

Limestone Foothills

Location

This sub type is found around Greystoke and the Lake District National Park. The sub type continues into the Mungrisedale Valley in the national park and is classified as Type I – Upland Limestone Farmland in the Lake District National Park Landscape Character Assessment.

Key Characteristics

- Rolling undulating topography with occasional plateaus
- Limestone pavements, crags and other rock outcrops are rare
- Areas of unimproved and improved pasture
- Stone walls and hedges reinforce the pastoral features
- In the south, small pasture fields with the presence of both disused and active quarries
- Ancient woodland and parkland
- Large forestry plantations

Physical character

This sub type is dominated by Carboniferous limestone overlain by glacial till. Some rocky outcrops form notable local features. The land rises to the adjacent Lakeland fells at an elevation of 220-360m AOD. The rolling undulating topography is occasionally steep and sometimes appears plateau-like.

Land cover and land use

The sub type is dominated by large forestry plantations around Greystoke and Johnby. The large blocks of forest and other woodland are the main features in this type. Elsewhere the land cover is largely characterised by unimproved pasture, areas of ancient woodland and parkland. Deciduous shelterbelts often edge coniferous plantations and help integrate them better with the rolling topography.

Field sizes are a mixture of large allotments and smaller fields. These are mainly bounded by stone walls or hedgerows. These can be tall and strong alongside roads. Pavements, crags and other rock outcrops are rare.

In the southern part of this sub type, the dominant characteristics come from small pasture fields, bounded by stone walls. The fields are interspersed with the pockmarks of old and active quarries. This contrasts with the large scale features found elsewhere.

Settlements are generally dispersed with a mixture of limestone and sandstone vernacular.

Ecology

One of the most notable features of this landscape are the broad roadside verges which support species-rich stands of tall herbs, neutral grassland, limestone grassland and rush pasture. Small areas of limestone grassland are also found around small outcrops of limestone and species-rich springs and flushes are also occasionally present. Small areas of upland ash woodland are sometimes present, but one of the main woodland features is the wood pasture and veteran trees of Greystoke Park. The landscape also supports barn owls and red squirrels.

Historic and cultural character

The settlement pattern features nucleated villages with limestone built traditional buildings. The field systems are mainly planned enclosure on former medieval wastes and feature dry stone walls and fossilised strips. Evidence of deer parks as at Greystoke Castle, are preserved within existing boundaries. Earthwork remains relating to medieval habitation and farming are associated with the villages but many have been removed in recent years.

Perceptual character

This is a large scale, open landscape which becomes smaller and more intimate in the wooded areas and in the southern part. This landscape is tranquil and peaceful, and has a strong relationship with the Lake District fells and national park. The changes in characteristics provide interest and the Parkland (eg Greystoke Park) is considered beautiful by many. In the more open parts of the west and north there are clear views of the Lake District fells which reinforce a sense of remoteness. Changes to the weather can accentuate the feeling of remoteness, especially when windswept and wet, or the feeling of tranquility on dry and still days.

Sensitive characteristics or features

Ancient woodland and parkland landscapes are sensitive to large scale development or significant plantation expansion. The matrix of walls and hedges reinforcing farmland and enclosing rural roads are sensitive to changes in land management. Ecologically sensitive roadside verges are vulnerable to road improvements and access to development. Small scale vernacular villages of limestone and sandstone and medieval earthworks and remains around settlements are sensitive to settlement expansion and new building design and materials' use. The sense of remoteness that is reinforced by the proximity to Lakeland Fells is sensitive to large scale agricultural, tourism or wind energy development.

Vision

The high quality elements of this landscape will be conserved and enhanced. Key components such as the strong pattern of limestone walls and hedgerows will be conserved and enhanced. Rare components such as species rich meadows, hay meadows and historic features such as lime kilns especially where associated with limestone pavement will be conserved, enhanced or extended. The extensive blankets of coniferous forest will be improved so that they relate more closely to the rolling topography while scattered patterns of woodland copses associated with hill tops and farm buildings will be developed to enrich the landscape and provide a diverse array of habitats. Intrusive development will be mitigated

where possible while inappropriate development and residential extensions to villages will be strictly controlled.

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 could result in agricultural practices moving towards mixed farming and ploughing up pasture in order to plant crops e.g. vegetables to biofuels. Climate Change could also lead to increased storm events and summer droughts impacting on trees and woodland.

Management Practices

- Farming and forestry 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.
- A lack of grant money available to farmers and the terrain may influence their capability to diversify and, therefore, farm incomes could suffer significantly.
- The loss of native and ancient tree cover and similar features through changes in farming practices.
- Current grant regimes can help prevent the loss and neglect of stone walls and the decline in botanical interest. The replacement of walls with wire fences has begun to erode the distinctive character of the area.

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.
- As agricultural practices shift there has 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.
- Mineral or other industrial development could take place where there are mineral resources in the southern part, and closer to large settlements.

Access and Recreation

- Public rights of way and 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.
- 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

- Manage and enhance species rich grassland in marginal farmland and roadside verges through appropriate management including restricting the use of fertilisers.
- Areas of limestone pavement should be subject to sympathetic grazing management and the surrounding grassland should be targeted for restoration or enhancement.
- Ameliorate existing coniferous stands taking account of the impact of forestry practices from surrounding viewpoints.
- Adopt rotational cropping of forested areas in coupe sizes and shapes that generate a pattern of cleared areas, open spaces and newly planted areas and identify suitable species for long term retention, thereby creating a more natural appearance harmonious with the landform.
- Use of broadleaf native species to enhance ecological and landscape value.
- Establish woodland copses in association with hill tops or new farm and residential developments to soften their impact and remain in character with traditional buildings.

Cultural features

- Restrict field enlargement or major change to the existing pattern of field boundaries.
- Conserve and restore existing walls and hedgerows.
- Restrict introduction of fences to replace or 'gap-up' walls and hedgerows.
- Reinstate roadside walls to strengthen the traditional interdependent pattern of roads and field boundaries.
- Plant new field boundary and feature trees to replace maturing stock using indigenous stock typically Ash.

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.
- Ensure new development associated with villages and farmsteads 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.
- Minimise the impact of minerals or other development by careful siting, design and high standard of landscape treatment, particularly where public views are affected.
- Use traditional materials to define site boundaries, roads and access points.

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.
- 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.
- Ensure any recreational developments are contained within a robust landscape structure to ensure the character of the existing landscape is not harmed.