

Chapter 4: Character of the Leeds Landscape

Introduction

- 4.1 The countryside around Leeds shows a great diversity of landscape character which results from the interaction of both the physical and human influences on the area. This wide variation in landscape character has been analysed on the basis of desk study and detailed field survey of the study area, using a methodology which is described in Appendix A of this report. This method of landscape assessment enables the character of the landscape to be described in a hierarchical framework which establishes the pattern of variation in the landscape. The hierarchical framework is based on the identification and description of Regional Character Areas, Landscape Types and Landscape Units.

Regional Character Areas

- 4.2 Regional character areas are recognisable as distinct landscape 'regions' at the broad scale, based on general characteristics such as landform, geology, soils, land use, ecological associations, historical associations and urban and industrial activity and which incorporate a range of typical landscape types. There are five such areas in the Leeds District. These are:
- Leeds Coal Measures;
 - Millstone Grit Plateau;
 - Wharfedale;
 - Eastern Limestone Belt; and
 - Vale of York.

The main characteristics of these regional character areas are described below.

The Leeds Coal Measures

- 4.3 A large area of undulating country occupied by part of the Yorkshire coalfield and lying between the limestone belt to the east and the Millstone Grit moors to the west and north. Although the coalfield represents a continuation of the Millstone Grit, there is a greater variability of sandstones and a greater dominance of coal. The occurrence of natural resources of coal but also stone, iron and soft water amongst others has been the most influential factor in the development of this landscape, leading to the growth of industry and expansion of the urban area of Leeds.
- 4.4 Throughout the area but particularly adjacent to the urban edge, land use is dominated by human activity with many areas under intense pressure from both authorised and unauthorised urban fringe land uses and activities, such as scrap yards, caravan storage and horse grazing. On the edges of the built-up area, roads, canals and railways run along the valleys of the Aire and the Calder, fronted by ribbon development of houses, factories and warehouses. Quarries both past and present and waste tips are common sights, particularly along the Aire Valley which has been scarred by its industrial past.

The industrial history of the region has also led to the development of several great industrialists' houses such as Temple Newsam which along with Middleton and Roundhay now form important urban fringe parks, well used by local people and by visitors from further afield.

- 4.5 The underlying geology of the coalfield has resulted in a mix of light, well-drained soils derived from the sands tones and much heavier soils derived from the Coal Measure sands and clays. The presence of a large urban population has led to the development of intensive types of arable or mixed dairy farming. Horticulture is common, particularly in the south of the region, where the strips of intensive cultivation of potatoes, broccoli and rhubarb contrast with pockets of small-scale often degraded arable and pasture including large areas of horse pasture adjacent to settled areas. Woodland occurs in mainly dense semi-natural strips along valleys and becks with oak and sycamore common throughout. Planted woodland occurs mainly in the parkland areas around the edge.

The Millstone Grit Plateau

- 4.6 The Millstone Grit Plateau is made up by more or less continuous ridges, with valleys in between. These ridges are all escarpments of varying steepness or slope. Where the scarp slope is steep and the dip slope gentle, such as along the Chevin (along the edges of Wharfedale, there is a marked difference in topography and land use. Elsewhere within the region, however this contrast is not so pronounced.
- 4.7 Farmland is predominantly pastoral, with sheep and cattle grazed pastures, interspersed with smaller pockets of rough pasture and horse grazing around settlements. In the far north west tip of the region, Hawksworth Moor forms the only significant area of open heather covered moorland within the district, fringed by fields of semi-improved pasture. Throughout, the abundance of stone has led to many of the fields being bounded by drystone walls. To the east of the region however, hedgerows are more common, and arable farmland appears amidst the fields of pasture.
- 4.8 Mixed and coniferous plantations are dotted throughout this region, but occur particularly in the east, close to the Harewood estate. Areas of semi-natural deciduous woodland also occur within the numerous valleys and becks which cut across the plateau, although are generally absent from some of the more exposed areas of high ground where, isolated hedgerow trees form the only tree cover.
- 4.9 Architecturally, the local stone of the region has been used since the earliest times in large structures, such as long bridges across rivers, castles, churches and the majority of houses. Today, the use of the sandstone has diminished, with the rock being replaced by bricks for small scale building and by more ornamental stone like Portland Stone or by concrete for larger structures.

Wharfedale

- 4.10 The River Wharfe rises high in the Pennines, winding through tracts of varied and scenic countryside before completing its course by joining the Ouse at Cawood. Within the Leeds district, the region encompasses the broad floodplain of the Wharfe between alley and Wetherby and the overlooking, steep scarp slopes of the high ground to the south. Underlain by Millstone Grit, the Wharfe Valley forms the largest of the series of valleys which cut into the stone.

- 4.11 Surrounded by large flat fields of mainly pasture in the west and arable in the east, the river meanders through the floodplain, with occasional strips of mature deciduous woodland lining the banks. Overlooking the floodplain, the steep, well wooded slopes of the escarpment, particularly along the Chevin and on the Harewood Estate, dominate views within the valley and provide an important recreational resource for local people. Where woodland doesn't occur, sheep pastures characterise the steeper slopes, with patches of scrub and rough pasture also present.
- 4.12 The market town of Ilkley and the village of Pool form the main settlements in the region, both affected by the scars, past and present, of sand and gravel workings within the floodplain.

The Eastern Limestone Belt

- 4.13 This belt forms part of a larger ridge of Magnesian limestone stretching from Ripon to Doncaster, about four to five miles wide, with a well marked scarp to the west and dipping gently eastwards beneath the Trias marls and sandstones of the Vale of York. In all its length, this limestone belt, with its well drained soils, reasonably good climate and low altitude has given rise to a landscape of rolling, fertile farmland and well wooded parks, crossed by numerous dry valleys. The areas of productive large scale arable farmland are often open, with few features such as hedgerows or hedgerow trees. This simplicity is emphasised by the regular blocks of planted mixed woodland, which make up a number of large estates and parklands and which dominate views from within. The limestone supports a rich and diverse flora which contributes to the distinctive character of the landscape and which shows a marked contrast with the grits to the west.
- 4.14 Although crossed by a number of main roads, including the A1, accessibility within this region is limited, mainly due to the large extent of the private and self-contained parkland estates. Settlement is predominantly in villages and small market towns, with the local stone appearing in the characteristic creamy white vernacular buildings topped by contrasting red roofs. Country houses such as Ledston Hall and the churches and cottages of Aberford, Ledsham, Bramham and Boston Spa are all built of this stone, which is also associated with buildings in York and the surrounding plain. Evidence of prehistoric and Roman remains such as earth banks and the system of Roman roads such as the forerunner of the A1, are common throughout this region.
- The Vale of York*

- 4.15 To the east of the limestone belt lies a region of low lying vale land, often not more than a few feet above sea level. The Trias rocks are covered almost everywhere by glacial sands and gravels and also by alluvium. The Vale of York occurs in only a small part of the Leeds district, to the east of Wetherby. As a whole however it forms a large tract of countryside separating the Pennine hills and dales in the west from the Cleveland Hills and the Hambleldons in the east. It is a wide, fertile plain of large arable fields, divided by a network of hedges and roads and dotted with brick cottages and farmsteads, villages with prominent churches and the occasional big house, sometimes forming the centre of large estates. Great tracts of sugar beet, barley, oats and potatoes form the main crops, with smaller areas of rich pasture occurring in parts_
- 4.16 Within the Leeds district, the landscape consists of gently, almost imperceptibly, rolling low lying land, dominated by large arable fields, interspersed with small pockets of semi-natural and planted woodlands. Settlement is sparse, with only isolated buildings and the racecourse at Wetherby interrupting the farmed landscape.

Landscape Types

4.17 Landscape types are tracts of countryside, defined at a more detailed level, which have a unity of character due to particular combinations of landform and landcover and a consistent and distinct pattern of constituent elements. The same landscape type may occur in different regional character areas but will be distinguished by the broader regional influences of geology, soils and land use history.

There are four broad landscape character types in the countryside around Leeds, namely settled, agricultural, wooded, and river landscapes.

Within these four main groups there are 19 landscape types as listed below. The main characteristics of these landscape types are detailed in Part 2 of this report.

Pastoral fringe farmland	Limestone villages and farmland
Arable fringe farmland	Wooded escarpment
Urban fringe parklands;	Wooded parkland
Encapsulated countryside	Wooded plateau edge valleys
Open arable farmland	Wooded farmland
Arable plateau farmland	River floodplain
Pastoral plateau farmland	River valley
Pastoral escarpment	River gorge
Small scale farmed ridges and valleys	Degraded river valley
Gritstone moorland	

Landscape Units

- 4.18 Landscape units are discrete geographical areas of relatively uniform character, which fall within one or the other of the landscape types. In one regional character area, the same landscape type may occur in a number of different landscape units.
- 4.19 Within the Leeds District, 45 landscape units have been identified. These have all been named according to their geographical location and are listed below. The main characteristics of these individual landscape units are detailed in Part 3 of this report.

Aberford	Kippax and Swillington Fringe
Arthington Floodplain	Kirkstall Valley
Barwick to Garforth	Ledsham to Lotherton
Boston Spa, Clifford and Bramham	Linton Hills
Bradford Fringe	Linton-Collingham Floodplain
Bramham Park	Lower Aire
Calverley Valley	Meanwood Valley
Cockersdale	Methley Park
East Ardsley Fringe	Middleton
East Bramham	Moseley Beck
East Garforth	Otley-Pool Floodplain
East Harewood	Rawdon Plateau
East Leeds Fringe	Rothwell Fringe
East Morley Fringe	Roundhay
East Wetherby	South Morley Fringe
Eccup Plateau	Temple Newsam
Gildersome Fringe	The Chevin
Guiseley Plateau	West Bramham
Harewood	West Harewood
Hawksworth Gill	Wetherby Gorge
Hawksworth Moor	Wike Ridge to East Rigton
Hawksworth Plateau	Wyke Beck Valley
Hollin Hall Plateau	

Hierarchical framework

- 4.20 The way in which regional character areas, landscape types and landscape units fit together within the hierarchical framework is illustrated in Table 1. The location of landscape types and landscape units is shown in simplified map form in Figure 2.

LANDSCAPE TYPES:

- Pastoral fringe farmland
- Arable fringe farmland
- Urban fringe parklands
- Encapsulated countryside
- Open arable farmland
- Arable plateau farmland
- Pastoral plateau farmland
- Pastoral escarpment
- Small scale farmed ridges and valleys
- Gritstone moorland
- Limestone villages and farmlands
- Wooded escarpment
- Wooded parkland
- Wooded plateau edge valleys
- Wooded farmland
- River floodplain
- River valley
- River gorge
- Degraded river valley
- Regional character area boundaries

LEEDS LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

Figure 2

LANDSCAPE TYPES AND LANDSCAPE UNITS

LAND USE CONSULTANTS

5km

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