

Moorland and Commons

Location

This sub type runs in a north west to south east direction from Shap to the south of 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. All of this type meet the criteria for National Park designation and is being considered for designation in 2010/11.

Key Characteristics

- Broad, open grazing common with heather moorland
- Limestone pavement, scars and screes
- Western intrusion of granite
- Some large coniferous plantations
- Wide views of the Lake District and Howgill Fells

Physical character

This sub type is mainly Carboniferous limestone, but the western fringe is underlain by Shap granite. Glacial erosion and weathering has exposed limestone pavements, scars and screes. Limestone pavements and scars are dominant in many areas particularly on Orton and Ashy Scars.

Land cover and land use

Land cover is dominated by open common grassland or remnant heather moorland with some coniferous woodland and occasional tree clumps. Although streams and rivers are limited, sink holes and springs can be found throughout.

The edges of the open commons and lower fields are bounded by strong limestone walls. These, along with the exposed rocks, pavements and scars form distinctive features in the area. The walls and outcrops often form rectilinear and linear patterns across the landscape. The

stone walls which form the boundary of the commons are of historic interest. The area is an important limestone habitat and a number of the scars, pavements and grasslands have been designated.

The extreme western and eastern parts of the area are affected by industrial and urban influences, including the M6 motorway and highway depot, A685, and mineral extraction and processing. Despite this the majority of the rest of the landscape retain an open and undeveloped character.

Ecology

This landscape is dominated by internationally and nationally important and protected limestone pavements, upland heathland and acid grassland moorland. Associated with these are species-rich springs and flushes, roadside verges, purple moor-grass and limestone grassland. The distinctive clints and grykes of the pavements support interesting flora. The limestone grasslands and flushes support a range of rare and uncommon species, including Geyer's whorl snail, bird's-foot sedge, bird's-eye primrose and slender green feather-moss. Birds of interest include Lapwing, Reed Bunting, Curlew and Skylarks.

Historic and cultural character

There is little settlement and much unenclosed common land. What enclosure exists is late. The few settlements that date from the first half of the 19th century are situated in either planned enclosure or the edge of assarts. Small areas of plantation woodland exist in an area of medieval deer park around Ravenstonedale. These areas are especially important for prehistoric remains which include boundary walls, settlements and cairns. In addition they contain features peculiar to upland farming such as biolds and widespread evidence of quarrying and lime burning.

Perceptual character

The landscape is largely open and exposed with expansive panoramic views to the Lakeland and Howgill Fells and the North Pennines. There is tangible sense of remoteness because of the lack of settlements and development. Its open character has a strong relationship with the adjacent higher fells whose uncluttered skyline contributes to a sense of tranquillity and relative wildness. This can be accentuated by changes in the weather. Pockets of heathland and limestone outcrops provide added interest to the open moorland and seasonal contrasts. The sense of tranquillity is largely intact despite the busier developed edges around Shap and Kirkby Stephen.

Sensitive characteristics or features

Extensive areas of unenclosed commons bounded by limestone walls, the linear grain of walls and rock exposures and prehistoric remains and distinctive historic land use patterns could be sensitive to agricultural or other development. Open uncluttered skylines and rough untamed commons provide a sense of remoteness and wildness and are sensitive to large scale energy and infrastructure development. Limestone pavements, screes and scars expose the underlying geology and, along with a mosaic of limestone grassland and heathland, are sensitive habitats that could be vulnerable to unsympathetic changes in land management.

Vision

The open rough, unspoilt limestone pavement and moorland character and its ecological and historic interest will be conserved and enhanced. The heather and species rich grassland of the commons, limestone and other natural features will be conserved and enhanced to reinforce landscape distinctiveness and improve ecological interest. The commons boundary walls will be maintained to maintain the distinction between common and enclosed land. Historical features will be protected and managed. New infrastructure or other development will only be supported if it does not erode the intrinsic character of the area. Large conifer plantations will be better integrated in the landscape through the introduction of

more diverse tree species and through a softening of straight edges. Large extensions will be resisted if they are likely to detract from local characteristics.

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.
- 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 erosion of distinctive character in some areas due to losses of heather moorland and species rich grassland.
- Blocks of conifer planting have interrupted the openness and rough uniformity of the commons.
- An increase in improved and semi-improved pasture has changed the character of some fringe areas.
- Overgrazing can effect limestone pavement, grassland and wet flushes, and under grazing can result in scrub encroachment and the reduction in ecological interest.

Development

- The M6 corridor as an element in the landscape could have the potential to attract new large scale minerals, industrial, infrastructure or other commercial development, particularly on the western fringes around Shap due to the relationship of the M6 and several quarries. Improvements to surfacing, lighting and information systems along the motorway could affect its appearance and people's awareness of it in the landscape.
- Energy infrastructure developments and associated vertical structures such as, communication masts, pylons or large scale wind turbines could erode the open and remote character of the landscape.

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

Natural Features

- Regenerate heather through management programmes including reduction of stocking levels, control of bracken, phased cutting and burning.
- Manage limestone grassland to improve the variety of flowering plants through appropriate stocking levels and control of scrub, bracken and rushes.
- Restrict localised agricultural improvement particularly of isolated fields within the moorland including application of organic manure or fertiliser, liming or herbicide treatment.
- Avoid planting of coniferous blocks on the open moorland and consider restoration of moorland on clearance and felling of existing blocks.
- Help retain the open and unspoiled qualities of this landscape by reducing existing blocks of coniferous plantations and discouraging additional plantation blocks.
- Protect and enhance tarns and wetlands through carefully controlling drainage schemes to safeguard water quality and levels, through regenerating water margin vegetation by preventing overgrazing or poaching by stock, and by controlling scrub encroachment.
- Protect and enhance limestone pavements and scars and associated features such as glacial erratics (e.g. around Shap) by preventing removal or disturbance and setting suitable grazing levels. This may involve the local exclusion of sheep outside areas of commons.
- Reinforce existing tree clumps on the fringes of the commons in field corners and next to farmsteads and tarns by appropriate management, natural regeneration, restocking with indigenous species and exclusion of stock.
- Support steps to move SSSIs into favourable condition, including the use of temporary fencing in open areas, as this will enhance the landscape character and ecological interest in the long term.

Cultural Features

- Discourage introduction of permanent fences on the Commons; temporary fencing may be acceptable in

order to assist heather regeneration and to improve the condition of SSSIs.

- Manage common and allotment boundary walls in a traditional way.
- Conserve historic sites such as burial mounds, cairns and settlement earthworks avoiding damaging agricultural or other activities.
- Conserve the geological, historic or ecological importance of disused quarries.

Development

- Avoid development in remote, undeveloped, prominent and exposed areas that would degrade the landscape character. Particular developments that could cause harm include telecommunications masts, pylons, large scale wind turbines, and overhead transmission lines and telephone lines. Small scale wind turbines may be accommodated if visually and functionally related to and in proportion with existing used buildings.
- Resist the construction of new access tracks and roads that compromise the relative wildness of the landscape.
- Resist expansion of major developments such as quarrying and industry. Where this is unavoidable minimise the impact by careful siting, design and high standards of landscape treatment.
- 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 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.