

Limestone farmland

Location

This subtype is found to the east of the Lake District National Park between Shap and Kirkby Stephen. The sub type continues into the national park and is classified as Type I – Upland Limestone Farmland in the Lake District National Park Landscape Character Assessment. Most of this type meets the criteria for National Park designation and is being considered for designation in 2010/11.

Key Characteristics

- Rolling upland farmed landscape
- Distinctive limestone characteristics in the form of strong field patterns with high stone walls
- Land cover is dominated by improved or semi-improved pasture
- Small broad leaved, coniferous or mixed plantations provide variety and interest
- Historic features are often obvious and evoke a strong sensory response

Physical character

This sub type is dominated by Carboniferous limestone overlain by glacial till. In places outcrops provide high geological interest. Other areas of interest are associated with the till and fluvial glacial deposits exposed along Scandal Beck. This provides key evidence for interpreting late Quaternary stratigraphy.

This is a rolling upland farmed landscape found between 250-300m AOD. The area is intersected by small streams and rivers and has distinctive limestone characteristics. The area forms a transitional area with the higher Lakeland and Howgill Fells.

Land cover and land use

The underlying limestone geology is present through the strong pattern of fields bounded by high stone walls and other built stone features, such as lime kilns and traditional farm buildings. The matrix of walls emphasise the rolling landform.

Land cover is dominated by improved or semi-improved pasture. Tree clumps and small broadleaved, coniferous or mixed plantations often near farmhouses are typical features. In the Orton-Raisbeck area the scale of fields is larger with a pattern dominated by large allotments and more open moorland. Around some of the villages and hamlets there is smaller scale pasture with some long, narrow fields. At lower levels the patchwork of walls give way to hedges with some field boundary trees.

The local building vernacular is dominated by limestone with a mixture of discrete nucleated villages and dispersed farms. These are mainly connected by small roads that often follow the grain of the landscape.

In the western parts the M6 motorway, rail line, pylons and large quarries contrast with the pastoral characteristics and introduce discordant man made features in the landscape.

Ecology

This landscape supports some of the most species-rich hay meadows in Cumbria and is also notable for broad species-rich roadside verges. Where the limestone outcrop areas of limestone grassland are present and in places there are extensive species-rich springs and flushes with alpine bartsia and black bog-rush. Stands of upland ash woodland are present along gills and river valleys. The many small rivers that dissect this landscape support both otter and white-clawed crayfish.

Historic and cultural character

A landscape of nucleated villages with a variety of early and late enclosed fields all bounded by dry stone walls containing features such as hog holes and bee boles. The villages often have traditional village greens and traditional limestone built farm buildings within them. Isolated field barns also feature. The landscape has a variety of well preserved earthwork remains including ridge and furrow and lynchets. The boundaries of former late medieval deer parks are preserved within the modern field pattern. Archaeological remains include prehistoric stone circles and cairns, early medieval settlement remains and the remains of abandoned quarries and limekilns. The historic legacy is rich and discernable.

Perceptual character

This is a farmed landscape with a pastoral character. The bright greens of improved fields contrast with darker unimproved and more open land. At lower levels there is a sense of enclosure, which changes to a more open and expansive, feeling on more exposed areas. There are long, open views and mainly uncluttered views of the Lakeland Fells, the Howgills and the Northern Pennines. There is a strong sense of history derived from a wealth of historic features and a sense of remoteness in many parts. Changes in the weather can give an elemental feeling and accentuate feelings of exposure and remoteness.

Sensitive characteristics or features

The limestone vernacular from field walls, lime kilns and traditional farm and village buildings is sensitive to changes in land management and new development patterns and materials. Species rich hay meadows and roadside verges, and the matrix of walls that reinforce the rolling landscape grain and varied historic field patterns are sensitive to changes in land management. Small, traditional villages, with a rural character and village greens are sensitive to village expansion. Discrete rural roads winding along contours are sensitive to highway improvements. Archaeological remains and historic farm buildings and features are sensitive to changes in landscape management and village/farmstead

expansion. Long open views to the Fells, Pennines and Howgills are sensitive to large scale and prominent development that could significantly interrupt views.

Vision

This landscape will be conserved and enhanced.

This well managed landscape will be fostered while the historic field and settlement pattern will be conserved and maintained retaining the open character of this landscape. Historic earthworks and other archaeological and features of historic interest will be conserved. Wildlife interest will be increased to help enhance this landscape. This will be achieved through conserving, restoring and extending small woods, flower-rich grassland and field boundary trees, increasing habitat diversity and enriching the less diverse areas. Farm buildings, roads and quarry extensions will be carefully controlled and designed. Development will be of high quality and complement the local vernacular in this sensitive landscape.

Changes in the Landscape

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

Management Practices

- Farming practices are the primary influence on the character of this distinctive landscape and changes in policy or grant funding regimes could effect the future management of landscape features both positively and negatively.
- Over the past few decades the tendency towards intensively managed grassland and silage production has produced 'clean' well-managed fields.
- A lack of grant money available to farmers and the terrain may influence their capability to diversify and, therefore, farm incomes could suffer significantly.
- Current grant regimes can help prevent the loss and neglect of stone walls, decline in botanical interest, neglect of woods and field boundary trees.
- Intensive grazing regimes and field improvements have reduced biodiversity and caused harm to historic features in the past.

Development

- These 'transitional' landscapes are traditionally fragile in nature and new development may further exaggerate this trend eroding distinctive characteristics.
- The Government's commitment to renewable energy could see an interest in large scale wind energy schemes in this open area which could change key open views and the feeling of remoteness felt in parts of this area.
- The need to upgrade the national grid during the next decade could see changes in character where pylons already exist along the M6 corridor.
- 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.
- As agricultural practices shift they have been a move towards the erection of large scale farm buildings which – depending on their design - can be particularly intrusive in the higher open parts of this landscape.
- Planned and incremental expansions to villages may be needed to support the rural economy and agricultural diversification. This needs to be sensitive to the historic form, local topography and vernacular to prevent erosion of the landscape character.
- Maintain and enhance existing species rich grassland, meadow and flush.
- Support improvements to the condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest that will enhance and support a more diverse landscape.
- Plant new field boundary trees or tagging selected saplings to replace maturing stock using indigenous or locally established species.
- Reinforce existing woods by appropriate management, natural regeneration, restocking and exclusion of stock.
- Establish new small to medium scale native broad-leaved, mixed plantations woods on improved farmland and along beck sides.
- Avoid new planting on species rich grassland, wetland and higher open landscapes or where it might obscure distinctive field patterns.

Cultural Features

- Discourage field enlargement and 'ranching' that result in the loss of traditional field patterns and boundaries.
- Manage and restore walls and hedgerows in a traditional way
- Restrict introduction of fences to replace or 'gap-up' walls and hedgerows.
- Restore fenced boundaries to traditional walls and hedgerows
- Conserve historic artifacts including burial mounds, cairns, settlement earthworks, standing stones, through avoidance of damaging agricultural activities such as disturbance and removal of stones, levelling and excavation, planting trees, poaching, ploughing and tipping.
- Conserve and enhance historic structures such as limekilns and stone barns. This may include protection from stock, removal of trees or scrub or carrying out structural repairs with archaeological advice.
- Protect features such as long fields behind villages and funnel shaped intakes.

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

Natural Features

- Restrict further agricultural improvement of existing semi-improved pastures and meadows, including ploughing, fertilising, herbicide spraying, reseeding and liming. Restore areas lost to improvements where possible.

Development

- Avoid development in the transitional, fragile and exposed areas that will degrade their character, specifically tall or vertical energy infrastructure developments such as large scale wind turbines and pylons.
- 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.
- Protect settlement fringes from unsympathetic development.
- Ensure new development respects scale, form and distinctive character of villages.
- Enhance through sensitive environmental improvements to entrances, village greens and planting etc.
- Conserve and maintain traditional farm buildings.
- New farm buildings, structures, tracks and access ways should be sympathetic to their surroundings. This can be achieved by careful siting; integration with existing buildings, breaking down mass, choice of sympathetic colours and non-reflective finishes and appropriate planting.

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.