



Assington

Neighbourhood Plan

2018-2036

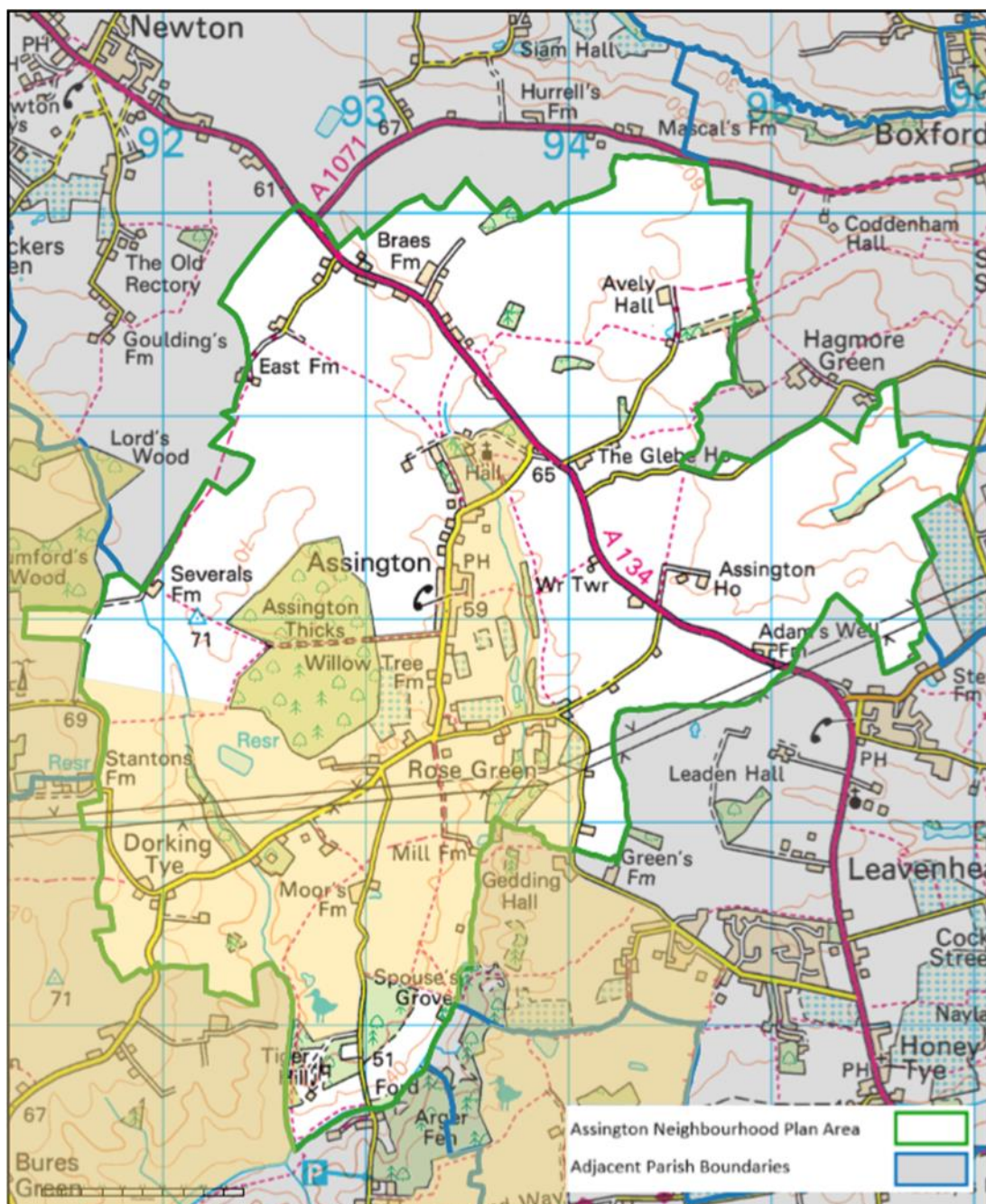
Supporting Document:
Area of Local Landscape Sensitivity

Assington Area of Special Landscape Sensitivity

Assington currently has an extensive special landscape area, designated in the 1980's, as shown on the map below in yellow. A Special Landscape Area (SLA) is a non-statutory local landscape designation used by Local Planning Authorities to define areas of high landscape importance. The areas can be designated for their intrinsic physical, environmental, visual, cultural or historic value in the contemporary landscape and they may be unique, exceptional or distinctive to the local area.

The SLA designation is not set to be continued in the Babergh Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan and instead a new designation of 'Area of local landscape sensitivity' (ALLS) has been proposed. Therefore an assessment has been undertaken, supported by AECOM, to establish whether:

- 1) The existing SLA should be continued and designated as an ALLS
- 2) Whether there are grounds for extending the SLA/ALLS into additional areas of the parish.





1) Should the existing SLA become an ALLS?

The quality of the landscape area first designated in the 1980's has not significantly changed from that time, with development infringing only in the centre of the village and with important viewpoints, wildlife and biodiversity still thriving.

Significant support was gained through the residents questionnaire and at subsequent consultation events for continuing the SLA designation, although it was recognised that, in practice, the local planning authority gave little regard to this designation in determining the outcome of planning applications.

There are clear grounds therefore to continue the existing area designation and update it to become an ALLS.

2) Should the existing SLA/ALLS be extended?

Babergh's original adoption of the SLA scheme stated "The boundaries of the Special Landscape Areas in the Babergh District tend to relate to river valleys, and have been drawn to follow physical features on the ground, e.g. roads, hedgerows etc." The proposed extension shown on the map below isn't restricted to valleys, but still includes the varied contours along watercourses, and also follows roads, pathways and hedgerows.

Landscape Sensitivity recognises features that make an area distinct, recognisable and unique. Planning decisions need to recognise these qualities and sustain them for the future, so that they contribute to the economic, social and environmental objectives for the area.

An extended ALLS has been drawn up, of comparable quality to the SLA, while going beyond the SLA's approach of following valleys.

There was good support from residents for the initial plan proposals in the December 2018 questionnaire, and parishioners appear to agree that all four landscape areas of the parish have comparable importance for landscape and environment, including favoured views, biodiversity, and circular walks.

3) Evidence:

In Assington, the SLA covers the southern part of the parish, then extends along the two valleys of the Assington Brook tributaries, reaching up to The Street and the Church, and including the three County Wildlife Sites: Oatetch Grove and Meadow, the Churchyard, and Assington Thicks.

We surveyed Assington parish, and having confirmed that the existing landscape still justified the SLA designation, identified features lying outside of the SLA, that are clearly of comparable quality.

We found these features included:

- 1) Landscape features of Assington Park,
- 2) The best examples of the "big sky" landscapes, with vistas to outlying woodlands,

- 3) Areas with '**Key Characteristics**' defined by Suffolk County Council in its '**Ancient Rolling Farmlands**' Landscape Description Unit (LDU). Potential planning decisions are required to have respect to these key characteristics, defined "by four principal attributes: physiography, ground type, land cover and cultural pattern. These are derived from six mapable datasets: relief, geology, soils, tree cover, farm type and settlement",
- 4) Impressive houses standing out in the landscape.

4) Results and Conclusion:

The identified features of groups 1 - 4 which lie outside the SLA are alongside public footpaths and roads, and have a strong identity for people living locally. It is therefore determined that, given their quality and impact, they should also be granted the status of an area of local landscape sensitivity (ALLS).

1) **Landscape features of Assington Park:**

(A scarce feature in this part of Suffolk, the Park is north of The Street, which includes a complement of attractive outbuildings, the Church, ruined Hall and parkland):

- a) the north part of the Park, crossed by the public footpath running north from The Street, and prominent alongside the A134,
- b) the exceptional grassy avenue of lime trees where the public footpath runs,
- c) the avenue of mature oak trees beside the A134, and,
- d) the 'threepenny bit' Lodge House by the public footpath on the cut-off curve on the east verge of the A134

2) **The best examples of the "big sky" landscapes:**

(This is a much-admired feature of Suffolk, but at its most attractive shows a full horizon and particular landscape features, as in Assington, near the village centre):

- a) land between Assington Thicks and the Park, most readily seen from near the bend at the north end of the Street, includes the watercourse east from The Thicks to Dale Cottage, and ancient woods framed 'between land and sky' are The Thicks, and three on the western parish boundary - Mumfords Wood, Lords Wood and Fitches Wood,
- b) land west of Assington Thicks, reached by the public footpath through The Thicks, open to the Essex boundary beyond the Stour, the ancient woodlands between, and the TV mast which has become largely accepted as an unusual local landmark.

3) **"Key Characteristics" defined by Suffolk County Council in its "Ancient Rolling Farmlands" Landscape Description Unit (LDU):**

(The following features, lying outside the SLA, are the LDU's "Key Characteristics" and fit with a picturesque charm that's appreciated locally):

3.1) **"Dissected by river valleys":**



a) the north part of the valley of the Assington Brook, as seen from the road and the public footpaths east from the Street, is classic of these picturesque valleys; and the east valley side (running as far as the A134 and traversed by the public footpath south from the Church) has the characteristic steep sunlit slope, and contained, secluded appearance amounting to an integral asset of this rural village.

b) the watercourse east from the scenic pond by the road at Avely Hall, leads through a wet fennymeadow with cricket-bat willows to the public footpath north from Hagmore Green, and onward towards the River Box.

c) the stream running east from a point north-east of Assington House towards the River Box, is seen only from the road from Leavenheath to Stone Street, it is a set of grazing meadows in traditional maintenance.

3.2) “Field pattern of ancient random enclosure”; “Scattered ancient woodland parcels containing a mix of oak, lime, cherry, hazel, ash and holly”; “Network of winding lanes and paths, often associated with hedges, create visual intimacy”.

In this north part of the parish, such woods were long ago removed, but an important remnant of this lies between Assington House and Avely Hall, alongside the two winding roads running north-east from the A134, on either side of Glebe House, and alongside the public footpath between those roads to Firs Farm. Here the hedges and their verges, along each side of lanes which connection only to ancient dispersed farms, are classic of a “ghost” of an ancient wood, from which were enclosed ancient assart fields - evidenced by their irregular lines, and plantlife of ancient woodland - including small-leaved lime, scarce ferns and other flora. Their seclusion and intimacy are a strong part of their value.

3.3) “Hedges of hawthorn and elm with oak, ash and field maple as hedgerow trees”

Though now mostly removed for post-war agriculture, some remain along parts of the A134, in this area on both roadsides between Glebe House and Assington House, and in hedges running off westward to the village.

3.4) “Dispersed settlement pattern of loosely clustered villages, hamlets and isolated farmsteads of mediaeval origin”

The whole of the parish is marked by this settlement pattern which is so crucial historically, with ancient farmhouses distantly connected by winding lanes, and in this particular area the outstanding examples are Dillacks Farm, seen from the A134 near the Water Tower, and Avely Hall which has the name of the Domesday manor, seen from the road which leads to it from Glebe House.

4) Impressive houses standing out in the landscape:

(such houses and their established grand gardens are a frequent and therefore major feature of the Suffolk landscape):

In the Assington area we see three clear examples, seen from the A134 and the side-road:

- Glebe House, built as a vicarage in around the Victorian era,
- Avely Hall, a farmhouse presumed timber-framed and faced with brick, and
- Assington House, a farmhouse presumed timber-framed with Georgian frontage.

The shaded area of the map below shows the totality of the proposed area of local landscape sensitivity for the draft neighbourhood plan.

