

Allen Pyke Associates

HOUGH ON THE HILL
PARISH LANDSCAPE
CHARACTER ASSESSMENT



Landscape architecture



Urban design



Environmental planning

Prepared on behalf of

**HOUGH ON THE HILL PARISH
COUNCIL**

Ref: 2448-H-RE-01D – FINAL

Date: October 2013

Contents

1	Introduction & Methodology	Page 1
2	Policy Context	Page 3
3	Existing Character Assessments	Page 6
4	Hough on The Hill Parish Assessment	Page 11
5	Parish Character Assessment	Page 23
6	Parish Level Landscape Recommendations	Page 27

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Photographs are taken by Allen Pyke Associates, David Watt and members of the Parish Council Steering Group

Image on front cover – view from footpath between Gelston and Hough on the Hill

I. Introduction

- I.1 In June 2013 the Parish of Hough on the Hill in Lincolnshire commissioned landscape architects Allen Pyke Associates Ltd. to undertake a locally based landscape character assessment of the parish. This study was commissioned alongside one for the neighbouring parish of Stubton. The purpose of this study is to provide supporting information for a potential Neighbourhood Plan.
- I.2 The assessment draws on the existing published landscape character assessment for South Kesteven and on the Lincolnshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Project (see sections below for further detail). Both documents are essential parts of the existing, adopted local planning policy and have therefore been important in the development of this parish based study which seeks, where relevant, to further sub-divide the area into a finer grain of characterisation.
- I.3 This study has been undertaken in line with the Natural England's best practice guidelines along with a focus on the experiences and perception of the local residents of their landscape and surroundings. As well as reviewing the elements that make up the character ie the physical nature of the landscape and its land use, the experience of living or working within the area or engaging in recreational activities have been considered. Important views, valued walks, local landmarks etc have all been discussed with the residents of the parish and the findings have been used to develop the landscape character areas set out below.

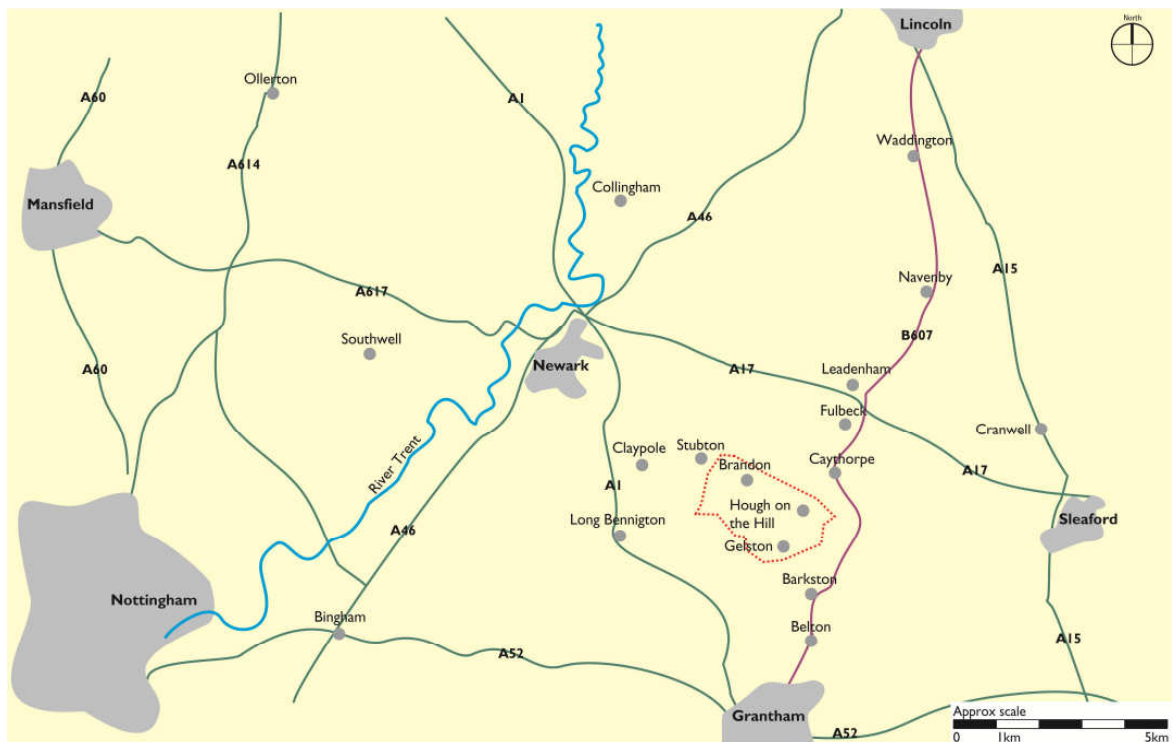


Fig 1 – Location of Hough on the Hill Parish (note – not all villages/roads are illustrated)

Methodology

- I.4 Landscape Character Assessment, as noted above, is the recognised methodology for describing the landscape and its defining characteristics at a variety of scales from national through to regional, district and parish. Guidelines for undertaking such assessments were published by Natural England (formerly the Countryside Agency) in 2002 and 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland' remains the recognised standard for such studies. Landscape character assessment is also recognised by national government within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- I.5 This parish based assessment has been undertaken in a number of stages. Following the development of the brief and scope of this study with members of the Parish Council, the first stage was to undertake a 'desk based' assessment which included a review of current and historical mapping, planning policy and existing, published, character assessments. The second stage involved a series of site visits and walking of most of the footpaths and lanes within the parish. These were recorded with photographs and written notes describing the features within the landscape, views, landmarks etc. The third stage involved drawing up an initial character area map and describing the key characteristics of each area. Stage four involved input from the community which sought to gain an understanding of how local people use, experience and feel about the landscape. This occurred through the use of a simple questionnaire and a workshop with local residents who reviewed the initial findings and the initial character area locations and descriptions. The final stage was the collation of information into a map and series of descriptions for each parish level character area. The findings were then used to consider the threats or implications of change on the landscape. This has been developed into a series of objectives and recommendations that may be used to inform future parish based policy.
- I.6 Whilst the assessment followed the above stages, this has not been a linear process and that each stage has overlapped and informed the work of the other stages.
- I.7 The site work was undertaken during the summer months when trees and hedges were in leaf and visibility in places restricted. It is also noted that whilst the majority of photographs were taken in July and August in good weather conditions, seasonal change will affect the appearance of much of the landscape, especially that which is in arable production. The different annual and seasonal growing regimes result in an ever changing landscape ranging from deep ploughed fields, to the floral yellow cover of oilseed rape, to the bright green of young crops and the golden fields just prior to harvest.

2. Policy Context

National Planning Policy Context

- 2.1 At a national level the landscape is recognised as an important asset and this is set out in planning policy as well as being promoted by public bodies such as Natural England and English Heritage. In 2006 the government signed up to the European Landscape Convention which became binding in 2007. Part of delivering the objectives of the convention has been through the preparation and application of landscape character assessments. Such assessments have become important and recognised tools in helping decision making bodies, developers and the general public understand distinctions between landscapes at all scales as well as helping set policy relating to the conservation or enhancement of the landscape. The convention defines landscape as *“An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.”* (Council of Europe 2000)
- 2.2 Under the Localism Act 2011, the government sets out that local communities, through a Parish Council or through the formation of a local forum, can produce Neighbourhood Plans with a view to setting locally based guidance on where new development can go and what any such development should look like. This landscape character assessment will be used to inform the policies set out in the potential Neighbourhood Plan and will form part of the ‘evidence base’ for the Plan.
- 2.3 The NPPF forms the primary national planning policy in respect of new development and seeks to promote sustainable development across the country. Local Plans (those prepared by the District Councils) are also required to be in line with the NPPF. Neighbourhood Plans are required to be in line with both the NPPF and Local Plan policy.
- 2.4 The NPPF sets out 12 ‘core principles’ the first of which states that decision making should *“be genuinely plan-led, empowering local people to shape their surroundings, with succinct local and neighbourhood plans setting out a positive vision for the future of the area.”*
- 2.5 The fourth principle states that decision making should *“always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings”* and the fifth principle states that it should *“take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it”*.
- 2.6 Section 8 of the NPPF, Promoting Healthy Communities, sets out the national policy relating to access to open space and its importance to health and well-being, whilst much of this policy is concerned with formal open space and sports provision, paragraph 75 states that *“Planning policies should protect and enhance public rights of way and access. Local authorities should seek opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.”*

- 2.7 Section 11, Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment sets out how policy and decision making should protect and enhance the natural environment including minimising impact on bio-diversity and 'protecting and enhancing valued landscapes' with an emphasis on existing 'protected landscapes'. Section 12 goes on to set out policy relating to Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment noting that policy and planning decisions should take account of "*opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.*"
- 2.8 Paragraph 170, which sets out requirements for local authorities in respect of preparing an 'evidence base' to support their local plans, states that "*Where appropriate, landscape character assessments should also be prepared, integrated with assessment of historic landscape character, and for areas where there are major expansion options assessments of landscape sensitivity.*"

Local Planning Policy Context

- 2.9 The Parish of Hough on the Hill is located within the administrative boundary of South Kesteven District Council. The Core Strategy adopted in 2010 contains the current planning policy. Section 4, Environmental Policies, sets out the Council's policy relating to environmental issues including landscape character which is set out in Policy EN1 Protection and Enhancement of the Character of the District. The preamble to the policy states that

"Landscapes are an important part of Lincolnshire's physical and cultural resource. They contain innumerable visible traces of human interaction with nature over many millennia. They contribute to the identity of the County, provide settings for everyday life, attract tourism and business, and are a source of enjoyment and inspiration. Virtually all landscape, however unassuming, means something to someone."

It goes on to state that

"The District's landscape character is not only its topography but is a blend of natural features, biodiversity and man-made structures. This policy aims to ensure that these resources are conserved and that the environment is protected and enhanced. It aims to make sure that development within the District does not compromise the variety and distinctiveness of the existing biodiversity and wider environment. It is intended to sustain an attractive, diverse, high-quality, accessible, thriving and environmentally healthy countryside in South Kesteven."

- 2.10 Policy EN1 States

"South Kesteven's Landscape Character Areas are identified on the map [paragraph 4.1.10]. Development must be appropriate to the character and significant natural, historic and cultural attributes and features of the landscape within which it is situated, and contribute to its conservation, enhancement or restoration. All development proposals and site allocations will be assessed in relation to:

- 1. statutory, national and local designations of landscape features, including natural and historic assets*
- 2. local distinctiveness and sense of place*
- 3. historic character, patterns and attributes of the landscape*
- 4. the layout and scale of buildings and designed spaces*
- 5. the quality and character of the built fabric and their settings*

6. *the condition of the landscape*
7. *biodiversity and ecological networks within the landscape*
8. *public access to and community value of the landscape*
9. *remoteness and tranquillity*
10. *visual intrusion*
11. *noise and light pollution*
12. *Conservation Area Appraisals and Village Design Statements, where these have been adopted by the Council*
13. *impact on controlled waters*
14. *protection of existing open space (including allotments and public open space, and open spaces important to the character, setting and separation of built-up areas)”*

3. Existing Published Character Assessments

- 3.1 There are already studies which exist at a national, regional and district scale and this section will summarise the findings of these assessments as they form an important basis for the more detailed parish level assessment below.

National Landscape Character Area

- 3.2 Natural England is currently in the process of reviewing and re-publishing all national level character assessments. The parish of Hough on the Hill falls within national character area 48 Trent and Belvoir Vales (which was recently re-published in April 2013). The area (see map below) covers a large geographical area and is described as being:

“characterised by undulating, strongly rural and predominantly arable farmland, centred on the River Trent. A low-lying rural landscape with relatively little woodland cover, the NCA offers long, open views. Newark-on-Trent (generally referred to as Newark) lies at the centre with Grantham, Nottingham, Lincoln and Gainsborough on the peripheries. The southern and eastern edges of the Vales are defined by the adjoining escarpments of the Lincolnshire Edge and the Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Wolds NCA. To the west, the escarpment of a broad ridge of rolling landscape defines the boundary with the neighbouring Sherwood and Humberhead Levels NCAs. The area’s generally fertile soils and good quality agricultural land have supported a diversity of farming over a long period but, because of this, little semi-natural habitat remains. The powerful River Trent and its flood plain provide a strong feature running through the landscape. It is the greatest biodiversity resource, being a major corridor for wildlife moving through the area and supporting a variety of wetland habitats. It also provides flood storage as well as large amounts of cooling water for local power stations.”

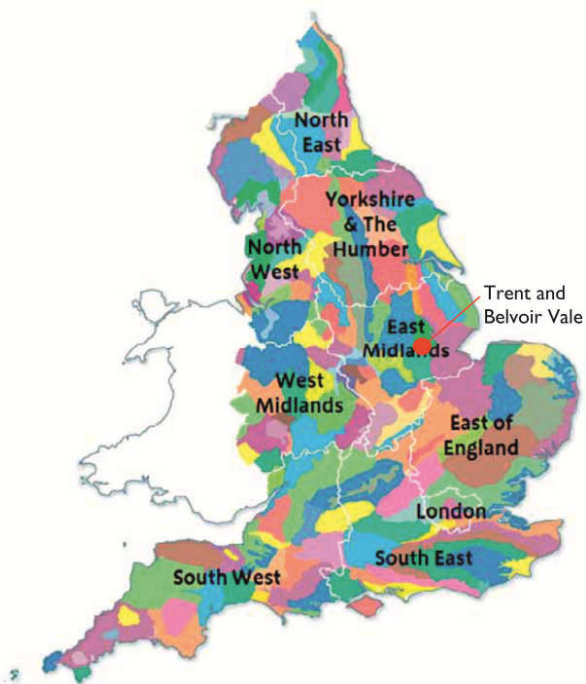


Fig 2 – National Landscape Character Area 48 – Trent and Belvoir Vale

- 3.3 It is of note that several photographs used to illustrate the character area within this publication are taken from within the parish of Hough on the Hill. These are of views looking down across the Trent Valley from the elevated slopes of the escarpment. The full character assessment and the broader scale policies within it can be viewed on the Natural England website.

Regional Scale Character Area

- 3.4 The East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment was published in 2010 on behalf of the East Midlands Landscape Partnership. At this regional scale the parish falls across two Character Groups/Areas Character Group 4 - 'Lowland Vales' - Character Area 4a 'Unwooded Vales' and Character Group 6 - 'Limestone Farmland' - Character Area 6a 'Limestone Scarps and Dipslopes'. The key characteristics are described as follows -

Character Area 4a 'Unwooded Vales'

- Extensive, low lying rural landscape underlain by Triassic and Jurassic mudstones and clays and widespread superficial deposits;
- Expansive long distance and panoramic views from higher ground at the margin of the vales gives a sense of visual containment;
- Low hills and ridges gain visual prominence in an otherwise gently undulating landscape;
- Complex drainage patterns of watercourses that flow within shallow undulations often flanked by pasture and riparian habitats;
- Limited woodland cover; shelter belts and hedgerow trees gain greater visual significance and habitat value as a result;
- Productive arable and pastoral farmland, with evidence of increasing reversion to arable cropping in recent times;
- Regular pattern of medium sized fields enclosed by low and generally well maintained hedgerows and ditches in low lying areas; large modern fieldscapes evident in areas of arable reversion; and
- Sparsely settled with small villages and dispersed farms linked by quiet rural lanes.

Character Area 6a 'Limestone Scarps and Dipslopes'

- Limestone escarpment and dip-slope with strong north south alignment;
- Diverse patterns of land use and regular spring line settlements along scarp in contrast to the more open and exposed dip slope;
- Limestone villages retain strong historic character, and provide strong link to the nature of the underlying geology;
- Ermine Street forms a significant feature of the landscape, and continues to dictate landscape patterns and boundaries;
- Place names and some indicator species are reminders of once widespread heathland; and
- Evidence of declining landscape condition across intensively farmed areas.

District Landscape Character Assessment

- 3.5 The South Kesteven Landscape Character Assessment was prepared by FPRC on behalf of the District Council in 2007. It forms part of current planning policy and is specifically referred to within the Core Strategy environment policies. The assessment, building on the national character assessment, divides the district into six character areas (see map below). The parish of Hough on the Hill falls within the character area also called the 'Trent and Belvoir Vales'. The key characteristics for this area are described as follows

- A relatively simple, medium to large-scale, open arable or mixed farming landscape.
- Flat or very gently undulating topography.
- Simple regular fields enclosed by hawthorn hedges.

- Relatively few hedgerow trees and virtually no woodland.
- Small villages typically located on slightly rising land.
- Church towers and spires visible across the landscape.
- Buildings styles vary, but a high proportion of brick with dark red pantiles

3.6 The landscape objectives for this character area are as follows -

- Maintain and improve field boundary condition.
- Retain ditch patterns.
- Maintain wet grassland areas.
- Protect any woodland cover.
- Maintain existing hedgerow trees and plant new hedgerow trees.
- Provide new woodland planting with any new large scale agricultural buildings.
- Maintain views to elevated villages and churches.

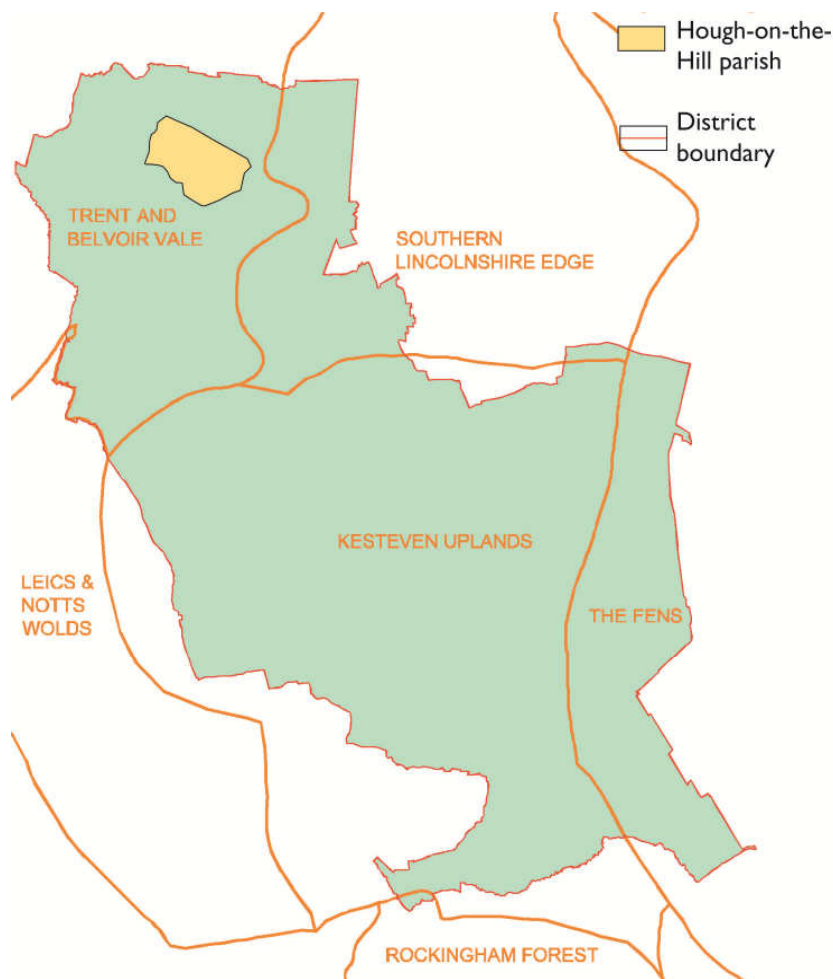


Fig 3 – SKDC Landscape Character Areas

Historic Landscape Characterisation

- 3.7 Lincolnshire County Council published the 'Lincolnshire Historic Landscape Project' in 2010. The study, based on best practice methodology provided by English Heritage, seeks to define the existing landscape in terms of its historic development and influences. Hough on the Hill falls within the wider Regional Character Area 7 known as The Southern Cliff and within the historic Character Area Zone TVL4 The West Grantham Farmlands within The Trent Valley Character Area. Whilst covering a much larger area, of relevance to this assessment, The Southern Cliff character area refers to the '*distinctive line of settlements traceable along the cliff from Lincoln southwards to Grantham. This line appears to follow the curvilinear course of the Cliff, but is not limited to the top of it. It may be that the settlements were established along a spring-line*'. Reference is made to the agricultural land having a high proportion of surviving parliamentary and planned enclosures and the hills and valleys which are more suited to pastoral farming.
- 3.8 The description of the character area goes on to state '*The area is well wooded, with a mixture of ancient woodland and more recent plantations. The large country estates in the area have also enhanced the woodland cover of the area through the planting of shelter belts, screens and game coverts. There is a greater occurrence of woodland in the rolling hills of the south than on the heath. There is less woodland cover on the eastern slopes at the fen edge, perhaps indicating the greater arable productivity of the soil in this part of the area.*'
- 3.9 Sheep farming and the wool trade is referred to as one of the contributing factors to the historic wealth of the area, which is evident in the surviving stone built farm houses dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is noted that the area retains strong elements of its historic character but with area of ancient enclosure on the uplands having been lost to the pressures of modern day farming practices.
- 3.10 The historic character zone, The West Grantham Farmlands (TVL4) notes that the zone is '*divided between the flat low lying areas of farmland and several small hills, on which the historic nucleated settlements are found*'. The landscape of the wider character zone is described as rural, displaying a 'strongly planned character', though it notes that around Caythorpe and Hough on the Hill, the fields are '*larger and more irregular, although the character of straight, hedged boundaries is still prevalent. A less dominated pattern of small irregularly-shaped fields with sinuous boundaries can be seen on the higher ground in the immediate vicinity of some settlement such as Gelston*'. And with further reference to Gelston it is noted that during the later medieval periods '*parts of former open fields were gradually enclosed in a piecemeal fashion*', perhaps for grazing sheep, and that these ancient enclosures are well preserved around Gelston. Reference is also made to the well preserved ridge and furrow in some fields, particularly on higher ground.
- 3.11 During the 18th century, any remaining open fields or commons were enclosed either by private owners or under the parliamentary enclosures acts, which also resulted in the addition of dispersed farmsteads, beyond the existing settlements. Further modification to field patterns have taken place in the twentieth

century resulting in some areas having larger fields to accommodate modern mechanised farming techniques.

- 3.12 Settlement is described as dating from the early medieval period, with all villages mentioned in the Domesday survey of 1086.



15th Century Cross at Gelston and ridge and furrow pasture near Hough on the Hill

4. Hough on the Hill Parish Assessment

Introduction

- 4.1 As described in the introduction, the methodology for assessing the parish landscape character areas has been applied using a combination of published information and maps, site visits and consultation with local residents. This section provides a brief description of the main attributes contributing to the landscape of the parish of Hough on the Hill. This is followed by a description of the parish level character areas.
- 4.2 The parish of Hough on the Hill comprises a predominantly agricultural landscape with a number of small villages and scattered farms. The main villages, described in further detail below, are Hough on the Hill, the largest of the villages and located to the east of the parish; Gelston to the south of the parish and Brandon located centrally in the heart of the parish.



View from Loveden Hill looking towards Gelston Grange over the surrounding agricultural landscape

- 4.3 The Lincolnshire Dictionary of Place Names (Cameron, 1998) notes the meanings of the villages as follows: Hough, deriving from the Old English word, Haga meaning enclosure; Gelston, probably referring to 'Giofull's village and ton, a hybrid of the word tun, usually referring to an Anglo Saxon settlement taken over by the Danes. Brandon is believed to derive from the old English word dun or hill, looking over the River Brant.



View from Gelston looking north east across the surrounding agricultural landscape

4.4 The parish lies within Lincolnshire approximately 10 miles east of Newark on Trent, approximately 15 miles south of Lincoln and approximately 10 miles north of Grantham. The road network through the parish comprises rural lanes which in places are single track. The area is popular with cyclists, with Gelston and Hough on the Hill located along the Hougham Village Cycle Route, a circular leisure route. The main East Coast railway line runs parallel with the south of the parish but does not pass within it.

Settlement

4.5 Hough on the Hill is the largest of the three villages within the parish and is located on the top of the escarpment and in part on its north west facing slopes. A number of lanes radiate out connecting it to the surrounding villages.

4.6 The village itself comprises a nucleated village of predominantly limestone houses with pantile roofs. There has been some modern infill and conversion of farm buildings into residential properties. The Brownlow Arms and the adjoining former post office, Grade II listed buildings, are located in the centre of the village. The Church of All Saints is a Grade I listed building, dating back to Saxon times. It is constructed of local limestone and ironstone and has a tower with a circular stair turret attached. It was built on a hill within the village, known as Castle Hill, alongside the motte and bailey and also a Scheduled Ancient Monument. To the south of High Road further archaeological earthworks are evident which relate to Hough Priory, an Augustinian priory founded about 1164 and dissolved in the early 15th century. Much of the village is designated as a Conservation Area and there are several other Grade II listed buildings, including Manor Farmhouse, Hough House, The Red House, Manor House and the former village school and Schoolhouse. As a former estate village to the Brownlow family, the Tudor-gothic style is distinctive in many parts including the former estate cottages. Further details relating to the development of the village, the Conservation Area and the buildings within it can be found in the Conservation Area Appraisal (produced by SKDC, the appraisal was still in draft format whilst at the time of completing this assessment).



The Church of All Saints, Hough on the Hill and a view towards from the church yard towards of the former post office and the Brownlow Arms

4.7 Gelston, which lies to the south of Hough on the Hill, is a small village, again on the elevated slopes of the escarpment. Here the houses are predominantly of red brick, with some render and limestone with some properties dating from the 1700s and others from the later 20th century. The village is located alongside

Loveden Hill (an archaeological monument), which includes the site of an Anglo-Saxon burial ground, the largest in the county and including over 1700 cremations and 45 inhumations. A locally significant track runs around the hill and down to Gelston Grange towards Brandon and several footpaths converge in and around the village. Gelston does not have a church but there is a converted former chapel building. The remains of a stone cross are prominent on the Village Green thought to date from the 15th century and itself a Scheduled Ancient Monument. There is also a preserved Pinfold adjacent to the green and areas of open land within the village envelope allowing views out towards the surrounding countryside and contributing to the rural character of the village.



The Village Green at Gelston

4.8 The small village of Brandon is located centrally to the west of the parish on the lower levels. The houses are built from both red brick and local limestone. The Old Hall, a Grade II* listed building, dates from the 16th century and is built from distinctive bands of ironstone, blue lias and limestone. Whilst many properties date from the 18th and 19th centuries, a number of houses were built in the latter 20th century.

4.9 The chapel, dedicated to St John the Evangelist, is constructed from limestone and ironstone, though has a modern slate roof. The layout and size of the village has remained largely unchanged, with the exception of the council built houses to the south, and the village still retains areas of undeveloped land within its boundaries.



The chapel of John the Evangelist, Brandon and view looking down Hall Road with The Old Hall to the right

Geology and hydrology

- 4.10 The underlying geology of the parish is varied, particularly to the east where the ground rises up the escarpment.
- 4.11 The River Brant runs north-south through the parish and alongside the village of Brandon. Elsewhere water courses within the parish are limited to a small stream to the west and field drains. There are some areas of standing water associated with field irrigation. Within Hough on the Hill and Gelston, as found elsewhere along the escarpment, a number of springs rise from the limestone and feed down into the rivers system and some properties have wells.

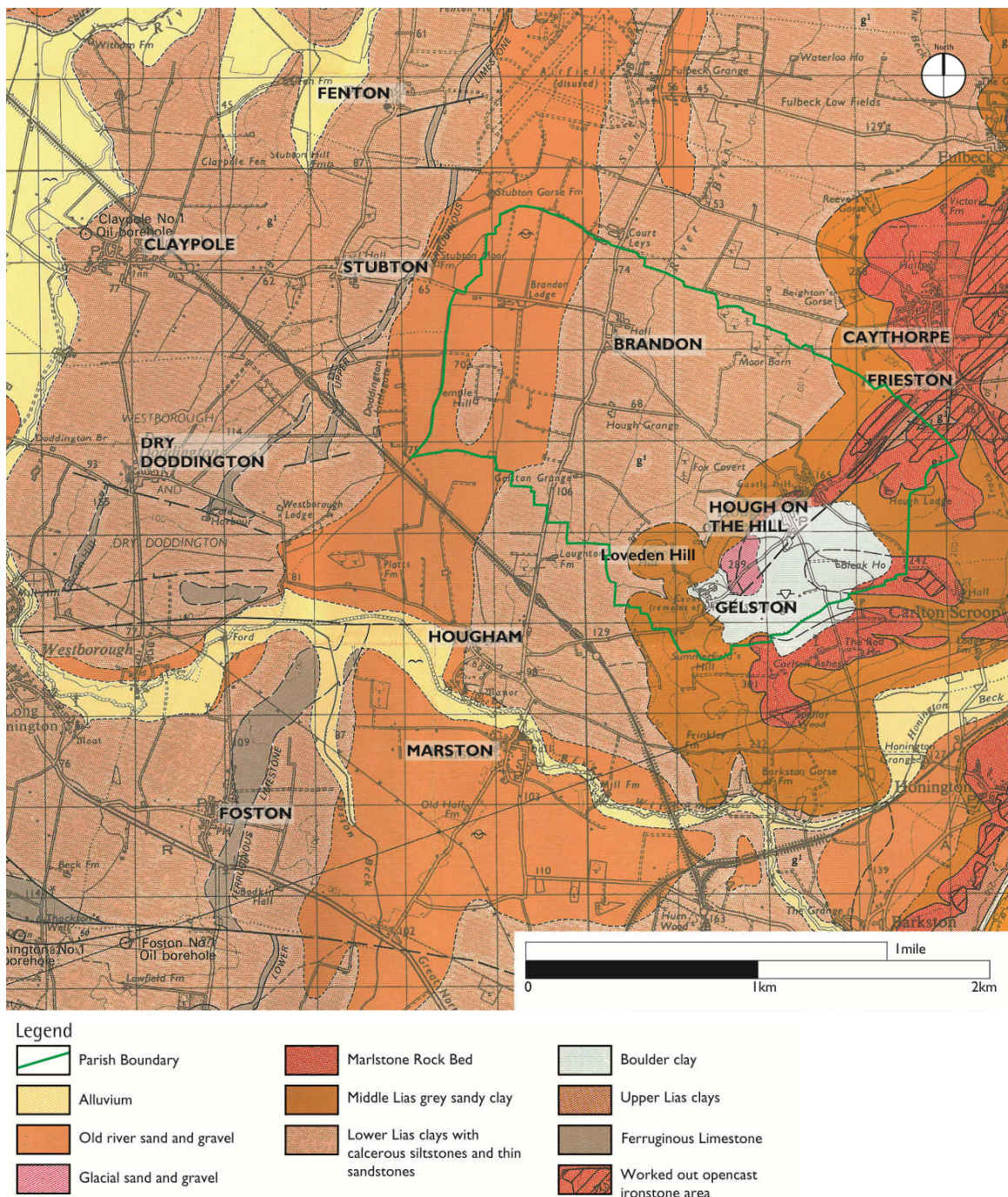


Fig 4– Geology Map

Topography, Views and Visibility

4.12 The topography is varied within the parish with a predominantly a flat area at approximately 20m AOD (Above Ordnance Datum) and covering much of the parish but rising towards the escarpment (also known locally as the Cliff or the Lincoln Edge), which at its highest point is at approximately 85m AOD. Loveden Hill, a local landmark is located to the north west of Gelston and rises to approximately 70m AOD. Land beyond the parish in the upper escarpment rises to approximately 110m AOD.

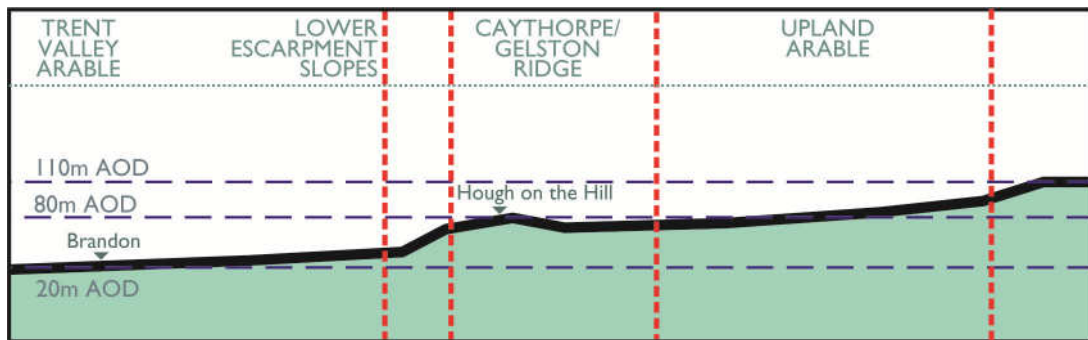


Fig 5 – Illustrative section through the parish – not to scale

4.13 The time of year affects the nature of views, for example the loss of leaf cover on trees and hedgerows in winter opens up some otherwise contained views. At other times of year, the angle of the lower setting sun highlights particular features such as the limestone church spires and towers in nearby villages. The varied topography and extensive views out contribute to the character and enjoyment of residents and visitors to the area.

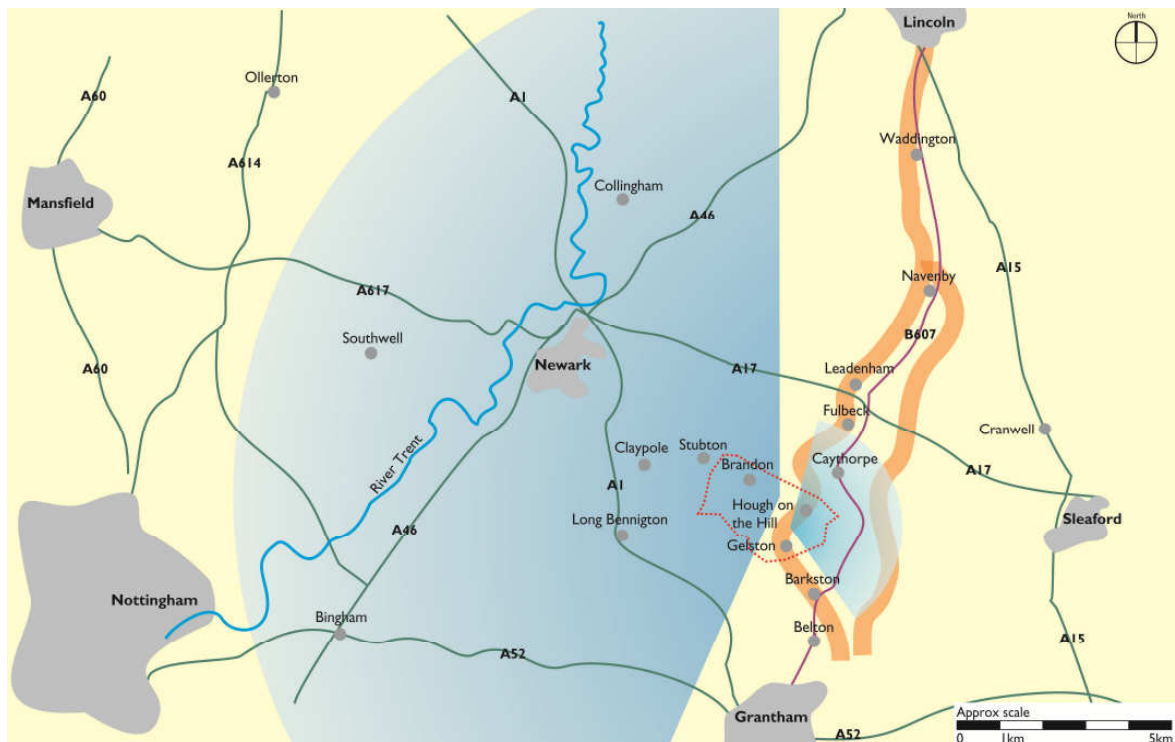


Fig 6 – Illustrative map of key views from the escarpment slopes (shown in orange) near Hough on the Hill

- 4.14 Whilst many of the field boundaries comprise hedgerows and mature trees there is a predominance of long distance views, often many miles beyond the parish boundaries and the variation in topography results in the views being a significant feature of the landscape. The escarpment itself, including Loveden Hill is prominent in views from the west when looking towards the parish, and from many locations from some distance away, it forms the horizon. From the lower levels, for example in and around Brandon, the escarpment forms a significant feature in the views with the wooded areas, villages and church towers and spires forming local landmarks.



Panoramic view from Hough on the Hill looking down the escarpment towards the Trent Valley

- 4.15 From the higher ground along the escarpment ridge or from its slopes, the views west are across many miles of the Trent valley, into Nottinghamshire and beyond. From some vantage points, views across this landscape cover 180 degree views of fields, hedgerows and plantation woodland. In addition to the numerous church towers and spires visible in the landscape a number of historic buildings can be seen including Lincoln Cathedral, Belvoir Castle, Newark Castle and Southall Minster. There are very few modern man-made structures visible; however these include Staythorpe Power station near Newark, and Cottam Power Station (some 25miles away) along the River Trent and the sugar factory in Newark. Whilst distant in the view these can change in prominence depending on the weather for example influencing the view of steam clouds from the cooling towers. A tall mast, located near Brandon, is visible in many of the views, but this is a temporary structure due to be removed within 6 months to a year.
- 4.16 From other locations along the higher ridge of the escarpment, the views eastwards are across fields towards the upper slopes of the escarpment, beyond the parish boundary. Here again only a few man made structures are visible. These include a telecommunications tower beyond Carlton Scroop and single wind turbine near Carlton Ashes which is especially visible from Gelston.



View looking south east towards Brandon with the escarpment on the horizon

- 4.17 A number of high status houses such as Fulbeck Hall (Grade II* Listed) and Leadenham House (Grade II* Listed), are located along the length of the escarpment, south of Lincoln and were clearly deliberately located to benefit from the views out across the Trent Valley and along the curve of the escarpment itself. This is also the case for Stubton Hall (Grade II) which lies to the west in adjacent parish of Stubton and Belton House (Grade I Listed and with a Registered Park and Garden), north of Grantham and some 5 miles from the parish. Bellmount Tower (Grade II* Listed) within the grounds of Belton House is located on elevated slopes to benefit from the view. The Tower, built in 1751 as a focal point and viewing tower, has been the subject of a separate study The Belton House and Park – Setting Study and Policy Statement 2010 (prepared by Atkins for South Kesteven District Council and The National Trust) and whilst the parish lies several miles away from the Park, it is clear that the countryside within the parish forms part of the wider view and landscape setting of Belton House and Park and in particular Bellmount Tower.

Land Use and Vegetation

- 4.18 The land use is predominantly agricultural fields with the majority of land being used for arable production growing wheat, sugar-beet, field beans, oilseeds, potatoes etc. There are a few fields used for grazing sheep, particularly along the slopes of the escarpment and in smaller fields closer to the villages as well as some horse paddocks and grazing for cattle. In places near Hough on the Hill and Gelston there are fields where ridge and furrow has been preserved.
- 4.19 There are a number of small areas of deciduous woodlands (Fig 7), generally in planned, linear formations along field boundaries. There is a larger mixed deciduous wood near Brandon called Protection Wood. Land within the parish including some areas of woodland is used for shoots and raising game birds. Numerous badger setts and fox coverts are found across the parish.



Views of road side hedges with woodland and mature trees on the horizon

- 4.20 Hedgerows grow along many field boundaries, and comprise native species with a predominance of hawthorn and blackthorn. Groups of trees occur at some junctions with other field boundaries and occasional larger mature trees such as oaks, ash and horse chestnut occur within the hedgerows and along some roads. Along some older boundaries, particularly on the escarpment slopes, there are numerous instances of remnant hawthorn hedges where the hawthorns have been allowed to grow into small trees. There are a large number of trees around and within the village of Hough on the Hill and within all three villages a variety of tree species are found including ornamental species, conifers and fruit trees that are more typically found within residential areas.
- 4.21 Some shelter belt planting occurs around the edges of farms and includes species such as the distinctly fastigate Lombardy Poplars or conifers as well as other larger growing species including oak, ash, chestnut willow and poplar.

Footpaths

4.22 There is a network of footpaths, tracks and bridleways throughout the parish (Fig.7). Feedback via the public consultation (see below for further detail) confirmed that these are well used by local people and visitors and as reflected throughout this study, the wide panoramic views and seasonal change experienced along these routes are essential elements to the enjoyment of the area. The Viking Way is located to the south of the parish and is connected by footpaths leading from the village of Gelston. It is a long distance, national route of some 147 miles which runs from the Humber Bridge, in North Lincolnshire to Oakham in Rutland to the south.



Fig 7 – Map of Parish with public rights of way, churches and woodlands

Public Consultation

4.23 The following summarises findings of the initial public consultation exercise which included the receipt of over 30 questionnaires and an evening workshop event attended by over 30 residents.

4.24 Residents were asked the following questions

- 1 - Which 5 words would you use to best describe the character of the countryside within the parish?
- 2 - What are the 5 key elements, landmarks or features that you associate with the surrounding countryside?
- 3 - What do you value most about your local countryside?
- 4 - What, if any, are the negative aspects of the surrounding countryside?
- 5 - Thinking about how you experience the local countryside, what, if any improvements could be made to enhancing this experience?
- 6 - How often do you use the local footpaths/bridleways etc?
- 7 - Which is your favourite footpath/walk/local area and why?

Question 1

4.25 The foremost characteristic of the area as viewed by local people is its overwhelmingly undeveloped and tranquil nature. Though featuring a number of working farms, the lack of industrial sites is seen as a key positive attribute by residents. This underlines the local view of the area as 'historic' and 'natural'. Local sites of interest such as 'The Cliff' and Loveden Hill derive much of their value from this setting.

Question 2

4.26 Key landmarks such as Loveden Hill and Bellmount Tower and locations such as Caythorpe and the other 'Cliff' villages share many characteristics and associations that were highlighted by locals as important, such as the local architecture used throughout the small, traditional villages. Local churches formed another significant set of features highlighted as important for reinforcing the character of the area. The core underlying theme of both the man-made and natural features of the area is the 'harmoniousness' of their layout, raising the lack of support of any development other than improvement of existing infrastructure.

Question 3

4.27 A vast majority emphasised the area's 'feeling of space and peace' as the feature they valued most, in conjunction with limited traffic and 'unspoilt' rural views.

Question 4

4.28 Residents did however identify that whilst infrequent, heavy goods vehicles damage the tranquillity and character of the area as well as creating noise, pollution and causing physical damage to local roads and impacting road safety. The lack of affordable housing, a cycle lane, basic amenities and postal services were seen as drawbacks of the area, however as with other questions, residents' responses highlighted that they would view increased development negatively. Other issues included a lack of local schools available in the

area itself; the poor state of many footpaths and the lack of protection for specific species (Barn owls in particular).

Question 5

- 4.29 Residents were particularly concerned for the conservation of local farm buildings and the general architecture of the churches and villages. The prevention of lorries travelling through villages was an issue of near unanimity. To a lesser extent the lack of disabled access and seating on footpaths illustrates the concern of specific community groups. Greater awareness of the parish history and natural/wildlife attributes was also seen as an area for future improvement as was the condition of country paths and public rights of way.

Question 6

- 4.30 Though not all residents commented on their use of local footpaths and bridleways, those who did, use them on a daily or weekly basis.

Question 7

- 4.31 Footpaths/bridleways between Gelston, Caythorpe and Brandon appear to be the most heavily used while others such as those in and around Temple Hill, Carlton Scoop and Little Gates Nursery were cited as being locally popular.

Workshop

- 4.32 The workshop held on 18th September 2013 at All Saints Church in Hough on the Hill was attended by over 30 local residents. Following a brief presentation about the parish character assessment three groups were formed to discuss the draft character areas as identified on maps. The discussions, in most parts confirmed the overall findings of the questionnaire, in that the rural and unchanged character were of most importance and that people highly valued aspects such as tranquillity with bird sound and lack of traffic noise being noted as important characteristics of this area. In addition the importance of local landmarks such as the church spires and towers as well as access to footpaths and bridleways were raised.
- 4.33 All three groups agreed with the four main character areas and the descriptions below reflect the discussions on each area. Loveden Hill was specifically highlighted as a special area and it was felt that it should be given prominence within the character assessment. The historic connections dating back to the Anglo-Saxon times were seen as very significant to many local people and it was recognised that its prominent location alongside but separate to the escarpment and the wide and long distance 360 degree views out over the adjacent vale and surrounding areas emphasised its significance over many centuries.



Photographs from Loveden Hill and looking towards Loveden Hill from the footpath between Gelston and Hough

- 4.34 All groups agreed that one of the most valued aspects of living in the parish are the views both to and from the escarpment – the sense of openness, large open skies and the experience of the changing seasons were seen as intrinsic to and improving the quality of their daily life. Low levels of night time light pollution was also mentioned as a benefit allowing for the enjoyment of night skies.

5. Parish Character Areas

- 5.1 The following section describes the local landscape character areas. The characteristics are drawn from information collected in the desk based assessment but more importantly from visiting the area, walking around the landscape and consulting with local residents to gain an understanding of their views on the landscape and what they feel are the main characteristics.
- 5.2 The assessment concluded that the land within the parish can be subdivided into to four character areas. Each is described below with a general description and a summary of key characteristics. There are a number of these key characteristics that are found across all three areas.

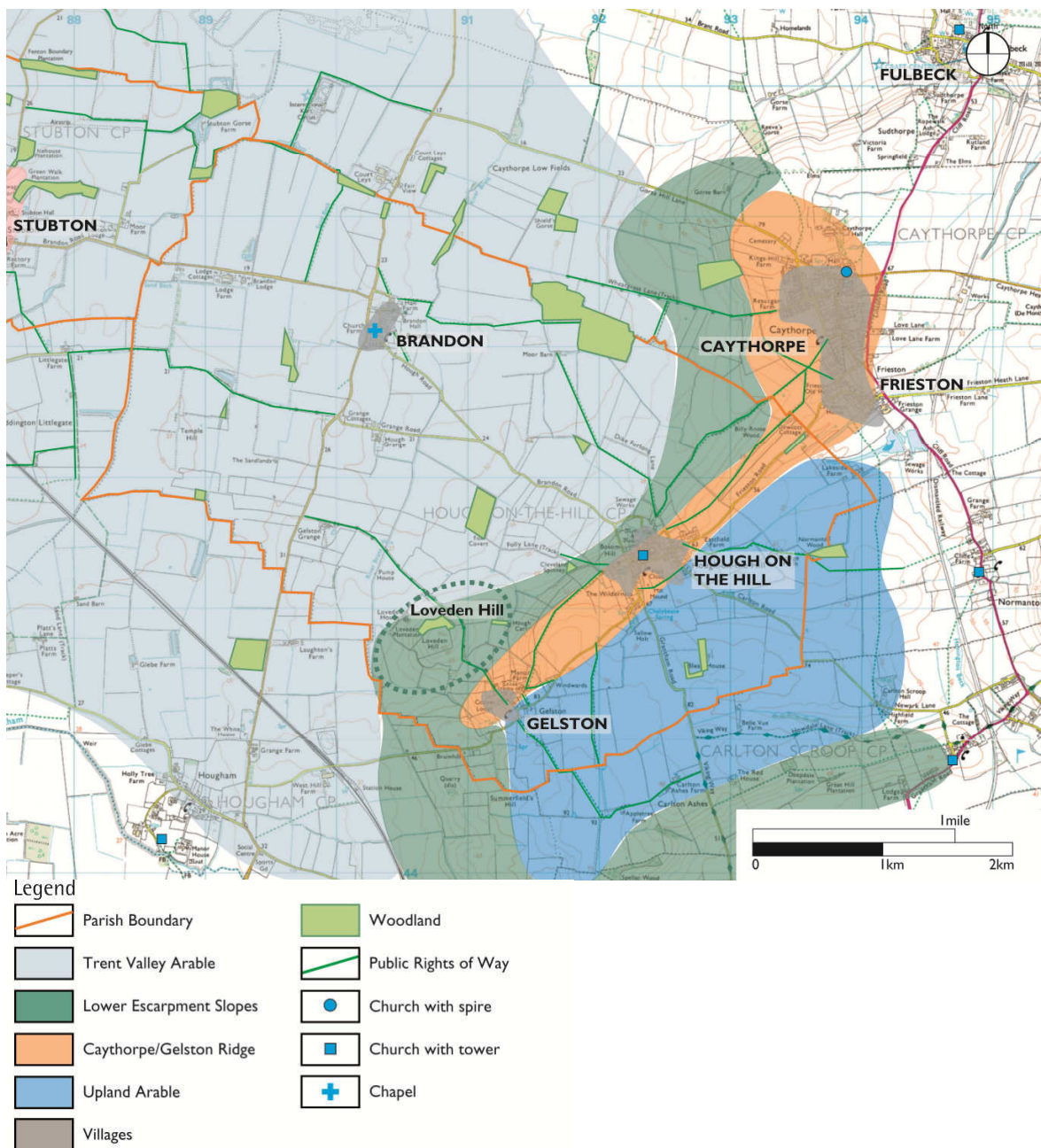


Fig 8 – Map of Parish Landscape Character Areas

5.3 PCA 1 - Trent Valley Arable - This is the dominant landscape character within the wider area and its boundaries extend well beyond the Parish. The characteristics are in keeping with the broader landscape character area of the Trent and Belvoir Vales described in the South Kesteven Assessment. Whilst generally within arable use, it was noted at the consultation event that much of the land had been used by dairy herds until the 1950s and that the choice of crop is now determined by the soil which tends to be sandy in the west with more clay in the east.

5.4 The Character Area includes the village of Brandon as well as a number of farms. The majority of buildings are of lower scale, considered harmonious with the landscape though there are a few larger scale agricultural buildings of which a small number are in some disrepair and detract from the quality of the landscape from some local views. Key characteristics for the PCA are

- A tranquil area with, large open views and only a very few minor roads.
- A relatively simple, medium to large-scale landscape with open arable fields.
- Flat or very gently undulating topography but with views east towards the escarpment beyond.
- Simple regular fields enclosed by predominately hawthorn / blackthorn hedges, with some wider field margins.
- Some hedgerow trees and areas of plantation woodland.
- Occasional farms (or former farms) with a range of residential buildings generally of lower scale two storey, but with some larger scale agricultural buildings (barns etc)
- Church towers and spires visible landmarks across the landscape particularly along the elevated land of the escarpment villages to the east.
- Building materials include a high proportion of brick with dark red pantiles with some localised use of Lincolnshire limestone.



View across arable fields and hedgerow with trees

5.5 PCA 2 – Lower Escarpment Slopes – This area comprises the undulating slopes of the limestone escarpment which runs through the parish. With the highest area to the east, the slopes within the study area are generally north-west facing. The land use is generally pasture with some arable fields on the more gently sloping areas. The northern part of Hough on the Hill sits within the character area and includes the pasture to the south of Lower Road and some houses and farm buildings on the edge of the village. Loveden Hill also sits within this character area and comprises a distinct hill with an area of woodland to the north. The village of Hough on the Hill and Loveden Hill are of historic/archaeological importance.

- A tranquil area with extensive 180 degree views to south, west and north with views stretching many miles across predominantly agricultural landscape.
- Smaller to medium pasture with some ridge and furrow evident. Some arable fields on shallow slopes.
- Gently undulating topography along the north-west facing slope with Loveden Hill being a prominent feature of historic note.

- Fields enclosed by predominantly hawthorn / blackthorn hedges – including some remnant hedges along older field boundaries.
- Some hedgerow trees and pockets of woodland and trees around the perimeters of the villages.
- Includes the northern area of the village of Hough on the Hill.
- Church towers and spires visible across the landscape both along the escarpment and out over the vale.
- Some pylons, and other infrastructure visible on the distant horizon.
- Building styles vary, but a high proportion of Lincolnshire Limestone with some ironstone and brick with dark red pantiles with some slate.



View towards the escarpment edge near Hough on the Hill

5.6 PCA 3 – Caythorpe Gelston Ridge - this area forms a narrow strip between the two adjacent character areas but is distinct in that its forms a ridge, affording 360 degree views from many locations. The area includes the village of Hough on the Hill, Gelston and Frieston/Caythorpe (outside the parish).

- A tranquil area with extensive 360 degree views from countryside and edge of village with views stretching many miles across predominantly agricultural landscape to the west and towards the higher escarpment slopes to the east.
- Mixture of small to medium pasture with some arable fields.
- A distinct ridge along the top of the escarpment between gently undulating topography along the north-west facing slope and containing former ironstone workings.
- Fields enclosed by predominately hawthorn hedges – including some remnant hedges.
- Some hedgerow trees and trees around the villages.
- Includes the villages of Gelston and Hough on the Hill.
- Church towers and spires visible across the landscape.
- Some pylons, and other infrastructure visible on the distant horizon.
- Building styles vary, but a high proportion of Lincolnshire Limestone with some ironstone and brick with dark red pantiles with some slate.



View along the escarpment edge

5.7 PCA 4 – Upland Arable - this area lies to the south and east of parish and comprises arable fields on a plateau between the two faces of the escarpment. Views to the east are towards the upper escarpment slope. A single wind turbine near Carlton Ashes is visible from much of this area.

- A tranquil area of open landscape with views across to the upper escarpment.
- Medium arable fields with some pasture.
- Generally flat topography.
- Simple regular fields enclosed by a mix of hedges and fences with drainage ditches.
- Some hedgerow trees and small woodland plantation.
- Church towers and spires visible across the landscape.
- Some pylons and other infrastructure visible across the landscape to the east.
- Scattered buildings with a mix of brick and limestone; dark red pantiles.



View across arable fields towards the upper escarpment

6. Parish Level Landscape Recommendations

- 6.1 This section draws on the findings of the character assessment and the comments and discussions held with local residents. Following the consultation draft of the initial character area plan and accompanying descriptions, the conclusion was that that the landscape, as it is, is a highly valued local resource and that the character of the parish and its setting should be retained. Key aspects of the character across all areas relate to the open, unspoilt and rural nature of the parish and wider area and that the views to and from the parish are of importance with the most significant features being the church towers and spires, Loveden Hill and the absence of larger scale built form.
- 6.2 Through consultation with residents there were a number of issues identified that are seen as threats to maintaining the landscape character, which are summarised as follows.
- Change of landowners – as much of the land is in arable agricultural use there is a concern that if the nature of farming changed then this could affect the character of the area – for example through the construction of large scale agricultural buildings.
 - An increase in the provision of alternative energy – whilst there currently are very distant glimpses of wind-turbines on the horizon, there is a threat as a result of current or future planning applications which would affect the open and uninterrupted views across the countryside, particularly in the case of turbines which would break the horizon.
 - Loss of trees and hedgerows – there is a potential threat of loss of hedgerows through either lack of management or pressure to remove for agricultural reasons. There is also a significant threat to trees, specifically those susceptible to disease such as Ash, Oak and Horse Chestnut, all of which are present within the parish.
- 6.3 A series of recommendations are made below which could be considered for adoption by the Parish Council. The aim is to assist the Parish in their promotion of the area for the enjoyment of residents and visitors specifically through the retention and enhancement of their highly valued landscapes and the distinct characteristics found within the Parish.



Community event in Brandon

A - Access to the Landscape

- 6.4 A1 - Maintain footpaths by ensuring they are easily identified and accessible year round. Efforts should be made to ensure signs are located at specific junctions or changes in direction and that, particularly where footpaths cross fields in production, a clear and accessible route is maintained. It is noted that the responsibility for implementing this may fall to individual landowners and efforts should be made to maintain dialogue with the relevant parties.
- 6.5 A2 - Review the permissive rights of way. To encourage access to the countryside efforts should be made to retain access to existing permissive rights of way and review, where appropriate, the option to have these formally designated as public rights of way. Where possible circular off road routes should be encouraged for the safety and enjoyment of all users.
- 6.6 A3 - Consider an increased number of bridleways. This would assist in avoiding unsafe use of roads (for riders and drivers). Where possible liaise with landowners to review the use of existing tracks and field margins to create new, safe, off-road bridleway routes.

B - Residential and Village Environment

- 6.7 B1 - Any new development should respect the style and scale of the existing properties and villages. Through reviews of planning applications, all development including conversions, extensions and any new development should ensure that the scale of buildings do not change the existing characteristics of the villages and that building materials, including boundary treatments (front / side walls, fences etc) are in keeping with the prevailing materials within each village. The impact of any other developments such as solar or wind generation should be considered with specific reference to the amenity and setting of residential properties.
- 6.8 B2 - New development should not significantly affect the existing village envelopes. To avoid change in the character and scale of the villages any new development should be carefully located on previously developed (brownfield) land.
- 6.9 B3 - Maintain the distinctive pattern of open spaces within the villages. Efforts should be made to ensure that the undeveloped land within the villages including the greens and other open spaces remain intact to retain the existing character and structure of the villages. (See also C4 below).

C - The Landscape and Natural Environment

- 6.10 C1 - Maintain existing hedgerows, trees and woodland and where possible encourage the planting of new trees and hedgerows. Where appropriate, the Parish Council should encourage enhancements to the biodiversity of the area through the retention of existing vegetation and promotion of new planting, where possible using seeds / cuttings established from local sources. The responsibility for implementing this will be largely with private landowners.

- 6.11 C2 - Monitor trees for signs of disease. As trees are such a highly valued resource, efforts should be taken by the landowners and those using footpaths etc. to assist in the monitoring and identification of diseased trees. Information on identifying such diseases could be made available to residents (possibly through links to existing on-line resources). In order to maintain the level of tree cover in the longer term, the planting of disease resistant species to replace those under threat should be positively encouraged.
- 6.12 C3 - Maintain the character, setting and views of the parish. The views to and from the rural, undeveloped landscape have been identified as intrinsic and special aspects of the area. The character of the landscape and setting of villages and natural features, in particular Loveden Hill, are all highly valued. Care should be taken to maintain the character of the landscape, the setting of the villages and the quality and nature of the views. When reviewing planning applications the Parish Council should consider the appropriateness or otherwise of any development with a view to avoiding change to the unspoilt and open nature of the area and views to and from it. To avoid harm, larger scale buildings and structures which will be out of keeping with the openness and unencumbered views should be avoided.
- 6.13 C4 - Local Green Space Review – Through public consultation, a number of open spaces have been identified as being distinct and significant in the local area. Loveden Hill has been highlighted as an important local feature within the landscape and the historic significance as well as physical attributes are both highly valued by local residents. The Parish Council might usefully consider whether or not the hill could be designated as a scheduled ancient monument and also, due to its local value, consider applying for the hill to be designated as a Local Green Space under the provisions set out in the NPPF. Other areas such as the open spaces within Brandon could also be reviewed to assess appropriate designations.

Policy Compliance

- 6.14 The following section demonstrates how the above recommendations relate to existing national and local policy including the objectives of the District level Landscape Character Assessment.

A - Access to the Landscape

A1 - Maintain footpaths by ensuring they are easily identified and accessible year round.

A2 - Review the permissive rights of way

A3 - Consider an increase number of bridleways.

- 6.15 NPPF - paragraph 75 of Section 8 states that “*Planning policies should protect and enhance public rights of way and access. Local authorities should seek opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.*”
- 6.16 SKDC Core Strategy – There are no specific local policies relating to public rights of way as these are covered by national policy (NPPF) and fall under the provisions set out in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, however reference is made to ‘*public access to and community value of the landscape*’ in Policy EN1 in respect of new development proposals.

B - Residential and Village Environment

B1 - Any new development should respect the style and scale of the existing villages.

B2 - New development should significantly affect the existing village envelopes.

B3 - Maintain the ‘green spaces’ within the villages.

6.17 NPPF – The NPPF requires that development “*always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings*”.

6.18 SKDC Core Strategy – Policy EN1 requires that development proposals should be assessed in respect of the following (items relevant to the above are listed)

2. *local distinctiveness and sense of place*

3. *historic character, patterns and attributes of the landscape*

4. *the layout and scale of buildings and designed spaces*

5. *the quality and character of the built fabric and their settings*

12. *Conservation Area Appraisals and Village Design Statements, where these have been adopted by the Council*

14. *protection of existing open space (including allotments and public open space, and open spaces important to the character, setting and separation of built-up areas)*

6.19 SKDC Wind Energy Supplementary Planning Document (adopted June 2013) Section 3.2 makes specific reference to Landscape and Visual Amenity and Box 2 states that site selection for turbines “shall have regard to the local landscape character”.

C - The Landscape and Natural Environment

C1 - Maintain existing hedgerows, trees and woodland and where possible encourage the planting of new trees and hedgerows.

C2 - Monitor trees for signs of disease.

C3 - Maintain the character, setting and views of the parish.

C4 - Local Green Space Review.

6.20 NPPF – Paragraph 109 of Section 11 in the NPPF requires that the planning system should ‘*contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by*’ - ‘*minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government’s commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;*

6.21 Paragraphs 76 and 77 of the NPPF set out the provisions for designating areas as Local Green Space it states that the designation should only be used –

- where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- where the green area is 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
- where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

6.22 SKDC Core Strategy – Policy EN1 notes that “development must be appropriate to the character and significant natural, historic and cultural attributes and features of the landscape within which it is situated, and contribute to its conservation, enhancement or restoration” and notes that development proposals and site allocations will be assessed in relation to the following (items relevant to the above are listed).

1. statutory, national and local designations of landscape features, including natural and historic assets
2. local distinctiveness and sense of place
3. historic character, patterns and attributes of the landscape
6. the condition of the landscape
7. biodiversity and ecological networks within the landscape
9. remoteness and tranquillity
10. visual intrusion

6.23 SKDC Landscape Character Assessment – The recommendations above reflect the objectives for the district level character area – The Trent and Belvoir Vales which are as follows –

- Maintain and improve field boundary condition.
- Retain ditch patterns.
- Maintain wet grassland areas.
- Protect any woodland cover.
- Maintain existing hedgerow trees and plant new hedgerow trees.
- Provide new woodland planting with any new large scale agricultural buildings.
- Maintain views to and from the elevated villages and churches.