

Rolling Farmland and Heath

Location

This sub type can be found in the east of the county south of Appleby running alongside the Eden Valley, and in the south of the county to the east of the M6 motorway near Kendal and Kirkby Lonsdale. A small part of this type adjacent to the Lune Valley meets the criteria for National Park designation and is being considered for designation in 2010/11.

Key Characteristics

- Shallow relief plateau with ridges and hollows
- Rolling farmland
- Occasional rocky outcrops
- Rough pasture with wet flushes and semi heathland
- Coniferous plantations
- Narrow wooded valleys with wetland features

Physical character

The geology is a mixture of Carboniferous limestone and Silurian slates and gritstones. The land is relatively high, rising between 150-250m AOD. The underlying limestone geology gives rise to a rolling appearance in the east and a plateau landscape where the Silurian rocks occur between the Kent and Lune Valleys. The plateau has a shallow relief of ridges and hollows and occasional rocky outcrops and a knobbly outline to the ridges.

Land cover and land use

There is a varied land cover pattern with improved pasture dominant in lower parts. Medium sized fields are enclosed by hedges, some with significant hedgerow trees, and to a lesser extent, stone walls. In higher parts and along ridge tops rough and poorly drained pasture is dominant, often interspersed with patches of heather,

bracken or rushes. The land is intersected by streams, tarns and marshy hollows.

The landscape is punctuated by small and medium sized coniferous plantations particularly on the higher ground. Small deciduous woodland is evident but sparse, and gorse and willow scrub can often be found.

Small villages, scattered hamlets and farms are connected by a network of rural roads that cut across the landscape. Masts and pylons have begun to change the character in some areas in the south. The Settle to Carlisle railway forms a liner feature crossing the landscape in the east, and Killington Reservoir is an important manmade feature in the south.

Ecology

This is a landscape of rough and improved pasture containing areas of rush pasture and purple moor-grass, upland heathland and acid grassland. Of note in the area south of Killington Reservoir is the presence of a series of small raised bogs, whilst conifer plantations in this area provide nest sites for long-eared owl. Species-rich roadside verges are a feature of this landscape south of Appleby and above the Lune valley.

Historic and cultural character

In the south there is a dispersed settlement pattern with limestone built farmsteads often featuring date stones on both houses and farm buildings. In general buildings date from the late 17th century onwards. The field system is a mixture of ancient, former common arable and parliamentary enclosure. In the east, however, the settlement pattern is based on nucleated villages with a field pattern of early enclosures often containing fossilised strips.

Perceptual character

The landscape is medium to large scale and open. On higher land there are some wide views of surrounding fell and dale tops, adjacent valleys and, in the south, across to Morecambe Bay. Despite the introduction of some large scale vertical discordant features, the limited nature of these enables the landscape to retain the feeling of a peaceful, working farmland. Seasonal changes bring contrasts in colours between rough and improved pasture, heather and bracken and changes in weather can provide a feeling of containment when long views are obscured.

Sensitive characteristics or features

Open ridges along plateau edges and expansive views to the Yorkshire Dales, Lakeland Fells and Morecambe Bay are sensitive to poorly sited and scaled development, including large scale infrastructure development. The matrix of hedges and walls that reinforce the field pattern and contrast with more open and rough pasture found in higher parts are sensitive to changes in land management. The peaceful countryside character is sensitive to agricultural intensification and changes in land use.

Vision

This landscape will be enhanced and the core of rough heath and grassland will be retained.

The visual contrast between the open rolling farmland and the heath will be strengthened. The existing rough grassland and features, such as marshy hollows, will be maintained. Remnant heath will be conserved and enhanced and adjacent improved land will be allowed to revert back to heath where fragmentation has occurred. Woodland areas will be expanded as an alternative to agriculture as this will make a positive contribution to the landscape. Only development which is of high quality and can be contained by the natural rolling topography will be accepted and the uncluttered natural character of the rolling farmland and heath will be conserved.

Changes in the Landscape

Over the next 10 – 20 years this landscape could be subject to the following changes or issues:

Climate Change

- Climate change mitigation could see increased interest in short rotation coppicing and forestry.

Management Practices

- Agricultural improvements on marginal land, and pressure to convert semi-natural areas to improved pasture.
- Localised symptoms of neglect including dilapidated walls, replacement of hedge and walls by fences, and grazed farm woodlands.

Development

- The Government's commitment to an increase in renewable energy could see growing pressure for energy infrastructure developments such as large scale wind turbines.
- Upgrades to the national grid and new pylons, communication masts and caravan parks could also erode the character of the area.
- The M6 corridor as an element in the landscape could have the potential to attract new large scale commercial development. Improvements to surfacing, lighting and information systems along the motorway could affect its appearance and people's awareness of it in the landscape.

Access and Recreation

- Public rights of way provide a network of routes that enable quiet appreciation and enjoyment of the countryside. Ongoing maintenance is needed to support this network in the future.
- Current farm stewardship grants provide the opportunity to develop more public access in the countryside. Future grant or other programmes may continue to support this.

Guidelines

Climate Change

- Forestry and coppice planting should reflect any field patterns and the grain of the landscape. They should be sited and designed so that they integrate well with

the landscape, retain the open moorland character and do not sit as large unbroken blocks of planting.

Natural Features

- Regenerate suppressed heather through management programmes including reduction of stocking levels, control of bracken, phased cutting and burning.
- Manage semi-natural acidic grassland to enhance biological diversity including controlled light grazing.
- Cease further agricultural improvement including ploughing, reseeding, application of fertiliser, liming or herbicide treatment.
- Recreate heath or rough grassland on land which has been 'improved' to pasture to strengthen the continuity of semi-natural land cover. This may involve cultivation to expose peat soils, spreading heather cuttings with ripe seed from nearby moorland and initially excluding stock.
- Re-create and enhance wetland including flushes, small tarns and marshy hollows. This may include preventing drainage improvements and blocking existing drains to maintain high water levels, preventing overgrazing and poaching by stock, controlling scrub encroachment.
- Protect gills and becks from stock to encourage development of diverse ground flora, scattered trees and woodland.
- Protect rocky outcrops by preventing removal or disturbance and controlling scrub encroachment.
- Restore the matrices of hedgerows closer to plantations.
- Conserve and reinforce ancient woodland in valleys and field boundary trees at lower levels.
- Restore and reinforce existing grazed broadleaf and mixed woodlands by exclusion of livestock, natural regeneration, restocking of plantations.
- Ameliorate existing coniferous plantations including softening geometric outlines, introduction of open spaces and species diversification.
- Establish new medium scale mixed and broad-leaved plantations aligned to respect and enhance the topographic pattern of interlocking ridges and reduce the visual dominance of transmission lines and masts. Avoid planting on heath, species rich grassland and wetland.
- Plant new field boundary trees to replace maturing stock using indigenous species.

Cultural Features

- Restore and maintain dry stone walls and hedges enclosing improved farmland where they are a key feature.
- Strongly discourage the removal of hedges and stone walls and introduction of fences.

Development

- Avoid siting development on prominent edges of the plateau taking advantage of the natural containment offered by intermediate ridges and horizons.
- Resist cluttering of further communication masts or large scale wind turbines, particularly on valley rims.
- Ensure new development respects the local landscape character and vernacular.
- Reduce the impact of new farm buildings by careful siting and design, including choice of finishes and appropriate planting.
- Encourage the appropriate management of new farm development such as slurry and silage tanks to minimise their impact on local character.
- Avoid siting large scale wind energy, other vertical structures such as telecommunications masts, pylons and overhead transmission lines in open and prominent areas where it could degrade the rural character of the area and affect sensitive views.
- Retain the rural character of the M6 corridor by resisting large scale commercial development, and ensuring new motorway infrastructure such as information signs and necessary lighting is sited to minimise adverse effects on open parts of the landscape. Noise pollution should be mitigated against through careful selection of surface materials.

Access and Recreation

- Public rights of way should be well maintained and quiet recreational areas and facilities should be improved and developed to be compatible with the pastoral character of this sub type.
- Seek opportunities to enhance access to farmland through farm stewardship or other schemes.
- Promote and enhance existing recreation routes by improving waymarking, providing appropriate surfacing, gates and gaps and interpretation.