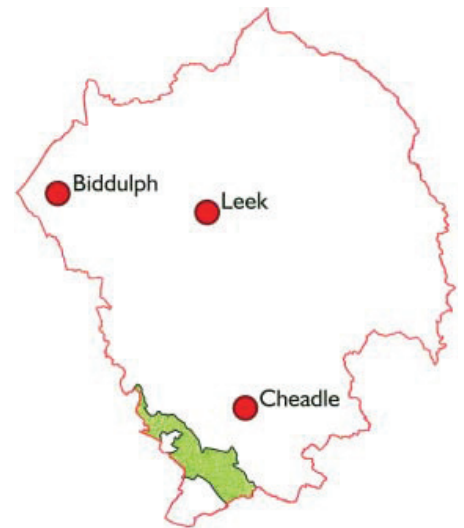


Settled plateau farmland slopes

This character type is found in both the Potteries and Churnet Valley Joint Character Area, to the central west of the District south of Werrington and Cellarhead, and in the Needwood and Claylands Joint Character Area, in the south western corner of the District. The landscapes are rolling plateaux with dispersed scattered hamlets and farmsteads.



Key Characteristics

- Gentle undulating landform with flat open valleys
- Small scale ancient hedgerow field pattern
- Low lying wet fields with ponds and well vegetated streams
- Views limited by hedgerow pattern and dense tree cover
- Urban fringe farming with horseculture
- Incongruous A50 dual carriageway corridor and mainline railway

Geology, Landform and Soils

A gentle undulating landform with small scale valley features. Glimpses of distant views extend through vegetation with Stoke-on-Trent skyline viewed from higher ground. Low lying wet fields with ponds extend around the River Blithe and tributary streams with ancient hedgerow patterns.

Vegetation

Ancient hedgerows line field boundaries with mature hedgerow trees creating a dense cover. A generally small scale landscape comprised of irregular fields. Oak and ash are predominate trees in this area, although lines of alder and willow are found along streams and rivers. New tree and shrub planting lines the A50 creating a green corridor through the area. Tall hedgerows. Loss of hedgerows close to conurbation edge due to the impact of horsey culture and marginalisation of farming.

Land use

The area is mainly used for low intensity pastoral farming and in proximity to settlements and close to the conurbation edge informal recreation. Increasingly land is being used for horse grazing.

Enclosure

Ancient hedgerows and trees limit views and create visual enclosure. Roadside hedges appear to be well maintained. Close to the conurbation field boundary hedges, however, are poorly maintained and gaps have been replaced with post and wire fences for stock control often in disrepair. The large scale feature of the A50 dual carriageway has in parts been cut into this small scale landscape limiting views out and creating a sense of enclosure. Scale of landscape and enclosure increases within the road corridor and close to the edge of the conurbation.

Settlement and buildings

The proximity of this area to Stoke-on-Trent and its good accessibility has increased pressures on the surrounding landscape. Isolated farms are either

in disrepair or have been improved and converted to residential creating a more suburban feel to the area. Villages within this area are commuter areas for surrounding towns and city. Blythe Bridge is contained within this character type but abuts and is strongly linked with the conurbation. Forsbrook is a typical commuter village with a mix of old and of new properties of brick construction. Cresswell is visually separated from the rest of the district by the A50 trunk road.

Transport and Access

The very busy main A50 Stoke-Derby trunk road runs through the centre of the entire character area bypassing a number of settlements. The original line of the A50 Uttoxeter Road which is a Roman road connects these settlements. This remains a busy road particularly during incidents on the main A50. Other lateral minor roads lead off this roman road. A main line railway from Stoke to Derby runs through this character area with a number of disused railway lines leading from it. There is a railway station at Blythe Bridge and the Foxfield Steam Railway terminates at the north of the village.

Incongruous landscape features

A50 dual carriageway corridor and mainline railway. Adverse impact of the conurbation edge. Use of post and wire fences for stock control.

Key Planning and Management Issues

- Impact of conurbation; urban fringe farming and increase in horseyculture
- Replacement of hedgerows by fencing.
- Busy roads and mainline railway
- Loss of some semi-natural vegetation (ancient woodland, hedgerows and semi-natural grasslands)

Capabilities and sensitivities of the landscape to accommodate change

Planning for Landscape Change Supplementary Planning Guidance to Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan, identifies this landscape character area as in the area to the north west of Blythe Bridge as a landscape requiring regeneration; and the remaining area including that part of the landscape character type within the Needwood Claylands as requiring landscape enhancement.

Urban fringe pressures have had a particularly adverse impact on the landscape quality of in the west of this area due to the impact of the urban fringe and the resultant deteriorating condition of existing landscape features.

The small area to the north and east of Forsbrook has been identified as a 'landscape at risk' of sudden loss of quality in Section 7.18 of the Supporting documentation to the Planning for Landscape Change Supplementary Planning Guidance. Measures to meet the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan targets are considered to be critically important in preventing such a loss.

Landscape Planning Guidelines

- In the area in the west of this landscape character type large scale woodland planting would screen and contain the edge of the conurbation reducing its visual influence. Plantations should be largely broadleaved and need to take account of the flatter landscape of the river valley. The re-establishment of hedgerows and/or small tree groups redefining small field enclosures will combine with the larger tree blocks to reduce the scale of the landscape.
- The growth of horseculture has caused the subdivision of fields by fencing, loss of hedges and the erections of shelters for horses. Consideration should given to actions that can be taken to counteract the impact of this landuse on landcover and landscape scale.
- The area to the north and east of Forsbrook still retains its ancient small field pattern which is well defined by hedgerows and hedgerow trees. In view of its proximity to the A50 corridor and the main line railway it is vulnerable to pressure for development. The character and form of this landscape is extremely important to the setting of the settlement and new development and adverse changes to management of this area should be avoided. Active management of BAP habitats will help to maintain and reinforce the landscape elements that contribute to the high quality of this small scale landscape.
- Planting along stream lines is an important feature of this landscape character type. Reinforcement of streamline planting with native wetland tree and shrub species is to be encouraged.
- Reinforcing the existing vegetational structure of the area away from the urban fringe should consist of small scale planting of small field size, field corners and hedgerow trees. The character of floodplains should remain more open.
- New native woodland planting should where possible be used to improve the distribution of and links to existing ancient woodlands, counteracting isolation of these woodlands.
- Conifers should be used sparingly and dominate as broadleaves are the more typical tree type.
- Where new development is proposed, the edge of the development and public open spaces associated with it should contain appropriate tree and shrub planting to reduce the visual impact of the development and to enable it to be more readily assimilated into the landscape.
- The grouping and form of new buildings should reflect the juxtaposition, scale, form, enclosure and materials of traditional local buildings characteristic of this area.
- The colour of prefabricated agricultural buildings should be determined taking careful account of position, predominant tones of adjacent vegetation, local materials and sky, so as to minimise the visual impact of the development.

- The loss of semi-natural vegetation should be checked and remaining habitats should be protected, managed and where possible extended to create sustainable communities.

Land Management Guidelines

The condition of the semi-natural vegetation characteristic of this landscape type is generally deteriorating. These habitats require protection, management and to be re established. The main issues are as follows:

Hedgerows

It is highly important that ancient and diverse hedgerows, particularly the hedgerow trees along them, are maintained and managed. Where hedgerows are planted or restored it is important that they should be species rich reflecting local indigenous hedge mixes and that the plants where possible should be grown locally. Consideration should be given to how the current practice of the erection of stock proof fencing rather than maintenance and management of hedgerows can be checked and the retention and maintenance of hedgerows be encouraged.

Canals, lakes and ponds

The maintenance and enhancement of water bodies and catchments is highly important as is increasing the number of water bodies.

Reedbeds

Opportunities should be taken to maintain and create reedbeds

Rivers and Streams

It is highly important that the quality of all natural existing channel features is maintained and that the quality and quantity of water is improved.

Wet Woodlands

It is highly important that further losses of wet woodlands are prevented and that existing woods are maintained, enhanced and restored. Efforts should be made to increase the number of wet woodlands in the area particularly within the flatter valley bottoms.

Ancient/semi-natural broad leaved woodland

It is of high importance to the character and quality of the landscape that degraded ancient/semi-natural broad leaved woodlands are restored and that new woodlands should be recreated or regenerated. Existing woodland should be maintained and enhanced.

Lowland Acidic Grassland

It is highly important that action should be taken to prevent further losses of acidic grassland other than to lowland heathland restoration. This grassland habitat should be maintained, enhanced and restored, where possible by maintaining a buffer between it and other dominant/invasive habitats. The number of such sites should be increased and support given to the linking of fragmented sites through habitat creation.

Lowland Heathland

It is of high importance that new heathlands are created and that areas previously heathland are re-created. Existing heaths should be protected from development and from damaging activities.

Lowland Wet Grassland

Existing lowland wet grassland should be maintained and enhanced. Degraded areas should be restored and opportunities taken to create new areas.

Unimproved and neutral grassland

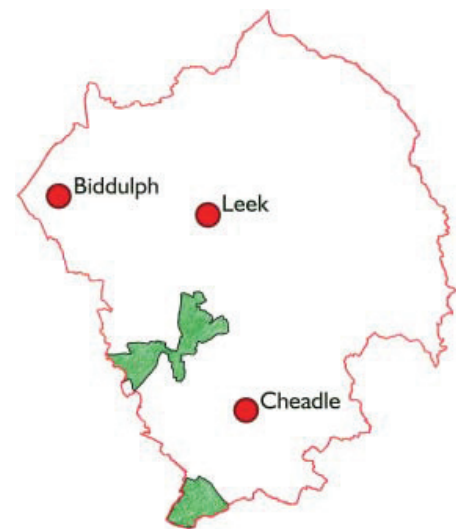
Existing unimproved and neutral grasslands that are in poor condition should be restored. These habitats should be maintained and safeguarded and habitat creation should be used to link adjacent sites through the creation of new sites or re-creation of former areas.

Arable field margins

Arable field margins should be maintained, improved and restored where possible.

Settled plateau farmlands

This character type is found in both the Potteries and Churnet Valley Joint Character Area, to the central west of the District south of Werrington and Cellarhead, and in the Needwood and Claylands Joint Character Area, in the south western corner of the District. The landscapes are rolling plateaux with dispersed scattered hamlets and farmsteads.



Key Characteristics

- Open large scale landscapes with extensive views from a rolling plateau
- Low grade pasture farmland with overgrazed poorly drained fields with rushes and rough grass
- Large scale regular and irregular field patterns with hedges and dry stone walls
- Hedges deteriorated to the extent that field boundaries marked by isolated trees, fencing and remnant thorn and holly
- Some blocks of mature broadleaf woodland
- Heathland
- Parkland
- Dispersed settlements
- Developing urban fringe character due to proximity to Stoke-on-Trent
- Busy road network surrounds the area; railway line

Geology, Landform and Soils

Gentle slopes to the Churnet Valley edge with a rolling plateau lies on boulder clay overlying Triassic mudstones. In more northerly area views extend over Stoke on Trent and towards Biddulph. Non calcareous stagnogley soils are poorly drained and overgrazed. Hedgerows and some dry stone walls are aligned in a regular field pattern. Stone outcrops in higher areas.

Vegetation

A regular pattern of hedged fields have deteriorated in parts with isolated beech, birch, oak and holly trees demarcating field boundaries. Overgrazed, poorly drained fields have resulted in rushes and rough grass predominant in fields. Heathland is present in isolated areas on higher ground with stunted oak and birch trees. Blocks of woodland are associated with Consall Hall historic parkland. Bromley Wood on the southernmost part of the district is ancient semi natural woodland. Some introduction of exotic species.

Land use

The main land use is dairy farming although gradually replaced with horse grazing. Consall Hall and gardens provides a tourist attraction within the area. A number of fish ponds are associated with Consall Hall. Major overhead power lines crossing the southernmost tip of the district within Needwood Claylands Joint Character Area.

Enclosure

Hedges and dry stone walls are in a poor state of repair and have been replaced extensively with poorly maintained post and barbed wire fence. Where hedgerows exist regular field patterns are clearly defined. Some lanes have banked hedgerows restricting views and creating a sense of enclosure.

Settlement and buildings

This area is generally urban fringe to the City of Stoke-on-Trent. Old stone dwellings are

intermixed with new style properties. A number of individual isolated properties have been improved creating a suburban feel to the area. Werrington, Cellarhead and Wetley Rocks are the main settlements within this character type. Major overhead power lines crossing

Transport and Access

The busy A52, A520 and A522 run through and alongside the boundaries of the character area with a network of busy minor roads within the area. Railway line crosses area.

Incongruous landscape features

Horseyculture and over grazing associated with urban fringe farming. Increasing use of post and wire fencing for stock control. Busy roads. Mainline railway line. Overhead power lines.

Key Planning and Management Issues

- Impact of conurbation; urban fringe farming and increase in horseyculture
- Powerlines
- Replacement of hedgerows and drystone walls by fencing.
- Busy roads and mainline railway
- Parklands
- Loss of some semi-natural vegetation (ancient woodland, heathland hedgerows and semi-natural grasslands)

Capabilities and sensitivities of the landscape to accommodate change

Planning for Landscape Change Supplementary Planning Guidance to Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan, identifies this landscape character

area, the area south of Werrington and the area in the south west corner of the district as landscapes requiring regeneration; and the area east of Wetley Rocks as a landscape that requires restoration.

Urban fringe pressures have had a particularly adverse impact on the landscape quality of this area due to the proliferation of incongruous features and the deteriorating condition of existing landscape features.

Landscape Planning Guidelines

- Urban fringe pressures can have an adverse impact on landscape quality with the proliferation of incongruous features and the deteriorating condition of existing landscape features. The landscape structure has deteriorated with the loss of vegetational features and the impact of the urban fringe. There are open views to the conurbation. This landscape requires a new vegetational structure to be created comprising of woodland, hedgerows and trees which will screen the conurbation and soften the impact of larger scale obtrusive features such as overheadlines and major transport routes.
- The planting of small woodlands, hedgerows with associated trees and tree groups can also help to restore the vegetational cover and re-articulate the scale of the landscape. The new vegetational structure should link to existing remnant vegetation and field pattern. It should create a mosaic of spaces, some open some wooded and of small to medium scale.
- Where new development is proposed, the edge of the development and public open spaces associated with it should contain appropriate tree and shrub planting to reduce the visual impact of the development and to enable it to be more readily assimilated into the landscape.
- Field boundaries should be retained, maintained and, in places, replaced to maintain the scale of the landscape. Stone walls or native hedgerows should be used as a means of enclosure dependent upon local character. Replacement of hedges and drystone walls by fencing should be discouraged.
- The growth of horseculture has caused the subdivision of fields by fencing, loss of hedges and the erections of shelters for horses. Consideration should be given to actions that can be taken to counteract the impact of this land use on landcover and landscape scale.
- Landowners should be encouraged to diversify land use away from the current low grade farming.
- Heathland areas should be protected. Planting in the vicinity of heathland should avoid invasive species and create a transitional area of a heathland character around the edges that should aim to link visually with nearby heathland and extend heathland character out into the surrounding landscapes.
- Development and new tree planting should take account of the setting of the historic parklands, of the setting of important buildings and of important local views. Any proposals for development or land use change which impacts upon the setting of an historic parkland must take account of the unique character of that designed landscape.
- Any proposals for development or land use change within an historic landscape should be informed by a detailed historic landscape appraisal.
- Historic landscapes contain introduced decorative tree species that are inherent to the design of the parkland and pleasure grounds and to its setting. It may be appropriate to introduce some of these species into the area identified as the setting of the parkland. Consideration should be given to protecting, in particular, individual specimen and groups of trees that are significant historically or visually to this landscape or to local settlement.
- The grouping and form of new buildings should reflect the juxtaposition, scale, form, enclosure and materials of traditional local buildings characteristic of this area.
- The colour of prefabricated agricultural buildings should be determined taking careful account of position, predominant tones of adjacent vegetation,

local materials and sky, so as to minimise the visual impact of the development.

- The loss of semi-natural vegetation should be checked and remaining habitats should be protected, managed and where possible extended to create sustainable communities.

Land Management Guidelines

The condition of the semi-natural vegetation characteristic of this landscape type is generally deteriorating. These habitats require protection, management and to be re established. The main issues are as follows:

Hedgerows

It is highly important that ancient and diverse hedgerows, particularly the hedgerow trees along them, are maintained and managed. Where hedgerows are planted or restored it is important that they should be species rich reflecting local indigenous hedge mixes and that the plants where possible should be grown locally. Consideration should be given to how the current practice of the erection of stock proof fencing rather than maintenance and management of hedgerows can be checked and the retention and maintenance of hedgerows be encouraged.

Ancient/semi-natural broad leaved woodland

It is of very high importance to the character and quality of the landscape that degraded ancient/semi-natural broad leaved woodlands are restored and that new woodlands should be recreated or regenerated. Existing woodland should be maintained and enhanced.

Ancient and semi-natural broadleaved woodland is generally particularly important to the form and character of historic parkland landscapes. Similarly the maintenance, safeguarding and restoration of wood pasture and parkland is also important. It is also likely that a number of veteran trees will be found within an historic parkland.

Wet Woodlands

It is highly important that further losses of wet woodlands are prevented and that existing woods

are maintained, enhanced and restored. Efforts should be made to increase the number of wet woodlands.

Lowland Heathland

It is of high importance that new heathlands are created and that areas previously heathland are re-created. Existing heaths should be protected from development and from damaging activities.

Lowland Acidic Grassland

It is highly important that action should be taken to prevent further losses of acidic grassland other than to lowland heathland restoration. This grassland habitat should be maintained, enhanced and restored, where possible by maintaining a buffer between it and other dominant/invasive habitats. The number of such sites should be increased and support given to the linking of fragmented sites through habitat creation.

Reedbeds

It is highly important that opportunities are taken to maintain and create reedbeds.

Rivers and Streams

It is highly important that the quality of all natural existing channel features is maintained and that the quality and quantity of water should be improved.

Lowland Wet Grassland

Existing lowland wet grassland should be maintained and enhanced. Degraded areas should be restored and opportunities taken to create new areas.

Unimproved and neutral grassland

Existing unimproved and neutral grasslands that are in poor condition should be restored. These habitats should be maintained and safeguarded and habitat creation should be used to link adjacent sites through the creation of new sites or re-creation of former areas.

Arable field margins

Arable field margins should be maintained, improved and restored where possible.