

Landscapes of Worcestershire

Landscape Type Information Sheet

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



The key factors that define this landscape are its topography, its large scale and open character and the estate like influence of large regular fields, plantations and belts of trees. The undulating form of the plateau is emphasised by the openness and long distance views. This is a landscape formerly associated with extensive sheep walks, although much of the permanent pasture has now been lost to arable uses.

It is a landscape that was probably cleared of its tree cover by Roman times, and with its favoured light and easily cultivated soils, has been farmed ever since, with little opportunity for the natural re-establishment of woodland, except along the steeper valleys. The tree cover today comprises plantation woodlands and tree belts, the shape of which emphasise the regular pattern of fields. It is an area of intensive agriculture with settlement tending to be confined to the valleys and lower ground, with the exception of occasional farmsteads. The dominance of stone, as a building material for settlement and farm buildings, and also for field boundary, walls provides further unity and distinction to the landscape.

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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. This is a landscape where plantation woodlands are a feature, rather than being a landscape that is classed as wooded.

The introduction of too much new woodland planting on the plateau area could easily result in closing down the views and creating a sense of enclosure which is uncharacteristic of this landscape. Whilst there is little evidence of the distinctive field pattern becoming broken, ongoing deterioration of the walls themselves gives cause for concern for the long term perpetuation of this distinctive characteristic.

This is a landscape where priority should be given to ensuring that the large scale, open pattern of regular fields is retained. Reinforcement and expansion of the characteristic belts of trees along roadsides could usefully strengthen the structure and scale of the landscape. The planting of further large plantations should be considered, in order to enhance the estate character of the landscape, providing care is taken to recognise and conserve the dominance of large open spaces. Initiatives to secure the ongoing repair and maintenance of the network of stone walls should be encouraged.

The strategy for the Limestone Estatelands should be one of conservation with an element of enhancement, seeking to conserve the large scale, remote character and distinctive features of the landscape whilst enhancing the structure and scale of the landscape with further tree planting.

Landscape Guidelines

- maintain the large scale estateland character of the farmed land by conserving the strong rectilinear field pattern
- enhance the structure of the landscape by encouraging new woodland planting whilst retaining the long distance views and open character of the plateau
- conserve and restore field boundary walls, especially along roadsides.
- new, or replacement, tree planting should be predominantly broad-leaved, favouring beech, together with oak and ash, as the major species
- strengthen and expand the linear pattern of tree belts along roadsides

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