

Landscapes of Worcestershire

Landscape Type Information Sheet

Unenclosed Commons

Landscape Type Description

A category of landscape offering tremendous variety of scale and size, the overriding characteristics being the lack of enclosure and, usually, a land use of rough grazing. The smaller unenclosed commons are ranked as features within other Landscape Types but a few are considered to be of sufficient extent to warrant separate classification. Settlement, where present, is usually restricted to wayside dwellings situated around the perimeter of the common.



Key Characteristics

Primary

- Unenclosed land
- Rough grazing land use

Secondary

- Wayside dwellings of distinctive scale and style, located on the perimeter of commons
- Unwooded, but small plots associated with dwellings often afford scattered tree cover
- Acid grassland/heath very often associated with these landscapes



The character of these landscapes has, in the past, developed as a result of the activities of those with commoners' rights over the relevant area different activities resulting in differing identities. They are, as a group, notable for their lack of enclosure and their overall sense of wilderness.

There is frequently an element of settlement associated with these commons, the style, scale and pattern of which is particularly distinctive, typically being small, wayside cottages, often white-washed, set in small plots of irregular shape. In many cases, tree cover is largely restricted to the plots and gardens associated with these cottages. The traditionally grazed commons are invariably associated with a high nature conservation value due to their unimproved status.

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There would appear to continue to be a general lack of motivation to restore active pursuance of rights of common today, factors of economic benefit, disturbance and danger to grazing stock from busy roads, dogs and people together with increased regulations associated with animal husbandry perhaps contributing to such reluctance. The demise in the exercising of commoners' rights has resulted in reversion to scrub in many places.

Elsewhere commons are valued for their recreation potential and managed in a municipal fashion, with regular cutting of the sward and sometimes associated planting of ornamental trees. There have, however, been successful instances of community approaches to restoring grazing stock on commonland, Monkwood Green being an example. Long term sustainable management initiatives are clearly needed for these landscapes and the success of such existing schemes should be widely promoted and encouraged elsewhere.

Commons can convey an exhilarating sense of wilderness, a scarce commodity in much of the lowland landscape, associated invariably with an important value for nature conservation and the securing of their appropriate management should be a high priority. The settlements associated with commons are often much sought after today, the properties frequently becoming subject to enlargement and remodelling, and risk developing a suburban character as a result. It is important that the integrity of such small communities is retained and their distinctive detail and spatial patterns conserved.

The management strategy for the unenclosed commons is, therefore, one of conservation and restoration. Conserving the unity and spatial patterns of the commonside settlements and restoring the land use practices needed to perpetuate the land cover and wildlife interest associated with each area, summarised as to conserve the special spatial character and scale of the landscape.

Landscape Guidelines

- conserve and enhance the visual distinctiveness of open common areas
- conserve and enhance the spatial pattern, scale and specific character of wayside dwellings associated with commons
- recognising that each common will have a different historical profile, seek to define management objectives to integrate wildlife benefit, current recreational interests and other uses, together with the historical interest
- seek to avoid municipal/tidy approaches to management

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