

sheilsflynn



Brecks' special qualities

Annexes

Annexes

- A1 Methodology
- A2 Viewpoint analysis
- A3 Evaluation criteria










A1 Methodology

- A1.1 Preliminary special qualities - based on the landscape character assessment, initial fieldwork and research
- A1.2 Detailed fieldwork and research - objective analysis, visual analysis, personal responses
- A1.3 Formal recording framework - using Natural England's evaluation framework
- A1.4 Cross reference to relevant guidance and project activities

Core Brecks landscape types

- Brecks landscape boundary
-  Brecks Arable Heathland Mosaic
-  Brecks Plantations
-  Brecks River valleys

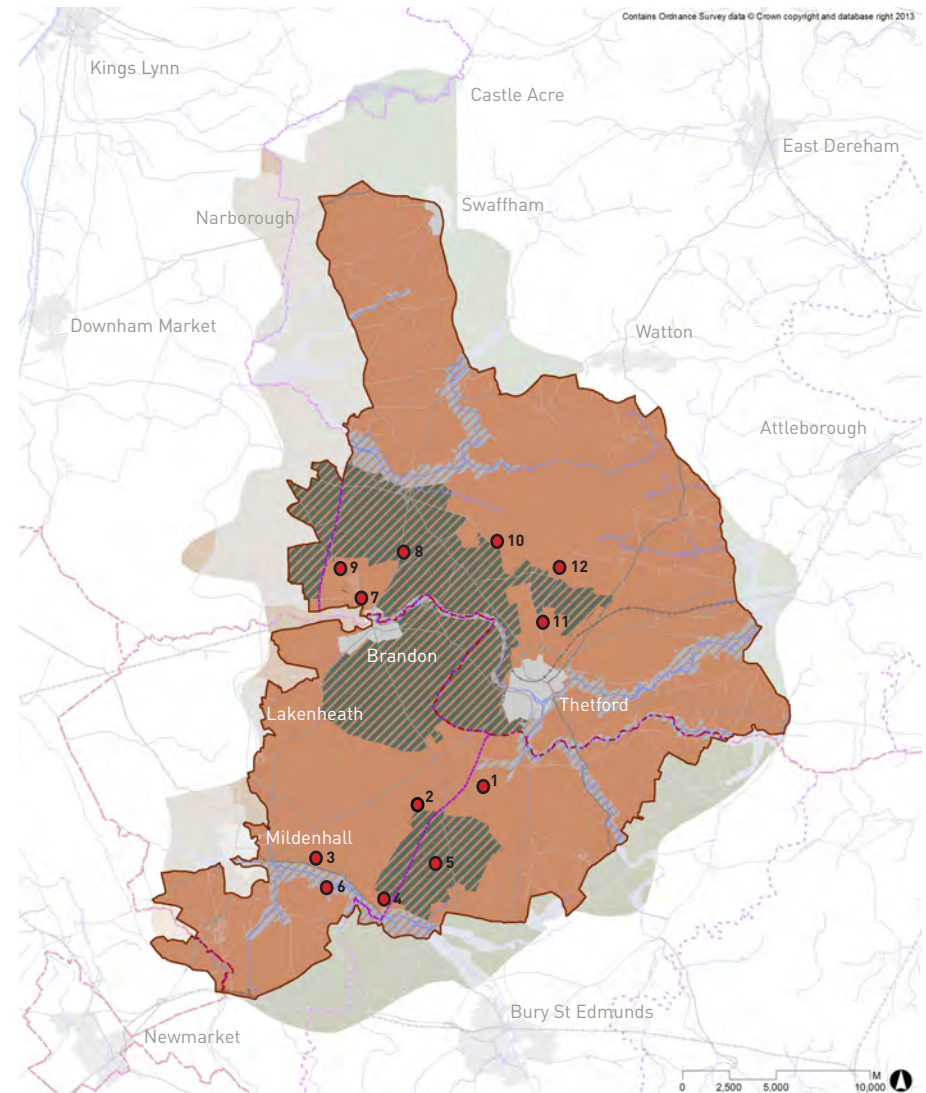
Other landscape types within NCA 85

-  Low Chalk Farmland
-  Rolling Clay Farmland
-  Plateau Estate Farmland
-  Rolling Estate Chalklands
-  Settled Fen
-  River Valleys
-  Chalk River Valleys

Viewpoints

-  Location of viewpoints used to describe the special qualities of the Brecks

Viewpoint locations



A1 Methodology

A1.1 Preliminary special qualities

The Brecks Landscape Character Assessment¹ (LCA) and the research that underpins it is the starting point for this assessment of the special qualities of the Brecks landscape.

A 're-familiarisation' tour generated an initial list of the special qualities of the Brecks. This was an unstructured set of notes that recorded the character, feel and detail of aspects of the Brecks that contribute to its special sense of place.

There are some obvious pointers - the pine lines and heaths - but there were thoughts about the working landscape, the red 'no go' flags of the military zones, butterflies, lizards, rabbit warrens, clusters of secret pingos, trackways and an oddly structured mosaic of land uses.

A1.2 Detailed fieldwork and research

Drawing on the robust methodology developed by Scottish Natural Heritage for assessing and recording the special qualities of Scotland's National Scenic Areas,² we identified a set of 12 representative viewpoints which revealed the intrinsic character of the Brecks (map on page 4). For each viewpoint, we considered three aspects of the Brecks landscape:

- **objective analysis** - visible and physical characteristics in the usual form of landform, land cover/land use, settlement pattern, specific features, biodiversity. This part of

the analysis was similar to the LCA, but we also recorded the condition of the landscape and looked for detail, for instance in the way building materials are used and the relationships between buildings, settlement and landscape features.

- **visual analysis** in the form of visual relationships and visual experience, bearing in mind that it is often the way in which characteristics combine or interact that make the landscape distinctive. We looked for aspects of scale, diversity, openness, colour and texture, line, movement, weather and views
- **personal responses** - the experience of the landscape, picking up on meaningful and evocative aspects of its character.

Each of these three was recorded in turn for each viewpoint so that there was a consistent, structured approach to the detailed fieldwork. The assessment was recorded informally on field sheet. We used extensive photography to describe the character of the landscape, supplementing our existing collection of images.

The visual evidence from the fieldwork was supplemented by research into the history and culture of the Brecks, its geodiversity, climate and biodiversity.

A working map was prepared to show the area that defines the Brecks, cross referenced with the landscape types already mapped for the LCA.

A1.3 Formal recording framework

Natural England has developed a rigorous

framework for recording a systematic evaluation of natural beauty,³ with a list of contributing factors and sub-factors which can be judged by indicators (statements of the features, characteristics and qualities which tend to indicate whether a particular factor is present).

This evidence-based approach is highly relevant and was adapted for use in recording special qualities rather than the specific criteria for designation of protected landscapes. In practice, this means that the Natural England criteria were used as an overview and that identified additional factors and sub-factors which expressed the special qualities of the Brecks.

The resulting table suggests relevant indicators that can be used to make judgements about the conservation, enhancement and management of the Brecks' distinctive qualities in a rigorous and transparent way.

A1.4 Cross reference to guidance

Finally the report signposts relevant guidance and sources of information for conserving each of the identified Brecks' special qualities. The sources used were:

- Brecks Landscape Character Assessment, 2012
- Breaking New Ground Landscape Conservation Action Plan, 2013
- The Brecks Biodiversity Audit, 2009.

³ Guidance for assessing landscapes for designation as National Park or AONB in England, March 2011

¹ Brecks landscape character assessment, 2012, Sheils Flynn

² Identifying the special qualities of Scotland's National Scenic Areas, David Tyldesley and Associates, 2007, SNH Commissioned Report no 255

A2 Viewpoint analysis

A formal record of the structured landscape analysis which contributed to the Brecks' Special Qualities report, based on the methods developed by Scottish Natural Heritage (see A1.2)

Viewpoint 1 – East of Barrow's Corner

Grid Ref: TL 842777



East



North-west



North-east



West



Objective	Visual	Personal/emotional
<p>Very gently rolling, smooth landform – slight slopes in all directions, but no abrupt topographic features. Large arable fields bordered by well established, straight farm tracks, separate straight shelterbelts of pine trees and occasional larger blocks of mixed woodland.</p> <p>Uninhabited – Barrow's Corner pig farm to west, but no sign of any buildings within sight of viewpoint. No hedgerows, all fields enclosed by pine lines or pine shelterbelts or larger blocks of conifer woodland</p>	<p>Contrasts in texture between grassland tracks and cropped arable fields</p> <p>Dark backdrop of woodland to every angle of view</p> <p>Large scale landscape; relatively homogeneous, but subtle changes in the pattern of the repeated elements – arable fields, pine-lines, mixed woodland.</p> <p>Angular geometry of fields, trees and tracks. Long, straight lines. Always a backdrop to views so large scale but contained</p>	<p>Empty, quiet.</p> <p>Anyone you see stops to talk and is inquisitive</p> <p>Deeply rural and very much a working landscape. Hints of agriculture/forestry and construction. Quite scruffy in places – bits of tarpaulin, machinery in corners.</p> <p>Predictable pattern. Very big – takes a long time to walk across each field and view changes only at corners of fields</p>

Viewpoint 2 – Berner's Heath

Grid Ref: TL 799773



North



East



South (Berner's Heath)



Ruin (west edge of heath)



Objective	Visual	Personal/emotional
<p>Smooth, very subtle change in elevation. Barely perceptible, but slight roll to higher elevation is visible in longer views across the heathland to the south.</p> <p>Arable fields separated by dense, thick (10 tree wide) shelterbelts of pines and larger geometric blocks of mixed woodland.</p> <p>Wide, dusty long straight farm tracks (byways) rutted by vehicles alongside some fields.</p> <p>Open heathland (Berner's Heath) to south, edged by larger tracts of conifer plantations. More organic and textured mosaic of acid grassland, heather and patches of scrub. Relatively open</p>	<p>Strong contrasts in texture, colour and enclosure between woodland, pine belts and heathland.</p> <p>Filtered views through pine lines emphasise contrasts between dark and light – foreground and backdrop. Strong geometric lines and abrupt edges of woodland and arable fields vs mottled, textured and patchy mosaic of heathland.</p> <p>Brownish colours of heathland compared to brighter greens of verges.</p> <p>Wire fencing around heathland</p> <p>Ruins of a pot-marked building or possibly a military screen to west and distant views to monument along A11.</p>	<p>Some of pines on the edges of the pine lines are twisted and knarled, exposing primitive looking contorted reddish trunk skeletons, which stand out against the dark green mass of the woodland edge. As if some of the pines have personality</p> <p>Distant noise and movement of vehicles on A11 to west.</p> <p>Odd ruin along border of heathland to west of viewpoint – poignant and abandoned, semi-overgrown. Sense that some parts of landscape are intensively used and others (eg heathland) left to nature. Pheasants running along fence in heathland, ducking beneath the scrub and longer grass</p>

Viewpoint 3 – B1112, north-west of Icklingham

Grid Ref: TL 769736



North-west



North-east



Objective	Visual	Personal/emotional
<p>Very gently rolling landform. Grassland to north and more textured (grazed) common land to south, where there is also a more 'lumpy' landform in places. Dead straight road with very wide grassy verges. No hedgerows, but instead road bordered by wire stock-proof fencing. Straight pine lines marking field boundaries and tracks on all sides of the fields</p>	<p>Large fields but enclosed on all sides, with framed views beyond (where road cuts through pine lines). Pine lines marking straight paths and tracks, which cut diagonally across the existing field pattern and suggest a landscape of historic layers.</p> <p>An enclosed landscape which seems spacious, not least because this must be an historic drove road with wide grassy verges.</p> <p>Pine lines stand out from woodland edges with light trunks silhouetted against the dark green foliage</p>	<p>Village of Icklingham to south-east and roads all around, but the pine lines cut out the bustle and only the B1112 is visible.</p> <p>Strong sense of history and a historic track or settlement in the bumpy fields to the south. 'Hidden finds' and layers of history</p>

Viewpoint 4 – Rampart’s Field

Grid Ref: TL 789717



South-west



South-east



East



North



Objective	Visual	Personal/emotional
<p>Hummocky, small scale landform, with steep low ridge to the north, which is almost masked by dense scrub and trees.</p> <p>Area of open access land with small car park.</p> <p>Managed as a nature reserve by a local Friends Group</p>	<p>Small-scale landscape of paths, meadow, trees and scrub. Views are contained by trees and scrub.</p> <p>Tussocky, highly textured grassland with a diverse array of flora.</p> <p>Views up to stunted and twisted silhouettes of pine lines on the crest of the ridge (and edge of Rampart’s Field) to the north</p>	<p>Feels a bit like a quarried landscape, with unpredictable, ‘wonky’ character.</p> <p>Landscape seems quite disorientating – small area feels bigger than it is as (easy to go round in circles). Like a microcosm</p>

Viewpoint 5 – Near King's Picnic Site, North Stow

Grid Ref: TL 827752



North



East



West



South



Objective	Visual	Personal/emotional
<p>Forestry Commission managed conifer plantation, with straight rides between a relatively small scale geometric pattern of forest compartments. Plantations are of different ages in the woodland lifecycle, with some mature and some newly planted.</p> <p>Strong hierarchy of forest rides, from wide, straight rides with dusty (sandy) tracks that are used by lorries and neat piles of logs along the route, to narrow, grassy footpaths.</p> <p>B1106 and recreational car park to west of the viewpoint.</p>	<p>Views from this open ride are tightly framed by mature stands of woodland to the north, but filtered to more open newly planted woodland to the east.</p> <p>Very strong contrasts of light and shadow. Dramatic angles and straight lines of division and change.</p>	<p>Surprisingly varied scenery and a feeling of being up close to nature – woodpeckers and tree creepers.</p> <p>Formality about the pattern; sense of ephemeral landscape that is being formed and reformed.</p> <p>A controlled canvas</p> <p>Working landscape of logs and lorries and constant change.</p> <p>Domestic scale in this part of the forest.</p> <p>Sense of being very secure and on the edge</p>

Viewpoint 6 – Farthing Bridge, Icklingham

Grid Ref: TL 827752



West



South-east



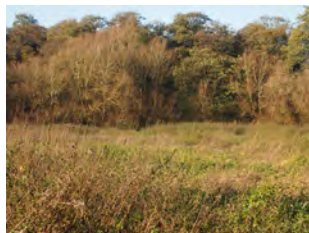
Objective	Visual	Personal/emotional
<p>Flat, relatively broad river floodplain of the River Lark to the south of Icklingham. Unusually wide floodplain compared to other Brecks river valleys. Pastures, with areas of tussocky grass, small wetlands and reeds to south of river; scrubby tree belt fringing the river bank to the north. Field boundaries are a mix of hedgerows, tree belts and wire fencing. There are two small bridges over twin watercourses in this part of the floodplain.</p>	<p>Relatively enclosed landscape, but with large fields. Curved, soft edges. Detailed, diverse mosaic of vegetation and water. Richly textured, with hummocky landform, pools of floodwater, patches of reeds and tussocks of longer grass within a matrix of floodplain pasture.</p> <p>River is a focus for views, but is quite overshadowed by riparian vegetation in some places.</p> <p>Sequence of views along the road and over the two bridges, with dense vegetation in between.</p> <p>Overlapping, layered effect of hedgerows and trees.</p> <p>No straight edges</p>	<p>Deeply rural, familiar river floodplain views. Strong sense of order and function as the river is the driving force, shaping its surroundings.</p> <p>No cars, people or even buildings in sight (although the village is close-by).</p> <p>Organic, natural. Meandering and relaxing. Timeless</p>

Viewpoint 7 – Little Ouse at Brandon

Grid Ref: TL 783869



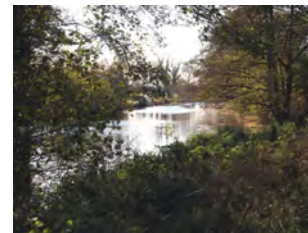
East



North-west



North-east



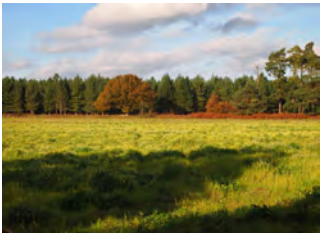
West



Objective	Visual	Personal/emotional
<p>Flat river floodplain on northern fringes of Brandon Scrub, reeds and tussocky grass to north, edged by belt of woodland on the margins of the floodplain. River Little Ouse to the south and is a focus for views. Gardens and boat house paraphernalia on south bank of river.</p> <p>Curved, natural alignment of landscape features, following the river corridor; only straight edges are marking land ownership boundaries, which extend to the river edge.</p> <p>Groups of houses in views to the east, along the A1065</p>	<p>Highly textured, lush river floodplain with a natural character. The river structures the landscape, but the mix of land uses on the fringes of Brandon give a slightly chaotic character to the riverbank views.</p> <p>Enclosed along the riverbank, but the wider floodplain to the north gives a sense of scale and an implied feeling that the river can and does shift course on a regular basis.</p> <p>Noise of traffic and views to Brandon bridge to east</p> <p>Relatively small scale landscape</p>	<p>The river is an attractive focus, which draws and holds attention</p> <p>Tranquil landscape, but a sense of the busy settlement and roads just close by. River has a calming influence</p> <p>Very strong natural presence – senses are alert because of the dominance and flow of the river</p>

Viewpoint 8 – Fringe of Emily's Wood, Lynford Road

Grid Ref: TL 806901



North



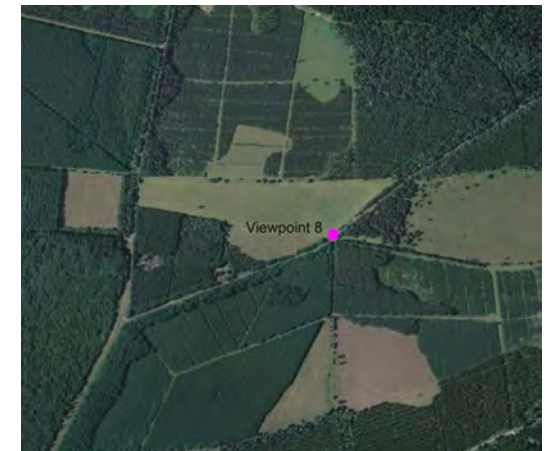
West



South-east



North-west



Objective	Visual	Personal/emotional
<p>Very gently sloping landform. Arable field within the forest. One of many in an area that is dominated by extensive commercial plantations. The edges of the woodland are fringed by a thin, sporadic line of deciduous trees, with occasional Scot's pines within the mix.</p> <p>To the south, Lynford Road is a straight, narrow cut through the forest. There are functional straight rides leading from the road (via gates) into the forest. Both rides are completely surrounded by trees.</p>	<p>Straight edges - in field pattern, road and plantation edges. Very strong sense of enclosure as all sides of the field can be seen and the view is contained. Eye is drawn to any small change in the woodland skyline silhouette, so the occasional deciduous tree or Scot's pine becomes a minor landmark in the view.</p> <p>To the south and along the road, views are densely enclosed and channelled along the road and along the adjacent forest rides.</p>	<p>The open arable field in the centre of the view is a flat plane which encourages the eye to roam.</p> <p>Angular geometry of field and plantation edges.</p> <p>Sense of arrival and opening out - open field within forest has a special quality.</p> <p>Road and rides to the south have a functional character - heavy galvanised steel and warning signs. Keep out! The plantation here is rather scary - sense that you could get lost and that you'd be entering something vast and potentially unending</p>

Viewpoint 9 – Brandon Road, north-west of Weeting

Grid Ref: TL 769892



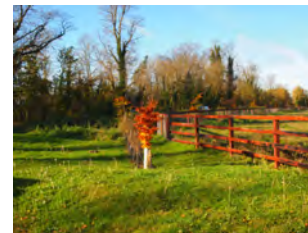
North



North-east



South-east



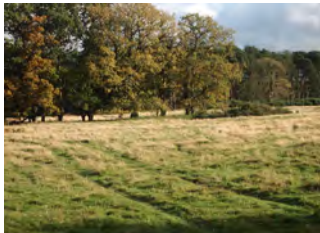
West



Objective	Visual	Personal/emotional
<p>Dead straight road on a very gently sloping plateau to the north west of Weeting. Road is enclosed by a dense tree belt to the west; open views across arable fields to the east, but with distant enclosure by more woodlands.</p> <p>Large, stone gateposts at turn-in from road, with small newly planted hedgerows alongside. Parkland character, with some mature trees in the field. Sheep grazing.</p> <p>To south (towards village) the fields are subdivided by electric/wooden fences and buildings are visible through the trees. New tree planting close to boundaries</p>	<p>Partially open landscape; Mature parkland trees frame and add a focus to views across the fields. The edges of the plantations are bordered by mixed woodland so the fields have softly textured borders. Longer, rural views to the north and west; more enclosed, domestic small-holding to the north, on the margins of Weeting.</p>	<p>Odd juxtaposition of flamboyant gateposts in an open farmland setting - suggests questions. Is there going to be a new development? A landscape with personality.</p> <p>Mix of parkland, farmland, farm and village, with those gate-posts too. Domestic, small-holding. New planting suggests a work in progress.</p>

Viewpoint 10 – Near West Tofts

Grid Ref: TL 848940



East



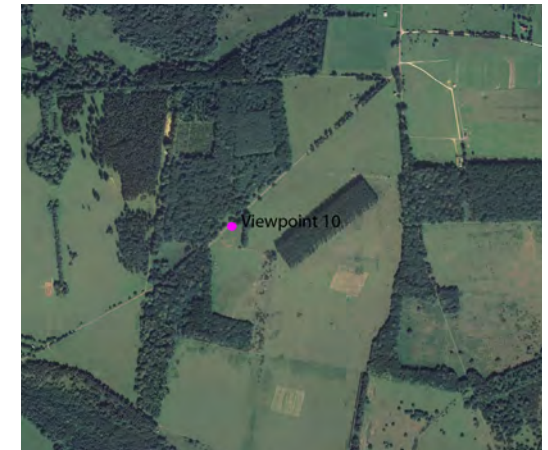
South-east



North-west



North-east



Objective	Visual	Personal/emotional
<p>This viewpoint is within the STANTA military zone (inadvertently) close to Buckenham Tofts Plantation. A very gently sloping landform and a natural landscape pattern with a mosaic of grassland, heathland and woodland. Straight single track road, with some remnant pine lines alongside</p>	<p>Long views, partially framed by stands of mixed woodland and tree belts, with open acid grassland and heath.</p> <p>Some straight edges - remnant field edges and tracks</p> <p>Exapnsive scale; nothing containing the views and the horizon seems distant</p>	<p>Landscape seems almost manicured, with stunning vistas and an attractive mix of heathland and woodland.</p> <p>Sense of being on the edge and looking out across a relatively natural landscape. Highly textured, colourful (autumn shades)</p> <p>Back in time. Seems unfarmed and empty. Birdsong. Relaxing and timeless</p>

Viewpoint 11 – Croxton

Grid Ref: TL 873874



South-east



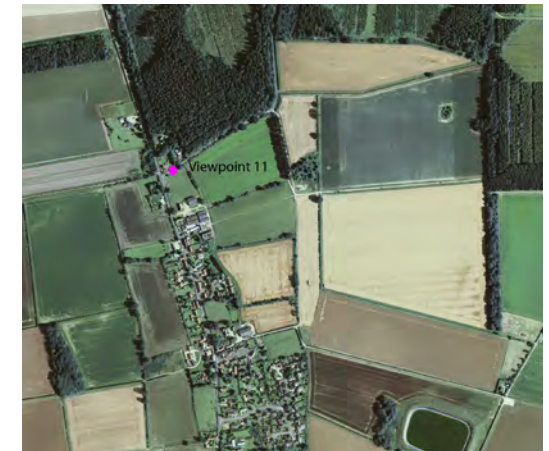
North-east



South west



West



Objective	Visual	Personal/emotional
<p>Hereward Way (lane) on northern fringes of the village of Croxton. Views are across small paddocks to a farmhouse on the edge of the village. The house, farm buildings and surrounding walls are built from flint, stone and brick. A mature oak tree is part of the complex.</p> <p>This entrance to the village from the north is marked by an ornate village sign on the grass verge. The boundaries of the road are defined by post and wire fences. To the north and east, the road is enclosed by dense stands of mixed woodland so there is a strong contrast between the settlement and the countryside to the north.</p> <p>The road leading into the village has open arable fields (bounded by hedgerows) to the west. Within the village, there are individual trees within the paddocks and a mix of hedgerows and stone walls defining individual properties.</p>	<p>The farm complex is in the centre of the view, seen across an extensive, open green paddock. This loose settlement pattern, with a mix of buildings, stone walls and fields provides an attractive entrance to the village and a transition from a rural to a settled environment.</p> <p>Contrast with the densely enclosing woodland along hereward way to the north.</p>	<p>The stone walls surrounding the farm complex 'anchor' the buildings into the land so that there is a strong sense of historic continuity. The farmhouse, and the houses along the road leading into the villages, are built on a smaller scale to the barn adjacent to the house, giving the working farm a stronger presence than the house - there is also farm machinery in view. This is a functional landscape; not a postcard view.</p> <p>Road signs and overhead wires add hints of domestic clutter.</p>

Viewpoint 12 – Great Thorpe Heath

Grid Ref: TL 884894



West



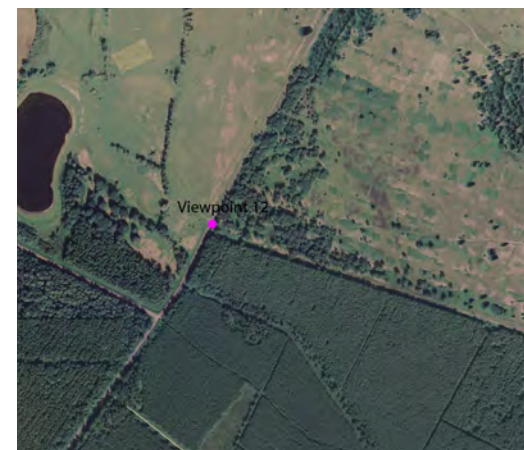
North-west



South-east



East



Objective	Visual	Personal/emotional
<p>Gently sloping, open heathland plateau landscape near to Fowlmere. Mix of open grass heath, stands of woodland and pine lines to the west. Bracken and post-and-wire fencing alongside the road. Mixed woodland to the east, with small areas of open grassland between the trees (mostly birch). To the south-east there is more extensive commercial woodland plantations, with straight rides.</p> <p>There is a mown track along the road, which may perhaps be for maintenance.</p> <p>This is the edge of the STANTA military zone so there is no public access.</p>	<p>The sequence of views from the road suddenly open up at this point, having emerged from a zone of dense woodland to open woodland.</p> <p>The mere is hidden from view behind stands of woodland and a pine line.</p> <p>Bracken and autumn colours define the strong landscape edges along the road; more mottled, textured landscape pattern within open grass heath beyond.</p>	<p>Sudden contrasts between open and enclosure; edge landscapes. You feel small and within a landscape mosaic that is on a very big scale.</p> <p>Simple, quiet and slightly mysterious landscape. The pine line suggests a historic field boundary that is a remnant and there is a partial view beyond it, but you can't see what it might be. The 'no access' rule heightens the sense of mystery. The pine line peters out into the distance on the heath - it is no longer a functional part of this landscape.</p>

A3 Evaluation criteria

Natural England's rigorous framework for recording a systematic evaluation of natural beauty, as applied to the Brecks (see A1.3)

Natural beauty evaluation table - The Brecks

Factor	Example sub-factor	Example indicator	Brecks indicator
Landscape quality	Intactness of the landscape in visual, functional and ecological perspectives	Characteristic natural and man-made elements are well represented throughout	<i>Extensive and large scale mosaic of heathland, farmland, woodland and blocks of commercial forestry on a plateau with a relatively dry continental climate and exceptionally infertile sandy soils. Many field and road boundaries defined by distinctive remnant 'pine lines' of contorted Scots pine. Dispersed pattern of settlements: towns and villages concentrated in narrow river valleys, connected by an open, angular network of straight roads and tracks.</i> The juxtaposition of acid and calcareous soils within a mosaic of woodland, tree belts, heathland and farmland contributes to distinctive and exceptionally rich biodiversity. 28% of all England's S41 Priority Species occur in the Brecks.
	The condition of the landscape's features and elements	Landscape elements are in good condition	Strong overall character. However, the heathland component of the mosaic (which contributes the most distinctive sense of place) has become fragmented and the pine lines, which were planted in the early nineteenth century are becoming increasingly mature, with gaps and occasional dead trees.
	The influence of incongruous features or elements (whether man-made or natural) on the perceived natural beauty of the area	Incongruous elements are not present to a significant degree, are not visually intrusive, have only localised influence or are temporary in nature	The conifer plantations are incongruous features which have, over the past century, become an established component of the Brecks landscape mosaic. The Brecks has always contained a mix of odd land uses, including rabbit warrens (medieval times), designed parklands (18th century) and military training areas (today and this peculiar mix is part of the Brecks character. However, elements which seem incongruous are those which change the overriding sense of 'emptiness' on the plateau, which is typically not settled. They include the built infrastructure associated with the Lakenheath airfield and large agricultural buildings. Other incongruous elements are farm reservoirs and the temporary intrusive influence of polytunnels, pig shelters and solar farms

Factor	Example sub-factor	Example indicator	Brecks indicator
Scenic quality	A distinctive sense of place	Landscape character lends a clear and recognisable sense of place	Sandwiched between the more fertile clayland plateaux to the north, east and south, and the level drained peat and silt fens to the west, the Brecks' distinctive land use history sets it apart from all surrounding landscapes. The combination of a sparse settlement pattern, a large scale mosaic of remnant dry heath, farmland and forestry plantations and the strongly angular, pattern of field boundaries, pine lines and roads is highly distinctive. This large scale landscape pattern harbours important subtle and sometimes surprising landscape characteristics, which are also important to the Brecks' identity. Examples are fluctuating meres, pingos and a high concentration of important archaeological features resulting from a long continuity of human settlement, including Neolithic flint mines, medieval churches, priories and rabbit warrens, 18th- and 19th-century designed parklands and estate villages, Second World War defence features and 20th-century abandoned settlements in the military training area known as the Stanford Training Area (STANTA).
		Landform shows a strong sense of scale or contrast	A gently undulating landscape with a low-lying, dry plateau that rises to the north. Subtle long slopes lead to alluvial flats containing narrow, shallow, meandering river valleys. The Brecks is also known for an unusual suite of periglacial landforms and features, including remnants of collapsed pingos and other ground-ice depressions (eg Thompson Common and Fouldon Common) and areas of patterned ground where with patches of calcium-rich soils are interspersed with acidic conditions. Fluctuating meres, such as those at Fowlmere and Ringmere, may also have formed during the post glacial period.
	Visual interest in patterns of land cover	Land cover and vegetation types form an appealing pattern or composition in relation to each other and/or to landform which may be appreciated from either a vantage point or as one travels through a landscape	The large scale mosaic of lowland heath, mixed farmland, conifer plantations, broadleaf woodland and tree belts is understood when travelling along the long straight, gently undulating roads and tracks that criss-cross the Brecks. The regular geometric shape and form and the repeated occurrence of plantations and shelterbelts unify the land cover pattern, forming wooded horizons and framing views into adjacent landscapes.

Factor	Example sub-factor	Example indicator	Brecks indicator
	Appeal to the senses	Strong aesthetic qualities, reflecting factors such as scale and form, degree of openness or enclosure, colours and textures, simplicity or diversity, and ephemeral or seasonal interest	Overall the scale and strongly contrasting blocky patterns of open and enclosed landscapes are characteristic of the Brecks landscape. There is a striking change in the character of vegetation at the fringes of the Brecks, which is particularly evident during the winter months, when the roadside bracken turns a rusty reddish brown. The heaths and mosaics of acid and calcareous grasslands and the belts of mixed woodland and pine have a distinctive rough texture, which contrasts with the uniformity of the arable fields and conifer plantations. The sandy soils and scattered flints are ubiquitous; farm and forest tracks are typically rutted with sand and traditional knapped flint, clunch (a form of impure chalk) and 'white' brick are characteristic building materials.
		Memorable or unusual views and eye-catching features or landmarks	Belts of contorted Scots pine form a striking silhouette against the fields, defining the Brecks
		Characteristic cognitive and sensory stimuli (e.g. sounds, quality of light, characteristic smells, characteristics of the weather)	The unique landscape of the Brecks stems from the region's free-draining, nutrient-poor sandy soils and its micro-climate, which is relatively dry with extremes of temperature. The combination of drought, low rainfall, hot summers and cold winters has influenced the development of steppe-type vegetation and to an agricultural system that used the infertile soils for grazing and rabbit warrening and the alluvial river valley soils for more intensive cropping and fen products. Contrasts between the dark, densely enclosed forestry plantations and the surrounding more open farmland and heathland landscapes imparts striking changes in the quality of light and the way the landscape is experienced, with sudden vistas and framed, open views as the straight roads slice across the mosaic of juxtaposed land uses. The heathland landscapes and forestry plantations each have a characteristic smells, which contribute to the strong sensory experience of the Brecks.
Relative wildness	A sense of remoteness	Relatively few roads or other transport routes	Away from the main A-road transport corridors where traffic is consistently busy including the A11, A1065 and A134, the Brecks remains still and peaceful.
		Distant from or perceived as distant from significant habitation	The area is sparsely populated. In this dry, infertile plateau landscape, settlement (and archaeological features) are concentrated in the river valleys and on the edge of the Fens to the west, as well as close to the postglacial meres and pingo ponds.

Factor	Example sub-factor	Example indicator	Brecks indicator
	A relative lack of human influence	Extensive areas of semi-natural vegetation	The Brecks has internationally important extensive tracts of lowland heath, which often comprise complex mosaics of acid and calcareous grassland, or "grass heath", together with, in places, heather-dominated heath. The Brecks also contains nationally important wetland habitats, including pingos and groundwater-fed meres.
		Uninterrupted tracts of land with few built features and few overt industrial or urban influences	The Brecks has absorbed the large scale built infrastructure associated with commercial forestry and military training areas and airfields. Nevertheless, this remains a deeply rural landscape; the large scale pattern of land uses contains extensive areas with a strong sense of remoteness
	A sense of openness and exposure	Open, exposed to the elements and expansive in character	The extensive heaths and arable farmland landscapes of the Brecks have an open, expansive character with a strong sense of exposure to the elements. This is heightened by the unusual continental microclimate of the Brecks area, which is characterised by extremes of temperature.
	A sense of enclosure and isolation	Sense of enclosure provided by (eg) woodland, landform that offers a feeling of isolation	Forestry plantations and belts of woodland create a strong sense of enclosure which contrasts with the surrounding open arable, heathland and grassland landscapes. The blocks of forestry and woodland create areas that feel relatively empty and isolated.
	A sense of the passing of time and a return to nature	Absence or apparent absence of active human intervention	The open, natural landscapes of the Brecks heaths give the impression of a complete absence of human activity, although these landscapes have in fact developed as a result of human intervention in the form of extensive stock grazing, rabbit warrening and (today) landscape management which incorporates regular disturbance of ground surfaces to encourage the rare ruderal species that are found in the Brecks.
Relative tranquillity	Contributors to tranquillity	Presence and/or perceptions of natural landscape, birdsong, peace and quiet, natural-looking woodland, stars at night, stream, sea, natural sounds and similar influences	Around 60 per cent of the Brecks is classified as undisturbed (Campaign to Protect Rural England Intrusion Map 2007) and the Brecks remains amongst the most tranquil areas in the East of England. There are very large areas of forest and private farmland where it is rare to see other people. Expansive silences are broken only by the calls of unfamiliar birds reaching across empty heathland

Factor	Example sub-factor	Example indicator	Brecks indicator
	Detractors from tranquillity	Presence and/or perceptions of traffic noise, large numbers of people, urban development, overhead light pollution, low flying aircraft, power lines and similar influences	Threats to tranquillity come from new development (especially around Thetford) and increased car travel, including in relation to recreational trips. This represents a fall from 86 per cent since the 1960s (Campaign to Protect Rural England Intrusion Map 2007). Areas suffering from intrusion are associated with Thetford, Brandon, the A11 corridor and development (Lakenheath) on the western fringes of the Brecks. There is also regular intermittent low flying from military aircraft which can feel intrusive.
Natural heritage features	Geological and geo-morphological features	Visible expression of geology in distinctive sense of place and other aspects of scenic quality	The distinctive landscape character of the Brecks is underpinned by its unique geodiversity, most notably the area's Pleistocene sand, clay and flint-derived sediments and associated periglacial landforms. The area is particularly important for our understanding of Pleistocene geology and the evolution of this landscape in response to the extreme tundra environment of the last ice age, The Neolithic flint mines of Grimes Graves and the concentration of early settlements are located in the Brecks because of the exceptional high quality of the seams of flint and scattered superficial flint deposits found in the area.
		Presence of striking or memorable geo-morphological features	Towards the end of the last (Anglian) Ice Age, when tundra-like conditions prevailed, freeze and thaw processes on the surface chalk led to characteristic patterned ground and striped soils of alternating acid sands and alkaline chalk (as at Brettenham Heath). During this period shallow depressions termed pingo ponds, as well as the so-called karstic depressions, such as the Devil's Punchbowl at Croxton, were formed. The famous fluctuating Brecks meres, such as Ringmere and Fowlmere, may be connected to this karstic drainage.
	Wildlife and habitats	Presence of wildlife and/or habitats that make a particular contribution to distinctive sense of place or other aspects of scenic quality	Recent studies (Brecks Biodiversity Audit, 2010) have revealed the Brecks to be a unique biodiversity hotspot in the UK, vitally important for rare and threatened species. Over 12,500 species were documented in 2010, 2,000 of which were endangered. The Brecks contains 28 per cent of all rare species in the UK and is particularly important for invertebrate species. As a consequence of the value and fragility of the natural environment, 40 per cent of the Brecks NCA is covered by national nature conservation designations. The national and international importance of the Brecks heathland is recognised by the many designations, including four National Nature Reserves and 42 SSSI. In addition, European legislation has designated one Special Protection Area and four SAC. Some 13 per cent of the area supports Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats, including lowland heathland and lowland meadows.

Factor	Example sub-factor	Example indicator	Brecks indicator
		Presence of individual species that contribute to sense of place, relative wildness or tranquillity	<p>The Brecks is notable for a distinctive flora and fauna that is reliant on open and disturbed ground and which contribute to the landscape's unique sense of place. The grass heaths are typified by an open turf of grasses such as sheep's fescue, while calcareous soils support chalk grassland species such as purple milk-vetch, fairy flax hairy rock-cress. In a few instances on highly calcareous soils, often where these have been brought to the surface by human activity, the broken turf supports an unusual group of rare lichens such as scaly-breck lichen (<i>Squammarina lentigera</i>). The rarest of the Brecks plants are found on the heaths, as well as in the rides and other open space in Thetford Forest, including Spanish catchfly (<i>Silene otites</i>), Breckland thyme (<i>Thymus serpyllum</i>) and spring speedwell (<i>Veronica verna</i>). On the deeper acid soils, and where management favours it, heather can be abundant and on some heaths forms dense stands.</p> <p>The Brecks has important populations of rare ground-nesting birds such as stone curlew, woodlark and nightjar. The heaths are exceptionally important for invertebrates, including ants, spiders, beetles and solitary bees, with characteristic butterflies including the brown argus and dingy skipper on the chalk and small copper, grayling and green hairstreak on the acid heaths.</p>
Cultural heritage	Built environment, archaeology and designed landscapes	Presence of settlements, buildings or other structures that make a particular contribution to distinctive sense of place or other aspects of scenic quality	<p>Brecks' vernacular buildings are built of brick, flint or chalk, or combinations of these materials, with roofs of slate or pantile. Local building materials include clunch, a form of impure, hard chalk and 'white' brick, which results from mixing clay with lime. Decorative brickwork, with different coloured bricks laid in patterns, and traditional knapped flint are characteristic local architectural features.</p> <p>Settlements are concentrated in river valleys, but the large regular courtyard farms and fine houses that date from the enclosure period (including Euston Park, Lynford Park and Shadwell Park) are focal points in Breckland views. Ruins of medieval deserted churches, such as Roudham, and the evacuated villages of Stanford, Sturston, Tottington and Bodney that fell within the STANTA military training ground are also poignant local landscape features.</p>

Factor	Example sub-factor	Example indicator	Brecks indicator
		Presence of visible archaeological remains, parkland or designed landscapes that provide striking features in the landscape	<p>The Brecks' unique geodiversity has arguably supported one of the longest surviving histories of mineral extraction in England with flint mining dating to Neolithic times. Grime's Graves, which has over 400 mine shafts surrounded by an open 'lunar' landscape of shafts, pits, quarries and spoil dumps, is the only Neolithic flint mine open to visitors in Britain. Elsewhere in the Brecks, prominent archaeological sites include Bronze Age burial monuments, which were often sited on local skylines; Iron Age and Roman settlements, including Thetford Castle; Saxon earthworks such as the Devil's Dyke; medieval churches and ruined deserted churches such as Roudham; monastic remains (eg the Cluniac Priory of Our Lady of Thetford) and the embankments surrounding medieval rabbit warrens which can still be traced in parts of the Brecks.</p> <p>More recent military history dates from the Second World War and artefacts include pill boxes, anti-glider ditches and old airfields.</p>
	Historic influence on the landscape	Visible presence of historic landscape types or specific landscape elements or features that provide evidence of time depth or historic influence on the landscape.	The Brecks has an exceptionally strong sense of history. The landscape is littered with historical evidence of the past. Significant sites include Neolithic flint mines, bronze-age burial monuments, Iron Age and Roman settlements, Saxon earthworks, medieval churches, monastic remains and abandoned villages. Extensive medieval and postmedieval rabbit warrens remain as earthen banks and occasional warren lodges. Many more archaeological sites are known to be preserved beneath the forestry plantations.
		Perceptions of a harmonious balance between natural and cultural elements in the landscape that stretch back over time	The character of the Brecks landscape mosaic stems from this region's distinctive land use history, which dates back through the centuries and reflects the way people and wildlife have adapted to the specific geological and micro-climatic conditions of this dry, infertile plateau. Remnants of past land uses, including extensive heathlands, fluctuating meres, pine lines, Bronze Age burial mounds, the earth banks that enclosed the medieval rabbit warrens and designed parkland landscapes contribute to a landscape with an exceptionally strong time-depth and a harmonious balance between natural and cultural landscape elements.

Factor	Example sub-factor	Example indicator	Brecks indicator
	Characteristic land management practices	Existence of characteristic land management practices, industries or crafts which contribute to natural beauty	The Brecks' heathlands developed as a result of the medieval openfield system in which livestock grazing kept the nutrient levels of the heathland low, while overnight folding of sheep flocks on arable land increased the fertility of these areas, transferring nutrients from heath to arable land. During the 18th and 19th centuries, local agricultural rotations included the 'brecks', areas of heathland that were converted to arable and cultivated for a few years before being left to revert to heath again. These traditional land management practices encouraged the development of the characteristic flora of the Brecks, which requires open, regularly disturbed ground. The techniques now form part of the land management strategies for the tracts of Breckland heaths and acid grassland landscapes today.
	Associations with written descriptions	Availability of descriptions of the landscape in notable literature, topographical writings or guide books, or significant literature inspired by the landscape.	Historian and naturalist W G Clarke's 1925 iconic work, In Breckland Wilds, draws attention to the Brecks' vast tracts of wild and open heathland, which he found entrancing and inspiring. He was following in the footsteps of diarist John Evelyn, who famously described The Travelling Sands of Santon Downham in 1668. Later writers such as Mary Mann, who wrote about the harsh conditions of the rural poor in her short stories, the Fields of Dulditch (1902) and Michael Horne who also wrote movingly about the rhythm and pace of farming life in books such as Autumn Fields (1944). Virginia Woolf spent August 1906 at Blo' Norton Hall and wrote about the pervading sense of history in towns like Thetford.
	Associations with artistic representations	Depiction of the landscape in art, other art forms such as photography or film, through language or folklore, or in inspiring related music	The popular television series, Dad's Army was filmed in Thetford during the 1960s and 70s and a popular statue of Captain Mainwaring is sited on Thetford Riverside.
Good recreation provision	High quantity of appropriate recreation provision	Presence of extensive network of rights of way or extent of open access land over much of the area	Recreation is supported by an extensive public rights of way network and 2,343 ha of open access land (although extensive areas of open access land are closed between February and November to protect rare ground-nesting birds. Parts of the Peddars Way, Icknield Way Path, Angles Way ('Broads to the Brecks'), Icen Way and The Harling Drove promoted long distance trails pass through the Brecks.

Factor	Example sub-factor	Example indicator	Brecks indicator
	Diversity of good quality provision for quiet enjoyment	Opportunities to enjoy a range of high quality landscape experiences, including active and quiet recreation activities	Recreation is largely centred on Thetford Forest with forest walks and rides as well as more formal provision at the High Lodge Centre, with facilities such as Go- Ape, mountain bike hire, summer concerts, and guided activities. Wide-ranging opportunities for exploration are also offered by the extensive network of walking and cycling trails and opportunities to walk within country parks and nature reserves.
Accessibility	Accessibility to centres of population	Transport links to centres of population	With recent improvements to the A11 the Brecks has good transport links to London and the SE and to East Anglia
		Availability of sustainable transport options providing links to centres of population	There are railway stations at Thetford and Brandon. The Brecks is promoted as a centre for walking and cycling – there are four mountain bike trails in Thetford Forest (and a bike hire centre) and promoted 22/10km Brecks Cycling Discovery Routes provide opportunities to explore the region by bike. Walking and cycling routes are promoted via a dedicated Brecks website - http://www.brecks.org/ and via the Breaking New Ground LPS website - http://www.breakingnewground.org.uk/
Potential for enhancement	Potential for appropriate enhancement of enjoyment and understanding	Possible plans to improve provision for access to or quiet enjoyment of the landscape so as to provide opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the area's special qualities, by new provision or improved management of existing	Thetford Forest has the capacity to increase its contribution as a regional and national recreational resource, leading to opportunities for increased funding for environmental enhancement schemes. The management of visitor numbers will be required to prevent damage and disturbance of sensitive habitats and species.

Cambridge Studio

32 St Barnabas Road
Cambridge CB1 2BY

telephone: 01223 229994
email: cambridge@sheilsflynn.com
web: www.sheilsflynn.com