Harborough Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Type 6: River Valley Slopes

Harborough District Council

Prepared by LUC
August 2024

LCT 6: River Valley Slopes

Figure 1.1: LCT 6: River Valley Slopes with component Landscape Character Areas

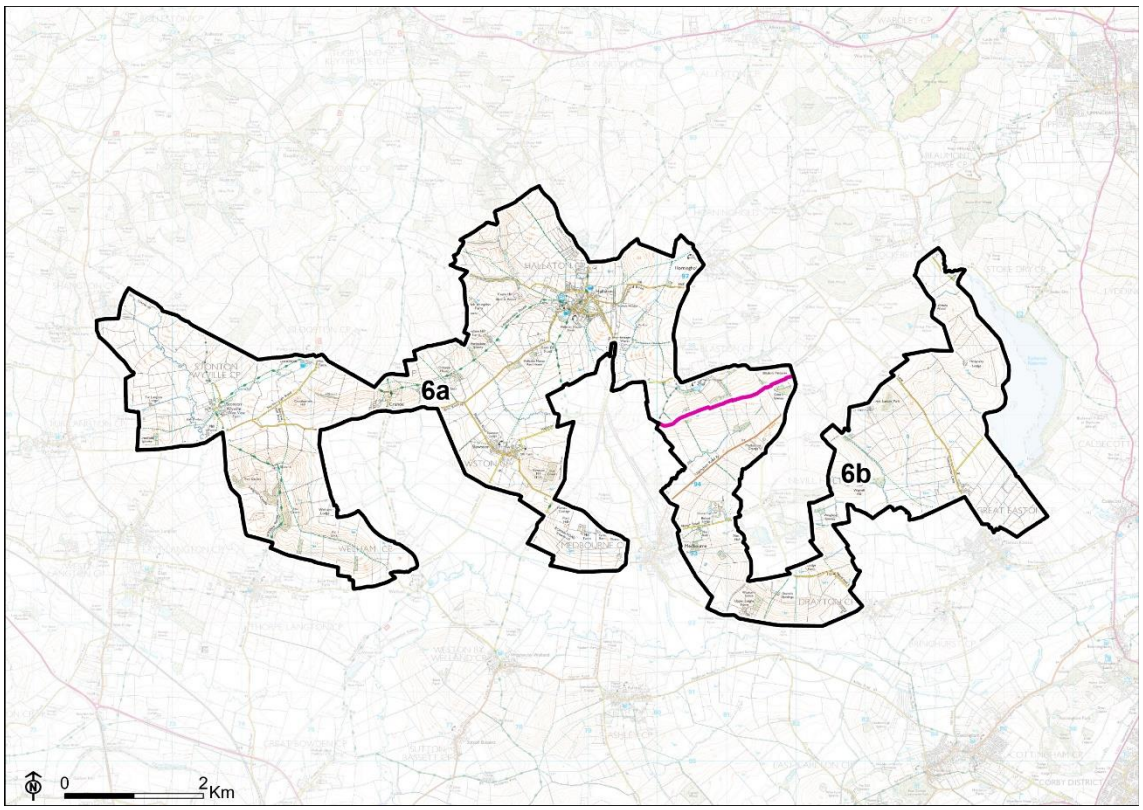
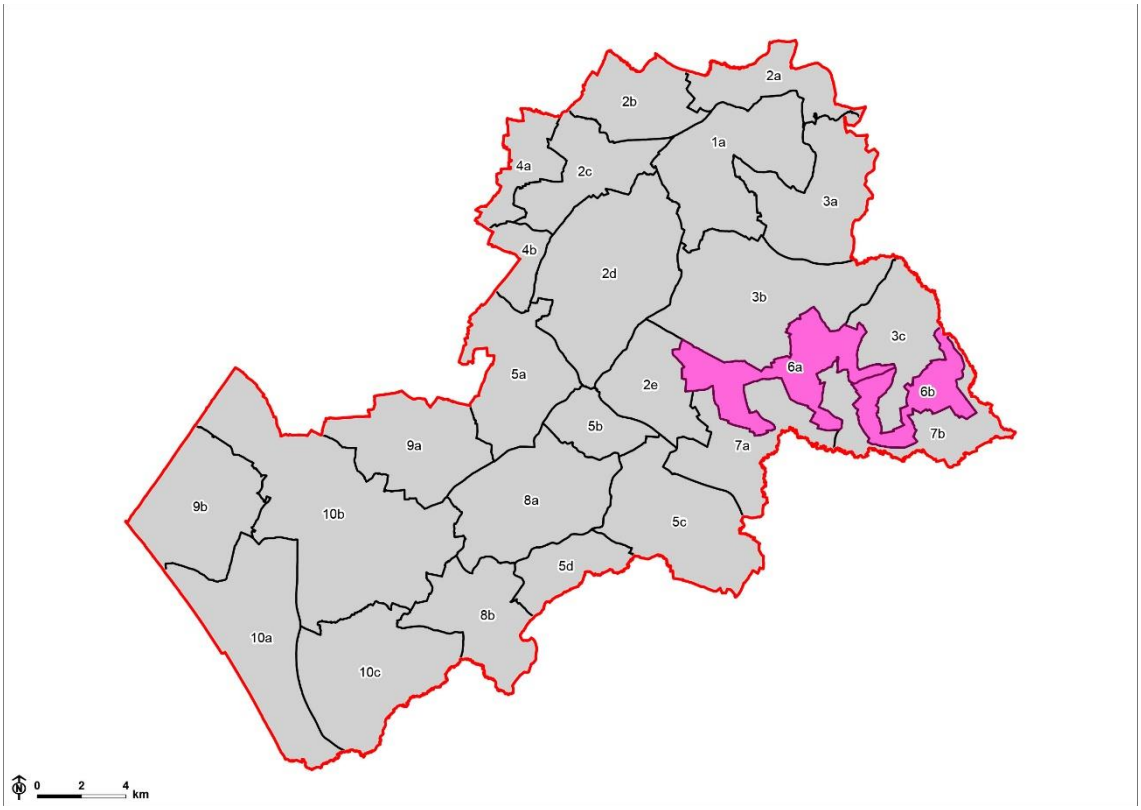


Figure 1.2: Location of LCT 6: River Valley Slopes within Harborough District



Component Landscape Character Areas (LCAs)

- LCA 6a: Hallaton to Stonton Wyville
- LCA 6b: Medbourne to Eyebrook Reservoir

Location and Summary

Lying in the east of the District, the River Valley Slopes Landscape Character Type (LCT) is located between the wooded farmland of LCT 3 to the north, the rolling tributary farmland of LCT 2 to the west and the low-lying floodplain of the River Welland of LCT 7 in the south and east. A small section of the eastern boundary follows the Leicestershire-Rutland county boundary. The LCT boundary is broadly defined by the wide sloping valley sides topography associated with the River Welland to the south and forms part of the wider landscape of the Welland Valley which spans the Harborough-Rutland-North Northamptonshire boundaries.

This LCT comprises the gentle south facing slopes of the River Welland valley, which become slightly steeper to the east. Some small tributaries to the River Welland, along with their narrower valleys, cut through the landscape which is formed of medium scale fields of mixed pasture and arable farmland, as well as springs, distinctive mounds and scattered historic settlements. A network of lanes with wide verges cross broadly north south and allow for long-distance views south across the broad valley bottom of the River Welland in LCT 7 and towards the opposite valley side located within North Northamptonshire.

Representative Photographs

Figure 1.3: LCT 6 representative photograph 1

Figure 1.4: LCT 6 representative photograph 2

Key Characteristics

- Gently sloping river valley sides associated with a wide river valley bottom of the River Welland to the south, which are steeper in places, with distinctive mounds such as Langton Caudle and Crossburrow Hill. Underlain by Triassic to Jurassic mudstone, siltstone, limestone and sandstone with primarily loamy and clayey fertile soils.
- Crossed by a network of smaller streams and springs which feed into larger tributaries of the River Welland.
- Farmed landscape of medium to large geometric fields with limited woodland cover or natural heritage designations, but with strong hedgerows and wide verges and margins.
- Scattered with historic features such as strong examples of ridge and furrow, as well as scheduled monuments, medieval settlement remains and villages covered by conservation areas which contributes to a strong sense of time-depth.
- Strong recreational network including local public right of way (PRoW) which radiate out from villages and long-distance footpaths including the Midshires Way, Leicestershire Round, and Macmillan Way which cross through the area.
- Rural and relatively open in character with occasional scattered settlement, strong perceptions of tranquillity and dark skies.
- Long distance views afforded south across the wider Welland Valley towards neighbouring districts and across the narrow valleys due to limited woodland cover. This LCT forms a backdrop to views from these neighbouring districts.

Natural Influences

This LCT comprises the south facing slopes of the Welland valley. It is underlain by a bedrock of Triassic to Jurassic mudstone, siltstone, limestone and sandstone. This is overlain with superficial clay, sand and gravel deposits which were deposited during glaciation along the River Welland and along the narrower river valleys. Across much of the area the soils are loamy and clayey, with pockets which are lime-rich, supporting traditional agricultural land uses.

The underlying geology influences the landform, particularly in the west, where distinctive mounds have been formed at Crossburrow Hill, Langton Caudle and Slawston Hill. The landform is a defining characteristic of the area, ranging from approximately 145m to 65m AOD. Springs are also common across this landscape, feeding into small tributary streams, within narrow valleys which run broadly north-south before joining the River Welland.

Woodland cover is relatively sparce, with only occasional small blocks of deciduous woodland and riparian trees located along streams. Wide verges and strong, well-maintained hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees are characteristic of this landscape and there is evidence of succession planting. There are relatively few natural heritage designations, however pockets of land along a wooded stream to the west of Hallaton are designated as local wildlife sites (LWS) and include lowland meadow, wet grassland, semi-improved grassland and deciduous woodland priority habitat. Other areas of priority habitat include small blocks of deciduous woodland such as Fox Covert, traditional orchards at Great Easton Park and on the western edge of Hallaton, and an area of floodplain grazing marsh to the south of Eyebrook Reservoir. These pockets of habitat are scattered across a landscape of primarily medium scale fields which are mixed pastoral and arable, bounded by an intact hedgerow network with hedgerow trees, occasionally replaced by post and wire fences. Species include ash, oak, hawthorn, whitebeam and horse chestnut and occasional willows and pines. Despite the relatively low woodland cover, the intact hedgerow network along field boundaries and roads contributes to a strong landscape pattern as well as a strong ecological habitat network.

Cultural Influences

This LCT is rich in cultural and historic features, with a large number of scheduled monuments, conservation areas and listed buildings scattered across the LCT, as well as the historic field patterns. Scheduled monuments include Iron Age and Roman ritual sites, remains of Hallaton motte and bailey castle and remains of a medieval village at Stonton Wyville. There are further examples across the LCT of mounds and a former medieval village which are not covered by a designation but still contribute to the strong sense of time depth.

Medium sized fields, which are relatively geometric in shape, are characteristic of this landscape and become smaller surrounding settlement. They are primarily planned enclosure dating to the 18th and 19th century, many containing strong examples of ridge and furrow, particularly surrounding Hallaton and Slawston. There are some examples of large irregular fields away from settlement which date to the mid-19th century and very large post-war fields, which are relatively modern in origin and were created through amalgamation. Overall, the historic field pattern contributes to a strong sense of time depth overall in this LCT.

Settlement is in the form of scattered nucleated villages and hamlets which are often designated as conservation areas and contain a large number of listed buildings, such as at Hallaton, Slawston and Blaston, including grade I and grade II* listed churches. Typical architectural materials used are ironstone with limestone, with examples of thatch, slate and collyweston roofs, interspersed with orange and red brick, which creates a strong local vernacular. Village greens are a common feature within villages, as are wide mown grass verges which are well maintained and occasional areas which display an estate character, for example the area between Neville Holt and Medbourne. There has been little expansion of the villages, and they retain their historic and rural character.

Settlement is connected by a network of rural lanes, lined with occasional trees, including roadside oaks. A dismantled railway line, which was once part of the

Great Northern and London and North Western Joint Railway is evident east of Hallaton, Its former route marked by trees and occasional brick structures.

Multiple long-distance footpaths, alongside National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 64 and local cycle routes, run alongside a strong network of PRoW, which tend to radiate out from settlement and results in a rich recreational resource, particularly to the west.

Perceptual Influences

There is a strong rural character influenced by the absence of modern development, agricultural land uses and small historic villages. This farmed landscape has a sense of openness with long-distance views afforded towards the neighbouring North Northamptonshire and Rutland. There are views south across the floodplains of LCT 7 towards the opposite valley sides of the Welland valley, including towards Rockingham Castle, within North Northamptonshire and east towards Eyebrook Reservoir in LCT 7 and across the water towards Rutland. There are pockets of enclosure experienced within this landscape, from within the narrow tributary valleys where landform and riparian vegetation screen views out. This contrasts with a sense of exposure on some of the higher slopes and the tops of mounds, particularly where vegetation is absent such as on Crossburrow Hill.

There is a strong sense of tranquillity, which is strengthened by the sounds of birdsong and livestock, rustling leaves and an absence of road traffic noise or movement. Development is limited to small villages and hamlets with little modern influence and the majority of roads which cross through this area are local lanes. There is a sense of relative remoteness, particularly in the east due to the absence of settlement, however this is reduced where overhead pylon lines are visible. Corby power station is visible in the distance within North Northamptonshire which forms a landmark feature on the horizon. This LCT experiences some of the darkest skies in the District due to a relative absence of light pollution.

Landscape Character Areas

LCA 6a: Hallaton to Stonton Wyville

Including the settlements of Hallaton, Slawston, Cranoe and Stonton Wyville. Blaston and Glooston straddle the northern boundary of this LCA.

Figure 1.5: Map of LCA 6a: Hallaton to Stonton Wyville

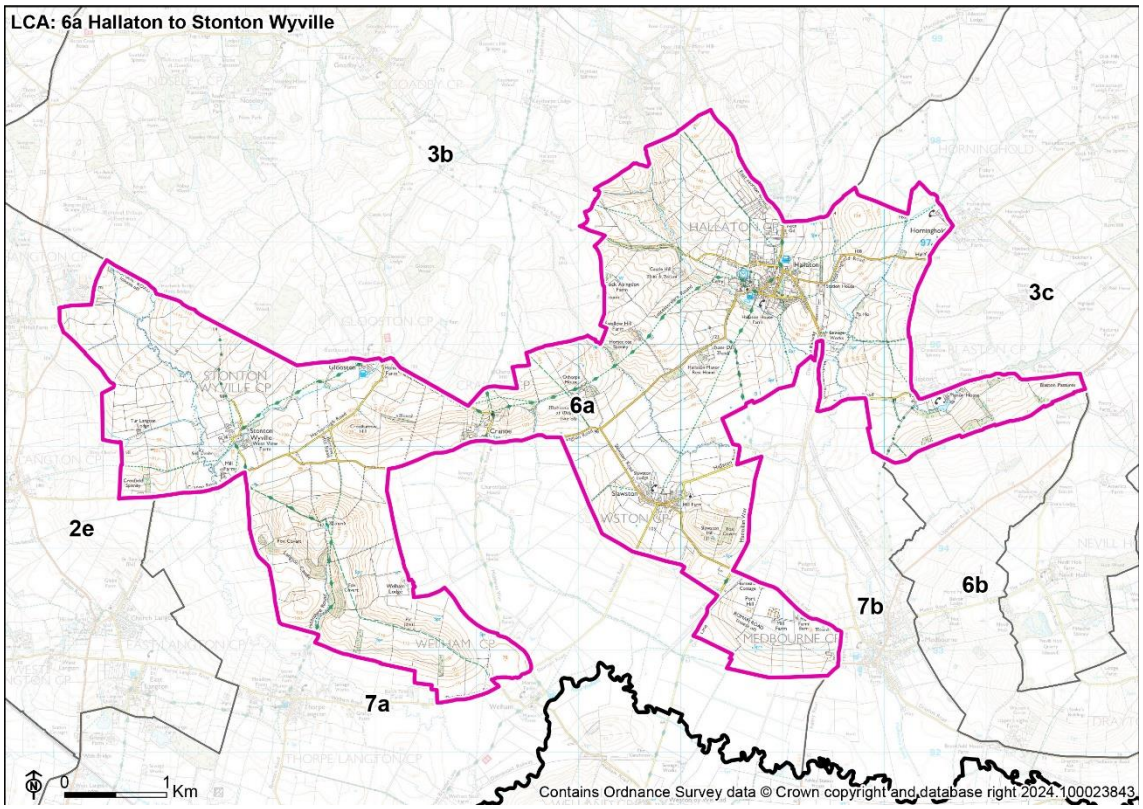


Figure 1.6: LCA 6a representative photograph 1

Figure 1.7: LCA 6a representative photograph 2

Located in the west of the LCT and spanning from Stonton Wyville in the west to Hallaton and Blaston in the east, with fingers of land extending south towards, but stopping short of, Thorpe Langton and Medbourne. The northern boundary borders the rolling wooded farmland of LCT 3, the western boundary borders the tributary farmland within LCT 2, and the southern boundary borders the valley bottom of LCT 7.

Natural Influences

Valley slopes are a defining characteristic of this LCA. Wide and gentle valley slopes of the Welland valley are crossed by narrower tributary valleys and streams which feed into the River Welland. The mounds at Langton Caudle, Crossburrow Hill and Slawston Hill are distinctive landform features, with steep topography which contrasts with the gentler valley sides of the Welland. Corridors of land along watercourses have loamy and clayey floodplain soils with naturally high groundwater. Tributary streams are fed by scattered springs and include Medbourne Brook, and multiple unnamed streams surrounding Hallaton and Blaston in the east, Stonton Wyville and Glooston in the west. Streams are organic in shape and contrast with the primarily geometric surrounding fields. Woodland cover is not a defining characteristic, however there are some examples of small geometric blocks of deciduous woodland, such as on the eastern slopes of Slawston and riparian woodland along streams. This riparian vegetation often filters and screens views of the steams and creates a localised sense of enclosure. There are limited natural heritage designations, with the exception of a LWS at Glebe Farm Castle and Marsh where there is wet grassland, and wooded stream valley north of Castle Hill to the west of Hallaton. Tree species across the LCA include ash, oak, horse chestnut and hawthorn along the intact hedgerow network, with willows located along watercourses. Wide verges with wildflower species and strong hedgerows create an ecological network and birds of prey are noticeable hovering in the sky.

Cultural Influences

There is a high concentration of planned enclosure dating back to 18th and 19th century, many of which contain ridge and furrow, evidence of ploughing in the Middle Ages and a distinctive and eye-catching feature in the landscape. There are smaller fields near the settlements which are small rectilinear fields and paddocks and chases which further influence the historic landscape of the villages. To the east of Hallaton, the historic field pattern is weakened slightly by the presence of very large post-war fields which were created through

amalgamation. The villages of Hallaton, Slawston and Blaston are designated as conservation areas and have a strong historic character. Although Hallaton has seen some modern development, this is well integrated in the village and the settlement retains its historic character. Although not designated as conservation areas, the hamlets of Cranoe and Stonton Wyville display some fine examples of stone and red brick buildings which are listed and contribute to a historic character. A particular building of note within the LCA is grade I listed Church of St Michael and All Angels, Hallaton which is constructed of ironstone rubble and limestone dressings and dates back as far as the 12th and 13th century. Numerous prehistoric features are marked on OS mapping but not covered by formal designations, including a mound at Langton Caudle and the deserted medieval village of Othorpe, east of Canoe and the site of Othorpe House, a grade II listed farmhouse. A scheduled monument is located at Stonton Wyville designated for its medieval millage earthworks, fishponds and mill leat and a further two scheduled monuments are located to the south and west of Hallaton, comprising an Iron Age and Roman ritual site, settlement, enclosures and linear ditched features, and Hallaton motte and bailey castle. A manorial site and medieval settlement at Blaston are also designated as a scheduled monument. The former railway infrastructure is evident along the dismantled railway line, in the form of red brick structures which along with the older heritage features mentioned above create a very strong sense of time depth. There is a strong network of PRoW providing access to the landscape including the Leicestershire Round, Macmillan Way Midshires Way long-distance footpaths, alongside NCN Route 64.

Perceptual Influences

Views to the south are long-distance across the Welland Valley towards North Northamptonshire, restricted in places due to the intervening mounds and valley landform. This landscape has a varied and intricate pattern which is influenced by the contrast in colour and texture between fields and hedgerows, the varied field scales and uses, ridge and furrow markings and riparian woodland, which is organic in shape and contrasts with the primarily geometric fields. Although crossed by a strong network of local lanes, this landscape is tranquil and absent of more modern infrastructure, with the exception of overhead pylons lines

which are particularly noticeable on the skyline to the north of Langton Caudle and Crossburrow Hill. This LCA also experiences dark skies with little light pollution, wide grass verges and birdsong, livestock noises and rustling leaves which contribute to a strong sense of tranquillity.

LCA 6b: Medbourne to Eyebrook Reservoir

This LCA does not contain any settlement, only scattered farmsteads.

Figure 1.8: Map of LCA 6b: Medbourne to Eyebrook Reservoir

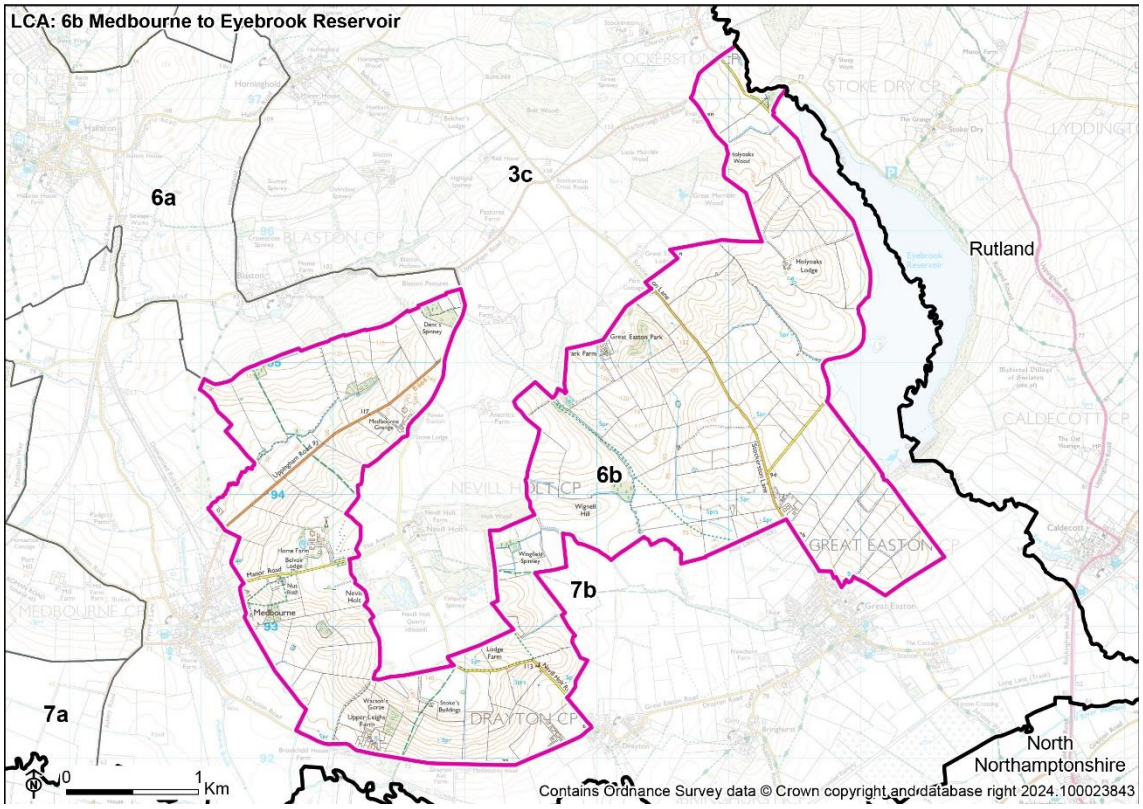


Figure 1.9: LCA 6b representative photograph 1

Figure 1.10: LCA 6b representative photograph 2

This LCA is located in the east of the LCT and spans from and the eastern edge of Medbourne in the west to Eyebrook Reservoir in the east. The eastern boundary borders the boundary with Rutland for a short stretch but largely borders Eyebrook Reservoir within LCT 7 to the east and south. To the north this LCA borders the rolling wooded farmland of LCT 3.

Natural Influences

Steeper valley slopes, associated primarily with the River Welland are a defining feature of this LCA and differentiate this landform with the gentler valley slopes in LCA 6a. There are some narrower valleys associated with streams feeding the River Welland, however these valleys are not as defined as in LCA 6a. Streams are small and unnamed and are often associated with scattered springs. Woodland is generally sparse, with some small blocks of deciduous woodland and riparian vegetation along streams. Parkland landscape at Great Easton Park includes parkland trees, however this is relatively localised, although there are visual connections to parkland and estate landscapes at Nevill Holt, located in adjacent LCT 3 to the north. Priority habitats include fragmented small blocks of deciduous woodland such as Dent's Spinney and a single fields of flood plain grazing marsh to the north of Great Easton. Dense mature hedgerows and wide verges with wildflowers also contribute positively to the ecological network, however there are no natural heritage designations.

Cultural Influences

Fields are geometric in shape, particularly in the south-east near Stockerston Lane and Great Easton where they are small and narrow. There is a high concentration of planned enclosure dating back to 18th and 19th century, many of which contain ridge and furrow, evidence of ploughing in the Middle Ages and a distinctive and eye-catching feature in the landscape, particularly on steep slopes overlooking the Welland Valley. To the far east of the LCA and at Wignell Hill the historic field pattern is weakened slightly by the presence of very large post-war fields which were created through amalgamation. There are no cultural heritage designations within this LCA and so the sense of time depth is primarily driven by the historic field patterns, and intervisibility with parkland at Nevill Holt to the north. Recreational opportunities are limited to a few PRoW within this LCA which radiate out from Nevill Holt and Great Easton (within LCT 3 and LCT 7 respectively).

Perceptual Influences

Settlement is limited to occasional scattered farmsteads connected by a relatively spread-out minor road network which results in low levels of human activity and contributes to a high sense of tranquillity, relatively dark skies and a relative sense of remoteness. An exception to this is along the B664 south of Blaston which is slightly busier than the local road network, locally reducing perceptions of tranquillity. It is, however, rural in character. Colour and texture in hedgerows and wide grass verges alongside birdsong, livestock sounds, and rustling leaves further contribute to the relatively strong sense of tranquillity. A mast at Home Farm and the distant power station in North Northamptonshire on the horizon introduce human influence into the landscape. There are long-distance views across the wide Welland Valley towards North Northamptonshire where the opposite valley side forms a wooded skyline. There is a strong visual relationship with LCT 7, where the steep slopes of this LCA rise up from Eyebrook Reservoir.

Landscape Character Type Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- The landform of sloping valley sides which allows for long-distance views into neighbouring districts and forms a backdrop to views into the District.
- Landform mounds, which are located within LCA 6a, which form distinctive features within the landscape.
- Springs and streams feeding the River Welland which contribute to the ecological network, and the riparian woodland along them.
- The wide verges, margins, hedgerows, fragments of priority habitat, occasional small woodlands and parkland trees which have biodiversity value and provide a strong landscape pattern.
- Smaller historic field patterns, including many examples of ridge and furrow, which are particularly valued due to the presence of larger amalgamated post-war fields.
- The settlement pattern of scattered historic villages, often designated as conservation areas, with a strong local vernacular of ironstone rubble, thatched roofs and red brick.
- The numerous cultural heritage designations scattered across the landscape, which date to the Iron Age, Roman and medieval time periods and include scheduled monuments, as well as some historic features which are marked on OS mapping but not formally designated.
- Strong network of PRoW and long-distance footpaths which are of recreational value to neighbouring urban areas.
- The rural and tranquil nature of the farmland landscape with very limited modern development and dark skies.
- The relatively open character with long-distance views afforded across the Welland Valley towards neighbouring districts.

Landscape Strategy

The strategy for the River Valley Slopes LCT is to enhance habitat connectivity between hedgerows, trees, small woodlands and watercourses, while retaining the long-distance open views across the Welland Valley and conserving and enhancing the wealth of cultural heritage features across the landscape.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Protect the mound landforms, such as at Crossburrow Hill, Slawston Hill and Langston Caudle and ensure their distinctive character is kept intact.
- Protect and manage the streams and watercourses for the benefit of flood alleviation and biodiversity, including Medbourne Brook and other unnamed streams.
- Manage the streams and the adjacent land to ensure good water quality for the benefit of wildlife, addressing issues such as agricultural run-off.
- Protect, enhance and extend the limited small remnant woodland blocks, connecting them to the riparian woodland corridors associated with the network of streams, including through providing new habitats and further strengthening hedgerows to enhance ecological connectivity across the landscape.
- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the further creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods and protect and enhance the existing wide margins and roadside verges.
- Identify, monitor and manage any effects of pests and diseases on trees and woodland. Replace trees lost with species appropriate to the site

conditions and likely to withstand the effects of climate change in the future.

- When planting new trees, ensure they are resilient species, in appropriate locations and with adequate management and maintenance methods in place to ensure resilient and robust woodlands for the future.
- Protect and maintain valued semi-natural habitats, including priority habitats such as the small field of flood plain grazing marsh within LCA 6b and lowland meadow and wet grassland within LCA 6a.
- Protect the historic field patterns, particularly where there is ridge and furrow. Protect and appropriately manage the cultural heritage features, such as scheduled monuments and conservation areas, as well as any undesignated historic features such as the former medieval village mounds and parkland, to preserve the sense of history.
- Retain the long-distance views afforded across the Welland Valley and across the narrower valleys.
- Ensure the high level of tranquillity experienced through much of the landscape is retained.
- Enhance and promote the strong network of recreational routes across the area.

Development Management

- Avoid locating development (both buildings and other structures including masts) in proximity to the south facing valley sides where they can be viewed from across the Welland Valley and would be visually prominent within the landscape when viewed from neighbouring districts, particularly within LCA 6b which is steeper.
- Avoid construction of large-scale buildings which will be widely prominent within this largely open landscape, particularly within LCA 6b which is less wooded than LCA 6a.

- Ensure development is appropriate to the rural and farmed character of this landscape and retain a low settlement density.
- Manage change arising from future development or farm diversification to ensure it can be accommodated without detriment to the valued attributes and sense of place, particularly in regard to agricultural pressure on the ridge and furrow.
- Conserve the pattern of small historic nucleated villages and retain separation between settlements, which is particularly relevant to LCA 6a and settlements including Slawston, Blaston and Hallaton.
- Protect the unifying local vernacular of the area which includes ironstone rubble, thatched roofs and red brick. New development or conversions should retain some local character by incorporating traditional building styles and materials where possible.
- Protect dark skies by preventing and positively reducing artificial light pollution and avoid siting development where it would interrupt long-distance views across the Welland Valley.

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