

Landscape Types:

Upstanding Village Farmlands



16. UPSTANDING VILLAGE FARMLANDS

Regional Character Areas

Northamptonshire Uplands.

Location

This landscape type covers the elevated landscapes in the north of the county to the north and south of Banbury, around Claydon and Kidlington, Great Bourton, Bloxham and Deddington.

Overview

A hilly landscape with a strong pattern of hedgerows and nucleated villages characteristically built from the local ironstone.

Key Characteristics

- A steep-sided, undulating landform.
- A well-defined geometric pattern of medium-sized fields enclosed by prominent hedgerows
- A strong settlement pattern of compact, nucleated villages of varying sizes with little dispersal in wider countryside.

Geology and landform

The Middle Lias series, a mix of clays and sands, largely dominates this area. The beds are overlaid in places by the Marlstone Rock bed, an iron-bearing limestone that gives rise to the higher hills. To the south of Banbury, only parts of the ironstone are overlaid by the clays and thin limestones of the Upper Lias, as these have been eroded away over much of north

Oxfordshire. The rolling landform is apparent throughout the landscape type, and rises to a height of 160m around Mollington. Around Deddington and Bourton, the landform is shaped into prominent ridges and small gullies drained by ditches and streams.

Land use and vegetation

The land uses are mixed. Arable cropping dominates the areas around Deddington, Hempton, Bodicote and Claydon, whereas grassland, interspersed in places with small patches of scrub and secondary woodland, is largely associated with the steeper slopes. Ridge and furrow pasture is a characteristic feature of this grassland. These fields are sometimes used for pony grazing. A number of wide, species-rich road verges are located in the more elevated northern part of the landscape type.

There is very little woodland and it is largely confined to small plantations on the steeper grounds and in the parkland at Williamsote. Patches of scrub are found growing in the steeper gullies.

Cultural pattern

There is a prominent pattern of geometrically-shaped fields enclosed by moderately tall hedges. The hedges give structure to the landscape and are dominated by hawthorn, elm and elder. Fields are moderately-sized, except for the larger arable fields around Bodicote. Hedgerow trees, of oak and ash, are generally sparse but become denser where they are associated with grassland. Most of the remaining trees are concentrated along roadsides, footpaths, bridleways and parish boundaries. The elevated nature of the landform, combined with lack of woodland and tree cover, results in a rather open landscape.

The pattern of well-defined nucleated villages is very characteristic. They are often situated on rising ground and slopes, linked by straight roads. This nucleated settlement pattern is in contrast to the few dispersed farmsteads in the wider countryside. The vernacular character is strong in most of the settlements, but is particularly prominent in the smaller villages to the north of Banbury including Bourton and Mollington. The larger settlements, such as Deddington, Bloxham and Adderbury also retain a core of buildings with a strong vernacular character. The distinctive ironstone used as building material gives rise to characteristic warm orange-brown buildings with stone or slate roof tiles.

BIODIVERSITY

Overview

This landscape type supports a range of locally important habitats, including deciduous woodland and plantations, as well as priority habitats such as acid and marshy grassland.

Key Characteristics

- Predominantly low-medium to medium bioscores.
- Priority habitats such as acid and marshy grassland.

General Description

This landscape type is located on the steep, undulating hills to the west of Banbury. Overall, it supports a range of locally important habitats including some deciduous woodland, plantations, semi-improved grassland and species-poor hedges with trees. There is only a limited range of other important and priority habitats such as ancient semi-natural woodland, species-rich hedgerows, parkland and acid and marshy grassland. These habitats are generally very small and isolated within the landscape type.

LOCAL CHARACTER AREAS

A. Mollington (NU/28 and NU/35)

Landscape Character

The area has medium-sized fields and a mixed farming pattern, with the larger fields associated with arable farming and the smaller grass fields largely restricted to the steeper slopes. Ridge and furrow pasture can be seen in places. Fields are enclosed by a prominent network of hawthorn and elm hedges with some ash and field maple. The hedgerow network is generally in good condition with dense, well-maintained hedges, although some internal field hedges tend to be low and gappy. Throughout this area there are thinly scattered, mature trees of oak and ash and a few small mixed plantations around Mollington.

Biodiversity

Bioscores/biobands: 32/LM; 54/LM

Locally important habitats include deciduous woodland, plantations, semi-improved grassland and species-poor hedges with trees. There are some species-rich ponds.

B. Wardington (NU/32)

Landscape Character

The area has small, regularly-shaped fields with both arable cropping and semi-improved grassland. The grassland tends to be restricted to the steeper slopes. Some ridge and furrow pasture can also be found. Fields are enclosed by hedges dominated by hawthorn, blackthorn, elm and field maple. There are sparsely scattered hedgerow trees of ash and oak, and a small deciduous plantation close to Williamscot. The hedgerow network is declining and hedges are often low, gappy and, in some places, removed altogether and replaced by fences.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 100/MH

There are a number of locally important habitats including deciduous woodland, plantations, semi-improved grassland, scrub and species-poor hedges with trees. There is also parkland, with its associated mature trees, surviving acid grassland and heath along the embankments of a disused railway, and some marshy grassland along the Cherwell Valley.

C. Bodicote (NU/16)

Landscape Character

The area is characterised by large-sized fields dominated by arable farming, with some smaller grass fields used for pony grazing. They are enclosed by low hawthorn hedges which are generally in good condition. Hedges bordering roadsides and old lanes are taller, well-maintained and more species-rich. There are a few young ash, field maple and oak trees in the hedges, and some small tree clumps close to farms.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 48/LM

Locally important habitats include plantations, semi-improved grassland, scrub and species-poor hedges with trees. There are also species-rich hedges bordering some roads and green lanes.

D. Bloxham (NU/9)

Landscape Character

The area is characterised by regularly-shaped, small-sized grass fields and larger arable fields. Ridge and furrow pasture is common. Fields are enclosed by a prominent network of intact hawthorn and elm hedges which, in places, are overgrown and gappy. Mature ash, oak and sycamore trees are scattered throughout the area. They are denser where there is more grassland, along roadsides, country lanes and the disused railway line.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 48/LM

This area has a number of locally important habitats including deciduous woodland, plantations, semi-improved grassland, scrub and species-poor hedges with trees. There is also some parkland with its associated mature trees.

E. Deddington (NU/6)

Landscape Character

The area is dominated by large, geometrically-shaped arable fields. There is some semi-improved grassland, interspersed with scrub, on the steeper slopes. Ridge and furrow pasture is also evident. Fields are enclosed by a prominent network of low, intact hawthorn hedges. They are generally taller and thicker where they enclose grassland. Mature ash and oak trees are scattered throughout, and they are denser to the east of Deddington and along bridleways and old lanes. There are some minor watercourses along the valley bottoms.

Biodiversity

Bioscore/bioband: 36/LM

Locally important habitats include deciduous woodland, plantations, semi-improved grassland, scrub and species-poor hedges with trees.

FORCES FOR CHANGE

- The hedgerow network is generally intact and in good condition, even in places dominated by intensive arable farming. However, around Bodicote the hedgerow pattern is weaker, with roadside hedges tending to be overgrown and internal field hedges generally low and gappy.
- There is some residential development within the main settlements that is out of character, particularly in the larger settlements to the south of Banbury. There are also some industrial estates, but they are generally well screened by landscape planting.
- Other land uses, such as the disused airfield and wireless station near Barford, can be visually intrusive.

Landscape strategy

Conserve and enhance the strong pattern of hedgerows and hedgerow trees, and the nucleated settlement pattern and strong vernacular character of the villages.

Guidelines

- Strengthen and enhance the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges using locally

characteristic species such as hawthorn, and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash.

- Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type, particularly along roadsides.
- Conserve the surviving areas of permanent and ridge and furrow pasture on the steeper slopes and hillsides.
- Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements and promote the use of building materials, characteristically the ironstones and slate tiles of the Northamptonshire Uplands, and a scale of development and that is appropriate to this landscape type.
- Enhance tree cover through small-scale woodland planting next to streamlines and on steeper hillsides, so that it does not block off views of the landscape, keeping the feeling of openness.

Biodiversity Strategy

Ensure that all surviving priority habitats are safeguarded, in favourable condition and management, and enhanced to satisfy the actions and targets identified within the relevant habitat and species action plans. Safeguard, maintain and enhance all locally important habitats in a way that is appropriate to the landscape character of the area.

Guidelines

- There are very few priority habitats within this landscape and they tend to be small and isolated. It is important that they are safeguarded and in favourable condition and management through agreement with the landowner. Opportunities for expanding these habitats within the landscape type are very limited.
- Species-rich hedgerows are distributed throughout different parts of the landscape type, particularly bordering roadsides and green lanes. Priority should be given to safeguarding and maintaining this resource, particularly in those local character areas where they remain a significant feature.
- Opportunities for the establishment of other locally important habitats, such as semi-improved grassland and small deciduous woodlands, should be promoted in order to strengthen wildlife corridors and enhance the local landscape character.

Key Recommendations

- **Safeguard and enhance the landscape character of the hedgerow network.**
- **Ensure that the few surviving priority habitats are in favourable condition and management.**