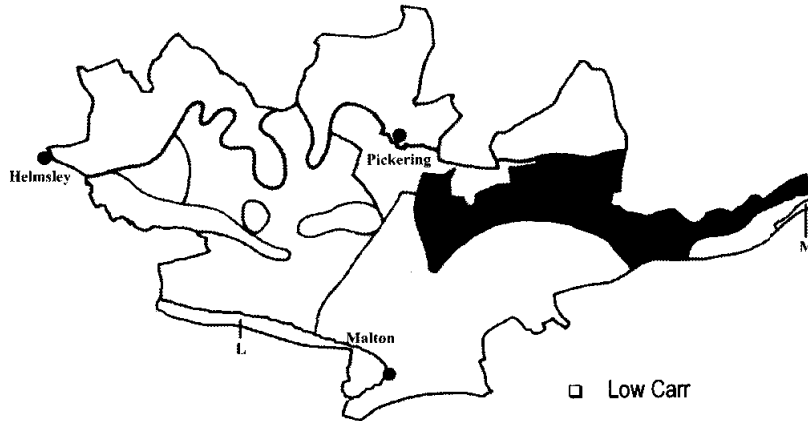


**AREA H** Open Vale Farmland**Key Characteristic Features**

- Extremely flat terrain.
- Strongly rural character.
- Extensively drained landscape.
- Open and expansive.
- Sense of relative seclusion and inaccessibility.

**Landform And Context**

The *open vale farmland* is a geographically large area that covers much of the eastern Vale. Located to the east of Pickering and Thornton-le-Dale, it broadly follows the course of the rivers Derwent and Herford to the boundary of Ryedale District at the A64 near Staxton. Due to the configuration of Ryedale District's boundary, *open vale farmland* narrows considerably to the east. However, in reality this landscape character type ranges beyond the District boundary, particularly to the north, where it extends into Wykeham Carr and eastwards into Flixton and Starr Carrs.

Formed on the fluvial and lacustrine clays of the Vale floor, the landscape of the *open vale farmland* is extremely flat and low lying. The entire area lies at around 23 to 24 m AOD sea level. There is a strong topographical contrast between the flat landscape of the *open vale farmland* and the steeply rising chalk escarpment to the south.

**Land Use And Landscape Pattern**

This is an agricultural landscape with the dark peaty soils sustaining predominantly intensively farmed arable fields, although there are also some pastures, particularly closer to the rivers Derwent and Herford. The agricultural land quality in this part of the Vale of Pickering is high (MAFF Grades 2 and 3) and is generally of a better quality than seen in other parts of the Vale. This is largely due to the presence of deeper, peaty soils. Along the southern edge of the Vale between West Heslerton and Sherburn, the infertile sands and gravels of the A64 corridor are less suited to arable or pastoral cultivation and there are areas of dry pasture, pine plantations and both working and disused sandpits. Some of the sandpits are now piggeries.

Fields are large and field boundaries mostly follow ditch lines or access tracks. The landscape is open with few hedgerows and only occasional small, geometric blocks of woodland to punctuate views. Most of these occur on the poorer soils along the southern edge of the area where they comprise mixed deciduous and coniferous plantations. Minor tree groups tend to occur alongside the roads and access tracks or are grouped as shelterbelts around the isolated properties. Hedgerow trees are generally absent.

Narrow lanes, often running in a north south alignment across the farmland, give access to isolated groups of farm buildings. All routes tend to follow a straight alignment, but with definite kinks. They therefore respond to and accentuate the regimented, geometric pattern of fields.

In keeping with much of the Vale, this is a highly planned landscape, which has undergone extensive drainage to facilitate the intensive agricultural activity seen today. The principal watercourses are the rivers Derwent and Hertford, both of which have been substantially modified by drainage engineers. Between Brompton Beck and Ings Farm, the District boundary marks the line of the former course of the river Derwent before it was canalised in the nineteenth century. A comparison of the meandering and natural line of the former river course with the straightened channel seen today provides an indication of just how artificial the landscape has become.

In addition to the rivers, a network of dykes, cuts and canalised watercourses crosses the area. These regulate the water table and are visible but not prominent in the landscape.

### Settlement

With the exception of Yedingham, which developed on the site of a Benedictine priory, most of the villages within the *open vale farmland* are concentrated on the rising land on its northern and southern margins. This pattern reflects the historically harsh conditions of the west, low lying Vale. Settlements such as Wilton, Allerston and Ebberston along the area's northern margin lie within the Fringe of the Moors.

Whilst larger settlements are largely absent, there are a number of scattered farmsteads throughout the area. These date back to the period of intensive drainage and the parliamentary enclosures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The relative

inaccessibility of these farmsteads, combined with the general lack of connecting roads in a north to south direction makes this part of the Vale seem remote and somewhat isolated.

### Subjective Responses

Despite having been radically altered by land drainage, the *open vale farmland* retains a distinctive sense of place, which is notable less for its scenic quality, which is bleak and somewhat monotonous, than for its visual expansiveness and relative seclusion.

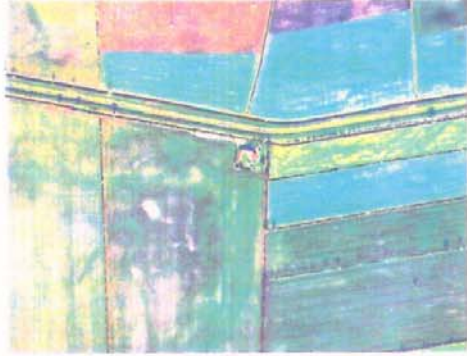
Views are long and the landscape generally open, punctuated by the occasional blocks of woodlands and by views of the surrounding hills beyond its boundaries. It is the latter views that give a sense of scale and security to a landscape that could, otherwise appear quite remote and threatening.

### Sensitivity to Change

Extensive built development is unlikely to be a possibility in this flat, low lying landscape, but further engineering works related to the river channels, drainage ditches and transmission lines are all potential forces for change. Large scale vertical elements such as transmission lines represent the most significant threat to landscape character, as they would dominate the landscape and detract from its remote and open character.

The scenery is clearly the product of its agricultural management. The intensity of this management, and in particular, the effect of land drainage, has created a highly planned landscape and scenery with few notable or distinguishing features. Despite this, the landscape has a distinctive landscape pattern and a sense of rural isolation that could be easily eroded by inappropriate changes to the landscape, regardless of whether they are widely visible.

The landscape is clearly of variable quality; Many landscape features are in a relatively poor condition; those hedgerows that do occur are often broken or replaced by post and wire fences and there is strong evidence of hedgerow loss and field enlargement. Scrubby vegetation along ditches is regularly removed and the few woodland blocks tend to be of a similar age and lacking structural, species and age diversity.



Source: Environment Agency

Low Carr (GR 945 790)

# Area H

## Open Vale Farmland

Large, flat and open low-lying fields, are characteristic of Open Vale Farmland



Near Wilton Carr House

The landscape is extensively drained by a number of deep ditches and modified river channels



Binnington Carr

The strong contrast between the *open vale farmland* and the chalk escarpment to the south is a distinctive visual feature in this area and one that may be threatened by changes to the A64 corridor. The blocks of woodland which emphasise this contrast should be conserved and it is important that the landscape in this area remains unified and uncluttered by further development or atypical land uses.

Much of the *open vale farmland* is likely to contain sites of archaeological and cultural value. These are highly vulnerable to landscape change, particularly further desiccation of remaining peat.

### Landscape Guidelines

#### Landscape Strategy

**This is a flat and low lying landscape of dark peaty soils, which sustains intensively, farmed arable fields, small woodlands and scattered settlement. Fields are large and defined by a network of drainage ditches. Hedgerows are rare and the little woodland is concentrated along the rising ground along its southern fringes. It is a highly planned landscape that, despite having been radically altered by land drainage, retains a distinctive sense of place, which should be conserved and locally enhanced.**

#### Land Management

Whilst any further field enlargement and loss of landscape structure or habitat should be discouraged, the main objective should be to maintain the open expansive character of this landscape whilst offering scope for localised landscape improvement and enhancement.

Between West Heslerton and Sherburn, the strong transition from the open landscape of the Vale to the more intimate and enclosed landscape of the Wolds escarpment should be maintained. There may be scope for new woodland planting to give greater emphasis to this boundary.

Hedgerows are conspicuous by their absence in this landscape. Those remaining should be protected, replanted and managed, particularly where they occur close to settlements, along lanes and within the A64 corridor. New hedgerow planting should not impinge on the predominantly open character of the wider area.

Although it is generally invisible in longer views, water is a key structuring element in this landscape. Specialist studies should be undertaken to ensure the best approach to maximise the visual, ecological and floodplain management requirements of all the watercourses in the area. Unless essential for flood control, no further rivers or stream channels should be modified by canalisation, diversion or changes to the banksides. Remaining areas of wetland should be protected from degradation by drainage or excessive erosion due to cattle trampling. Local enhancement measures should give priority to increasing the visual and ecological importance of the waterside landscapes, whilst maintaining the overall open quality of the landscape.

Wide uncultivated buffer margins should be created alongside drainage ditches where they abut arable land.

Linear riparian habitats are important as they provide food and necessary cover for a range of aquatic and semi-aquatic invertebrates, birds, and mammals in particular the water vole. Natural riparian habitats on the rivers Derwent and Hertford should be conserved, and priority should be given to the ecological improvement of these areas. This should include the conservation of marginal plant communities and of those on the banksides. A margin of uncultivated land should be left between the agricultural land and the tops of the banks and in areas of grazed pasture, stock should be prevented from causing bank erosion. Further tree planting of appropriate locally occurring wetland species, such as goat willow, crack willow and alder should be encouraged to provide cover for mammals especially water vole and otter.

Consideration should be given to the potential for management of local water tables for the creation of relatively large areas of wetland, which would have both visual and ecological value. This should include changes to the drainage systems to allow some areas to retain a high water table, control of pollution in particular agricultural run-off and control of non-native species. To increase the amount of wetland habitat, suitable arable fields close to existing wetland areas should be reinstated as wet grassland through changes to the drainage system and re-seeding with an appropriate grassland mix reflecting the species present in existing unimproved wet grassland areas.



These grasslands should include shallow pools to provide suitable habitat for invertebrates and birds. Important archaeological sites would also benefit from raised water table levels, since wet peat is important for palaeo-ecological and cultural preservation. Potential new sites should be identified before any major land management work is carried out. Methods for statutory protection of important sites should be sought for the most important sites.

Carr woodlands are an important wetland habitat providing cover for birds and mammals. Any areas of scrub or carr woodland should be conserved and enhanced with further planting of appropriate, locally occurring native species of tree and shrub. Some of the re-created wetland areas should be allowed to develop into carr woodland, either by natural succession or by planting indigenous wetland species such as downy birch, alder, goat willow or crack willow.

It is important that the remote, isolated character of much of this area should be maintained through the control of recreational facilities.

Along the southern edge of the *open vale farmland*, sandpit restoration schemes should be designed according to visual and ecological criteria. Ecologically, the aim should be to create a series of habitats. Visually, criteria relating to landform, edge characteristics and visual highlights are important. Other considerations may include access and leisure to maximise visitor and, therefore, income potential.

### Field Boundaries

Existing hedgerows should be conserved along their original alignment, and improved by replanting the gaps with suitable, locally occurring, native species, in particular hawthorn and hazel. Hedge cutting should avoid mechanical over-flailing. Existing willow scrub along the ditches, which flank some of the hedgerows, should be retained wherever possible, to provide wildlife habitats within areas of intensive agriculture and to strengthen the wildlife corridors created by the hedgerows.

Hedgerow trees are not a conspicuous feature of this landscape. However, around villages particularly along the A64, new planting of hedgerow trees could significantly improve both the approaches to these villages and the road corridor. This should comprise locally occurring native species, with occasional hedgerow trees of ultimately statuesque proportions, such as oak and ash.

### Trees and Woodlands

Except along the A64 corridor, woodlands are not characteristic of this landscape and it is important that the overall open character is maintained. However, small scale woodland planting would help to emphasise the southern boundary of the Vale between West Heslerton and Sherburn. This should reflect the existing geometric pattern of woodlands in terms of distribution, structure and composition. The existing small woodland blocks should be conserved and managed to improve their structure and species diversity. Management should include selective thinning of non-native species, particularly those that are invasive such as sycamore, since these tend to shade out some of the indigenous species. Any removal of mature trees due to disease or as part of a thinning regime, or any removal of dead trees, should take into account roosting bats and hole-nesting birds. Trees should be checked for both prior to felling or tree surgery. Any felled dead wood should be left on site to provide invertebrate habitat for detritivores.

Any new planting of woodlands or shelterbelts should comprise tree and shrub species native to the area to produce a good woodland mix. New woodlands would be most beneficial in areas where they can be used to extend the existing woodland cover or where there are robust hedgerows or scrub, to serve as wildlife corridors.

### Settlements and Buildings

Because many of the scattered farms have undergone considerable expansion and amalgamation they often appear intrusive and out of character in the open countryside. Screen planting could reduce the visual impact of these buildings. Such screen planting should comprise locally occurring native species rather than exotic conifers.

Larger villages are concentrated along the southern edge of the area. Coalescence of these villages through ribbon development along the A64 should be strongly resisted. Attractive 'entrance' features could be provided on the approach to villages along the A64 similar to those on the approach to Thornton-le-Dale. These could use vernacular materials and traditional methods of construction to reinforce and reflect the character of the individual villages. By giving the appearance of narrowing the road corridor, they may also assist in the reduction of traffic speeds.

Settlement throughout the remainder of the area is sparse and typically scattered. Further development should be discouraged in order to retain the expansive, remote qualities that are so characteristic of the area.

### Infrastructure

The A64 becomes increasingly urban in character in an eastern direction. There is scope to improve the setting of this road, focusing particularly on hedgerow restoration and avenue tree planting on the approach to villages.

### Priorities for Action

- ❑ *Conserve and locally enhance the existing landscape pattern of large geometric fields with few hedgerows or woodlands.*
- ❑ *Locally restore and enhance the present wetlands in the area, so that they are more sympathetic to landscape and wildlife.*
- ❑ *Continue to protect important ecological sites.*
- ❑ *Seek methods of protection for prehistoric archaeological sites preserved in peat.*