with small-scale pastures and only limited arable land. In these valleys the soils change over small distances so that wet pasture on clay soils with impeded drainage can lie adjacent to sandy soils supporting gorse and mixed woodland. The contrast of vegetation and variety of habitats that these valleys support makes them very special both in landscape and ecological terms. Arger Fen is designated an SSSI and includes the area of Tiger Hill in its designation. The SSSI supports a range of natural habitats from fen and wet grassland to dry acidic grasslands and ancient woodland. These are also identified as Local Nature Reserves.



Crossing a ford near Arger Fen.

The valleys of the Black Brook and Little Horkesley are more generous in scale, supporting mixed farming where some hedgerows have been removed. Their character is therefore slightly different, to the more intimate Tiger Hill/Arger Fen and Dewlands Farm tributary, but they still provide a quiet and attractive retreat from the wider Stour Valley.

The strong patchwork pattern of this landscape is mainly attributed to the vegetation, enclosure pattern and land use, but the network of lanes and small roads, also forms a very strong repetitive pattern. Many of the lanes connect the upland landscape with the valley, crossing the valley side at right angles, and allowing distinctive and memorable views of the Vale. Other



Nursery small holding on the valley sides at Higham.

lanes run along the break of slope or within the upland landscape. Combined, these lanes form a chequered pattern connecting settlements and different landscapes. Some show signs of being very old, eroded into the ground with steep lynchet banks either side, which have been formed by the build up of soil at the edges of the adjacent ploughed fields.

Settlement varies from small nucleated villages at Little Horkesley and Higham, to numerous isolated farm buildings which can be found dotted along the valley sides, often appearing on the brow of the slope when viewed from the valley floor. Much of the settlement pattern is old, dating from as far back as the Saxon period, although many of the buildings in the villages are more recent. Occasional, elegant large halls set in parkland are also present in this landscape, the parkland being generally more apparent than the grand hall buildings themselves. Despite the dispersed pattern of settlement there are significant stretches of this landscape where no buildings are visible, particularly in the secluded valleys, giving rise to the feel of a generally rural and sparsely populated landscape.

The upland landscape

This landscape forms a plateau of South Suffolk and North Essex Claylands that extend across Essex and Suffolk and form the context of the Dedham Vale

landscape. These uplands are composed of sands and gravels and Boulder Clay, giving rise to loamy soils, and support a predominantly arable land use. The upland fringe landscape described below refers to the areas of upland landscape that extend into the AONB boundary only, but these areas have many similarities to the wider landscape context in which Dedham Vale sits.

Upland fringe

"It is a high climb up here, slowly huge views spread out and seem to encircle the winding road. The tilting green wheatfields are streaked in long lines by the harrow. Here and there towering wellingtonias and Douglas firs shelter an isolated farmhouse."

Ruth Rendell (1989).

The upland fringe lies roughly at the 50 m contour and above, and appears flat in contrast to the valley side landscapes, although it undulates slightly. The higher altitude of this landscape compared to others within the AONB makes it more exposed, and sometimes a bleak landscape in winter. Extensive views across the plateau are characteristic, giving rise to little sense of enclosure, while views to the Stour Valley itself are not generally possible.

The edge between the upland fringe and valley side landscapes is characterised by gentle convex slopes that dip down to a line or blocks of woodland that occur on



Quiet arable upland plateau with few hedges.

the more enclosed valley side landscapes. Often these woodlands are seen as just the tops of trees 'peeping' over the horizon.

Mainly this landscape is composed of gravels and brickearths, except where the boulder clay deposits extend into the AONB to the north of the Vale at Snakes Wood, and to the north and south of the Stour Valley at Wissington. The resulting soil type gives rise to predominately arable land use in a medium to large scale irregular field pattern. The flinty nature of the soils in the ploughed fields is often noticeable, especially in winter, providing local interest and texture to the scene. Although predominantly arable, small areas of heathland were once present but they now remain only as place names.

The fields are generally bounded by flailed hedges, as well as ditches and grassed banks covered in cow parsley in summer. The lack of substantial hedgerows due to hedgerow removal and the impact of Dutch elm disease, reinforces the more open and exposed character of this landscape. Small lanes which pass round the arable fields appear to follow old field

boundaries often taking angled turns. This pattern is reinforced in places by regular, more recently planted lines of poplar trees along the roads.

Woodland is not a predominant element in this landscape with few rectangular blocks. Woodlands tend to be isolated and are often linear in shape, occurring along the edges of fields. However, this open pattern is contrasted by the regularity and semi-enclosure created by apple orchards, which occur mainly on the south-facing slopes at the north-western corner of the AONB. These orchards are remnants of an industry which, in the past, covered a much wider area of the Vale.

Settlement is characteristically a dispersed pattern of old farm houses and buildings. Some are associated with the orchards and have related large industrial-scaled buildings. In some cases, nucleated villages on the edges of the valley side landscapes extend into the AONB, and in the case of Dedham Heath, linear ribbon development has created a different and more modern settlement pattern. Pylons are highly visible in such an open landscape and the water tower at Raydon acts as a landmark.

5. FEATURES OF THE LANDSCAPE

The valley landform

Dedham Vale is noted for its subtle valley profile, and attractive lowland landscape. It is this overall character which embraces the other typical features of the Vale and it is therefore worthy of mention.

The valley sides and valley floor are comfortably proportioned and gentle in their character, and form a subtle and unassuming landscape. The convex slopes of the valley sides are particularly characteristic, and most readily experienced when entering the Vale along the rural lanes from the north or south. During harvest, lines of cut corn emphasise the slope's convex shape, an aspect of the Vale which has been captured by many artists.

Rivers, meadows and pastures

Perhaps the most memorable feature of the Vale landscape is the lush lowland character of the floodplain meadows and pastures, immediately adjacent to the Rivers Stour, Brett and Box. Shaped by the force of river and water erosion over the centuries, Dedham Vale owes much of its sense of place to the character that the river, meadows and pastures provide.

The floodplain landscape varies considerably depending on the time of year. In winter it is an open,



Lush waterside vegetation, the River Stour near Wormingford Bridge.

deserted landscape with brown reeds lining water channels and frost on the branches of willow and alder. In contrast, it becomes a green and more enclosed landscape in the summer, populated not only by cattle grazing in buttercup meadows but also by tourists boating, walking and picnicking in true English style. The river channels generally have well-vegetated margins, in places overhanging willow trees, forming tunnels of shady green. In contrast the Cattawade Marshes to the east of the AONB, remain open and exposed throughout the year, reflecting a change in character as the Stour Valley nears the tidal estuary. This area of marshes is designated an SSSI for its important wetland habitats and nature conservation value. Waders and wildfowl such as Redshank, Lapwing and Oystercatcher breed within the cattle-grazed pasture, while riverside vegetation provide further nesting habitats for Teal, Shoveler, Tufted Duck and Water Rail. Other areas of meadow and water margins further upstream have also been identified as locally important habitats for birds and other animals.

Within the floodplain landscape small white bridges that cross the water channels, occasional mill buildings, mill ponds, and traditional barns provide splashes of colour and interesting focal points.



Flatford Mill.

Traditional vernacular buildings

The traditional buildings and settlements of Dedham Vale make a significant contribution to the landscape character.

As in adjoining parts of Essex and Suffolk, a lack of building stone gives rise to a distinctive vernacular style using wood, clay, lime and flint. In Dedham Vale the number of unspoilt buildings and settlements in the landscape, compliment the natural features and landform, and create a strong character and identity.



Timber-framed house in Stoke-by-Nayland.

Many buildings are of a traditional box timber-frame construction with mainly clay plain tiles and occasional thatched roofs. Walls are often plastered and sometimes decorated with 'pargetting', an external decorative plasterwork which became fashionable during the 16th century. Other buildings are plastered and painted various shades of red, yellow, pink and off-white. These colours are a distinctive aspect of the Vale and are derived from the traditional practice of limewashing with a mixture of lime and tallow coloured by the addition of locally derived earth pigments to produce pinks, apricots and buffs. As stronger natural pigments became more widely available deeper colours were used. Where some bright modern colours such as 'magenta pinks', blues and brilliant white are used the effect is less harmonious.

Some of the grander buildings relating to former times of prosperity, were built of brick which has mellowed with age to become a soft orange-red, and which in many cases is draped with wisteria and ivy. Some of the brick seen in the Vale is likely to have come from the Sudbury brickworks after the Georgian period.

The earlier woollen industry saw the rebuilding of Saxon churches to form magnificent landmarks along the Stour Valley. Among the greenery of the landscape their towers reach upwards, reinforcing local identity and helping to create visual coherence and aid orientation. They remain as the only prominent tall

buildings in this landscape, located along the edges of the valley floor or prominently on hilltops as at Stoke-by-Nayland. Each church has a slightly different



Harry in his garden by David Embry. Ordinary country life in a garden at Langham.

architectural style and history; some are rendered such as Shelley church and others are faced in local flint and each has its own style of tower.

Flint also occurs as a local building material in boundary walls to front garden plots. Constructed with red brick plinths, quoins and copings, these walls complement and enrich the buildings with which they are associated.

Other buildings in this landscape are those in agricultural use. Barn construction particularly has a distinctive vernacular style. Most are clad with dark-stained weather boarding that bulges and sags with old age. Usually they are constructed upon a brick plinth which provides a visual link with other brick buildings and structures. The roofs are made of red clay plain tiles or corrugated tin or asbestos. Part of the romantic quality of some of these old barns can be attributed to their run down and dilapidated state, but their close association with the landscape in which they sit also gives them a special presence. Often they are situated on the bend of a narrow lane and are set down within the folds of the landform with vegetation closing in around them; the combination creates a pleasant rural scene.

Ancient lanes, grass verges and hedges

The lane network of Dedham Vale is an intricate part of the landscape and worthy of special mention. These winding lanes possess an intrinsic quality in their own right that offers a very particular landscape experience to those who travel along them and present a different world to the busy main routes of the A12 and A134. A number of the lanes in the area are protected as ancient lanes, reflecting earlier patterns of movement.

Many of the lanes are thought to be old tracks or drove roads, connecting lowland river pastures to upland woods, wood pastures and commons. Associated with them are remnants of old woodbanks lined with large, bulbous, coppiced hazel stools. In other places the lanes are confined with hedges and banks sometimes cocooned in overhanging tree vegetation which creates a tunnel of dappled shade in summer. Wild flowers are also in abundance in spring and early summer. Bluebells in places clothe the banks of narrow lanes, their blue intensified in sunlight, while the froth of cow parsley is common along the verges throughout the area. The hedges that line the lanes include a wealth of species such as hazel, field maple, holly, ash, elm and blackthorn.

The lanes that run up and down the valley sides provide some of the most memorable framed views of the Vale. Views are glimpsed as one approaches the crest of the slope before descending into the valley, and from here long distant views open up across the Stour



Horse riders along a quiet lane.

Valley, and are reminiscent of those captured by John Constable so many years before.

These narrow and often tortuous routes restrict vehicular access and have thus limited large-scale development, but they can become congested when accommodating large numbers of car-borne visitors who flock to the area in summer and during holiday periods. There are, however, sufficient lanes which still remain infrequently travelled for the area to retain its unspoilt rural character.

Woodlands and trees

Woodland and trees are an essential part of the Vale's character, enclosing lanes, enhancing landform and framing views. There are no extensive areas of woodland however; small copses, farm woods and overlapping lines of hedgerow trees are more typical and together create the impression of a well-wooded landscape.



Argers Fen woods.

There is a tremendous variety of species and structure of woodland cover within the Vale which adds visual interest and gives rise to significant contrasts in local character. This variation often reflects the changes in soil type found on the valley sides, as at Arger Fen and Tiger Hill. Trees also indicate the presence of water, with the silvery leaves of poplar and the pale bat willow, which occur along the floodplain. One cannot help but notice the large and mature pollarded willows which line the Rivers Stour, Brett or Box and which form such a significant element of the riparian character. Similarly, the occasional Black Poplar stands out on the floodplain, while in contrast there are no longer signs of the large elms that were once a characteristic of the Vale. The overlapping lines of trees on the valley floor make a distinctive pattern. In other places in the Vale land ownership and parkland play a role in influencing tree species; holly being typically associated with Giffords Hall.

Only a few of the Vale's woodlands are ancient, some of which have been replanted as mixed woodland. Limes occur in some hedgerows as relics of more extensive woods. More recent plantations of mixed coniferous trees, orchards or poplar have regular patterns and structure, while elsewhere random woods of small farm copses tucked into the land form, or naturally regenerating woodland, are more common.

Woodland management over the centuries has also played a very influential role on the development of the character of some of the woods. Thus one can stumble across large stools of coppiced hazel, or along the lanes identify coppiced woodland edges and woodbanks. More recent trends of game shooting have continued and have increased the maintenance of many of the woods in the area.

The variety of woodland contributes enormously to the character of the Dedham Vale. The seasonal variation in colour can be spectacular, not only from the trees but from the changing hues of a bracken understorey and carpets of woodland wild flowers.



Willow on the banks of the Stour near Flatford.

6. FORCES FOR CHANGE

Much of the natural beauty of Dedham Vale can be attributed to the gentle topography of the valley landscape and the interlocking patterns of land use and settlement over the centuries, which have left their mark in the form of hedgerows, woods, copses, riverside pollards and vernacular buildings.

More recent forces for change in the landscape have not always had such harmonious consequences, with small and incremental developments over time having as much impact as dramatic changes. These raise planning and management issues that need to be addressed by intervention and encouragement, in order to ensure the future of the AONB as a nationally outstanding landscape.

When considering the complex of factors which generate change in the landscape, influences of cause and effect cannot be limited to finite boundaries. Although the AONB is protected with strict planning controls, the intervisibility of the AONB with areas outside its boundary means that factors causing change outside are still likely to extend their influence within the Vale. A particularly sensitive relationship therefore exists between the AONB and its surrounding countryside.

Some of the key pressures acting on Dedham Vale, which are critical to manage in order to retain the beauty of the landscape, are discussed below.

Development

The buildings and settlements that accommodate the small population of Dedham Vale make a considerable contribution to the aesthetic qualities of the AONB, and have remained remarkably intact in face of modern development pressures. It is important, therefore, to maintain the character and quality of existing buildings and settlements.

In the 1960s the demand for development was increasingly driven by changes in the rural population,



New houses, East Bergholt.

and an influx of new people wishing to live in the Vale and commute to London, Ipswich and Colchester. This brought a need for commuter housing and resulted in modern housing occurring around some of the existing old villages. The designation of the AONB in 1970, however, has largely controlled these pressures, protecting the landscape through planning policies in relevant local and structure plans. Nevertheless, examples of inappropriate development prior to 1970 act as a reminder of the need for continued care in the exercise of development control powers. Nowadays, development outside the AONB and unsympathetic alterations to existing properties cause the largest threat to the quality of the AONB.

The pressures of a changing population and the trends to convert farm buildings into residential use, the break-up of farm units and often the small-scale incremental improvements to buildings continue to place considerable pressures in the Vale. Inappropriate alterations to the facade of buildings and their settings can still occur, although many conversions and rebuilding works have been sensitive and successful. Similarly, there has been a gradual increase in 'suburbanisation' and 'gentrification' of rural properties, with the introduction of fencing and pony paddocks. Also the introduction of night lighting in some village streets, and concrete curbing to rural lanes, undermines rural character.

Success in the future is dependent on finding the right balance between controlling inappropriate development and the maintenance of the rural economy. This landscape assessment has identified some of the key attributes and characteristics of Dedham Vale that give it special qualities, and which should be used to guide future change. As regards future developments, these should continue to be carefully scrutinised to assess their likely impact, as should any development which falls in close proximity to the AONB boundary and is visible from within it.

Farming policy and agricultural change

The farmed landscape provides the substance and fabric of Dedham Vale, and like most areas in Britain, has been significantly influenced and altered by changes in agricultural policy. In recent years the most important influences have included Common Agricultural Policy reform and EEC quotas, which have dictated types and quantities of rural produce. In some cases, this has resulted in the closing of markets and the decline of particular crops characteristic of an area. Thus the loss of a market for apples led to the



Plastic creates a micro-climate for crops such as potatoes.

subsequent decline in the number of orchards in Dedham Vale. Similarly, the increased cultivation of rapeseed and the use of plastic in fields to bring on vegetable crops, has expanded considerably as a result of changing EEC quotas and agricultural markets. Each of these changes have had a dramatic impact on colour and texture we see in the landscape.

These changes have also led to increased demands on water and this in conjunction with increased demands from public supplies has affected the water levels of the Stour. Water is brought in from the Ely Ouse transfer system, but when this supply is not adequate or is needed elsewhere, water is taken from the chalk aquifers in the Sudbury area. The

Environment Agency carefully monitor water levels and control the issuing of abstraction licences. Water shortages for farmers are, however, forcing them to look for opportunities to dig their own reservoirs. This does not require planning permission, and has significant implications for the landscape, and raises questions as to where the water for the reservoirs will come from, if surplus winter supplies are not sufficient.

Generally, Dedham Vale has always supported a mix of arable and pastoral land use, but there have been fluctuations over the last century, altering the feel and character of the landscape as a result. During the post war boom in agriculture much of the floodplain meadows were cultivated and drainage ditches piped. In the 1970s Anglian Water proposed trapezoidal channels to drain agricultural land further, a scheme supported by many farmers. Strong local protests ensued over a number of years and the local authorities made an Article 4 order in 1975, for the stretch of river between Stratford St Mary and Cattawade, to prevent the canalisation scheme taking place. The cultivation of meadows aided by improved drainage was halted and reversed, with the introduction of the Environmentally Sensitive Area designation in 1988. The result has been a dramatic return to record levels of grassland in areas on the valley floor. Now, pressures from horse grazing, the lack of stock for appropriate grazing regimes and the development of associated buildings threatens the quality of these pastures — a new challenge.



Modern harvest at Dedham.

The Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) designation by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, has also heightened awareness of conservation issues and initiatives in the area, with grants available to retain, and traditionally manage, important rural landscape features. Similarly, the ESA has helped to halt the loss of hedgerow boundaries and field amalgamation which was commonplace during the agricultural prosperity of the 1950s. The creation of the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Countryside Project pre-dated the ESA, and was set up to do something positive in the light of increasing arable and loss of elm. This initiative along with the increasing amounts of land either covenanted or purchased by the National Trust, has encouraged the planting of many more hedges and trees throughout the area.

With many of the existing hedges comprising elm, which has been severely effected by Dutch elm disease, management of these hedges becomes of paramount importance.

Trees and woodland management

Trees are a key aspect of landscape character, and Dedham Vale contains a significant variety of tree species. Many of the woodlands are small copses and form a dispersed pattern that gives rise to a green and lush landscape. Thus, the management of existing small woodlands and the careful consideration of future planting are important factors in retaining the character of the Vale.



Tree planting at Bosted.

Over the last century there has been no overall loss of semi-natural woodland found in the Vale, and overall there has, in fact, been a steady increase in woodland cover since the Second World War. This is due to the desire of land owners to plant small copses for game cover, and an increase in awareness in the value of trees for nature conservation.

The most dramatic change in tree cover within the Vale has taken place in the last 50 years due to the propagation of Cricket-bat Willows and hybrid Black Poplars on the floodplain. Cricket-bat Willows were introduced in the early part of this century, and occur as blocks and linear strips along numerous ditches close to the Stour. The introduction of the hybrid varieties of poplar is more recent and occurred in the 1950s when Bryant and May, the match manufacturer, encouraged landowners to plant large clumps at close spacings on the valley floor. Unfortunately, there is currently no regular market for poplar, and many trees have now been felled or were lost in the gale of 1987, along with other areas of woodland. Some of the plantations have since been replaced by Cricket-bat Willow, also in response to market demand.

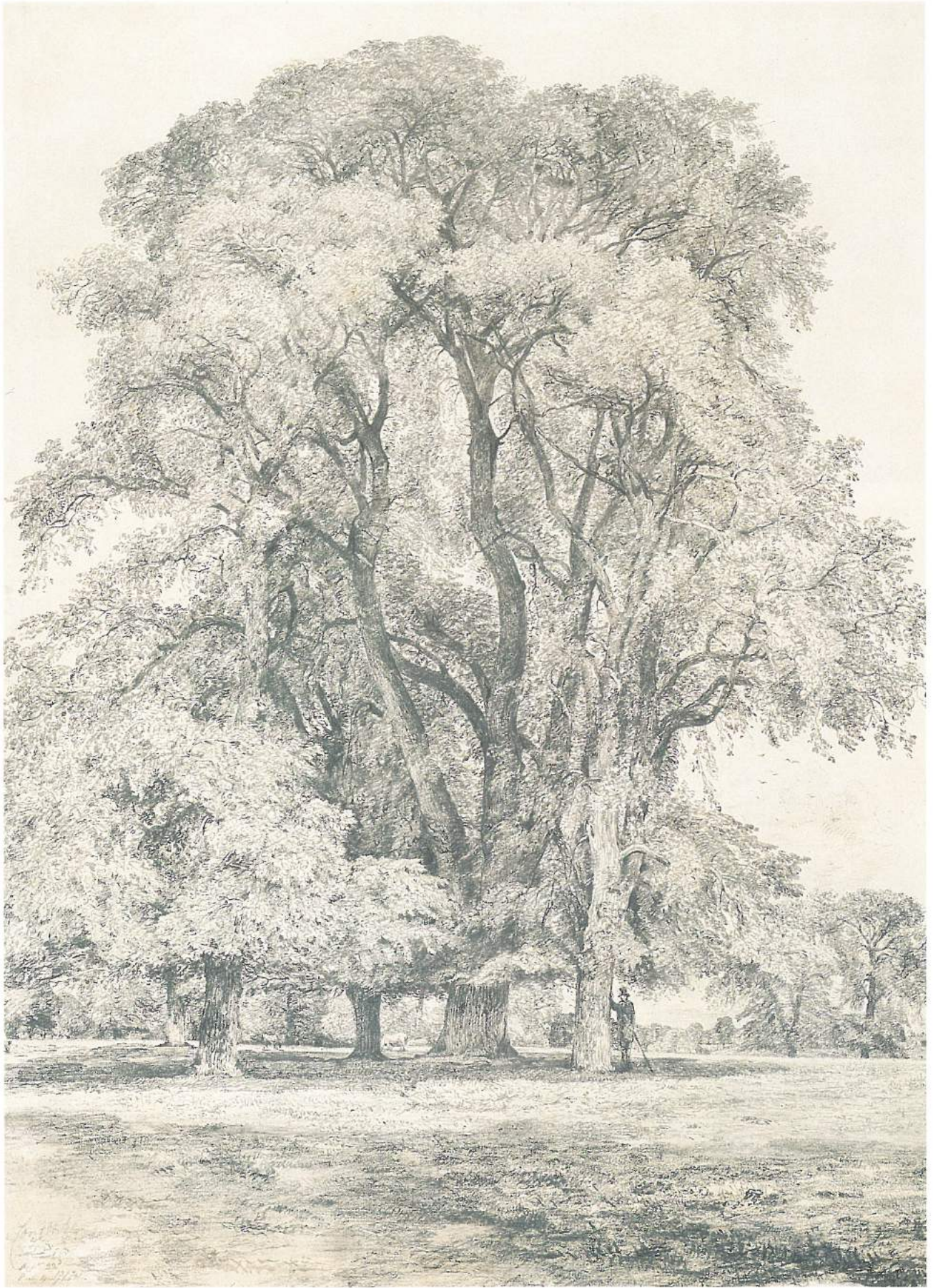
The onslaught of Dutch elm disease in the 1930s and 1970s has affected the tree and hedge cover. Many of the large elms, which so typified the Vale and which were sketched by Constable, occurred in parkland on the valley sides. Their loss from the Vale has been a serious detriment to the character and quality of the landscape, but they are now being replaced by an increasing number of different tree species.

Other changes in tree distribution and character have come about due to the development of golf courses in and around the AONB. Located at Stoke-by-Nayland and near Raydon, these recreation areas have contributed an alien pattern of non-native conifers in hedges, tree clumps and as individual specimens. The use of these inappropriate trees has had a serious visual impact on the distinctive rural character of the landscape, and poses one of the most significant threats to the character of the Vale.

Of equal significance for the landscape will be the management of existing woodland. Lack of appropriate management and the lapse of traditional practices such as coppicing, will have long-term impacts on the character of small woodlands. On a shorter timescale the felling of existing woodland, particularly of plantations with mixed conifer planting, will need careful consideration to keep the visual impact of this necessary management to a minimum.

Recreation and tourism

Dedham Vale as a whole has so far remained relatively undeveloped for recreation and tourism. The major centres of attraction, provision of facilities, and thus visitors have tended to concentrate on the popular locations of Dedham Village and Flatford Mill, mainly in relation to 'Constable Country'. During public holidays and at weekends, especially in the summer, this area is visited by large numbers of people. The pressures on the landscape in this area have been recognised in the Dedham Recreation Capacity Study of 1994, which centred on the village of Dedham and considered issues



Elm trees in Old Hall Park, East Bergholt, by John Constable. (By courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria & Albert Museum.)



Winter visitors at Flatford.

of over-crowding, traffic congestion, wear and tear on the physical fabric and the location of inappropriate development. The study highlighted the need for careful visitor management at centres such as Dedham, and acknowledged that current provision of facilities were adequate. However, as the popularity of countryside holidays and recreational pursuits, such as cycling, continues to grow, and as the special qualities of Dedham Vale become known, it is likely that the demand for wider use of the area for recreation will also increase.



Cars and cyclists at Arger Fen.

Recent policy guidance on tourism signs now makes it easier to place signs and advertising in the countryside and this could also contribute to the growth of man-made features in response to tourism.

The development of a new Rare Breeds Centre at Dedham, Stoke-by-Nayland golf course, (and Raydon

golf course, which while outside the AONB has a visual impact upon it), are typical examples of increasing recreation and tourism pressures. Such pressures form the largest potential for future change to the landscape. Given the importance of woodland and land use patterns in influencing landscape character and quality, new golf course developments and other recreational land uses, which disrupt the pattern of the landscape and rural tranquillity, should be resisted.

People's increased mobility due to car ownership will no doubt place increased pressure on the lanes that traverse this landscape. There must be an over-riding priority to protect the intrinsic character of these narrow routes even though they provide the only access to much of the area. Newly developing ideas for area-wide rural traffic management could be pursued, with the objectives of decreasing the impact of the car on this tranquil landscape. Landscape designers and traffic engineers need to work together to ensure any traffic calming measures are sensitively designed and integrate well with character and identity of local areas.

Infrastructure

Within this century, land has been lost to the new A12, which although having sound impact on the villages of Dedham and Stratford St Mary is nevertheless skilfully routed through the valley. However, possibilities of future widening to this road continue to threaten this landscape.

The building of sewage treatment works, a flood defence structure downstream of Flatford, various lines of electricity pylons and the installation of pipes, wires and cables across the Vale and through villages have

impacted on the landscape. More recently, the upland plateau areas that surround the AONB, and thus potentially the AONB itself, is under increasing pressure from the development of tall masts and communication towers. Controls are needed on the location, height and appearance of masts, given the potential of such structures to compete visually with characteristic vertical features of the Vale such as church towers. Masts would adversely affect the human scale of the landscape and are likely to spoil the AONB's prime and most precious characteristic — its unspoilt, undeveloped and idyllic appearance.

Within the villages themselves there are current threats to traditional character from insensitively designed traffic calming schemes and street lighting, which are likely to have a significant effect on the rural character of these settlements. Similarly, increased reliance on trade from tourism places pressures to advertise facilities both outside and within the villages, creating visual clutter. Strict planning controls and



The A12.

good design briefs should be able to control such development, so that the benefits of traffic calming, improved lighting and advertising can be achieved in ways which conserve the character of the villages.



Towards Manningtree from the marshes.

7. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE AONB LANDSCAPE

Dedham Vale sits alongside 40 other AONBs in England and Wales, and embraces some of the finest unspoilt lowland countryside. Of all the AONBs it is a lowland landscape most held in the nation's mind's eye as the English rural idyll. The widespread recognition of both its landscape quality and association with the painter John Constable afforded it AONB designation in 1970.

Today, the AONB designation, the primary purpose of which is to conserve and enhance natural beauty, provides a degree of protection for the benefit of this and future generations. However, the long-term prospects for this important area depend upon the care and management it receives from those who live and work within it, and the willingness of everyone to respect and conserve the area's pastoral character and idyllic qualities.

The need for sensitive planning and management is particularly evident around Dedham Village and Flatford, Constable's home landscape and the setting for some of his most famous paintings. Here, pressures

from the competing demands of tourism, conservation, development and farming are concentrated. Despite this, the landscape retains the essence of what Constable painted nearly two centuries ago, although of course there have been many changes.

Elsewhere, agricultural change has placed extensive pressure on the landscape, recently leading to the designation of nearly the entire AONB as an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA). The ESA aims to protect the nationally important scientific, historic and landscape value of Dedham Vale AONB, which is greatly dependant on specific farming practices being adopted. To date the scheme has been very successful in this and there is every prospect of this success continuing.

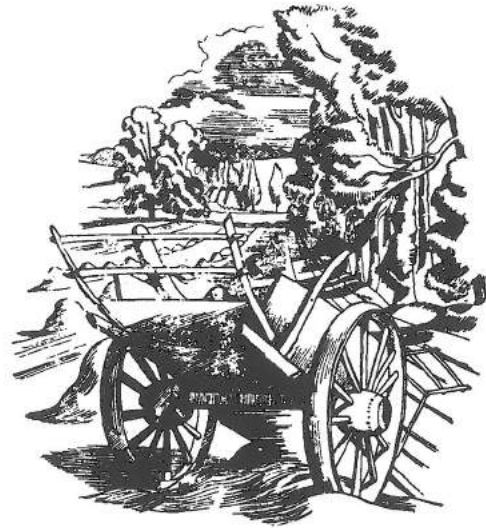
Outstanding qualities

AONBs are designated for the fine quality of their landscape, in other words, their 'outstanding natural



Autumn colours; Stratford St Mary from Dedham.

beauty'. There are often a combination of factors that give an area its distinctive character and beauty, and thus make it outstanding. Section 52(3) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 states that: "the natural beauty of any land shall be construed as including references to the conservation of its flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features". The Countryside Commission acknowledges that natural beauty cannot simply be defined as the visual appearance of the countryside alone, but needs to include factors such as landform, vegetation, man-made features, aesthetics and historic and cultural associations. The rarity and representativeness of a landscape relative to those in other areas of the country is also of importance, as is its unique 'sense of place', its accessibility and the public perception of it.



Farm cart, sketch by John Nash.

An unspoilt English lowland landscape

The AONB is important because of its unspoilt rural character. It has remained remarkably free from the intrusion of modern development and, to date, from the pressures of tourist activity away from the honeypot sites. Rich agricultural landscapes and woods are complemented by the consistent use of local building materials and colours in the villages and isolated cottages.

This visual harmony gives the AONB its strong sense of unity, which is vital to its aesthetic appeal and sense of place. Within this overall character, the landscape is greatly enhanced by rich contrasts in scenery and characteristic details.

Although the Dedham and Flatford Mill area is most popular with visitors, other parts of the AONB are of equally good landscape quality, their apparent lack of popularity owing more to low public awareness than to any inherent shortcomings. Ironically, it is the absence of public awareness and pressure that has preserved much of the charm of the Vale, contributing to its timeless, quiet and undiscovered character.

Historic connection and public consensus

There is a strong consensus that traditional landscapes tend to retain their appeal with the public — as well as nature conservationists — in preference to modern, intensively farmed agricultural landscapes. Lush hedgerows, small fields, flower-rich meadows, pollarded willows, tangles of riverside vegetation, water-filled ditches, reed beds and similar features are preferred to vast sweeps of featureless arable fields. The existence of many such traditional landscape features within the

AONB, and the designation of the ESA, ensures a strong connection remains with history and traditional land management.

Old, and largely unspoilt villages, ancient lanes, mills, colourful isolated cottages and the relative absence of intrusive modern development reinforces the character and quality of Dedham Vale. In the landscape can be discovered many layers of history, from the medieval to the present, each adding visual richness and a link with the past.

It seems likely that people will continue to visit Dedham Vale in increasing numbers. Improved communications and the public's concern for, and interest in, the natural environment and heritage will draw people in search of Constable's landscape and surrounding areas of peaceful, pastoral countryside. Their interest is further confirmed by the number of Constable's tranquil scenes which outnumber all other popular reproductions from paintings to chocolate boxes, trays and puzzles.

A vision for the future

In a world where natural and cultural landscapes are being lost at an unprecedented rate, remaining areas where the rural idyll and people's pastoral roots can still be discovered are profoundly important. The connection of one of Britain's best loved painters with Dedham Vale serves to focus attention on such a vision for the future, and gives the area added interest and value.

The human race is characterised by its unquenching thirst for new ideas, change and development, but people equally value, to an increasing extent, the continuity and integrity to be found in their landscape heritage, which connects them to nature and their

pastoral roots. In unspoilt and beautiful landscapes, people find relaxation, inspiration and an uplift for the spirit. The job of conserving such landscapes is continuous and often unspectacular. It can be achieved as part of people's day-to-day work, supplemented by additional financial resources, specialist professional advice and voluntary work amongst the community.

Conserving the special landscape of Dedham Vale in the future will involve many people and organisations — ideally working to a common goal through an agreed management plan.

It will necessitate the continued help and cooperation of farmers in the way they manage their land, the willingness of engineers to take advice of designers to ensure that features such as traffic calming

measures are sensitively integrated, the effectiveness of planning authorities in controlling unsuitable development and, no doubt, the outspokenness of local communities and others who care about Dedham Vale to resist harmful change, just as they did three decades ago when the prospect of major housing developments loomed. It will also involve raising awareness of the area's inherent qualities, and innovative solutions to integrate the pressures of tourism, and thus accommodate the many people who visit and enjoy the Vale.

The essence of the Dedham Vale AONB landscape lies in its unspoilt, traditional character. This will remain so provided it is continually managed with vigilance, sensitivity and care.



Riverside picnic by the Stour.

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APPENDIX—LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

“This is not a landscape set in oils. The vast and draughty fields, mostly ploughed out of sheep walks and commons during the enclosures of Constable’s own lifetime, are acquiring new hedges and woodlets, and a welcome new sense of intimacy.”

Richard Mabey, *A Country Diary*, (1995).

Every landscape evolves through time and it is therefore important to guide that change positively. This section provides management and design guidance and practical advice for enriching the distinctive characteristics of each landscape type identified in Dedham Vale. The guidelines give special consideration to conserving or, where necessary, reinforcing the sense of local identity which gives the area its strength of character.

What can you do to care for the landscape?

These guidelines present ideas for the future of the landscape, and are relevant to local landowners, residents, visitors and tourists and all those involved in the care of the landscape.

The guidelines are divided into two, those which are Vale-wide in their application, and those which are specific to the seven identified landscape character types. This section is followed by a list of organisations who can provide more detailed information and advice.

Vale-wide guidelines

- Care should be taken when designing, building and restoring features in the landscape, such as boundary walls, gates and building extensions, to ensure their scale, design and materials are in keeping with the character of the local vernacular.
- The colour of the local vernacular housing within the Vale is a striking feature worthy of protection. Care and advice should be taken to ensure the appropriate shade of colour is selected and used.
- The AONB landscape is noted for its subtle landform and pattern of land use. Maintaining traditional pastoral and mixed farming, and the restoration of semi-natural habitats, such as wet pasture and heathland, are therefore important. Such initiatives can be supported by grants.
- Consideration should be given to the reintroduction of elm into the landscape where it was traditionally a significant element, using locally selected strains resistant to disease. Existing elm should be maintained in hedgerows through regular cutting, flailing or coppicing.

- The majority of trees in Dedham Vale are in hedgerows and small copses. New planting of significant blocks of deciduous or coniferous woodland should be avoided, particularly on the valley floor, as here it could close up characteristic views along and across the valley.
- Traditional woodland management, such as coppicing, select felling and restocking should be encouraged.
- The existing pattern of winding roads and lanes have great character and should be protected from lane widening and/or hedge removal.
- Horse paddocks and related buildings need careful siting and consideration to avoid cluttering the landscape and visually detracting from the edges of villages.
- Tourism pressure is a potential threat to this landscape, causing traffic congestion in the villages and noise pollution in rural landscape. Opportunities should be sought to provide a choice for visitors to explore Dedham Vale by foot and bicycle where possible.
- Advice should be sought when locating new footpaths and cycle routes.
- The location and design of signage should be appropriate to Dedham Vale’s rural character and should be unobtrusive.

Landscape character area guidelines

Estuarine valley floor

Retain the open and uncluttered character of the marshes, and protect their sense of quiet and remoteness.

Seek advice on:

- traditional grazing regimes, through the support of the ESA scheme;
- the creation of wet ditches to act as field boundaries;
- tree planting, ensuring it is appropriate in terms of its scale, shape, location and species.

Avoid:

- extensive tree planting;
- the siting of tourist facilities which may undermine the remote qualities and nature conservation importance of this landscape.

Enclosed valley floor

Retain and protect the characteristics of this lowland river floodplain, its overlapping vegetation and valley setting.

Seek advice on:

- maintaining traditional pollarded willows along the water channels;
- increasing and restoring wet pastures in fields adjacent to the river through water level management;
- new tree planting ensuring it is of the appropriate species, scale and location. Seek opportunities to plant in places that help to emphasise characteristic views to churches and other landmarks;
- new development and extensions to existing buildings, so they are in keeping with local character.

Avoid:

- damage to the river banks from recreation, boating and extensive cattle poaching;
- extensive plantations of poplar and cricket bat willow;
- ploughing up pasture adjacent to river courses.

Open valley floor

Retain the distinctive open character of this landscape but reinforce its valley floor characteristics and visually define the line of the river more clearly.

Seek advice on:

- the development of a 3–4 m wide river margin composed of trees, water-margin plants, and meadow to enhance riverside habitats, and the visual prominence of the river. Advice and permission should be sought from the Environment Agency when planting trees along the riverbank.
- planting new hedges along the line of existing fencing, to create a softer boundary to fields, or alternatively creation of ditches on the floodplain to act as field boundaries;
- water management plans, to revert arable land adjacent to the river to wet pastures;
- appropriate planting around buildings on the valley floor.

Avoid:

- planting at the base of the valley sides and on the valley floor, thereby retaining views and visual links from the valley floor to the valley sides, and the open character of this landscape.

Undulating matrix

Retain the mosaic of land uses and habitats. Enhance the characteristic variety of landscape scales and features, such as field boundaries and small woodland copses.

Seek advice on:

- planting deciduous edges to coniferous plantations and the creation of a more diverse mix of species through selective felling, natural regeneration and restocking. Use seeds from local sources using broadleaves rather than species as a nurse crop to deciduous woodland;
- the most appropriate location for farm storage areas, on the valley slopes, which are highly visible from other areas in the Vale;
- re-establishing coppice regimes for old woodlands and hedges in order to retain their character, particularly along old lanes and woodbanks. Continue the pollarding of willows along rivers;
- the accommodation of horses and related recreation in the landscape, suitable grazing regimes and ways of reducing the pressure of horse riding and overuse of existing bridleways and roads;
- locating new woodland and hedgerow lines and ways to vary the pattern of woodland so that it responds to its location within the landscape;
- increasing the numbers of orchard cherry trees in the area surrounding Polstead reinforcing the village's sense of place and local identity.

Avoid:

- planting of coniferous trees and hedges, particularly on golf courses, around farm buildings and around individual properties. These plants are not in keeping with the landscape character of the area and create a visually fragmented landscape;
- the development of tall features/buildings that would visually compete with the characteristic church landmarks.

Stour valley sides

Retain and enhance the rural character and variety of scales found in the pattern of small fields, isolated farm buildings, larger arable fields, blocks of woodland and small-scale tributary valleys.

Seek advice on:

- opportunities to restore and expand areas of dry and wet grassland and wet woodland;
- replanting hedgerows in areas where arable land use has previously removed the pattern of enclosure, or where it can create a softer boundary alongside existing post and wire fencing. Ensure hedgerow species are appropriate for the area;

- the enhancement and restoration of parkland on the valley sides;
- the most appropriate location for farm storage areas, on the valley slopes, which are highly visible from other areas in the Vale;
- the management and protection of habitats found within the small tributary valleys and the protection of each valley's intimate and secluded character;
- replanting characteristic small groups of pine on the upper valley slopes, at focal points such as road junctions. Such clumps planted for landscape reasons should not be confused with coniferous plantations or coniferous trees and hedges associated with golf courses and individual properties, which would not be appropriate in this AONB landscape.

Avoid:

- development that will undermine the rural character of the valley sides and place vehicular pressures on the small lanes.

Upland fringe

Enhance the ordered nature of this landscape and retain the visual variation between the enclosed wooded character of the valley sides and this more open, exposed landscape.

Seek advice on:

- the recreation of small patches of heathland and opportunities to link fragments of acidic grassland and/or heath habitat;
- the enhancement of species diversity of the road verges and field margins. Broaden field margins and corners where possible;
- managing existing woodlands and hedges;
- planting new woodland blocks, which should follow the lines of existing field patterns, and reflect the current distribution of woodland in depressions of land form and around buildings. Use new planting to link existing woodland habitats.

Avoid:

- small, isolated tree groups and woodland that may visually clutter and fragment this landscape.

Contacts for technical advice

Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Project

Telephone: 01473 583176

Environment Agency

Telephone: 01733 371811

National Trust

Telephone: 01263 734077

English Nature (SSSIs)

Telephone: 01284 762218

Anglian Woodland Project

Telephone: 01473 265195

Contacts for grant aid and advice

Environmentally Sensitive Area:

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food (MAFF)

Telephone: 01223 462727

Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA)

Telephone: 01223 462762

Forest Authority

Telephone: 01394 450214

Local organisations

River Stour Trust

Chairman
55 Harwick Road
Colchester
Essex, CO4 3BU

Dedham Vale Society

Wissington Mill
Nayland
Colchester
Essex, CO6 4LX

Local authorities

Suffolk County Council

Telephone: 01473 583000

Essex County Council

Telephone: 01245 492211

Babergh District Council

Telephone: 01473 822801

Tendring District Council

Telephone: 01255 425501

Colchester Borough Council

Telephone: 01206 282222

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