

Landscapes of Worcestershire

Landscape Type Information Sheet

Principal Settled Farmlands

Landscape Type Description

A small- to medium-scale, settled agricultural landscape of scattered farms, relic commons and clusters of wayside dwellings. These built features are linked by a network of narrow, winding lanes which nestle within a matrix of hedged fields. Tree cover is largely restricted to thinly scattered hedgerow trees and groups of trees around dwellings. The land is primarily one of mixed farming.



Key Characteristics

Primary

- Hedgerow boundaries to fields
- Moderate-to-high density settlement pattern of farmsteads and rural dwellings dispersed throughout the area

Secondary

- Mixed farming land use
- Rolling lowland with occasional steep-sided hills and escarpments

Tertiary

- Irregular enclosure pattern of small and medium-sized fields
- Scattered hedgerow trees



The Principal Settled Farmlands are medium-scale, fairly open, agricultural landscapes of scattered farms, relic commons and clusters of wayside settlements. Farms and dwellings are linked by a network of narrow winding lanes which nestle within a matrix of hedged fields, a characteristic shared with the Timbered Farmlands. The Settled farmlands however, lack any significant woodlands, their characteristic tree cover being that of scattered trees, most notable along streamsides and watercourses, and also in association with settlement. Hedgerow tree cover is less significant, differing from that of the Timbered Farmlands by its lower density and the lack of oak dominance.

In Worcestershire, these landscapes are located in areas of former Royal Forest and their 'hybrid' characteristics, between Timbered Farmlands and Village Farmlands, may be the result of late clearance of such forest areas following contraction of the Royal Forest boundaries with withdrawal of the associated Forest Laws, which had previously influenced and restricted their land use.

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Mixed farming now characterises the land use. These are landscapes with a notably domestic character, defined chiefly by the scale of the field pattern, and the nature and density of its settlement. They lack the strongly defined nucleated settlement pattern of the latter, possessing a dispersed settlement pattern of farmsteads and hamlets of moderate to high density, again more akin to that of the Timbered Farmlands.

Settled Farmlands are thought to have developed from areas of extensive open field, which arose from the later clearance and, therefore, existed for a correspondingly shorter period of time than the areas of open field associated with Village Farmlands. The field pattern tends to be of a sub-regular nature, supporting the suggestion of early enclosure of areas of open field.

The pattern of small- to medium-sized hedged fields is vulnerable to change as the tendency towards arable dominance reduces the functional worth of hedgerow boundaries. Hedgerow loss and deterioration is already in evidence locally, with corresponding dilution of the essential scale of these landscapes. There are pressures for development in many of these areas and a danger that concentrations of new development could arise, resulting in the creation of a pattern approaching the nucleations of other Landscape Types.

Woodlands are not characteristic of these landscapes and the introduction of such features tends to dilute their identity. Opportunities for new tree planting are best concentrated along watercourses, strengthening the linear pattern of these features. It is desirable to encourage additional tree cover in the vicinity of farmsteads and other settlements, in so doing, emphasising the domestic scale of the landscape. The small scale fields of permanent pasture found within these landscapes can often be of significant nature conservation interest, the increasing change in land use in favour of arable farming can threaten such sites and initiatives to safeguard remaining areas of permanent pasture should be strongly promoted in these areas.

The management strategy for the Principal Settled Farmlands is, therefore, to conserve and enhance the unity and scale of the landscape with particular emphasis given to retaining its settlement pattern and the hedgerow boundaries to its fields.

Landscape Guidelines

- conserve and enhance the pattern of hedgerows
- retain the integrity of the dispersed pattern of settlement
- conserve and enhance tree cover along watercourses
- enhance patterns of tree cover associated with settlement
- seek opportunities to conserve all remaining areas of permanent pasture

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