

Landscapes of Worcestershire

Landscape Type Advice Sheet - *Planning and Development*

Limestone Estatelands

Landscape Type Description

A sparsely populated 'upland' landscape characterised by thin limestone soils, estate plantations and large rectilinear fields defined by drystone walls. Although still retaining a remote character, the stone walls convey a sense of human presence and the soils a sense of warmth to this landscape. Closely associated with the higher parts of the Cotswold escarpment, this is a well ordered landscape of large open spaces framed for the most part by woodland edges and belts of trees.



Key Characteristics

Primary

- Upstanding rolling plateau, capped with oolitic limestone
- Thin, stony soils with characteristic orange colouring
- Large rectilinear fields defined by drystone walling
- Dominant use of stone for building
- Woodland of planned character—estate plantations and belts of trees

Secondary

- Scattered settlement, largely restricted to isolated stone farmsteads
- Discrete woodlands with dominance of beech in woodland composition



Current Concerns

The essential scale and spaciousness of these landscapes could become fragmented and diluted by land use changes. Whilst these areas can accommodate considerable amounts of new woodland planting, the siting and scale of such woodland will be a critical factor in order to ensure that the dominance of the landform and the sheer visual expanse of the landscape is not compromised: the introduction of too much new woodland on the plateau area could easily result in closing down the views and creating an uncharacteristic sense of enclosure. The planting of further large plantations would enhance the estate character of the landscape, providing care is taken to recognise and conserve the dominance of large open spaces.

Ongoing deterioration of the stone walls gives cause for concern for the long term perpetuation of this distinctive characteristic. Initiatives to secure the ongoing repair and maintenance of the network of stone walls should be encouraged. Reinforcement and expansion of the characteristic belts of trees could usefully strengthen the structure and scale.

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Opportunities for Landscape Gain

Large-scale Landscape

Opportunities may arise to remove sub-divisions of formerly larger fields or parcels of land. There may be opportunities for new woodland planting, and this, and any new landscaping associated with new development should reflect the particular scale of these landscapes.

Landscape gain can probably be best achieved by simply respecting the large scale and avoiding dilution of this through the introduction of small-scale elements.

Stone Walls

There may be opportunities to build new stone walls, restore, strengthen or protect existing walls. There may be opportunities to promote any particularly distinctive local techniques of stone wall building, and provide training to ensure local skills are perpetuated. Funding opportunities to maintain and restore stone walls could be promoted.

Land Use - Mixed Farming

Whilst there is little potential to influence land use at the landscape scale, with current trends suggesting a move towards increased arable, it may be possible to encourage the incorporation of pastoral land uses on land associated with, or adjacent to, new development. This may be particularly appropriate if an element of public access is to be accommodated.

Settlement Pattern Dispersed

This landscape is one of intensive agriculture with settlement tending to be confined to the valleys and lower ground, with the exception of occasional farmsteads. Creating clustering or settlement nuclei through new development is inappropriate to the characteristic settlement pattern of this Landscape Type. But, as current planning guidance precludes dispersed settlement in the landscape in general, significant amounts of new development will generally be discouraged from these landscapes, being better sited in those landscapes where settlement clusters and nuclei are appropriate.

Woodland Character - Planned

Consider introducing new blocks of woodland, and bringing derelict/unmanaged areas of woodland into appropriate management. These are landscapes that can generally accommodate new woodland planting, including commercial plantations and planting of non-indigenous species. There is great potential for imaginative landscape design together with a wide range of opportunities to enhance the biodiversity of the area. When creating new woodland it will be important to respect the strong woodland characteristics associated with the Limestone Estatelands – particularly the regular boundary shape, the size of woodland, the species composition and the presence of linear belts of trees, often bordering the roads as well as woodland blocks – in order fully to achieve appropriate landscape gain.

Enclosure Pattern - Planned

There are likely to be many opportunities to introduce a regular pattern of boundaries – for example defining ownership boundaries to dwellings, providing new field boundaries, introducing areas of woodland or other planting for landscaping purposes, or defining roadside boundaries. Care must be taken to respect the scale of the landscape when augmenting, restoring or re-introducing the regular pattern of enclosure.

Building Style - Dominant Use of Stone

Bearing in mind sustainability issues of obtaining sources of stone, promote the use of local stone as a building material. Encourage traditional skills in retaining/reviving local building styles and building methods. There are many characteristic design features associated with the 'Cotswold style' of building and, whilst these need not necessarily be slavishly followed, they should be borne in mind – again, specialist advice should be sought to identify such details and where opportunities for their incorporation may be appropriate.

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