

**Witchford Neighbourhood Plan**  
*Landscape Appraisal*

*Final Report*



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## Appendix 1: Extract from Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines (1991)

# 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Alison Farmer Associates was appointed by Witchford Neighbourhood Plan Group to undertake a landscape appraisal of the Parish, in order to provide a robust evidence base to support the development of policy within the emerging Neighbourhood Plan. In particular the Neighbourhood Plan Group required land within and surrounding the main village to be assessed in detail to establish the sensitivity and capacity of the Parish to accommodate new development, but also to present a vision for the Parish, which seeks to conserve and enhance special qualities and ensure positive change.
- 1.1.2 Witchford Neighbourhood Plan area comprises the Parish of Witchford and three additional areas which are likely to be brought into the Parish as part of boundary amendments considered by the Boundary Commission. The study area is illustrated below comprising the Parish (green) and additional areas (blue). The area stretches from Green Drive and West Fen Road in the north through to Grunty Fen Catchwater Drain in the south. The main settlement within the Parish is Witchford village, located on the southern mid slopes of a small island which rises to just 16m AOD above the surrounding fen landscape and to the south west of Ely. The A142 bypasses the village to the north connecting Ely with March. There are a number of employment sites close to the village including Sedgeway Business Park and Ashley Park to the north of the A142 and Greenham Park to the south. Immediately adjacent to the Parish, to the east, lies the Lancaster Way Business Park.

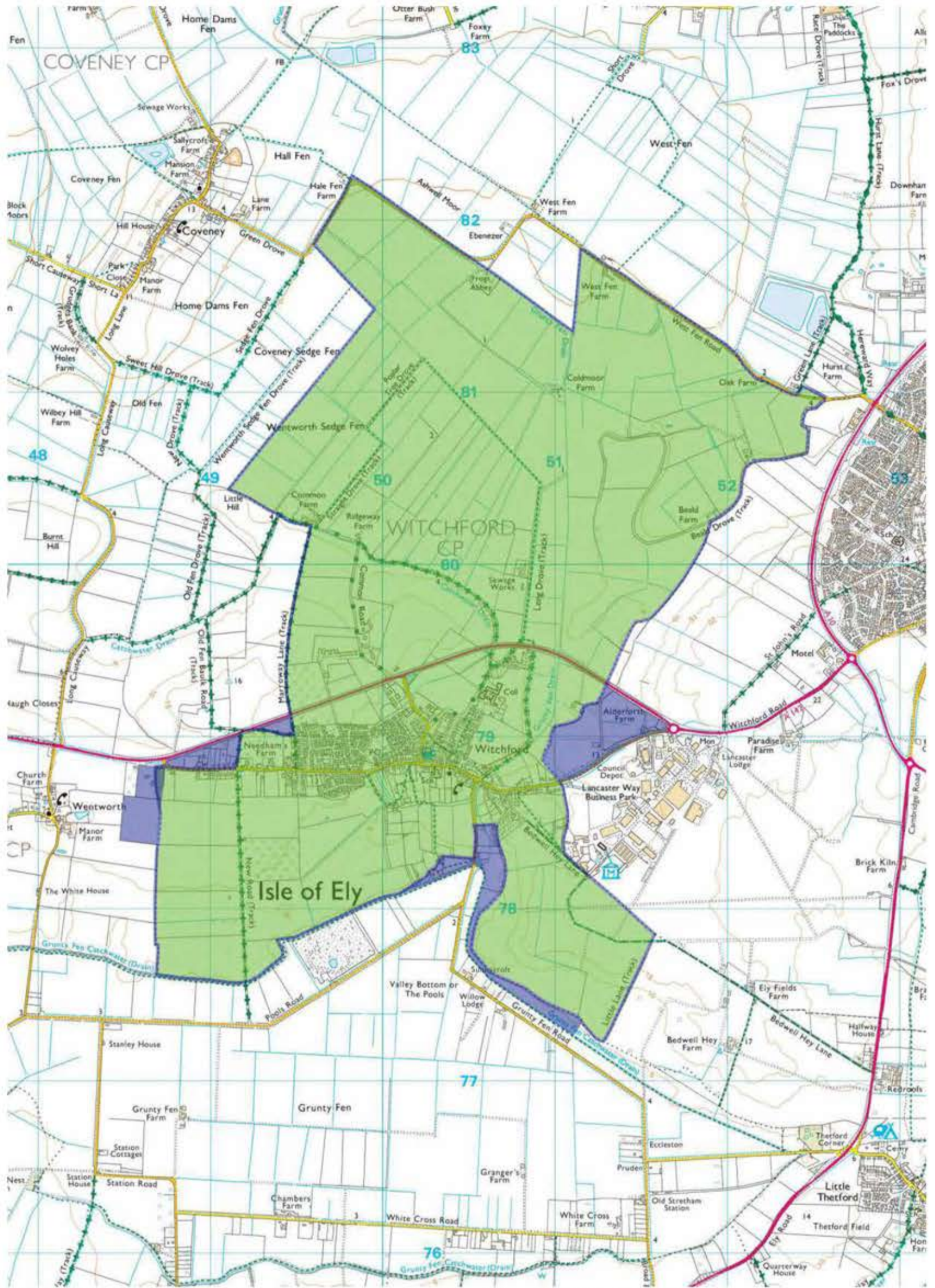
## 1.2 Objectives

- 1.2.1 The key objective of this study is to provide a robust understanding of the character and qualities of the Neighbourhood Plan Area in order to make sound judgements as to the sensitivity and capacity of land surrounding the main settlement to accommodate development and to identify special qualities to be conserved and enhanced.

## 1.3 Scope of Work

- 1.3.1 The assessment considers all the land surrounding the settlement of Witchford but also the wider landscape setting. Where relevant, reference has also been made to land beyond the Parish where there is strong inter-visibility such that the wider landscape forms a setting to the settlement, bolstering its sense of place e.g. rising land to the northwest just beyond the Parish boundary.

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



Witchford Neighbourhood Plan Area (Data provided by East Cambridgeshire District Council)

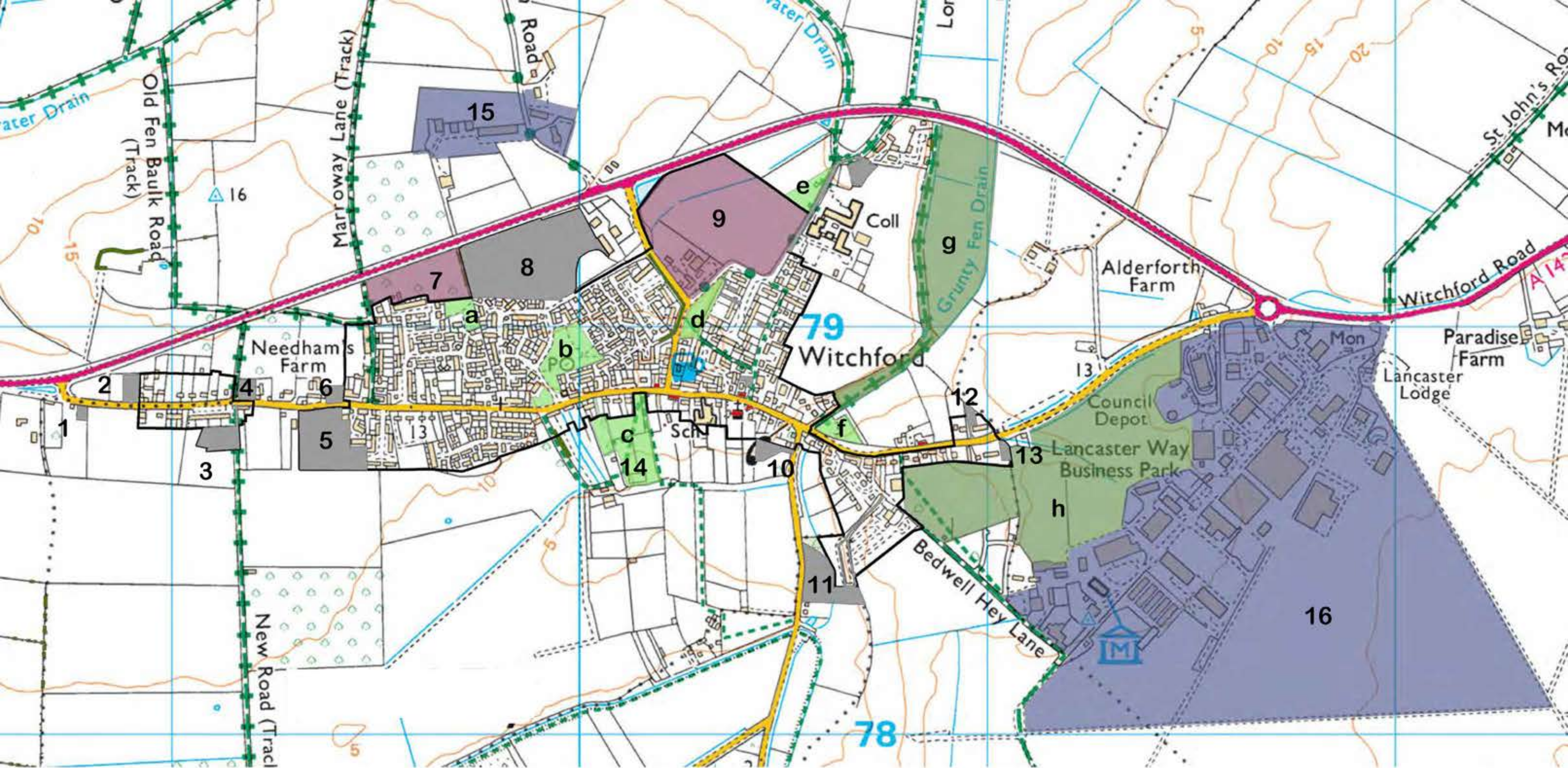
## 1.4 The Neighbourhood Plan

- 1.4.1 Under the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, East Cambridgeshire granted Neighbourhood Plan Area for Witchford on 26 August 2016.
- 1.4.2 The Witchford Neighbourhood Plan Working Group was subsequently established and a village questionnaire undertaken in November 2016. This survey assessed what the community liked and disliked about Witchford and how they would like to see it develop in the future. The results of the survey indicated that above all villagers valued Witchford's community spirit, the relative peace and quiet and open spaces, but were concerned about the pressure from increasing housing development.
- 1.4.3 A second Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire was held during February 2018. The key themes arising from the questionnaire were support for:
- Protection of green spaces and the rural aspect of Witchford.
  - Employment opportunities local to Witchford including encouraging home working.
  - A wide housing mix in any new development.
  - Infrastructure and other physical measures to make travelling within Witchford easier and safer.
  - Increased facilities for the community, over a range of ages.

## 1.5 Planning Context

- 1.5.1 The adopted East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015 sets out the vision, objectives spatial strategy and policies for the future development of the district. It also identifies land and allocates sites for different types of development, such as housing and employment, to deliver the planned growth for the district to 2031. Within this Local Plan a number of housing sites are allocated within Witchford.
- 1.5.2 The Council is currently preparing a new Local Plan for East Cambridgeshire. The Council issued a call for sites in 2016 at which time a number of proposals were put forward for Witchford. Preferred sites were identified, a number of which have approved planning permission. Others have subsequently been proposed as allocations in the emerging local plan (Local Plan Proposed Submission) and/or the subject of current planning applications. These various sites are illustrated on Figure 1 and detailed in the table below.
- 1.5.3 In the emerging Local Plan Witchford is identified as a 'Large Village' within the settlement hierarchy. The Local Plan states:

*'The village itself offers a good range of services, including a shop with post office, churches, village hall and primary and secondary schools. Within the village there are a number of significant areas of open space, including common land.'*



**Key**

Settlement Limit

Permissions and Allocations  
(refer to page 4 of report)

Planning Permissions

Housing Allocations/Current Applications

Employment Allocations

- Local Green Space
  - a. Field End and Wheats Close
  - b. Victoria Green
  - c. Millenium Wood and Horsefield
  - d. The Common
  - e. Allotments, Manor Road
  - f. Allotmetns, Broadway
- Green Wedge
  - g. Sandpit Drove
  - h. Land west of Lancaster Way Business Park

Witchford Neighbourhood Plan  
Landscape Appraisal

**Figure 1: Emerging Local Plan**



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*Pedestrian and cycle routes provide links to Ely, Lancaster Way Business Park, and neighbouring villages and the countryside.*

*Witchford is therefore suitably placed to accommodate significant growth'.*

*(paras 7.47.3 and 7.47.4)*

<b>Site reference (refer Figure 1)</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>Housing</b>		
1	Adjacent to Briery Farm	Planning permission - single dwelling and garage
2	Land north of Sutton Road	Under construction - 2 dwellings
3	Land off New Road	Under construction - 13 dwellings
4	Land at 204 Main Street	Planning permission - 5 dwellings
5	Land south of Main Street	Planning permission - 46 dwellings
6	Land East of Needhams Farm	Outline planning permission for residential development
7	Land north of Marrowway Lane	Allocation in emerging local plan and current planning application for 40 dwellings
8	Land North of Field End	Planning permission for 128 dwellings
9	Land off Manor Road	Allocation in emerging local plan and current planning application for 116 dwellings
10	Land west of Grunty Fen Road	Outline planning permission for residential development
11	Land east of Grunty Fen Road	Change of use from mobile homes to residential
12	Land north of Main Street	Planning permission single dwelling
13	Land south of Main Street	Planning permission single dwelling
14	Land South Of Main Street on The Horsefield	Current outline planning application for 31 homes
<b>Employment</b>		
15	WFD.E1	Allocation in emerging local plan
16	Ely.E2 (a, b & c)	Allocation in emerging local plan

## **1.6 Methodology and Approach**

1.6.1 This landscape appraisal has been carried out in accordance with Guidelines on Landscape Character Assessment<sup>1</sup> and best practice in relation to sensitivity and

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



capacity assessments. The approach has included a client meeting, desk study and further detailed site assessment during August and September 2018.

- 1.6.2 This assessment is a landscape capacity-led approach which considers the Witchford settlement and its landscape setting holistically. The approach considers the special qualities of the area and opportunities to enhance and develop these further. Analysis is used to provide robust evidence to support judgements on the sensitivity of land and its capacity to accommodate development from a landscape/townscape perspective.
- 1.6.3 The appraisal reviews existing documentary evidence on the settlement and its landscape and considers the historic evolution, describes landscape setting, key views, gateways and landmarks as well as valued characteristics and spaces. Local character areas are defined and used as a framework for understanding the relationship between built form and landscape setting. Individual sites are considered within this wider context rather than in isolation. Opportunities for environmental initiatives which seek to enhance local identity and settlement distinctiveness are also highlighted where relevant. The result is the presentation of a robust evidence base which can be used to inform the development of policy within the emerging Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.6.4 The following definition of terms are used in this study:

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

**Value** is defined as the relative value that is attached to different landscape by society. In this study value has been assessed in the context of Witchford settlement and with reference to factors such as designations, conservation interest, distinctive features, role and function (i.e. setting or gateway), condition and intactness, and rarity.

**Capacity** of an area considers the extent and nature of development which may be accommodated and is derived from an understanding of both landscape value and sensitivity of a landscape to change.

## 2: The Evolution of Witchford

### 2.1 Early Origins and Evolution

- 2.1.1 Witchford is a medium sized village in the Parish of Witchford just c. 2km to the west of Ely. Like many fen villages it is located on a slight rise of land (rising to c. 16m AOD) which forms a transitional island to the main Isle of Ely in the east and is flanked to the north and south by extensive areas of fen farmland.
- 2.1.2 The elevated island on which the village sits is known to have attracted early occupation with evidence of prehistoric and Roman activity. An Anglo-Saxon cemetery was unearthed to the east of the village (on the site of former WWII aerodrome and now industrial estate) and the church is thought to have been located on a much earlier Anglo Saxon site, with oldest surviving parts of the church (font and west tower) dating to the 13th century.
- 2.1.3 Witchford is mentioned in the Domesday Book. Early spellings of the Parish include 'Wic' or 'Wych' and although the meaning of the place name is not clear, one interpretation is the *wych elm which grows by the ford*. Today there is no ford crossing at the lowest point along Main Street. The Grunty Fen Drain passes under the road at this point instead.
- 2.1.4 One of the earliest enclosures associated with the settlement lies to the north of the current village, close to the highest point known as Little Hill. This D shaped enclosure may reflect an early settlement location or field enclosure.
- 2.1.5 In the Medieval Period the village was associated with four open fields which were used for cultivation. These fields lay on the slopes of the island close to the village dwellings and were divided into long linear strip fields. These fields are likely to have become enclosed prior to the Enclosure Act of 1841. The pattern of strip fields extending from the village edge is still apparent on the south side of the village.
- 2.1.6 Beyond the slopes which formed the immediate setting to the village were wider areas of marsh/ common grazing accessed from the village via drove roads. These are still evident today e.g. Sandpit Drove and Holts End Drove. There are also remnants of common land at the junction of Common Road and Sedge Way in the north of the village. In the mid nineteenth century the marshes surrounding Witchford were drained as part of the great fen drainage. Straight ditches were dug, such as Grunty Fen Drain which runs from Grunty Fen in the south to the marsh known as Old Common in the north. Maps dating to 1841 show that there was a smock mill called Common Mill in the area of Old Common.
- 2.1.7 In the early 1900s the village had a linear form along the main street which formed the route between Ely and March. The main core of settlement occurred in the east around the church and ford but extended westwards along the road. The early maps

show the loose collection of dwellings and associated small scale pastures and numerous small scale orchards. The fields to the south of the core village are particularly striking for their long linear 'strip field' character, stretching down towards the fen. The field pattern to the north of the village, which is located on the higher part of the island, is more rectilinear in form and larger scale.

- 2.1.8 In 1942 an RAF aerodrome was established on the higher and flatter land to the east of the village and became an RAF Bomber Command Station. Various temporary buildings, to house RAF servicemen, were constructed to the north of the village. The airfield was subsequently closed in 1946 and in 1951 Witchford Village College was built on the site of former officer mess buildings. The aerodrome itself started to be redeveloped in the late 20th century as the Lancaster Way Business Park which subsequently gained Enterprise Zone status. Other areas which accommodated buildings for servicemen were also redeveloped e.g. the site of Sedgeway Business Park and Ashley Park to the north of the village.
- 2.1.9 During the second half of the 20th century new housing development occurred and started to fill in areas behind and to the north of the Main Street. The layout of this housing was often in the form of cul-de-sacs and the house types had a uniform character.
- 2.1.10 In the late 1980s the A142 bypass to the village was constructed to the north and was followed by further housing development between the urban edge and the road. During this period there has been a noticeable decline in orchards with many lost to housing or farmland.

## 3: Landscape Character

### 3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The Parish of Witchford is covered by a number of different landscape character assessments including National Character Areas which are defined by Natural England, the East of England Regional Landscape Typology, Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines and a more local Ely Capacity Study which distinguished between the Isle of Ely and transitional islands within the wider fen landscape. A summary of relevant descriptions from each assessment is given below. This is followed by a local character assessment for the Parish and Witchford village which describes local variations in character and aspects of landscape which contribute to a sense of place.

### 3.2 National Character Area 46 The Fens

3.2.1 This National Character Area (NCA) is a distinctive, historic and human influenced wetland landscape which formerly constituted the largest wetland area in England. The area is notable for its large-scale, flat, open landscape with extensive vistas to level horizons. The level, open topography shapes the impression of huge skies which convey a strong sense of place, tranquillity and inspiration.

3.2.2 Relevant key characteristics include:

- Expansive, flat, open, low-lying wetland landscape influenced by the Wash estuary, and offering extensive vistas to level horizons and huge skies throughout, provides a sense of rural remoteness and tranquillity.
- Jurassic clays are overlain by rich, fertile calcareous and silty soils over the coastal and central fens and by dark, friable fen peat further inland. The soils are important for agriculture, which is hugely significant for the rural economy in the Fens.
- Flood storage areas on the Nene, Cam, Lark and Ouse washes also provide significant biodiversity interest.
- Overall, woodland cover is sparse, notably a few small woodland blocks, occasional avenues alongside roads, isolated field trees and shelterbelts of poplar, willow and occasionally *leylandii* hedges around farmsteads, and numerous orchards around Wisbech. Various alders, notably grey alder, are also used in shelterbelts and roadside avenues.
- The predominant land use is arable – wheat, root crops, bulbs, vegetables and market gardening made possible by actively draining reclaimed land areas

- Open fields, bounded by a network of drains and the distinctive hierarchy of rivers (some embanked), have a strong influence on the geometric/rectilinear landscape pattern.
- Large, built structures exhibit a strong vertical visual influence, such as ..... Ely Cathedral on the highest part of the Isle of Ely dominating its surrounding fen.
- Settlements and isolated farmsteads are mostly located on the modestly elevated 'geological islands' and the low, sinuous roddon banks (infilled ancient watercourses within fens). Elsewhere, villages tend to be dispersed ribbon settlements along the main arterial routes through the settled fens

### 3.2.3 Key changes in character relevant to Witchford Parish include:

- There has been some loss of historic hedgerow patterns on clay islands found in the inland fen area due to housing development and limited management.
- The loss of pasture is particularly evident around settlements. Pasture and older grassland survives principally on the fen islands (where settlements are long established) and in churchyards both on islands and elsewhere in the Fens.
- Modern built development is eroding the architectural and historic character of some Fenland villages. Development on settlement margins can be particularly damaging, creating visual intrusion and resulting in the loss of surrounding landscape features and increasing the risk of coalescence. The proliferation of smaller, unplanned residential development along arterial roads is also changing the landscape, reducing the sense of remoteness and enclosing views.
- Road improvements are commonplace, including straightening of existing routes and new 'by-pass' schemes designed to alleviate congestion within towns and villages.
- There has been a significant increase in the number of larger industrial scale units, mainly related to the agricultural/horticultural industry with minimal screening to assimilate the structures into the open landscape.
- Light pollution is an increasing issue but this may decrease with new, energy-efficient more directional lighting technology.

## 3.3 Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines

- 3.3.1 This document, although published in 1991, contains useful descriptions of the Fenland landscape and provides management guidance. An extract of the document showing suggested enhancements to the landscape is provided in appendix 1 of this report.

### 3.3.2 In particular the Guidelines note that the:

'islands are significant in the landscape: most are occupied by settlements or farmsteads which, with their associated tree cover, gives them special prominence.

In relation to settlements and large developments it notes that:

*'many Fenland villages have suffered from unsightly fringe development. Planting thick hedgerows with trees or wider shelterbelts on the margins would soften harsh boundaries between rear gardens and farmland.....entrances to some villages would be improved by tree planting along verges.'*

It goes on to state that:

*'Fen Islands provide opportunities to increase tree cover through hedgerow planting, and the creation of new copses and woodland, thus providing a contrast to the surrounding fen. At the transition area between fen and island, the creation of small grass paddocks surrounded by thick hedges and trees or areas of woodland would reinforce the contrast and the sense of moving from one to the other'*

In relation to dykes and drains it notes that:

*'selected drains could form linear landscape corridors through the fens. Here, a smaller scale character is appropriate, with meadows, copses, pollarded willows, changes of level and wetland habitats. From these more sheltered corridors, there would be contrasting views out to the wider fenland beyond.'*

## 3.4 East of England Landscape Typology

3.4.1 The East of England landscape typology defines landscape character types, which are generic and repeat across an area. Two landscape types are relevant to the Neighbourhood Plan Area of Witchford namely Lowland Village Farmland and Planned Peat Fen. These are illustrated on Figure 2 and key characteristics described below.

### ***Lowland Village Farmland***

3.4.2 The key characteristics of this landscape type include:

- a generally low lying, gently rolling topography, although some areas adjacent to lower lying levels can appear elevated
- drained by small streams which are visually indistinct
- intensively farmed agricultural landscape with patches of wet woodland, reedbed and wet grassland along river valleys and low-lying hollows
- predominately arable land use with some pasture and orchards
- groups of trees, often around farmsteads and occasional small plantations
- medieval moated sites and fine stone churches are characteristic features
- medium/large scale, regular field pattern defined by well trimmed hedgerows

- mix of regular and sinuous field patterns reflecting planned enclosure from common fields
- dense largely nucleated rural settlement pattern and outlying farmsteads
- away from transport routes there is a sense of tranquillity
- open expansive views

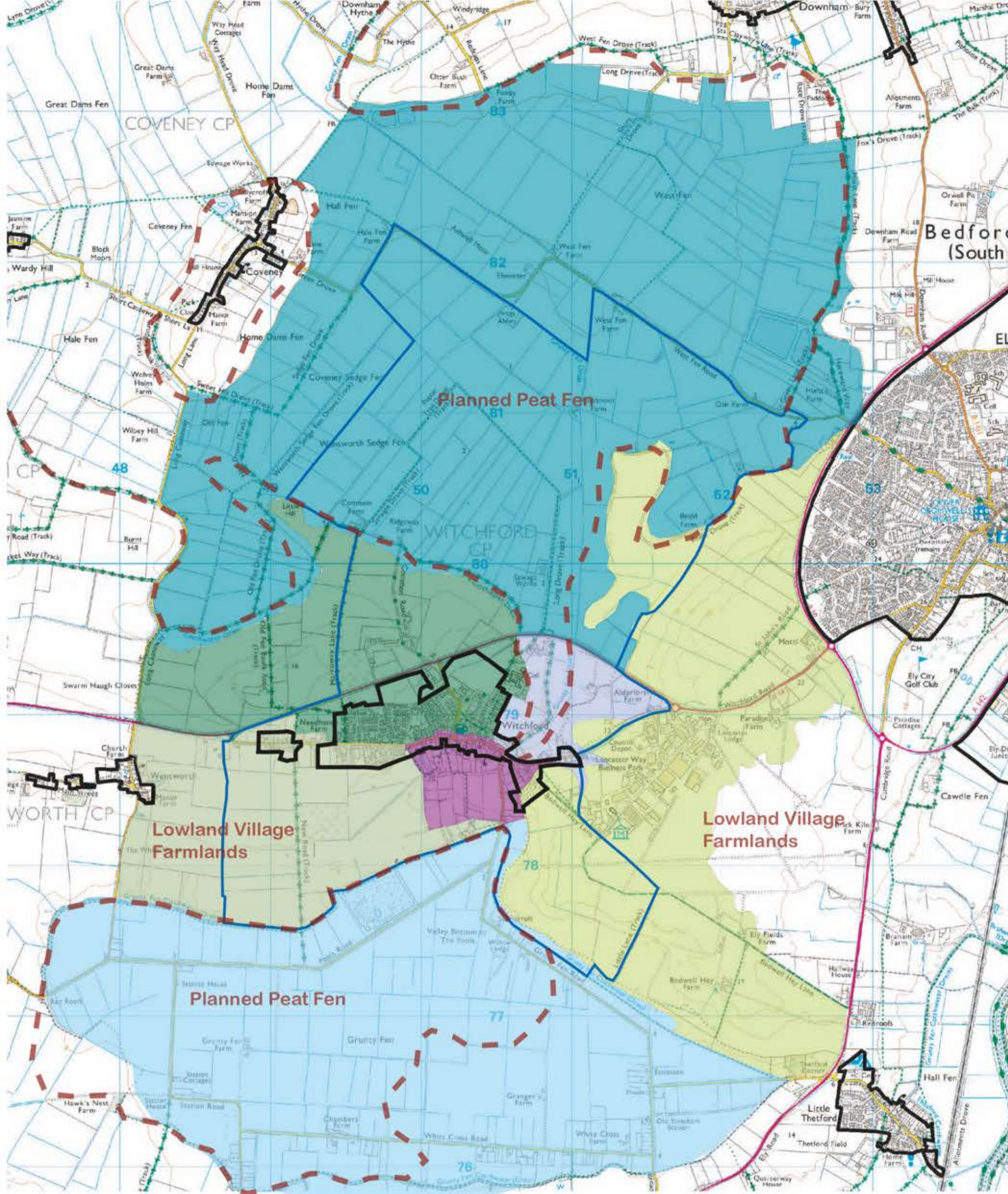
### ***Planned Peat Fen***

3.4.3 The key characteristics of this landscape type defined in the East of England typology include:





- expansive low lying (often below sea level) landscape with a distinctively flat landform
- network of drainage ditches
- uniform and low-lying landscape, characterised by drained fenland, supporting a mosaic of wetland habitats including fens, reedbed, and wet woodland
- intensively farmed arable landscape
- limited to no tree cover - patches of scrub and conifer belts around farmsteads
- long straight roads with 90 degree bends on dykes above arable fen fields
- occasional pump houses
- planned geometric landscape with large fields defined by straight ditches defined in 18th and 19th centuries
- sparse settlement pattern limited to isolated farmsteads
- quiet, remote landscape with dominant large skies
- flat horizontal terrain gives rise to simple long distance views where vertical features assume significant visual prominence

## **3.5 Local Character Areas**

3.5.1 To supplement these character areas/types and in order to draw out local variations in character, this assessment has defined a further seven local character areas which are geographically specific and unique and are illustrated on Figure 2. These character areas consider Witchford settlement and its landscape context together articulating how the current built up areas relate to the landscape setting. The character areas help to describe the variety of character found within the Neighbourhood Plan area and local sense of place. A summary description of each character area is provided below. These character areas provide the framework for the detailed analysis and assessment within section 5.0 of this report.

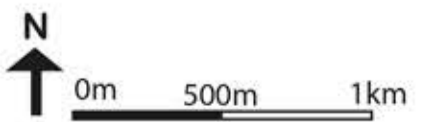


**Key**

-  Neighbourhood Plan Area
-  Settlement Limit
-  Landscape Types
-  Local Landscape Areas
-  Grunty Fen
-  West Fen
-  Common Side
-  Witchford Southern Slopes
-  Witchford Strip Pastures
-  Sandpit Drove Valley
-  Island of Ely

Witchford Neighbourhood Plan  
Landscape Appraisal

**Figure 2: Landscape Character**



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### **Grunty Fen**



3.5.2 This character area lies to the south of the Neighbourhood Plan area and comprises a flat open agricultural landscape which forms an important setting to the fenland islands that surround it. Notable characteristics of this landscape include:

- Open low-lying arable landscape below 5m AOD.
- Relatively small area of fenland defined by surrounding fen islands of Little Thetford, Stretham and Witchford.
- Former marsh drained in the mid nineteenth century resulting in a geometric pattern of drainage ditches which divide medium to large scale fields.
- Straight roads with right angled bends and undulating surface.
- Glimpsed views to large sheds on Lancaster Way Business Park and housing development in the west of Witchford.
- Grunty Fen Catchwater Drain defines outer edge of area.
- Area defines the edge of the fen island and performs an important landscape setting to the village which reinforces sense of place.

### **West Fen**



3.5.3 This character area lies in the north of the Neighbourhood Plan area and extends beyond its boundary. It forms low lying flat agricultural land between the island on which Witchford sits and that of the settlements of Coveney, Little Downham and Ely. Key characteristics of this landscape include:

- Open, expansive flat arable farmland with few hedgerows or trees
- Former area of marsh drained in the mid 17th century

- Views to surrounding higher land/islands
- Linear road network with right angle bends and undulating surface
- Geometric pattern of drainage ditches divide fields
- Isolated farmhouses with some historic barns and contrasting modern farm buildings
- Village of Witchford not visible from this landscape although industrial units on northern side of island are evident
- Former smock mill located within this area
- Northern part of area falls within the Functional Land Impact Risk Zone for the Ouse Washes Goose and Swan population.
- Exceptional quintessential views to Ely Cathedral along West Fen Road

### ***Common Side***



3.5.4 This character area includes the highest land of the Witchford fen island and the northern setting to the village. Key characteristics relevant to this area include:

- Gently sloping land to the north of Witchford village ranging from c. 16m AOD to 5m AOD
- Northern slopes comprise arable farmland within medium to large scale fields with some hedgerows and trees but often no enclosure
- Large commercial units associated with Sedgeway Industrial Park and Ashley Park
- Elevated views northwards across fenland to surrounding fen islands and settlements
- Area bisected by the A142 by-pass
- Higher land immediately north of the A142 forms a backdrop and setting to the settlement
- Northern village edge is set back from A142 and indented although intervening land often appears unkempt
- Housing predominately dates to second half of 20th century forming cul-de-sac estates
- Historic lanes and drove routes cut across area connecting village with fen to the north and offering recreational routes and sense of history
- Memorable views from eastern side towards Ely Cathedral

### **Witchford Southern Slopes**



3.5.5 This character area lies to the south of the village and forms the south facing slopes of the Witchford fen island. Key characteristics relevant to this area include:

- Gently sloping land on southern side of Witchford Island ranging from c. 13m AOD to c. 5m AOD
- Arable farmland within medium to large scale fields with some areas of orchard
- Village comprises modern housing and loose pattern of individual properties along Sutton Road with notable gaps in building line
- Elevated views from higher slopes southwards across Grunty Fen
- Village edge is visually prominent where it lies close to break in slope when viewed from south

### **Witchford Historic Core and Strip Pastures**



3.4.6 This character area lies immediately south of the main historic core of the village on south facing slopes. Key characteristics relevant to this area include:

- Historic core of the village centred around the church and former ford crossing
- Historic former strip fields enclosed by hedgerows giving rise to long linear fields extending from the village edge to Grunty Fen
- Gently sloping south facing land ranging from c. 10m AOD to 5m AOD
- Land use is pasture and woodland
- Hedgerows, woodland copses and small fields give rise to an intimate and enclosed character with some views out from elevated locations
- Glimpsed views to historic buildings within village
- Squat tower of church is a local landmark

- Main street has a sinuous form coupled with changes in elevations and historic buildings gives rise to a strong sense of place

### ***Sandpit Drove Valley***



3.5.7 This character area lies to the northeast of the historic core of the village and is associated with a small valley between the Witchford island and main island of Ely. Key characteristics relevant to this area include:

- Gentle valley sides ranging from c. 10m to 3m AOD separating Witchford Island from the main Isle of Ely
- Topography and vegetation give rise to intimate and more enclosed character
- Rural character with mixture of pasture (some horse paddocks) and arable
- Glimpsed views to the properties within village
- Former area of ford which crossed the Main Street
- Memorable views of hexagonal tower of Ely cathedral
- Wetland vegetation associated with drains (Grundy Fen Drain) and ponds
- Area forms an important gap between the Lancaster Way Business Park and Witchford Village and is part designated a Green Wedge within the emerging Local Plan

### ***Island of Ely***



3.5.8 This character area lies to the east of the Neighbourhood Plan area and forms rising land as part of the wider Isle of Ely. Key characteristics relevant to this area include:

- Gentle slopes (ranging from c. 22m AOD to 5m AOD) and a shoulder of flatter elevated land around 15m AOD

- Former RAF airfield with remnant features still legible e.g. concrete runways and nissen huts
- Lancaster Way Business Park covers northwestern part of former airfield comprising large scale industrial buildings
- Open arable farmland with gappy hedgerows affording elevated views into lower lying areas beyond
- Memorable views to Ely Cathedral
- Eastern edge of business park is open and stark.

## 4: Detailed Analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 This section seeks to establish more detailed baseline data on village character and its landscape setting. Consideration is first given to the current settlement form and setting. Secondly, gateways are considered in terms of how they affect perceptions of arrival and distinctiveness. Thirdly, landmarks and key views in and out of the village are identified and described. These are illustrated on Figure 3. Finally an analysis of green spaces is given focusing specifically on two areas of open space which have not been identified in the emerging Local Plan as Local Green Space (LGS). Consideration is given as to whether the areas merit designation along with possible alternative approaches to ensuring protection of their values and special qualities.

### 4.2 Settlement Form and Setting

- 4.2.1 Witchford village is a typical fenland settlement in that it is primarily located on the south facing slopes of a low hill surrounded by open fenland farmland and has historically comprised a linear arrangement of dwellings and farms along the road which connected Ely to March. At right angles to this route are 'drove roads' and lanes which connected the settlement to the wider fen/common. The village is unusual for two reasons, firstly in its proximity to Ely and secondly its historic focus on a shallow valley which separates the wider Isle of Ely from the lower, smaller island on which the village sits. The subtle changes in topography and arrangement/hierarchy of linear routes has shaped the form and feel of the village and also effects the gateways. The A142 has had a relatively small influence on settlement gateways and continues to be perceived as separate from the village.
- 4.2.2 Variations in the character of the built form are highlighted in the landscape character areas noted above. In simple terms there are three areas of distinct built form:
- Firstly the **historic core** where there is a concentration of historic buildings built in traditional yellow brick and local vernacular styles reflecting rural cottages, farmhouses. Buildings often sit at the edge of the pavement along Main Street, and are predominately one plot deep, creating a clearly defined streetscape.
  - Secondly there is an area of linear development along Sutton Road comprising a **dispersed pattern of** historic farm buildings/rural cottages separated by more recent infill dwellings and notable areas of open space/agricultural land. Dwellings are often set back from the road with front garden plots and the character of Sutton Road is rural with grass verges, hedges and trees.

- Thirdly there is an area of **infill estate development** which has established in the second half of the 20th century to the north of Main Street. In these areas houses have a visual uniformity and are arranged in cul-de-sac road layouts. Successive housing schemes are often poorly connected with one another reducing ease of movement through the settlement and resulting in some areas feeling disconnected. Some are higher density than the village historic core.

4.2.3 There are areas where the wider landscape setting of the settlement is readily perceived from within the built up area. In these locations the wider landscape can be said to penetrate the built form. These areas are particularly valued for helping to reinforce the small scale, rural character and location of the village and its historic origins and are illustrated on Figure 3.

### 4.3 Gateways

4.3.1 Two types of gateway have been identified as part of this study. The first is the initial gateway into the settlement which marks the start of built form. Often this type of gateway occurs where there is more recent 20<sup>th</sup> century development on the outskirts of the settlement along main routes or where new road junctions have been created. These gateways may or may not have a strong character or sense of place.

4.3.2 The second gateway is that into the historic core of the settlement. This gateway marks the arrival at an area which has antiquity reflected in the built form, vernacular architecture or street pattern/spaces.

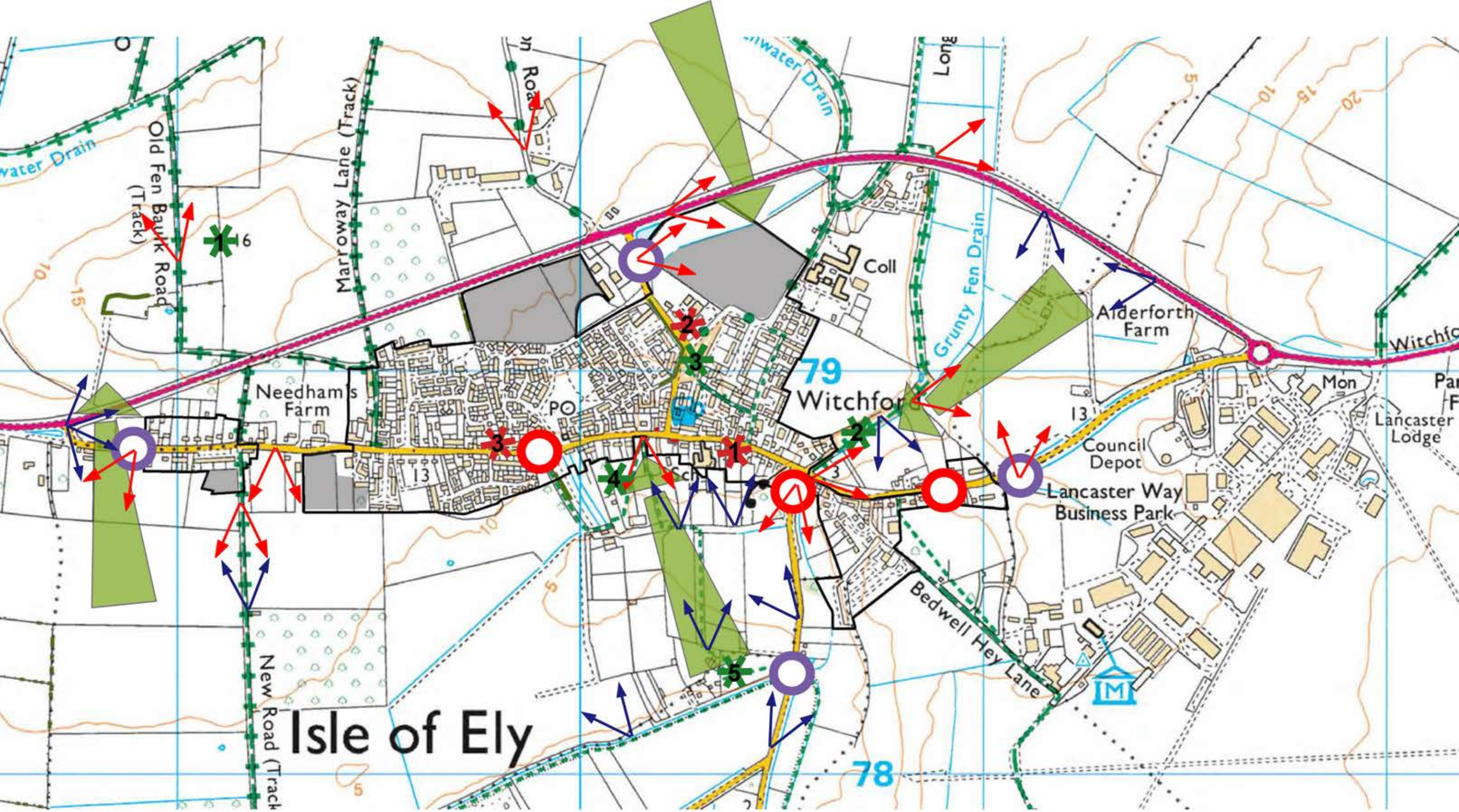
4.3.3 The gateways defined in this study are illustrated on Figure 3. Key findings are as follows:

- Gateways occur at the western and eastern ends of the village and also to the north along Common Road and to the south along Grunty Fen Road.
- The distance between the initial settlement gateway and the historic core gateway is relatively short giving rise to the perception that the settlement is compact and has a strong sense of place with little indistinct peripheral suburban development.
- Gateways are not defined by road junctions or roundabouts. As a result the settlement retains a rural character with junctions to subsidiary routes occurring within the fabric of the settlement.






### 4.4 Landmarks and Key Views

4.4.1 Key features which contribute to sense of place and orientation have been identified and are illustrated on Figure 3. They include the following:

- St Andrew's Church



**Key**

-  Settlement Limit
-  Gateways
-  Historic Gateway
-  Views Towards Settlement
-  Views Out to Wider Landscape

-  **Built Features**
  1. St Andrew's Church
  2. The Belhams and Worcesters
  3. Baptist Church
-  **Landscape Features**
  1. Little Hill
  2. Sandpit Drove
  3. Common
  4. Millennium Wood
  5. Old Recreation Ground and Woods

-  Landscape Extending into Village
-  Committed Development

**Witchford Neighbourhood Plan  
Landscape Appraisal**

**Figure 3: Analysis**



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- The Belhams and Worcesters<sup>2</sup>
- Baptist Church
- Little Hill
- Sandpit Drove
- Common Open Space
- Millennium Wood
- Old Recreation Ground and Woods

4.4.2 Views are critical in defining and reinforcing sense of place and local distinctiveness, connecting places where people live with the wider environment and landmarks which can aid orientation.

4.4.3 The position of the village on the south facing slopes means that from the settlement, views outwards are primarily to the south with the exception of those around Sandpit Drove. Similarly views towards the settlement from the wider landscape are mainly from the south or from the A142.

4.4.4 The key views are illustrated on Figure 3 and described briefly below:

**Views from the edge of the village looking south:** These views are from elevated positions looking out across the wider fen landscape to the south. Views are often vistas from within the built form or from public rights of way which run close to the existing urban edge. These views reinforce the rural context and origins of the settlement and connect it to the fen landscape which forms its wider setting. Close to the historic core these views may be intermittent and channelled by vegetation due to the smaller scale field enclosure pattern which is typical of the immediate setting of the village. In contrast views from the settlement edge in the west are more open giving rise to wider panoramas.

**Views from the edge of the village looking north and east:** These views occur from the junction of the A142 and Sutton Road and are towards the rising land and highest point of the island on which Witchford sits (Little Hill). In these views the rising land forms an important landscape backdrop to the village. Further east the views from the A142 are in a northeasterly direction towards Ely Cathedral and the rising slopes of the main Isle of Ely. These views are memorable and noted as quintessential views and approaches to Ely. Beyond the A142 there are views from the north facing slopes looking northwards towards West Fen and Coveney.

**Views towards the village from the south:** From the wider landscape there are views back to the village from Grunty Fen Road and Pools Road as well as from public rights of way e.g. New Road (track). These views are from areas of lower elevation. The built edge is not prominent in these views, although housing along Ward Way is most visually prominent due to its elevated position on the edge of sloping land and use of white render. Elsewhere development is either set back away from the main slopes or filtered from view due to intervening vegetation.

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<sup>2</sup> Although these are rural farm buildings they make an important contribution to the street scene and reinforce the rural character of the village.

**Views towards the village from the north:** There are no views of the village from the north and from West Fen. This is because the village is located on the south facing slopes to the south of the A142. There are however wide ranging views of Sedgeway Business Park and Ashley Park. Whilst the single storey buildings are not especially noticeable taller buildings stand out and appear large in scale. Their light colour material also increases visibility.

## 4.5 Green Spaces

- 4.5.1 NPPF (2018) Section 8 enables local communities, through the development of the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans, to identify green areas for special protection that are particularly important to them.
- 4.5.2 Local Green Space (LGS) designation must include land which is locally special offering unique benefits to the local community. It may not be appropriate for some areas or open space to be designated. The NPPF sets out the criteria for designating LGS Sites which can include areas which are:
- a. *in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;*
  - b. *demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and*
  - c. *local in character and is not an extensive tract of land'.*
- 4.5.3 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), introduced in 2014, provides additional support and guidance to complement the original NPPF. The PPG states that *'Areas that may be considered for designation as Local Green Space may be crossed by public rights of way. There is no need to designate linear corridors as Local Green Space simply to protect rights of way, which are already protected under other legislation'* (Paragraph 018).
- 4.5.4 East Cambridgeshire District Council (ECDC) Local Green Spaces Report November 2017 undertook a review of Local Green Spaces. Table 1 of the report sets out the criteria used for determining if an area warrants designation. The criteria reflect those of the NPPF with the addition of a further criterion (criterion 4) which involves checking each site against certain information, such as planning history, existing designations and potential conflict with emerging allocations.
- 4.5.5 ECDC set out their interpretation of the criteria. Proximity was interpreted as within 400m or a 5 minute walk of the local community and not isolated or distant. Extensive tract was interpreted as not swathes of open countryside or long distance linear routes. Interpretation of special qualities was as follows:
- 4.5.6 **Beauty:** enhances local character, adds to the setting of a building or groups of buildings. For this criteria the following aspects were considered:

- The visual attractiveness of the site as a whole;
- The contribution the site makes to landscape or townscape character and local distinctiveness;
- The contribution the site makes to the physical form and layout of a settlement or neighbourhood.
- Whether the site offers long views through or beyond a settlement or neighbourhood or views of locally valued landmarks.

4.5.7 **Historic significance:** listed building near or on area/open space, provide the setting of and/or views of listed building or historic assets such as a war memorial whose setting needs protecting. Also historic landscape features, such as ancient trees or old hedgerows. For this criteria the following aspects were considered:

- Whether the site provides a setting for heritage assets or other locally valued landmarks;
- Whether the site contains any historical features, such as ancient trees;
- Whether the site is associated with a historical figure or event;
- Whether there are any regular, historical events such as a village fete that are regularly held on the site;
- The Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record.

4.5.8 **Recreational value:** play area, allotments, informal spaces in housing estates, sports and playing fields (not already covered by a designation). For this criteria the variety of recreational opportunities, formal or informal was considered.

4.5.9 **Tranquillity:** spaces that are calm and allow for quiet enjoyment and reflection. Tranquillity Mapping prepared by the CPRE was used to identify whether a site is located in an area that can be described as tranquil. Sites need to demonstrate a feeling of remoteness and quiet contemplation for the majority of the site and a general lack of artificial noise such as road traffic or nearby industry.

4.5.10 **Richness of its wildlife:** provides for biodiversity, geodiversity, known protected species, and/or priority habitats. Many open spaces offer some benefit to wildlife. For a site to meet this criterion, there must be evidence that it is rich in wildlife, such as records, ecological evidence or expert advice. Sites already designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, National or Local Nature Reserve will not be considered appropriate for LGS designation as these are considered to be adequately protected by national legislation and other policies in the plan. Other sites to be considered could:

- Include a priority habitat as defined in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biodiversity Action Plan;
- Include important landscape features, such as veteran trees, ancient woodland or ancient hedgerows.

4.5.11 Of the open spaces put forward by Witchford Parish Council (16 in total), 7 were considered worthy of designation and are illustrated on Figure 1. These included:

Site reference (refer Figure 1)	Local Green Space (LGS) reference and site name
a	LGS4 - Field End and Wheats Close
b	LGS1 - Victoria Green
c	LGS7 - Millennium Wood and Horsefield
d	LGS6 - The Common
e	LGS3 - Allotments, Manor Road
f	LGS5 - Allotments, Broadway

4.5.12 However a number of areas to the south of Witchford (including Holts End Drive, Edna's Wood, Fairchild Wood and the Old Recreation Ground and Community Orchard) and Sandpit Drove to the northeast of Witchford village were considered to not meet the criteria. This Landscape Assessment has therefore reviewed these latter areas to determine if there is additional evidence which may be relevant to their designation as LGS. This review has drawn on landscape assessment and additional data collected by the local community in the summer of 2018 through a community consultation where the views of the local community and users of these spaces were asked why they value them.

#### ***Green Space to the South of Witchford***

4.5.13 The local green space to the south of Witchford comprises a sequence of physically connected land parcels. Two of these Millennium Wood and The Horsefield were found to meet the criteria for designation as LGS. The other areas were not found suitable for designation. Importantly these areas were put forward by the Parish and considered by ECDC as individual parcels and were not considered as a single entity, which in reality, is how they are perceived, experienced and function. This assessment/review therefore considers Holts End Drove, Edna's Wood, Fairchild Wood, and Old Recreation Ground as well as Toad Corner and Kevin's Place (which are two additional areas not previously considered) as a single entity but also considers the wider landscape context in which they sit. These areas connect to The Horsefield and into the village via footpath 1 and along Grunty Fen Road creating a popular circular route. All lie within 500m of the urban edge and are easily accessed.

4.5.14 All of these areas fall within the Witchford Historic Core and Strip Pastures character area (refer to para 3.4.6 above) which comprises the land south of the historic core of the village where there are tangible patterns of former stripfields and piecemeal small scale enclosures, typically found on the fringes of fen island settlements, and rare within the context of Witchford. The area also reflects patterns of old routes i.e. Holts

End Drove. From this area there are views to the Church of St Andrews and the area forms a setting to the historic core of the village. The church views, the distinct enclosure patterns, old hedgerows, linear meadows, ponds, establishing woods and orchard all add to local distinctiveness and quality of the area. Witchford Open Space Group (OSG) is a community group of volunteers founded in 1989 which works for the conservation/people's enjoyment of the natural environment. It has worked extensively in the aforementioned areas including management of ponds, and hedge/woodland/orchard planting, much of which has taken place in the last 10 years. Those areas managed by OSG are increasing in biodiversity and nature conservation interest and collectively form an important area of green infrastructure which enhances healthy living.

- 4.5.15 A separate survey of local community views on the areas of open space was undertaken in August 2018. A range of responses were received and some examples of people's responses are provided below. The following quotes are from this survey and help to demonstrate the value placed in these open spaces by the local community:

*'For the sheer pleasure of safe open countryside in close proximity – a very precious village amenity indeed'*

*'The openness. The feeling of tranquillity. Lovely to have a green space in the centre of the village'*

*'You are in the country as soon as you walk through the gate, it is in the heart of the village. One day you can walk on your own and other there could be six or more people you bump into. Great for people's well-being chatting, putting the world to rights. We don't want neat path to walk on, we love to walk on the grass'*

*'I come for peace and quiet, to walk in the countryside – it is my favourite short walk in Cambridgeshire'*

- 4.5.16 It is clear therefore that this area of open space meets many of the criteria for Local Green Space Designation. However, it is acknowledged that it comprises some linear areas of landscape which also rely on wider privately owned land/productive agricultural land as part of their character and enjoyment. Whilst the designation of Millennium Wood and The Horsefield as Local Green Space is fully supported, the wider landscape to the south and east is also considered to be important as an area of historic interest which is valued for its green infrastructure. Consideration should be given to the designation of these areas as LGS or alternatively the wider area might be considered for designation as a Local Green Infrastructure Target Area or Protected Open Space in that it contributes to local amenity, character and green infrastructure collectively.

#### **Sandpit Drove**

- 4.5.17 This area was put forward for consideration by ECDC but was not recommended for designation as LGS in the emerging Local Plan. The area was found to lie close to

the community and have recreational value. However, it was considered to comprise a public footpath which is already protected as a public right of way.

- 4.5.18 Whilst the area does contain a public right of way it comprises an old drove way/green corridor defined by mature hedgerows and hedgerow trees and containing a linear swath of grassland and pond. This area is actively managed for wildlife and its public amenity value by local volunteers. These linear drove route landscapes are typical of the fen landscape (as highlighted in the Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines). From the initial length of the drove alongside the Grunty Fen Drain, there are views out to the wider shallow valley landscape which separates the Isle of Ely from Witchford island. In these views the tower of Ely Cathedral can be seen and adds to local distinctiveness and enjoyment. Further north the existing vegetation creates an enclosed and intimate experience which is in contrast to so many experiences of the wider landscape surrounding the village.
- 4.5.19 The local community survey, undertaken in August 2018, revealed the following value placed in this area of open space by the local community:

*'I am disabled and often struggle to walk. I can park next to electricity station and immediately walk'*

*'There are lots of wild flowers and an area which is managed by a hard working team to keep it nice. The bench is convenient and being able to rest is inviting to me and others to meet by and chat. All giving it its valuable rural calming feel'*

*'It's totally different from walking in the built up area of the village'*

*'It's peacefulness, the nature and wildlife'*

*'Tranquil. Views towards Ely Cathedral. I feel truly in the countryside'*

- 4.5.20 There is therefore evidence that this area is of value to the local community and meets a number of the criteria for LGS designation. However the area is also identified in the emerging Local Plan as an area of Green Wedge and this is considered further in below.

## **4.6 Green Wedges**

- 4.6.1 Green Wedges are open areas around and between settlements and are defined in the emerging local plan. The primary role of Green Wedges is defined in the local plan as:

*'to maintain the distinction between the countryside and built up area and protect the separate identity and character of individual settlements. Green Wedges may also provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation and access to the countryside'*

*Whilst the purpose of Green Wedges is to protect the open and undeveloped character of areas within them, it is not intended that they should operate as an absolute restriction on all development proposals. Certain types of development may be acceptable, so long as they are not detrimental to the character, role and function of the Green Wedge within which they are situated. This may include, for example, limited agricultural and nature conservation related development, or essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation uses.*

#### 4.6.2 The Green Wedge Policy states that:

*'Green Wedges, as indicated on the Policies Map, have been identified to fulfil the following functions and policy aims:*

- a. Preventing the merging of settlements, protecting their setting and preserving their separate identity, local character and historic character;*
- b. To guide development form, ensuring that as settlements grow, open space is incorporated within them;*
- c. Creation of a 'green lung' to offer communities a direct and continuous link to the open countryside beyond the urban area;*
- d. Provision of an accessible recreation resource, with formal or informal opportunities, close to where people live. Within the areas identified as Green Wedges, planning permission will only be granted where it can be demonstrated that the development is not contrary or detrimental to the above functions and aims.*

*Development proposals within a Green Wedge will be expected to have regard to:*

- e. The need to maintain the open and undeveloped character of the Green Wedge and the physical separation between Witchford and Lancaster Way Business Park;*
- f. Opportunities to improve the quality of green infrastructure within the Green Wedge; and*
- g. The maintenance and enhancement of the Public Rights of Way network and links to the countryside, to retain and enhance public access where appropriate to the function of the Green Wedge.*

*Development proposals adjacent to a Green Wedge will be expected to demonstrate that:*

- h. They do not adversely impact on the function of the Green Wedge, taking into account scale, siting, design, materials and landscape treatment;*
- i. They have considered linkages to and enhancements of the adjacent Green Wedge'.*

[emphasis added]

#### 4.6.3 The Local Plan designates two Green Wedges adjoining Witchford village which are shown on Figure 1. Whilst the purpose of Green Wedges is to protect the open and undeveloped character of areas within them, certain types of development may be acceptable within them, so long as they are not detrimental to the character, role and function of the Green Wedge within which they are situated i.e. development associated with agricultural, nature conservation or outdoor enjoyment.

#### 4.6.4 The Plan states that

*'Witchford Green Wedges are designated to prevent the coalescence of Witchford and Lancaster Way Business Park and to guide future development of the village through ensuring open spaces are incorporated which offer a direct and continuous link to the open countryside'.*

- 4.6.5 It would seem therefore that the area of Green Wedge to the north of the Business Park is to prevent coalescence between the business park and village while that along Sandpit Drove is to retain the open space in any future development. Significantly, this assessment has found that the shallow valley between the two areas of Green Wedge forms a distinctive area of landscape which extends into the village. Whilst lying between the two areas of Green Wedge it arguably performs the same function in forming an open physical gap between Witchford and Lancaster Way Business Park and in offering direct and continuous links, both physical and visual, to the open countryside. These perceptions are experienced along the public right of way associated with Sandpit Drove and along the A142 and Main Street. A loss of openness between the two areas of Green Wedge would seriously undermine the ability of these areas to meet their objectives. It is recommended therefore that consideration is given to the extension of the Green Wedge designation across the valley landscape. This would more accurately reflect the character and function of the valley landscape and be a more logical extent of the Green Wedge helping to improve its effectiveness as a whole.



## 5: Detailed Assessment of Peripheral Areas

### 5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 This section of the report considers peripheral areas around the settlement in terms of their suitability to accommodate development. Within each of these areas there may be sites which have already been approved for housing, are allocated for development in the emerging local plan or form current applications. This assessment is from a landscape perspective and does not take account of other issues or constraints which will also affect an area's ability to accommodate development.

5.1.2 The areas comprise the local character areas illustrated on Figure 2. Each area is described in terms character and context followed by an evaluation of sensitivity and capacity to accommodate housing growth in the context of the character of the village and its setting. The assessment draws on all baseline data set out in this report.

### 5.2 Analysis Tables

<p><b>Common Side</b></p> <p><b>Relevant Housing Sites/allocations:</b> Two housing allocations and one planning permission between the existing urban edge and the A142. Employment allocation associated with Sedgeway Industrial Park and Ashley Park.</p>
<p><b>Context and Character</b></p> <p>This area lies to the north of Witchford settlement on rising land and forms the highest land in the Parish at 16m AOD. It has a distinct north and south face the former affording views out across West Fen while the latter relating more closely to the A142 by pass and the urban edge of the settlement. Historically this area has comprised common land (remnants of which remain), orchards and temporary accommodation for service men of the Witchford Airfield. Historic drove routes connected the settlement to West Fen and are still evident as public rights of way and tracks. This area has seen notable change in the latter half of the 20th century with the growth of modern residential housing, commercial development, a school and the construction of the A142 by pass. Today land use is a mix of rough pasture close to the settlement and arable north of the A142. The existing urban edge is filtered by vegetation and has an indented edge, although some land parcels between the urban edge and road have an unkempt feel and are allocated for housing development. The village feels separate from the bypass and development sits back away from junctions with it. This means that the A142 has not resulted in the creation of new gateways into the settlement which are otherwise located at the start of development, some distance from the road. On the northern slopes commercial development has occurred at Sedgeway Industrial Park and Ashley Park comprising commercial/industrial buildings.</p>
<p><b>Key Landscape Sensitivities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open exposed north facing slopes which are highly visible from the wider Parish and beyond</li> <li>• Rising land north of Witchford forms a setting to the settlement, reinforcing sense of place</li> <li>• Memorable views of Ely Cathedral when travelling east on A142</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drove roads have an intimate historic character providing access to the wider landscape and memorable views.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities for Development</b></p> <p>A number of sites are allocated for residential and commercial development in this area and it is therefore likely to see considerable change. Beyond these developments the area has limited scope for further commercial / industrial development associated with the existing business parks or residential development between the existing urban edge and A142. This is due to visual sensitivity of the north facing slopes and risk of intensification of development along the A142 corridor. There is potential for development to be perceived as 'enveloping' the road which would undermine perceptions of rural village character and merging of the village and industrial areas to the north, thus extending the village uncharacteristically onto the northern facing slopes of the island. Care should be taken to retain an indented urban edge and sense of separation from the A142 including retention of pasture fields and woodland between the built edge and the road. Furthermore the rural character of Sedge Way which is derived from its adjacent pastures, remnant orchard, grass verge and hedgerows and farm buildings along its margins, should be retained. The creation of an 'urban' gateway into the village from the A142 should be avoided.</p>
<p><b>Guidance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that any new development on the northern slopes comprises buildings which are smaller in scale than those currently built and the use of dark non reflective building materials.</li> <li>• Ensure new commercial development delivers new hedgerow/tree planting to build up overlapping lines of vegetation on the northern slopes, filtering views to development associated with existing business parks and reinforcing the distinction between island and wider fen.</li> <li>• Seek removal of non native planting around business parks and replace with native woodland.</li> <li>• Seek to retain an open landscape buffer and separation between the village edge and the A142 - avoid development which sits close to the road or extends north of the road.</li> <li>• Avoid the creation of a new gateways into Witchford from the A142 through prominent building at junctions, new signage or creation of roundabouts.</li> <li>• Retain rural character of Sedge Way.</li> <li>• Seek to improve the streetscape character of Field End through new tree planting especially with new junctions into development sites to the north.</li> <li>• Consider the creation of new orchards on land between the settlement edge and A142, especially north of Newlands Farm.</li> <li>• Improve the physical footpath connections from the existing urban edge across the A142 through creation of safer pedestrian crossings.</li> </ul>

## Witchford Southern Slopes

### Relevant Housing Sites/allocations:

Number of small scale or individual housing sites with planning permission.

### Context and Character

This area lies between Wentworth and the historic core of Witchford. The current settlement limit boundaries in the emerging Local Plan show a separate area of development along Sutton Road. In the early 20th century, development along this road comprised Newlands Farm and a loose collection of rural dwellings. Over the second half the 20th century and early 21st century infill housing has occurred along the road, although there remain notable gaps between dwellings comprising arable and pasture fields and affording views out of the village to the wider countryside. Sutton Road retains a rural character with grass verges and hedgerows and with a notable concentration of street trees and vegetation in property boundaries and behind properties e.g. north of Needham's Farm. This gives rise to perceptions of a lower density of development than further east and settlement fringe character. The construction of the A142 and associated junction with Sutton Road, coupled with

recent housing on the edge of the settlement, has influenced the western gateway into the settlement which is currently weakly defined.

Beyond the settlement edge to the south the land forms a plateau of elevated land which then drops gently towards the fen beyond the 10m contour. Where more recent housing development has occurred behind Main Street close to the 10m contour (Ward Way), it is more visible from land to the south, appearing on the skyline. However, for the most part development is set back on these slopes and is not visible from the wider countryside to the south. However new housing development in this vicinity may give rise to a more visually evident urban edge.

#### **Key Landscape Sensitivities**

- Land beyond Witchford to the west performs an important physical and visual separation from the village of Wentworth.
- Rural characteristics of Sutton Road.
- Visual sensitivity of the land south of the urban edge when viewed from the wider landscape.
- Rural loose arrangement of dwellings, open agricultural land penetrating the urban area, with views out.
- At the western edge of the village dwellings have a loose arrangement and are set back from the A142 junction.

#### **Opportunities for Development**

There are some opportunities for new residential development to the south of Sutton Road and along New Road (track) in association with structural planting which could create a soft urban edge and wooded skyline helping to reinforce the contrast between the island and wider fen landscape and limiting visual intrusion of development from the landscape to the south. Care should be taken to ensure new development does not result in the loss of 'gaps' between built development or loss of key views from Sutton Road to the south and to 'Little Hill' to the north. Opportunities exist to strengthen the gateway and approach into the settlement along Sutton Road after the junction with the A142.

#### **Guidance**

- Create new strong gateway to settlement through the planting of new street trees and creation of open space/community orchard and retain views outwards to the north and south avoiding the extension of development closer to the A142 along Sutton Road.
- Any new development to the south of Sutton Road and along New Road (track) should be a) kept back from the break in slope b) be accompanied by overlapping lines of planting/hedgerow restoration to limit visual impacts from the wider landscape to the south and create an appropriate soft edge, c) be no more than 2 storeys high and d) use materials which have low reflective qualities.
- Retain open 'gaps' between development which are either visually connected to the wider landscape or reinforce perceptions of a loose low density character typical of the western part of the village.
- Seek opportunities to create new orchards on the edge of the settlement.

### **Witchford Historic Core and Strip Pastures**

#### **Relevant Housing Sites/allocations:**

Planning application 18/01336/OUM

#### **Context and Character**

This area comprises the historic core of Witchford village which extends along Main Street and focuses around the crossing of the former stream/ford from which Witchford is thought to get its name.

Buildings in this part of the village are predominately historic, a number of which are listed. Dwellings include terraces of cottages built at 'back of pavement' with no front garden plots, and larger scale houses or former farmhouses set within grounds. Main Street has a distinctive sinuous character descending down the hill towards the former ford crossing before rising again onto the Witchfrod island. Some buildings act as local landmarks and are prominent in views along Main Street, and at road junctions with Common Road and Grunty Fen Road, adding to local distinctiveness. In between the historic properties there is some recent housing infill but the predominant character of this part of the village is historic.

To the south the land slopes down from Main Street to the wider fen landscape forming the southern slopes of the island on which the village sits. The enclosure pattern on these slope reflects the small scale strip field enclosures associated with the rear of properties. These enclosures do not survive elsewhere in the setting of the village and in the context of the Parish are rare. They are of historical interest forming a distinctive setting to the settlement and reinforce the distinction between the character of the island and wider fen landscape.

The Horsefield is a meadow which connects the core of the village with the wider landscape and enables countryside to extend into the built up area. It offers an opportunity to view the wider fen landscape from Main Street, as such it reinforces the 'island' position of the village surrounded by fen and its rural 'village' character.

#### **Key Landscape Sensitivities**

- The distinctive qualities of this part of the village relate to the concentration and integrity of historic buildings some of which are landmarks and the sinuous and undulating nature of Main Street.
- Highly valued views from Main Street southwards towards the wider Fen across The Horsefield.
- The small scale strip field enclosure which extend to the south of the built edge add to local distinctiveness and are rare in the context of the village.
- This part of the village is well treed due to hedgerows and hedgerow trees and vegetation within rear property gardens such that the built edge of the settlement is not readily visible from the wider landscape to the south.

#### **Opportunities for Development**

Development in this area is likely to alter the relationship between the historic core of the village and its landscape setting and the small scale linear pastures which are a key characteristic immediately adjacent to the settlement edge. These qualities are tangible and easily appreciated through views from Main Street across The Horsefield and also from the public rights of way to the south of the village. The characteristics of this area should therefore be conserved and enhanced through land management and recreation initiatives for the benefit of the village community as a local asset and are sensitive to development.

#### **Guidance**

- Avoid back land development which severs or removes the open rural character of the strip fields which form a valued setting to the settlement.
- Seek opportunities to improve the management of hedgerows and hedgerow trees to reinforce and retain the strip field patterns
- Seek opportunities to improve the management of linear pastures to enhance grass sward diversity and avoid temporary subdivision of fields which can add visual clutter
- Retain open views across The Horsefield and avoid urbanising influences on these views such as the introduction of new roads, signage and lighting.
- Improve access and community involvement in land management and care for the area.

- Consider the reinstatement of orchards on the southern slopes.
- Improve connections between the school and Millennium Wood perhaps for use as Forest School.
- Avoid development within the historic core of the village which blocks views to distinctive buildings or undermines the integrity of the built character of Main Street.

## Sandpit Drove Valley

### Relevant Housing Sites/allocations:

None

### Context and Character

This area is associated with the shallow valley between the A142 and Main Street. The Grunty Fen Drain flows through this area, and there are a number of smaller field drains and ponds. This area is associated with the historic route of Sandpit Drove which is a public right of way. The varied topography of this area is a defining characteristic adding visual interest. There are views of Ely Cathedral to the northeast which add orientation and local distinctiveness.

Land use is predominately arable with some areas of pasture used for grazing horses and allotments close to Main Street. Development along Main Street is visible on the upper slopes of the valley, back clothed by trees along the road. Development to the west is also located on slightly higher land and is set back with playing fields associated with the school and an open arable field separating Sandpit Drove from the urban edge. There is some noise and visual intrusion from the A142 but this is limited. The area contains a couple of small farms - Alderforth and a mobile home park close to the A142 which is contained by substantial vegetation. From the A142 there are filtered views across this area to the large commercial/industrial buildings on Lancaster Way Business Park and the roundabout junction between the A142 and Business Park which is visually prominent and lit at night.

This area contains an area of Green Wedge designation in the Emerging Local Plan (focused specifically on Sandpit Drove) and a substantial part of the area also falls within the Quintessential Views of Ely.

### Key Landscape Sensitivities

- Distinctive valley topography
- Quintessential views to Ely Cathedral
- Historic drove route and nature conservation interest
- Important recreational route and rural character of value to the local community
- Important open rural landscape providing visual and physical separation between Lancaster Way Business Park and Witchford Village

### Opportunities for Development

There are opportunities for some limited residential development or school expansion associated with the existing urban edge to the south west of this area and potentially accessed off Meadow Close. Any development in this area would need to leave a landscape buffer with Sandpit Drove and keep close to the existing urban edge. It would require associated mitigation planting to ensure development does not visually intrude on the valley landscape or appear prominent. The wider valley and open slopes north of Main Street are sensitive to development due to their rural character, role in providing memorable views and as countryside penetrating the village.

### Guidance

- Retain the open rural character of this area and consider extension of the Green Wedge designation across the valley to include land between the two currently defined Green Wedge areas (as noted in section 4.6 above).

- Improve the current urban edge where properties back onto this area and there are areas of non native planting or abrupt edges of close board fencing which have a localised urbanising effect.
- Encourage hedgerow management and replanting to retain and improve the structure of the landscape and green infrastructure and filter views to the Lancaster Way Business Park from the A142.
- Continue to manage Sandpit Drove as a recreational route and enhance biodiversity of grassland, hedgerows and ponds within the area.
- Ensure that any new development on the fringes of this area is appropriately mitigated and that careful consideration is given to building heights and night lighting to keep intrusion of built form on this landscape to a minimum.
- Manage horse grazing and avoid sub division of fields and proliferation of associated structures which may have a cumulative urbanising effect.

## Island of Ely

### Relevant Housing Sites/allocations:

Enterprise Zone associated with the Lancaster Way Business Park - allocated for commercial/industrial development.

### Context and Character

This area lies to the east of Witchford Village and comprises higher land which defines the Isle of Ely and the approach to the city along the A142 Witchford Road. East of Witchford the Isle of Ely forms an open elevated plateau which in the Second World War accommodated the Witchford airfield. The remains of the airfield are evident in the landscape including remnant concrete runways and nissen huts which have to some extent been incorporated into the relatively recent establishment of the Lancaster Way Business Park. The large buildings on the business park are evident in views from Cambridge Road to the east and A142 to the west. Land slopes to the south and to the north west into areas of lower lying fen and part of the land falls within the Green Wedge designation which aims to maintain the sense of separation between Lancaster Way Business Park and Witchford village.

Lancaster Way Business Park is the district's major strategic employment area and a large part of the site has been designated an Enterprise Zone. The area is allocated for employment development within the emerging local plan and is divided into three areas Ely 2(a) existing business park, Ely 2(b) area suitable for further employment development and Ely 2(c) land available for further expansion of the business park.

### Key Landscape Sensitivities

- Historical significance of the former airfield in terms of the history of Witchford and Second World War with tangible elements remaining evident in the landscape adding to local distinctiveness
- Visual sensitivity of open slopes and plateau landscape which is often highly visible from surrounding lower lying areas
- Public rights of way which connect Witchford village with the wider landscape and business park.
- Open agricultural land which performs an important role in creating a physical and visual separation between Lancaster Way Business Park and Witchford Village and part of the approach into Witchford Village.

### Opportunities for Development

This area has already been identified for commercial development in the emerging Local Plan or as green wedge. There is little/no further opportunity for development.

#### **Guidance**

- Retain and enhance public rights of way around the perimeter of the former airfield and tangible connections to the history of the area.
- Seek the establishment of an appropriate landscape buffer to the business park avoiding urbanising influences such as chain link security fencing on recreational routes. Instead seek to establish a green recreational corridor which enhances enjoyment of the wider countryside and mitigates adverse effects of development.
- Ensure a strong masterplan for development within the Enterprise Zone to avoid ad hoc development with piecemeal landscape mitigation or structure. Landscaping associated with development should seek to optimise mitigation and work beyond the boundary of the Enterprise Zone with enhancement of the wider landscape ensuring development has a 'good fit' and delivers wider positive environmental gain.
- Establish a strategic landscape strategy for the enterprise zone and its implementation prior to the development of large scale commercial built form in order to minimise landscape and visual impacts.
- Ensure building heights are restricted in line with policy (max height of 5m) and non reflective building materials are used to reduce visual impacts.
- Retain the grass verges along Witchford Road and open fields to the south of the road which provide the rural approach to Witchford village following the A142 and Witchford roundabout.

## 6: Summary of Findings

### 6.1 Special Qualities to Conserve and Enhance

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

- The linear form of settlement on the mid slopes of Witchford Island with curving form of Main Street affording vistas to key buildings;
- Distinct hierarchy of routes from A142 by-pass, historic Main Street and right angled drove routes and lanes connecting the settlement with the wider fen;
- Close association between the historic core of the village and strip field pattern to the south;
- Small, open, rural valley forms a distinctive area to the north east of the village reinforcing sense of place;
- Loose arrangement of dwellings to the west along Sutton Road, with breaks in the built form, gives rise to a rural character;
- Village edges are predominately indented and organic in character;
- Remnant orchards within and on the margins of the settlement;
- Notable views out of the settlement from Main Street particularly to the south due to the drop in elevation towards Grunty Fen, reinforce the location of the village and perceptions of a rural community;
- Key built and natural landmarks such as churches/cathedral and fen islands reinforce sense of place and orientation within the wider landscape.

### 6.2 Changes to Avoid

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



- Large scale buildings on open elevated slopes which are visually prominent from the surrounding landscape;
- New housing on the southern edge of the village which is visible from surrounding lower land;
- Inappropriate building materials and sub-urban building forms;
- Urban and engineered road layouts which do not reflect the existing hierarchy of routes;
- High density and abrupt urban edges;
- Alterations to settlement gateways weakening sense of arrival and distinctiveness;
- Potential loss of key views to surrounding landmarks (including Ely Cathedral) and visual and physical connectivity between the village and wider landscape;
- Loss of hedgerows and remnant orchards;
- Loss of meadows/grassland and ponds.

### 6.3 Key Environmental Initiatives

6.3.1 The following environmental initiatives have been identified to help conserve and enhance the local distinctiveness of Witchford. They include:

- Enhancement of western gateway through improved structural planting to defined stronger edge to village, create a threshold and reduce visual intrusion of existing housing on approach along the A142. Protect open space and views to the wider landscape.
- Improve landscape interface between the urban edge and A142 with improved structural planting and retain views to Ely cathedral from eastern areas.
- Protect additional areas of green space including wide verge opposite Bedwell Hey Lane, gaps in built form along southern side of Sutton Road, historic strip enclosures south of historic village centre.
- Consider extension of Green Wedge to include whole of valley landscape to the northeast of the village.
- Retain rural character to Sedge Way including soft verge, hedgerows, farm buildings and orchard.

### 6.4 Management and Development Guidelines

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

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

- Improve urban edges where development forms a hard edge or is visually intrusive through additional planting as small woodlands or overlapping lines of vegetation;
- Open up views to the church so it can act as a stronger landmark;
- Retain a landscape buffer between the urban edge and the A142 and avoid new development being located close up against the edge of the by-pass;
- Improve pastures on island slopes and within the valley to the northeast of the village, strengthening landscape character;
- Ensure Witchford remains an island settlement and avoid expansion onto the northern slopes or onto low lying landscapes which surround it.
- Seek opportunities to improve the streetscape particularly where rear property boundaries form a poor quality edge to roads/lanes through planting initiatives and carefully sited new development;
- Manage and improve areas of open space to reflect rural character of the village and its wider context - reduce night lighting, urban street furniture and municipal management.

6.4.3 Development guidelines seek to inform new development and include the following:

- Avoid cul-de-sac developments which do not reflect lane hierarchy and form of the settlement;
- Seek always to ensure permeability through new housing areas, connecting any new development into the heart of the existing settlement;
- Avoid extending gateways into the wider landscape where new development is proposed - avoid the development of roundabouts at the junction of the settlement with major roads which are uncharacteristic and undermine the rural 'village' character of the settlement;
- Avoid cumulative effects of small housing schemes which collectively, over time, extend the urban edge and relate poorly to one another – seek wider masterplans and visions for broader areas linking in aspirations for open space, reinforcement of rural landscape setting, views and vistas, public rights of way/circular countryside walks and recreation;
- Avoid infill development which undermines the rural character of the village or connectivity to the wider landscape setting and which affects key sequential views along Main Street and lanes.

## 6.5 Conclusions

6.5.1 In conclusion this assessment has revealed that Witchford has some capacity to accommodate appropriately designed development. To ensure a good fit between new and old it is important that any new development seeks to conserve and enhance the character of the existing settlement in terms of urban form and its

relationship to the wider landscape setting. The settlement has a number of sensitivities related to its special qualities and as a result of this is most able to accommodate small scale developments in specific areas. There is also scope to protect further areas of Local Green Space and to widen the Green Wedge designation.

**Appendix 1**

Extract from Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines