

# Landscapes of Worcestershire

## Landscape Type Advice Sheet - *Planning and Development*

# 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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### Opportunities for Landscape Gain

#### Hedgerows

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 long established hedgerows should guide the composition of new hedgerow planting. Fencing and other uncharacteristic boundary treatments could be removed and replaced by hedgerows.

#### Land Use - Pastoral

Opportunities may arise, through Stewardship and other agri-environment funding incentives to encourage a predominantly pastoral land use, particularly if arable land uses appear to be dominating.

#### 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.

#### Scattered Hedge/ Watercourse Trees

There may be opportunities to plant new hedgerow trees, extend the life of existing hedgerow trees through such means as tree surgery, protective measures, or protection of the hedgerow. The use of protective designations such as TPOs might be relevant. The removal of inappropriate trees – such as belts of poplar may on occasion be appropriate, combined with new planting of a more appropriate nature in terms of species and location.

#### Presence of Ridge and Furrow

The ridge and furrow pattern survives best under pastoral land uses – there may be opportunities to encourage reversion from arable land uses to pasture to help conserve ridge and furrow and prevent its further erosion through such actions of cultivation as ploughing etc. There may 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](http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/lca) or contact the Worcestershire County Council Environmental Policy Team on 01905 766038