

Landscapes of Worcestershire

Landscape Type Advice Sheet - *Planning and Development*

Village Farmlands with Orchards

Landscape Type Description

A distinctive planned low-land agricultural landscape with a notably dominant orchard land use. This is an intensively cultivated landscape characterised by a nucleated pattern of expanded villages surrounded by large cultivated fields.



Key Characteristics

Primary

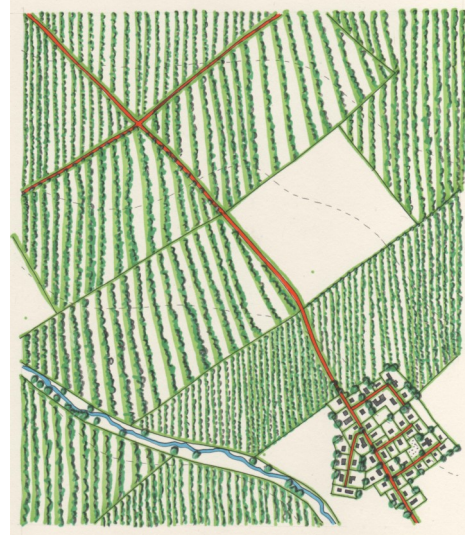
- Extensive apple and plum orchards on south facing slopes

Secondary

- Nucleated settlement pattern

Tertiary

- Gently undulating topography
- Planned enclosure pattern of medium- to large-scale fields
- Cereals and field vegetables



Current Concerns

These landscapes tend to be located in areas of very slightly pronounced topography, where the south facing slopes provide ideal conditions for fruit growing. As the name suggests, orchards are a primary land use, apple, plum and gage being particularly notable, covering extensive areas of land. The characteristic traditional orchards of standard trees are disappearing in certain areas, with many old traditional fruit tree varieties being lost as a result. The economic worth of certain types of orchard – such as damson and plum – appears to be in decline and could hamper prospects of replacement once the old trees have declined. New orchard planting/restoration, notably of apple, often uses bush stock, the smaller stature of which has an impact upon the scale of the landscape.

Opportunities to improve the structure and wildlife potential of this landscape should focus on restoring good linear tree cover along watercourses and streams, encouraging new tree planting in and around villages, encouraging the establishment of wide field margins and the appropriate management of roadside verges and other non-productive land.

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Opportunities for Landscape Gain

Removal or fragmentation of swathes of orchards (with concomitant loss of viability of holdings) and lack of maintenance of orchards resulting in decline and loss are significant threats to this Landscape Type. Typically the orchards comprise standard trees but it is recognised that bush trees are favoured for economic reasons in many locations. Standard trees create a greater landscape impact, hold greater biodiversity interest and should be favoured for replanting where possible.

Orchards

In terms of landscape gain, there may be little opportunity to influence land use itself but it may be possible to restore/create areas of orchard particularly in locations adjacent to development proposals – obviously the long term (commercial) viability will be a prime consideration but the concept of community orchards may render such ideas viable.

Note there are local distinctiveness aspects relating to orchards - certain areas in the Vale of Evesham, for example, are noted for stone fruits, particularly plums, elsewhere apple orchards may dominate. Opportunities should be sought to retain such identities and explore existence of locally distinctive varieties of fruit tree, retaining and perpetuating them by re-introduction where appropriate. Lines of hedgerow fruit trees, particularly damson, are also distinctive local features that could be conserved and/or restored.

Settlement Pattern - Nucleated

This Landscape Type is strongly defined by nucleations of settlement. 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.

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.

Also historic patterns of settlement should be noted - i.e. layout/density/orientation of dwellings within the village - and ideally be reflected in new development proposals. Villages often contain domestic orchards within their boundaries – seek to retain and perpetuate such features and create new ones where appropriate.

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