

Ropsley and District Neighbourhood Plan – National Character Area Profile No. 75 - The Kesteven Uplands (2014)

Introduction

The National Character Area (NCA) profiles, which are produced by Natural England, cover the whole of England. It has been divided into 159 areas which share similar landscape characteristics, and which follow natural lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries, making them a good decision-making framework for the natural environment.

NCA profiles are guidance documents which can help communities to inform their decision-making about the places that they live in and care for. The information they contain will support the planning of conservation initiatives at a landscape scale, inform the delivery of Nature Improvement Areas and encourage broader partnership working through Local Nature Partnerships. The profiles will also help to inform choices on how land is managed and changes. Each profile includes a description of the natural and cultural features that shape the landscape, how the landscape has changed over time, the current key drivers for ongoing change, and a broad analysis of each area's characteristics and ecosystem services. Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEOs) are suggested, which draw on this information. The SEOs offer guidance on the critical issues, which could help to achieve sustainable growth and a more secure environmental future.

The Ropsley and District Neighbourhood Plan (R and D NP) area falls entirely within National Character Area 75 which is entitled the Kesteven Uplands. The purpose of this report is to extract and summarise information from NCA 75 which is relevant to the R and D NP area.

Key points are highlighted in red font

Summary of NCA 75 Kesteven Uplands NCA 75 is a gently rolling, **mixed farming landscape dissected by the rivers Witham and the East and West Glen. Ropsley is located close to the northern boundary.** The area lies at the junction of Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Leicestershire and Rutland. The majority of the area covered by the NCA falls within the historic Kesteven district of Lincolnshire. **It is a deeply rural landscape** which has only a very small urban area. This area is geologically varied with a wide range of soil types, from limestone through to heavy clays. The area's well-drained calcareous loam soils support the cultivation of cereals, oilseeds and root crops. **Wide road verges with herbs and wildflowers characterise the area, and individual hedgerow trees provide important woodland character.** The origin of the word 'Kesteven' comes partly from the Celtic word 'coed' meaning woods, and scattered woodland survives **with some important semi-natural and ancient woodlands.**

There is a principal aquifer within the underlying limestone, which also extends north to the Humber and continues beyond the area. The protection of water quality and improvement of water availability are therefore very important issues for this area **as the Kesteven Uplands form a watershed between a number of catchments including the River Glen. The River Witham rises in the NCA and both of the rivers drain into The Wash.** The Key Characteristics are.

- 1 Medium-scale, undulating mixed farmland landscape gently rising from the Fens in the east to **the limestone ridge in the west.** Large arable fields predominate on the higher ground of the Kesteven Plateau, with clipped and gappy hedgerows.
- 2 Enclosure is generally by hedgerows and more locally by stone walls.
- 3 Rivers East Glen and West Glen dissect the area, their valleys containing species-rich meadows, grazing marsh and woodlands.
- 4 Underlying limestone supports shallow, well-drained calcareous loams, with

areas of less permeable clayey soils developed on glacial till.

5 Significant areas of woodland including semi-natural and ancient, commercial woodlands and parkland landscapes which, in combination with the topography, frame and contain views.

6 Nucleated settlement pattern comprising small traditional villages with few isolated farmsteads or houses. Villages are evenly distributed with the exception of the line of settlements along the edge of the Fens to the east and larger villages towards Stamford.

7 Picturesque villages and towns with buildings of the local honey coloured limestone.

8 An archaeologically rich area.

Kesteven Uplands today

1 The NCA is agricultural; arable predominates on the higher ground or plateau with larger fields bounded by clipped and hedgerows. Species-rich verges and meadows are notable.

2 There are significant areas of woodland including semi-natural and ancient woodland which, in combination with the topography, frame and contain views.

3 The NCA is generally characterised by villages with low densities of dispersed settlements.

4 Most villages are distinguished by local limestone houses and farm buildings, with red pantiles more prevalent in the north. Many settlements retain a rich historic character.

5 The NCA is an archaeologically rich area with ancient trackways, abundant evidence of Roman settlement and deserted medieval villages.

6 Leafy country lanes with wide road verges bounded by enclosure hedgerows are typical of the area and give variety and texture to the landscape, contrasting with the more common open roads in the rolling countryside. Individual hedgerow trees provide important character.

7 Limestone and ironstone quarries throughout the area, but many of which are now disused.

8 The modern field pattern, produced through the consolidation of smaller fields, seems to retain much of the rectilinear character of the underlying planned enclosures.

Ecosystem services The Kesteven Uplands NCA provides a wide range of benefits to society.

Each is derived from the attributes and processes (both natural and cultural features) within the area known collectively as 'ecosystem services'. Those relevant to R and D NP are:

Cultural services (inspiration, education and wellbeing):

1 Sense of place/inspiration provided by the rolling nature of the landscape which is dissected north to south by the rivers Witham, East Glen and West Glen.

2 Significant areas of medium-sized woods, (semi-natural and ancient) dispersed throughout the area, framing and containing views, and alongside wide species-rich verges, meadows and mixed farmland generally enclosed by hedgerows reflect a deeply rural landscape.

3 The settlement pattern is generally dispersed but nucleated, with small, picturesque honey-coloured stone villages evenly distributed throughout the area.

4 Local geology is also reflected in the exposed geological features including characteristic limestone and ironstone quarries.

5 A sense of inspiration and escapism is associated with the intimate landscape of small woodlands, stone villages, parklands and halls which contrasts with the more open, elevated arable areas with exposed, distant views.

Sense of history:

1 The NCA includes a large concentration of deserted medieval villages, areas of ridge and furrow, ancient trackways, boundaries (e.g. dry limestone walls and ancient hedgerows).

2 The history of farming can be traced through small-scale, irregular medieval fields which remain in many areas, alongside the large-scale and regular enclosures of the 18th and 19th centuries and numerous ancient woodlands.

- 3 The long history of using local limestone for the construction of buildings is evident from the abandoned quarries scattered around the area and the vernacular which dominates.

Landscape change - Recent changes and trends:

Settlement and development - There is a moderately high rate of development outside of urban and fringe areas, but development is scattered throughout the NCA and has had little overall impact, except in the north-east and near the A1 main road with a major impact locally. The NCA has seen a high level of interest in renewable energy with single, small-medium wind turbine applications at farm level and this will contribute to landscape change. **There has been an increase in planning applications for solar farms over 50 ha in size.**

Historic features There has been limited uptake of Environmental Stewardship agreements for the management of historic features in agricultural areas. **However, the protection of archaeological features such as Scheduled Ancient Monuments has improved. It should also be noted that many historic farm buildings remain unconverted.** Most are intact structurally but dereliction of isolated farm buildings and agricultural units is likely.

Drivers of change Housing expansion could impact on the local landscape, placing more demands on the water available in the aquifer, but also creating opportunities to improve green infrastructure and provide links to the countryside for both access and biodiversity. **The demand for renewable energy is likely to increase and the area has already seen a recent rise in wind and solar energy schemes.**

Economic conditions may alter to make the extraction of minerals such as ironstone, an attractive prospect again. Demand for limestone, sand and gravel is likely to continue or even increase and it is therefore likely that existing quarries will need to be extended and new quarry sites found. While these may impact negatively on the landscape and environment in the short term, they will also create opportunities for landscape enhancement, habitat creation and recreation, and provide opportunities for interpretation, understanding and research into the geodiversity and landscape processes of the area.

Statements of Environmental Opportunity The SEOs offer guidance on the critical issues, which could help to achieve sustainable growth and a more secure environmental future.

SEO 1: Manage and enhance the agricultural landscape and soils of the Kesteven Uplands, continuing the tradition of mixed farming which has shaped the area, viable and sustainable food production, seeking to enhance biodiversity and improve water quality and availability.

- **Conserving blocks of woodland and expanding the areas of semi-natural grassland.** Manage margins and the pattern of hedgerows and fragmented habitats. These are important for wildlife as corridors and habitat networks within the farmed environment as well as for landscape character.
- **Continuing the sensitive management of historic environments.**
- Retaining mature hedgerow trees and augmenting them to ensure continuity, and restoring neglected riverside pollards.

SEO 2: Protect and significantly increase the extent, quality and connectivity of the unimproved and limestone grasslands throughout the NCA, to enhance biodiversity, ecological networks, water availability and quality, climate regulation and sense of place.

- **Managing fragmented limestone grasslands, (limestone plateau roadside verges), with the highway authorities and Wildlife Trust Living Landscapes/Life on the Verge projects.**

- Conserving and managing the suite of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Local Sites to protect and improve their condition. Raising awareness of the value and importance of the species-rich roadside verges.

SEO 3: **Manage and expand the native woodlands** throughout the Kesteven Uplands to reinforce the area's wooded character, benefit biodiversity, increase the potential for biomass, access and recreation, and help to regulate climate change and water quality.

- Promoting the extension of existing woods and planting of new woodlands of mixed broadleaved trees where this is appropriate.
- Managing and restoring boundary features including hedgerows, replacing over-mature hedgerow trees and restoring neglected riverside pollards.
- Conserving and managing the suite of woodland SSSI and Local Sites to protect and improve their condition.

SEO 4: Protect, manage and promote the area's rich historic environment including the significant limestone geology, the historic parklands, the manor houses and medieval monastic buildings, and deserted medieval villages, while also improving access and interpretation to enhance people's understanding and enjoyment of the landscape.

- Managing former extraction sites for their range of mutually beneficial heritage interests including geodiversity, biodiversity and industrial archaeology.
- **Identifying, conserving and monitoring above-ground and buried archaeological remains that are under threat from increased cultivation and pressures from development.**
- **Maintaining the character of historic villages, towns and the architecture including farmsteads and country houses by using locally quarried stone in restoration where possible, to reinforce links with the underlying geology and strengthen sense of place.**
- **Use understanding of this architecture and the settlement pattern to plan for and influence any environmentally beneficial new development which makes a positive contribution to local character.**
- **Conserving the settings of historic landmark buildings including the medieval churches, abbeys and country houses.**
- Conserving and managing geological SSSI and Local Sites to protect and improve them.
- **Promoting public access and the creation of permissive and definitive access** to increase opportunities to visit the area in a sustainable way.

Additional opportunity - **Conserve the strong settlement character of the Kesteven Uplands villages and ensure that new development is sympathetic to this, protecting its tranquil characteristics away from major urban influences.**

- **Conserving a sense of tranquillity associated with open hills, undeveloped valleys and remoter ridges by protecting relatively sparse settlement pattern of small, isolated villages, ensuring that new development is integrated into the landscape sensitively.**
- **Plan new developments that do not negatively impact on the character of settlements or surrounding landscape and that they provide accessible open green spaces.**
- **Encouraging the use of local building stone, adherence to Historic England guidelines.**
- **Planning for new community greenspaces and green infrastructure to provide wildlife corridors in order to improve the resilience of species to climate change, and to increase opportunities for local communities to enjoy their local greenspace.**