

Sub type 11b

# Low Fells

## Location

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This sub type is found to the east of Kendal around Hay Fell and Lambrigg Fell.

## Key Characteristics

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- Rolling low fells with rocky outcrops
- Open improved pasture
- Some areas of bracken, moorland and heather
- Small woodlands and scrub on the steeper slopes and by farms
- Distant views along Kent and Lune valley

## Physical character

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This sub type is mainly Silurian gritstones forming low fells between 200m-300m AOD. They have a distinctive northeast to southwest grain. The relatively soft sedimentary rocks have eroded to fairly rounded forms with only occasional rocky outcrops and a knobbly outline in places.

## Land cover and land use

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The vegetation is generally open grassland with varying intensity of management. Sometimes there is a strong contrast between rich green improved pasture enclosed by stone walls and open moorland of rough grass, bracken and remnant heather.

The open landscape is relatively featureless with only occasional stone wall field boundaries. Trees can be found along small streams, and willow scrub is often found in rushy hollows. Small woods or scrub can be found on steeper slopes. Tree clumps are often associated with farm buildings. Occasional farmsteads coincide with the improved land served by peripheral lanes.

The M6 motorway and to a lesser extent the A684 are discordant features. Fell tops afford distant views down the Kent and Lune valleys.

## Ecology

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These low fells support areas of upland heathland and acid grassland, with areas of rush pasture and purple moor-grass and stands of gorse scrub. Small upland oak woodlands are present along stream valleys and small stands of wet woodland are present in damp hollows.

## Historic and cultural character

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There are few settlements and most are isolated farmsteads. The field system is a product of late enclosure and defined by dry stone walls. There is evidence of some medieval deer parks and widespread evidence of quarrying.

## Perceptual character

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Due to the transitional location and relationship to higher fells, these are relatively undramatic low fells. They have a simple, open character. Colourful patches of heather, streams and wooded steep slopes and the mosaic of stone walls provide interest which can be accentuated with seasonal change. Despite the movement and noise where the M6 motorway carves through the Westmorland fells, the area is still generally seen as an open place to enjoy the countryside, with wide and largely unspoiled panoramic views. A sense of isolation can occur at times of poor weather as views become enclosed by cloud or rain.

## Sensitive characteristics or features

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The distinctive landscape grain and mosaic of walls are sensitive to unsympathetically sited and scaled development and changes in land management. The small woodlands and contrasting wide open moorlands are sensitive to changes in land management. The wide and expansive views of Lakeland Fells and the Howgills are sensitive to significant and large scale infrastructure development.

## Vision

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### **This landscape will be conserved and enhanced.**

Agricultural change will be managed to conserve and re-create key components such as species rich grassland, heather moorland and other natural features. Where complementary diversification is a real prospect in this marginal farming area it will be encouraged. Low key recreational uses and extensive woodland planting will be introduced in carefully sited areas to enrich the character and support the management of existing features and moorland. New housing development will be sensitive to the surrounding landscape and reinforce local vernacular.

## Changes in the Landscape

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

### **Climate Change**

- Changes species and habitats could arise as temperatures rise and species migrate higher up hillsides.

### **Management Practices**

- Increased grazing, scrub and heather clearance could continue to change the character of the moorland.
- The loss of remaining moorland through drainage, reseeding, fertilisation and enclosure by fences.
- Symptoms of neglect, including grazed woods, over mature farm copses, unmanaged heather and dilapidated walls and barns.

### **Development**

- Planned and incremental expansion of settlements and farmsteads and the use of non vernacular

materials could erode local character.

- 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.
- The development of more large scale wind energy schemes could erode the open and generally undeveloped character, particularly close to national landscape designations.
- Other development pressures include quarrying extensions and communications masts.

### **Access and Recreation**

- Despite open access land and the Dalesway passing through this landscape recreation is low key and compatible with the landscape.
- 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

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### **Natural Features**

- Enhance and/or recreate fell wetland habitats including flushes, small tarns and bog pools. This may include preventing drainage improvements and blocking existing drains to maintain high water levels, preventing overgrazing and poaching by stock, excluding supplementary feeding areas and controlling scrub encroachment.
- Protect gills from encroachment by stock to encourage the development of more diverse ground flora, scattered trees and woodland.
- Protect rocky outcrops as features by preventing removal or disturbance and controlling scrub encroachment.
- Consider recreating heather moorland on suitable land.
- Regenerate suppressed heather through management programmes including reduction of stocking levels, control of bracken, phased cutting and burning.

- Regenerate rough pasture through controlled light grazing, control of bracken and rushes.
- Restrict further agricultural improvement including ploughing, re-seeding, application of fertiliser, liming or herbicide treatment.
- Conserve and reinforce the scattered pattern of isolated mature trees and clumps concentrated around farms and tarns.
- Bring remnant and grazed woodland back into appropriate management by exclusion of livestock, natural regeneration and restocking.
- Ameliorate existing coniferous plantations including softening geometric outlines, introduction of open spaces and identifying suitable species for diversification and long term retention.
- Plant lower sheltered slopes with a mosaic of mixed and broad-leaved woodland avoiding moorland, wetland and rocky outcrops.

### ***Cultural Features***

- Restore fenced boundaries to traditional stone walls.
- Restrict removal of stone walls and replacement by fences.
- Manage and repair derelict stone walls.
- Avoid the use of 'barrier' fencing.

### ***Development***

- Ensure that developments take advantage of the natural containment offered by intermediate ridges and horizons, avoiding sites on prominent edges of the plateau.
- 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.
- 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.
- Ensure that all developments are carefully designed so as not threaten the open, unspoiled character; this is particularly the case with tall and vertical structures such as large wind turbines and pylons.

### ***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.