

WOODED FARMLAND

Landscape character

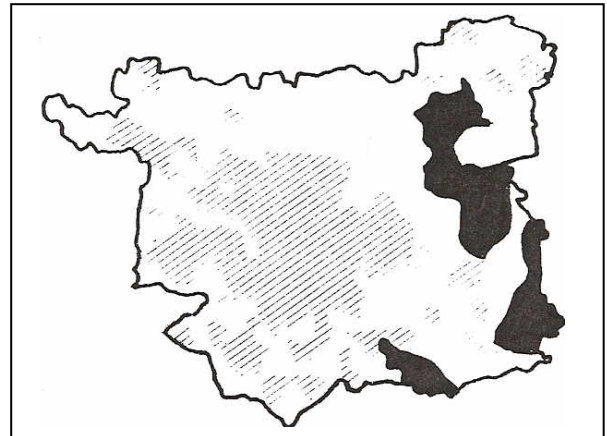
The wooded farmland landscape type occurs mainly within the Eastern Limestone Belt and can be found in four landscape units: Methley Park (LCM17); West Bramham (ELB5); Aberford (ELB6); and Ledsham to Lotherton (ELB7). It forms gently rolling or undulating areas of large scale arable farmland characterised by large blocks of mixed woodland. Many of these woodland blocks are sharp edged and regular in shape, forming part of old and existing estate holdings.

In contrast, strips of semi-natural woodland form attractive, softer features along valley becks. Both these types of woodland help create a well wooded horizon when the area is viewed from within. Pockets of pasture occur around some of the settlements and around large houses, but the open arable fields predominate.

These tend to be bordered by low gappy hedgerows, with only occasional hedgerow trees breaking up the simple pattern. Small rural villages and isolated, generally large farm buildings, lie scattered within these areas.

Forces for change

The main influence on the evolution of the wooded farmland areas has been the development and management of much of the land as part of large parkland and estate holdings. This has tended to result in the simple but characteristic pattern of large areas of mixed plantations and intervening areas of arable farmland. This pattern has remained largely intact, although changing agricultural practices have resulted in a gradual decline in the condition of hedgerows, which tend to be low cut and gappy, and a consequential fragmentation of the field pattern. Future change could occur with proposed new commercial or highway development in the area.



Management strategy and guidelines

The overall management strategy for the wooded farmland landscape type should be one of conservation of the characteristic features. In some areas, this should be combined with a careful balance of restoration, where parkland and farmland features are in decline. Enhancement through new planting may be appropriate, but this should reinforce the existing pattern of tree cover rather than creating a new character.

Management guidelines which are applicable for all the landscape units within the wooded farmland landscape type are described below. Detailed management strategies and guidelines for the individual landscape units are described in separate documents, using the references above.

- *Conserve and enhance the pastoral and wooded continuity of the narrow valleys and enhance their value as landscape, wildlife and recreation corridors.*
The isolated pastoral and wooded valleys lying along small becks or streams form key linear features and important landscape and wildlife corridors in an otherwise cultivated area. To maintain this value, areas of pasture should be retained and consideration given to returning bankside arable fields to grassland. In addition, natural regeneration of bankside trees should be encouraged and consideration given to encouraging recreational access along the valleys.

- *Conserve and restore existing parkland and where opportunities arise, consider restoring areas of former parkland.*
Landscaped parks and their surrounding estates are the distinctive feature of this landscape, providing much of the woodland cover so characteristic of this area. As well as their historical importance, these parklands provide diversity and interest in the landscape. True parkland throughout the Leeds district is in decline, with some areas being taken into intensive agricultural production, which emphasises the need to conserve and manage these existing areas. Wherever possible it is important to retain the peaceful character of traditional parkland and to encourage new planting to replace old trees. Planting should respect the original design intentions of individual parks, which may involve historical research and drawing up a restoration plan. Where opportunities arise through incentives such as the Countryside Stewardship scheme to help manage existing areas, these should be investigated.
- *Conserve the wooded character of mature roadside trees.*
Roadside trees are important features along some roads, helping to increase the well wooded nature of this landscape type. Many of these trees are mature and form remnants of tree avenues which were planted as part of the designed parkland and estates which are common throughout. These mature trees need to be retained until other trees have grown to replace them. To maintain and enhance this tree cover, new planting should be carried out, using species planted in the original avenue designs.
- *Conserve existing tree cover and enhance where tree cover is weaker, through medium scale planting.*
Due to the well wooded nature of this landscape, there are probably limited opportunities for significant amounts of new planting. However, where the tree cover is weaker, there may be opportunities for medium scale planting to enhance and complement the overall wooded effect. Woods up to field size may be appropriate, but care should be taken not to block off views through the landscape. Small woodland may appear out of scale in this landscape type
- *New planting along woodland edges should favour native trees.*
The gently rolling nature of this landscape is such that woodland edges are the most prominent features. As a result a major part of many large woods cannot be seen. These woods are suited to commercial forestry operations, although if lines of conifers appear along woodland edges they can present an unnatural appearance. This effect could be softened by the inclusion of well shaped and scaled, irregularly spaced groups of broadleaves to vary species height and diversity.
- *Conserve and restore all primary hedgerows and manage them more positively as landscape features.*
The landscape of the wooded farmlands is characterised in the main by a large scale regular field pattern infused with large blocks of woodland. Field pattern is not a dominant visual influence where woodland cover is strong. However, where tree cover is weaker, the field pattern becomes more significant and here it is important to avoid any further fragmentation of the landscape. In particular, it is important to conserve primary hedgelines, along roadsides, bridleways, footpaths and farm and parish boundaries. In addition, they should be managed more positively as landscape features, planting up individual gaps where appropriate.
- *Conserve the wooded linear earthworks.*
One of the characteristic features of the wooded farmland are the linear earthworks, which are prominent due to their scrub and woodland cover. As well as their historic importance, these earthbanks provide important linear tree cover, which has the visual effect of linking together separate areas of woodland. These earthbanks should be conserved and their wooded cover managed to conserve and enhance their value.