

Forests

Location

This sub type is found in the north of the county at Kershope and Spadeadam Forests.

Key Characteristics

- Areas of high rolling or undulating moorland and plateau
- Large areas of coniferous planting
- Some open attractive areas on forest edge
- Extensive views towards distant hills and craggy scarps

Physical character

The geology is mainly Carboniferous sandstone and gritstone overlain by peat. The land is high rolling or undulating moorland and plateau. It rises from around 150m to 520m AOD.

Land cover and land use

The landscape is extensively planted with coniferous forest. Its character changes with the management cycles of clear felling and replanting. The forests are made up of large and extensive planting blocks with firebreaks and access roads. There is little variation in tree species and sitka spruce dominates. Within the forests open space is sparse and often limited to remnants of simple moorland that are found around the periphery of the forests.

Around the edge of the forest there are areas of farmland with a mixture of improved, semi improved and marshy pasture. Fields are large and regular in shape. Where the fields are bound by hedges there is a strong matrix field pattern. Some hedges have been replaced by wire fences. The field pattern and hedges tend to weaken closer to the plantations.

Settlement is sparse. Isolated farmsteads and dwellings are found at the edges of the forests. Part of Spadeadam Forest is used for military purposes and its associated roads, security fences, buildings and overhead power lines influence the landscape character.

Ecology

Extensive coniferous plantation dominates this landscape and provides nest sites for goshawk and a reserve for red squirrels. Within and around the edges of these plantations there are large areas of blanket bog, rush pasture, purple moor-grass and small raised bogs. These are particularly extensive in Spadeadam Forest. Isolated areas of hay meadow and wet woodland are present in the upper reaches of the River Irthing. Species-rich springs and flushes are present where there is a calcareous influence to the irrigating waters and support species such as small white orchid.

Historic and cultural character

The landscape remains largely unenclosed and the settlement pattern is largely dispersed and post-medieval in origin. A number of the farms originated as bastles in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Prehistoric sites including burial cairns are relatively common. Other important potential heritage sites include 20th century military sites such as the Blue Streak missile testing range at Spadeadam. In the 1950's Spadeadam was the test location for the "Blue Streak" missile project, the equivalent to the American Atlas missile. It was suddenly cancelled in 1960. Britain attempted to salvage the project by utilising the "Blue Streak" technology to enter the Space Race and form the first stage of a satellite launcher.

Perceptual character

The forests have a feeling of remoteness, wildness, tranquility and space at the moorland edges. Changes in the weather can accentuate these feelings. At the forest edges horizons are wide and the scale vast with extensive views towards distant hills and craggy scarps. Within the forests views are limited but the continuous tree cover provides a feeling of remoteness.

Sensitive characteristics or features

The peripheral areas of blanket bog, heathland and moorland provide contrast to the large scale and uniform plantations and are sensitive to changes in land management and additional forestry plantations. The simple dispersed settlement pattern is sensitive to expansion. The expansive views and sense of openness from forest edges to distant hills is sensitive to enclosure or interruption from significant infrastructure development. The remote feeling in forests and along edges arising from a lack of development is sensitive to intensification of land use.

Vision

The forest landscape, adjacent moorland and farming areas will be enhanced. Recreation within these areas will be increased where opportunities present themselves and, there will be an increase in nature conservation interest of upland mire habitats both inside and outside the forests. The detrimental visual impact of remaining military areas will be reduced through careful restoration or redevelopment. The visual containment of the forests will provide limited opportunity for some wind energy development which will be combined with moorland reinstatement and complementary forest management. Natural features, field boundary patterns and traditional farm buildings will all be enhanced to further improve the characteristics of the farming landscape.

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 a shift to short rotation forestry.
- Areas of active blanket bog and peat provide the best carbon sinks after woodland and can assist with carbon sequestration.

Management Practices

- Within publicly owned forest, Forest Design Plans are reducing the impact of cycles of clear felling, creating open spaces and restoration of raised mires and seeking to introduce native species, particularly on Plantations with Ancient Woodlands (PAWS). Improvements are taking place within privately owned woods as management plans are developed.
- There could be a possible threat to upland mires through forestry expansion or agricultural improvement.
- Hedges are being replaced by wire fences as farming practices change.

Development

- There is interest in wind energy development in the area due to its exposure and relative remoteness.
- The future use of military areas at Spadeadam may need careful consideration to limit adverse effects on landscape character.

Access and Recreation

- Public rights of way and areas of open access land 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.

Guidelines

Climate Change

- Forestry 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 and retain the open moorland character.
- Projects should be encouraged that seek to improve the condition of areas of peat to optimise their carbon capture potential.

Natural Features

- Increase planting of deciduous trees as feature trees, within hedgerows, along water courses and in tree groups to act as a foil to the dominant coniferous woodland in the background.
- Create linked networks of vegetation to enhance nature conservation value and their use as ecological corridors and links with the adjacent forest area.
- Adopt sensitive felling cycles to reduce the impact of clear felling and re-shape forests to enhance topographic variations of scarps, plateaus and lower foothills and vistas of crags and tors.
- Protect and enhance natural areas and mires peripheral to the forested areas and natural crags or tors from masking by forests.
- Remove conifers from areas of high nature conservation interest such as blanket mire.
- Extend the forestry management policies to encourage recreation.
- Relieve the overwhelming green of the predominantly sitka spruce stands with more open areas, change in species, colour contrast, inclusion of deciduous species in appropriate locations and introduction of focal points and features of interest including suitable trees for long term retention.
- Use of broadleaf species along the river valley sides to give definition to the water course rather than disguise it and encourage the development of riverside habitats.

Cultural Features

- In fields adjacent to forests and woodland, enhance the pattern of hedgerows with additional planting and supplementary planting of poor hedgerows.
- Forestry activities should avoid damage to upstanding archaeological remains, and clear tree growth away from them when opportunities arise.

Development

- Wind energy infrastructure should be sited and designed to reduce any adverse landscape and visual effects, particularly to the dispersed population.
- Create landscape buffer zones between the military areas and the surrounding forest landscape.
- Encourage partnership arrangements between Forest Enterprise, MOD, Local Authorities and conservation bodies to develop and monitor long term landscape and nature conservation plans.

Access and Recreation

- Public rights of way and access to open access land should be well maintained to allow quiet enjoyment and appreciation of the areas.
- Establish points of orientation for recreation purposes and enhance the networks of footpath, bridleway and cycleway links.
- Seek opportunities to enhance access to farmland through farm stewardship or other schemes.