

River Gorge

Landscape character

The river gorge landscape type occurs in only one landscape unit: the Wetherby Gorge (ELB8).

It is characterised by a narrow winding strip of land, cut by the River Wharfe as it meanders through the Eastern Limestone Belt. The banks are narrow and in places steeply sloping, clothed by dense deciduous woodland, with mature trees overhanging the river.

Where woodland does not extend to the edge, narrow strips of pasture or larger fields of arable farmland lie directly along the banks. Isolated farms or works such as sewage works generally lie well screened along the banks. The gorge is somewhat inaccessible and not particularly visible, except from crossing points such as bridges and certain public footpaths.

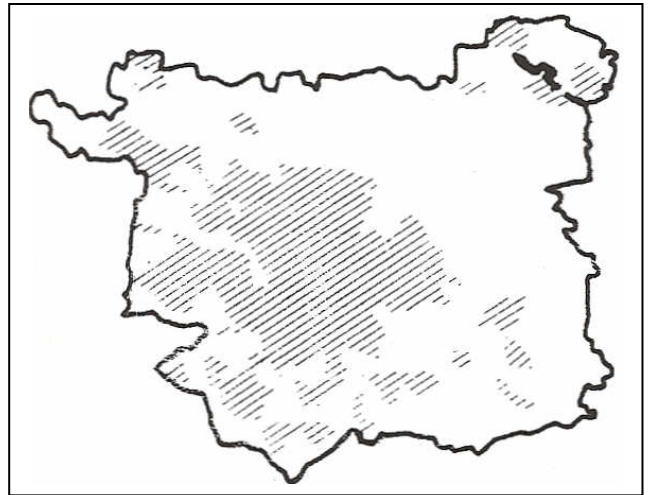
Forces for change

The river gorge has probably undergone little noticeable change in recent years with many of its characteristic features remaining intact. Tree cover has, however, largely disappeared from the riverbanks to the east of Thorpe Arch, with large fields of arable farmland stretching right down to the waters edge.

Management strategy and guidelines

The overall management strategy for the river gorge landscape type should be the conservation of the important characteristics of the river and its immediate surrounds. Where tree cover has been lost, however, there could be opportunities for the restoration of character, through the encouragement of natural regeneration or small scale tree planting to enhance the river's continuity.

Management guidelines which are applicable for all the landscape units within the river gorge landscape type are described below. Detailed management strategies and guidelines for the individual landscape unit is described in a separate document, using the reference given above.



- *Retain and enhance river channel diversity and marginal vegetation.*

The narrow river channel is a major feature within this landscape type. Where the ecological value has declined, there is much scope for improvement through sensitive management. The retention of a diverse range of features such as meanders, shallow, cliffs and backwaters is very important. River margins are important and tree, scrub and plant growth on river banks should be retained and protected. All these features have an intrinsic value and are integral to the visual and aesthetic quality of the riverside environment.

- *Conserve and enhance the wooded continuity of the river gorge and enhance its value as a landscape, wildlife and recreation corridor.*

The wooded river gorge of this landscape type forms a key linear feature and important landscape and wildlife corridor. To maintain this value, natural regeneration of bankside trees should be encouraged. Planting new trees and small copses may also be appropriate in places, especially where they complement existing tree cover and where they reflect the sinuous nature of the watercourse. Consideration should be given to encouraging more recreational access along the river bank.