

# Landscapes of Worcestershire

## Landscape Type Advice Sheet - *Land Management*

# Principal Village Farmlands

### Landscape Type Description

An open, rolling landscape characterised by a nucleated pattern of expanded rural villages, surrounded by large arable fields, often subdivided into a series of smaller plots. This is an intensively farmed landscape associated with fertile, free draining soils which give rise to high quality farmland used for growing a wide variety of cash crops. This is a landscape of contrasts, the intensely functional, yet often very open and empty character of the farmland and the focused, communal density of the villages.



### Key Characteristics

#### Primary

- Nucleated pattern of expanded rural villages
- Arable/cropping land use—cereals and field vegetables on fertile, free-draining soils

#### Secondary

- Hedgerows define field boundaries
- Rolling lowland topography

#### Tertiary

- Planned enclosure pattern of medium-to-large scale fields
- Groups of trees associated with dwellings



### Current Concerns

These are landscapes derived from vast expanses of former open field, which have remained under intensive cultivation following their enclosure and in which the regeneration of woodland and tree cover has never re-established to any significant degree, with the exception of elm, which was formerly a dominant hedgerow tree. The key elements of these open landscapes are the settlement pattern and land use, with a notable contrast between the concentrations of dwellings and farmsteads in the villages and the relatively unsettled land between them.

Opportunities to improve the structure and wildlife potential of the landscape should be concentrated on restoring good linear tree cover along the watercourses and streams, encouraging new tree planting in and around the settlement nuclei to enhance village settings, promoting the development of wide field margins, and appropriately managing roadside verges and other non-productive land. Traditional orchards are also a notable characteristic but are gradually disappearing in certain areas, being replaced by bush stock and associated with this is the loss of old fruit tree varieties, many with close links to the County. Woodland cover is not a characteristic of the village farmlands and the prospect of new woodland planting in these areas would dilute their distinctive character.

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## Guidelines for Land Management

### How to use this sheet

The aim of this information sheet is to provide *general guidelines* about the priorities for land management activities - focusing on relevant landscape features - within this Landscape Type. However, Landscape Types are generic descriptions of landscape character and any advice **must** be interpreted within the context of the site in question. Please also visit the Landscapes of Worcestershire mapping pages <http://qis.worcestershire.gov.uk/home/wcc-lca-maps> to click on your area and read the more specific ecological and landscape descriptions.

In the case of any habitat work, specialist advice should be sought from the County Ecologists and/or the appropriate agency (Natural England, Forestry Commission, Environment Agency, Defra) to ensure that the work is appropriate, is carried out at the right time of year, in the correct manner and in the best possible location. Surveys may need to be carried out to assess the sites for presence of protected species or existing habitat. With this in mind, please read on for opportunities for land/habitat management activities appropriate to this Landscape Type...

### Trees and Orchards

The general guidelines for trees and orchards in Principal Village Farmlands are to:

- **conserve** and **enhance** tree cover along watercourses and hedges
- encourage opportunities for tree planting in and around villages
- **conserve** and **restore** old orchards around villages, with emphasis placed upon the locally distinctive fruit type and varieties
- **conserve** and **restore** lines of hedgerow fruit trees

Woodland is not characteristic of these landscapes but tree cover is provided by hedgerow trees (previously notably elm), watercourse trees and fruit trees. Opportunities to improve the structure and wildlife potential of the landscape should be concentrated on restoring good linear tree cover along the watercourses and streams, replacing hedgerow elms with oak or ash and encouraging new tree planting in and around the settlement nuclei to enhance village settings. Orchards are a notable feature, occurring throughout the area on a domestic scale, with lines of fruit trees, usually damson, a distinctive feature in certain localities. Traditional and local varieties of fruit tree represent an important part of the County's heritage and should be perpetuated wherever possible.

### Hedgerows

The general guideline for hedgerows in Principal Village Farmlands is to:

- **conserve** and **enhance** hedgerow structure, with emphasis on the primary hedgelines

There may be opportunities to plant new hedgerows, restore, strengthen or protect existing hedgerows and their patterns, and promote appropriate management – in terms of maintenance regimes and protection from stock. The species composition of existing primary (long established) hedgerows should be noted and used to guide the composition of new hedgerow planting. Fencing and other uncharacteristic boundary treatments could be removed and replaced by hedgerows.

### Field Margins and Verges

The general guidelines for field margins and verges in Principal Village Farmlands are to:

- promote the development of wide field margins
- promote management of roadside verges for wildlife benefit

These are intensively cultivated landscapes so opportunities for widespread habitat restoration or creation are limited. However, significant benefits for biodiversity may be achieved by enhancing existing sites – developing wide field margins and managing roadside verges for wildlife benefit (i.e. employing appropriate mowing regimes).

For more information visit our website [www.worcestershire.gov.uk/lca](http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/lca) or contact the Worcestershire County Council Environmental Policy Team on 01905 766038