



Dedham Vale AONB *Natural Beauty and Special Qualities and Perceived and Anticipated Risks*

Final Report



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Contents

1: Introduction	4
1.1 Appointment and Aim of the Study	4
1.2 Background	4
1.3 Methodology and Approach	5
1.4 Format of Report	6
2: Designation and Assessment History	7
2.1 Factors Which Led to AONB Designation	7
2.2 Landscape Character Assessment	7
2.3 Management Plan	8
3: Evidence Table	9
3.1 Introduction	9
3.2 Natural Beauty Factors and Special Qualities Evidence Table	10
4: Conclusions	24
4.1 Why Dedham Vale is Unique within the Family of AONBs	24
4.2 Protecting Qualities Going Forward	24
 Appendix 1: Extract from Guidance on Assessing Landscapes for National Park and AONB Designation, Natural England (2011)	
 Appendix 2: Extracts from Guidance on Landscape Character Assessment, Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2002) and Landscape Assessment, Countryside Commission (1993), CCP423.	

1: Introduction

1.1 Appointment and Aim of the Study

- 1.1.1 This report has been prepared by Alison Farmer Associates on behalf of The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Partnership. The aim of the study has been to review, gather and present evidence on the natural beauty and special qualities of the existing AONB in order to clearly articulate why it is one of England's nationally valued landscapes.
- 1.1.2 This study also considers the vulnerability of these factors and qualities in terms of current and perceived risks, with the aim of assisting AONB officers to better understand the potential effect changes are likely to have on the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB, when advising on land management and commenting on development proposals.
- 1.2.2 This study considers all the land within the existing AONB designation, but not the Project Area¹.
- 1.2.3 A parallel study has looked at the land to the west and north of the existing AONB. This area currently lies outside of the existing AONB but has been evaluated against the natural beauty criterion to establish if all or some of the land is eligible for national designation. The results of this study are set out in a separate report titled 'Evaluation of Area Between Bures and Sudbury'.

1.2 Background

- 1.2.1 There are many ways of expressing the value we place on a landscape. For a landscape to be designated as an AONB it needs to express 'natural beauty'² and whilst there is no statutory definition of this term, Natural England has published guidance³ on designating landscapes which defines the factors regarded as contributing to natural beauty (refer to appendix 1 for extract). Prior to the publication of this guidance the criteria which were used in determining valued landscape were set out in landscape assessment guidance (see appendix 2 for extracts):

- Landscape Character Assessment, Guidance for England and Scotland (2002) Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage;
- Landscape, and Assessment Guidance (1993) Countryside Commission publication (CCP423).

Prior to this the approach established by Hobhouse and the National Parks Commission to identify our first National Parks and AONBs was used and was relevant to the designation of the Dedham Vale AONB in 1970.

- 1.2.2 In addition to understanding natural beauty and the factors which contribute to it, the term 'special qualities' is also frequently used in management plans for designated landscape, landscape character assessments and in planning policy.

¹ The Dedham Vale Project Area extends from the western edge of the existing AONB along the Stour Valley as far as Haverhill.

² Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

³ Guidance for Assessing Landscapes for National Park and AONB Designation, Natural England, 2011.

An understanding of special qualities can enable what is particularly valued about a specific landscape to be encapsulated. Inevitably, however, there can be significant overlap between a description of a landscape's natural beauty and its special qualities and the terms are frequently used interchangeably.

- 1.2.3 It can often be difficult to articulate the natural beauty and special qualities of a landscape and furthermore to understand how change in the landscape, be it land use/management change or development, can affect these valued attributes.

1.3 Methodology and Approach

- 1.3.1 This assessment has included a review of existing documentation in order to better understand the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB. There is no shortage of documents which describe the Dedham Vale landscape and provide insight into the area's natural beauty and special qualities. These documents include the following:

Landscape Character Assessment

- *Dedham Vale Landscape Assessment: Technical Report* to the Countryside Commission and others, Landscape Design Associates, 1996.
- *The Dedham Vale Landscape, An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*, Countryside Commission, 1997.
- *East of England Landscape Character Assessment (2009)*.
- *Suffolk County Landscape Character Assessment 2009* and updated 2011.
- *Essex Landscape Character Assessment*, Chris Blandford Associates, 2003.
- *Colchester Borough Landscape Character Assessment, Chris Blandford Associates, November 2005*.
- *Historic Landscape Characterisation, Suffolk (2008)*.
- *Managing a Masterpiece Landscape Partnership, Historic Landscape Study, 2013*.
- *The Stour Valley Heritage Compendia, The Historic Landscape Compendium, Howard Brooks, 2013*.

Natural Beauty Evaluation

- *Designation History Series: Dedham Vale AONB*, Ray Woolmore, 2010.

Land Management

- *Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project Area, Management Plan 2016-2021 (Approved by Partnership)*.
- *Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Management Plan 2010-2015, Strategy*.

- 1.3.2 Following review of existing documentation, consideration was given to the relationship between the natural beauty factors defined by Natural England and the special qualities listed in the 2016-2021 Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project Management Plan. Information was then collated in support of these factors and qualities from existing documents and evidence. This was followed by consideration of the perceived and existing threats to each of the natural beauty factors and special qualities in order to explore their vulnerability to change.

1.4 Format of Report

1.4.1 The remainder of this report covers the following:

- **Section 2** sets out the designation and assessment history, and why Dedham Vale was designated an AONB in order to understand qualities previously identified with the area.
- **Section 3** includes a detailed table setting out the evidence in relation to the factors which contribute to natural beauty and special qualities and the relationship between them. It then highlights potential threats to these qualities.
- **Section 4** sets out the conclusions of the assessment and how this study can be used in future.

2: Designation and Assessment History

2.1 Factors Which Led to AONB Designation

- 2.1.1 Dedham Vale was not identified for designation by Dower or Hobhouse but was put forward by the relevant Local Authorities in light of the increasing threat of development in 1966. L. J Watson (landscape advisor to the National Parks Commission) undertook field inspection of the proposed area in 1966. He concluded that the area justified designation as an AONB on account of the exceptional beauty of some of the villages and their settings, notably Dedham, East Bergholt (parts of), and Nayland and Stoke-By-Nayland. He added that this was good landscape by any standards, and whereas it was not necessary to have heard of Constable to enjoy it, the associations which Dedham Vale had with him and with other 18th and 19th century English landscape painters, added very much to the appreciation of its beauty and interest⁴. The Dedham Vale AONB was subsequently designated in 1970.
- 2.1.2 The relevant Local Authorities to Dedham Vale, prepared a study of the area titled 'Dedham Vale Proposals' dated 1968 which sought to provide proposals for the ongoing conservation and enhancement of the landscape. The report highlighted the following qualities of the area:
- The character of the vale is essentially determined by the River Stour (para 60);
 - The red brick-tile and timber-thatch of many existing farm buildings contribute to the traditional character of the Vale (para 94);
 - It is the mixture of [building] styles, spaces and siting which gives villages their charm and interest (para 123).
- 2.1.3 Following designation two further extensions of the AONB were put forward and approved in 1978 and 1991 respectively. The landscape assessment undertaken as part of the second AONB boundary review (Commission Paper 90/31) noted that east of Wormingford it was a high quality landscape, having a sense of harmony and tranquillity, and being special, and evocative of Constable's time and thus of historic rural England⁵. Similar commentary was provided in the public consultation leaflet on the extension stating that the landscape comprised a broad tranquil valley, containing a delicate patchwork of trees and hedges, with the River Stour meandering through it. It also mentioned that the area, like the existing AONB, conveyed a sense of being a "special" landscape, comfortable and familiar, and evocative of historic and rural England in John Constable's time⁶.

2.2 Landscape Character Assessment

- 2.2.1 In 1997 a detailed landscape character assessment of Dedham Vale was undertaken and provides a comprehensive account of the valued characteristics and special qualities highlighting the extraordinary range of different scales and features including "rolling fields on the valleys slopes, lush and sheltered valley-floor meadows and

⁴ Designation History Series, Dedham Vale, 2010, para 7.

⁵ Designation History Series, Dedham Vale, 2010, para 61.

⁶ Designation History Series, Dedham Vale, 2010, para 67.

open marshes, intimate tributary valleys and nucleated villages of great charm and vibrant colour"⁷.

- 2.2.2 In 2013 a further study of the landscape was undertaken as part of the Managing a Masterpiece Landscape Partnership, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). This provided greater detail on the historic aspects of the landscape and provided explanations for the attractive landscape patterns seen today.

2.3 Management Plan

- 2.3.1 A statement of the significance of the Dedham Vale AONB is set out in the 2016-2021 Management Plan (approved by the AONB & Stour Valley Partnership) as follows:

'The Dedham Vale AONB is a subtle lowland river valley with an assemblage of features associated with this landscape still in place and intact. These features include a gently winding river and tributaries; gentle valley sides with scattered woodlands; sunken rural lanes; picturesque villages with imposing churches and historic timber framed buildings; scattered farmsteads and agricultural buildings; small fields enclosed by ancient hedgerows; riverside grazing meadows with associated drainage ditches and visible and hidden archaeology providing evidence of human habitation over previous millennia.'

The area remains an overwhelmingly agricultural landscape, free of incongruous development and large scale industrial developments. Despite some intrusions of human activity in the twentieth and twenty first centuries, the area retains a rural charm and tranquillity and is largely free of infrastructure associated with modern life.

The essential character of the Dedham Vale AONB was established in the middle of the previous millennium and has remained intact despite social, technological events. The fundamental beauty of the area and the scenes of a working landscape were captured by England's finest landscape artist, John Constable RA. The sites of those outdoor paintings are still recognisable in the heart of what is now the AONB.'

- 2.3.2 It also sets out the special qualities of the existing AONB as:

- Iconic lowland river valley associated with the artist John Constable RA, the views he painted are still recognisable today;
- Historic villages with timber framed housing and prominent churches;
- Valley bottom grazing marshes with associated drainage ditches and wildlife;
- Naturally functioning River Stour with associated tributaries, meres and historic river management features;
- Semi natural ancient woodlands on valley sides and associated wildlife;
- Traditional field boundaries intact and well managed;
- Apparent and buried archaeology indicating millennia of human occupation;
- A sense of relative tranquillity;
- Surprisingly long distance views from higher ground along the valley in an area associated with large skies.

⁷ The Dedham Vale Landscape, An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Countryside Commission, 1997.

3: Evidence Table

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 Since Dedham Vale was designated an AONB there has been significant assessment of the landscape to inform variations in character and special qualities. These landscape character assessments provide useful and relevant information to assist in collating information on and articulating the natural beauty and special qualities of the Dedham Vale landscape. This has been supplemented with field evaluation.
- 3.1.2 The table below sets out the factors which contribute to natural beauty and then the associated special qualities so that the relationship between the two can be better understood. This is followed by evidence to support these factors and qualities and finally information on the perceived and anticipated risks to these qualities. The information collated should not be taken to be exhaustive but should be used as a general guide only.
- 3.1.2 The table below clearly demonstrates that the existing AONB expresses a range of special qualities which sets it above 'normal countryside' and which deservedly places it within the family of nationally valued landscapes.
- 3.1.3 The analysis also demonstrates that, of the six factors which contribute to natural beauty, Dedham Vale is particularly valued for its landscape quality, scenic qualities and cultural and artistic associations. These factors are especially strongly expressed and give rise to the area's unique character.

3.2 Natural Beauty Factors and Special Qualities Evidence Table

Natural Beauty Factors/ Considerations	Special Qualities noted in Management Plan	Supporting Evidence	Current, Perceived and Anticipated Risks to These Qualities
<p>Landscape quality</p> <p><i>Intactness of the landscape in visual, functional and ecological perspectives</i></p>	<p>Lowland river valley i.e. intact valley unit</p>	<p>Valley profile and form:</p> <p>Gentle valley slopes and steeper tributary valleys with woodland give rise to a subtle but legible landscape. Distinction of land uses associated with the valley side (arable, woodland and settlement) and valley floor (pastures and grazing marsh) reinforce the legibility of the valley form.</p> <p>Heath and acid grassland occur in places reflecting the underlying geology and soils.</p>	<p>Conversion of pasture on the valley floor to arable - this undermines the traditional land use patterns and visual definition of the vale comprising distinct valley sides and floor.</p> <p>Planting of poplar and willow plantations on the valley floor - these can mask the characteristic riparian trees and the course of the river and can alter the character and habitat value of traditional meadow areas.</p> <p>New woodland planting in significant blocks which screens valued views and does not emphasise subtle landform changes and traditional woodland patterns.</p> <p>Development on the valley sides which is visually conspicuous or which extends uncharacteristically onto the valley floor - this undermines the predominately rural character of the vale and historical positioning of settlement on the valley sides.</p> <p>Decline of heath and acid grassland in last 100 years and missed opportunities to re-create and connect heath/acid grassland in association with land management or new development.</p>
<p><i>The condition of the landscape's features and elements</i></p>	<p>Traditional land use patterns</p>	<p>Continuity and intactness:</p> <p>Sense of continuity in management over time giving rise to time depth and a visual unity.</p>	<p>Changes in land uses which may disrupt the pattern include plantations of cricket bat willow within the valley floor which creates enclosure and reduces legibility of drainage ditches.</p>

Natural Beauty Factors/ Considerations	Special Qualities noted in Management Plan	Supporting Evidence	Current, Perceived and Anticipated Risks to These Qualities
		<p>High degree of integrity - although there are a range of different spatial scales there are repeating elements within them.</p> <p>The presence of features including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church towers • Parkland trees and wood pasture/majestic oaks • Small woods on the steep slopes • Coppiced hazel • Hedgerows and hedgerow oaks • Rural barns nestled into folds in landform • Sunken lanes <p>The high concentration/frequency of these features and their distribution is grounded in the traditional management of the valley and is remarkably intact but highly vulnerable to loss.</p>	<p>Fragmentation of biodiversity habitats across the AONB due to hedgerow loss, lack of woodland management inc. coppiced hazel woods, loss of veteran trees, loss of elms.</p> <p>Development which disrupts the landscape patterns in terms of the loss of existing features or introduction of new features which can be unsympathetic.</p> <p>Extension of gardens into areas of former pasture can cause a domestication of otherwise rural character and the extension of urbanising influences.</p> <p>Development with inappropriate, non-native curtilage planting or boundary treatment and signage which domesticates rural lanes, verges/hedgerows and former pasture/arable fields.</p>
<p><i>The influence of incongruous features or elements (whether man-made or natural) on the perceived natural beauty of the area</i></p>	<p>Agricultural landscape free from incongruous development</p>	<p>Managed landscape created by traditional farming practices captured in paintings of landscape artists and remarkably intact still to this day.</p> <p>Where development occurs it is predominately rural and traditional in character.</p>	<p>Piecemeal changes resulting in loss of features due to lack of management and or the introduction of new elements which undermines the 'ruralness' of the area. It is often not the individual effects of a specific change but the cumulative effect with other changes in the vicinity which are most keenly felt for example temporary enclosures for grazing, temporary animal shelters, fencing, concrete road edges and night lighting.</p> <p>Development which introduces most significant effects includes new infrastructure (road and communications/services) and inappropriate designed or poorly located housing development.</p>

Natural Beauty Factors/ Considerations	Special Qualities noted in Management Plan	Supporting Evidence	Current, Perceived and Anticipated Risks to These Qualities
			Agricultural or large scale industrial buildings(e.g. Anaerobic Digestion Plants), where they may be visible across valley slopes, or on the valley floor, or breaking the skyline such that they draw the eye, may appear out of scale, and effect the patterns between other landscape elements.
<p>Scenic quality</p> <p><i>A distinctive sense of place</i></p>	Iconic lowland river valley	<p>Appeal to the senses:</p> <p>A small scale, domesticated landscape with a sense of traditional management which is the epitome of lowland English countryside.</p> <p>Familiar and idyllic, intimate and domesticated, subtle and harmonious balance of land use and features.</p>	<p>Land use changes and development which does not contribute to and may undermine local details and features.</p> <p>Large scale developments which are out of character with the small scale and intimate qualities of the vale.</p> <p>Gradual ad hoc introduction of elements such as signage, new buildings, storage of materials, night lighting etc. which may be associated with small scale commercial ventures or agricultural diversification and may fragment the current harmonious balance of traditionally managed lowland countryside.</p>
	Valley Bottom Grazing Marshes	<p>Scale, colour and texture:</p> <p>Green and luxuriant pastures, with grazing cows and sheep, river meandering lazily amid stout but graceful willows.</p> <p>Valley floor wet meadows and arable rolling valley sides contrast with each other in terms of scale, colour and texture.</p> <p>Marshes near Manningtree have a simple character which is open and expansive with occasional buildings which add interest and</p>	<p>Loss of grazing marshes/pastures to arable land uses or poplar/willow plantations.</p> <p>Extension of development on to the valley floor altering historic settlement pattern.</p> <p>Increased tree planting and field enclosures on the valley floor which undermine a sense of openness and contrast with the valley sides and which blocks valued views.</p>

Natural Beauty Factors/ Considerations	Special Qualities noted in Management Plan	Supporting Evidence	Current, Perceived and Anticipated Risks to These Qualities
		colour amid a sea of reeds.	
<i>Visual Interest in patterns of land cover</i>	Assemblage of features	<p>Visual Interest:</p> <p>Dedham Vale is not a dramatic expansive landscape but a small scale domesticated landscape where the juxtaposition of features including the riverside meadows grazed by cows and sheep, graceful willows, meandering watercourse, rolling farmlands - cornfields at harvest, fine oaks, picturesque villages and distinctive valley topography offer visual delight and interest.</p> <p>Leafy lanes often with wild flower verges (many are 'Protected Lanes' in Essex or Roadside Nature Reserves in Suffolk) link nucleated villages of great charm and vibrant colour.</p> <p>Isolated farms or barns sit in hollows in the hills while church towers stand proudly at the top of slopes and act as local landmarks.</p>	<p>Introduction of new built form which may disrupt the predominate small scale and rural character of existing buildings and features and the relationships between them. Aspects which may affect the ability of a new development to 'fit' include height, mass, arrangement and size of windows, pitch of roof, detailing and colour.</p> <p>Introduction of new agricultural buildings on the skyline and with no vegetated or land backdrop can be visually intrusive. Consideration should also be given to colour, orientation, and ridge height.</p> <p>New development which visually competes with the landmark character of church towers.</p>
	Enclosure and views	<p>Sequence of views:</p> <p>Woodlands and trees and overlapping lines of vegetation enclose lanes, enhance landform and frame views such that there is an unfolding sequence of views.</p> <p>Steep tributary valleys contain a high</p>	<p>Lack of consideration of the landscape and visual effects of development both on the immediate environment but also longer distance views from across the valley when making land use and management decisions.</p> <p>Inappropriate design and location of new woodland on the valley sides - new woodland should emphasise rolling flowing lines of topography, should have sinuous edges and</p>

Natural Beauty Factors/ Considerations	Special Qualities noted in Management Plan	Supporting Evidence	Current, Perceived and Anticipated Risks to These Qualities
		concentration of woodland which creates an enclosed and intimate landscape with high degree of seclusion.	generally occur on steep slopes/in the depressions in landform.
		<p>Wooded skyline:</p> <p>Wooded skyline including woodland on the surrounding plateau which defines the vale.</p>	<p>Development on the upper valley slopes which breaks the skyline or appears prominent.</p> <p>Loss of wooded skyline due to lack of management or development or introduction of inappropriate species of planting on the upper slopes/skyline e.g. Leylandii.</p>
<i>Appeal to the senses</i>		<p>John Constable was inspired by the subtle and harmonious balance of all the ingredients of the classical English Lowland and he wrote the following:</p> <p><i>"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".</i></p> <p><i>"The sound of water escaping from mill dams often rotten plants, slimy moss and brickwork..."</i></p> <p><i>"Painting for me is another word for feeling and I associate my careless boyhood with all that lies on the banks of the Stour".</i></p>	<p>Retaining the intactness of the landscape which so inspired John Constable and has the ability to appeal to the senses of people today is unique. Understanding the detail Constable perceived, captured and so loved is fundamental to retaining the cultural heritage interest we place on this landscape in the present day.</p> <p>Threats and issues noted above are all relevant to this aim.</p>

Natural Beauty Factors/ Considerations	Special Qualities noted in Management Plan	Supporting Evidence	Current, Perceived and Anticipated Risks to These Qualities
<p>Relative wildness</p> <p><i>A sense of remoteness</i></p>	Remoteness	<p>Perceptions of being away from it all:</p> <p>Sense of remoteness is readily perceived on the open and exposed grazing marshes near Manningtree where the call of marshland birds (Redshank, Lapwing and Oystercatcher) add ambience and are evocative of a remote and natural area. Inland the deeply rural countryside at Wiston and Boxted can also feel remote.</p> <p>Significant sections of the valley landscape remain relatively inaccessible with roads crossing the river only at infrequent intervals giving rise to a greater sense of remoteness.</p>	<p>Increased footpath/cycle or road access to areas which currently retain a sense of remoteness.</p> <p>Development which requires increased access to areas currently with relatively limited accessibility.</p> <p>Increased frequency of trains, new infrastructure, phone masts, increased traffic etc can all undermine perceptions of remoteness.</p>
<p><i>A relative lack of human influence</i></p>	Agricultural landscape	Managed landscape created by traditional farming practices. This is not a strongly 'natural' landscape but one which portrays land management practices established in the middle of the 20th century.	Piecemeal changes resulting in loss of features due to lack of management and or the introduction of new elements which undermines the traditional land management patterns of the area. It is often not the individual effects of a specific change but the cumulative effect with other changes in the vicinity. For example the loss of veteran trees or individual pollarded willows along the Stour or the loss of wood pasture or grazing meadows and replacement with arable farming or development.
<p><i>A sense of the passing of time and a return to nature</i></p>	Evidence of human habitation over previous millennia	<p>Passing of time:</p> <p>In places there are dilapidated barns with bulging and sagging weatherboarding which engenders romantic qualities and the passing of time.</p>	<p>Loss of features which enhance perceptions of time depth and are reminiscent of Constable's day. These features can be vulnerable to small scale incremental loss.</p> <p>Balancing the retention of the best through listing and inclusion on heritage at risk register but also the accepted decay of others all of which add to the qualities of the area.</p>

Natural Beauty Factors/ Considerations	Special Qualities noted in Management Plan	Supporting Evidence	Current, Perceived and Anticipated Risks to These Qualities
<p>Relative tranquillity</p> <p><i>Contributors to tranquillity</i></p>	<p>Relative Tranquillity</p>	<p>Factors which contribute to perceptions of tranquillity:</p> <p>Familiar idyllic images Lack of overt signs of development Natural sounds Presence of water along the banks of the Stour Minimal noise and light intrusion Ability to enjoy/walk lanes with minimal traffic</p>	<p>Local electricity distribution networks and communication masts within, and in the setting of, the AONB.</p> <p>Light pollution can affect the area's dark skies and should be kept to a minimum including the use of full cut off lighting and directional light to control spillage for development within the AONB and also within its wider setting.</p> <p>Aircraft noise can significantly intrude into the rural tranquillity of the vale.</p> <p>Development which introduces/generates unacceptable levels of traffic on minor roads or leads to the need for general highways 'improvements' or interventions, i.e. kerbing, lighting, and signage which can introduce inappropriate materials and be out of scale with the intimate small scale qualities of this landscape.</p> <p>New infrastructure crossing the valley floor may result in physical fragmentation and loss of tranquillity.</p>
		<p>Consensus:</p> <p>Emotional responses to this landscape are reflected in the draw of artists and writers and the expression of a 'quiet idyll'. Dedham Vale because of its lowland rural character can have a wide appeal to many sections of society. People visit the area and feel safe in the lowland rural scene - here they have the opportunity to feel inspired.</p> <p>The Dedham Vale landscape has a propensity to satisfy people's expectation of a classic</p>	<p>Recreational activities which result in an increase in the numbers of people perceived in the landscape, or activities which are not directly tied to quiet enjoyment can undermine opportunities to be inspired by the environment.</p> <p>Increased parking providing improved access to the rights of way network may undermine the qualities of the 'quiet idyll'.</p>

Natural Beauty Factors/ Considerations	Special Qualities noted in Management Plan	Supporting Evidence	Current, Perceived and Anticipated Risks to These Qualities
		English lowland landscape.	
<i>Detractors from tranquillity</i>	Some intrusions of human activity	<p>Factors which detract from perceptions of tranquillity:</p> <p>Visibility and noise intrusion from A12 Peripheral or linear housing development Electricity pylons High concentrations of visitors around 'honey pot' sites. Recreational activities which are not regarded as quiet outdoor recreation e.g. organised or motorised sports.</p>	<p>Pressure for new housing and improved infrastructure that alters the traditional pattern of settlement such as the expansion of nucleated villages or infill development resulting in linear development along lanes.</p> <p>Increased night lighting and signing.</p> <p>Increased numbers of people evident in the landscape and noisy sports.</p>
<p>Natural heritage features</p> <p><i>Geological and geomorphological features</i></p>	Geology and Geomorphology	<p>Land use patterns:</p> <p>London Clay and sand and gravel deposits exposed on valley sides are reflected in quarry sites, remnant and past heathland e.g. Tiger Hill.</p> <p>Distinctive pattern of vegetation reflecting underlying soils - elm, thorn, oak, hazel and field maple in hedgerows on the lower slopes with holly, pine and ash becoming more common on the upper slopes. Within the valley floor alder and willow are commonplace.</p>	Lack of understanding of underlying geology/soils when undertaking new planting resulting in a loss of the otherwise distinctive patterns of vegetation where there is a change in soil and therefore weakening of local landscape character.
<i>Wildlife and habitats</i>	Functioning River Stour and Tributaries	<p>Concentration of valued habitats:</p> <p>Sites of Special Scientific Interest and County Wildlife Sites are primarily associated with the River Stour and tributaries.</p>	<p>Loss of native trees associated with the riverside.</p> <p>Changes in land use and new development which have an adverse effect on water quality and may affect the nature conservation value of habitats associated with the river and</p>

Natural Beauty Factors/ Considerations	Special Qualities noted in Management Plan	Supporting Evidence	Current, Perceived and Anticipated Risks to These Qualities
		<p>Alder and black poplar and pollarded willow along the watercourses.</p> <p>Rough grassland gives rise to ideal hunting ground for barn owl.</p> <p>Iconic scenes along the river e.g. Flatford Mill derived from traditional management which over time has created valued habitats.</p> <p>Bluebells clothe the banks of narrow lanes in spring and buttercups carpet the meadows.</p>	<p>its tributaries.</p> <p>Lack of traditional grazing management resulting in over grazing or under grazing and loss of grassland species diversity.</p> <p>Inappropriate mowing regimes for grass verges and planting of garden plants/bulbs within verges adjacent to properties can undermine species diversity of verges.</p>
	Semi Natural Ancient Woodlands	<p>Appealing woodland patterns and woodland habitat networks.</p> <p>Ancient woodland on the valley sides e.g. Boxted Hall and alder carr along the valley floor.</p> <p>Juxtaposition of acidic sandy soils and clay soils results in a range of habitats in close proximity e.g. Arger Fen.</p>	<p>Fragmentation of woodland habitat, resulting from changes in land use or development.</p> <p>Missed opportunities to undertake off site planting in association with development where there may be opportunities to improve habitat networks and reinforce local landscape character with the introduction of typical landscape features and re-introduction of traditional management techniques.</p>
<p>Cultural heritage</p> <p>Built environment, archaeology and designed landscapes</p>	Historic Villages	<p>Intact settlement pattern:</p> <p>Saxon/Medieval settlement pattern - distinctive settlement form clustered around small triangular greens or 'tyes'. The small scale of traditional villages, built form and layout and the relationship between the village and the wider landscape setting remains predominately</p>	<p>Development pressure on the fringes of existing settlements, altering settlement form and relationship to the landscape.</p> <p>Incremental development such as infill development along lanes resulting in linear settlement form and gradual urbanisation of the wider landscape.</p>

Natural Beauty Factors/ Considerations	Special Qualities noted in Management Plan	Supporting Evidence	Current, Perceived and Anticipated Risks to These Qualities
		<p>intact. Many of the settlements are conservation areas and contain buildings which reflect major phases of prosperity associated with the cloth trade in the 13th century.</p> <p>A dispersed pattern of individual rural dwellings occurs throughout the area and along roads.</p>	<p>Replacement dwellings, of inappropriate scale, form, dominance, which do not respecting vernacular architecture.</p> <p>Loss of traditional settlement form and relationship with the wider landscape such as at Stratford St Mary and East Bergholt.</p> <p>Where new development is proposed care should be taken to understand the effects on the perceptions of the traditional form of the village, how it may affect perceptions of the settlement when viewed from the wider landscape and how it sits within its landscape context and effects on the sense of arrival and departure from the village. In the case of the latter care should be taken to avoid traffic calming measures or roundabouts on the outskirts of a settlement which alter its character and sense of arrival.</p> <p>Building orientation and position in the landscape are significant considerations.</p>
	Historic sites and landscapes	Significant collection of visibly tangible historic features, structures and buildings including limekilns, 2 Norman Motte and Bailey castles, historic navigation, great halls and estates, including Registered Parks and Gardens - (e.g. Tendring Hall, Giffords Hall).	<p>Erosion of above ground archaeological sites e.g. Motte and Bailey Castles.</p> <p>Loss of veteran trees and parkland landscapes.</p> <p>Lack of understanding of these historic features such that they are undervalued and yet have huge potential to increase enjoyment and appreciation of the time depth of this landscape.</p>
Historic influence on	The working	Landmark features/eye catchers:	New development which draws the eye either detracting

Natural Beauty Factors/ Considerations	Special Qualities noted in Management Plan	Supporting Evidence	Current, Perceived and Anticipated Risks to These Qualities
the landscape	landscape	<p>Landmark churches built of knapped flint reflecting period of prosperity (woollen trade 1300-1600) but built on the sites of former Saxon churches. Their landmark qualities reinforce identity and visual coherence of the area.</p> <p>Traditional barns clad in stained weather boarding - these buildings are characteristic of Dedham Vale and reinforce its rural roots. Their organic character and way in which they sit in the landscape add time depth, visual interest and have been an inspiration to artists such as Nash.</p> <p>Visual interest in range of buildings styles and types:</p> <p>Range of building styles including Medieval timber framed dwellings, grander brick faced 18th century houses, modern buildings from 20th and 21st centuries. Occasional 'pargetting' on buildings and colour of buildings reflects traditional lime washing with a mixture of lime and tallow colour from locally derived earth pigments resulting in pinks, apricots and buffs.</p>	<p>from an existing valued landmark or introducing a new uncharacteristic feature which has a poor dialogue with the wider landscape. A new development may inadvertently become a landmark feature due to poor siting, use of uncharacteristic materials, colours or due to high reflectivity.</p> <p>Conversion of barns resulting in a significant change to their character and setting. These features are highly valued structures reflecting the agricultural roots of this landscape and provide local interest and add to scenic qualities.</p> <p>Use of traditional building material, (the colour, texture and type of which contributes to local character), is preferable over new materials. Introduction of inappropriate colours, texture or building material can undermine and detract from the strong unity of traditional built form. However, in some instances new materials may be appropriate. Where this is the case they should be of a dark/subdued colour and non reflective and should fit their wider context and establish a positive relationship with other buildings around them.</p>
Characteristic land management practices	Evidence of management practices established in	<p>Tangible history:</p> <p>Ditches and banks and coppiced hazel stools marking former park and woodland</p>	Lack of management of small remnant areas of heath habitat and missed opportunities to restore heathland fragments and connectivity between historic heathland sites.

Natural Beauty Factors/ Considerations	Special Qualities noted in Management Plan	Supporting Evidence	Current, Perceived and Anticipated Risks to These Qualities
	middle of 20th century	<p>boundaries. Many of the sinuous lanes date back to early patterns of livestock movements from valley floor to valley sides.</p> <p>Place names associated with former heathland - Dedham Heath, Polstead Heath and Levenheath.</p> <p>Engineered channels/sluices relate to a time when the Stour was navigated between Manningtree and Sudbury (post 1705) and when mills developed along the route producing mainly corn which was transported by barge.</p> <p>Traditional orchards associated with the small villages e.g. Polstead Cherry.</p> <p>Artistic evidence demonstrating traditional landscapes and people working the land.</p>	<p>Modern orchards are also characteristic of the landscape around Levenheath and export local produce nationally. However care needs to be taken that the scale of such commercial farming and associated infrastructure does not have adverse landscape and visual effects.</p> <p>The characteristic management practices were depicted in paintings in the middle of the 20th century and reflect labour intensive and small scale enterprises. Today pressure for land uses and activities which are larger in scale, demonstrate increased automisation and the introduction of new mechanised features, can appear out of place and undermine the tangible traditional management of the area. Activity which increases traffic and the erosion of sunken lanes can have a similar effect.</p>
Associations with written descriptions	Association with Ronald Blythe and Many Other Writers	<p>Present day landscape connects people to past writers and to expressing emotions associated with place:</p> <p>The AONB contains an assemblage of features captured in the writings of Ronald Blythe. The similarity of the landscape today to that depicted in historic writing reinforces the timeless quality of this landscape.</p>	Changes as a result of development, land management or recreation which adversely affect the landscape quality, scenic quality and tranquillity of this landscape (described above) will all adversely affect its cultural heritage value and the appreciation and enjoyment of its literary associations.
Associations with artistic	Association with Constable and	<p>Present day landscape connects people to past artists and to expressing emotions</p>	Changes as a result of development, land management or recreation which adversely affect the landscape quality,

Natural Beauty Factors/ Considerations	Special Qualities noted in Management Plan	Supporting Evidence	Current, Perceived and Anticipated Risks to These Qualities
representations	Many Other Artists	<p>associated with place:</p> <p>The AONB contains an assemblage of features captured in the paintings of John Constable, Sir Alfred Munnings and John Nash which are still evident today. The similarity of the landscape today to that depicted in historic paintings reinforces the timeless quality of this landscape.</p> <p>Dedham Vale provokes a remarkably strong emotional response which is readily expressed in the works of artists and writers. It is not just the association of this landscape with artists and writers that is of value but rather the opportunity to experience first had the landscape qualities noted above which are so well captured by such artists and writers. It is this combination that sets this landscape above the ordinary as a national treasure and provides visitors with such inspiring experiences.</p> <p>Dedham Vale deeply resonates with visitors as a classic English landscape - this 'Englishness' is reinforced by its association with artists such as Constable who are synonymous with our sense of who we are and cultural identity.</p>	<p>scenic quality and tranquillity of this landscape (described above) will all adversely affect its cultural heritage value and the appreciation and enjoyment of its artistic associations.</p> <p>Over commercialisation of associations e.g. Constable but also other artists and writers. Over exploitation may give rise to potential ramifications such as increased signage, increased activity and visitor numbers which may undermine the very qualities people are seeking to experience.</p>
Associations of the landscape with people, places and events		<p>The legend of the dragon in Wormingford Mere.</p> <p>Tangible historic sites including above ground</p>	<p>Associations of the landscape with people, places and events are by their very nature hard to geographically pinpoint and therefore are prone to a lack of, or inappropriate, management.</p>

Natural Beauty Factors/ Considerations	Special Qualities noted in Management Plan	Supporting Evidence	Current, Perceived and Anticipated Risks to These Qualities
		and below ground archaeology e.g. cropmarks which have association with particular periods in history and increase peoples enjoyment and perceptions of changing landscape patterns over the centuries.	

4: Conclusions

4.1 Why Dedham Vale is Unique within the Family of AONBs

4.1.1 As noted in paragraph 3.1.3 above Dedham Vale is particularly valued for its landscape quality, scenic qualities and cultural and artistic associations.

4.1.2 The Designation History of Dedham Vale (2010) notes in para 80 that:

"the fact that the area still contains the scenes made so familiar to a wide audience by Constable's portrayal of its landscape centre around Dedham and Flatford Mill has meant that to many the AONB is particularly valued as 'Constable Country'. Constables' scenes of vibrant working landscapes have come to represent the epitome of England's lowland countryside, and much of this landscape is still recognisable in the AONB today. The dominance of this association has made Dedham Vale a special, one-off AONB'.

4.1.3 While the Dedham Vale 1996 Landscape Assessment document states that:

"Dedham Vale is a landscape full of subtleties....The context of Dedham Vale in an exposed plateau helps to emphasise the more intimate and special qualities of the Vale. Although it lies in relatively close proximity to other Essex and Suffolk river valleys , it stands out from them because of its concentration of interesting and historic buildings, the scale and dominance of the river, and the fact that it is remarkably free from industrial development and suburban sprawl, retaining a sense of the classic East Anglian rural lowland landscape. Its focus is inward, leaving a lasting impression once experienced".

4.1.4 All of the above serves to encapsulate why Dedham Vale is designated an AONB and sits unique within the national family of AONBs.

4.2 Protecting Qualities Going Forward

4.2.1 Whilst this report summarises the natural beauty factors and special qualities it should be used in association with the documents listed in para 1.3.1 above and not used in isolation.

4.2.2 It is anticipated that this document will be used by the AONB Partnership in their work with local landowners and in commenting on planning applications. It is also hoped that this report will be used by local planning officers as a checklist of the special qualities and 'natural beauty factors' which are relevant to this AONB and therefore will inform their advice to developers and will assist in determining planning applications. It should also be helpful to landscape professionals engaged in assessing landscape and visual effects of proposed development and also those involved in advising on land management initiatives.

Appendix 1:

Extract from Guidance on Assessing Landscapes for National Park and AONB Designation, Natural England (2011)

Appendix 1:

Evaluation Framework for Natural Beauty Criterion

The sub-factors and associated indicators should be regarded as a “menu” of examples (developed from past designations and subsequent consultation) from which those appropriate to the character of the landscape under consideration should be chosen, adapted or added to. There is no “scoring” involving accumulations of indicators and it is possible for a landscape to exhibit natural beauty or offer opportunities for open air recreation even if a number of the indicators shown in this appendix are not present.

Factor	Example sub-factor	Example Indicator
Landscape quality	Intactness of the landscape in visual, functional and ecological perspectives	Characteristic natural and man-made elements are well represented throughout
	The condition of the landscape’s features and elements	Landscape elements are in good condition
	The influence of incongruous features or elements (whether man-made or natural) on the perceived natural beauty of the area	Incongruous elements are not present to a significant degree, are not visually intrusive, have only localised influence or are temporary in nature
Scenic quality	A distinctive sense of place	Landscape character lends a clear and recognisable sense of place
	Striking landform	Landform shows a strong sense of scale or contrast
		There are striking landform types or coastal configurations
	Visual interest in patterns of land cover	Land cover and vegetation types form an appealing pattern or composition in relation to each other and/or to landform which may be appreciated from either a vantage point or as one travels through a landscape
	Appeal to the senses	Strong aesthetic qualities, reflecting factors such as scale and form, degree of openness or enclosure, colours and textures, simplicity or diversity, and ephemeral or seasonal interest
		Memorable or unusual views and eye-catching features or landmarks
		Characteristic cognitive and sensory stimuli (e.g. sounds, quality of light, characteristic smells, characteristics of the weather)
Relative wildness	A sense of remoteness	Relatively few roads or other transport routes
		Distant from or perceived as distant from significant habitation
	A relative lack of human influence	Extensive areas of semi-natural vegetation
		Uninterrupted tracts of land with few built features and few overt industrial or

Factor	Example sub-factor	Example Indicator
		urban influences
	A sense of openness and exposure	Open, exposed to the elements and expansive in character
	A sense of enclosure and isolation	Sense of enclosure provided by (eg) woodland, landform that offers a feeling of isolation
	A sense of the passing of time and a return to nature	Absence or apparent absence of active human intervention
Relative tranquillity	Contributors to tranquillity	Presence and/or perceptions of natural landscape, birdsong, peace and quiet, natural-looking woodland, stars at night, stream, sea, natural sounds and similar influences
	Detractors from tranquillity	Presence and/or perceptions of traffic noise, large numbers of people, urban development, overhead light pollution, low flying aircraft, power lines and similar influences
Natural heritage features	Geological and geo-morphological features	Visible expression of geology in distinctive sense of place and other aspects of scenic quality
		Presence of striking or memorable geo-morphological features
	Wildlife and habitats	Presence of wildlife and/or habitats that make a particular contribution to distinctive sense of place or other aspects of scenic quality
		Presence of individual species that contribute to sense of place, relative wildness or tranquillity
Cultural heritage	Built environment, archaeology and designed landscapes	Presence of settlements, buildings or other structures that make a particular contribution to distinctive sense of place or other aspects of scenic quality
		Presence of visible archaeological remains, parkland or designed landscapes that provide striking features in the landscape
	Historic influence on the landscape	Visible presence of historic landscape types or specific landscape elements or features that provide evidence of time depth or historic influence on the landscape.
		Perceptions of a harmonious balance between natural and cultural elements in the landscape that stretch back over time
	Characteristic land management practices	Existence of characteristic land management practices, industries or crafts which contribute to natural beauty
	Associations with written descriptions	Availability of descriptions of the landscape in notable literature, topographical

Factor	Example sub-factor	Example Indicator
		writings or guide books, or significant literature inspired by the landscape.
	Associations with artistic representations	Depiction of the landscape in art, other art forms such as photography or film, through language or folklore, or in inspiring related music
	Associations of the landscape with people, places or events	Evidence that the landscape has associations with notable people or events, cultural traditions or beliefs

Appendix 2:

Extracts from Guidance on Landscape Character Assessment, Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2002) and

Landscape Assessment, Countryside Commission (1993), CCP423.

- **recreational opportunity:** opportunities afforded for open-air recreation, having regard both to landscape character and position in relation to centres of population. (Also used in defining National Parks in England);
- **natural beauty and amenity:** a composite term, used in the founding legislation of SNH contained with The Natural Heritage (Scotland) Act 1991. The Act defines the natural heritage as including the physical elements of flora, fauna, geology, physiographic features and natural beauty and amenity. This combination of terms covers the physical landscape, but also the less tangible aspects such as remoteness or tranquillity, and aspects of landscape experience which appeal to senses other than sight, such as the sound or smell of the sea.

7.22 In considering natural beauty and amenity, and in any other situation which requires that a landscape be identified as requiring special attention, judgements must be based at least in part on the concept of **landscape value (para 7.8)**. This refers to the relative value or importance that stakeholders attach to different landscapes and their reasons for valuing them. The reasons may be set out according to a range of more detailed criteria that may include the following:

- **landscape quality:** the intactness of the landscape and the condition of features and elements (**para 7.8**);
- **scenic quality:** the term that is used to describe landscapes which appeal primarily to the visual senses;
- **rarity:** the presence of rare features and elements in the

landscape, or the presence of a rare landscape character type;

- **representativeness:** whether the landscape contains a particular character, and/or features and elements, which is felt by stakeholders to be worthy of representing;
- **conservation interests:** the presence of features of particular wildlife, earth science or archaeological, historical and cultural interest can add to the value of a landscape as well as having value in their own right;
- **wildness:** the presence of wild (or relatively wild) character in the landscape which makes a particular contribution to sense of place;
- **associations** with particular people, artists, writers, or other media, or events in history.

There may often be a consensus of opinion about the value of an area encompassing one or more of these criteria, which can be traced over time from the views expressed by different stakeholders.

7.23 **Tranquillity:** In addition to these landscape-related criteria there is another criterion, 'tranquillity', that is a composite feature related to low levels of built development, traffic, noise and artificial lighting. Authors of Landscape Character Assessments must state their criteria for 'low levels' clearly and should also consider whether one or more of the factors needs to be addressed individually, rather than in combination. Policy makers and practitioners may find it useful to refer to the Tranquil Areas maps [54]. Tranquil area mapping is currently underway in Scotland, as is the identification of core wild land areas.

7.24 The full range of criteria set out above may be used to identify valued landscapes that merit some form of designation or recognition. They can be used, either individually or in combination, to assist the definition of nationally important areas throughout England and Scotland. These include National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Scenic Areas, and equivalent areas.

7.25 The criteria of 'natural beauty', 'recreational opportunity' and 'natural beauty and amenity' can be the starting points for selecting the broad area of search for designation or recognition of special areas. The criteria listed in **paras 7.22 and 7.23** could be used to provide a supporting statement about why a particular area is valued.

Boundaries can then be determined by assessing the character and quality of the landscapes within the area of search to determine whether or not they should be included (see **Chapter 9** for further detail).

iv. Landscape capacity

7.26 Many Landscape Character Assessments will be used to help in decisions about the ability of an area to accommodate change, either as a result of new development, or some other form of land use change, such as the introduction of new features, or major change in land cover such as new woodland planting. In these circumstances judgements must be based on an understanding of the ability of the landscape to accommodate change without significant effects on its character. Criteria for what constitutes significant change need to be identified in planning policies or landscape strategies, and will usually be informed by potential effects on character and/or particular features and elements.

Many of these designations were originally made in the 1950s and 1960s, and were not accompanied by any formal landscape assessment. However, for the most recent AONB designations (which are likely to be the last in the series) the Commission has required the preparation of a published landscape assessment setting out the reasons why the area is believed to be of outstanding natural beauty. Similar publications are also being prepared for all of the existing AONBs.

At county level, additional non-statutory landscape designations may be defined and the need for them is recognised in advice from the DoE. PPG 7 [2] states "there are further designations, applied to other areas of the countryside... which serve to highlight particularly important features of the countryside that should be taken into account in planning decisions. These include locally devised ones, such as Areas of Great Landscape Value, which local planning authorities sometimes include in their structure or local plans to denote areas to which special countryside protection or other policies apply".

Figure 21. Criteria for evaluating landscapes for designation.

Landscape as a resource

The landscape should be a resource of at least national (regional, county, local) importance for reasons of rarity or representativeness.

Scenic quality

It should be of high scenic quality, with pleasing patterns and combinations of landscape features, and important aesthetic or intangible factors.

Unspoilt character

The landscape within the area generally should be unspoilt by large-scale, visually intrusive industry, mineral extraction or other inharmonious development.

Sense of place

It should have a distinctive and common character, including topographic and visual unity and a clear sense of place.

Conservation interests

In addition to its scenic qualities, it should include other notable conservation interests, such as features of historical, wildlife or architectural interest.

Consensus

There should be a consensus of both professional and public opinion as to its importance, for example as reflected through writings and paintings about the landscape.

Based partly on: Land Use Consultants (1991), *Landscape assessment: principles and practice*, Countryside Commission for Scotland.

In the past there has been some confusion and debate over criteria for the definition of landscapes suitable for designation. However, as for other aspects of landscape assessment, there is now fairly widespread agreement on criteria, which are often quoted in the Commission's AONB publications, for example. A summary of these criteria is presented in Figure 21. It should be noted that they can be adapted for use at almost any level. Essentially the quality of the landscape is judged against that of surrounding landscapes, whether at national, regional, county or local scale. Of particular note is the fact that although scenic quality is the essential and overriding factor in designation, the designation criteria also recognise the relevance of non-visual factors, such as special concentrations of historical, wildlife or architectural features. Cultural associations and public preferences, for example as demonstrated through writings and paintings about the area, are also given some weight.

Any landscape evaluation exercise needs to commence with a landscape classification, dividing the landscape up into areas of common character. The value of each character area should then be carefully judged against the designation criteria. This is likely to require a combination of professional judgement on scenic quality, informed opinion as to special conservation values, and known public preferences. The landscape evaluation should review fully and systematically the evidence for (and against) the designation on all of these counts.

Guidelines

Landscape classification and evaluation are pointless exercises in themselves: to be meaningful and worthwhile they must be translated into action on the ground, whether this be through planning policies, countryside management, or initiatives to create new landscapes. Landscape guidelines are the main mechanism for achieving action, and their use is strongly commended at both county and district levels. They can provide a valuable input to development control; can assist in the prioritization of countryside management activities and expenditure; and can give landscape design guidance for new developments in the countryside.

Public involvement in the preparation of landscape guidelines — for example through a public consultation exercise — is recommended. It can be particularly useful in formulating landscape strategies, deciding priorities, and considering how resources should be allocated. Its special role is in helping to ensure that landscape planning and management activity meets public expectations, and is cost-effective.

Figure 22 shows some possible steps in the process of preparing landscape guidelines. Guidelines may apply to the countryside as a whole, or may be directed specifically towards designated landscapes. In the former case a whole range of different strategies may be required, ranging from