

OPEN ARABLE FARMLAND

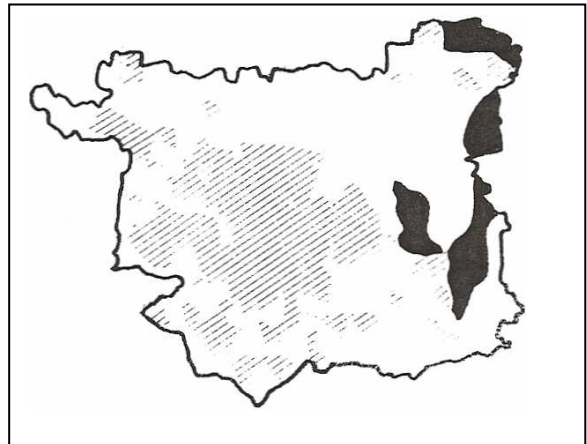
Landscape character

The open arable landscape type occurs in the lower lying and gently rolling eastern pans of the district, and can be found in four landscape units:

Barwick to Garforth (LCMJ 5); East Garforth (ELBI); East Bramham (ELB2); and East Wetherby (VOYI). Occurring on generally fertile, productive soils, this landscape type is characterised by medium to large regular fields of arable farmland. The openness of the farmland is emphasised by the lack of hedgerow trees and woodland, which allows for long, uninterrupted views from areas of higher ground. Where woodlands do occur they are mainly within small copses or plantations. Isolated farmsteads and buildings are present throughout, with settlements restricted to small villages. Occasional pockets of pasture occur around some settlements, although these tend to be dwarfed by the surrounding large scale arable farmland.

Forces for change

The main pressures influencing landscape change in the areas of open arable farmland, appear to be related to gradual agricultural intensification. Amalgamation of fields into larger units has occurred to a small extent, but perhaps of greater significance is the gradual loss of hedgerows, with many appearing poorly maintained and suffering from neglect. This has the effect of emphasising the sense of openness, particularly on the exposed ridge tops. Today, with the new EC set-aside rules, the amount of set-aside land in landscape types such as this is likely to increase, creating new opportunities



for land management. Within some areas of open arable farmland, small-scale mineral extraction activities have also influenced past landscape change.

Management strategy and guidelines

Due to the loss of structure and decline in many traditional farmland features, the overall management strategy for the open arable farmland landscape type should be one of restoration. There may also be opportunities for enhancement through small scale woodland planting, although this should be carefully designed to maintain the generally open nature of the landscape.

Management guidelines, which are applicable for all the landscape units within the open arable farmland landscape type, are described below.

Detailed management strategies and guidelines for the individual landscape units are described in a separate document, using the reference listed above.

- *Control the design and location of new agricultural buildings, particularly where they are highly visible in the open arable landscape.*

The traditional farm buildings of the arable plateau farmland are gradually being replaced by the construction of large modern farm buildings, which often look out of place and can be visually intrusive. Many of these new buildings are large by necessity and therefore careful siting and design are important considerations as no amount of landscaping will conceal a building that is fundamentally badly designed. Big buildings can sometimes sit well in the open plateau farmlands, but only if they are well sited in relation to other features such as landform and tree cover. Selection of building materials and choice of colours should complement those in existing buildings and in the surrounding landscape.

- *Conserve and enhance the pastoral and wooded continuity of the small river valleys and enhance their value as landscape, wildlife and recreation corridors.*

The isolated and occasional pastoral and wooded valleys within this landscape type form key linear features and important landscape and ecological 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. New small scale planting may also be appropriate, designed to reflect the sinuous nature of the watercourses. Consideration should be given to encouraging recreational access along these valleys.

- *Encourage the development of wide field margins along streamlines and woodland edges.*

With the outlook for farming changing particularly in areas of intensive farming such as the arable plateau farmland, expanded field margins offer positive opportunities for enhancing both landscape and wildlife interest. Options include wildlife fallow margins to encourage wildflowers and grassland margins to be managed as rough grassland. To gain maximum benefit, field margins should be developed alongside features of interest such as primary hedgerows, woodland edges, streamlines and footpaths.

- *Enhance tree cover through small to medium scale woodland planting.*

There is scope within most of the open arable landscapes for woodland planting. This is particularly the case, however, in the East Garforth landscape unit, where there is a fragmented pattern of generally large hedged fields. The siting and design of new woods will need to be carefully planned, with the aim being to try and frame views, rather than totally block them off. New planting could be targeted, where possible, on hilltops and rising ground, where existing cover is sparse and the field pattern fragmented. Particular care should be taken to shape the edges of the new woods. Deciduous planting is preferable, although mixed woodlands would be acceptable as long as edges and skylines are sensitively handled.

- *New woodland planting may be appropriate as screening for prominent industrial developments, farm buildings or garden centres, although this should be carefully designed to fit in with a wider planting programme for the area.*

There is some scope for woodland planting within this landscape to screen prominent farm buildings, garden centres, industrial areas, quarries and roads. Planting should where possible be used in a positive way to strengthen the overall farm landscape and as part of any wider woodland planting scheme, rather than looking like an afterthought in an attempt to hide a particularly intrusive building or section of road.

- *Strengthen hedgelines by encouraging natural regeneration of hedgerow trees or if necessary, replanting of locally occurring species.*

Where hedgerows and hedgerow trees have been lost or removed, the landscape can appear rather open and structureless. Hedgerow trees can have the effect of filtering views through the landscape helping to create a better sense of scale and enclosure. Where hedgerow trees still remain, these should be conserved. Where they have been lost, hedgerows should be strengthened wherever possible through encouragement of natural regeneration or replanting, using locally occurring native tree species.

- *Conserve and restore all primary hedgerows and prevent further field amalgamation where at all possible.*

Large regular fields bounded by hedgerows are a characteristic feature of the open arable landscape, although the gently rolling topography does not allow this pattern to register strongly. Where hedgerows have been removed, the field pattern is often fragmented and the scale of the landscape increased. In these areas, it is important to avoid further fragmentation of the landscape through hedgerow removal. Where the hedgerows are in poor condition, priority should be given to restoring primary hedgelines, including those along roads, footpaths and bridle ways and farm boundaries, through appropriate management. Where hedgerows are very gappy or have been removed, consideration should be given to replacement planting.