

# Landscapes of Worcestershire

## Landscape Type Information Sheet

# Village Claylands

### Landscape Type Description

An open, gently rolling agricultural landscape characterised by an ordered pattern of hedged fields and discrete rural villages connected by a network of minor roads. This is a landscape of heavy, poorly drained soils, typically associated with broad clay vales backed by steeply sloping escarpments. The field pattern tends to define the scale of the landscape.



### Key Characteristics

#### Primary

- Hedgerow boundaries to fields

#### Secondary

- Pastoral land use with relic ridge and furrow
- Gently rolling lowland topography
- Heavy, poorly-drained soils
- Medium-to-large scale field pattern
- Rural lanes with uniform grass verges
- Scattered hedgerow and streamline trees
- Nucleated settlement pattern of usually small, rural villages



The pastoral land use is one of the key elements of this landscape, together with the pattern of settlement and hedged fields. These are landscapes derived from former extensive areas of open fields, but were less favoured for continued arable cultivation becoming predominantly converted to pasture at the time of enclosure. The settlement pattern reflects the organised community structure associated with open field culture of long standing, though often the villages have since declined in size or even become abandoned, reflecting the decline in status of the areas for farming.

The pattern of hedged fields defines the scale of the landscape which until recently would have conveyed a more pronounced sense of structure and enclosure. These landscapes were often bastions of elm tree cover in the past, and the composition of many hedges is still dominated by this species. The hedgerows are not, however, devoid of tree cover and scattered populations of hedgerow ash in particular are not uncommon.

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Woodland is not a characteristic feature of these landscapes, tree cover today being most notably represented by streamside cover. There are still significant areas of permanent pasture in some localities, often with notable representation of ridge and furrow.

An increase in the proportion of arable land is evident which can have repercussions on several aspects of landscape character. The loss of pasture dilutes the distinctive land use as a basic concern, with corresponding damage to the nature conservation and archaeological interest if areas of unimproved meadow are destroyed in the process. The increase in arable land uses also reduces the functionality of hedgerows in the relevant areas, with consequent dilution of landscape scale and structure as hedges become lost or fragmented. Further dilution of landscape character would result if new woodland planting were to be targeted in these areas.

These are landscapes where the conservation of the hedgerow network is of prime importance. The retention of permanent pasture should be encouraged along with opportunities to convert arable land back to a pastoral use. The problems associated with restoring the distinctively dense patterns of tree cover associated with the elm are described for the Village Farmlands, and here again, rather than use an alternative species to replicate the character, it is left for a degree of natural resistance to emerge that will enable regeneration of this species to arise from the remaining hedgerow stock. Hedgerow trees tend to be tolerated more readily in areas of pastoral land use, and the encouragement of a scattered tree presence within the hedges could be encouraged, favouring ash as the major species. This is not a landscape where an oak dominance would be expected. The restoration of lines of tree cover along the watercourses is also to be encouraged along with the planting of tree groups in and around settlement to enhance the character and to help emphasise the distinctive settlement pattern.

The management strategy for the village claylands would be one of conservation and enhancement with conserving the distinctive scale of hedged fields and pastoral character of the landscape being the priority, whilst enhancing the areas in and around settlements with new tree planting.

### Landscape Guidelines

- conserve the pattern of hedgerow boundaries
- conserve all remaining areas of permanent pasture
- conserve and enhance tree cover along water courses
- conserve and enhance the scattered populations of hedgerow trees
- seek to retain the integrity of the distinctive settlement pattern of small villages
- encourage the planting of tree groups in association with settlements
- opportunities for conversion of arable land back to pasture should be given consideration

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