

SOHAM AND BARWAY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Views and Vistas

Draft Version 2.0

2nd April 2024

Introduction

The report forms part of the evidence base for Policy SBNP13 - Landscape Character of the Soham and Barway Neighbourhood Development Plan, and is to be read in conjunction with that Policy. The report defines those views and vistas which are considered to be highly valued by the community and where development proposals should not adversely impact upon them from the edge of Soham and Barway out into the countryside and the views from the countryside into the Soham and Barway.

Soham and Barway and their setting in the landscape

Most small towns have various hills, cliffs and other high points from which different views of areas of the town can be seen.

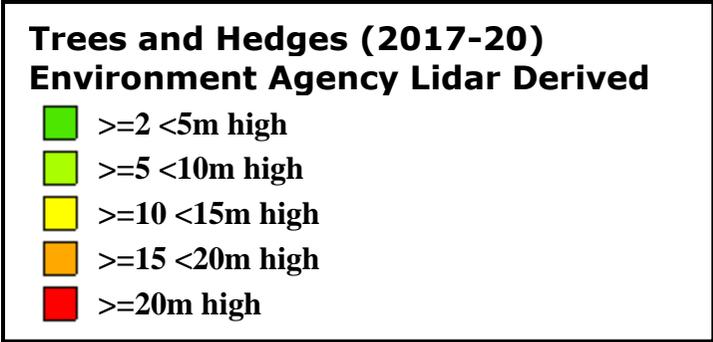
Here in Soham, because of its location on the edge of the Fens, has no natural highpoints. Our most significant landmark is St Andrews Church in the centre of town. However, this lack of high points does not mean that it detracts from the special essence of the area.

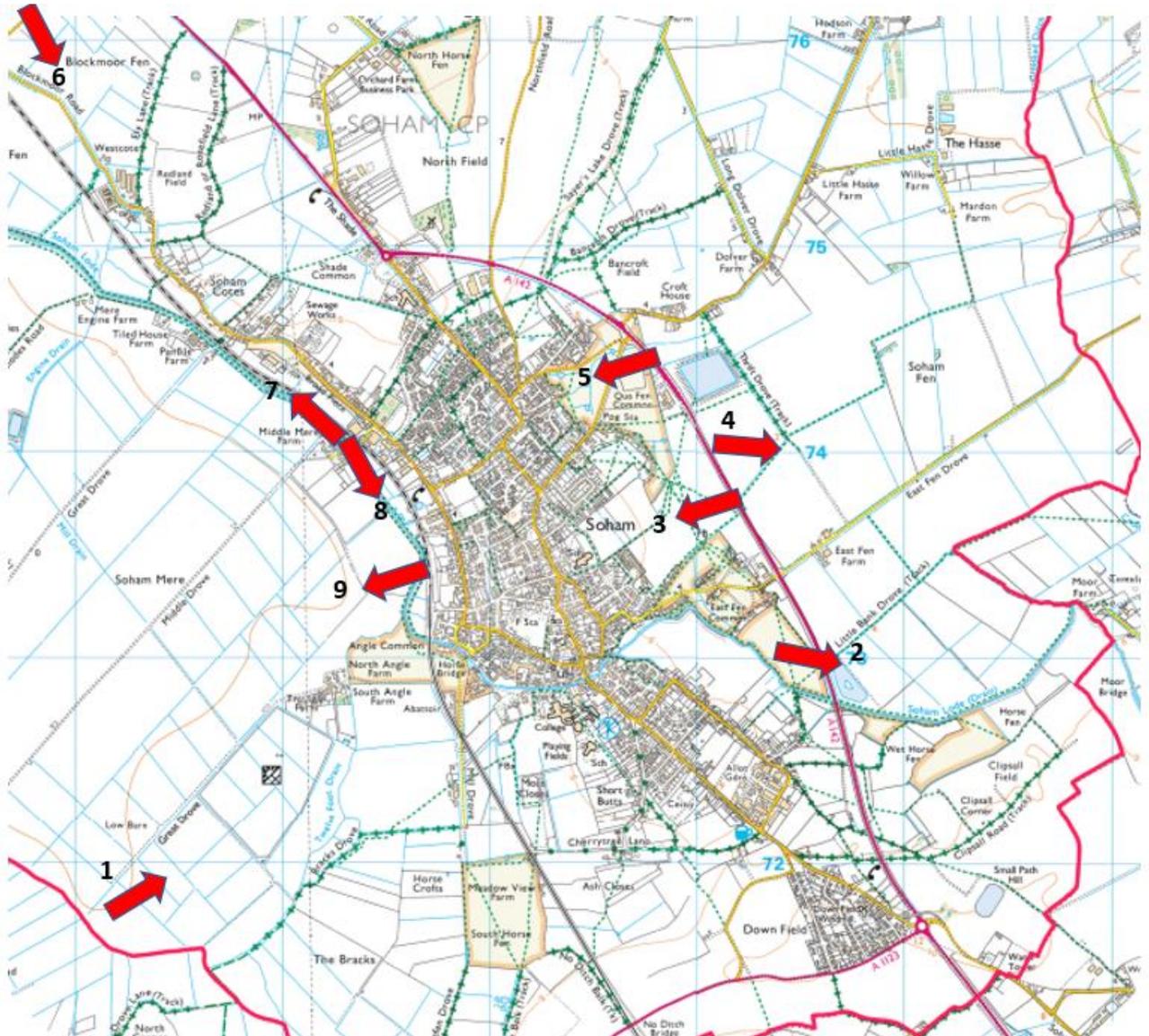
The flatness of the surrounding land may seem to some a featureless and uninteresting landscape. In fact, it provides the opportunity to enjoy wonderful skylscapes from all directions around the town and enables some wonderful views stretching for many miles across the farming landscapes which are so important to the town and its history.

It should also be noted that in this flat landscape there are very few trees or hedges. Those that are visible will mainly have been planted as windbreaks for crops or protection for buildings from the weather and the wind which sweeps across this flat landscape from due east. More recently some small copses have been planted to encourage wildlife.

Below is a map taken from Norfolk County Council's aerial survey of trees which clearly shows the concentration of trees and hedges within the town and the lack of trees of any size in the surrounding countryside. This map not only shows the numbers of trees and hedges but also the heights of the trees. Clearly there are very few tall trees (over 20 m high). This may be for several reasons i.e. tall trees do not survive here very long because of the amount of wind; the lack of good soil to anchor roots deep into and also that in previous times, there was little timber for building so trees never reached any great age or height.

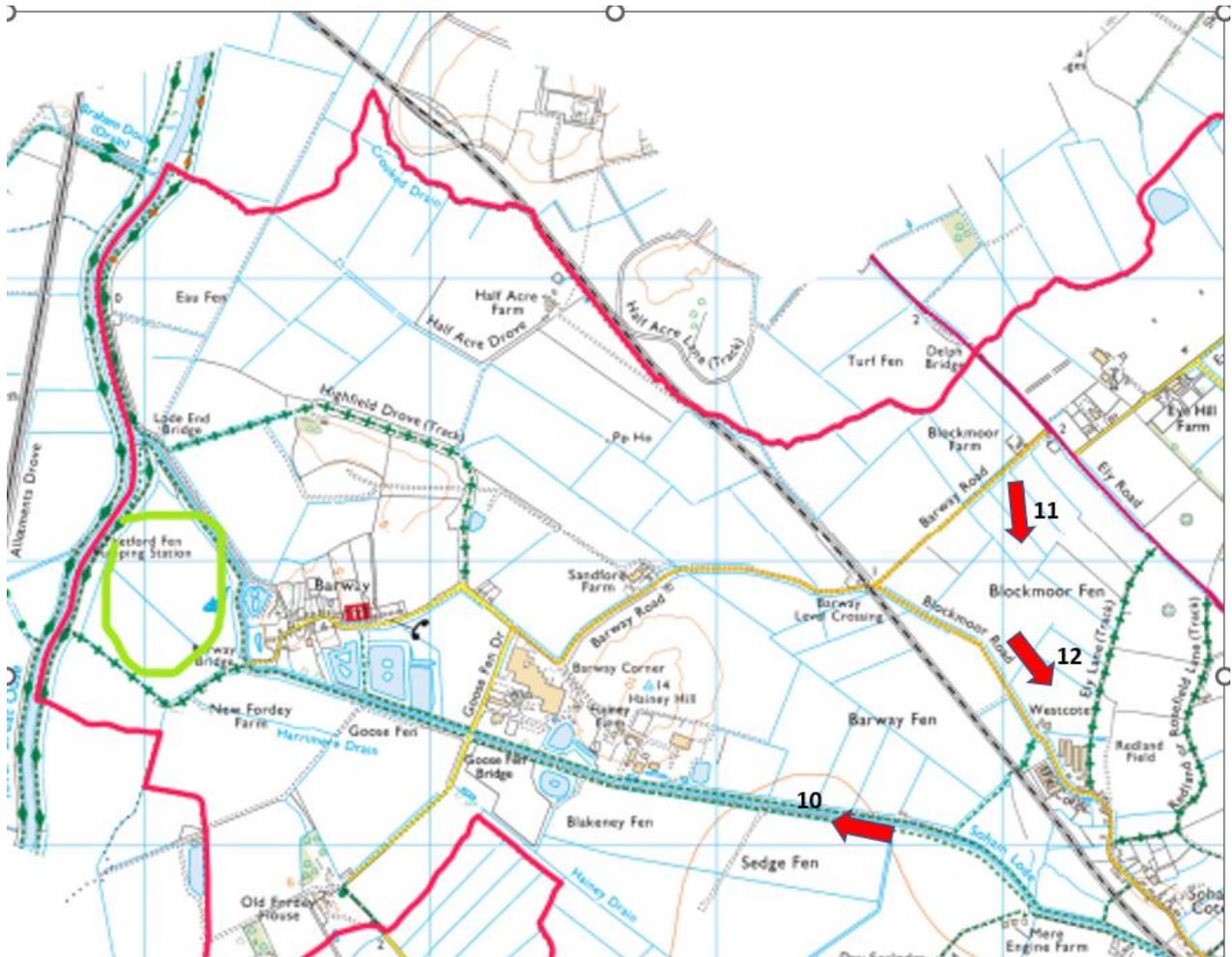
Norfolk County Council Survey of Trees and Hedges





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VALUED VIEWS AND VISTAS IN AND OUT OF SOHAM



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VALUED VIEWS AND VISTAS IN AND OUT OF BARWAY

Below there are a series of photographs around the parish of Soham and the hamlet of Barway which provide a flavour of the setting of the town within its surrounding landscape. This setting provides the essence of Soham as it is closely related to its history.

1.



View 1: Looking northwards from the A1123 this view of Soham clearly illustrates the distinctive flat landscape of the area. The town can only just be made out from the centre of this photo and the arable land is typical of all that surrounds Soham.

2.



View 2 Looking east across the A142 towards Isleham the flat landscape continues. Whilst seemingly unremarkable it does characterise the open and spacious nature of all the countryside around the town on all four sides. Note how buildings are completely absent despite the far reaching views here.

3.



View 3: A closer view of St Andrew's Church, seen from the A142 bypass above the line of trees that flank East Fen Common, reveals the 15th century bell tower rising majestically in the centre of the town's Conservation Area. Horses grazing in the foreground are a regular feature of the geography here and has been so for many generations.

4.



View 4: The uninterrupted view from the east side midpoint of the A142 Soham by-pass, across the unspoilt surrounding countryside, stretches out for many miles. Rich arable farmland surrounds Soham for miles in all directions and this vital resource has been used to feed the UK for centuries.

5.



View 5: The views across the unspoilt Qua Fen Common offers walker and tourist alike unique access to historic grasslands untouched since Anglo Saxon times. It houses species-rich hedges, and a number of seasonal pools east of Bushel Lane. In the distance the eastern side of Soham is only just visible.

6.



View 6 : Taken from Blockmoor Road, this view of Blockmoor Fen shows the walking, running and cycling routes on offer here. Leading to Soham Cotes and onwards to Broad Piece, this alternative entry to Soham is used by residents of Barway and is dissected by multiple irrigation waterways as the land is barely one metre above sea level.

7.



View 7: This view, from the north facing side of the road bridge in view 14, shows Soham Lode and the associated public footpath heading off towards Barway. Flanked by trees and hedges this route is navigable for the ardent walker who wants to take in the rural aspects of the local countryside. Trees thrive on the banks close to the water and provide much needed habitat for animals, birds and insects.

8.



View 8: This view of the bridge crossing the Soham Lode at Clark's Drove looks southward and is used mainly to allow farm vehicles to access Middle Drove and the surrounding farmland. A public footpath runs alongside Soham Lode which offers a quiet, but pleasant, walk towards Soham. To the left (out of shot) is the railway level crossing.

9.



View 9 : This view from the footbridge above the track at Soham Railway Station faces south-westerly across the tracks towards Wicken. The station was reopened in December 2021 after being closed in 1965. This view towards Wicken clearly shows the fen-like and the wide open views from Soham landscape character of the agricultural land surrounding Soham.

10.



View 10: This view of Soham Lode, a man-made drainage channel that runs approximately 7 miles from the River Great Ouse, through Barway and Soham and onto the River Snail, was thought to be constructed around 1790 when it was built to reduce flooding in Soham and Fordham. The sloping banks and riverside grasses provide an unkempt frame to the river.

11.



View 11: This view is an excellent example of the flatness of the top quality agricultural land and its lack of trees. This picture is taken looking back across Blockmoor Fen from Barway Road, towards Soham.

12.



View12: From the 'back' road from Barway looking back towards the north east Another example of the flat fen land, deep ditches to keep the land dry enough to farm and a few trees in the distance.