The River Tove Floodplain is located on the southeastern boundary of Northamptonshire. The southern section of the River Tove Floodplain forms part of a broader character area that extends eastwards beyond the county boundary, being formed in part by the floodplain of the River Great Ouse, which meets the Tove at Cosgrove. The northern section extends westwards into Northamptonshire towards Towcester. In the northern section, the River Tove is central to the floodplain landscape, but in the southern section, the Tove runs along the county boundary together with the Grand Union Canal and River Great Ouse. The narrow, meandering course of the river set into the floodplain is often inconspicuous within the landscape, marked only by scattered trees of willow and ash with occasional limes and poplar lines. Pollarded willows also occur along the line of the river, most notably at Passenham. Although in places both the River Tove and canal are open to surrounding fields, in other areas they are bounded by post and wire and fences and the canal is frequently lined by low hawthorn hedgerows.

A combination of arable land and improved pastures, grazed by both sheep and cattle, characterises the area, although pasture predominates in the southern section of the character area around Passenham, the western edge of the character area, including the areas around the settlement of Cosgrove, northwest of Grafton Regis, and south of Stoke Bruerne Park. Small areas of calcareous grassland also occur in similar locations. Field sizes vary throughout the floodplain landscape, although in larger fields there is often evidence of field amalgamation. Woodland cover is sparse in the character area, confined mainly to areas of young tree planting established along the line of streams flowing into the River Tove north of Alderton. Isolated small broadleaved copses are located within the area, the largest of which is Folly Furze. Areas of woodland and amenity planting are also associated with Cosgrove Leisure Park. Despite limited woodland cover in the floodplain, woodland in surrounding landscape types creates a greater sense of tree cover, particularly to the north of the area around Easton Neston Park and Stoke Bruerne Park.

Typical of the landscape type, settlement is limited. A number of isolated farms and dwellings occur within the floodplain, but large areas nevertheless remain unsettled. The eastern edge of Cosgrove, east of the Grand Union Canal, also extends into the floodplain along with a hotel and Cosgrove Leisure Park. South of Cosgrove the hamlet of Passenham occupies a bridging point along the course of the river. The hamlet comprises a church, collection of farm buildings, and old mill and mill leat are located. Limestone is often conspicuous in the construction of many of the buildings. There are limited roads providing access to individual dwellings and settlements. These generally cross over the floodplain landscape rather than running along the valley. Glimpsed views are possible, however, of the A5(T) Watling Street Roman Road.

Although recreational opportunities in the River Tove Floodplain are generally limited, the Cosgrove Leisure Park, east of Cosgrove, provides one of the largest inland caravan and leisure parks within England. The Park is set within 180 acres of landscaped grounds with the river and twelve lakes providing a number of water sports activities. Fishing lakes and a driving range are also located southwest of Passenham. A number of footpaths cross through the landscape, including the Grand Union Canal Walk and a limited stretch of the Grafton Way. Beyond the character area there are glimpsed views of Towcester Racecourse.
17c Brampton Valley Floodplain

The Brampton Valley Floodplain Character Area is located on the northern edge of Northamptonshire and drained by a number of tributaries. It flows from the northern edge of the character area around Droughton, and towards the centre of Northampton, before finally joining the River Nene. The meandering course of the main tributary that flows through the central part of the valley is frequently marked by willow and ash, and is particularly overrun around Northampton in the Kingsthorpe Nature Reserve. In other areas, however, the watercourse is largely open, marked only by occasional trees punctuating the landscape.

Land use in the area is a combination of both arable and pastoral fields, although the latter predominates in smaller scale fields in the southern section of the character area up to the Northampton and Lamport Railway, and northwest of Brixworth. Beyond this to the north, fields are larger and under arable cultivation. Due to the close proximity of urban development, ‘horsiculture’ predominates in pastures to the south, along with significant areas of neutral grassland. Fields are frequently divided with post and rail fences, with evidence of prominent, white ribbon temporary fencing. Many fields are undergrazed and have a scrubby, overgrown appearance in the landscape. Typical of the landscape type, woodland cover is sparse, confined to linear broadleaved copses along the course of tributary streams. However, hedgerow trees and streamside vegetation provide some tree cover within the area.

Settlement within the valley is extremely sparse with only occasional isolated farmsteads and dwellings located adjacent to roads crossing over the valley landscape. Associated with a number of dwellings are stable blocks, which are particularly prominent to the south of the character area, close to Northampton. Although the majority of roads crossing the valley are minor, the A5199 and A508 are both busy roads within the character area. Bounding the southern boundary are the A5095 and A428, providing further urbanising influences upon the area.

Two railway lines are located along the valley, one of which is still in use, the other a dismantled railway that once formed part of the Northampton to Market Harborough branch, designed by George Bidder and George Stephenson, and opened in 1859. Although passenger services were closed on the line in 1981, rebuilding of the railway began in 1995 and six and half miles are now complete to the Lamport Crossing. The Northampton and Lamport Steam and Heritage diesel railway now operates on the line as a tourist railway. The Brampton Valley Way, Midshires Way and off road cycle track also run along the remaining length of the dismantled railway. The Kingsthorpe Local Nature Reserve provides an additional recreational opportunity within the area. Originally known as Kingsthorpe Mill Meadows, it covers an area of 7 hectares of land, and was formerly used as an area of flood meadows. It included the site of Kingsthorpe Mill. Sections of the old mill race are still evident in the area, which is now important for insects, wild flowers and mammals.
17d River Ise Floodplain

The gently sloping valley and floodplain of the River Ise Floodplain Character Area stretches between Kettering and Wellingborough to join the River Nene southeast of Wellingborough. The settlement of Burton Latimer extends across the valley south of Kettering and divides the floodplain landscape. Despite being heavily influenced by the close proximity of large urban areas and associated infrastructure, the character area does retain some sections that have a rural character where the river is surrounded by vegetation, including flag irises and rushes. A varied character predominates throughout the floodplain landscape.

A combination of both arable and pastoral land, in fields of varying sizes, characterises the landscape. Often, however, small to medium scale grazing sheep pastures predominate, notably north of Burton Latimer, together with some areas to the south around Furnace Cottages and on the eastern edge of Wellingborough. Areas of calcareous and neutral grassland are also closely associated with areas of improved pasture. A significant area of neutral grassland is evident to the northwest of Barton Seagrave, adjacent to the River Ise. Woodland cover, although limited, is more abundant in this character area than any other areas of River Valley Floodplain. It is mainly confined to linear woodlands closely associated with the River Ise and its tributaries, along the dismantled railway northeast of Wellingborough, and within Wicksteed Park and Boughton Park on the northern edge of the character area. Woodland here forms part of the more expansive parkland landscape of Boughton Park, including scattered parkland trees. Hedgerow trees are located throughout the landscape, contributing to overall tree cover with willow, alder and hawthorn common along the course of the River Ise.

Settlement in the character area is extremely limited, confined to isolated farms and dwellings and an area of industrial units along Furnace Lane. Despite limited settlement within the floodplain, significant urban areas are visible adjacent to the character area. Limited areas of vegetation adjacent to settlements provide partial screening, including tree and shrub planting surrounding the River Ise, and public open space between Kettering and the northern edge of Barton Seagrave. Crossing the floodplain landscape are a number of roads that connect settlements beyond the character area, including both quiet country roads and the busier A6003 and A14(T) at Kettering, and the A510 at Wellingborough. Other urban influences include high voltage pylons and the main line railway connecting Wellingborough and Kettering, which follows the western edge of the character area. It is a busy line with relatively frequent trains, and is inconspicuous among some sections within the landscape, marked only by post and wire fences with some scrub. Sections of dismantled railway also occur within the area.

Wicksteed Park is located within the centre of the floodplain on the southeastern edge of Kettering, and provides a valuable recreational opportunity within the character area. Developed on a former area of meadowland, and the inspiration of its founder Sir Charles Wicksteed, the Park was the first leisure park in the UK. Set within 147 acres of sunken gardens, tree lined walks, nature trails and picnic areas, the park is also a valuable wildlife habitat. Central to the park is a 30 acre lake and at the northwest corner is the pavilion building. Car parking facilities are extensive at the Park and a miniature railway provides access around the site. The Park, together with public open space to the north adjacent to the River Ise, provides important areas for recreational opportunities in close proximity to urban centres. A number of public rights of way also cross the floodplain landscape.

Although landmarks in the character area are limited, the church spire at Finedon is a notable feature and prominent on the horizon.
CHARACTER AREAS

18a The Nene – Long Buckby to Weedon Bec
18b The Nene – Weedon Bec to Duston Mill
18c The Nene – Duston Mill to Billing Wharf
18d The Nene – Billing Wharf to Woodford Mill
18e The Nene – Woodford Mill to Thrapston
18f The Nene – Thrapston to Cotterstock
18g The Nene – Cotterstock to Warmington
18h The Nene – Warmington to Wansford
18i The Welland – Market Harborough to Cottingham
18j The Welland – Cottingham to Wakerley
18k The Welland – Tixover to Wothorpe

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Broad, flat and predominantly wide floodplain surrounded by rising landform of adjacent landscape types;
- Deep, alluvial clay and silt with sand and gravel, masking the underlying geology;
- River channel with slow flowing watercourse with limited bank side vegetation in areas;
- Predominance of unimproved pasture with pockets of both neutral and improved grassland and scattered arable land in fields of varying size; arable land becomes more frequent within the western section of the Nene Valley;
- Limited woodland cover confined to occasional broadleaved copses scattered throughout the floodplain;
- Hedgerow trees, although infrequent, are an important feature where they do occur, creating localised well treed areas;
- Hedgerows are generally overgrown and reinforced with post and wire fencing with intermittent sections showing evidence of decline;
- Settlement is very limited within the floodplain with a sequence of small nucleated villages on the lower valley slopes, along the western section of the River Nene;
- Wider settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads and individual dwellings;
urban influences arising from the proximity of large urban areas and associated road infrastructure on the perimeter of some sections of the floodplain;

- minor roads generally cross the floodplain landscape at right angles to the river, with major roads also following the valley course and marking the boundary of the type;

- evidence of long periods of gravel extraction and restoration within the Nene Valley, particularly along the middle section of the Valley, with patterns of restored landscapes with numerous areas of wetland and lakes; and

- significant recreational activities within the Nene Valley landscape, mainly focused on the restored lakes.

LOCATION AND INTRODUCTION

The Broad River Valley Floodplain landscape character type occurs in two separate areas within the county, in association with the two major river valleys of the Nene and Welland. The principal area, comprising the Nene Valley, extends across the central and eastern part of the county from the west of Northampton towards the northeastern section of the county and beyond towards Peterborough. A further section of the character type is also located along the northern boundary of the county where Northamptonshire adjoins Leicestershire, adjacent to the River Welland. A total of eleven character areas have been identified, eight within the Nene Valley and three within the Welland Valley.

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and Soils

Although the rivers flowing through the Broad River Valley Floodplain have cut down through the underlying rocks, the valley floors have been overlain in areas with glacial till (drimeton) dating from the Quaternary period, and sand and gravels, which mask the rocks beneath. Deep alluvial clay and silt deposits have enriched the valley floors, creating soils of good quality for agricultural use. Isolated areas of river terrace gravels can also be found scattered along the upper reaches of the river floodplain.

Soils within the valleys are characteristically of a good quality and fertile, due to the rich alluvial deposits. A broad band of stoneless clayey soils, in places calcareous, and variably affected by groundwater are evident along the base of the river valleys. Soils vary along the lower valley slopes and along the course of the rivers. In the River Welland and western section of the Nene these mainly include slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged, fine loamy over clayey soils, fine silty over clayey or clayey soils, and fine loamy over clayey and clayey soils, with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging. Small pockets of deep well drained coarse loamy and sandy soils, locally over gravel and slowly permeable calcareous clayey soils are also evident. In the central section of the Nene, soils mainly comprise deep permeable, mainly fine loamy soils variably affected by groundwater, and slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged, clayey soils with similar fine loamy over clayey soils. Lower valley slopes in the eastern section of the River Nene are dominated by well-drained calcareous clayey and fine loamy soils over limestone, in places shallow and brashy.

Landform

The Broad River Valley Floodplains comprise some of the lowest areas in the county, in places reaching a height of only 20m ASL. They form distinctive riparian landscapes with the main rivers and tributary streams following a meandering course across the floodplain. In the northeast of the county, the Nene Valley floodplain comprises a low-lying, almost flat area that progressively merges into the flat and extensive landscape that characterises the Cambridgeshire Fens to the east beyond the county. In contrast, at its source close to Badby, the Nene Valley floodplain is more confined, surrounded by the more elevated land of the Undulating Hills and Valleys. In localised areas, the floodplain is narrower when surrounded by rising landform, such as areas adjacent to the Limestone Valley Slopes, adjacent to the Nene, and where the Fermel Scarp Slopes form a backdrop to the floodplain landscape, as in the case of the Welland. Generally, however, the floodplains of the river valleys are predominantly broad.

Hydrology

The river channels of the Broad River Valley Floodplain are intrinsic to the character of this landscape type. For the majority of their course, the rivers give the impression of being slow flowing with variable depth and height of the surrounding river banks. Bank side vegetation in general is sparse with only limited areas of the riverside being well treed. Marginal vegetation is more abundant, however. As a consequence, in a number of areas the rivers lose their dominance within the floodplain landscape. Chains of former sand and gravel pits are located within the Nene valley, a large number of which have been flooded to form artificial lakes and combine to create local nature reserves. The earliest of these support dense vegetation and wet scrubland around their margins and provide valuable wildlife and wildfowl habitats.