

# RIVER FLOODPLAIN

## Landscape character

The river floodplain landscape type can be found in three landscape units: the Otley to Pool Floodplain (WHF6); the Arthington Floodplain (WHF7); and the Linton-Collingham Floodplain (WHF8). It is characterised by a flat, cultivated river floodplain, following the winding course of the River Wharfe, between Otley in the west and Wetherby in the east. Large regular fields of pastoral and arable farmland with hedgerows and isolated hedgerow trees are characteristic features, although occasionally 'pocket' of parkland with parkland type trees also occur.

Mature trees line the banks of the meandering river, with small copses appearing elsewhere. Underlain by alluvial and sand and gravel deposits, the floodplain has been worked for many years for aggregates. Where land has been disturbed, the fabric of the landscape has started to break down, to be replaced by large areas of open water where extraction activities have ceased.

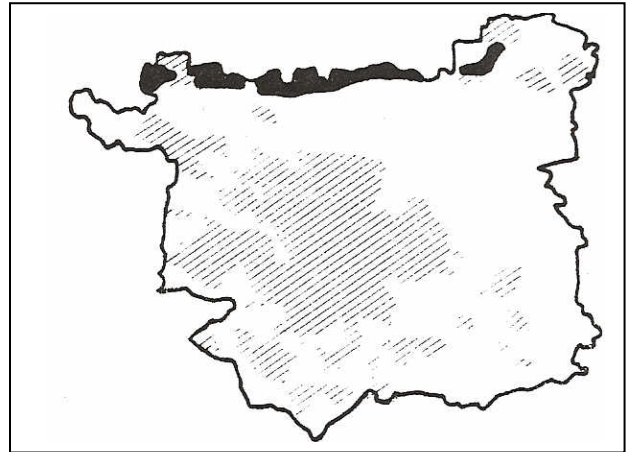
## Forces for change

One of the main forces for change in parts of the river floodplain in recent years has been the extraction of high-grade mineral deposits of sand and gravel. This has resulted in the creation of open water pits which can lie in rather bland and featureless surrounds, permanently changing the nature of the pastoral floodplain.

Elsewhere, there appears to have been a gradual shift from pastoral to arable farmland and a gradual deterioration in the condition of field boundaries. Golf course development in one part of the area, around Linton has led to a gradual 'suburbanisation' of the narrow floodplain.

## Management strategy and guidelines

The overall management strategy for the river floodplain landscape type should be a careful balance between conservation of the important and characteristic features of the floodplain, combined with restoration where these features, through agricultural change, are being lost or are falling into decline. Management guidelines which are applicable for all the landscape units within the river floodplain landscape type are described below.



Detailed management strategies and guidelines for the individual landscape units are described in separate documents, references as above.

- *Control development along the river floodplain to ensure that any new development reinforces the historic pattern of riverside towns and villages.*  
The alluvial floodplain of the River Wharfe forms an important feature along the length of the Wharfe valley. The continuity of the river corridor is often disrupted by built development, particularly in the area close to Otley. New development should be restricted where possible to higher ground, avoiding the lower lying floodplain. In addition, any new development should be carefully located to preserve the historic settlement pattern of riverside towns and villages such as Otley and Pool.
- *Restoration proposals for sand and gravel mineral workings should be based On an assessment of landscape character to reflect the characteristic features of the river floodplain.*  
Restoration of sand and gravel workings along the Otley to Pool stretch of the Wharfe floodplain has traditionally been to open water. This has resulted in the creation of a new type of landscape in the previously intact pastoral floodplain. Where restoration is in the early stages of development, the immediate surrounds to the open water pits can appear rather bland and featureless. Restoration schemes should therefore take account of how the site relates to the surrounding wider landscape in order to assess whether reinstating the original landscapc or creating a new landscape is most appropriate.

- *Opportunities should be sought for creating wet/and habitats during restoration of sand and gravel workings.* Restoration of sand and gravel workings along the Wharfe floodplain has traditionally been to open water. Most restoration schemes offer positive opportunities for creative conservation and enhancement of landscape character, in particular the creation of wetland habitats such as reedbed and marsh. Where possible, natural regeneration should be encouraged.
- *Retain grassland along alluvial floodplains and where possible consider a return from arable to pasture under traditional grassland management.* Traditionally the river floodplains were managed for haymaking and summer grazing. However, flood alleviation schemes have helped to stimulate an increase in arable production, with this being particularly apparent along the eastern end of the Wharfe floodplain. This has resulted in the break up of continuity of the river corridor, with the associated loss of wetland habitats. Given the current agricultural need to reduce surplus cereal production and to control nitrate leaching into watercourses, river floodplains would be the most suitable areas to return to traditional grassland management. This could be done through promotion of the Countryside Stewardship scheme.
- *Identify opportunities for recreating riverside wetland habitats.* Reedbeds and marshland are typically associated with river corridors, and are particularly important for wildlife as well as giving an element of naturalness to river landscapes. They are now uncommon and need to be protected. In addition, through government incentives, there may be opportunities for creating new wetlands in certain areas.
- *Enhance the continuity of the river channel through encouragement of natural regeneration of bankside trees.* Scattered waterside trees and scrub are important features contributing to the riverside environment. To maintain this effect, natural regeneration of trees should be encouraged, but care should be taken to maintain a variety of habitats alongside the river margin and to avoid ecologically important sites such as unimproved grasslands and wetlands. Larger scale woodland planting should be avoided.
- *Conserve and restore the characteristic tree avenues which line roads and tracks leading up to large houses.* In places, mature tree avenues leading up to large houses or farms form an important, but localised feature within the floodplain. These should be conserved and restored where appropriate through the replanting of suitable replacements where the original trees have reached over maturity.
- *Seek to control field amalgamation and hedgerow loss, restoring hedges where these have been lost or are in poor condition.* Field pattern is an important visual element along the floodplain, particularly when viewed from adjacent high ground. The fields are bounded by mixed and thorn hedgerows which are in places becoming thin and gappy, and are being replaced by wire fencing, which results in a more open, neglected landscape. Replacement hedgerow planting or restoration through more appropriate management should be encouraged in these areas, although they should not be allowed to grow tall as this would have the effect of over enclosing the floodplain.