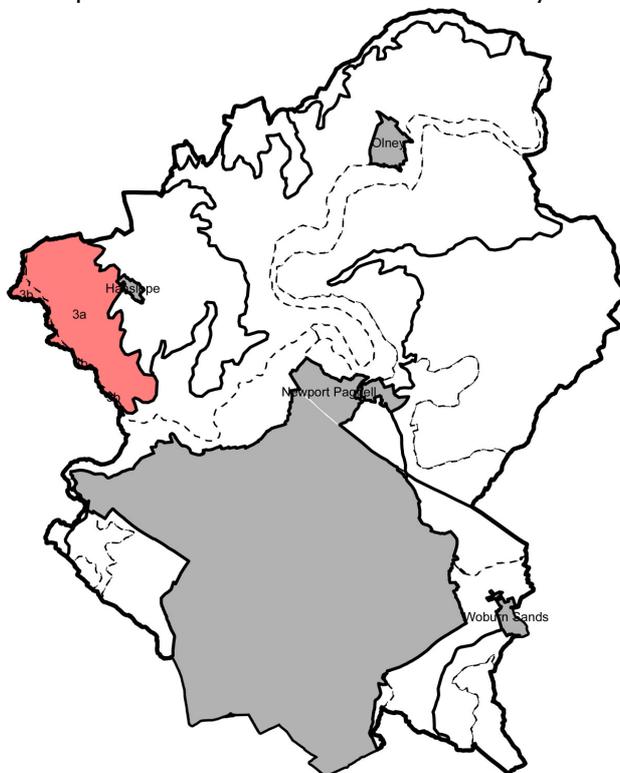


3. Tove Valley

Summary Page

Location

The area lies to the north west corner of the authority adjacent to the Northamptonshire border, west of the Hanslope Plateau and north of the Ouse Valley.



Character Summary

The landscape unit of the Tove Valley is divided by the county boundary. The valley is a broad shallow valley which contains the following sub areas:

- a. Tove Valley Slopes – comprising open and gently sloping valley sides with minimal woodland cover and a mix of arable and pasture
- b. Tove Valley Floodplain – a narrow band of floodplain that follows the sinuous River Tove

Key Characteristics

Tove Valley Slopes

- Gently sloping valley landscape
- Large arable fields and clipped hedges
- Areas of pasture concentrated on the lower slopes near flood plain
- Minimum isolated settlement
- Relatively quiet and remote
- Meandering river in narrow flood plain corridor

Tove Valley Floodplain

- Meandering river in narrow flood plain corridor

Distinctive features

Tove Valley Slopes

- West coast mainline railway
- Castlethorpe village and castle
- Areas of ridge and furrow

Tove Valley Floodplain

- Riparian willows
- Causeway bridge

Assessment

Geology and Soils

The geology of the River Tove floodplain is formed on river alluvium with the overlying soils being stoneless clays and in places calcareous in nature with seasonally high groundwater (Fladbury 1 Association). Closer to Milton Keynes, the soils of the valley slopes are slowly permeable and seasonally waterlogged loamy soils over clay and overlying river terrace drift or clay shale (Bishampton 2 Association). Further north, however, the valley slopes tend to be calcareous clayey soils that are also slowly permeable and seasonally waterlogged but over chalky till (Hanslope Association).

Topography

The Tove valley follows a very shallow and poorly defined valley that runs across to the west into Northamptonshire with the River forming the county boundary. The valley slopes are gently sloping and within Milton Keynes administrative area they rise up to the adjacent Hanslope Plateau sub area of the Yardley Ridge. The valley floor and flood meadows are relatively flat with little fall along their length. There are a number of springs that flow down towards the Tove and these have created locally steeper valley features. There are also areas of cutting and embankment along the of the West Coast mainline railway.

Degree of Slope

The Tove Valley slopes have an average slope of approximately 1 in 45. There are locally steeper areas along the valleys of springs that flow towards the Tove, with slopes of up to 1 in 16. Along the river the fall is minimal.

Altitude Range

The River Tove falls from 73m AOD on the north eastern boundary of the authority to 63m AOD at the edge of the Character Area, shortly before its confluence with the River Great Ouse. The valley sides rise up from the valley floor at around the 65m contour, reaching a maximum height of 110m on the edge of the Hanslope Plateau.

Hydrology

The River Tove is a tributary of the much larger River Great Ouse. For most of this stretch it forms the county boundary between Milton Keynes Council and Northamptonshire. Its course is narrow and meandering and there are a number of manmade features along this section of it, including weirs and leats serving the now disused Castlethorpe Mill and the site of the former Cosgrove Mill across the country boundary in Northamptonshire. There are also a number of more natural features in the form of springs that rise up and disappear again on the valley slopes. Many of the farms on the valley slopes also have ponds associated with them.

Land cover and land use

Land use is predominantly arable in large fields with only clipped and gappy hedges and few field trees dividing field units. Towards the river corridor there are more areas of permanent pasture both on the narrow flood plain and on the valley slopes, which include areas of ridge and furrow e.g. on the meadows leading to Castlethorpe Mill. The section of the Tove valley within Milton Keynes contains a relatively high proportion of pasture grazed mainly by sheep which reflects the presence of a few specialist farmers.

Biodiversity

There is minimal woodland cover with only few mature copses, shelterbelts and tree rows which, where present, often follow streams and ditches that flow into the Tove. However there are some areas of young plantation woodland closer to the river.

Historical and Cultural significance

Castlethorpe contains an extensive motte and bailey castle dating back to at least the mid 12th century. The village was not mentioned by name in the Domesday Survey of 1086 as the area was part of the larger manor of Hanslope during the mediaeval period. The Anglo-Saxon

place name of Castlethorpe means “the farm or the secondary settlement of the castle”. Historically the Tove Valley related more to Towcester to the north with links to the wool industry which is still reflected today in the amount of sheep pasture.

Field Pattern

The Tove Valley contains a range of historic field patterns including areas of both organic and regular pre 18th century enclosure together with 18th and 19th century parliamentary enclosure with straighter boundaries. There are areas of assarted enclosure on the higher ground near Higham Cross and some 20th century prairie fields particularly to the south of Castlethorpe overlooking Wolverton.

Transport Pattern

The Tove Valley is crossed by a number of small country roads. Some of these e.g. leading from Long Street to Grafton Regis are narrow, hedged and winding. There is one crossing point of the river at Castlethorpe by a bridges and causeway. The main west coast railway passes through the area with the cuttings, gantries and bridges creating a strong linear built element through the landscape.

Settlement and Built form

Castlethorpe is the only settlement and combines a mix of traditional limestone and brick buildings to the centre of the village grouped around the earthworks of Castlethorpe Castle (SAM) and some modest late 20th century estates. There are a few isolated properties and farms accessed off tracks or narrow twisting lanes, e.g. at Higham Cross.

Useful Links

Castlethorpe Castle <http://www.mkheritage.co.uk/cv/docs/Castle/castleinfo.html>

English Heritage SAM Register

Evaluation Page

Visual and Sensory perception

The area is relatively remote and with a tranquil character, being distant from main roads, however the west coast mainline railway brings intermittent noise intrusion. There are some distant views to Wolverton from the southern edge of the area. There are additional views across the valley to the Grand Union Canal with its narrow boats which traverses the southern slopes. Here the movement of boats at a higher level introduces visual interest in the valley setting.

Recreational Opportunities

There is a good network of footpaths and bridleways in the area including routes along the valley floor which provide opportunities for informal recreation including walking, cycling and riding. The nearby canal and Navigation Inn at Thrupp Wharf is a popular destination.

Community Views

Time depth Perspective

Evaluation Matrix

3a Tove Valley Slopes

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER	WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG	
Impact of landform* Impact of landcover* Historic pattern* Visibility from outside Sense of enclosure Tranquillity Distinctiveness/rarity	Insignificant Insignificant Insignificant Widely visible Open /exposed Discordant Frequent	Apparent Apparent Apparent Locally visible Partial Moderate Unusual	Dominant/Prominent Dominant/Prominent Dominant/Prominent Concealed Contained/confined Tranquil Unique/rare	
Totals * Prime condition categories if tie	3	4	0	
CONDITION	POOR	MODERATE	GOOD	
Landcover Change Age Structure of Tree Cover* Extent of semi-natural habitat survival* Management of semi-natural habitats Survival of cultural pattern (fields and hedges) Impact of built development* Visual unity <i>* Prime condition categories if tie</i>	Widespread Overmature Relic Poor Declining/Relic High Incoherent	Localised Mature/Young Scattered Not obvious Interrupted Moderate Coherent	Insignificant Mixed Widespread/Linked Good Intact Low Unified	
Totals * Prime robustness categories if tie	3	4	1	
MATRIX	Good	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
Moderate	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore	
Poor	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character	
Condition	Weak	Moderate	Strong	
	Strength of Character			

Landscape Strategy = Improve and Conserve

Sensitivity

Ecological – Very Low

Cultural – Low

Visual – Moderate

Tranquillity – Very High

Evaluation Matrix

3b Tove Valley Floodplain

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER	WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG	
Impact of landform* Impact of landcover* Historic pattern* Visibility from outside Sense of enclosure Tranquillity Distinctiveness/rarity	Insignificant Insignificant Insignificant Widely visible Open /exposed Discordant Frequent	Apparent Apparent Apparent Locally visible Partial Moderate Unusual	Dominant /Prominent Dominant/ Prominent Dominant/Prominent Concealed Contained/confined Tranquil Unique/rare	
Totals * Prime condition categories if tie	2	3	2	
CONDITION	POOR	MODERATE	GOOD	
Landcover Change Age Structure of Tree Cover* Extent of semi-natural habitat survival* Management of semi-natural habitats Survival of cultural pattern (fields and hedges) Impact of built development* Visual unity <i>* Prime condition categories if tie</i>	Widespread Overmature Relic Poor Declining/Relic High Incoherent	Localised Mature/Young Scattered Not obvious Interrupted Moderate Coherent	Insignificant Mixed Widespread/Linked Good Intact Low Unified	
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Condition	Moderate	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	Poor	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
	Weak	Moderate	Strong	
	Strength of Character			

Landscape Strategy = Improve and Restore

Sensitivity

Ecological – Moderate

Cultural – High

Visual – Low

Tranquillity – Very High

Guidelines

Countryside Management

Generally Countryside Management

Generally

- Maintain and strengthen the distinction between the valley slopes and the floodplain
- Identify, retain and manage key viewpoints to appreciate the valley setting and its component parts
- Improve right of way signage so it is clear but appropriate to the location, using local materials where possible
- Promote traditional methods of hedgerow management including coppicing, laying and gapping up
- Improve rights of way connections from urban settlements to the right of way network promoting new links where absent e.g. from Wolverton

3 a Tove Valley Slopes

- Protect the open character and panoramic views from visually intrusive development in the countryside and adjacent urban areas. Promote additional planting of hedges and woods to the south of the area to reduce the impact of Wolverton and Milton Keynes
- Promote retention, restoration and planting of hedges and the addition of hedgerow trees within the open landscape to provide additional structure while still retaining vistas across the valley. Pattern to follow historic field boundaries where possible
- Promote extension of uncropped or grass field margins to enhance biodiversity linkage following existing and proposed rights of way where possible
- Promote the creation of new ponds and the retention / enhancement for wildlife of existing ponds
- Promote and support grazing and sheep farming as a distinctive feature in the landscape

3 b Tove Valley Floodplain

- Protect existing flood meadows from ploughing, grassland improvement or mineral extraction
- Encourage continued management of flood meadows by grazing
- Promote improvements to the river, water edge and pond habitats to encourage increased biodiversity value through marginal planting and localised bank profiling and sympathetic maintenance of drainage ditches
- Promote the management of riparian vegetation including floodplain pollards, new specimens including Black Poplar and where appropriate more extensive areas of wet woodland

- Encourage reversion of arable to pasture within floodplain
- Promote the use of ditches and hedges in place of post and wire as a means of stock enclosure

Guidelines in relation to development

- Restrict built development in the area retaining the primary role for agriculture and recreation
- Protect the historic setting and structure of ~~the~~ Castlethorpe and the outlying hamlets including views to the villages and the retained open spaces within them including Castlethorpe castle
- Where built development or restoration is considered appropriate indigenous building materials or equally visually acceptable alternatives should be used to maintain and enhance the traditional character of the existing villages
- Prevent development that could detract from local landmarks including village churches and views from historic locations