

Three key perspectives that differ in their views towards conservation, farming, and recreation.

While views are infinitely diverse, the study found that they gathered around three distinct visions for the landscape. Some consider Norfolk a place where nature recovery should be prioritised, where habitats are restored and connected across farmland and where wildlife can thrive undisturbed. This vision often desires to see more land returned to nature, and favours farming practices that improve the value of farmland for wildlife. Others instead prioritise farming, valuing retaining productive land for food production, highlighting the traditional agricultural heritage of the county, and its important role providing food for the country. Further, farming is considered the economic activity that underpins nature conservation efforts all other activities in the countryside. A third vision focuses on engagement and recreational opportunities for people, not only considering the countryside as a space to enjoy and connect with nature, but also as a tool to increase awareness and interest for key countryside issues. This view highlights the aesthetic and recreational value of the countryside, and favours management practices that create landscapes that are diverse, productive and accessible.

These perspectives can often clash. Should areas of the countryside be devoted to habitat creation, or kept under the plough? Should we grow food intensively, or incorporate practices that increase farmland's ability to support wildlife? Should countryside users have more access to farmland and reserves, or should wildlife be protected by limiting access to delicate ecosystems? These questions represent an oversimplification of nuanced and multilayered trade-offs in how land can be used but show nevertheless that finding agreeable strategies for all can be difficult.

There's a lot of common ground across visions for Norfolk's countryside.

While disagreements exist, the study also found many areas of common ground – everyone sees Norfolk's countryside as a space where multiple visions can coexist, and everyone believes they have a responsibility to care for it. There is a shared understanding of the need for efforts to improve the state of nature across agricultural land and natural areas, and a recognition of farming's vital role in maintaining Norfolk's landscapes, identity and economy. Similarly, all visions desire to see well-managed public access to the countryside, and responsible users benefitting from being outdoors while protecting farmland and delicate habitats. This shared sense of responsibility offers a foundation for collaboration, rather than conflict.

Unsurprisingly, all perspectives share a deep appreciation for Norfolk's diverse nature. However, each key vision seems to value different forms of nature: some consider large areas of semi-natural habitats (such as woodlands, wetlands, heathlands or scrub) to be more valuable for the ecology and wildlife of the landscape as a whole, while others focus on the importance on conservation features that support wildlife and connect habitats across farmland (like wood patches, ponds, and hedgerow networks) for their ecological or aesthetic value.

Perspectives also acknowledge the need to meet increasing demands for rural development, energy and housing provision, but share a concern over the negative impacts these may have on nature, loss of agricultural land to development, and the aesthetic and recreational value of the countryside.

Finding ways to align diverse perspectives through common ground and shared values.

The study highlights the wide diversity of expectations and priorities for Norfolk's countryside. While they differ significantly in how they understand and value farming practices, forms of nature and types of recreation, they also share underlying values and common ground on various issues, highlighting the potential for alignment and collaboration. Encouraging and supporting farming practices that are both sustainable and economically viable for farmers, supporting local nature reserves and connectivity between them, and creating well-managed access opportunities could

help balance the demands for food production, conservation, and recreation in ways that are beneficial for most people. Considering all perspectives is essential, and tapping into shared values of stewardship, and care for Norfolk's communities, nature, and farming heritage might be a great way to find alignment across multiple visions for the countryside.

As Norfolk's landscapes continue to evolve, finding balance will be key. Understanding different perspectives and working towards shared solutions will help ensure that our countryside remains a place where nature, farming, and people can thrive.

A research article about the study discussed in this post is currently under review for publication in the academic journal:

- Sánchez Soto, L. G., Holmes, G., Williams, D. R. (*in review*) What are landscapes for? Diverging preferences and shared framings of rural farming landscapes.