

Landscapes of Worcestershire

Landscape Type Advice Sheet - *Planning and Development*

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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Opportunities for Landscape Gain

Settlement Pattern - Nucleated

This Landscape Type is strongly defined by nucleations of settlement in a landscape otherwise 'empty' of buildings. Historically the farms were also located within the villages rather than in the open countryside. Any development located away from these nuclei will dilute this primary characteristic and so, from a landscape character perspective, new development should be sited within existing villages. Removal of redundant buildings located away from the village nuclei could also be appropriate.

In addition, the villages within these landscapes are often detected from a distance by their concentrations of tree cover (often of ornamental species – typically associated with the church, vicarage, manor house etc.). Such features are easily lost through infilling and so efforts should be made to retain, perpetuate and increase such tree cover associated with village nuclei.

Hedgerows

Due to the absence of livestock in the fields, these are landscapes where the need for internal hedged field boundaries is becoming increasingly redundant (in contrast to the need to retain 'external' boundaries of holdings to define ownership). Hedgerows therefore often lack the necessary regular maintenance that would otherwise be required to keep them stockproof. As a result hedgerows are tending to deteriorate and fragment in many places and are often cut lower, therefore reducing their impact on the landscape.

In terms of landscape gain, 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 hedgerows should be noted and used to guide the composition of new hedgerow planting. Hedgerow elm trees have traditionally provided a strong contribution to the character of these landscapes but have all been lost to Dutch Elm Disease. There is no sign of natural resistance emerging to this disease and therefore it has been decided to promote the planting of oak and ash substitutes for the original densely planted hedgerow elms.

Fencing and other uncharacteristic boundary treatments could be removed and replaced by hedgerows. Funding support for such works should be promoted to landowners.

Land Use – Arable/Cropping

The land use in these areas is very strongly based on cropping and horticulture, with characteristic concentrations of tunnels and greenhouses associated with such uses. Orchards are a notable feature, occurring throughout the area on a domestic scale, with lines of hedgerow fruit trees, usually damson, a distinctive feature in certain localities. There may be little opportunity to influence land use itself but it may be possible to restore/ encourage appropriate usage for redundant commercial greenhouses.

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