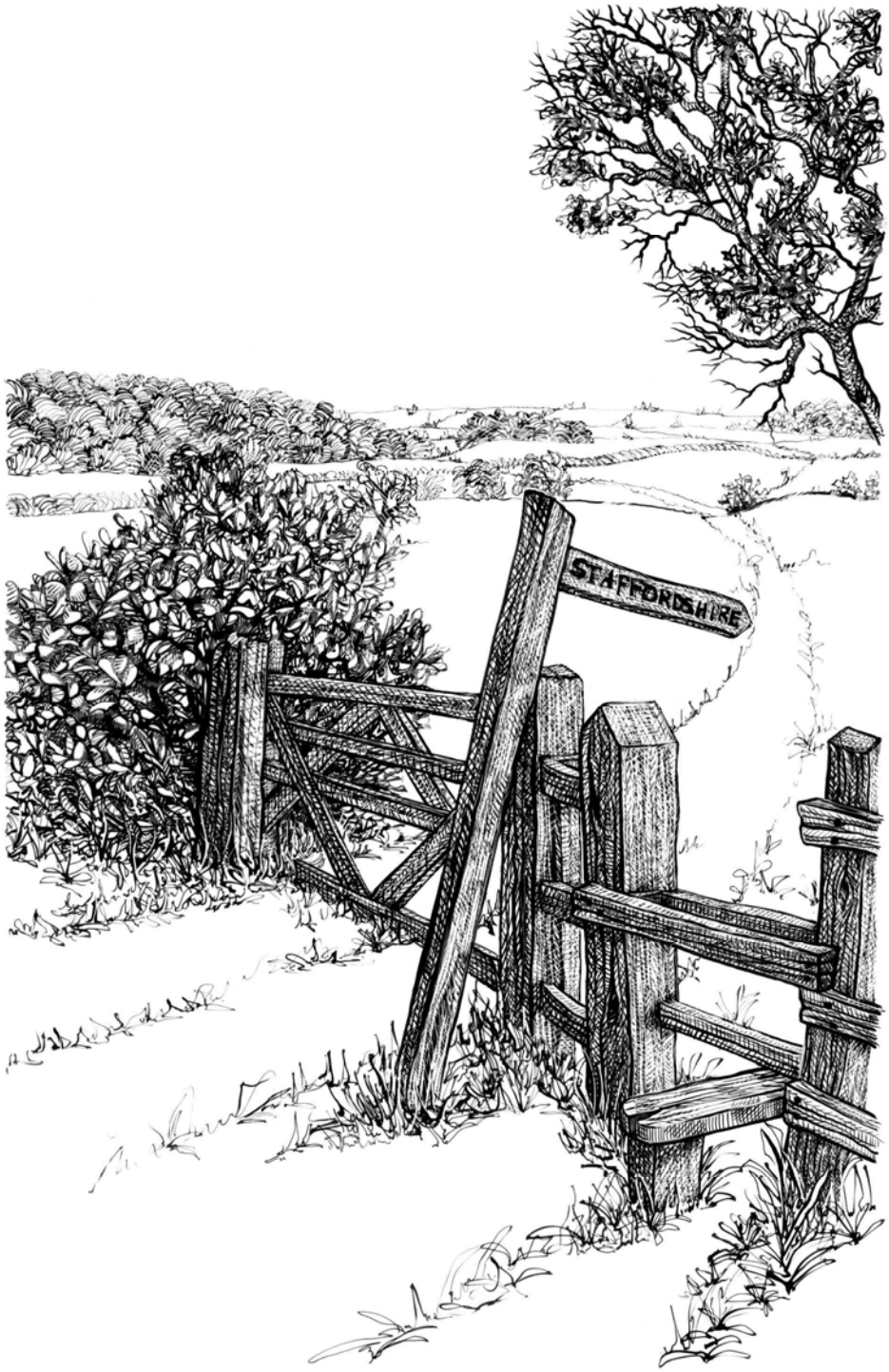
Staffordshire
County Council



Planning for Landscape Change: Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan 1996 – 2011 Landscape Descriptions Stafford Borough

Adopted on 10 May 2001 as
Supplementary Planning Guidance
to the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
Structure Plan 1996-2011

Planning for Landscape Change:

Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan, 1996 – 2011

Volume 3: Landscape Descriptions (Specific to Stafford Borough)

Staffordshire County Council,
Development Services Department 2001

Volume contents

Introduction: using this guidance

1. For the purposes of description the Structure Plan area of Staffordshire has been broken down into nine **Regional Character Areas** (RCA), based on a map of countryside character prepared by the former Countryside Commission and English Nature. Of these nine Regional Character Areas, five are present in the area covered by Stafford Borough. These are in turn broken down into a series of **Landscape Character Types** and it is the LCT's occurring in Stafford Borough that are included in this document as an abstract of *Planning for Landscape Change (Landscape Descriptions)*, Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan 1996 – 2011. (Only one very small area of Trent Valley Washlands RCA, consisting of a small area of Riparian alluvial lowlands LCT occurs within the Borough and this has not been included in the descriptions.) This terminology is discussed in more detail in the Supporting Documentation to the Supplementary Planning Guidance.

2. In each chapter the overall landscape character of one of the Regional Character Areas occurring in the Stafford Borough area is described, followed by detailed descriptions of each of the landscape character types that occur within it.

3. To use the document to guide decisions on landscape treatments for specific sites, first locate the general area of the site from map 1 in Appendix 1, and from the key identify the Regional Character Area within which it falls. Map 2 of Appendix 1 can be used to determine the landscape character type that the site falls within. The relevant chapter for the Regional Character Area can be located from the contents page. Each chapter contains a list of the landscape character types found within that Area. Turn to the description for that type: this will give details of the landscape's visual character, and of the features which contribute to local distinctiveness, and which should be conserved wherever possible. Incongruous features which are beginning to appear, and which could lead to a loss of that distinctiveness, are also described.

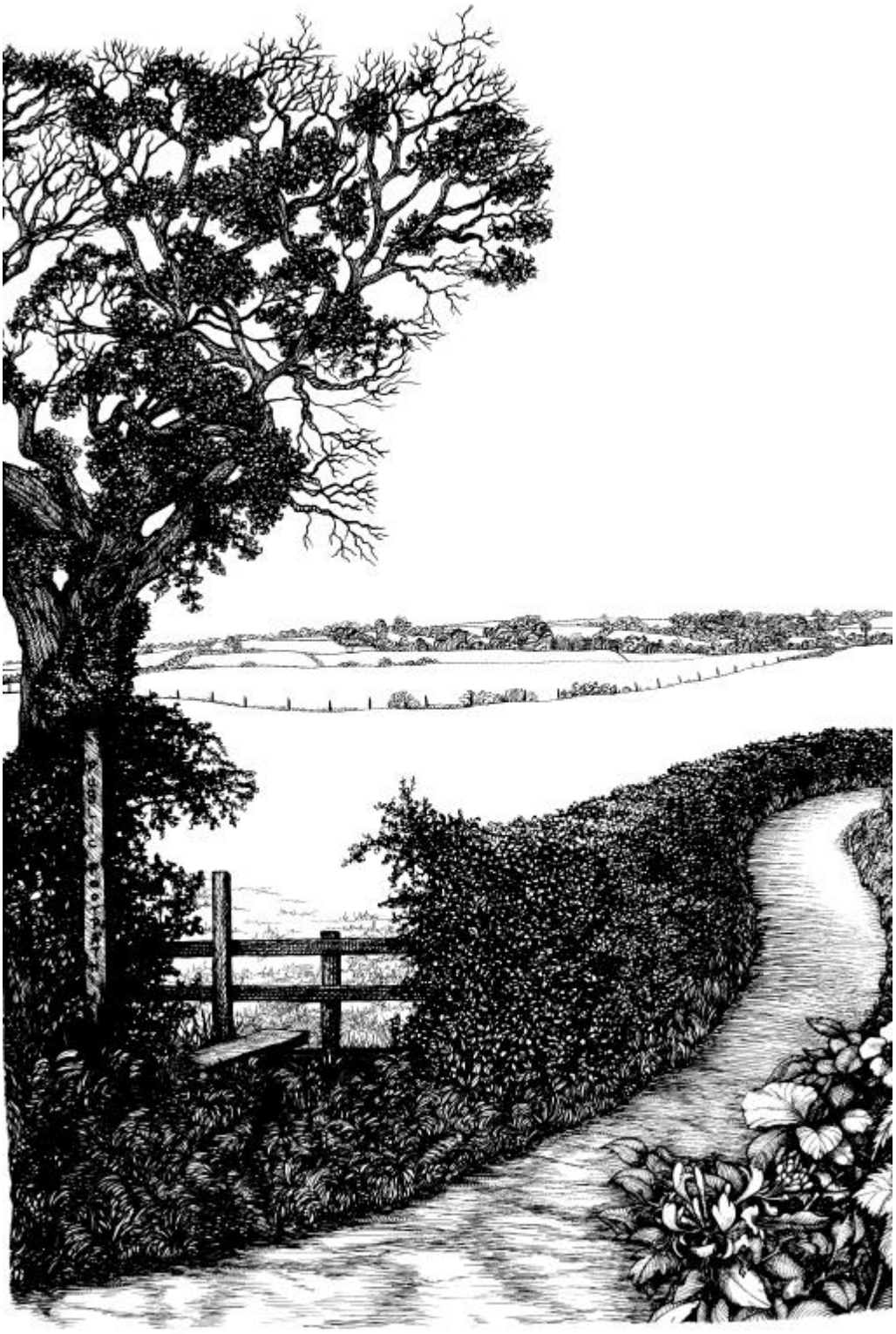
4. Map 3 of Appendix 1 indicates which of the landscape policy objectives listed in the Structure Plan landscape protection and restoration policy is appropriate to the general area around the site. Where e.g. landscape conservation or maintenance is appropriate the protection of existing features and patterns in the landscape will be important. Where the appropriate emphasis is on restoration or regeneration the guidance on woodland planting and the provision of other new habitat at landscape scale may assume more importance.

5. The landscape policy objectives map also shows which areas are particularly sensitive, in landscape terms, to the impacts of development and land use change. This classification summarizes much of the information given in the descriptions, to indicate in general terms the potential for successfully mitigating or compensating for those impacts.

6. It should be noted that the mapping units used throughout the guidance have boundaries which have generally been drawn to follow a recognizable feature on the ground; but in appreciating landscape character our perception does not stop at such boundaries. The character of any particular area will be influenced visually by that of surrounding areas. Decisions relating to the location and nature of development should be informed by all of the relevant material in this guidance, and it will sometimes be necessary to refer to two or more landscape character descriptions,

and to consider the landscape policy objectives for surrounding land. There will always be a need to evaluate individual proposals on a site by site basis. Guidance indicating, e.g., that woodland planting would bring landscape benefits should be interpreted in the knowledge that this should not be at the expense of existing semi-natural habitats which are likely to already have a high nature conservation value.

7. It is anticipated that further information, especially with respect to specific guidelines for landscape conservation and enhancement, will be added to this volume as a result of feed-back from its users. In the meantime, the Countryside Agency publication *Countryside Character Volume 5: West Midlands* is a valuable source of information at Regional Character Area level. As it takes a broader view of landscape than is possible in a county volume it is particularly helpful in describing contributors to landscape character, such as building styles and settlement patterns, that demonstrate regional, rather than local variation.



The Staffordshire Plain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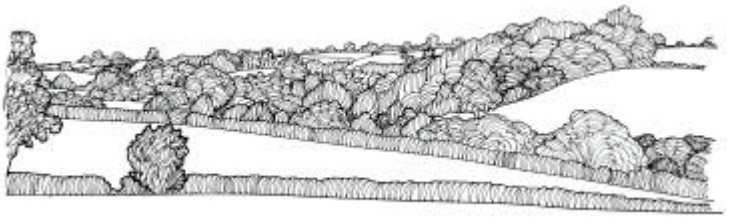
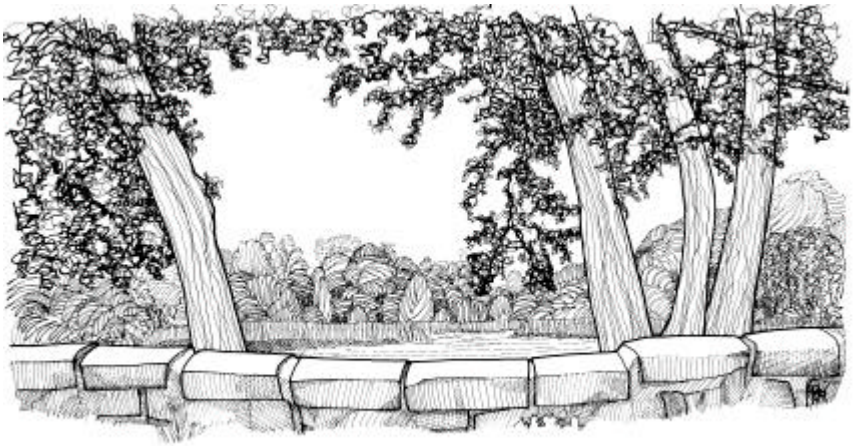




Regional Character Area 61 - Staffordshire Plain

This chapter describes the landscapes of the Staffordshire Plain. This is that part of the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain Character Area, as defined by the former Countryside Commission and English Nature that falls within the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan area.

The first part of the chapter comprises a general description of the landscape character of this part of western Staffordshire, the extent of which is shown on Map 3 of Appendix 1. This is followed by detailed descriptions of each of the landscape character types and, where applicable, sub-types that occur within it.

Chapter contents

The Staffordshire Plain

1. Not all of Staffordshire's regions have clearly defined borders and this area of rolling farmland, with its small towns such as Eccleshall and Brewood, shares many characteristics with its neighbouring counties to the west. This is a gently rolling lowland landscape, unified by its deposits of glacial drift, which has been a major influence on the soils, ecology and land use of the area. At the end of the last glaciation the ice sheet, which had been up to 1 km thick, began to retreat, dumping unsorted boulder clays and sands and gravels in the glacial outwash and creating the kettleholes in which developed the meres and mosses that are characteristic of the Staffordshire-Shropshire border. That part of the plain within Staffordshire is now an intensive agricultural landscape of dairy farming, with some stock rearing, but it is now giving way to arable farming in places. The more intact areas of landscape show the irregular pattern of hedged fields, ancient hedgerows and large numbers of over-mature hedgerow oaks characteristic of this part of the county. A distinctive character is imparted by the extensive network of small, often sunken, winding lanes, by the dispersed pattern of small rural towns and by the traditional red brick architecture.

2. The scale of the landscape is enlarging in many areas, as a result of the change to arable cropping, compounded by a general decline of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. In these areas, and especially where landform becomes stronger, views across the landscape become more evident, fences become more common and ancient broadleaved woodlands give way to newer plantations.

3. The plain as a whole is not homogeneous, as discrete sandstone areas are elevated above the clay lowlands. For this reason it is helpful to describe the character area with reference to subdivisions based on those geological differences, as follows.

The West Staffordshire Lowlands

4. Western Staffordshire undulates gently between the tributaries of the Rivers Sow and Penk. This is a rolling lowland landscape of drift-covered Triassic mudstones. Neutral and acidic stagnogleys are interspersed sparsely with pockets of sandy soils, now recognisable by evidence of former heathland in roadside vegetation and a regular field enclosure pattern. Glacial kettleholes have given rise to Copmere, Aqualate Mere and Loynton Moss, and to features which have since been drained and often stripped of their peat, but which are still evident from the predominance of bracken and silver birch, and from place names. Depressions, often with ponds, of more recent origin are the frequent and characteristic marl pits, which resulted from the hand digging of Keuper Marl (now known as Mercia Mudstones) for use in promoting soil fertility.

5 The area was colonised by the end of the Bronze Age, although probably not intensively occupied until the Roman period. Several Roman roads meet in the area, including the road from Chester, which met Watling Street at

Pennocrucium. There is little historical evidence from the early medieval period, although the Domesday Survey suggests an arable landscape in the south with more pasture and woodland evident in the north. New settlements appear to have been founded later in the medieval period. Open fields were enclosed by agreement during the early post-medieval period and there was a move from an arable to a pastoral economy. Improved communications were introduced in the eighteenth century with the reconstruction of Watling Street and the building of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire and the Shropshire Union Canals.

6. The brick farms and villages here are of a mellow red. A wide range of timber-framed buildings can be seen in the older settlements, such as Brewood and Penkridge, some with brick replacing the earlier material of their infill panels. Villages are often on raised ground with fine stone parish churches, such as St Lawrence in Gnosall. In the surrounding countryside one may still see large farmsteads which date from the prosperous period of farming in this area, the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some have now been converted to residential use as at Sutton and Derrington, but good working examples can still be seen at Billington and Wood Eaton.

7. In the extreme south of this region much of the landscape remained as heath until eighteenth century enclosure. Chillington Hall now stands at its centre and its designed landscape and estate buildings predominate here.

8. Agricultural land quality is mainly average, with over 80% of the area at Grade 3. Dairy farming, with some stock rearing, now predominates, but is giving way in some places to arable, where it has been accompanied by field rationalisation. The cropping comprises mainly combinable arable crops with potatoes, sugar beet and small fruit grown on the better quality land. The more intact areas show an irregular pattern of hedged fields, ancient hedgerows, and large numbers of over-mature hedgerow pedunculate oaks (*Quercus robur*). However, the scale of the landscape over quite substantial areas has enlarged significantly as a result of farm rationalisation and conversion to arable, reinforced by a general decline of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Localised small-scale landscapes occur in the flat river valleys of the Trent and Penk, where wetland tree species predominate.

   Commercial forestry is practised on half a dozen or so traditional estates. Conifers and broadleaves are grown, separately and in mixture, and no single species predominates. The distribution of ancient woodlands is markedly uneven: there are distinct clusters around Chillington, and between Gnosall and Woodseaves, but very few elsewhere in the area.

10. Perhaps the most characteristic of all small trees in this area is the damson, usually found in cottage gardens and the hedgerows surrounding former smallholdings and cottagers' plots. Although such small fields and gardens are at risk of tidying and conversion to pony paddocks, for the time being the tree seems to be holding its own, and its blossom continues to light up the hedgerows in spring, whilst the lanes are often stained purple in autumn from falling fruit. English elm *(Ulmus procera)* was formerly a characteristic tree of

the western lowlands, but only a single mature specimen is now known to survive here, although sucker regrowth is common. The native black poplar (*Populus nigra* var. *betulifolia*) has fared rather better: the area would qualify as the species' heartland in Staffordshire, if such a rarity could be said to have one.

11. A small fragment of a Shropshire landscape extends slightly into Staffordshire, in the area to the west of Woodseaves. Permo-Triassic sandstones are overlain by brown earths and drift-derived stagnogleys, giving rise to a gently rolling landscape, becoming more pronounced in some parts. The area was probably originally heathland, interspersed with mosses. There are no apparent traces of prehistoric occupation, although evidence survives for Roman communications. Much of the area shows signs of having been enclosed since the early 1800s.

12. The agricultural land quality is generally good. Intensive arable cropping contributes significantly to the area's visual character. The original heathland vegetation shows through strongly in remnants of silver birch woodlands, in the heathland species present in the hedgerows, and in the ordered nature of a recently planned landscape. The hedges and hedgerow trees appear to be in decline, and there is evidence also of large-scale removal of hedges, increasing the scale of the landscape. Stream corridors in places provide the only intact landcover elements. Winding, often sunken, lanes reflect the edge of the heathland enclosure and represent the older landscapes of the surrounding areas, often with a similar character due to agricultural intensification. The large-scale open rolling nature of the countryside ensures that the whole landscape is on view. Settlement of this area is characterised by a sparse pattern of expanded hamlets and isolated large farms and estate buildings. There is no commercial forestry, and the area has no ancient woodlands.

The Woodland Quarter

13. This is a local name, of unknown provenance, for a distinctive region of sandstone hills and large woodlands to the south west of Newcastle-under-Lyme. At its core is an area of strongly rising landform, culminating in the Maer and Hanchurch hills, with their extensive conifer plantations and remnant heathland character, resulting from the acidic sands and brown soils overlying Permo-Triassic sandstones. The agricultural land quality here is mainly average at Grade 3, with some Grade 2. This is predominantly a livestock farming area with dairying the main farm type. Cereals and other more demanding arable crops including potatoes are grown mainly in the south and west of the area where land quality is generally better than further north.

14. The undulating landform is a unifying feature; to the west of the core area, approaching the boundary with north Shropshire, it supports a medium scale landscape with an intact field pattern and conifer woodlands on a pronounced rolling landform, whilst to the south it develops into an elevated plateau of intensive farmland and dispersed hamlets. This is an area of scattered woods

and regular to semi-regular medium sized fields, where the mixed arable and pastoral farming, with few trees, sculpted hedges and strong landform, results in extensive views across the landscape. The landform reduces to a much smaller scale the landscape around Copmere in the extreme south, where it becomes strongly incised by steep sided wooded valleys. In the intensively farmed arable areas the landscape becomes very much more open in character. Broadleaved woodlands have more effect in dictating scale in these areas, though never enough to interrupt views across them. Small winding lanes are a general feature of the quarter.

15. There is some evidence for prehistoric and Roman settlement, but the irregular field pattern, the lack of nucleated villages and the preponderance of woodland-type names all suggest that the present landscape is the result of gradual colonisation of an area that was once wooded. No particular date can be determined for this colonisation, but it may have continued up until the early modern period. In effect, it may have ended with the final enclosure, by agreement or by Act, of the remaining open heaths and commons. Encroachment since the middle ages is reflected in such settlement names as Woodwall Green and Shortwood Cottages. Panelled timber-framed buildings dating from this period can be found, for example in Hanchurch. Later brick was used, although some houses still incorporate sandstone, which reflects the availability of stone in this area. The designers of the parklands, laid out around halls such as Keele, Whitmore, Maer and Swynnerton in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, made good use of the rolling character of the area. There are long-established mills at Offleybrook and Walk Mill, in the valleys near Eccleshall, although their surviving buildings are largely of nineteenth century date.

16. There are large Forest Enterprise woodlands, mainly of Corsican pine [*Pinus nigra var. maritima*], at Burnt Wood, Bishops Wood and Swynnerton Old Park on the Hanchurch hills, and similar privately owned commercial woodlands on the Maer Hills and at Burnt Wood. The Maer Hills plantation, and possibly that at Swynnerton Old Park, occupy former heathlands, whilst Bishops Wood and Burnt Wood are ancient woodland sites. A semi-natural remnant of former simple oak coppice with both native species and hybrids survives in the latter woodland. With the exception of the ancient woodlands, the areas of greatest nature conservation interest are probably the valleys of the Rivers Tern and Sow, and the Coal Brook. Two tree species which impart a particular local character in the upper Sow valley are bird cherry *(Prunus padus)* - usually thought of as an upland species - and the nationally-rare Plot elm *(Ulmus carpinifolia* var*. plotii)* now relegated almost to the status of a shrub as a result of Dutch elm disease.

The Northern Meres and Mosses

17. The character of the clay lowlands is reasserted in this area to the north of the sandstones of the Woodland Quarter. It is an old cultural landscape with a strong structure of medium sized irregular hedged fields with large numbers of hedgerow oaks. It is characterised by pastoral farming of dairying and stock

rearing with some areas under arable cropping. The land is mainly of average agricultural quality, at Grade 3.

18. The underlying Triassic mudstones carry a mantle of glacial drift which has given rise to neutral or acidic stagnogleys with pockets of sandy soils. Meres and mosses of glacial origin are represented by Betley Mere, Cranberry Bog and Cracow Moss.

19. There is some surviving evidence for prehistoric burial practices, but little other evidence for pre-medieval activity here. Settlement is scattered, and there are faint traces of a woodland origin in the local placenames. The major settlements, Betley and Ravenshall, are linear in form and there is a form of cottage settlement south of Betley Mere, around Cracow Moss. The northern part of the area shows evidence of more recent enclosure in the straightness of the roads and the regular field pattern, contrasting with the surrounding irregular, medium-sized hedged fields with large numbers of hedgerow pedunculate oaks.

20. The sharing of characteristics with counties to the west is most sharply seen in this area, where the timber-framed buildings of Cheshire influenced builders in both the medieval and later periods. Small highly decorative panels are found in Hall o'the Wood, Balterley, and the timber- framed parish church of Betley belongs to a group of similar buildings in Cheshire. Later buildings use the dark red-brown bricks common throughout north Staffordshire; some of the houses in Betley

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES

Riparian alluvial lowlands

These are landscapes of levels and lowland river valleys, where alluvial soils and occasional peat overlie alluvial drift and Triassic mudstones. The dominant land uses are cropping with some stock rearing in large hedged fields of a regular pattern, with few woodlands.

Visual character

These riverine landscapes are characterised by their flat topography and visual links with landform and land uses of surrounding areas. The predominantly pastoral farming on the floodplain gives way to small areas of arable cropping where this becomes possible due to the slight raising of the land levels.

There are few woodlands, and none of ancient origin. The landscape is characterised by trees associated with waterside planting. Willow, alder and poplar predominate along the river, stream and dyke courses, with remnant deteriorating hawthorn hedges and occasional hedgerow oak present. Hedgerows vary, with some areas intact and well looked after whilst deteriorating in other places, resulting in extensive wire fences. Variation within the valley, in the extent of the floodplain pasture, results in changes of views across the landscape. Some areas appear well treed as a result of grown up thorn and extensive tree cover, whereas the narrower parts of the river valleys offer little restriction to views through them.

Habitation tends to occur adjacent to the floodplain. Canals feature strongly in these areas and give a local character where they are present. Adjacent built up areas considerably change the character of the landscape in some places by visually dominating the internal landscape features.

Characteristic landscape features

A flat landform**,** with pastoral floodplain farming; waterside tree species; a variety of watercourses from rivers and canals to streams; dykes and water channels; poplar plantations and hawthorn hedges in an angular field pattern; isolated red brick farm buildings.

Incongruous landscape features

Adjacent urban landscape uses and encroaching urban elements such as sewage works; electrified railway; power lines; lines of fencing replacing deteriorating hedgerows.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The most critical factor which currently limits landscape quality is the relatively poor survival of characteristic (i.e. riparian and wetland) semi-natural vegetation. The valley of the river Penk, to the south and east of Stafford, has been identified as a 'landscape at risk' of sudden loss of quality (see Section 7.18 *et seq*. of the Supporting Documentation) and in this area in particular measures to reinstate and conserve such vegetation will be critically important in preventing such a loss. Other options and actions of particular relevance to this landscape type are listed in the Environment Agency's Staffordshire Trent Valley Local Environment Agency Plan.

Potential value of new woodland planting

These landscapes are potentially sensitive to new woodland planting because of flood control constraints and conflicting Biodiversity Action Plan targets for wet grassland, etc. There is potential for carefully sited discrete floodplain woodlands, and for planting of riparian buffer strips in arable areas to intercept field run-off in the interests of improving river water quality. Some planting to direct views away from, and screen intrusive urban features adjacent to the floodplain would also be of value.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/ semi-natural broadleaved woodland	re-create/ regenerate	lower
Ancient/diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	lower
	maintain trees	lower
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	lower
Arable field margins	maintain, improve and restore	medium
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	medium
	increase the number of such features	medium
Lowland wet grassland	maintain and enhance existing areas	high
	restore degraded areas	high
	create new areas	high
Reedbeds	maintain and create	high
Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	high
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	high

Wet woodland	maintain, enhance and restore	high
	prevent further loss	high
	increase the number of such woodlands	high

Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

The most appropriate species for planting are those associated with riverside habitats, e.g. poplar, willow and alder. Small to medium sized blocks, associated with existing vegetation whenever possible, would reflect the current scale of the landscape and avoid closing views.

Plantations up to field size may be acceptable, provided they are kept at some distance from important views and roads through the area. Some visual interlocking of woodland would add interest to views along the more open parts of the river valleys.

Settled plateau farmland slopes

These are, in general, landscapes of the slopes below rolling plateaux, on which boulder clay overlies Triassic mudstones. The soils, which are generally non-calcareous stagnogleys, support dairying with some mixed farming in a semi-regular pattern of hedged fields, with scattered woods, often of ancient origin, and areas of remnant heath. There is a dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets and farmsteads, with urban influences in places.

Visual character

The single example of the type found in this Regional Character Area is a landscape of intensive arable and pastoral farming where fields have been enlarged to increase the scale considerably in places. The well trimmed nature of the hedgerows, isolated trees and prominent rolling landform ensure that there are always views across the landscape to the distance or intermediate horizons. The many small woods (none of them of ancient origin) and the stream valleys are important in locally reducing scale and directing views. Typical red brick farmhouses and scattered cottages are quickly losing their character by improvement or erection of large associated buildings. The area is easily accessible due to the network of narrow winding lanes serving the farms and hamlets. Newer properties are surprisingly numerous and reduce the quality of the landscape by their visibility and inappropriate design.

Characteristic landscape features

Intensive arable and pasture farming; large scale field pattern with well trimmed hedgerows; a rolling, often pronounced landform; well treed stream corridors; dispersed red brick farms; narrow winding lanes and small woodlands.

Incongruous landscape features

Modern large farm buildings and new properties; gappy hedgerows and field trees where hedgerows have been removed.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The most critical factor which currently limits landscape quality is the relatively poor survival of characteristic semi-natural vegetation (i.e. ancient woodland, heathland and ancient hedgerows). The single area falling within this landscape character type has been identified as a 'landscape at risk' of sudden loss of quality (see Section 7.18 *et seq*. of the Supporting Documentation) and measures to meet the BAP targets listed below will be critically important in preventing such a loss.

This landscape character type is very sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Moderate to low, to restore a structure to the landscape now being lost due to farm intensification and subsequent loss of hedgerows.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/semi-natural broadleaved woodland	maintain and enhance	lower
	restore degraded sites	lower
	re-create/regenerate	lower
Ancient/diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	high
	maintain trees	high
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	lower
Arable field margins	maintain, improve and restore	lower
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	lower
	increase the number of such features	lower
Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	medium
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	medium

Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

Any size of woodland planting would be appropriate but they should be designed to fit into the existing field pattern on ridges and valleys and possibly designed to landform criteria on the steepest slopes. New planting should link into existing woods or hedgerows.

Broadleaved woodlands would be most appropriate, with any coniferous plantations being designed to reflect the surrounding broadleaved character by taking care over edge treatment and the appreciation of views from adjacent higher ground. The scale of planting should increase as it extends up slopes, and conifers should if possible be excluded from those upper areas.

Settled farmlands

Closely related to the previous type, but lacking its boulder clay, these are landscapes of undulating lowlands and hills, with non-calcareous brown soils overlying Triassic mudstones. There is a thin scatter of small woodlands, often of ancient origin. The settlement pattern is mixed, and not distinctive.

Visual character

This is a landscape of mixed arable and pastoral farmland in which farming practices vary from low intensity, still retaining an intact ancient pattern of hedgerows and hedgerow trees, to areas of more intensively farmed arable and improved pasture. Here the medium scale, irregular field pattern has deteriorated considerably by removal of hedgerows and inappropriate maintenance of those remaining. In the more intact areas, decline is occurring, with the landcover pattern beginning to break down and hedgerows either being allowed to grow up and become ragged, or being mechanically trimmed and becoming gappy as a result. The hedgerow oaks, characteristic of this countryside, are of mixed age and vary in density from being numerous enough to coalesce visually and filter views across the landscape, to becoming isolated elements in a landscape of generally open character. Increases in vegetation cover are often associated with the numerous field ponds and small stream corridors and where woodlands occur they have an important localised effect on the landscape, despite their generally small size.

The interaction between tree and hedgerow density and the gently undulating landform leads to localised variation, from medium to long distance panoramic views, and enables views through the landscape to show up the field pattern.

This landscape has a very rural feel, with the small winding country lanes linking the large numbers of traditional style red brick farms and old settlements. Industrial and commuter development, however, are now generally impacting on this character quite strongly. General decline, both of settlement pattern and landcover elements, is resulting in long term irreversible changes to the overall character of the landscape.

This is an intact rural landscape but it is showing signs of commuter pressure and is in danger of gradual decline.

Characteristic landscape features

A gently undulating landform with pronounced occasional high points; mature broadleaved woodlands; hedgerow oaks and a strong irregular hedgerow pattern; well treed field ponds and stream corridors; traditional red brick farmsteads and settlements; small ancient winding lanes.

Incongruous landscape features

New housing development; industrial development and large modern farm buildings; power lines and busy main roads; the introduction of fencing for stock control.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are the loss of characteristic landscape features, the poor condition of those features that remain, and the relatively poor survival of characteristic semi-natural vegetation (i.e. ancient woodland and hedgerows, semi-natural grasslands and riparian and wetland vegetation).

Potential value of new woodland planting

High to very high. New planting provides an opportunity for mitigating the visual effects of busy main roads and industrial development, and can provide a structure to the landscape where this is being lost due to farming intensification and subsequent hedgerow removal. The restoration of wet woodland, and new planting, would be of benefit.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/semi-natural broadleaved woodland	maintain and enhance	lower
	restore degraded sites	lower
	re-create/regenerate	high
Ancient/diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	high
	maintain trees	high
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	lower
Arable field margins	maintain, improve and restore	lower
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	high
	increase the number of such features	high
Lowland wet grassland	maintain and enhance existing areas	high
	restore degraded areas	medium
	create new areas	lower
Reedbeds	maintain and create	medium

Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	high
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	high
Unimproved neutral grassland	maintain and safeguard existing areas	high
	restore	medium
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	medium
	create/re-create new areas	lower
Wet woodland	maintain, enhance and restore	medium
	prevent further loss	lower
	increase the number of such woodlands	medium

Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

Planting should reflect existing field pattern, with a strong design emphasis on woodland edges to reflect the existing hedgerow character. Siting in more open areas needs more care and to be of a larger scale to tie into the existing land cover structure; it may require the addition of new hedgerows and hedgerow trees. The scale should be large enough to reflect landform in the areas where this is more pronounced.

Small to medium scale planting of field size or smaller is appropriate in the areas of more intact land cover elements. Planting should preferably be predominantly of a broadleaved character but opportunities exist for conifers to be introduced, particularly in the more open areas. On sloping ground these woodlands must have a suitable internal design due to the angle of view. Screening of popular views and local landmarks should be avoided.

Ancient clay farmlands

In Staffordshire this type is geographically well defined and restricted to the western side of the county. It is characterised by the irregular pattern of hedged fields with ancient hedgerows and oaks, by subtle evidence of former heathland, and by a dispersed settlement pattern with small rural towns. The major land use has been dairying, dictated by the stagnogley soils derived from boulder clay which covers Triassic mudstones, to create a rolling lowland plain; however, pockets of sandy soil have supported arable production, and this has spread to the heavier soils in recent years. There are estateland and parkland variants, but the major visual distinction between landscapes, from relatively well wooded to very open, appears only on further subdivision on the basis of landscape quality.

Visual character

This is a landscape of mixed arable and pastoral farmland, the character of which is strongly influenced by existing land use and farming practices.

In the areas of pastoral farming an intact irregular ancient pattern of hedgerows and hedgerow trees is still retained. In places this pattern is beginning to break down, with hedgerows either being allowed to grow up and become ragged, or being mechanically trimmed and becoming gappy as a result. The mature hedgerow oaks are characteristic of this countryside and still numerous enough to coalesce visually and filter views across the landscape. These trees are now predominantly mature or becoming over-mature and stag headed. In more intensively farmed, predominantly arable areas, rationalisation has resulted in considerable removal of hedgerows and inappropriate maintenance of those remaining. The accompanying decline of hedgerow tree cover has led to a generally open character where landform has become dominant over vegetation cover and trees are now often viewed as individual elements.

Throughout this landscape type, the varying tree and hedgerow density and landform give changing scales from medium to large. The gently rolling landform, with occasional high points, allows long distance views through the landscape to show up the landcover elements. Local small-scale ancient woodlands and plantations provide areas of denser visual containment. Especially important in this landscape are the many marl pits, meres and mosses, now surrounded by mature trees, and the series of small brooks. These, and canals running through the area, are picked out by lines of willow, poplar and alder, providing some structure in the more open arable areas.

Areas associated with villages are generally less intensively farmed and the scale is reduced by broadleaved linear woodlands. These divide the landscape into small discrete units and give a well-balanced interlock between the farmland and woodland elements. In these areas of smaller scale the field pattern is predominantly irregular, with dense mixed hedges and hedge banks. On areas of old common the hedgerows form a more regular pattern in the landscape.

This landscape has a very rural feel, with the small winding country lanes, large red brick farms and numerous old villages. Localised industrial and commuter development does not impact to any great extent on this general character, although a general decline, both of village character and landcover elements, could result in long-term irreversible erosion of the landscape character. Major road corridors have a significant localised effect and result in some areas being particularly well viewed.

Characteristic landscape features

Mature hedgerow oaks and strong hedgerow patterns; narrow winding lanes, often sunken; small broadleaved and conifer woodlands; well treed stream and canal corridors; hedgerow damsons; occasional native black poplars; numerous farmsteads, cottages, villages and hamlets of traditional red brick; a gently rolling landform with stronger slopes in places; dispersed settlement pattern; halls and manors; marl pits and field ponds; meres and mosses.

Incongruous landscape features

Busy main roads and motorway; powerlines; stag headed over-mature oaks; some conifer and poplar plantations; horseyculture; large modern farm buildings; industrial developments; electrified railway line; urban edge; improved and new commuter dwellings; introduction of wire fencing for stock control associated with deteriorating field pattern.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are the loss of characteristic landscape features (especially hedgerows and hedgerow trees), the poor condition of those features that remain, and the relatively poor survival of characteristic semi-natural vegetation (i.e. ancient woodland and hedgerows, semi-natural grasslands and riparian and wetland vegetation). A significant part of the area falling within this landscape character type has been identified as a 'landscape at risk' of sudden loss of quality (see Section 7.18 *et seq*. of the Supporting Documentation) and measures to meet the BAP targets listed below will be critically important in preventing such a loss.

This landscape character type is locally very sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.

Potential value of new woodland planting

High to very high, to maintain a structure to the landscape to offset the decline in hedgerow pattern as a result of farm intensification. The southern part of the area represented by this landscape type could benefit from the planting of large woodlands, and from the establishment of new native woodlands, strategically sited

to counter ancient woodland fragmentation. The maintenance, restoration and planting of wet woodland would be of value throughout this landscape.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/semi-natural broadleaved woodland	maintain and enhance	high
	restore degraded sites	medium
	re-create/regenerate	high
Ancient/diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	very high
	maintain trees	very high
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	lower
Arable field margins	maintain, improve and restore	medium
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	high
	increase the number of such features	high
Lowland calcareous grassland	safeguard remaining areas and adjoining land	high
	restore semi-improved grasslands	lower
	link fragmented sites through habitat creation	lower
Lowland wet grassland	maintain and enhance existing areas	high
	restore degraded areas	high
	create new areas	high
Lowland wood pasture and parkland	maintain and safeguard	medium
	restore degraded sites	medium
Peat bogs	maintain and enhance	very high
Reedbeds	maintain and create	high
Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	very high
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	very high
Unimproved neutral grassland	maintain and safeguard existing areas	high
	restore	high
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	high
	create/re-create new areas	high
Wet woodland	maintain, enhance and restore	medium
	prevent further loss	medium
	increase the number of such woodlands	medium

Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan. English Nature's Strategy for the Conservation of the Meres and Mosses of Cheshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire is also an important reference document for this landscape.

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

Increase planting of hedgerow trees and field corners to rebuild the structure of the landscape where decline is occurring.

Plant new woodlands to adhere to existing field pattern and to reflect the scale of the landscape. In the more open areas there is therefore the opportunity for large scale planting appropriate to those landscapes, provided that coalescence and views through them are considered. Consider the planting of new native woodland between ancient woodlands, to reduce fragmentation.

Respect the existing broadleaved character of the landscape in any new planting proposals, although some conifer content would be acceptable provided it was carefully integrated into the woodland design. Care is needed over the treatment of woodland edges to reflect the hedgerow character in colour and texture. Stream corridors could be reinforced with additional linear planting of waterside species.

Retain the visual interest of views from roadsides by avoiding extensive planting up to roadsides along considerable distances. In areas of stronger landform, internal design of woodlands will become important.

Ancient clay farmlands: estatelands

This is the landed estate variant of the basic landscape type.

Visual character

This landscape is influenced strongly by the presence of estate woodland planting. The character of the ancient landscape of irregular pastoral fields is modified by significant amounts of field sized broadleaved and coniferous plantations, whilst the much more open intensively farmed arable lands have undergone extensive hedgerow loss. Views across this landscape are controlled by the interplay of woodlands and stronger landform to give a changing perspective of the farmland. Woodlands dictate and limit the scale of the landscape, with all other elements being subservient, and landform is strong enough to show up the pattern of fields or this changing visual interlock of woodlands.

Buildings are an important feature of this landscape, consisting of characteristic estate buildings and cottages, or large farmhouses.

Characteristic landscape features

In addition to many of those of the farmlands variant described above: broadleaved and conifer plantation woodlands, parkland trees and hedgerow oaks; large farmhouses and estate buildings.

Incongruous landscape features

The introduction of fencing for stock control.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The most critical factor which currently limits landscape quality is the relatively poor survival of characteristic semi-natural vegetation (i.e. ancient woodland and hedgerows, semi-natural grasslands and riparian and wetland vegetation), although ancient woodland is better represented here than in the farmlands variant, described above. The area falling within this landscape character type has been identified as a 'landscape at risk' of sudden loss of quality (see Section 7.18 *et seq*. of the Supporting Documentation) and measures to meet the BAP targets listed below will be critically important in preventing such a loss.

This landscape character type is very sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.

Potential value of new woodland planting

High to very high, to maintain and strengthen the existing character of a woodland estatelands landscape. The establishment of new native woodlands, strategically sited to counter ancient woodland fragmentation, would be of particular value.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/semi-natural broadleaved woodland	maintain and enhance	high
	restore degraded sites	high
	re-create/regenerate	very high
Ancient/diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	very high
	maintain trees	very high
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	lower
Arable field margins	maintain, improve and restore	medium
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	high
	increase the number of such features	high
Lowland wood pasture and parkland	maintain and safeguard	medium
	restore degraded sites	medium
Peat bogs	maintain and enhance	very high
Reedbeds	maintain and create	high
Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	very high
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	very high
Wet woodland	maintain, enhance and restore	medium
	prevent further loss	medium
	increase the number of such woodlands	medium

Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Specific guidelines

<u>Tree and woodland planting</u>

New woodlands should be positioned to avoid interrupting important existing views into the landscape or changing the character of the open spaces. A conifer element is acceptable but if landscape character is to be maintained it should always be a less important visual component than the broadleaves. Consider the planting of new

native woodland between ancient woodlands, to reduce fragmentation.

The size of new planting needs to reflect the existing scale and proportion of woodlands by being fairly large but appearing as separate blocks as opposed to the consolidation of existing areas. Particular care should be taken over the design of edges or where planting will have an effect on the skyline.

Settled heathlands: parkland

The landscape type, which is infrequent, is associated with areas of glacial and alluvial drift that formerly supported heathland. This results in the major distinction on which landscape character types are based, between the alluvial drift of old river terraces (not found within this Regional Character Area) and the glacial drift of other gently rolling lowland areas. In both cases the soils are mainly acid sands and brown earths which support cropping and mixed farming in a regular pattern of small and large hedged fields. Many areas are quite well wooded, although there may be few hedgerow trees.

Aqualate Park falls within the parkland variant this general landscape type. Each parkland is a unique product of its original design and its evolution over time. Consequently, any proposals for development or land use change which would affect such a landscape should be informed by a detailed historic landscape appraisal. English Heritage maintains a Register of Parks and Gardens which contains some of the more significant sites, and local authority conservation officers and the County Sites and Monuments Record may be able to provide further advice on these and other parks and gardens.

Aqualate Mere and its surrounding land comprise a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a National Nature Reserve. English Nature should be consulted over Biodiversity Action Plan targets that are relevant at landscape scale.

This landscape character type is very sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.

Sandstone estatelands

In its common form, elsewhere in the Structure Plan area, the woodlands and parklands of traditional rural estates characterise the more intact parts of this rolling lowland landscape type. It has a wide geographic range in those parts of the county where Triassic sandstones are not obscured by drift deposits. Acid sands and brown earths predominate and, whilst some significant remnants of the original heathlands survive, the major land use is now arable cropping in large hedged or open fields of a regular pattern. Settlement is sparse, and characterised by expanded hamlets and wayside cottages. In the single area in the Staffordshire Plain which represents the basic landscape type the former woodlands and parklands have been almost completely lost.

Visual character

This is a gently rolling, featureless landscape where the increasing intensification of the arable farming has led to almost complete destruction of the fabric of the landscape, ensuring that all elements are on view. The degradation of this area is continuing, judging by the present state of the hedgerows and stag headed appearance of the remnant hedgerow oaks. Stream corridors in places provide the only intact landcover elements, giving some structure to this simple landscape.

The original vegetation pattern shows through strongly in the remnants of silver birch woodland and heathland species present in the hedgerows. Recent enclosure of the land is indicated by the ordered nature of a planned functional landscape.

Settlement is characterised by a sparsely settled pattern of expanded hamlets and isolated large farms and estate buildings linked by predominantly straight minor roads. Incongruous features such as modern large farm buildings and poorly designed reservoirs are being introduced into the landscape as a result of farm intensification.

Characteristic landscape features

Silver birch woodlands; well-treed stream corridors; straight roads; intensive arable agriculture in an open remnant field pattern.

Incongruous landscape features

Hedgerow removal along roadsides; field trees; badly designed farm reservoirs; large modern farm buildings and improved commuter properties; power lines.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are the loss of characteristic landscape features, the poor condition of those features that remain, the relatively poor survival of historic elements that contribute to landscape character, such as field, settlement and road patterns, and the very poor survival of characteristic semi-natural vegetation (i.e. heathland and related habitats, and meres and mosses).

This landscape character type is very sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Very high. There is a need in particular for the planting of larger woodlands, to restore the landscape structure of this open featureless arable farmland, to screen or direct views away from inappropriate development, e.g. reservoirs and modern farm buildings, and to reinforce the remnant heathland character of the landscape.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/semi-natural broadleaved woodland	maintain and enhance	high
	restore degraded sites	high
	re-create/regenerate	medium
Ancient/diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	medium
	maintain trees	medium
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	lower
Arable field margins	maintain, improve and restore	high
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	high
	increase the number of such features	high
Lowland wood pasture and parkland	maintain and safeguard	high
	restore degraded sites	high
Peat bogs	maintain and enhance	high
Reedbeds	maintain and create	high
Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	high
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	high

Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

New planting should tie into existing woodlands or be of sufficiently large scale to be appropriate for the remnant field pattern. Existing tree-lined stream corridors and copses can be consolidated to increase their scale.

Conifers are acceptable in this landscape, but care must be taken with edge treatment. The shape of new woodlands is less important than is fitting them to the existing vegetation pattern, but there are some areas of stronger landform where care should be taken.

Sandstone hills and heaths

This landscape type occurs at rather higher elevations than the sandstone estatelands: it has the same underlying geology and range of soils but the landform is more pronounced, comprising hills and dissected plateaux. Significant areas of this type in Staffordshire - in particular Cannock Chase - have the original heathland vegetation or coniferous forests established on heathland. Where conversion has been to farmland stock rearing is the predominant land use, in large hedged fields of a regular pattern, indicating relatively recent enclosure. Significant clusters of ancient woodlands are characteristic. The settlement pattern is generally dispersed, with expanded hamlets. The 'type-landscape', described below is farmed: estatelands, forest and parkland are treated as variants of the type.

Visual character

This is a landscape varying from intensive arable and pastoral farming, where hedgerows are closely trimmed and in decline, to small-scale intimate areas in which large grown-up intact hedges and numerous hedgerow oaks limit views through or across the landscape.

In the more intensively farmed arable areas hedgerow tree cover of oak and occasional ash is sparse. This results in an open, smoothly textured landscape with extensive views across. A pronounced landform, strongly undulating but flattening considerably in parts, results in the landcover elements being viewed as individual components of the landscape and field pattern showing up from elevated viewpoints. Woodland cover in these areas of medium to large scale tends to be small broadleaved or conifer plantations providing more localised relief along stream corridors and ridge tops. Small woodlands and copses are also often associated with farm buildings. Characteristically, where landform becomes more strongly rounded the intimate nature of the steep sided valleys and associated extensive broadleaved woodlands become the important factors in controlling scale. In these smaller scale valley landscapes there is little evidence of any agricultural pressure which would lead to further changes, but commuter pressures are apparent and these are subtly changing the character of settlements.

The network of winding ancient lanes, linking the small to medium sized farms, hamlets and individual properties of typical Staffordshire red brick, are often sunken and have extensive sandstone banks in the areas of more pronounced landform. These dictate views and give a very rural feel to the landscape. Areas of former heathland are apparent by the presence of a more regular field pattern, straight lanes, bracken and birch woodland, and these areas are often associated with newer rural properties.

Generally, this is a landscape where distinct characters are determined by different landform and woodland characteristics. The open flatter areas where everything is on view - including intrusive elements such as commuter properties, main roads and electricity pylons - are characterised by medium sized farms and large estates, whilst

the ancient pattern of small fields and predominantly pastoral land-use of the steep valleys imparts a more peaceful character to the areas of smaller scale.

Characteristic landscape features

Strongly undulating landform with steep sided valleys; a well treed landscape of field ponds, stream valleys and meres; ancient narrow sunken lanes; farms of traditional red brick; intensive arable and pasture farming; hedged field boundaries; hedgerow oaks; broadleaved and conifer woodlands.

Incongruous landscape features

Introduction of extensive post and wire fencing; field trees; modern housing; industrial development; busy main roads.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are the loss of characteristic landscape features, the poor condition of those that remain, and the introduction of the incongruous features noted above. The area between Standon and Chapel Chorlton has been identified as a 'landscape at risk' of sudden loss of quality (see Section 7.18 *et seq*. of the Supporting Documentation) and measures to meet the BAP targets listed below will be critically important in preventing such a loss.

This landscape character type is locally sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.

Potential value of woodland planting

Generally of high value, to restore a landcover structure to areas becoming more open as a result of agricultural intensification, and to screen modern housing and industrial developments. In some of the more heavily wooded parts the management and conservation of existing woods – especially those of ancient origin – would generally be a higher priority than new planting. However, the strategic siting of new native woodland could be of great value in reducing the effects of fragmentation and isolation of some ancient woodlands.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/semi-natural broadleaved woodland	maintain and enhance	medium
	restore degraded sites	medium
	re-create/regenerate	lower
Ancient/diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	very high
	maintain trees	very high
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	lower
Arable field margins	maintain, improve and restore	lower
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	high
	increase the number of such features	high
Lowland acidic grassland	maintain, enhance, restore and buffer	high
	prevent further losses (except to heathland restoration)	high
	increase the number of such sites	high
	link fragmented sites through habitat creation	high
	re-create or create/new heathlands	very high
Lowland wet grassland	maintain and enhance existing areas	medium
	restore degraded areas	medium
	create new areas	lower
Peat bogs	maintain and enhance	very high
Reedbeds	maintain and create	high
Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	high
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	high
Unimproved neutral grassland	maintain and safeguard existing areas	high
	restore	lower
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	medium
	create/re-create new areas	lower

Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

Planting should reflect the scale of the landscape, from large scale field sized plantations in the more open areas, to no more than small scale field corners or hedgerow planting in the more intimate areas. The predominantly broadleaved character should be retained but a carefully designed coniferous content to the woodlands could be included. Planting should be visually linked to existing hedgerows and woodland features whilst maintaining a careful balance between woodlands and surrounding open spaces.

On the lower ground, planting should be of a smaller scale and reflecting field pattern, but increasing in scale on the higher slopes. Care is needed with shape and internal design on the steeper slopes as the woodlands need to be designed to landform.

Sandstone hills and heaths: forest

This is a variant of the basic landscape character type in which forestry is the visually-dominant land use.

Visual character

This landscape type is dominated visually by large conifer plantations with a general heathy character, planted on areas of pronounced landform. The broadleaved component to the plantation edges and small outlying plantations helps integrate these wooded areas into the surrounding countryside, but they remain a strong dominant feature within the landscape. The surrounding farmland is an important element in defining the external appearance of these large blocks of woodland.

The open character of the surrounding countryside is interrupted in places by parkland, considerably reducing the scale of the landscape and giving those areas a distinctive character. This is a landscape much visited for recreation.

Characteristic landscape features

Large conifer plantations; oak woodland; parkland; pronounced sandstone ridge and rounded hill landform.

Incongruous landscape features

Wire fencing associated with deteriorating field pattern; horseyculture; modern and improved housing; agricultural set-aside; powerlines; busy roads.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are the relatively poor survival of historic elements that contribute to landscape character, such as field, settlement and road patterns, and the poor survival of characteristic semi-natural vegetation (i.e. heathland and related habitats, including heathy ancient semi-natural woodland). The Hanchurch Hills have been identified as a 'landscape at risk' of sudden loss of quality (see Section 7.18 *et seq*. of the Supporting Documentation) and measures to meet the BAP targets listed below will be critically important in preventing such a loss.

This landscape character type is very sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Relatively low. The conservation and management of existing woodland is a higher priority. New planting could strengthen links between large-scale conifer plantations and surrounding open countryside, and help to restore structure to those landscapes where a decline in hedgerow pattern is occurring as a result of farm intensification.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/semi-natural broadleaved woodland	maintain and enhance	very high
	restore degraded sites	high
	re-create/regenerate	medium
Ancient/diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	lower
	maintain trees	lower
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	lower
Arable field margins	maintain, improve and restore	lower
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	high
	increase the number of such features	medium
Lowland acidic grassland	maintain, enhance, restore and buffer	high
	prevent further losses (except to heathland restoration)	high
	increase the number of such sites	high
	link fragmented sites through habitat creation	high
Lowland heathland	protect existing heaths from development and damaging activities	very high
	re-create or create new heathlands	very high
Lowland wet grassland	maintain and enhance existing areas	medium
	restore degraded areas	medium
	create new areas	lower
Lowland wood pasture and parkland	maintain and safeguard	medium
	restore degraded sites	medium
Peat bogs	maintain and enhance	high
Reedbeds	maintain and create	high

Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	high
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	high

Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

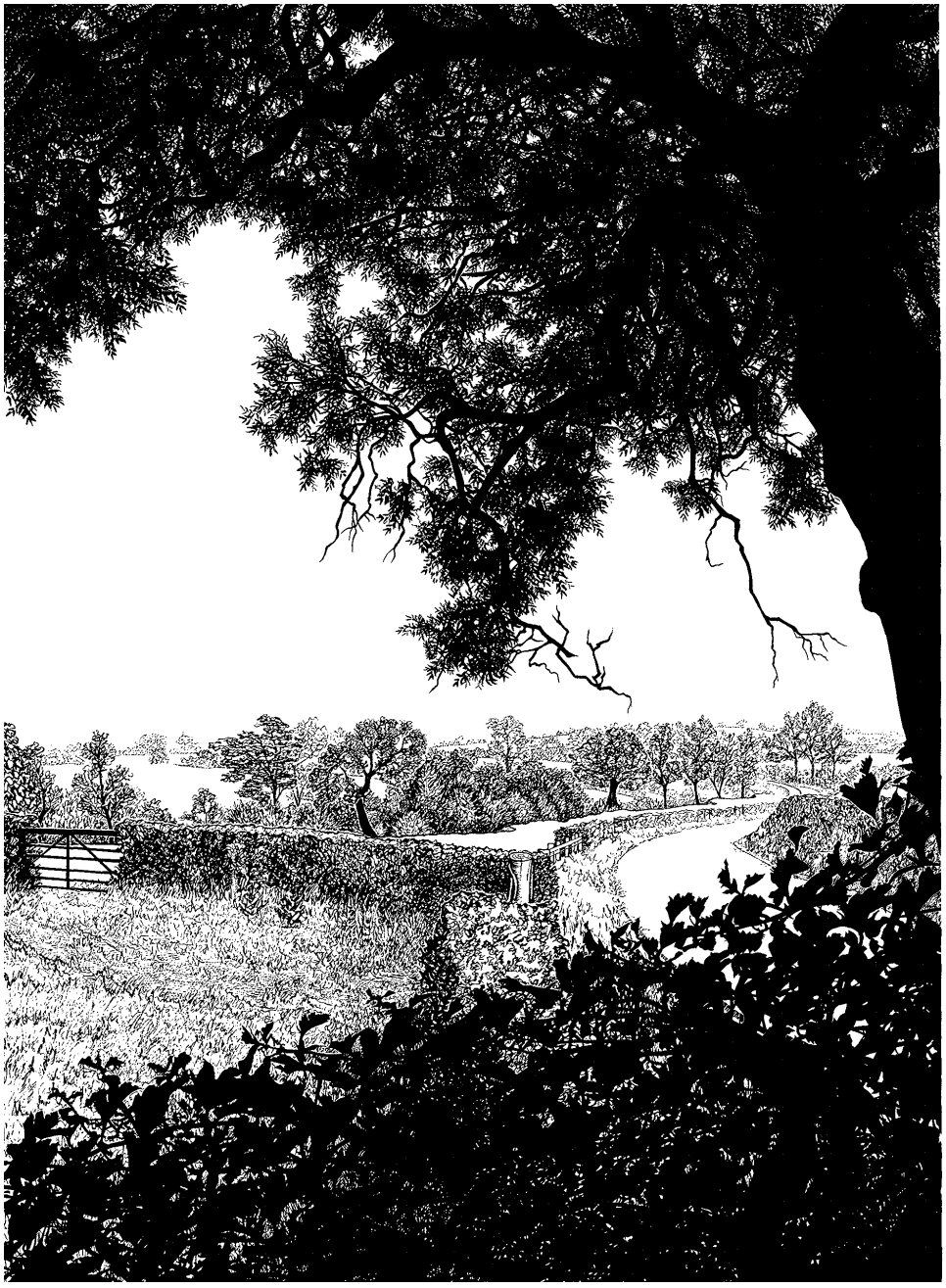
Extension of the existing woodland would have to be of small to medium scale and with a greater broadleaved content to help integration of the large plantations into the surrounding landscape. Planting should respond to landform to retain the current interlock between woodland and open space and to avoid simplification of the edges. There is the capacity to accept field sized planting, provided views through the farmland are maintained. Both broadleaved and conifer planting are acceptable. Particular care should be taken not to interrupt the parkland character where this is distinctive in places.

Sandstone hills and heaths: parkland

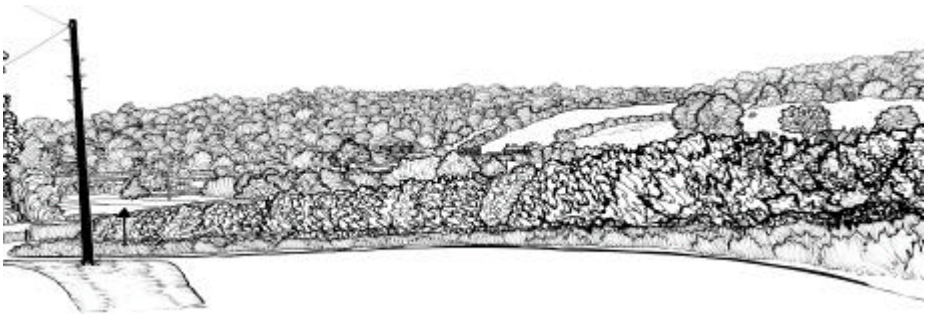
Trentham Park falls within this variant of the general landscape type. Each parkland is a unique product of its original design and its evolution over time. Consequently, any proposals for development or land use change which would affect such a landscape should be informed by a detailed historic landscape appraisal. English Heritage maintains a Register of Parks and Gardens which contains some of the more significant sites, and local authority conservation officers and the County Sites and Monuments Record may be able to provide further advice on these and other parks and gardens.

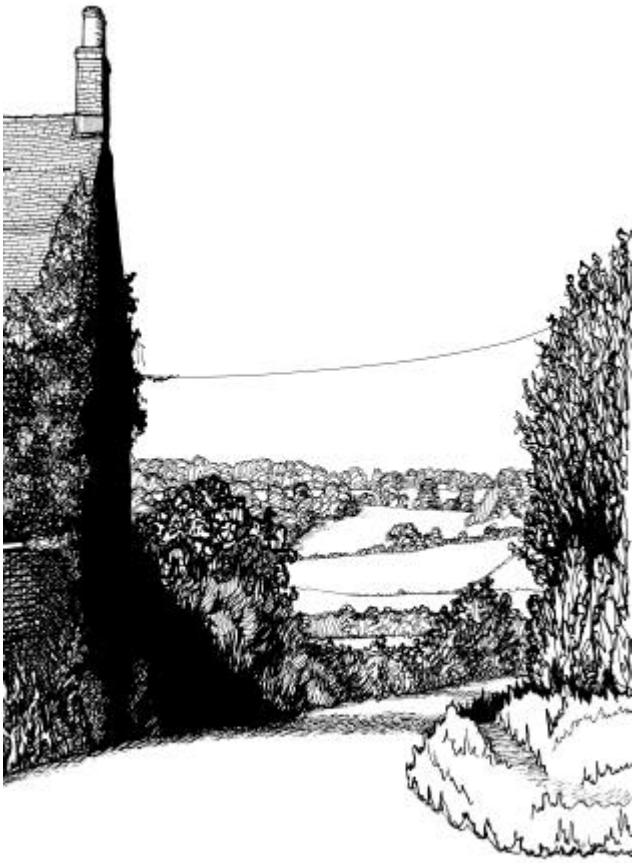
Particularly important Biodiversity Action Plan targets applying to this landscape include the conservation and management of existing ancient woodland, wood pasture and parkland, and the conservation, management and restoration of lowland heathland. Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

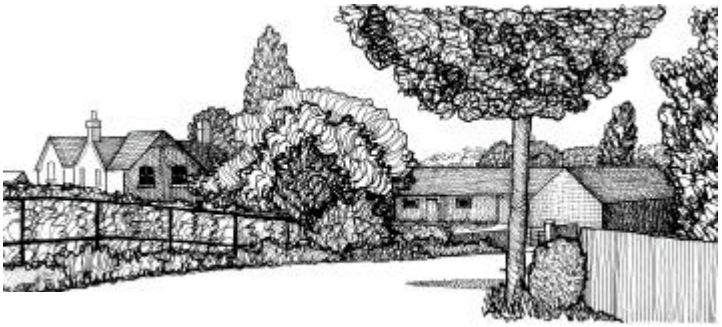
This landscape character type is very sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.

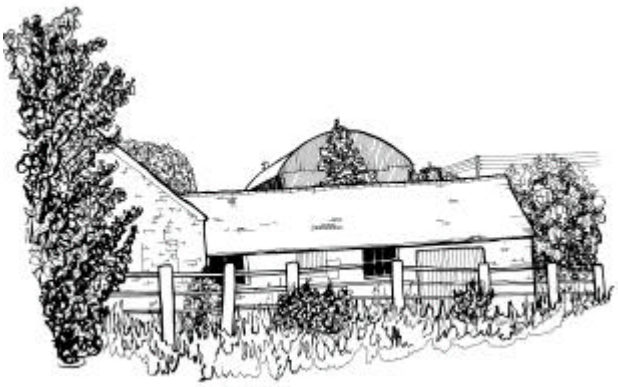


Needwood Claylands









Regional Character Area 68 - Needwood Claylands

This chapter describes the landscapes of the Needwood Claylands. This is that part of the Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands Character Area, as defined by the former Countryside Commission and English Nature, that falls within the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan area.

The first part of the chapter comprises a general description of the landscape character of this part of Staffordshire, the extent of which is shown on Map 3 of Appendix 1. This is followed by detailed descriptions of each of the landscape character types and, where applicable, sub-types that occur within it.

Chapter contents

Needwood Claylands

1. The Character Area as a whole is a rolling plateau of Triassic mudstones divided by the valley of the River Dove, which forms the boundary between Staffordshire and Derbyshire. That part within Staffordshire lies in the interfluve of the rivers Dove, Trent and Tean. A mantle of boulder clay has given rise to heavy stagnogley soils and brown earths, generally poorly draining and varying in reaction from base poor to base rich. Streams have cut through the clay to create the rolling landform in which valleys accommodate and often hide dispersed hamlets and villages. The land is of average agricultural quality, at Grade 3. It is very much a mixed farming area, two thirds of which is down to grass to support dairying with some beef and sheep farms. The arable cropping comprises mainly combinable crops including cereals and oilseed rape.

2. There have been a few finds of prehistoric artefacts in the area, but there is nothing to suggest settlement. The eastern half of the area formed the forest of Needwood, the first documentary evidence for which occurs in the 1120s, although it must have existed earlier. It was used by the Ferrers family for hunting, with the woodland managed for construction and fuel. In the third quarter of the thirteenth century it passed to the Duchy of Lancaster and in 1399 to the crown. Much land was emparked during the medieval period, and it is likely that the woodland was managed as wood pasture, and grazed by cattle. It was noted for the quality both of its oaks and its pasture, and for its dense growth of hollies.

3. The slopes and valleys, which surround Needwood's central plateau, contain many villages and hamlets with historic links to the forest. To the north, south and west are valley settlements such as Marchington, Yoxall and Abbots Bromley which have a variety of timber-framed buildings demonstrating their woodland dependence. Woodroffe's, on the edge of the forest near Marchington, is an excellent example of the quality of carpentry that was achieved, and Abbots Bromley's famous annual horn dance may still echo former forest rights. Newborough was laid out on the edge of the forest in the middle ages as an attempt to generate income from settlement by the forest's owner, Robert de Ferrers. However the attempt failed and the tiny village still lies along four sunken tree-lined lanes converging on the central green.

4. There was much enclosure of commons and wastes throughout the area in the eighteenth century, often followed by attempts to improve the land for arable cultivation. New roads, often perfectly straight, were built at this time. The gradual erosion of Needwood culminated in the disafforestation and enclosure of the remaining core of 9400 acres under an Act of 1801. The felling of trees began immediately, although it took 20 years to complete. A contemporary survey indicates that 58,621 oaks and 148,170 hollies were felled (Greenslade and Kettle, 1967). A description of a walk to the Swilcar Oak in 1802 notes that 'Here the devastation had begun - oaks and hollies were piled upon the ground; it was like crossing a field of battle. The hollies were bought up with great avidity by Manchester traders, being a wood particularly useful in printing cottons." (Ibid.)

5. The landscape that has emerged at Needwood is characterised by a very regular pattern of well cared-for hedged fields, straight roads and regular conifer plantations with isolated neat brick farms, bounded abruptly to the north by prominent and extensive ancient woodlands on the scarp slope above the river Dove. This is, next to the Churnet Valley, the most important concentration of ancient and ancient semi-natural woodland in the county, and also a successful commercial forest in the ownership of the Duchy of Lancaster. It is noted for the quality of its pedunculate oak and larch *(Larix spp.)*, and also for the occurrence of wild service tree *(Sorbus torminalis)* and small leaved lime *(Tilia cordata)*. Distinctive species of the understorey include spindle *(Euonymus europaeus)*, spurge laurel *(Daphne laureola)* and wood spurge *(Euphorbia amygdaloides)*, here at the northern edge of its range.

6. A number of landscaped parks and gardens were created here during the nineteenth century, and they have a considerable effect locally in increasing tree cover. The late Georgian red brick New Church, and nearby large Victorian farmstead on the wide road crossing the plateau, both illustrate the type of building which now characterise this landscape. On the east of the plateau Rangemore, a late nineteenth century village built at the expense of industrialist M. T. Bass, also demonstrates Victorian vernacular styles.

7. In the north and west of the area the plateau between the Rivers Blythe and Trent was also a royal hunting reserve after the Norman Conquest but did not have so enduring an influence on settlement as Needwood. The village of Hilderstone has good examples of the deep red and brown brick used in cottages in the area and it winds down a ridge between two streams forming a street village, a type common throughout the Midlands. The area is characterised by a small to medium scale pattern of semi-regular hedged fields, and a number of moated sites perhaps suggest extensive medieval woodland. Hedgerow decline is very apparent in places, with consequent increases in scale. In the extreme west a narrow band of Triassic sandstone, extending from Sandon to Downs Bank and beyond, imparts a distinctive remnant heathland character.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES

Settled plateau farmlands

These are landscapes of rolling plateaux, on which boulder clay overlies Triassic mudstones. The soils, which are generally non-calcareous stagnogleys, support dairying with some mixed farming in a semi-regular pattern of hedged fields, with scattered woods, often of ancient origin, and areas of remnant heath. There is a dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets and farmsteads, with urban influences in places.

Visual character

This is an open landscape of large-scale regular and irregular fields with extensive views from the raised, undulating plateau landform out to the surrounding countryside, except where conifer and broadleaved plantations restrict views and act as constant skyline features. Few hedgerows and a generally low density of hedgerow trees emphasise this open nature, although locally, remnant heathy woodland of ancient origin, containing oak, holly and silver birch, or woodland estate planting, help to reduce the scale and contain views. There are belts of mature broadleaved trees which intersect the open areas, and new tree planting has been carried out along tracks, although the use of exotic species has sometimes been inappropriate.

Intensive arable and improved pasture farming has reduced the level of diversity, with breakdown of field boundaries to wire fences, stunted individual oaks and individual thorn.

There is little access into these areas except tracks to large isolated estate farms with large modern agricultural buildings.

Characteristic landscape features

Ancient heathy oak woodland and new plantations; pronounced rolling ridge and valley landform; large farms; intensive mixed pastoral and arable farming; large scale fields; parkland.

Incongruous landscape features

Large numbers of fence-lines replacing hedgerows; gappy hedgerows; large farm buildings; stunted hedgerow oaks; exotic tree species.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are the loss of characteristic landscape features, the poor condition of those features that remain, and the introduction of incongruous features, as listed above. The representation of semi-natural vegetation characteristic of this landscape type (e.g. ancient woodland, wood pasture and unimproved grassland) is also relatively poor.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Very high, to decrease the scale of the landscape and restore some structure to an area of intensive farming losing much of its hedgerow pattern. The planting of larger woodlands would be particularly appropriate as would the strategic siting of new native woodland to reduce the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland. This landscape type therefore qualifies as a priority under two of the key actions in the government's England Forestry Strategy.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/semi-natural broadleaved woodland	maintain and enhance	high
	restore degraded sites	very high
	re-create/regenerate	very high
Ancient/diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	very high
	maintain trees	very high
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	high
Arable field margins	maintain, improve and restore	medium
Lowland wet grassland	maintain and enhance existing areas	high
	restore degraded areas	high
	create new areas	high
Peat bogs	maintain and enhance	high
	restore former raised bogs	high
Reedbeds	maintain and create	high
Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	high
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	high

Unimproved neutral grassland	maintain and safeguard existing areas	high
	restore	lower
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	medium
	create/re-create new areas	medium
Wet woodland	maintain, enhance and restore	medium
	prevent further loss	medium
	increase the number of such woodlands	medium

Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

Large blocks of woodland could be planted in the more open areas, reducing to medium scale in those with a more intact field pattern, or associated with existing woodlands. Woodlands should retain an essentially broadleaved character although a conifer content is acceptable. Care should therefore be taken with edge design to reflect this and, because of the nature of the landform, views will be available into any new woodland, so internal design is also important. 'Stepping stone' plantations, sited to reduce the isolation of existing ancient woodlands, should comprise locally native species.

Settled plateau farmland slopes

This is a close relative of the settled plateau farmlands, occupying the slopes running down from the plateau top with a consequent increase in visibility.

Visual character

This is a landscape of irregular, hedged fields and numerous hedgerow trees on a sloping landform, often dissected by small steep sided wooded stream valleys draining the plateau tops. Where the land-cover pattern remains intact, the hedgerows and hedgerow trees to a large extent control and limit views across the landscape, with the rolling landform and steeper slopes often allowing longer views and showing up the pattern of fields and small woodlands. Hedgerow tree cover is predominantly oak, with some ash, whilst stream side willow and alder have a strong localised influence along the valleys. Large areas of ancient woodland dominate the upper scarp slopes, lending a very individual character to those areas. The predominantly low intensity pastoral farming, together with a network of narrow, often sunken lanes and clustered farmsteads, hamlets and villages of traditional Staffordshire red brick lend the landscape a peaceful, rural feel.

Where agricultural intensification is taking place, a more open landscape of medium to large scale fields is reducing the diversity as field boundaries are declining to wire fence lines, gappy hedges and grown up thorn. Locally, small woodlands, mostly broadleaved in nature but sometimes with some conifer element, have a localised influence. The rolling nature of the landform, varying from gentle to more pronounced undulations, together with lack of land cover, shows up the variations in the landscape scale, the different field patterns and water features such as ponds and small streams. The presence of a large water supply reservoir changes the local scale and character of its area.

Deterioration of landscape quality is greatest at the immediate urban fringe, with less impact being evident at greater distances from the built environment. There is evidence, however, of commuter pressure and the urbanising influence of inter-war ribbon development, and discrete areas of industrialisation and mining. The landscape character is being weakened, but there are still sufficient hedgerow oaks, hedgerows and woodland to give the majority of these intensively farmed areas a strong rural character despite the development pressures.

Characteristic landscape features

Hedgerow oak and ash trees; broadleaved and conifer woodlands; irregular hedged field pattern; narrow lanes and hedge-banks; old villages and hamlets; small streams and field ponds; manors and parkland; undulating, sloping landform.

Incongruous landscape features

Extensive fencing; busy roads; electricity pylons; agricultural intensification; large modern farm buildings; modernised dwellings and commuter properties; village expansion.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are the loss of characteristic landscape features, the poor condition of those features that remain, and the relatively poor survival of characteristic semi-natural vegetation (e.g. ancient woodland and semi-natural grasslands). The area around Abbots Bromley has been identified as a 'landscape at risk' of sudden loss of quality (see Section 7.18 *et seq*. of the Supporting Documentation) and measures to meet the BAP targets listed below will be critically important in preventing such a loss.

This landscape character type is locally sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Somewhat variable, from moderate to very high value, to restore some landscape structure to those areas now increasing in scale due to agricultural intensification, and to reinforce the parkland character of discrete areas.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/semi-natural broadleaved woodland	maintain and enhance	high
	restore degraded sites	medium
	re-create/regenerate	medium
Ancient/diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	high
	maintain trees	high
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	high
Arable field margins	maintain, improve and restore	lower
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	high
	increase the number of such features	high

Lowland calcareous grassland	safeguard remaining areas and adjoining land	medium
	restore semi-improved grasslands	medium
	link fragmented sites through habitat creation	lower
Lowland wet grassland	maintain and enhance existing areas	medium
	restore degraded areas	medium
	create new areas	medium
Peat bogs	maintain and enhance	high
	restore former raised bogs	high
Reedbeds	maintain and create	high
Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	very high
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	very high
Unimproved neutral grassland	maintain and safeguard existing areas	high
	restore	high
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	medium
	create/re-create new areas	medium
Wet woodland	maintain, enhance and restore	lower
	prevent further loss	lower
	increase the number of such woodlands	lower

Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

The character of the sloping landform and increasing openness of some areas suggests a variety of appropriate scales of planting. In the more intact areas and along the valley bottoms no more than small scale planting of field corners or field size could be accommodated. This could then increase to medium to large scale further up the slopes and in the open landscapes, provided that views though are retained and there is interlock maintained between the planted and unplanted areas. The flow of fields around the interlocking woodlands is visually important. In most cases the design of plantations should build on or relate to existing hedgerows or woodlands. It should reflect the predominantly broadleaved character of the landscape, and any conifers that are used should not be allowed to dominate. In the more open areas and on steeper landform some design to slopes will become important, as will the internal design. This planting could usefully emphasise the varied landform, reinforce the parkland character where this is present, and reinforce

the stream valleys by the use of wetland species.

It is becoming increasingly important to reintroduce or strengthen the land-cover pattern by hedgerow replanting and tree conservation tagging schemes etc. In areas with existing ancient woodland, special care is needed over species choice of new woodlands.

Design in villages

The village of Rolleston on Dove, which falls largely within this landscape character type, has produced its own Village Design Statement.

Settled farmlands

Closely related to the settled plateau farmlands, but lacking their boulder clay, these are landscapes of undulating lowlands and hills, with non-calcareous brown soils overlying Triassic mudstones. The dominant land use is dairying with some mixed farming. There is a varied pattern of small to medium sized hedged fields with a scatter of small woodlands, often of ancient origin. The settlement pattern is mixed, and not distinctive. There is a parkland variant of the general farmland type.

Visual character

This is a landscape of strongly rounded or sloping landform with steeper slopes associated with narrow stream valleys draining the plateau area. Prominent broadleaved and conifer woodlands on the upper slopes begin to dictate the scale of the landscape and a smaller scale is associated with the narrow stream valleys and winding lanes leading up to the plateau.

Hedgerow pattern contributes substantially to landscape character. Its scale is variable: in some areas the pattern is largely intact, with numerous hedgerow trees, and to a large extent this controls and limits views across the landscape. This is particularly the case where increased hedgerow tree cover in the flatter areas allows some coalescence and, more importantly, where streamside vegetation of willow and alder has a considerable enclosing effect. In other areas hedgerows have become gappy or have been removed completely and extensive fencing introduced. This has led to an enlargement of scale, resulting in extensive views out to surrounding landscapes and showing up the pattern of fields, small woodlands and other landscape elements on the very visible landform.

The pastoral farming, together with a network of narrow, often sunken, lanes and clustered farmsteads lend the landscape a peaceful, rural feel. Scale becomes very much more reduced around the settlements where field pattern is smaller and more intact. Villages are, however, undergoing considerable expansion and the influence of busy road corridors and hobby farming are beginning to be noticeable. Pasture farming is intensifying and large areas of arable farming are now increasing the rate of decline of land cover elements. Small lanes are rapidly becoming rat - runs as villages expand and suburban creep into the countryside becomes noticeable.

The area is widely viewed from adjacent units. The presence of designed parkland has a marked local effect on the landscape with prominent parkland trees and increased woodland cover producing a very distinctive landscape.

Characteristic landscape features

Large numbers of hedgerow oak and ash; strong irregular field pattern; narrow lanes and hedge banks; traditional red brick buildings; undulating sloping landform; steep wooded stream valleys; broadleaved woodlands and conifer plantations; ancient village settlements; parkland.

Incongruous landscape features

Village expansion; busy roads; modern housing; extensive fencing; localised electrified railway line and large-scale industrial buildings.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factor which currently limits landscape quality is the loss of characteristic semi-natural vegetation, in particular ancient woodland and hedgerows, and semi-natural grasslands. Two discrete areas have been identified as 'landscapes at risk' of a sudden loss of quality (see Section 7.18 *et seq*. of the Supporting Documentation) and measures to meet the BAP targets listed below will be critically important in preventing such a loss. They are a small area to the north west of Sandon Park, and the area with the village of Yoxall at its centre.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Generally of moderate value, to restore some structure to those areas of the landscape now increasing in scale due to agricultural intensification, and to reinforce the parkland character of some areas within this landscape. An exception is the area to the west of Hixon, where its value would be very high, as an instrument of innovative landscape regeneration. It could provide a structural element to the landscape, screening and acting as a foil for the large scale industrial developments taking place. The planting of larger woodlands would be particularly appropriate. This is an example of the former industrial land, the planting of which is one of the key actions in the government's England Forestry Strategy.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/semi-natural broadleaved woodland	maintain and enhance	Medium
	restore degraded sites	Lower
	re-create/regenerate	Lower
Ancient/diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	Medium
	maintain trees	Medium
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	high
Arable field margins	maintain, improve and restore	lower

Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	high
	increase the number of such features	High
Lowland wet grassland	maintain and enhance existing areas	Lower
	restore degraded areas	Lower
	create new areas	Lower
Peat bogs	maintain and enhance	high
	restore former raised bogs	high
Reedbeds	maintain and create	high
Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	High
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	High
Unimproved neutral grassland	maintain and safeguard existing areas	Lower
	restore	Lower
	create/re-create new areas	Lower
Wet woodland	maintain, enhance and restore	Medium
	prevent further loss	Medium
	increase the number of such woodlands	medium

Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

Predominantly small to medium scale woodland planting would be appropriate in this landscape, with some additional need for hedgerow reinstatement, hedgerow tree planting and field corner planting to strengthen the wooded character. In the more open areas, larger planting would be needed, shaped more to landform than field pattern. Views into and through the landscape need to be maintained by keeping planting back from main roads and not completely filling open spaces. There is little opportunity to accommodate conifers in this landscape of broadleaved character, except where this is already occurring, when some additional conifers could be incorporated into new schemes. Additional planting in valleys would fit into the landscape better than planting up the middle slopes.

The landscape to the west of Hixon will accept considerable amounts of large-scale woodland, with a conifer element being appropriate. Woodlands should be kept back from roads to ensure some views through the landscape to surrounding areas and care will need to be taken over the design of woodland edges.

Settled farmlands: parkland

Sandon Park falls within the parkland variant of the general landscape type. Each parkland is a unique product of its original design and its evolution over time. Consequently, any proposals for development or land use change which would affect such a landscape should be informed by a detailed historic landscape appraisal. English Heritage maintains a Register of Parks and Gardens which contains some of the more significant sites, and local authority conservation officers and the County Sites and Monuments Record may be able to provide further advice on this and other parks and gardens.

This landscape character type is very sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.

Surveyor-enclosed plateau farmlands

This is related to the settled plateau farmlands LCT. It distinctive character has come about through relatively late (usually nineteenth century) enclosure of forest or heathland.

Visual character

This is an intensively farmed landscape which is visually dominated by large broadleaved and coniferous woodland due to the flat or very gently undulating landform and coalescence of the woodland blocks. Hedgerow trees are characteristically regularly spaced and variable in number, consisting largely of oak, but with ash in places.

Arable farming, with some small pastoral pockets, is within a medium to large-scale regular field pattern indicative of late enclosure; these regular fields and neatly trimmed, intact hedgerows form horizontal lines across the landscape. It has a well cared for intact appearance and is given its character by the wide straight roads and large interlocking woodland blocks interrupting views across the gently undulating landform. Hedgerow removal has begun in places resulting in some open, large scale farm sized areas and there is some infilling of hedge gaps where fences are beginning to appear. In general, this orderly landscape appears in little danger of rapid deterioration, apart from insensitive development and some further incursion of prairie farming.

Characteristic landscape features

Straight wide roads with multiple junctions; 19th century estate farms and cottages of red brick; evenly spaced and aged hedgerow oaks; extensive woodland edges; neatly trimmed hedges; geometric hedgerow pattern; flat plateau landform; arable and improved pasture farming.

Incongruous landscape features

Fencing; roadside development; electricity pylons; airfield.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

These are, in the main, landscapes of high quality, with few limiting factors. The most critical of these is the loss of some of the semi-natural vegetation (e.g. ancient woodland and unimproved grassland) characteristic of this landscape type. Two discrete areas have been identified as ‘landscapes at risk’ of sudden loss of quality (see Section 7.18 *et seq*. of the Supporting Documentation). They are the area centred on The Warren, to the north east of Blithfield Reservoir, and that around Barton Gate and Forest Thorn, to the north west of Barton under Needwood.

Measures to meet the BAP targets listed below will be critically important in preventing such a loss.

This landscape character type is locally sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.

Potential value of new woodland planting.

Of generally high value, to reinforce the present character of estate farmland with broadleaved conifer and broadleaved plantations. The strategic siting of new native woodland could be of great value in reducing the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland.

Significant parts of the areas falling within this landscape type are also within the boundary of the National Forest.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/semi-natural broadleaved woodland	maintain and enhance	medium
	restore degraded sites	medium
	re-create/regenerate	high
	maintain trees	high
Arable field margins	maintain, improve and restore	lower
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	medium
	increase the number of such features	medium
Peat bogs	maintain and enhance	medium
	restore former raised bogs	medium
Reedbeds	maintain and create	medium
Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	medium
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	medium
Wet woodland	maintain, enhance and restore	lower
	prevent further loss	lower
	increase the number of such woodlands	lower

Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

The landscape is capable of accommodating additional broadleaved or coniferous woodland planting provided it is positioned away from roads, to retain existing open views. Care should be taken over the design of new coniferous woodland planting in relation to its skyline and edge treatments to produce a graded profile.

Woodland planting of a scale and shape related to field size or larger would be appropriate although whole agricultural holdings should not be planted up except in specific situations, which need to be carefully planned. Smaller areas could be planted within the lower lying parts, where new planting could be related to hedgerows and hedgerow trees.

'Stepping stone' plantations, sited to reduce the isolation of existing ancient woodlands, should comprise locally native species.

Further guidelines may be found in the National Forest Strategy.

Sandstone hills and heaths

This landscape type is restricted to areas in which Triassic sandstones are not obscured by drift deposits. Acid sands and brown earths predominate. Significant areas of this type in Staffordshire - in particular Cannock Chase - have the original heathland vegetation or coniferous forests established on heathland. Where conversion has been to farmland, as in this Regional Character Area, stock rearing is the predominant land use. The settlement pattern is generally dispersed, with expanded hamlets.

Visual character

This is a landscape of mainly intact, small to medium scale irregular fields superimposed on a rolling, lowland plateau landform, incised by small steep sided valleys known locally as drumbles. The small-scale enclosed feel to this pastoral landscape is emphasised by the network of narrow, sunken, winding lanes and small hidden settlements. Broadleaved and conifer woodlands are often associated with the steep stream valleys and there are considerable areas of oak and conifer woodland in the area showing a strong heathy character.

Some breakdown of the land cover pattern is beginning to occur, with hedgerows becoming gappy in places and quite extensive fencing being introduced. The extensive tree and hedgerow cover provides coalescence on flatter areas, but where landform is more dominant, field pattern becomes more obvious and there are areas shown up of regular enclosure pattern. On the slopes up to the plateau this pattern has started to disintegrate and the rounded landform and prominent woodlands dictate the larger scale patterns.

Landform becomes prominently rounded and smaller in scale in areas, controlling the scale of the landscape where hedgerow pattern is not strong.

Some small remnants of the heathland that was formerly widespread survive as discrete patches: they are important ecologically, but they make a relatively small contribution to visual character. It is the heathy nature of the woodlands, and the presence of bracken in hedgerows that provide the stronger visual reminder of this landscape's heathland origins.

Characteristic landscape features

Hedgerow oak and ash; rolling plateau landform; steep wooded valleys; broadleaved and conifer woodlands; narrow lanes and hedge-banks.

Incongruous landscape features

Modernised dwellings; power lines; urban expansion.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

These are landscapes of high quality, with few limiting factors. The most critical of those factors is an incipient decline in the condition of some of the characteristic landscape features described above and, to a lesser extent, the loss of some of the semi-natural vegetation – in particular heathland and heathy ancient woodland - characteristic of this landscape type.

Potential value of new woodland planting

This landscape has been identified as potentially sensitive to further woodland planting. The potential benefits of new woodlands include: the establishment of a desirable strategic link between the existing woodlands of Trentham Park, the Hanchurch hills and the Maer Hills to the west, and the Churnet Valley to the east; the reduction of the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland through the strategic siting of new native woodland; the potential for protecting groundwater quality through a change from farming to forestry; the restoration of the balance between landform and tree cover in dictating the scale of the landscape and directing views through it. These benefits need to be weighed against Biodiversity Action Plan targets for the protection, restoration and re-creation of lowland heathland, for which this landscape is also strategically important. An expansion of both woodland and heathland can be accommodated, but siting should be informed by a more detailed analysis of the distribution of heathland remnants and the feasibility of their restoration.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/semi-natural broadleaved woodland	maintain and enhance	medium
	restore degraded sites	lower
	re-create/regenerate	lower
Ancient/diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	very high
	maintain trees	very high
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	high
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	medium
	increase the number of such features	medium

Lowland acidic grassland	maintain, enhance, restore and buffer	very high
	prevent further losses (except to heathland restoration)	medium
	increase the number of such sites	medium
	link fragmented sites through habitat creation	medium
Lowland heathland	protect existing heaths from development and damaging activities	very high
	re-create or create new heathlands	very high
	create new areas	medium
Lowland wet grassland	maintain and enhance existing areas	lower
	restore degraded areas	lower
	create new areas	lower
	restore former raised bogs	high
Reedbeds	maintain and create	medium
Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	high
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	high
Unimproved neutral grassland	maintain and safeguard existing areas	medium
	restore	medium
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	lower
	create/re-create new areas	lower
Wet woodland	maintain, enhance and restore	high
	prevent further loss	high
	increase the number of such woodlands	medium

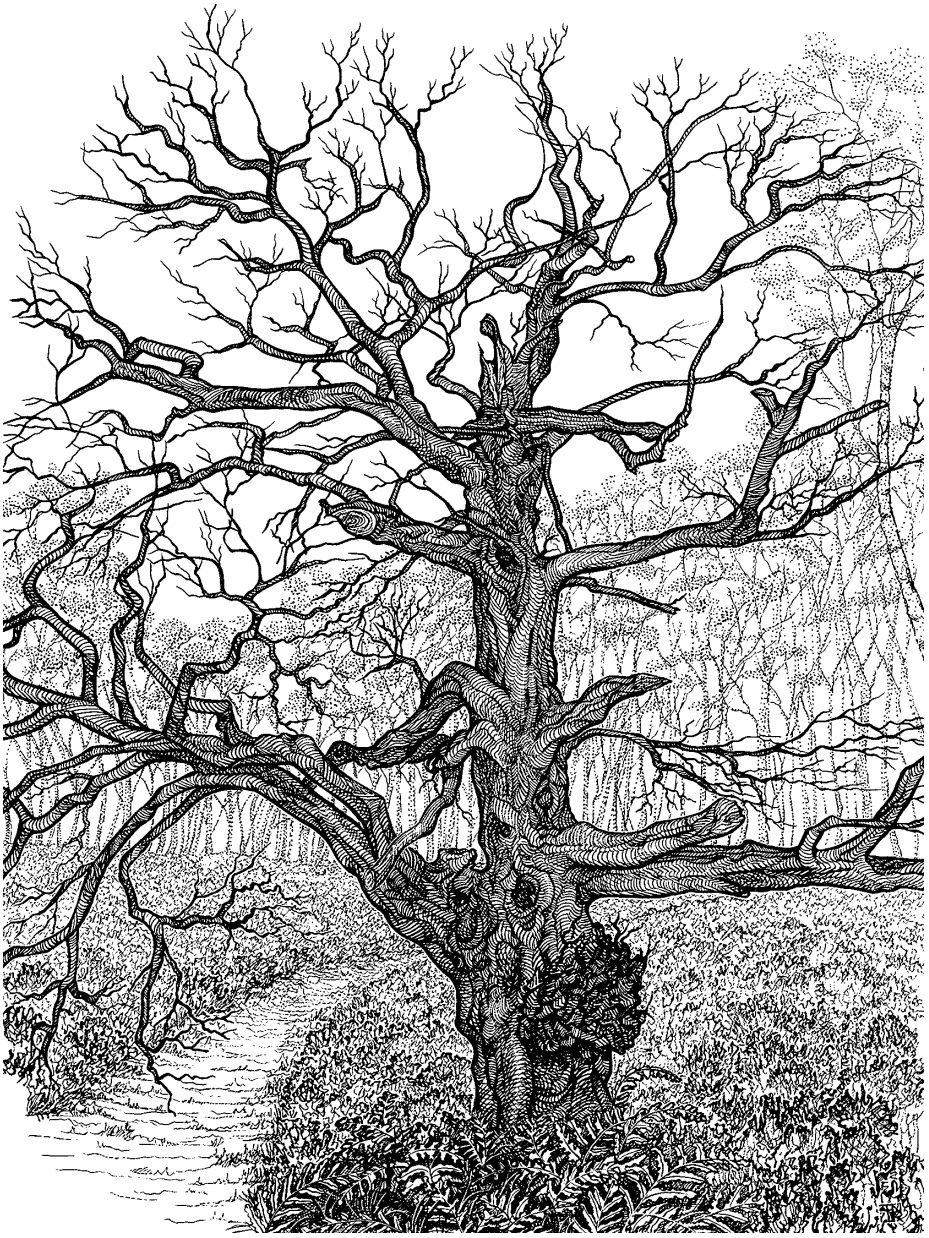
Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Specific guidelines

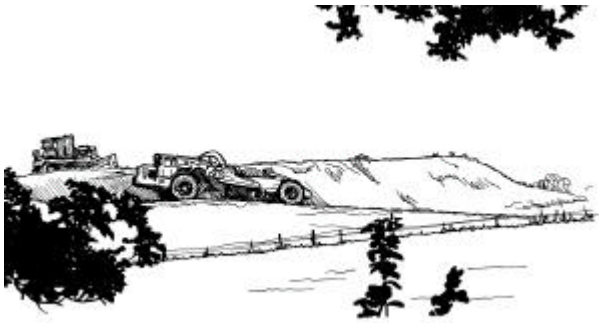
<u>Tree and woodland planting</u>

Subject to the need for detailed assessment of the suitability of planting sites, noted above, all scales of woodland planting are appropriate provided the margins are varied to reflect local scale and maintain views through the landscape. Field pattern is strong enough for new planting to tie into this existing vegetation. Steep valleys and areas where a weak field pattern is now present will dictate where design should respond to landform rather than land-cover.

Small scale planting schemes should build on existing tree cover and follow valley bottoms. The area is predominantly broadleaved and new planting should reflect this, although some conifer content is acceptable, as are conifer plantations where this character is already present. ‘Stepping stone’ plantations, sited to reduce the isolation of existing ancient woodlands, should comprise locally native species.



Cannock Chase and Cankwood



Regional Character Area - 67 Cannock Chase and Cankwood

This chapter describes the landscapes of the Cannock Chase and Cankwood Regional Character Area. This is that part of the more extensive Character Area of the same name, as defined by the former Countryside Commission and English Nature, that falls within the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan area.

The first part of the chapter comprises a general description of the landscape character of this part of southern Staffordshire, the extent of which is shown on Map 3 of Appendix 1. This is followed by detailed descriptions of each of the landscape character types and, where applicable, sub-types that occur within it.

Chapter contents

Cannock Chase and Cankwood

1. This region follows a wedge of Triassic sandstone, which pushes northward into central Staffordshire. The north-eastern and eastern boundaries are sharply defined by the Trent and Tame valleys; the western boundary follows the River Penk, but is rather less distinct, and to the south the wedge disappears beneath the West Midlands conurbation. Between Cannock Chase and the conurbation Carboniferous coal measures, overlain by glacial drift and stagnogley soils, create the South Staffordshire Coalfield. Podzolic soils and brown sands predominate in the northern half.

2. A central elevated, domed plateau makes up the area now known as Cannock Chase. This is the single largest lowland heath in Staffordshire, and in the Midlands. It also contains the modern Cannock Forest, Forest Enterprise's largest holding in the region at about 2,500 ha. and comprising largely Corsican pine. The area is subject to intensive recreational use and the largest of the heathlands is both a Country Park and a Site of Special Scientific Interest, managed by Staffordshire County Council. The most distinctive tree species, apart from the Corsican pines, are sessile oak and silver birch *(Betula pendula)*. Old Scots pines *(Pinus sylvestris)* and beech *(Fagus sylvatica)* were planted as focal points on hill tops. Natural regeneration of Scots pine has to be controlled, to maintain the heathland. Holly, formerly of great economic value as winter browse for commoners' sheep, survives mainly in bounding hedges.

3. The area approximates to the traditional site of the Cannock (or Cank) Forest, a royal hunting forest held by some to have been in existence by the reign of William the Conqueror. In common with other forests, it was also used as a source of revenue from rents and wood sales. Although Domesday records a very large area of woodland not all of the region was heavily wooded. Some must have been cleared during the Roman period, as the presence of Watling Street and an associated Roman town and estates makes clear.

4. The area seen by most people as Cannock Chase in the 21st century belies the extent and influence of the historic forest. Assarting or bringing new land into cultivation began around Cannock forest during the middle ages and added to the process of its erosion and settlement. Industry formed an important part of the local economy through and beyond the medieval period, particularly glass and iron making because of the supply of wood fuel. Much of the woodland of Cannock Chase was felled over a twenty-year period at the end of the sixteenth century, and surprisingly few ancient woodlands survive over the area as a whole. Coal extraction was important from the sixteenth century onwards and has made a major contribution to the landscape character of the southern part.

5. The building forms common to this region are more usually found around its periphery than on its central plateau, although to the south this has now been engulfed by industrialisation. A variety of timber-framed buildings survive from the period when the forest’s wood was the dominant regional building material. Examples can be seen in the cruck construction of “The Cottage” in

Shenstone in the south and in the square-panelled walls of the house adjacent to the old smithy, Walton-on-the-Hill, in the north although both probably date from the seventeenth century. Hill Top at Longdon in the east has both sophisticated and simple examples of timber framing in this period. The rare survival of a squatter's cottage in Upper Longdon demonstrates the growing social pressure on the forest's lands at this time.

6. Later buildings in the region were in a strong red-coloured brick with plain clay tile roofs as enclosure brought settlement closer to the central domed plateau. Here farmsteads of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries survive just beyond twentieth century incursions near the village of Cannock Wood. Their low two-storey profiles are in sharp contrast to the more prosperous farms in the lower parts of the region such as the grand eighteenth-century Manor Farm at Hints.

7. Over 90% of the area is Grade 3 agricultural land or better, with the higher quality land mainly to the south and west of Lichfield. The pattern of agriculture is very diverse: it is generally mixed farming with horticulture and more demanding crops such as potatoes and sugar beet on the higher quality land. There is also grassland supporting dairying and other livestock enterprises generally concentrated further north.

8. The coalfield area between Cannock Chase and the West Midlands is extensively industrialised, and the influence of mining and industry is such that in parts only remnants of farmland and heathland remain. The more rural parts of this landscape to the east, around Chorley, are now mainly used for stock rearing within a small to medium scale irregular field pattern where intact hedgerows and mature oaks are characteristic. Small scale woodlands, narrow sunken lanes and clustered farmsteads impart a peaceful feel to this area, which is probably the product of small scale medieval woodland clearance.

9. As the land drops down to the river valleys to the east near Lichfield, and west around Penkridge, estatelands and medium to large scale open agricultural landscapes still show evidence of their heathland origins in the hedgerows and woodlands. These peripheral parts of the area have a rolling, undulating landform in which large hedged fields of a regular pattern are used for intensive cereal and vegetable cropping. Arable prairie landscapes are becoming increasingly common as a result of the loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees.

10. In the farmlands close to the western boundary the winding lanes and isolated farmsteads are evidence of an older settlement pattern where intensity of modern agriculture, and now an ever present urban fringe influence, has resulted in deterioration of hedges and stunted oaks, an enlarging of scale, and a general urbanisation and decline of the landscape.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES

Sandstone estatelands

The woodlands and parklands of traditional rural estates characterise the more intact parts of this rolling lowland landscape type, which has a wide geographic range in those parts of the county where Triassic sandstones are not obscured by drift deposits. Acid sands and brown earths predominate and, whilst some significant remnants of the original heathlands survive, the major land use is now arable cropping in large hedged or open fields of a regular pattern. Settlement is sparse, and characterised by expanded hamlets and wayside cottages.

Visual character

This is an intensively farmed arable landscape of large regular fields. The landform is gently undulating and this, coupled with the scarcity of hedgerow trees, results in wide expansive views through the landscape into the distance. Views are framed by intensively managed plantation woodlands and game coverts in some areas and in others the horizon is formed by scarcely treed undulations, often a mile or so distant. The fields are often delineated more by crop changes than by any closely cropped hedgerows. The degree to which structural landscape features have been removed varies from cereal and vegetable growing prairies through to pastoral areas where hedges, although becoming gappy and sculpted, are very much in evidence and remain as a major feature. These more intact areas are sometimes associated with a steeper dissected landform of sandstone outcrops. The presence of intervisible game coverts gives an impression however of a fundamentally intact landscape, and parkland imparts a distinctive character to individual areas.

Major through rail and road routes are visually and aurally disruptive and minor roads are often well used.

Characteristic landscape features

Flat to gently undulating landform; intensive arable farmland; broadleaved and mixed woodlands; plantations and game coverts; parkland; hedged field pattern.

Incongruous landscape features

Large modern farm buildings; power lines; recent housing development; busy main roads; railways; poorly designed game coverts; wire fencing.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are the loss of characteristic landscape features, the poor condition of those features that remain, the introduction of incongruous features and the relatively poor survival of characteristic semi-natural vegetation, in particular heathland. The area around Salt Heath, near Hopton, has been identified as a 'landscape at risk' of sudden loss of quality (see Section 7.18 *et seq*. of the Supporting Documentation) and measures to meet the BAP targets listed below will be important in preventing such a loss.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Very high in those landscapes that are becoming open prairies due to agricultural intensification such that views begin to be controlled by woodland interlock. In these areas new planting, especially of larger woodlands, would help to restore landscape structure.

Some further planting would also be of value in those landscapes already featuring estate woodland, to reinforce their wooded appearance and maintain this character into the future. Otherwise the conservation and restoration of existing woodlands is a higher landscape priority. Parkland areas are in need of sensitively designed tree and woodland planting to restore those landscapes to an appropriate character.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/semi-natural broadleaved woodland	maintain and enhance	lower
	restore degraded sites	medium
	re-create/regenerate	medium
Ancient/diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	high
	maintain trees	high
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	high
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	high
	increase the number of such features	high
Lowland acidic grassland	maintain, enhance, restore and buffer	high
	prevent further losses (except to heathland restoration)	medium
	increase the number of such sites	medium
	link fragmented sites through habitat creation	medium

Lowland heathland	protect existing heaths from development and damaging activities	high
	re-create or create new heathlands	very high
Lowland wood pasture and parkland	maintain and safeguard	medium
	restore degraded areas	medium
Reedbeds	maintain and create	high
Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	high
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	high
Unimproved neutral grassland	maintain and safeguard existing areas	high
	restore	medium
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	lower
	create/re-create new areas	medium
Wet woodland	maintain, enhance and restore	medium
	prevent further loss	medium
	increase the number of such woodlands	lower

Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

In areas with existing woodland it is more appropriate to enlarge those than to create new plantations. In the more open areas new woodlands are needed, and these will be highly visible and in need of particular care over their design. They should generally be of a broadleaved character, although conifers are acceptable provided broadleaved edges are retained. Large woodlands, or large amounts of small interlocking woodlands, would both be appropriate and long views through the landscape should be retained.

In the smaller, more intact landscapes surrounding villages, smaller scale field sized or field corner planting could be introduced to fit into the landscape.

Planting within areas of parkland will need additional care over the design to retain the traditional character of the area.

Sandstone estatelands: farmland

This is a variant of the basic landscape type, in which the influence of landed estates is lacking or is not significant.

Visual character

This is an open gently undulating landscape of intensive arable farming in which the traditional agricultural fabric is breaking down under increasing pressure from adjacent urban areas and modern agricultural activities. This deterioration of the established medium scale field pattern is increasing the scale of the landscape; where the mixed species hedges remain they tend to be very gappy or sculpted, but in places they have been lost completely and replaced with fence lines. Hedgerow trees tend to be a mix of isolated, mature oak and ash with alder associated with the stream corridors and visually intrusive lines of poplar. The scattered mature hedgerow oaks, and trees left stranded in enlarged fields, indicate the decline of the traditional agricultural landscape.

Arterial roads, motorways, railways and power lines combine with encroachment of post-war housing and industry to urbanise the general character of this landscape. The deterioration of landscape quality is greatest at the immediate urban fringe, with less impact being evident at further distances from the built environment. The network of small winding ancient lanes is now heavily used as commuter routes, and large scattered farmsteads are very obvious in this open landscape. Urban fringe influences such as wire fences and pony culture are apparent in some areas and settlements have increased in size rapidly. Urban artefacts are increasingly being used to replace traditional rural materials for fencing and farm buildings as the agricultural use changes to increased horse pasture.

Villages greatly influence the appearance of the area; the surrounding landscapes of open intensive arable agriculture change, in their proximity, to permanent pasture with a smaller scale and more complete hedgerow and tree cover.

Characteristic landscape features

Gently undulating landform; intensive arable farming; hedged fields; treed stream corridors; small winding lanes.

Incongruous landscape features

Post and wire fencing; modern expanded villages; busy main roads; railways; urban edges; exotic ornamental tree species; electricity pylons; isolated field trees; deteriorating hedgerow pattern; large modern farm buildings.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are a decline in the condition of characteristic landscape elements and the relatively poor survival of characteristic semi-natural vegetation, in particular heathland. The loss of some characteristic landscape features and the proliferation of incongruous features are contributory factors.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Very high in the areas of lowest landscape quality and moderately high elsewhere, to restore a landcover structure to those areas where the scale has enlarged as a result of agricultural intensification and removal of the traditional hedgerow pattern. The planting of larger woodlands would be appropriate. Planting would also be of value to screen adjacent urban edges and intrusive urbanising elements within the landscape.

Some of the areas falling within this landscape type are also within the boundary of the Forest of Mercia.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/semi-natural broadleaved woodland	restore degraded sites	medium
	re-create/regenerate	medium
Ancient/diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	high
	maintain trees	high
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	high
Arable field margins	maintain, improve and restore	very high
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	medium
	increase the number of such features	medium
Lowland acidic grassland	maintain, enhance, restore and buffer	medium
	prevent further losses (except to heathland restoration)	lower
	increase the number of such sites	medium
	link fragmented sites through habitat creation	lower

Lowland heathland	protect existing heaths from development and damaging activities	medium
	re-create or create new heathlands	high
Reedbeds	maintain and create	medium
Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	high
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	high
Wet woodland	maintain, enhance and restore	lower
	prevent further loss	lower

Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

Although deteriorating rapidly, the pattern of hedgerows is still strong enough to dictate the character of new woodlands. These should be shaped to the existing field pattern and be of an equivalent medium to large scale except where fields become smaller and more intact around villages, where field corner planting would be appropriate. New woodlands should be predominantly broadleaved in character and closely associated with existing vegetation cover, although some conifer element is acceptable provided care is taken over edge design. On some of the steeper slopes, where hedgerow pattern has deteriorated, shaping of new woodlands to landform will be necessary.

Further guidelines may be found in the Forest of Mercia Forest Plan.

Sandstone hills and heaths

This landscape type occurs at rather higher elevations than the sandstone estatelands: it has the same underlying geology and range of soils but the landform is more pronounced, comprising hills and dissected plateaux. Significant areas of this type in Staffordshire - in particular Cannock Chase - have the original heathland vegetation or coniferous forests established on heathland. Where conversion has been to farmland stock rearing is the predominant land use, in large hedged fields of a regular pattern, indicating relatively recent enclosure. The settlement pattern is generally dispersed, with expanded hamlets. The variation in land use is the primary basis for subdivision into landscape character sub-types: farmland is taken to be the 'type-landscape', with estateland, parkland, forest, heathlands and minerals working and restoration variants.

Visual character

This landscape type varies from pastoral farmland characterised by an irregular, largely intact pattern of small-scale fields, to areas where intensive arable farming is associated with gappy hedges with declining hedgerow trees. Well-tended estates feature in some areas and strongly influence the landscape character. The undulating landform is deeply cut by stream valleys and this results in both short to medium length, as well as long views across to neighbouring landscapes. Hedgerow tree cover in the pastoral areas is of over mature stunted oaks and is rarely so dense as to cause heavily filtered views across the area. Hedgerows are still largely intact although lack of maintenance is still a threat, leading to hedges becoming gappy or grown up.

The continual removal of trees and hedgerows in the areas of intensive arable farming is emphasising the strongly rounded landform, whilst the proximity of the urban and forest edges often give the landscape the character of being hemmed in.

The urban influence is very great, with built up areas visible and farm cottages improved. The small roads are all very well used, giving the impression of an area that is travelled through by large numbers of people. The variable condition tends to emphasise the vulnerability to change of this landscape.

Characteristic landscape features

Small winding lanes; irregular hedged field pattern; stunted hedgerow oaks; pronounced rounded landform.

Incongruous landscape features

Urban edge; horseyculture; inappropriate poor quality fencing; agricultural set-aside.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are the relatively poor survival of characteristic semi-natural vegetation, in particular heathland, the loss of characteristic landscape features, and a decline in the condition of those features that remain.

Significant parts of the areas falling within this landscape type are also within the boundary of the Cannock Chase AONB. An area to the west of Etchinghill, another to the north of Upper Longdon, and a small area to the north-west of Wombourne have been identified as 'landscapes at risk' of sudden loss of quality (see Section 7.18 *et seq*. of the Supporting Documentation) and measures to meet the BAP targets listed below will be critically important in preventing such a loss.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Of moderate value overall, to provide a replacement structure to the landscape as hedgerows disappear due to general decline or farming intensification. It could also serve to screen incongruous urbanising landscape features and to reduce the visual influence of urban edges.

***Potential value of other habitat provision and* management**

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/semi-natural broadleaved woodland	maintain and enhance	high
	restore degraded sites	lower
	re-create/regenerate	lower
Ancient/diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	high
	maintain trees	high
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	high
Arable field margins	maintain, improve and restore	lower
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	high
	increase the number of such features	high
Lowland acidic grassland	maintain, enhance, restore and buffer	very high
	prevent further losses (except to heathland restoration)	medium
	increase the number of such sites	medium
	link fragmented sites through habitat creation	medium

Lowland heathland	protect existing heaths from development and damaging activities	very high
	re-create or create new heathlands	very high
Lowland wet grassland	maintain and enhance existing areas	high
	restore degraded areas	medium
	create new areas	medium
Lowland wood pasture and parkland	maintain and safeguard	medium
	restore degraded sites	medium
Reedbeds	maintain and create	high
Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	medium
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	medium
Unimproved neutral grassland	maintain and safeguard existing areas	high
	restore	medium
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	lower
	create/re-create new areas	medium
Wet woodland	maintain, enhance and restore	lower
	prevent further loss	lower

Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Specific guidelines

<u>Tree and woodland planting</u>

Field corner planting would generally be an appropriate scale of new woodland, however there is scope for larger scale woodlands to field size where deterioration in existing hedgerows is increasing the scale. In many areas, landform is stronger than field pattern and could begin to dictate the design of new woodlands. The size of new woodland planting should be determined by the interlock generated between the new planting, open farmland and adjacent areas of large woodlands. Broadleaved, conifer or mixed woodlands would be appropriate.

Screening of incongruous urbanising landscape features could be achieved by well-designed and sympathetically placed woodland blocks. The visual influence of urban edges can be reduced by directing views with new woodland planting.

Sandstone hills and heaths: heathlands

This is the heathland variant of the basic landscape type.

Visual character

This is a remote unenclosed landscape of large tracts of open heathland on a dissected sandstone plateau, now associated in many areas with developing tree cover and the spread of bracken. The appearance of these areas changes dramatically with the seasons, from the purple of the heather in the summer and early autumn, to the golds and oranges of the dying bracken.

The large expanses of open land create an impression of spaciousness and give wide sweeping views over the heathland and beyond. Groups of regenerating birch and pine trees provide visual diversity, helping to create a more intimate feel to parts of this landscape, and conifer edges often visually enclose the area so that all horizons appear wooded. Native oak woodlands and wood pasture are a restricted but very important feature as a surviving remnant of the once widespread forests of this area.

High public pressure is evident in deeply eroded paths and tracks which are highly visible because of the contrast between very light sandy soils and darker ground vegetation.

Characteristic landscape features

Open heathland; regenerating pine and birch; conifer plantation edges; dissected plateau landform.

Incongruous landscape features

Well used eroded paths.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

These are landscapes of high quality, with few limiting factors. The greatest potential threat to that quality is the loss of the characteristic heathland vegetation through colonisation by bracken or by trees, in the absence of grazing by domestic animals. This threat is currently being addressed through a number of management initiatives. The areas falling within this landscape type are also within the boundary of the Cannock Chase AONB.

This landscape character type is very sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Generally very low. This is one of the Structure Plan area's few landscapes which are regarded as sensitive to woodland planting, because of the value of this area for its lowland heathland communities. Conservation and expansion of the native oak woodlands and wood pasture is being encouraged by small-scale planting in appropriate areas.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/semi-natural broadleaved woodland	maintain and enhance	high
	restore degraded sites	lower
	re-create/regenerate	lower
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	lower
	increase the number of such features	lower
Lowland acidic grassland	maintain, enhance, restore and buffer	very high
	prevent further losses (except to heathland restoration)	medium
	increase the number of such sites	medium
	link fragmented sites through habitat creation	medium
Lowland heathland	protect existing heaths from development and damaging activities	very high
	re-create or create new heathlands	very high
Lowland wood pasture and parkland	maintain and safeguard	very high
	restore degraded sites	very high
Reedbeds	maintain and create	lower
Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	medium
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	medium
Wet woodland	maintain, enhance and restore	lower
	prevent further loss	lower

Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Sandstone hills and heaths: parkland

The parklands of Canwell, Beaudesert, Shugborough and Hatherton fall within the parkland variant of the general landscape type. Each parkland is a unique product of its original design and its evolution over time. Consequently, any proposals for development or land use change which would affect such a landscape should be informed by a detailed historic landscape appraisal. English Heritage maintains a Register of Parks and Gardens which contains some of the more significant sites, and local authority conservation officers and the County Sites and Monuments Record may be able to provide further advice on these and other parks and gardens.

This landscape character type is locally sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.

Riparian alluvial lowlands

These are landscapes of levels and lowland river valleys, where alluvial soils and occasional peat overlie alluvial drift and Triassic mudstones. Large nucleated villages are typical, and the dominant land uses are cropping with some stock rearing in large hedged fields of a regular pattern, with few woodlands.

Visual character

These riverine landscapes are characterised by their flat topography and visual links with landform and land uses of surrounding areas. The predominantly pastoral farming on the floodplain gives way to small areas of arable cropping where this becomes possible due to the slight raising of the land levels.

The landscape is characterised by trees associated with waterside planting. Willow, alder and poplar along the river, stream and dyke courses predominate, with remnant deteriorating hawthorn hedges and occasional hedgerow oak present. Hedgerows vary, with some areas intact and well looked after whilst deteriorating in other places, and being replaced by extensive wire fencing. Variation in the extent of the floodplain pasture results in changes of views across the landscape. Some areas appear well treed as a result of grown up thorn and extensive tree cover, whereas the narrower parts of the river valleys offer little restriction to through views.

Habitation tends to occur adjacent to the floodplain. Where roads cross these areas they are generally small winding lanes or fast through routes along the edges. Canals feature strongly and give a local character where they are present. Adjacent built up areas considerably change the character of the landscape in some areas by visually dominating the internal landscape features.

Characteristic landscape features

A flat landscape with pastoral floodplain farming; waterside tree species; a variety of watercourses from rivers and canals to streams, dykes and water channels; poplar plantations and hawthorn hedges.

Incongruous landscape features

Adjacent urban land-uses and encroaching urban elements such as sewage works; electrified railway; power lines; lines of fencing replacing deteriorating hedgerows.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

These are landscapes of high quality, with few limiting factors. The most critical of these is the loss of some of the semi-natural vegetation (i.e. riparian and wetland)

characteristic of this landscape type, and, to a lesser extent, an incipient decline in the condition of some of the characteristic landscape features described above.

Potential value of new woodland planting

These landscapes are potentially sensitive to new woodland planting because of flood control constraints and conflicting Biodiversity Action Plan targets for wet grassland, etc. There is potential for carefully sited discrete floodplain woodlands, and for planting of riparian buffer strips in arable areas to intercept field run-off in the interests of improving river water quality. Planting could also be of some value to direct views away from, and screen intrusive urban features adjacent to the floodplain.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/semi-natural broadleaved woodland	restore degraded sites	lower
	re-create/regenerate	lower
Ancient/diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	medium
	maintain trees	medium
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	lower
Arable field margins	maintain, improve and restore	high
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	very high
	increase the number of such features	very high
Lowland wet grassland	maintain and enhance existing areas	high
	restore degraded areas	medium
	create new areas	medium
Reedbeds	maintain and create	high
Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	very high
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	very high
Unimproved neutral grassland	maintain and safeguard existing areas	high
	restore	high
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	high
	create/re-create new areas	high
Wet woodland	maintain, enhance and restore	very high
	prevent further loss	very high
	increase the number of such woodlands	very hgh

Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

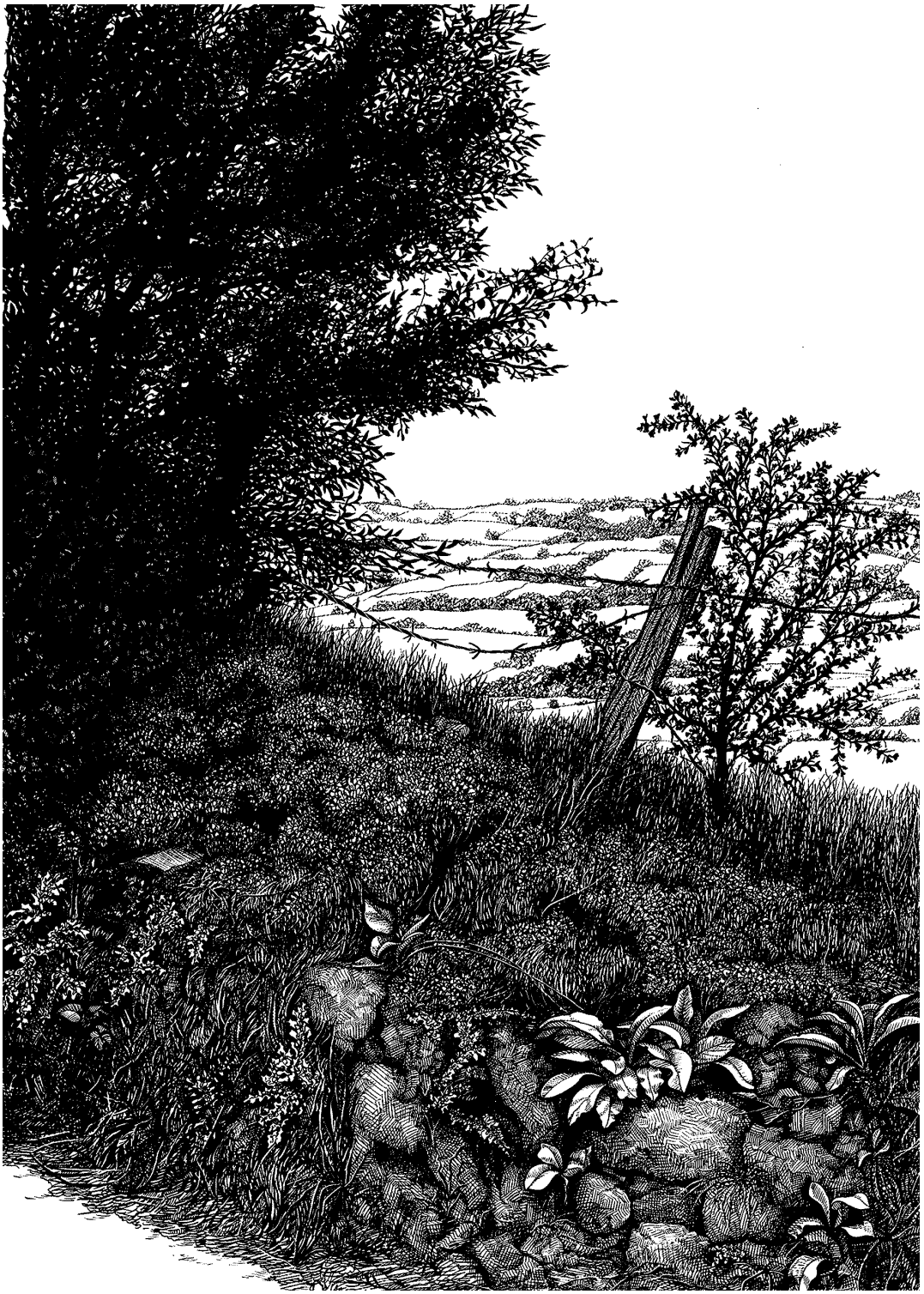
Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

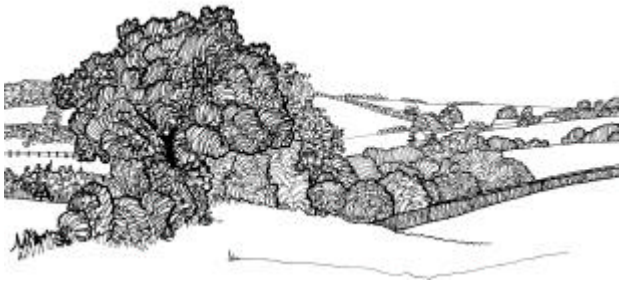
The opportunities for new planting are limited. The most appropriate species are those associated with riverside habitats, e.g. poplar, willow and alder. Small to medium sized blocks, associated with existing vegetation whenever possible, would reflect the current scale of the landscape and avoid closing views.

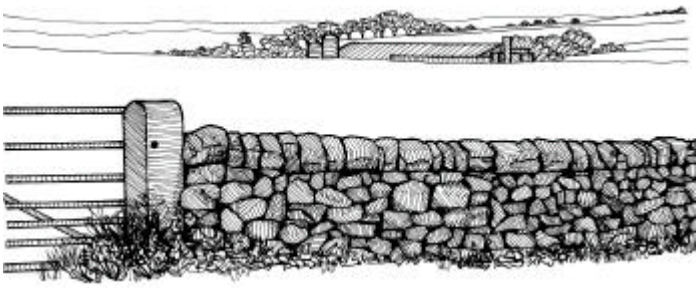
Plantations up to field size may be acceptable, provided they are kept at some distance from important views and roads through the area, and are not sited on the river floodplain. Some visual interlocking of woodland would add interest to views along the more open parts of the river valley.

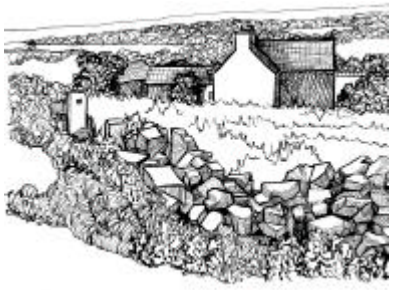
Other options and actions of particular relevance to this landscape type are listed in the Environment Agency's Staffordshire Trent Valley Local Environment Agency Plan.

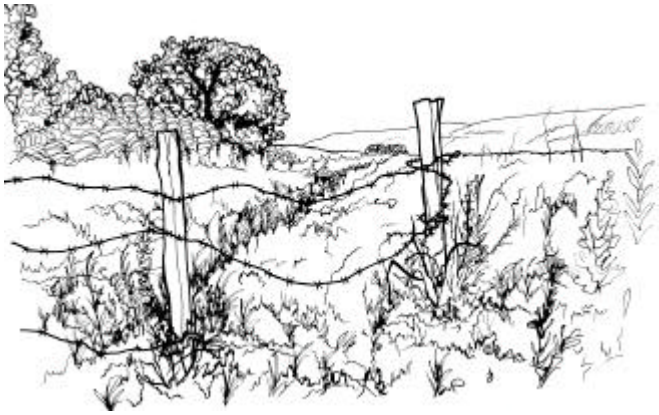


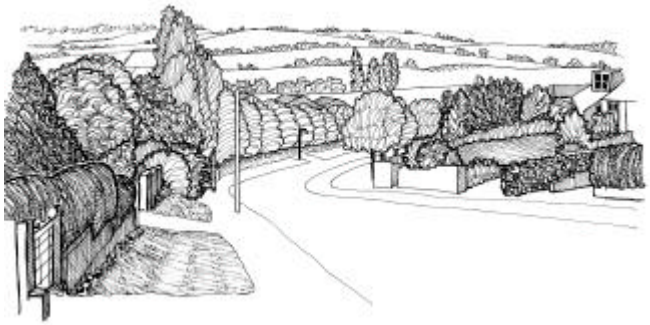
The Potteries and Churnet Valley











Regional Character Area 64 - Potteries and Churnet Valley

This chapter describes the landscapes of the Potteries and Churnet Valley Regional Character Area. This is that part of a somewhat larger Character Area, as defined by the former Countryside Commission and English Nature, that falls within the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan area.

The first part of the chapter comprises a general description of the landscape character of this part of northern Staffordshire, the extent of which is shown on Map 3 of Appendix 1. This is followed by detailed descriptions of each of the landscape character types, and, where applicable, sub-types, that occur within it.

Chapter contents

Potteries and Churnet Valley

1. This Regional Character Area, which is contained almost wholly within the county boundary, marks a zone of transition between lowlands and uplands, in the elevation range from about 100m to 300m O.D. The central part comprises heavily dissected hills and the extensively wooded valley of the River Churnet, associated with Carboniferous and Permo-Triassic sandstones, overlain in the main by brown earths and podzols. To the north west, towards Biddulph Moor and Mow Cop, outlying gritstone outcrops with stagnogleys and peat soils give rise to deeply incised plateaux of moorland and upland grassland. Carboniferous coal measures, covered in glacial drift and with stagnogley soils, underlie the fringes of Stoke-on-Trent.

2. Traces of early colonisation of the area survive chiefly in the form of barrows on high ground. The remains of an Iron Age hillfort survive within Alton Towers. A Roman road, from Littlechester to Chesterton, passed through the area, although evidence of occupation during that period is sparse. A diverse medieval landscape developed, with substantial surviving woodland in the south, thinning out to the north. Much of the economy of the area was pastoral, with arable cultivation close to settlements. Fields were enclosed, by private treaty, in the early post medieval period.

3. The industrial revolution had a significant effect on the area. A tendency towards specialised pastoral farming may have been the result of increased markets in the growing Potteries, which were founded on the winning of high quality clays. The area would also have produced cattle for fattening on more fertile pastures to the south. The processing of ferrous and non-ferrous metals was important in and around the Churnet Valley which, despite its attractive woodland setting, is still littered with the spoil heaps and industrial buildings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The area is also criss-crossed by canals, tram roads and railways, many long abandoned. Plentiful water supplies gave rise to mills, which then became surrounded by tiny industrial hamlets, many of which (e.g. Oakamoor and Tean) survive. Large areas remained unenclosed until the Georgian period, and Parliamentary Enclosure landscapes are a feature of the upland areas away from the mills and mines of the valleys.

4. The North Staffordshire Coalfield occupies much of the western part of the area, where deep mining, opencasting and clay winning have had a considerable impact on the landscapes of the area around Silverdale. There is a small outlier to the

coalfield near Cheadle. Other industries have included lead and ironstone mining, glass making and stone quarrying.

5. Although a large part of the west of this region is occupied by the expanded Pottery towns, the character of its buildings can still be discerned in the north and east. Here the gritstone buildings of villages and farmsteads have an almost defensive appearance clustered together in the short, steep wooded stream valleys known locally as cloughs. Buildings in Ipstones to the east illustrate the solid stone proportions used and these can be seen repeated where brick and tile have been introduced. Many of the large seventeenth-century houses, such as Horton Hall and Belmont Hall, adopted forms such as stone-mullioned windows with hood moulds, which are seen at their grandest at Caverswall Castle. These continued to be used, for instance in unpretentious farmhouses like Gillowfold Farm near Biddulph, into the eighteenth century. The nineteenth century prosperity of Stoke-on-Trent saw the creation of a number of landscaped parks and gardens, many of which survive. At Alton the famous pleasure gardens were designed to fill a rocky dell and in the village itself Alton Castle looks down on the Churnet like a castle on the Rhine. The recently restored Victorian gardens of Biddulph Grange are also a notable visitor attraction.

6. The agricultural land quality is generally poor, with approximately two thirds of the land Grade 4 and one third Grade 3. About two thirds of the holdings qualify as part time by MAFF criteria, although it is likely that a significant number are run as full time units, particularly in the north, with some consequent hidden underemployment. Three quarters of the area is permanent pasture, reflecting the below average land quality. This is predominantly a dairying area, but it also has substantial numbers of beef and sheep enterprises. There is some horticultural activity but this is almost entirely hardy nursery stock production. In the south there is a small area of arable cropping, mainly of cereals.

7. The greatest concentration of woodland in the area is the Churnet Valley, where there are large Forest Enterprise leaseholds, other commercial coniferous woodlands (mainly of Corsican pine) managed by private forestry companies, and wooded nature reserves owned by conservation organisations, and by the County Council. There is a particularly impressive concentration of ancient semi-natural woodland here, and the valley as a whole is a very good example of the constructive co-existence of commercial forestry, recreation provision and nature conservation in an area that can lay claim to being one of the birth places of the industrial revolution.

8. The valley runs through a smoothly undulating upland pastoral

landscape, linking to it by cloughs. Above these, stone walls become more common and narrow winding lanes and stone farmhouses give a consistent upland feel, with extensive long distance views. Sessile oak *(Quercus petraea)* is a characteristic species of the Churnet Valley and the cloughs, and sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) is common around farm buildings. There is some visual evidence of a decline in farming fortunes here.

9. A similar decline is evident in the area fringing the Stoke-on-Trent/Newcastle conurbation. There, on an undulating plateau, a very high density but dispersed pattern of farmsteads and individual properties is characteristic, with small to medium sized hedged fields used predominantly for stock raising. The area is sparsely wooded, and it has an urbanised pattern of many old mining villages. The effects of former and more recent coal mining activity are numerous in their impact on this landscape.

10. The recent development and expansion of Stoke-on-Trent has tended to obscure the evidence that it was originally a series of upland settlements. That character reasserts itself strongly to the north, around Biddulph Moor and Mow Cop, where stock rearing and rough grazing is practised in a regular pattern of medium to large-scale fields. The field name of hollins, found commonly here, probably relates to former holly *(Ilex aquifolium)* plantations, established to provide winter browse for livestock. Ancient woodland is well represented and along the border with Cheshire wooded cloughs are a distinctive feature of the landscape. The lower-lying marshy areas are a stronghold for the distribution of bay willow *(Salix pentandra)*.

11. In the coalfield farmlands to the south of Stoke-on-Trent the landscape has very much more of a lowland character, with intact field patterns, well trimmed hedges, numerous large hedgerow oaks and a well cared-for feel.

12. This part of the county is given its character by its pronounced landform, with deeply incised steep valley sides and extensive woodlands, and by its proximity and visual links to the adjacent Peak District. The presence of a large industrial conurbation has a pronounced effect on many of the landscapes surrounding it, with dense settlement patterns and well used roads. It is an area, however, with many attractions stemming from its scenic quality and industrial past.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE

Coalfield farmlands

These are sparsely wooded landscapes of former mining villages and small to medium sized hedged fields on undulating plateaux close to large population centres. The shales, sandstones and clays of the coal measures give rise to non-calcareous stagnogley soils, which would originally have supported acid grassland and wet heath. The predominant land use is now mainly stock rearing. Many areas have been subject to extensive opencast coal mining and clay winning and the distinction between these areas and those that have been less abruptly modified forms the basis of a division into sub-types.

Visual character

This is a well cared for lowland pastoral landscape characterised by neatly trimmed hedges and numerous mature oaks. Where hedges are becoming gappy, ranch style fencing is being introduced into the landscape. The flat or very gently undulating landform results in limited views across parallel lines of hedges where field pattern is not easy to see and hedgerow trees quickly visually coalesce to foreshorten views.

The urban edges to this landscape have been severely fragmented, with field pattern increasingly deteriorating and extensive urban fringe influences, e.g. a golf course and sewage works, now visually dominating the area. There are areas where hedgerow tree cover becomes less and a steeper landform allows more extensive views across the landscape.

Characteristic landscape features

Intact, well-trimmed hedges; hedgerow oaks; small winding lanes; field ponds.

Incongruous landscape features

Modern urban expansion; electricity pylons; busy roads; golf course; sewage works; electrified railway line.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are the loss of characteristic landscape features, the poor condition of those features that remain, and the prevalence of the incongruous features listed above.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Very high, to increase the screening of the urban edge and provide mitigation for urbanising developments within the landscape. New woodlands would also be of value as part of a strategic link between the wooded areas of the Maer Hills, Hanchurch Hills and Trentham Park to the west, and the Churnet Valley and its surroundings to the east.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

The following Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan Targets are relevant at landscape scale:

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/ semi-natural broadleaved woodland	maintain and enhance	medium
	restore degraded sites	medium
	recreate/ regenerate	high
Ancient/ diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	high
	maintain trees	high
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	medium
Arable field margins	maintain, improve and restore	lower
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	very high
	increase the number of such features	high
Lowland acidic grassland	maintain, enhance, restore and buffer	high
	prevent further losses (except to heathland restoration)	medium
	increase the number of such sites	medium
	link fragmented sites through habitat creation	lower
Lowland heathland	protect existing heaths from development and damaging activities	very high
	re-create or create new heathlands	very high
Lowland wet grassland	maintain and enhance existing areas	medium
	restore degraded areas	lower
	create new areas	lower
Reedbeds	maintain and create	high

Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	high
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	high
Unimproved neutral grassland	maintain and safeguard existing areas	lower
	restore	lower
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	lower
	create/ re-create new areas	lower

Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

Design new planting to field pattern, with particular care being taken over edge treatment to reflect the broadleaved character of the area. Small to medium sized planting would be most appropriate with consolidation of existing woodlands by planting field corners and edges and reinforcing the hedgerow tree pattern. Any large scale planting should be made up of small to medium scale components and long plantation edges should be avoided. The position of any planting should continue to allow views across the landscape where available and be kept away from major traffic routes to avoid blocking views out to surrounding areas.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Land description unit (LDU) the largest homogeneous land unit sharing a similar pattern of physical, biological and historical components. They can be used as mapping units across disciplinary boundaries encompassing ecology, archaeology and landscape, and as such they are the basic units on which assessment, evaluation and decision making are based.

Landscape character type A generic term for the representation of a particular combination of landscape elements and land uses that create a particular character. One example could be “riparian alluvial lowland farmlands”, representing all examples of farmed landscapes on the alluvial soils associated with the floodplains of lowland rivers. Such a landscape character type could be found within many different Regional Character Areas.

Landscape quality A function of the clarity with which the distinctive character of a landscape type is expressed in a given area, and of the condition of the landscape elements that contribute to that character.

Landscape sensitivity A general indication of the extent to which a landscape can accommodate change without unacceptable detrimental effects on its character.

Regional character area A discrete geographical area, the boundaries of which enclose landscapes of a broadly similar type. The *Character of England* Map, produced jointly by the former Countryside Commission and English Nature, divides England into 159 such areas.