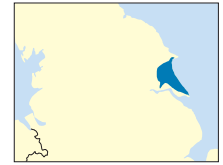


Holderness



Key Characteristics

- Low-lying, predominantly flat or gently undulating plateau jutting into the North Sea and dividing it from the Humber Estuary.
- Glacial landscape of till deposits, gravels and alluvium over chalk, with many glacial features such as drumlin mounds, hummocky terrain, moraine-like ridges and kettle holes.
- Rapidly eroding, soft clay, cliff coast.
- High-quality agricultural land used predominantly for large-scale arable cultivation and intensive livestock farming.
- Fields bounded by ditches in some areas, especially the floodplain of the river Hull, but by hedges on higher ground.
- Sparse tree and woodland cover leading to a generally open landscape with long views - enclosed by the wolds to the north and west.
- Highly fragmented, though locally prominent, remnants of semi-natural vegetation including Hornsea Mere and various carr, swamp and damp grassland habitats.
- Winding roads linking dispersed villages and hamlets, with village churches providing important landmarks in the generally flat landscape.
- Vernacular buildings of red brick and red pantile with some older buildings, especially churches, built in limestone. Use of cobbles near the coast.

Landscape Character

Holderness is an intensively farmed, low-lying landscape which lies to the east of the Yorkshire Wolds. It forms a broad, flat or gently undulating plain which is centred on the valley of the river Humber and runs south to Hull, is bounded by the North Sea to the east, by the Humber Estuary to the south and by the dip slope of the Wolds to the north and

west. The gentle terrain relates to its glacial history and there are widespread remnants of glacial features in the landscape.

Most importantly, however, the deposits of glacial till and alluvium, which cloak the underlying Chalk strata, create generally rich soils which support intensive arable cultivation. Fields are generally large while tree and woodland cover is relatively sparse and, as a result, the landscape is open with long views. The flat, open character means that the sky is often an important part of any view in the area.

The inland, agricultural landscape is separated from the North Sea by a line of soft clay cliffs and, as a result of this, the proximity of the sea is scarcely apparent except along the coastal fringe above the cliffs. The Humber estuary is visible to the south but views are sometimes restricted by flood embankments. The proximity of the sea and the estuary, combined with the flat, low-lying topography and lack of tree cover does, however, mean that Holderness is somewhat exposed especially when strong winds blow in across the North Sea.



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Semi-natural vegetation is now rare within Holderness. Marshland and meres were historically very common. Hornsea Mere, Yorkshire's largest natural lake, is now the only sizeable surviving example.





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The valley of the river Hull is broad and of an indistinct, shallow form. The river contrasts between its sinuous upper reaches, such as here near Wansford, and its lower reaches where it is contained within flood banks.

Although the character of the landscape is broadly uniform, there are variations which result from modest changes in topography, in the level of tree cover and in the nature of settlement and land use. Perhaps the most clearly distinct areas are the strip of coastal farmland and the valley of the river Hull. Coastal farmland runs from Withernsea in the south, past Hornsea to Bridlington. It is gently undulating land, rising up towards the sea, and is predominantly in arable cultivation. Holiday homes, caravan parks, wind-pruned trees and evidence of coastal erosion are all characteristic of this coastal zone.

The valley of the river Hull is broad and of an indistinct, shallow form. The sinuous upper reaches of the river contrast with its lower reaches contained within flood banks. There is little settlement in the valley except at the margins. Arable fields are dominant and trees and hedgerows are





Holderness meets the North Sea in a line of low, soft clay cliffs. This is an eroding coast, creating problems for settlements near the cliff edge. It has been estimated that, since the Middle Ages, some twenty to thirty settlements have disappeared into the sea as a result of this process. Today, coast protection is a major management issue for the area.

sparse but pasture occurs on poorer clay soils. In the lower reaches of the valley near to Hull there is a stretch of drained, open valley with highly fertile soils used to grow root crops and other vegetables as well as cereals.

The rest of the Holderness area is open arable landscape on flat or gently undulating ground with large, hedged fields, some hedgerow trees and copses and scattered settlement. In the southern part field boundaries are often drainage dikes. Urban fringe influences have an effect on landscape character around Hull with housing, industry, roads and pylons becoming prominent. Along the dip slope of the Wolds, the arable farmland slopes upwards towards the Chalk plateau and provides long views over the Hull valley to the sea.

Physical Influences

Holderness is shaped by superficial drift deposits overlying the Chalk below. Glacial till (boulder clay) is the most widespread deposit and extends over much of the area. It increases in thickness towards the coast and forms hummocky coastal terrain as well as soft clay cliffs. The till is interbedded with sands and gravels which are also of glacial origin as are the widely-developed landforms such as

hummocky terrain, kettle holes, which are rounded depressions formerly occupied by detached blocks, drumlins and moraine-like ridges. The valley of the river Hull contains younger deposits of river alluvium and peaty soils. A geomorphological factor of particular interest is the eroding coast which is receding at a rate which averages nearly 2 metres a year, making these the fastest eroding cliffs in Europe. It has been estimated that since the early Middle Ages some twenty to thirty settlements have disappeared into the sea as a result of this process.

Historical and Cultural Influences

There is evidence to suggest that the first settlers in Holderness arrived in Neolithic times, when the plain was generally very wet and probably consisted of a mix of lakes, marshes, islands and woodland. The environment became drier as sea level changed and trees were also progressively cleared helping to make the area more suited to settlement. The higher, drier areas of hills and ridges were initially favoured for settlement. Early drainage occurred in medieval times and the process continued until the last reaches of the valley of the river Hull were drained in the mid-18th century.

Enclosure took place relatively early in Holderness and much of it has been described as ‘ancient’ enclosure although the precise date at which it occurred is uncertain. The glacial till areas were enclosed first, while the peaty carr lands in the Hull valley often continued to be used in common. A number of open field villages also survived until the 17th century and for long periods the landscape must have been quite varied, with a mix of enclosed land, common pastures and open fields, supporting production of grass, corn, hay, sheep and cattle. Parliamentary enclosure did not have such an impact as it did in the adjacent Wolds as much of the land was already enclosed. It did, however, add a similar pattern of dispersed farmsteads set apart from the villages and areas of large, regular fields enclosed by thorn hedges.

Buildings and Settlement

Settlement in Holderness is usually on higher ground and is often surrounded by smaller fields than those in the more distant agricultural areas. Hamlets and villages are widely dispersed, with some being closely packed and nucleated while others are more linear and strung out along roads. Many have a particularly attractive character with a variety of buildings grouped around ponds and village greens. Church spires in villages are prominent landmarks. Farmsteads are usually large and widely dispersed, combining old brick farmhouses with large modern farm buildings.

The most common building materials are brick and pantiles. Brick making in England began in this area, in Hull and Beverley, in the 14th century. This probably resulted from connections with the low countries where the industry was established even earlier. Bricks were used in all sorts of buildings from farmsteads to great houses like Burton Constable, and many brickworks were established on the boulder clay of Holderness. Bricks used in the buildings of this area are soft, rich red in colour and long and narrow in shape. It has been said that they require particularly large mortar joints because of their irregularities. Limestone, imported from the Southern Magnesian Limestone ridge, appears in some buildings, and near the coast the distinctive ‘cobbles’ of Holderness appear. These are round boulders of boulder clay collected from the beaches and consist of many different types of rock. A number of churches along the coastal belt are built from this material which is sometimes used in combination with brick. Modern buildings in the area often have little in common with the local vernacular.

Land Cover

Farm land dominates the land cover of the area. It is predominantly arable although some pasture also occurs. There is woodland but its extent and distribution is

variable. Where woods do occur they are important in providing enclosure and structure within the landscape. Ancient woodland is very limited in occurrence and most woods are of relatively recent origin.

Semi-natural vegetation has largely been lost as a result of agricultural intensification and now only small fragments remain. Marshland and meres were historically very common but now Hornsea Mere, Yorkshire’s largest natural lake, is the only sizeable surviving example. Some unimproved neutral grassland still occurs on the boulder clays and a number of quarries and sand and gravel pits are of ecological importance.



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Beeford illustrates the common building materials of brick and pantiles. Brick making in England began in the Hull and Beverley area in the 14th Century. It was based upon the boulder clays of Holderness and probably resulted from the area’s connections with the low countries, where the industry was established even earlier.

The Changing Countryside

- Arable production methods have intensified and, in the past, this has caused loss of field boundaries both through removal and through dereliction due to lack of management. The rate of loss has now slowed down and some hedges are being replanted or brought back into management.
- There is a concentration of intensive, predominantly indoor, pig rearing and possible demands for larger pig buildings in the future.
- Set-aside land has a significant impact.
- Experimental growing of short rotation coppice which could become more extensive in future.
- Continued drainage threatens remnant wetlands and archaeological resources. Increased abstraction for irrigation is leading to lowering of water tables.

- Development is also bringing change. Urban fringe development around Hull and Beverley has sometimes created hard unsightly edges. There has been concern about lack of response to vernacular character in rural village development and about the effects of highway design and lighting in suburbanising the landscape. There are limited pressures for caravan sites at the coast, widespread demand for golf course development and some signs of pressure for riverside development.

Shaping the Future

- It is important to examine opportunities to influence the evolution of the agricultural landscape in this area.
- There may be scope to increase the extent of new woodland both by appropriate new planting and by regeneration of alder carr.
- An emphasis on better design in the countryside would help to tackle issues of inappropriate new development.
- The restoration of sand and gravel workings offers opportunities to create new wildlife habitats and wetland landscapes.
- The dynamics of the Holderness coast and its relevance to the much wider eastern coastline offer the opportunity to explore best practice in coastal zone management.



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Fields are generally large, in arable cultivation and with relatively sparse tree or woodland cover. The landscape is open with long views. The flat, open character means that the sky is often an important part of any view in the area.

Selected References

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Glossary

drumlins: streamlined elliptical hills of glacial till formed parallel to the direction of ice movement

kettle holes: deep, circular depressions formed by melting ice trapped in glacial deposits

carr: a marshy copse