

# Broads Landscape Character Assessment (2006)

## Local Character Area 19. Halvergate Marshes (excluding Bure Loop and the west of Tunstall Dyke)



1. Part of the Halvergate Marshes from the air (Photo: Mike Page)

**Survey Points:** TG 44470664; TG 43810480; TG 42270925

### Boundaries

This area is bounded by the river Bure to the north, the river Waveney and the northern bank of Breydon to the south, the edge of the floodplain and Tunstall Dyke to the west and Scare Gap to the east.

### Natural and Cultural Area Designations

- RAMSAR – South of Halvergate Fleet (ex part of Beighton Marshes) and western edge as far as Tunstall Dyke.
- SPA – Same area as RAMSAR
- SAC – Western half of area to south of Halvergate Fleet and Western edge below Tunstall Dyke.
- SSSI – Predominantly that to the south of Halvergate Fleet and the western edge.
- Conservation Area – Applies to entire Halvergate Marshes, Haddiscoe Island and north of Bure west of Stokesby.
- Scheduled Site - Berney Arms Mill

### Key Characteristics

#### *Topography and Relief*

- Vast, level estuarine marshland at around –1mOD. Relict cliff features can be seen around the edge of the former estuary e.g. at Burgh Castle and West Caister.

#### *Geology and Soils*

- The marshes are uniformly silty clay with peat along the western fringe.

#### *Scale and Pattern*

- The marshes are noted for their vast open expanse.
- The marshes display a high percentage of curvilinear dyke boundaries.
- Drainage windmills, marsh gates and side wings are all features repeated throughout the area.
- Both the Acle Straight and Tunstall to Halvergate Branch Roads are lined (sometimes intermittently) with pollarded willows.

#### *Land Cover*

- Land cover is predominantly pastoral with a band of carr woodland along the western edge. Some areas remain under the plough and there is a cluster of wet scrapes in the RSPB reserve area.

#### *Land Use*

- Land use is farming and nature conservation with leisure uses to a lesser degree.

#### *Settlement*

- Settlement is restricted to isolated marsh houses within the marsh and a series of marsh-edge settlements along the western boundary.

#### *Remoteness and/or Tranquillity*

- The sheer scale, inaccessibility and emptiness of much of the marshland area means it remains largely quiet and isolated although less so around the fringes
- Noise on the A47 can be intrusive although much depends on wind direction.

### Character Area Description

The area known as the Halvergate Marshes or Halvergate Triangle forms one of the defining landscapes of the Broads area. A vast panoramic expanse of grazing marsh dotted with windmills and often teaming with birdlife, is a unique survival. Although other marshland areas of the country were formerly drained by windmills, including the Fens, unlike Halvergate, most retain only the scant remains of their windmills and only Holland has anything comparable. As an expanse of grazing marsh, the marshes also form the largest area in the east of England.

The area comprises a vast expanse of marshland developed from an estuary that existed in Roman times but which became cut off from the sea by the formation of the sand bank on which Great Yarmouth has developed. Breydon survives as a relict of the open water, saltmarsh and mudflats of the estuary, as do remains of the two Roman forts that were positioned either side of the seaward entrance. (See C.A.s 20 and 21) The upland edge around the main level estuary area is visibly clear, retaining cliff-like sections in places notably Burgh Castle and West Caister.



2. A curving boundary dyke near Halvergate Fleet.

Archaeological evidence suggests the marshes have been settled for at least 1000 years and much was in private ownership from a relatively early date. Over time the marsh economy has developed from salt industry and (predominantly) sheep grazing into a major cattle-grazing district by the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Williamson, 1997). There were a series of distinct mounds in the marshes until recent years,



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which have been tentatively suggested as saltworking sites. Unfortunately these have now been almost entirely levelled leaving only shards of pottery to be found. One survives near Ash Tree Farm, north of the Acle Straight with a WWI pillbox set on top (TG 50550900).

The huge numbers of Scots cattle being fattened up on the marshes provoked comment from travel and agricultural writers during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The cattle were brought 'on the hoof' by drovers to fatten on the mineral rich pastures. This largely cattle grazed landscape saw little change in use until the 1970s when loans became available to incentivise farmers to deep drain and plough their marshland. The subsequent outcry and public protests led to the establishment of the Broads Grazing Marshes Scheme which subsidised the traditional management of the landscape and ultimately to the creation of Environmentally Sensitive Areas of which Halvergate was the first. Today the trend to arable conversion has largely been reversed. Although there are a few isolated areas of arable, the overall impression is of a vast pastoral expanse.



3. Marshes to the south of the Stone Road

## *The western boundary.*

At the western extent of the marshes the silty clay thins and gives way to a narrow band of peat along the upland edge. The marshes are consequently wetter with rushy areas. A discontinuous boundary of carr woodland lines the edge of the floodplain, that between Reedham and Wickhampton is older, being shown on both Faden's and Bryant's Maps - now mapped as Park Carr, Ashyard Carr, Decoy Carr, Drover's Carr, Miller's Carr and Wigg's Carr. Some of the woodland is managed for shooting purposes.

The woodland terminates much of the view to the west other than where buildings are sited on particularly high ground such as at Hall Farm, Reedham. A series of settlements (Tunstall, Halvergate, Wickhampton, Freethorpe and Reedham) are located along or near the western boundary with adjacent blocks of the marshland within their parish boundaries. Other areas of the marshes were detached portions of various local parishes often some distance away, including Postwick, South Walsham and Cantley. Various access points onto the marshes are found along this side. The main one being the Stone Road from Halvergate which provided access to the Fleet Road, historically the main route across the marshes, and later connected to the Acle New Road by the Branch Road.

## *The Fleet*

The marshes retain a high proportion of sinuous dyke boundaries, harnessed from natural saltmarsh creeks. The most significant of these, the Halvergate Fleet, acted as a main drain embanked with summer and winter walls with an area of rond in-between to act as a washland. A formerly probably similar watercourse to the north of the Fleet can be traced across much of the marshes and may explain the otherwise strange positioning of Kerrison's Mill and marsh farm there. Certainly by the eighteenth century, a series of drainage windmills moved water from their separate drainage levels into the Fleet which in turn drained into Breydon water via a sluice and from the 1930s, a diesel pump. The Fleet was also an area of settlement with a series of marsh farms (from which the mills were later run), established along it. This was the situation until the mid to late 1940s when the introduction of an electric pump and the reduction of the Fleet to a lesser drain meant the windmills and marsh houses were gradually abandoned. In the following years, derelict and demolished buildings became a feature of this area, as with much of Halvergate. The situation has somewhat reversed with three of the four surviving marshman's houses now permanently occupied, the fourth as a holiday home although the rubble heap of a fifth remains. Four of the Fleet mills survive, two are largely restored, one is protected and only one remains derelict.

Other settlement can be found along the rivers Bure and Yare and the newer communications (road and rail) routes.

## *The Yare Boundary*

Settlement along the Yare clusters into two distinct groups - that around Seven Mile House on the Reedham Marshes and that around Berney Arms. The north wall of Breydon also included a large marsh farm with various cattle compounds and later a mill and cottage as well as numerous houseboats (detailed in C.A. 20) of which only the mill and a fragment of the cottage remain. The grouping on the Reedham marshes is largely based around the drainage of the area and includes three windmills, a steam engine house and a diesel engine shed as well as the Seven Mile house

and some remains of a further marshman's house. The site was a particularly remote one until the diesel pump was replaced by an electric pump in the 1980s and concrete Internal Drainage Board access roads were built. The mills and engine house have been repaired and a visitor facility created in a partnership between Norfolk Windmills Trust and the Broads Authority funded primarily by the Heritage Lottery fund.

A small hamlet at Berney Arms developed around Thomas Trench Berney's 19<sup>th</sup> century Reedham Cement Works which at one time included 11 dwellings and a chapel (Hutchinson, 2000). The tall Berney Arms Mill, which formed part of this complex, survives along with Ashtree Farmhouse and the Berney Arms Public House. Chalk from Whitlingham was brought to the cement works by wherry, mixed with silty mud dredged from Breydon or Oulton Broad and burnt in kilns before being ground in the mill. The mill is now in the care of English Heritage and opened by appointment and Ashtree Farmhouse has been extended and turned into three dwellings by the RSPB. The RSPB are now a significant presence in this area, controlling a number of the marshes to the north as a reserve. This has created change in the landscape as a higher water table is maintained, wet scrapes are created and a number of small wind powered pumps have been introduced, designed to do the reverse of the job of the traditional mills and instead lift water onto the marshes.



4. Cattle crush for holding and loading/unloading cattle

## *The Bure and Tunstall Dyke Boundaries*

This section of the Bure is, like the Yare, heavily embanked. There has in the past been a greater connection with the settlements to the north of the Bure with former crossing points at Stokesby,

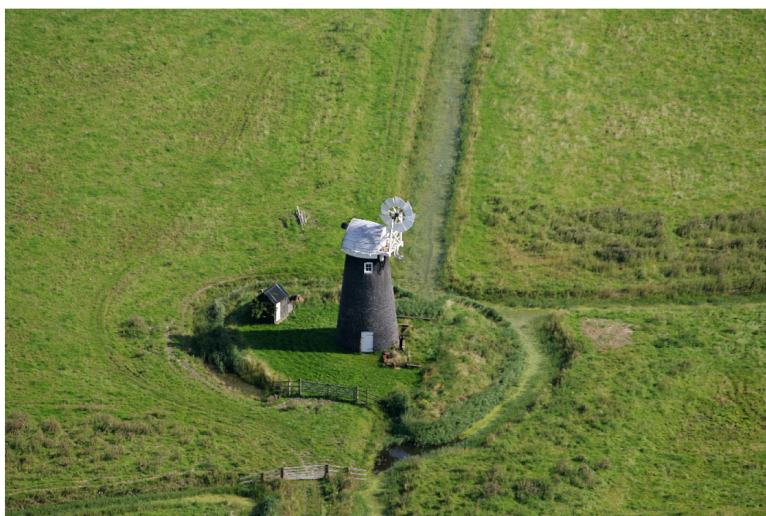


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Runham and Mautby. A number of mills and potentially early settlement sites are situated along the Bure, usually corresponding with the Mile house locations. The valley sides and settlement edge to the north are visible and the mills combine visually with those on the north side of the Bure although the floodbanks mean only the upper part of the mills across the river are visible. At the north-western extent of this area is Tunstall Dyke, formerly connecting the Bure with Tunstall upland. The dyke apparently survived the building of road and railway across its route as provision was made to allow wherries underneath. However its use still died out in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The dyke is now dry and overgrown, its staithe house and buildings gone. Two mills remain here, one to either side although a plantation immediately west of the dyke limits their landscape contribution.

The A47 Acle Straight, built as a Turnpike Road in the 1830s, has a significant impact upon parts of this area and further afield, both from constant rapid traffic movements and from the noise although this can vary considerably depending on the wind direction. Two railway lines cross the marshes – (Norwich to Yarmouth via Acle and Norwich to Yarmouth via Reedham) and overall have relatively little visual or noise impact. The latter retains a halt near Berney Arms, possibly the most remote in the country, where formerly there was a station. Both here and to the north of the Reedham group of mills were blocks of railway cottages. Those north of Reedham Marshes remain albeit half demolished.

## Other Sites and Features of Note



5. Howard's Mill, built on a detached part of South Walsham parish (Photo: Mike Page)

- Potentially medieval settlement sites: Stracey Arms, A 47 built on or near site of 7 Mile House. (TG 43850900); 6 Mile House (Bure) (TG 45990990); 5 Mile House site (Bure) (TG 47490985); Ashtree Farm/3 Mile House (TG 50400929); Walpole's Farm/Fleet Farm (Fleet) (TG 46550702); Hewitt's Farm/Marsh Farm (Fleet) (TG 46460719); Marsh House site near High's Mill (TG 45787003); Manor House (TG

- 44090671); Acle Marsh House (Kerrison's) (TG 46250870); 7 Mile House, Reedham (TG 45300775); 5 Mile House Reedham (TG 46450480); Lockgate Farm (Breydon) TG 49300775)
- Surviving Drainage Windmills and associated buildings include the truncated Tunstall Dyke smockmill (TG423092); Stracey Arms Mill (TG44150896) and House; 6 Mile House Mill & cottage (TG 461098); Perry' Mill (TG 472099); 5 Mile House Mill (TG478098); Kerrison's Mill (TG ); Mutton's Mill (TG442064); Stone's Mill (TG441056) also nearby marsh house; High's Mill (TG 457072); South Walsham Mill (TG 457072) also nearby marsh house; Banham's Black Mill (TG 480071); Berney Arms (TG 465049) also nearby Public House; and Polkey's Mill (TG 444034); Cadge's Mill (TG 446035); North Mill (TG 444036) along with Reedham Marsh Steam Engine House (TG 446035) and Seven Mile House (TG 445035).
- Lost Mills - Fleet Mills (Carter's Mill (TG 441058); Butterfly Mill (TG 450063); Goffin's Mill (TG 464070); also combined steam drainage/corn mill site (TG462069); Predecessors of Mutton's Mill (TG 44220665) and Stones Mill (TG 44200585); Lost Yare mills - Tuck's Mill (TG 461044); Predecessor of Berney Arms Mill (TG 45960431); Lost Tunstall Dyke Mill (TG 42020911) replaced by steam engine and later by surviving smock mill. Tunstall Black Mill and Marsh House (TG 43210950); Lost Bure mills – 4 Mile House (TG 48920976); Scare Gap Early Steam Engine site (TG 49830908)
- Decoy Carr – site of Reedham Decoy and crash site of two WWII B17 Flying Fortresses subject of *Time Team* archaeological investigation. (TG 432039)
- Crash site of B-24 Liberator July 1944 (TG 42310839)
- WWI Pill box sites (TG 42690696) and (TG 50510890). Stracey Arms Mill was also converted to a pillbox during WWII.

The Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER) [www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk](http://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk) should be consulted for details of all known historic sites within this area.

## Condition

Visual impacts affecting Halvergate include the new Scroby Sands Wind farm to the east; the built development of Great Yarmouth and Caister - most visible of which is that of a large industrial nature. The pylons and industrial type settlement of St. Olaves are also visible across the Haddiscoe Island. Despite these, the sheer scale of the marshes is such that the impacts from outside are lessened. Within the area the main source of visual intrusion is traffic movement on the A47 and also lighting around Stracey Arms/Branch Road junction. The pollarded willows which could offer some screening of road movements have become discontinuous.

A number of marshes have stood empty in recent years as the demand for grazing and consequently rental values have declined. There are also a number of derelict and part demolished buildings on the marshes. Some marshman's houses have also suffered a loss of character through the installation of more suburban boundary and gate treatments.

## Forces for Change

- Impacts of flood alleviation works
- Future of subsidies for continued grazing use
- Scheme underway to widen dykes to increase volume of fresh water held
- Future of Acle Straight dualling scheme.
- Continued development around Great Yarmouth/Breydon
- Potential impacts of Bure Loop Proposals
- Likelihood of increased scrapes/surface water on marshes to suit particular bird life.

## Artistic and Literary Associations

The Halvergate Marshes have provoked much less interest from artists and the late 19<sup>th</sup> century writers on the Broads than the upper river valleys and Breydon, often being dismissed as rather featureless. However they attracted attention from agricultural and early travel writers such as Daniel Defoe and William Marshall who provide important 18<sup>th</sup> century descriptions of the area.

## Additional Bibliography

Hutchinson, Sheila, *The Halvergate Fleet: Past and Present* (Norwich: Sheila and Paul Hutchinson, 2001); *Berney Arms Remembered* (Norwich: Sheila and Paul Hutchinson, 2003) Marshall, William, *The Rural Economy of Norfolk, Vol II* (London: 1787)  
The Landscape Partnership, *Pilot Landscape Character Assessment for the Broads Authority* (unpublished, 2005)

# BLCA addendum: Area 19: Halvergate Marshes (excluding Bure Loop and the west of Tunstall Dyke)

## Special and scenic qualities of the Broads which are represented in the character area

- A distinctive Broads landscape defined by a vast floodplain, the Halvergate Marshes display a number of the characteristics which reflect the special qualities of the area including vast panoramic grazing marsh, meandering rivers, nature conservation interest and big skies. Also relevant to the special qualities are the opportunities for boating and sailing afforded by the Bure and Yare.

### Remoteness and tranquillity

- Although a largely isolated area, development around the fringes locally reduces the sense of remoteness (such as floodlit playing fields within Halvergate Village and the presence of the A47 and the two railway lines. Noise from these transport corridors and movement associated with passing traffic crossing the area to the north is an intrusive element, reflected in the CPRE Intrusion Mapping.

### Enclosure and scale

- A vast scale, open marshland landscape with little or no woodland cover (apart from a band of carr woodland on the western edge of the Executive Area), resulting in an open character.
- Roads (Acle Straight and Tunstall to Halvergate Branch) are lined with pollarded willows which form the only visual breaks in an otherwise simple, open landscape.
- Only at the very edges of the area is there any perception of the valley sides and associated sense of enclosure – the low ridge beyond the band of carr woodlands west of the area.

### Light and reflectivity

- The largely open character of the area, the general lack of woodland cover and big skies combine to create a landscape with relatively little variation in light and shade.

### Pattern and texture

- The marshes are bound by rectilinear and curvilinear dyke boundaries creating a network of field systems which combines to create the largest area of grazing marsh in the East of England.
- Land cover is mostly defined by agriculture (predominantly pastoral) and a network of wetland habitats including rush pasture and reed beds, with settlements located on the edges of the area.

### Sense of time depth

- The vast expanse of grazing marsh was first reclaimed in Roman times from the former estuary of which Breydon Water is a relic and which became cut off from the sea by the sand bank on which Great Yarmouth now sits.
- The grazing marshes have existed for over 1000 years and evidence suggests the area was predominantly used for cattle grazing from the 16<sup>th</sup> century until recently due to the abundance of mineral rich soils.
- The HLC reveals the vast majority of this area to have been affected by 19<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup> century marsh reclamation of rectilinear pattern (with changes to field boundaries due to construction of the parallel railway and A47 corridors in the north), although isolated pockets of pre 18<sup>th</sup> century curvilinear enclosure remain in the centre of the area.

## **Skylines**

- Although views out and across the marshes are often expansive, to the west they are terminated by bands of carr woodland along the area's western boundary, with the low ridge within Broadland District beyond.
- Skylines are largely undeveloped and simple in character, due to the expansive areas of marsh, although occasionally punctuated by historic wind pumps.
- To the south, at St. Olaves, pylons and industrial development associated with boat yards create additional localised visual clutter on skylines although due to the vast expanse of the character area, impacts from beyond the boundaries are relatively low.

## **Visibility and intervisibility**

- Views are expansive throughout, with much intervisibility with adjacent marshland character areas in the Broads Authority Executive Area, although the rivers are embanked and some roads planted with pollard willows, which creates some visual containment.
- Drainage mills, a distinctive feature of the area, form strong visual components in this flat landscape.
- The Scroby Sands wind farm and built development at Great Yarmouth (industrial estates) are elements in distant views east from the area.
- The area has intervisibility with the ridge within Broadland District's South Walsham to Reedham Marshes Fringe character area<sup>1</sup>, although the gently undulating rural landscape beyond largely falls below this ridgeline.

## **Accessibility and experience/recreation**

- Boating access is provided via the Rivers Yare and Bure, which border the area.
- Pedestrian access to the marshes is relatively good with the majority of routes on to the marshes from the western edges, with the Weavers Way crossing the area to link Halvergate with Breydon Water.

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<sup>1</sup> Broadland District Council and Chris Blandford Associates, 2008, Broadland District Council Local Development Framework: Draft Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (SPD): [http://www.broadland.gov.uk/PDF/1.\\_Landscape\\_Character\\_Assessment\\_Draft\\_SPD.pdf](http://www.broadland.gov.uk/PDF/1._Landscape_Character_Assessment_Draft_SPD.pdf)