

# Low Farmland

## Location

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This sub type can be found in several parts of the county – north, east and west of Carlisle, south of Whitehaven and north of Barrow. The sub type continues into the Lake District national park east of Seascale and is classified as Type D1 – Low Farmland in the Lake District National Park Landscape Character Assessment.

## Key Characteristics

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- Undulating and rolling topography
- Intensely farmed agricultural pasture dominates
- Patchy areas of woodland provide contrast to the pasture
- Woodland is uncommon west towards the coast
- Fields are large and rectangular
- Hedges, hedgerow trees and fences bound fields and criss cross up and over the rolling landscape

## Physical character

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Permo Triassic bedrock is overlain by thick glacial drift deposits forming sand and gravel eskers, low drumlins and a variety of undulations and topographical variations in the landscape. The rolling topography is dissected by small and larger meandering river valleys, with the latter being found through the lower plain around Carlisle. The land is low lying, usually below 100m AOD.

## Land cover and land use

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Much of this type is intensively farmed agricultural land. The predominant land cover is pasture. This is interspersed with arable land. Fields tend to be fairly large and bounded by hedges with hedgerow trees, or replacement fences. The hedges form an interlocking matrix across the undulating land.

Tree clumps, riverside and hedgerow trees are notable features. Woodland is uncommon particularly close to the coast in the west. It increases as you move inland but is often found as patchy woodland. The valley of the River Lyne runs from Kirkclinton north eastwards forming an important linear feature east of Carlisle. It includes hanging and ancient semi-natural woodlands. Areas of wet pasture are found in low lying areas and near watercourses.

The settlement pattern is varied, with large and small nucleated traditional settlements intermixed with many discrete farms dispersed across the landscape. Buildings are often rendered with rich red sandstone buildings dominant along the west coast, and lighter sandstone buildings around Carlisle. Straight roads are common.

Pylons and telegraph poles are generally subtle elements, but pylons can sometimes dominate, especially where there is more than one line of them.

## Ecology

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This is an intensely, agricultural landscape where semi-natural vegetation is scarce. There are areas of grazing marsh and floodplain habitat north west of Wigton and north east of Carlisle. This supports a range of plants including creeping bent and marsh foxtail. In wetter field margins greater reedmace, reed canary grass, water plantain and sedges are supported. Hedgerows are common, but often species-poor and woodland is scarce west of Carlisle. Significant woodland cover is however present along the River Lyne, supporting a range of upland oak and wet woodland communities. Small and medium sized rivers are a common feature of the landscape, supporting small ribbons of woodland and otters. Several small remnant lowland raised bogs are present around the Carlisle area and these support areas of birch and pine woodland, rush pasture and purple moor-grass and small areas of raised mire vegetation. One has a colony of the uncommon white-

faced darter dragonfly. This landscape is important for farmland birds, including yellowhammer, linnet and tree sparrow. This landscape is also important for barn owl to the north and east.

## Historic and cultural character

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In the north of the county this landscape type is greatly influenced by the presence of the Anglo Scottish border and contains a number of medieval fortified sites including tower houses. Cropmark sites of prehistoric and Romano-British settlements are found. Other archaeological and historical interest in the landscape includes Hadrian's Wall and sites as diverse as Egremont Castle, the former Royal Ordnance Factory at Gretna and stretched across the Scottish border, Britain's earliest operational nuclear power station at Calder Hall. The settlement pattern is varied. To the west of Carlisle areas of medieval influenced nucleated settlements around former common arable fields and more dispersed farmsteads developed around the time of planned field enclosure. To the north and east of Carlisle and around Millom field patterns are dominated by planned enclosures and ancient enclosures. South of Whitehaven more traditional settlements are dominated by modern settlements and development associated with Sellafield. In general the field pattern is very regular with the area to the north of Carlisle characterised by late enclosure.

The Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins collaboration 'The Lazy Tour of Idle Apprentices' describes a journey from Corrode Fell to Allonby.

## Perceptual character

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This is a traditional working farmed landscape, interspersed with large scale industrial developments in the countryside. It is generally large scale and open. Views can be wide and long distance to the Fells and sea and have an expansive feeling, or small and contained giving a more intimate feel. Wind sculpted trees and hedges give a feeling of exposure and connections with the windswept coastline. Here the experience of the landscape can be more readily influenced by changes in the seasons and weather and there can be a more elemental experience close to the coastline. Woodlands,

and traditional scale farms and associated tree clumps provide distinctive punctuation and interest in the landscape.

## Sensitive characteristics or features

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The matrix of interlocking hedges, woodlands, trees along rivers and fields and wind sculpted trees in hedges in coastal areas are sensitive to changes in land management. The ecological value associated with grazing marsh, wetlands and floodplains are also sensitive to changes in land management. Frontiers of the Roman Empire: Hadrian's Wall and associated Romano British settlements are sensitive to infrastructure and other development. The traditional feel of villages and farms can provide a sense of stepping back in time in places and is sensitive to unsympathetic village expansion. The open and uninterrupted views to the Solway Firth and Lakeland Fells are sensitive to tall infrastructure development.

## Vision

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### **The key features of this well maintained working landscape will be conserved and enhanced.**

Further agricultural change and development will be absorbed and combined with measures to conserve and enhance landscape, wildlife features and minimise urban intrusions. Limited field enlargement and the removal of hedges will take place but the management of retained hedges will be a key priority to maintain traditional boundary features. Trees and woodland will be managed, restored and enhanced and will be used to integrate urban intrusions into the landscape.

## 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**

- An increase in short rotation coppice, biomass or other woodland planting could help mitigate against climate change and support renewable energy production.

- An increase in rainfall and extreme weather events could result in an increase in flash flooding. Flood risk management may result in man made mitigation measures such as strengthened river defences, re-engineered bridges and access routes.

### **Management Practices**

- Further intensification could result in a depletion of traditional field boundary patterns and the replacement of hedges with wire fences.
- Loss and neglect of features such as hedgerow trees, copses and wetland.
- There could be damage to lowland raised bogs and wetlands due to agricultural pollution, and changes to drainage that cause drying out.
- There has been an increase in the number of invasive species along watercourses, including Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed.

### **Development**

- Green infrastructure provides an opportunity to seek enhancements to the landscape, biodiversity and cultural heritages adjacent to urban areas and to create green corridors between settlements.
- Creeping urbanisation includes airport, warehouse, garden centre and large car park development which can degrade the traditional landscape characteristics.
- Large scale farm development sited away from the traditional farmstead can erode the pastoral character.
- Farm diversification could lead to an increase in the use of farm land for horse grazing and equestrian uses could result in changes to field patterns and boundaries. An introduction of stables and ménages could cause incremental change the character of the farmed areas.
- New nuclear power generation adjacent to Sellafield could come forward towards the end of the decade along with associated infrastructure which could change the character of the landscape.
- Upgrades to the national grid to provide energy security and support new power generation could result in larger pylons and sub stations.
- The continued need to support renewable energy schemes could likely result in an increase in large scale wind energy schemes. Wind energy schemes have already changed the character of the adjacent Ridge and Valley sub type and without careful control this could be replicated here.

- New large scale energy Infrastructure and the impact of the transportation of the infrastructure for potential large scale wind turbines could affect small country roads which may not have the capacity for such large loads.
- Coal extraction and the re-working of previous coal sites could become prevalent in these areas, specifically in areas around Flimby and Workington, which could impact upon local character.

### **Access and Recreation**

- New recreation facilities close to towns and cities, such as golf courses could lead to pressures in these landscapes.
- 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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### **Climate Change**

- Encourage biomass, short rotation coppice and energy crops that avoid areas of sensitive habitat, such as grazing marsh habitat and that seek to enhance hedge boundaries around fields. Planting should respect the scale of the local landscape features. The edges of short rotation forestry should be soft and follow the grain of the topography.
- Encourage appropriate woodland or other planting in landscapes higher up the river catchment areas to help provide natural alleviation to extreme weather events and reduce the amount of hard engineered solutions needed alongside rivers and close to settlements.

### **Natural Features**

- Manage and restock hedgerow trees, parkland trees and copses round farms and villages.
- Increase planting of mixed woodland and tree groups of varying sizes to create more panoramic diversity and colour
- Manage and enhance areas of semi natural and ancient woodland.

- Create 'linked networks' of vegetation using native trees and shrubs to form 'ecological corridors' as well as emphasise valleys.
- Use woodland to contain and soften those areas that have been degraded by development or require an improved setting in the landscape.
- Use woodland planting particularly along the M6 corridor, east of Carlisle, where strong landscape features are needed to compete with this divisive element.
- Manage raised bogs, wetlands and grazing marsh to improve wildlife diversity and provide contrasts in texture and colour to improved farmland.
- Restore wetland or unimproved grassland in particular around existing areas of moss. This may include 'blocking' of drainage systems, restricting grazing, appropriate wetland planting or seeding, removal of hedgerows, scrub and woodland.
- Plant deciduous tree groups and lines on garths, around farm buildings, along farm access roads and main entrances.
- Reduce the impact of large-scale new farm buildings by locating them in a non-prominent position subservient to traditional farm buildings, broken down in mass, softened by landscape proposals using a choice of sympathetic colours and non-reflective finishes.
- Encourage retention of traditional stone gateposts and features.
- Encourage horse grazing and equestrian uses to respect field boundaries and field patterns. Stables and other facilities should be sited sensitively with appropriate landscape mitigation to prevent the erosion of the pastoral farmland character.
- Ensure new development respects the historic form and scale of villages creating new focal spaces and using materials that are sympathetic to local vernacular styles. Further ribbon development or fragmented development should be supported where it is compatible with the wider landscape character.
- Improve visual awareness of the individual settlement, land uses and cultural landmarks along each road and provide locations for stopping, viewing and picnicking.
- Encourage environmental improvements along roadside settlements to include traffic calming, planting and stronger definition of gateway entrances and exits. Introduce roadside planting of deciduous and mixed species to enrich views from the road.

### ***Cultural Features***

- Restore and maintain remaining hedgerows to strengthen field patterns and convey an impression of good health.
- Renovate gappy overgrown hedges through management and replanting.
- Discourage introduction of fences to replace or gap up hedgerows
- Manage hedgerows in a traditional way.
- Restore and maintain traditional kests (hedge banks) and small scale field patterns.
- In all areas strengthen and develop field patterns to provide an improved setting for towns and villages.

### ***Development***

- Energy infrastructure including nuclear and large scale wind energy generation, pylons and substations should be carefully sited and designed to prevent this sub type becoming an energy landscape. Prominent locations should be avoided and appropriate mitigation should be included to minimise adverse affects.
- When new development takes place consider opportunities to enhance and strengthen green infrastructure to provide a link between urban areas and the wider countryside. Reinforcing woodland belts, enhancing water and soil quality and the provision of green corridors from and between settlements could all help reinforce landscape and biodiversity features.

### ***Access and Recreation***

- Integrate new recreation development, such as golf courses, into the countryside by careful siting, appropriate ground modelling and planting and exploit opportunities these developments provide to improve visual and wildlife diversity.
- Small scale sensitive farm based tourism/recreational businesses should be well sited close to or within existing farm buildings and appropriate landscaping should be included to integrate new facilities into the landscape.
- 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 public access to farmland through farm stewardship or other schemes.