Sub type 13c

Fells

Location

This landscape sub type forms an extension of the Lake District Fells around Shap, and extension of the Howgill Fells. It also includes extensive areas around Orton and Ravenstondale Fells and Middleton Fell south of Sedbergh. The sub type continues into the Lake District national park and is classified as Type F– Rugged/ Craggy Volcanic High Fell in the Lake District National Park Landscape Character Assessment. The landscape character continues into the Yorkshire Dales National Park where it is characterised as the Southern Howgill Fells Character Area and the Three Peaks and Central Moors and Fells Character Area. All of this type meets the criteria for National Park designation and is being considered for designation in 2010/11.

Key Characteristics

- Rugged, steep sided, round topped hills and ridges
- Deeply incised valleys and ghylls
- Rocky cliffs, scree and outcrops
- Open expansive rough grass, heath and bracken
- Enclosed pasture at lower levels
- Complex network of streams
- Some wooded ghylls and remnant broadleaved woodlands
- Lower lying edges of the central Lakeland High Fells
- Panoramic views

Physical character

Geologically, these fells and ridges are extensions of either the Lake District Fells or the Pennines and rise to around 700m AOD.

The Lake District extensions comprise the Howgills, Shap Fells and Middleton Fells. They are developed on Silurian grey sandstones and siltstones (Coniston Grit). The rocks have eroded to form steep sided rounded hills with deeply incised valleys and gills. There are occasional rocky crags, waterfalls and dramatic steep slopes with scree and boulders, particularly on the northern and eastern flanks. The outer fells or 'knotts' are knobbly in outline with rocky outcrops.

In Pennine extensions like Wild Boar Fell and High Barbon Fell, Carboniferous limestone capped by millstone grit produces more angular, stepped outlines. Rocky cliffs and scree occur on steep scarp slopes with softer dip slopes. Streams cut across the landscape. Caves, other karst features and various natural and engineered rock exposures are evident.

Land cover and land use

The fells are mainly covered by moorland, rough grass, bracken and wet rushes. Remnant patches of heather survive on some fells. Generally there is little or no tree cover. A few lower slopes and fells include areas of coniferous plantations. These often reflect the landscape form and leave craggy rocks exposed on upper slopes.

Lower slopes tend to be enclosed by stone walls as large fields or allotments of semi-improved pasture. Tree cover is more extensive here, largely found as wooded ghylls, in clumps around scattered farms and boundaries and in remnant broadleaved woodlands on the fellside. Fellsides along the Lune valley are distinguished by parkland trees and woods.

The area is lightly settled with many vernacular farm buildings with boundary trees, scrub gorse and thorn. Farmsteads tend to be strung out along the base of the fells. Local gritstone and limestone are used widely in walls and buildings. Man made infrastructure is limited to transmission stations, pylons and overhead lines associated with the M6 motorway. This intrudes in the relatively natural moorland landscape. Away from the M6 corridor road access is limited and characterised by small roads that follow valleys and the grain of the landscape.

Ecology

Much of this moorland is covered by acid grassland, particularly the Howgill Fells; however parts of Birkbeck Fells and Middleton Fell are covered by extensive areas of upland heathland and blanket bog. Rush pasture is frequent along the unenclosed valley bottoms. On lower ground there are species-rich hay meadows along some of the remote valleys. Limestone is present under some parts of this landscape and in places, notably The Clouds, it outcrops forming areas of limestone pavement with associated areas of limestone grassland. Species-rich springs and flushes are present locally. Upland oak woodland is present along some ghylls and valley sides on lower ground.

The Shap Fells are extensively designated for ecological interest. This includes heather dominated blanket bog on deep peat with widespread flush communities, areas of raised mire, a range of acidic grasslands and small broadleaved woodlands. There are diverse upland breeding bird populations and a sizeable herd of red deer. The Middleton Fells have extensive heather cover which supports herds of red deer. The wildlife of the fells includes buzzards, kestrels, foxes and hares.

Historic and cultural character

The area is dominated by unenclosed uplands. There are some ancient fields and intakes. The occasional isolated farmsteads are often on ancient sites and in the valleys some of the farms are located on medieval vaccary sites. Only the lower slopes are enclosed by often large, though not always regular, fields bounded by dry stone walls with hog holes. The landscape retains many historic features including droveways, pennings and bields. Archaeological earthworks and other remains are generally well preserved and shielings are particularly common in areas like the Howgills.

Perceptual character

These are generally unpretentious fells and lonely valleys which are dwarfed by the higher fells elsewhere in the County. The higher slopes and summits afford extensive and panoramic views. The fells are tranquil and have a sense of remoteness due to the lack of development and abundance of natural features. Changes in weather conditions can accentuate the sense of remoteness as views are enclosed and experiences become more elemental. In contrast to the Lakeland Fells these areas are little visited. The Howgills form a distinct cluster of soaring sweeping fells and have a higher profile and identity. AW Wainwright recognised their distinctive form, describing them in his walking guide as 'Sleek and smooth, looking from a distance, like velvet curtains in sunlight, like steep sided but gently domed……Their soaring and sweeping lines are not interrupted by walls or fences……a remarkable concentration of summits, often likened to a huddle of squatting elephants…..'.

Sensitive features or characteristics

Areas of open, uninterrupted upland, sometimes with dramatic sweeping and soaring fell sides, with a lack of roads and development provide a sense of tranquility and isolation that is sensitive to development.

Vision

The high quality elements present within this landscape will be conserved and enhanced.
The moorland will be sympathetically managed. The grassland and grazing levels will be managed to enhance land cover and species diversity. At lower levels the landscape will benefit from strong patterns of limestone walls and hedgerows which will be conserved and enhanced over time. Rare features, such as species rich hay meadows, will be expanded and conserved. The areas of coniferous forest will be improved and will relate more closely to the rolling landform, while patterns of woodland copses associated with hill tops and farm buildings will enrich the landscape where they exist and provide diversity of habitats. The open, unspoilt, uncluttered and wild qualities and characteristics of these landscapes will be conserved through resisting intrusive development which may impinge on these unique features; this could include vertical energy developments such as large scale wind turbines or pylons.

Changes in the Landscape

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

Climate Change

- This area is heavily influenced by natural erosion processes. These could intensify with increased rainfall and extreme weather events. Land cover and management practices could be changed to make the landscape more robust to effects of climate change.
- An increase in invasive species however, could affect key landscape characteristics.
- Blanket bog has become degraded. This effects its carbon sequestration potential. Good condition bog can help mitigate against adverse effects of climate change.

Management Practices

- Grazing pressures continue to degrade heather cover, limestone and other grassland and wildlife diversity.
- As farm incomes reduce, the loss of farm labour could be contributing to localised neglect of traditional features including occasional derelict walls and buildings, under-grazed woodlands and over mature farm copses.
- Coniferous afforestation pressures have abated in recent years however interest could increase if incentives are provided to support short rotation forestry.

Development

- Energy infrastructure developments and other vertical structures such as, communication masts, pylons, transmission lines, telephone lines and transport infrastructure could erode the open, undeveloped and wild character of the landscape. Such development could also have a negative effect on the settings of the National Parks.
- 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 affects its appearance and people's awareness of it in 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 suppressed heather through detailed management programmes including reduction of stocking levels, control of bracken, phased cutting and burning in accordance with Natural England's Heather and Grass Burning Code.
- Manage semi-natural acidic grassland to enhance biological diversity including reduction in stocking levels, control of bracken and rushes.
- Manage limestone grassland through appropriate grazing and scrub clearance regimes.
- Restrict further agricultural improvement including ploughing, re-seeding, application of fertiliser, liming or herbicide treatment.
- Protect and enhance fell wetland 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 and becks from stock to encourage development of diverse ground flora, scattered trees and woodland.
- Protect rocky outcrops, screes, potholes and caves by preventing removal, infilling or disturbance and controlling scrub encroachment.
- Reinforce existing tree clumps that accentuate farmsteads as visual islands at the base of fells.
- Restore and reinforce remnant grazed broad-leaved woodland by exclusion of livestock, natural regeneration restocking and appropriate management.
- Develop small to medium scale deciduous and locally native planting on suitable sites, and in particular on the lower slopes, valleys and ghylls.
- Ameliorate existing coniferous plantations including softening geometric outlines, introduction of open spaces and species diversification.

Cultural Features

- Manage the existing pattern of stone walls and repair derelict walls in a traditional way.

- Maintain and repair traditional farm buildings where they are significant landscape features.

Development

- Avoid development in remote, open, prominent and exposed areas that would degrade the landscape character. Development that could cause harm includes telecommunications masts, pylons, large scale wind turbines, and overhead transmission lines and telephone lines.
- 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

- Any parking facilities should be sensitively sited and well designed to minimise the impact on the landscape.
- Manage public access so as to avoid landscape damage and disturbance to sensitive habitats including sensitively designed waymarking, improved gates and gaps, bridges, boundary maintenance, appropriate surfaces and better interpretation.