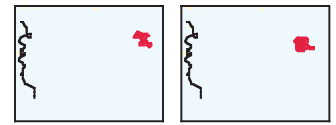


Central North Norfolk/ Mid Norfolk

Character Area
78/84



This description is an amalgamation of 78 Central North Norfolk and 84 Mid Norfolk

Key Characteristics

- Distinctive steep northern slope and more gentle southern face of Cromer Ridge, with outlying spurs and hills, is most distinctive topographical feature.
- Variable geology, with extensive sand and gravel soils. Topography variable with notably vigorous minor undulations and some flat areas.
- Predominantly arable, with variable field sizes, generally medium rather than large; relatively well-wooded, often a reflection of sporting interest within the estates, but with little ancient woodland.
- Remnant ancient countryside with patchwork field system which has been sporadically rationalized, particularly towards the west. Sinuous lanes and mixed hedges, with sunken lanes a feature of the Cromer Ridge.
- Large number of small- to medium-size 18th century estates, with more parkland north of river Wensum and a notable parkland belt between the rivers Wensum and Bure.
- Dispersed villages and isolated farmhouses within complex minor road network. Red brick and flint with pantiled or pegtile roofs. Cohesive 17th and 18th century vernacular architecture. Denser settlement pattern south of river Wensum.
- Great density and stylistic variety of churches, often associated with small villages or estates.
- Areas of heathland, especially along Cromer Ridge and in west, reflecting lighter soils north of river Wensum.
- Coastal holiday resorts of Cromer and Sheringham.



DAVID BURTON/COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY

The Cromer Ridge forms the northern boundary of this character area. This unusual geological feature is a vestige of a former glaciation and its variable topography and complex mixture of silty clays, sands and gravels leads to great variety in landcover, as seen here at Muckleburgh Hill.

Landscape Character

Central North Norfolk occupies the area to the north-west of Norwich and is bounded to the north by the coastal cliffs fringing the North Sea around Cromer. To the north-west the steep slopes of the Cromer Ridge fall to the narrow North Norfolk Coast and to the west divide it from the 'Good Sands' of North West Norfolk, although there is a transitional zone in parts along this boundary. To the east the area meets the fertile flatter ground of North East Norfolk and the upper valleys of the Broads while, to the south, a curving line across the Wensum valley marks a transition to slightly flatter, more open land. North of Wymondham and west towards Stow Bedon lies the boundary with the chalky boulder clay plateau of central East Anglia (South Norfolk and High Suffolk Claylands). The south-western edge of the area abuts Breckland, which is also fairly flat but composed of light sandy soils which support a very different landcover and settlement pattern.

the major heathland areas of Britain. However, much was easy to reclaim to agriculture and remaining areas now merit protection and conservation, for example Buxton and Cawston Heath.

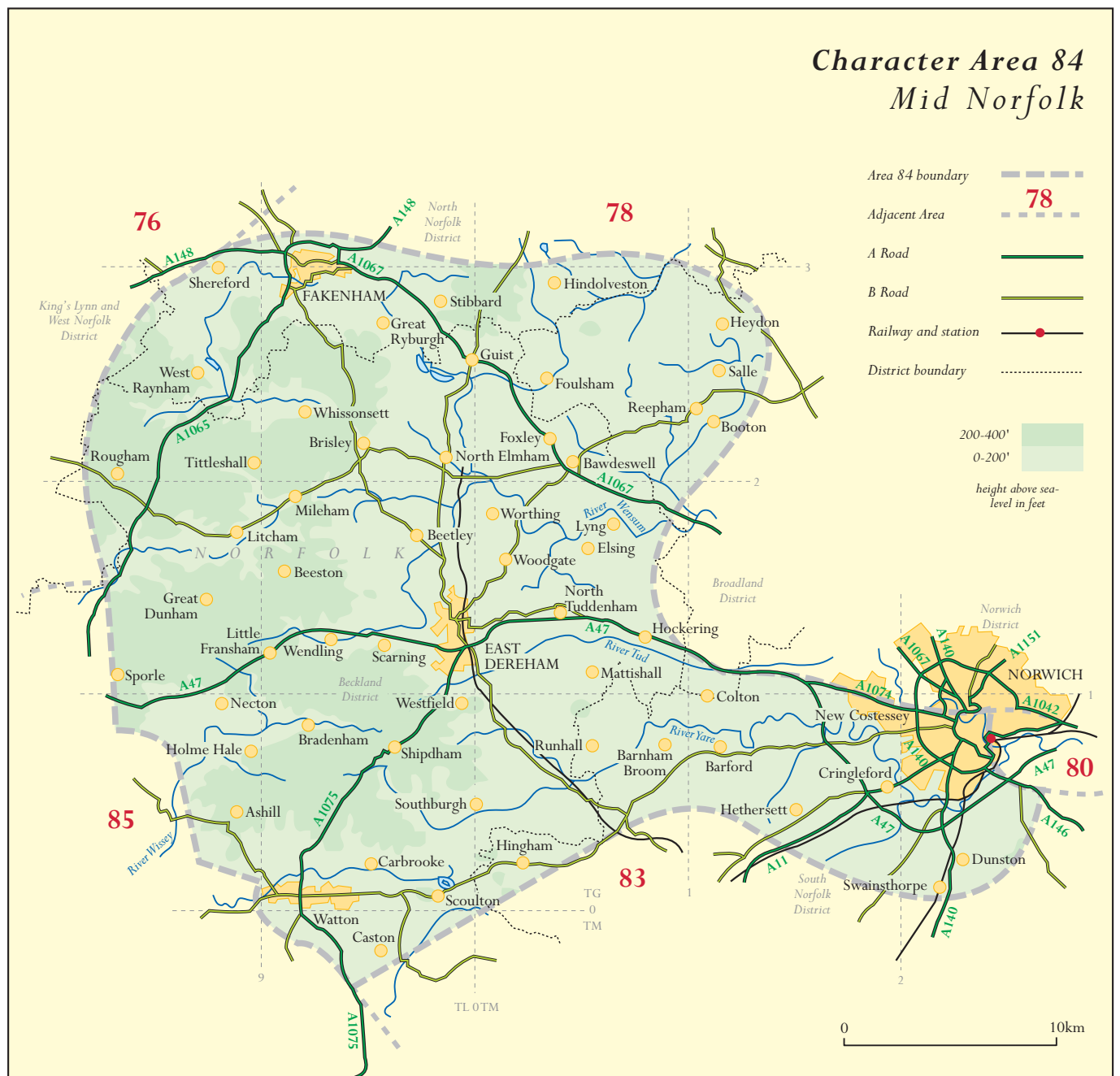
Central North Norfolk looks to Norwich for cultural and economic activity. There are no other large centres of population but, rather, a traditional pattern of market towns, such as Dereham and Aylsham. It is an area of dispersed villages and isolated farmhouses, generally of the 17th and 18th centuries, and of 18th century estates and country houses. On the coast, the resort towns of Cromer and Sheringham were both 19th century developments. Cromer sits in a dell between the coast and the Ridge and is a busy flint town with a sandy beach and a pier, full of little lanes and holm oak. Sheringham is less urban, again built of flint and red brick but quieter than its neighbour.



DAVID BURTON/COUNTRYIDEAGENCY

The undulating land is incised by broad shallow river valleys, such as the Wensum, which provide a strongly contrasting landscape of lush pasture and woodland on the valley slopes.

The impact of 20th century farming practices has not been avoided here but they have not been implemented



wholesale. There is a variety within this landscape which is perhaps a reflection of the comparatively large number of small- to medium-size estates, often with their own parkland, which contrasts with the few vast landownerships of the 'Good Sands' to the west. It also has considerable transitional character, especially in the heathland areas to the north and west, where wide roadside verges, a more rectilinear field pattern and the influence of the North Sea begin to be apparent, especially in the cliff formations between Cromer and Mundesley. To the south the change in topography influenced by the glacial till plateau is readily apparent.

Physical Influences

Central North Norfolk is bounded to the north by coastal cliffs and the Cromer Ridge which has a steep north slope and a more gentle slope to the south. This ridge extends from Holt to Mundesley but is most pronounced in the vicinity of Sheringham, where it reaches 100 m in height, with an average width of five miles. It is not, in national terms, a major landscape feature but an unusual one in East Anglia and of great interest geologically. This vestige of a former glaciation, with its mix of till (silty clays), sands and gravels, has provided the complexity of the soils in this area which give rise to great variation in land cover. Coastal erosion of the cliffs is an ongoing problem but the cliff-line remains a dramatic feature, contrasting with the open, flat coastline elsewhere in East Anglia.



JOHN TYLER COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY

The area still contains remnant 'ancient' countryside with sinuous, narrow lanes, mixed hedgerows and smaller field patterns, such as here at the Manor House near Great Ryburgh.

The local topography is very variable to the north. It is undulating except where incised by broad, shallow river valleys, such as the Wensum, and intricately rolling to the west of Norwich before flattening out into the central

glacial till plateau of East Anglia. To the west, the terrain gradually flattens towards the 'Good Sands' and to the east it flattens as it reaches Aylsham, before merging with the North-East plateau.

The river valleys of the Yare to the west of Norwich, the Wensum and western tributaries of the Bure create a lush pastoral landscape which is partly enclosed by woodland on the valley slopes. Extraction of sands and gravels along the Wensum has produced lakes with reeded margins in places. Towards Norwich, the valleys acquire a more urban character.

Historical and Cultural Influences

Central North Norfolk historically consisted of heathland and wood-pasture. Anglo-Saxon settlement along the Cromer Ridge, denoted partly by the large number of *ingham* place names, was followed by 14th century enclosure which led to small-scale, irregular field patterns and a twisting road network.

It appears to have been an area of mixed farming on relatively small landholdings which became fairly wealthy during the 17th century, as shown by the large number of flint and pantile farmhouses of the period. This was followed in the 18th and 19th centuries by the establishment of a large number of medium estates and the construction of appropriately-sized country houses. In some ways this was a return to a medieval landscape pattern when much of the land was occupied by deer parks. These were converted to farmland in the 16th and 17th centuries, only to change to parkland in the 18th century. Today, many of them are again farmland with the vestiges of parks around the houses. Such estates frequently have their own church and village, as at Heydon, which lends a paternalistic, not to say feudal, character to the landscape.

Melton Constable is an example of a park that had already been in one family's ownership for a long time when it was decided, in 1664, to build a third family house within the grounds. This was then added to substantially in the 19th century, when the nearby 'railway' village was also constructed (1885-1910) to house workers on this important junction of the Midland and Great Northern lines. This village appears to have been imported wholesale from the Midlands – there is nothing else like it in East Anglia.

Humphrey Repton is buried in Aylsham churchyard and his legacy can be seen in Sheringham Park, the design of which incorporated views to the sea although the house turns its back on the sea and looks inland over this fertile lowland. Sheringham and Cromer developed as holiday resorts in the early 19th century. In 1883 Clement Scott, a journalist, popularized this area in poems and articles, calling it 'Poppyland'. The Norfolk coast became a fashionable resort

area and Lutyens designed holiday homes at Overstrand and Sidestrand for London magnates. The coast now thrives as a retirement and holiday area, with a plethora of 20th century bungalows to emphasise the point.

Culturally this area has always looked to Norwich, situated at the confluence of the Yare and the Wensum, of which Pevsner wrote:

‘Norwich has everything - a cathedral, a major castle on a mound in the middle, walls and towers, an undisturbed medieval centre and winding streets and alleys, 32 parish churches ...’

The Saxon settlement became the major market town for East Anglia and by the Middle Ages was the third largest town in England, after London and York. It maintained its wealth through the cloth industry and export and was also home of the Norwich School of artists, of whom Crome and Cotman are perhaps the best-known exponents. It is centrally situated within the old kingdom of East Anglia (Norfolk and Suffolk) and well-sited on the confluence of the rivers Wensum and Yare, the latter being navigable and largely unbridged into the city centre. The Wensum valley is responsible for creating a city of surprising topographical variety in a rather flat county which presents a delightful mix of medieval, Georgian and modern architecture, a fine market-place and intriguing alleyways and streets. Remnant heathland, such as Mousehold Heath, is an additional attribute of the city. So, too, is the variation in landform both within and around the city, especially to the south and, in a smaller scale, more intimate way to the east.

Buildings and Settlement

The red brick and frequently black-glazed pantiled farmhouse of the early 18th century is an inherent component of Norfolk character, expressed most clearly in Central North Norfolk. Although there is a high proportion of 17th century houses, with flint walls dressed with brick and steeply-pitched thatched or pantiled roofs, the area has generally a small-scale 18th century character. This is exemplified by the large number of country houses built during the period, mostly in red brick but, later, in white or grey. There are some estate villages, of unified style and surrounded by dense tree belts, which are another feature of the area. Innate conservatism has ensured that the local vernacular style has been preserved into the 20th century, so there are few examples of later periods. The area has relatively few towns but those that there are, such as Aylsham and East Dereham, form active centres with their own identity. Large villages, like Hingham and Reepham, also contain more facilities than usual because of their relative isolation. This nucleated pattern is seen most clearly in the area north of the Wensum, while to the south the settlement pattern consists of clusters of villages.



RICHARD TILBROOK

Central Norfolk is rich in medieval churches with a particularly notable clutch around Reepham, including Heydon which is seen here. This is one of a number of estate villages closely linked to the development of small 18th century country houses. These are often surrounded by dense tree belts, another feature of this area.

A rich abundance of minor country houses lies between the major estates of Sheringham, Blickling and Felbrigg and the dispersed villages scattered among the dense network of narrow, twisting lanes. This is Ancient Countryside, much of it enclosed in the 14th century, and only 20th century agricultural rationalization has changed it. Between the villages there is still room enough for isolated 17th and 18th century farmhouses, often with splendid flint barns. Closer to Norwich, especially along the A47 and A1067, urbanization creeps westwards, with a string of commuter villages of 19th and 20th century origin.

Central North Norfolk/Mid Norfolk is unusually rich in medieval churches, with a particularly notable clutch in the middle of the area, near Reepham. Salle has been pronounced, by C.L.S Linnell, to be ‘not only the most marvellous church in a county of marvellous churches but one of the most beautiful in all England’. Nearby Booton excels as a dressed flint and stone Victorian frolic, be-pinnacled wherever possible in a spectacular flight of fancy by the then vicar. Cawston also has many admirers. These churches dominate the landscape, especially on the flatter land, and in an area of close-packed villages it is often possible to see two or three towers.

Land Cover

The varied landcover of Central North Norfolk/Mid Norfolk is a reflection of its mixed soils which are glacial in origin. This is traditional farming country which was formerly mixed, with sheep on the lighter land and cattle on the heavy, but is now mainly arable with some pasture along the valley floors. Cereals now dominate with break-cropping of sugarbeet and some oilseed rape.

The area is distinguished by tracts of heathland on the lighter sandy soils, particularly towards the coast, and by extensive belts of woodland with some conifers on the lighter land. This can be seen along the Cromer Ridge, in a wide arc swinging westwards from East Runton to Holt and south to Briston, then

on towards the A1067 at Guist. There is another concentration in a north-south line to the west and south of Aylsham.

Fields are variable in size and the small scale and irregularity of early enclosure has given way, in many areas, to a larger, more regular pattern. This change is also noted in a difference between areas of mixed hedgerow with frequent hedgerow oaks and areas of poor or remnant hedgerow with no hedgerow trees. These differences, however, form a mosaic within which different landownerships and consequent farming practice are likely to be the major factor of influence.

The river valleys provide limited contrast since many of them are tree-lined along the upper valley slope or have been planted with poplar along the valley floor. The unplanted river valleys display a wide, lush pastoral landscape with water meadows divided by reed-filled dykes.

On the fringes of Norwich, along the major road network, suburban development is encroaching on the rural character of the area.

The Changing Countryside

- Post-war hedgerow and hedgerow tree losses, although less prevalent now.
- The loss of heathland to arable cultivation and coniferisation in the early- to mid-20th century is now seen as more significant.
- Loss of contrast between uplands and river valleys, due to plantations on valley floors or sides.
- Creeping suburbanization, with the agglomeration of once-distinct villages, is particularly notable along the A1067.
- 20th century architecture is very limited in this area but has tended to ignore, or at best pay lip-service to, the vernacular and jars with the inherent character of the villages of Central North Norfolk, especially when local building materials are not used.
- Cliff erosion between Cromer and Mundesley.

Shaping the Future

- The retention, replacement and management of hedgerows is important.
- There is scope for mixed deciduous planting on valley sides, together with the retention and encouragement of pasture in the valleys. The appropriateness of poplar plantations on the valley floors should be considered.
- Design guide criteria would help development to relate specifically to the character of individual settlements.
- The conservation of parkland should be addressed.

- The relevance of sporting interests to the conservation and management of woods and hedgerows should be acknowledged.
- There are opportunities to manage remnant heathland and to investigate the potential for its re-creation.
- Sustainable or soft forms of protection against coastal erosion should be investigated.

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Central Norfolk is predominantly arable farmland but relatively well-wooded. The more undulating areas retain a smaller-scale, more balanced feel than some of the claylands to the south. Churches are a prominent feature and it is often possible to see two or three towers at any one time. This view is of Garvestone, Norfolk.