

Landscapes of Worcestershire

Landscape Type Information Sheet

Timbered Pastures

Landscape Type Description

A small-scale, settled, pastoral landscape characterised by filtered views through densely scattered hedgerow trees. The oak trees convey a sense of scale and stature combined with a feeling of maturity and history. This is a complex landscape of relic commons and former wood pasture, reflected today by an intermixed pattern of irregular fields and scattered farms occurring next to areas of geometric enclosure, straight roads and strings of way-side dwellings.



Key Characteristics

Primary

- Notable tree cover pattern of mature hedgerow oaks
- Ancient wooded character
- Small-scale landscape with well-defined pattern of small, hedged fields

Secondary

- Pastoral land use
- Dense network of minor lanes

Tertiary

- Impoverished, poorly draining soils with wet heathy vegetation
- Variable enclosure pattern
- Dispersed settlement pattern of farmsteads and strings of wayside dwellings



This is a landscape of considerable ecological and historical interest, comprising a matrix of former areas of commonland and areas of woodland assart origins. The key feature, providing its character and structure, is the dominant presence of dense lines of mature hedgerow oaks, which in turn rely upon the presence of hedgelines for their continued existence. The tree cover emphasises the small scale pattern of enclosure, overriding local differences in hedgerow pattern, regular where the fields are derived from the late enclosure of commonland, irregular where associated with fields of assart origin. The dominant pastoral land use is also a notable feature and one that can have significant nature conservation interest in addition to appearing complementary to the prominent hedgerow tree population.

This is a landscape that can contain considerable nature conservation interest, the presence of areas of unimproved permanent pasture together with the high densities of small field ponds associated with former marl pits, being particularly relevant.

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The age structure of the hedgerow oak is one of imbalance, with the majority of trees being mature or veteran, the long term potential for retaining this dominant landscape element, therefore, being poor unless new generations of oak can be encouraged quickly and on a significant scale. Changes in land use are evident, with a change to arable farming and also an increase in the grazing of horses becoming evident, both of which can have a detrimental effect upon the hedgerow structure, and in turn on the perpetuation of hedgerow trees. Significant numbers of field ponds are being lost due to infilling.

This landscape, as a whole, is subject to many pressures due to the proximity of the conurbation, not least through the modification of the characteristic wayside dwellings as a result of modernisation and enlargement. Pressures to modify the narrow winding complex of lanes could become a priority as traffic volumes increase.

Emphasis needs to be placed upon promoting the importance of hedgerow oaks to this landscape, developing appropriate new incentives to encourage the initiation of new populations. This characteristic is so strong in places that alternative opportunities to introduce tree cover within farmland, such as field corner plantings, are unlikely to achieve the distinctive density and consequent sense of enclosure created by the existing tree cover. The conservation of the hedgerow pattern is also fundamental in order to facilitate the structure for hedgerow trees. The tree cover could also be enhanced by encouraging planting in non-farmed locations, the land bordering highways for example offering considerable opportunities. The decline in the dominance of permanent pasture dilutes the unity of this landscape and opportunities, not only to conserve but also to restore this land use should be sought. This is a landscape which formerly included a distinctive concentration of unenclosed commons, the essential character of which could be integrated into any new development proposals for the area, in order to facilitate opportunities for recreation.

The management strategy should, therefore, focus upon the conservation of the small scale, enclosed character of the landscape, placing particular emphasis upon the distinctive hedgerow tree cover.

Landscape Guidelines

- conserve the dominant presence and density of hedgerow oak trees
- conserve, and restore the small scale pattern of hedged fields, through appropriate management
- conserve the pastoral land use character
- conserve the distinctive pattern and character of wayside dwellings
- maintain the distinctive density of ponds
- seek opportunities to reintroduce the character of unenclosed commons through creative design
- conserve the distinctive pattern and character of narrow, winding lanes.
- seek opportunities to enhance tree cover along highways and other non-farmed locations

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