

Woolpit and its Landscape

A brief overview of Woolpit and its historic landscape setting, concluding with an examination of the current pressures faced by the landscape



Introduction

The Parish of Woolpit is 1,977 acres in area, and seems to have been a settlement since Roman times. Today Woolpit is made up of the main village and the three hamlets of Woolpit Green, Woolpit Heath and Borley Green, together with three outlying farms/farmhouses.

Topography

Woolpit is situated on a north facing spur of land between two tributaries of the Black Bourn, which joins the Little Ouse and flows to Kings Lynn.

The village is about 60m above sea level and the land rises gently to the south to nearly 80m above sea level two miles away, before dropping into the valley of the Rattlesden River, a tributary of the south flowing Gipping. It is at the watershed between the north and south of East Anglia.

The village is now by-passed to the north by the A14 dual carriageway, the main road having originally passed through the village as part of the main Ipswich to Bury St Edmunds route, which had been a turnpike in 1711.

The railway linking the same two towns runs parallel to the road a little further north; the nearby station at Elmswell was connected to the brickworks in the village by a narrow gauge tramway.

Geology and soils

In the upper Gipping Valley from Woolpit eastwards to Stowmarket, the landscape typology is *Rolling Valley Farmland with Furze*. This landscape occurs on a mixture of outwash deposits from the ice-sheet of the Anglian Glaciation, principally silts, sands, gravels, some chalky till and in places silts or brick earths from former lakes or meres. These calcareous brick earth deposits were used to produce 'Woolpit whites'.

To the south of the Parish there is an area of *Ancient Rolling Farm Lands*. This is a rolling arable landscape of chalky clays and loams. Outside the built up area, the Parish consists mainly of agricultural land, mostly classified grade 3 with some grade 2 land north and south west of the village.



Historic and Cultural influences

The Manor of Woolpit was given to the Abbey of St Edmund in Bury St Edmunds in 1005 by Ulfketel, a leading East Anglian warrior. It remained in the hands of the Abbey until the dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539. At the time of the Domesday Book the population was estimated to be 270 people. The village was prosperous in the Middle Ages, probably due to its involvement in the woollen cloth trade.

The centre of the village has over 40 grade 2 listed buildings, mainly timber framed with 18th century brick facades. Most of these date from the 14th to the 16th century. St Mary's church, which is Grade 1 listed, was extensively rebuilt in the fifteenth century with much evidence of bequests from villagers. It was an important place of pilgrimage throughout the middle ages and the Chapel of Our Lady probably stood on the north side of our chancel until it was pulled down in 1551. The village centre has been designated a Conservation Area by Suffolk County Council.

A place of special interest is Our Lady's Well, a Scheduled Ancient Monument situated in Palgrave's meadow, also in the conservation area. This contains a spring, which for centuries has been reputed to have curative properties for eye ailments.

A local legend tells of the 'Green Children' who appeared out of the 'wolf-pits' (after which it used to be thought that the village was named) and spoke no known language.

Brickmaking has been especially important in the history of Woolpit. Sherds of Roman pottery found in the area prove that the Romans used the clay, but the first mention of a kiln is in 1574. By the 18th century the Parish records show large numbers of brick makers, tile makers and pamment makers. It remained a thriving business exporting tiles and Woolpit White bricks all over the country until the early 20th century.

The village market place was the site of a weekly market and two fairs, the Horsefair on the 16th September followed by the Cowfair on the 19th September. The Horsefair continued until the early 20th Century. These events had a reputation for drunkenness and bawdiness with the drunks being locked up in the village gaol, which still stands in Green Road.



Settlement Pattern

The village centre remains a local focal point where roads from Drinkstone, Norton, Rattlesden and Elmswell join the main Bury St Edmunds to Stowmarket route at the mediaeval market place. This gives the village a sense of cohesion with little ribbon development near the centre. Woolpit centre, with the Jubilee Pump, surrounded by shops, eateries and residences still housed in the original mediaeval dwellings, remains the picturesque social hub of the Parish and is a local tourist attraction. It has been used as a backdrop on film and television in *Private Peaceful* and the BBC TV drama *Lovejoy*. The outlying hamlets are located along the Rattlesden and Stowmarket roads and White Elm Road, which originally led to Norton.

The outer parts of the village experienced growth in the second half of the 20th Century, beginning with a post war period of social housing south east of the centre (Steeles Road). This is currently being upgraded and extended to include the recently built Green Croft. More social housing was added with Roman Fields, built in 2 stages in the 1980s and 2000s, and Abbots Meadow. Post war houses were built with very large gardens resulting in an average housing density of 16 per hectare. Recent houses have much smaller gardens but benefit from shared green spaces and good views of the countryside, with a housing density of 30 per hectare or higher.

To the west there was expansion from the late 1960s (Mitre Close). Further developments took place mainly north west of the historic core along the Bury Road with Briar Hill in the 1970s/80s; Meadowlands in the 1980s; Wrights Way, Wade's Wood and Hay Barn Meadow in the 1990s. Building was busiest between 1970 and 2000, when the population increased by 50%. The prestige estates (Briar Hill, Hay Barn Meadow) have a leafy feel with larger gardens, mature trees, grassy verges, and are 4 bed detached houses with a low housing density (13-15 per hectare). The other estates, comprised of 3-4 bed terraced, semi detached or detached houses, have shared green spaces, smaller gardens and a housing density of 20-23 per hectare. Many have pleasant rural views, maintaining the village feel.

Transport Corridors

Although Woolpit has long since lost its market status, it remains a working village and rural shopping centre. However, the network of lanes, mediaeval in origin, which converge upon the conservation village centre, conflict with the demands of 21st century traffic. There is frequent congestion with HGV vehicles, buses and agricultural vehicles competing for space with shoppers and local commuters. A designated HGV route runs past the school along a narrow stretch of Heath Road, which also forms part of National Cycle Route 51.

Development Pressures

Woolpit is currently facing pressure for residential expansion. It has an ageing population profile and more affordable housing is required in the village. This will ensure that the working population is able to live close by, young families are able to stay, and larger houses can be made available as elderly residents have options for downsizing. The lack of many infill sites in the village means that expansion into surrounding countryside is likely. But the social benefit must not come at a cost to the character of the historic village. Siting of new development must be carefully considered to protect our historic heritage for the future.

Further house building will bring further pressure on our roads, which are already overloaded at peak hours. There is frequent congestion in The Street and a shortage of parking space in the village centre. New housing may have adverse impacts on agricultural landscapes. There may conversely also be opportunities to restore character through policy change. The future for farming practice is unpredictable owing to climate change and further forces including: amalgamation of fields and farms; further boundary loss through lack of management; increased pressure on marginal land such as for pasture or small holdings; land used for renewable energy or growth of biomass; and other schemes which have an impact on character.



WOOLPIT LANDSCAPE AREA ASSESSMENT AREA 1

Broadgrass Green



Looking east towards Woolpit from White Elm Road

Key characteristics

- Rolling valley farmlands and furze (character type 19)
- Valleys with prominent river terraces of sandy soil. The land rises gently from the river valley in the west to the village settlement. The land falls away again to the north of the village to the northern boundary with the A14.
- Straight boundaries and open fields
- Mixed hedgerows of hawthorn, dogwood and blackthorn with oak, ash and field maple
- Sand and gravel extraction in the past resulted in quarries which have now been landscaped
- There are beautiful vistas to both Woolpit and Elmswell Churches from many points in area 1 due to the gentle rolling nature of the countryside.

Location

Area 1 lies to the North and Northwest of the Village settlement. On the northern boundary lies the A14 major trunk road which bypasses the village. Access to the village is via junction 47 to the east and the A1088 to the west. On the North-Western boundary lies Bridge Farm; the Business Park forms the boundary to the West and at its eastern boundary lies the Cricket Field and junction 47 of the A14.

Topography

Gentle undulating land rising steadily to the village settlement from the River Black Bourn to the west.

Geology

Chalky Clays and loams. Previous sand extraction. Broadgrass Green is mostly Grade 2 Agricultural Land, with a small area of Grade 3 abutting the A14.

Land cover and land use

Mainly arable farmland for the cropping of cereals and oilseed rape and small grazing paddocks. There are a small Business Park, transport depots and a grain store. The cricket field and tennis courts lie to the eastern side of Broadgrass Green. Disused sand and gravel pits have been developed into a business park. The buildings on the Business Park are of individual design and well spaced out. The area is landscaped and maintained to an excellent standard with trees and shrubs and natural wildlife ponds. There is a tree-lined vista to the western side over open rolling countryside.

Trees and woodland

On the north west boundary of White Elm Road and east of Woolpit Bridge lies a small pocket of Broadleaved woodland. The farmland habitat of Area 1 provides a habitat for many native birds including the turtle dove and the lapwing both of which are on the endangered species list. (Red List December 2015). Deer, rabbit, pheasant and fox have also been sighted in this area. Traffic noise can be heard emanating from the A14 interspersed with the sound of birdsong from the hedgerows.

Historic landscape / Time depth

There is a narrow footpath leading from the junction of Bury Road and White Elm Road bounded by mixed hedging, which rises steadily to the village settlement. A former public house lies on the corner of the road, with other Victorian Cottages. A few yards away to the east lies the village conservation area with its abundance of medieval timber framed buildings. St Mary's Church is situated very close to the edge of the settlement area, and Monks Close, a grade 2 listed building abuts Broadgrass Green.

Scale and enclosure

Mixture of larger fields and small enclosures.

Perceptual experience and views in / out

There are scenic views to the east overlooking rolling agricultural land and village settlement, both St. Mary Church and Elmswell Church can be seen from the western end of Area 1. There are also scenic views of open countryside to the north towards Norton and Elmswell, which are not interrupted by the traffic driving along the A14.

Rectory Lane leads down past the Tennis Club which has 4 courts by the Cricket Field and pavilion. The cricket field is bound by a ditch and hawthorn hedging and oaks to its northern and western boundaries.

There is a beautiful vista to both Woolpit and Elmswell Churches and over the gentle rolling fields of Broadgrass Green towards the farm buildings of Street Farm, White Elm Road, Haybarn Meadow and the north side of the village settlement.

Indicators of value and rights of way

Broomhill Lane rises off the southern side of the Bury Road. Near the top of the rise a footpath with wooden steps takes you down to the Wrights Way Estate built in the old sandpit.

White Elm Road formerly known as Norton Road now forms a cul de sac with land rising to the flyover on the A14 towards Norton (A1088). At this northern end of the road there is a Christian Fellowship Chapel called 'The Room', with adjoining cemetery and a beech tree which is over 130 years old. To the northern side lies an overgrown path which leads onto a disused track which runs for a short way behind the properties in White Elm Road.



Woolpit Landscape Area Assessment – Area 2 Woolpit Green



View towards Bishop Karney Green and Drinkstone Mills

Key characteristics

- Rolling valley farmlands (Landscape Type 19) to the west.
- Ancient Rolling farmlands (Landscape type 4))to the south west
- A broad ridge runs north south from Woolpit village to Woolpit Green. Green Road and the footpath from the village to Woolpit Green run along the top of the ridge.
- The land rises gently but steadily from the stream on the valley to the west up to the ridge and to the east it falls almost imperceptibly to Heath road and across onto area 3.
- Mostly arable farmland with moderate sized fields
- Scenic views westward over the **Special Landscape Area**
- Includes Woolpit Green, a small hamlet with **Grade 2 listed** traditional farmhouses and ponds

Location

Land to the south of the village bounded by the Business Park and village settlement to the north, the Drinkstone boundary to the west, Heath Road to the east, and area 4 to the south beyond Woolpit Green.

Topography

Gently undulating land rising slowly but steadily from the stream (a tributary of the Blackbourne) to the west.

Geology and Soils

Chalky clays and loams.

Landcover and landuse

Arable farmland

Trees and Woodland

Mixed hedgerows of hawthorn, dogwood and blackthorn with oak, ash and field maple;
Fragments of woodland

Historic landscape/Time depth

To the north of Hollybush Lane and Grange Farm there is an area of Rolling Valley Farmlands and Furze (Landscape Type 19) with the straight boundaries associated with late enclosure. The settlement and field pattern indicated on the 1884 Ordnance Survey Map remained in place until the mid-twentieth century. Subsequently the area was subject to a loss of hedgerows resulting from field amalgamation, coupled with settlement expansion. The settlement and field pattern indicated on the 1884 Ordnance Survey Map remained in place until the mid-twentieth century. Subsequently the area was subject to a loss of hedgerows resulting from field amalgamation, coupled with settlement expansion



1884 OS Map. Dispersed settlement pattern. Coaxial field pattern around site, with field patterns become more random to south. Compared with contemporary aerial photograph which indicates the extent of hedgerow loss and settlement expansion to the south of Woolpit.

To the south of Hollybush Lane and including Woolpit Green there is a beautiful unchanged area of **Ancient rolling farmlands** { *Landscape type 4 Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment*) with field patterns of ancient random enclosure, and regular fields associated with areas of heathland enclosure. This area includes 4 **Grade 2 listed** buildings: Grange Farm a traditional farm house with ponds and meadows and native trees; Green Farm, a half timbered farmhouse at Woolpit Green; Abbey Farm, and Abbey Farm Cottage a traditional timbered thatch.

Scale and enclosure

Relatively small scale and intimate.

Settlement, road network and relationship to village

The village settlement forms almost all of the northern border but in most places the houses are at present well masked by trees and hedges, except for the new buildings at Greencroft.

South beyond Woolpit Green lies the broad flat expanse of area 4.

North of Bishop Karney Green lies the Windmill Avenue business park, but this is completely screened by a tall tree lined hedge.

The area includes Woolpit Green, a small hamlet with triangle crossroads at the junction of 2 rural roads, Green Road and Rattlesden Road.

Heath Road runs along the eastern border from the village towards the Heath. This busy road forms part of the HGV route to Rattlesden which leads from the village to the junction with Green Road, runs west through Woolpit Green and turns south along Rattlesden Road.



View towards village from Woolpit Green

Indicators of value and rights of way

National Cycle route 51 enters the village via Drinkstone Road and exits the village along the screened cycle path along Heath Road. There is a very popular footpath crossing Bishop Karney Green with a beautiful view over towards Drinkstone Mills.

Perceptual experience and views in / out

This area is characterized throughout by innumerable beautiful views out over the **rolling valley farmlands** to the west with the **Special Landscape Area** and the tree line of Drinkstone Park on the horizon, and also the **ancient rolling farmlands** to the south-west. It offers various favourite walking and cycling routes for many residents of the village. The smaller lanes, Broomhill Lane, Drinkstone Road, Green Road, Hollybush Lane are typical of the network of winding lanes and paths, often associated with hedges, which characterize this landscape. Apart from



the traffic along Heath Road the whole area is very peaceful. There are two beautiful vistas leading into the conservation area of the village: the view along the rural ancient hedgerow of Drinkstone Road approaching the conservation area from the west; and the approach to Woolpit along Green Road, (a rural lane with views over rolling valley farmlands,) where the setting of Priory Cottage, a **Grade 2 listed** building, with the copse and hedging surrounding the linear pond on the opposite side of the road makes a beautiful entrance to Woolpit village.

WOOLPIT LANDSCAPE AREA ASSESSMENT AREA 3 Woolpit Heath and Borley Green



Looking west from Wood Road

The majority of Landscape Area 3 is comprised of Character Type 19 Rolling Farmlands and Furze

Key characteristics

- Valley landscape with distinctive areas of grass and gorse heath
- Valleys with river terraces of sandy soil
- Small areas of gorse heathland which used to be grazed
- Straight boundaries and generally small scale fields
- Co-axial field systems
- Mixed hedgerows of hawthorn, dogwood and blackthorn with oak, ash and field maple;
- Fragmentary cover of woodland
- Settlement pattern of clustered hamlets around a village, and associated farmsteads of medieval origin
- Villages are often associated with village greens

Location

Landscape area 3 lies north of the Lower Road up to the A14 and a small triangular parcel of land is separated by the A14 to the north and lies between the A14 and Wood Road. To the East the border is Woolpit Wood and Haughley Park Wood, and to the west it runs up to Jewers and Goldstar Transport, by Lady's Well.

Topography

The landscape is gently rolling in this area. Flatter to the East.

Geology

This landscape type occurs on a mixture of outwash deposits from the ice-sheets of the great Anglian glaciation – principally light soils of silts, sands and gravels, but also includes some chalky till and, in places, silts or brickearths from former lakes. The geological background has resulted in the frequent occurrence of dry heaths, as at Woolpit Heath. In the past these provided low-quality sheep or rabbit grazing, but in the 20th century many were exploited for sand and gravel.



Looking south east towards Sharpes Row

Land cover and land use

Many of the river-terrace heaths were originally exploited as commons by farmers living nearby, as a source of grazing and especially for gathering gorse which was cut for cattle fodder. Some survive as unimproved open areas, e.g. Shelland Green but others were enclosed and converted to farmland through agricultural improvements from the 18th century. In recent years some have become important areas for the production of irrigated crops and allotments as down Warren Lane. There is a small parcel of Glebe land running North West of Old Stowmarket Road which is a designated conservation area. The agricultural land classification of most this area (LAC) is grade 3, however, there is a parcel of land to the North West of Old Stowmarket Road which is grade 2. Where the soils are better quality, there are older farm units with mixed pasture and arable, characterised by more sinuous and older field boundaries.

Trees and woodland

This landscape has sporadic tree cover and a few small woodlands of broadleaved trees, with multi-species hedgerows including oak, ash, field maple and hawthorn. There is very little evidence of the heaths. Several of the large oak, some ash and a walnut tree have tree preservation orders.

Historic landscape / Time depth

Bordering Area 3 is the scheduled monument of Lady's Well in a small irregular moated enclosure, largely covered by trees and bushes and now a nature reserve. At Woolpit the calcareous brickearth deposits were used, particularly in the 19th century, for the production of bricks famously known as 'Woolpit whites'.

Scale and enclosure

Relatively small scale and intimate.

Settlement

The hamlets of Borley Green and Woolpit Heath are strung out along the Lower Road leading from Woolpit towards Stowmarket. The hamlets tend to be more tightly clustered than is common across Suffolk as a whole. Several of the buildings are listed (on the Heath, Hague Farm, Heath Farm, Dale House and The Lanes and 3 others; and Lawn Farm on the other side of the A14). Between these settlements are isolated houses or farms. There has been some ribbon development along the Lower Road and down the lanes, which run north from the Lower Road towards the A14 and end as cul-de-sacs. Infill over recent times has added to the

settlements in this area. Along Old Stowmarket Road lies a mixture of open fields and residential and commercial properties (Southlands on Old Stowmarket Road is a grade 2 listed building). The Brickworks Industrial Estate set in a landscaped area includes a large enclosed area of open water which was an old brickpit.

Perceptual experience and views in / out

In the north west of the landscape area the landform gradually rises towards Woolpit and Woolpit Green and remains predominately flat in the east and north, with several scattered farmsteads present along narrow lanes. Medium to small scale agricultural fields and blocks of woodland characterise the wider landscape, enclosed by fragmented hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees. There are good views of Woolpit village and its iconic Church spire from looking west from Wood Road. This is particularly impressive at night when floodlit.

Indicators of value and rights of way

Long ranging views towards Woolpit are apparent from elevated ground to the east with the church spire a prominent feature from well over two miles away. There are several footpaths leading north east from the Lower Road including Warren Lane, Grassy Lane and Oak Lane, these are ancient rights of way but they have been cut off by the building of the A14 and are now cul-de-sacs.

Condition and strength of character

The land is gently rolling and the ancient farming landscapes have given way to small enclosures with straight boundaries of mixed hedge and post and rail fencing. It is a working rural landscape in character with the rest of the area around Woolpit.

Woolpit Landscape Area Assessment – Area 4 Clopton Green



Key characteristics

- Area typical of Ancient Rolling Farmlands (Landscape type 4)
- Plateau of large or very large arable fields
- Bisected by single narrow road leading south to Rattlesden
- Wide views with Woolpit Wood on skyline to the east, and the trees of Drinkstone Park to the west.
- Largely inaccessible area of private farmland

Location

Land to the south and west of Woolpit Green (Landscape area 2), Woolpit Heath and Borley Green with the Drinkstone boundary to the west, and the Rattlesden boundary to the south.

Topography

Large, flat plateau rising almost imperceptibly towards Rattlesden to the south.

Geology and Soils

Slightly acid, loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage

Land cover and land use

Where retained, hedgerows are ancient and species-rich with associated ditches. The hedges are frequently high and wide and have a strong visual impact. There are however some significant areas of field amalgamation and boundary loss. The land is Grade 3 agricultural land classification, and in terms of crop production, sugar beet, cereals and oilseed rape dominate, the latter making a significant visual impact.

Trees and Woodland cover

The hedgerow trees are of typical clay land composition: oak, ash and field maple, with suckering elm, especially in areas with the lightest soils, where it makes up most of the woody component of the hedgerows. Oak trees are usually prominent and compliment the areas of woodland in this area, adding to the generally wooded feel of the landscape. An area of broad leaf deciduous woodland lies on the southern boundary known as The Great Wood.

Historic landscape/Time depth

Near the settlement area there remain medium sized fields with traditional hedgerow of mixed hawthorn, oak, ash and field maple. But further on there are very large fields created by post WW11 agricultural improvement.



View towards Woolpit Green

Scale and enclosure

Medium to large and very large fields with wide open horizons.

Settlement, road network and relationship to village

There are three hamlets forming the Northern boundary of this area - Borley Green, Woolpit Heath and Woolpit Green and some ribbon development along the Lower Road. The rest of the area has no settlement and is largely agricultural farm land. The area is bisected by Rattlesden Road, a single narrow rural road leading from Woolpit to Rattlesden. This is an unrestricted and fairly straight road with fast moving traffic. This has become a designated route for HGV lorries accessing the lorry park at the disused Rattlesden airfield. There are occasional passing places. Two cars can pass side by side, but there is insufficient width for a car to pass an HGV, and when 2 HGVs meet there can be problems. This is an attractive rural road with well maintained field hedgerow, and as such tempting to cyclists, but it is potentially very dangerous with a blind corner immediately past the settlement area.

Indicators of value and rights of way

There is one significant footpath which crosses from Clopton Green to Poplar Farm which is on the south east end of The Heath.

The ordnance survey map also marks a small footpath from Great Wood to meet the other footpath.

Perceptual experience and views in and out and intervisibility

The areas of field amalgamation have created longer views of a rolling lightly wooded countryside. From the south east corner there are views of the rolling landscape of South Suffolk beyond the Rattlesden Valley.

Woolpit Landscape Area Assessment –Area 5 Woolpit Wood and Haughley Park



Key characteristics

- An area of woodland, mainly broad leaved with some conifers.
- Forms a ridge which is visible as an important skyline feature from most central parts of the Parish
- Bluebell woods of Haughley Park are open to the public on certain days, otherwise the area is inaccessible to the public
- The whole of area 5 forms part of a special designated landscape area

Location

The easternmost corner of the Parish, split roughly equally by the A14 north and south of the road. It adjoins Wetherden to the north, Haughley to the east and Shelland to the south east.

Topography

Higher than most of the rest of the Parish, this gives good views towards Woolpit village. The northern half is a wooded ridge running roughly north-south reaching more than 75 metres and falling away to the north- east and west.

A deep east-west cutting through which the A14 runs separates this from the southern part, where the ridge gently falls away in all directions from about 75 metres in the north to less than 70 metres in the south.

Higher than most of the rest of the Parish, T mainly between 70 and 80 metres in height rising to 78 metres on the road to Haughley.

Geology and Soils

Chalky clays and loams.

Landcover and landuse

Woodland and Parkland



