

Landscapes of Worcestershire Landscape Type Information Sheet

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



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. These are relatively open, large scale landscapes, where the key elements are the settlement pattern and land use. It is important to try to retain the notable contrast between the concentrations of dwellings and farmsteads in the villages and the relatively unsettled land between them. 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 line of fruit trees, usually damson, a distinctive feature in certain localities.

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The hedgerow network provides structure in places but has often largely lost its function, and the resulting scale is derived from the patterns of cropping rather than the boundaries between them. 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. The regeneration of elm continues in the hedgerows but still eventually succumbs to disease at a certain size. The characteristic traditional orchards of standard trees are gradually disappearing in certain areas, being replaced by bush stock, associated with this is the loss of many of the old fruit tree varieties, many with close links to the County. These are landscapes with limited opportunities for habitat restoration and opportunities to manage areas of non-farmed land for nature conservation benefit are to be encouraged.

Although it is desirable to try to retain the full hedgerow structure for visual and wildlife reasons, it is perhaps most viable to focus primarily on the primary hedges in landscapes where the hedgerow function is generally in decline. 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. It is considered that the particular character of the elm was so distinctive that it would be inappropriate to aim to replicate its contribution to the landscape with alternative species. It is to be hoped that some natural resistance will eventually develop and consequent restoration of the "elmscape" will arise as a matter of course from the hedgerow elm stock.

The management strategy for the village farmlands is, therefore, one of enhancement and conservation - conserving the basic hedgerow fabric, together with the distinctive settlement pattern and the distinctive land uses. The opportunities for enhancement relate to encouraging tree planting around village locations and along watercourses and to the creation of improved habitat for wildlife.

Landscape Guidelines

- retain pattern of strongly nucleated villages with associated low dispersal of settlement in between
- conserve and enhance hedgerow structure, with emphasis on the primary hedgelines
- conserve and enhance tree cover along watercourses
- encourage opportunities for tree planting in and around villages
- conserve and restore old orchards around villages, with emphasis placed upon the fruit type and varieties associated with different localities
- conserve and restore lines of hedgerow fruit trees
- promote the development of wide field margins for wildlife benefit
- promote management of roadside verges for wildlife benefit

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