

Landscapes of Worcestershire

Landscape Type Advice Sheet - *Land Management*

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



Current Concerns

The pastoral land use is one of the key elements of this landscape, together with the pattern of settlement and hedged fields. 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, 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. Woodland is not characteristic and 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 and hedgerow trees (previously elm, now oak and ash) 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 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.

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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

The general guidelines for trees in Village Claylands are to:

- **conserve** and **enhance** tree cover along watercourses
- **conserve** and **enhance** the scattered populations of hedgerow trees
- encourage the planting of tree groups in association with settlements

Woodland is not characteristic of these landscapes but tree cover is provided by stream-side (watercourse) trees and hedgerow trees – which in the past were predominantly elm but now more commonly scattered populations of ash. watercourse 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 and encouraging new tree planting in and around the settlement nuclei to enhance the distinctive settlement pattern.

Hedgerows

The general guideline for hedgerows in Village Claylands is to:

- **conserve** the pattern of hedgerow boundaries

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.

Grassland, Ridge and Furrow

The general guidelines for grassland and pastoral land in Village Claylands are to:

- **conserve** all remaining areas of permanent pasture
- consider opportunities for converting arable land back to pasture
- **conserve** distinctive ridge and furrow patterns

Wherever possible, the retention of permanent pasture should be encouraged, along with exploring opportunities for converting arable land back to pastoral use. This is also consistent with protecting the historic ridge and furrow pattern, a characteristic feature of these landscapes. Ridge and furrow survives best under pastoral land uses so opportunities to encourage reversion from arable land to pasture may help prevent its further erosion through ploughing and other practices of cultivation. There may also be opportunities to remove tipped materials or encroaching vegetation (following ecological evaluation of the latter) that may be obscuring the ridge and furrow pattern and so better emphasise the cultural fabric of these landscapes.

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