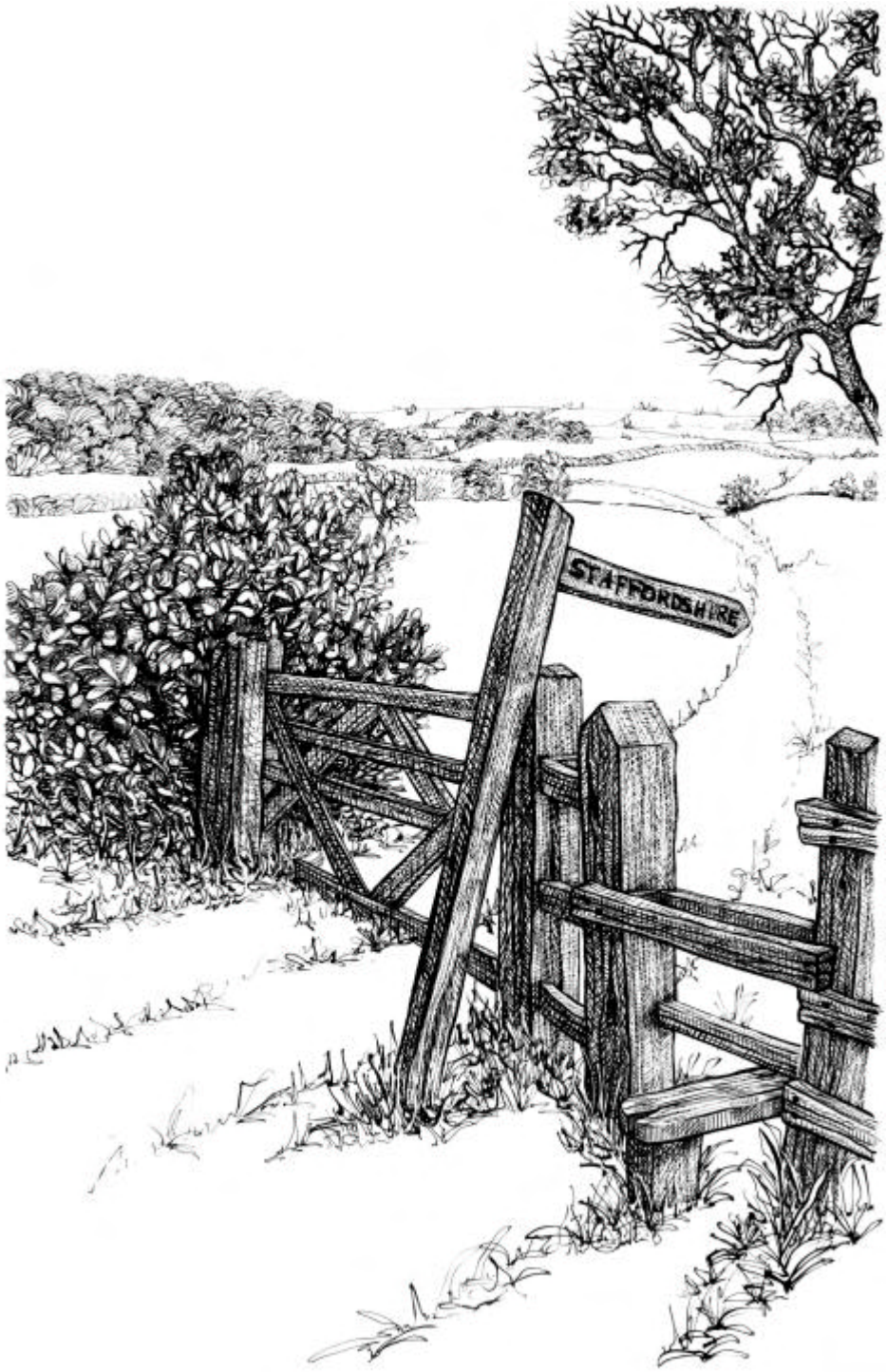
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Planning for Landscape Change: Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan 1996 – 2011 Landscape Descriptions



Planning for Landscape Change:

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

Volume 3: Landscape Descriptions

Staffordshire County Council,
Development Services Department, 2000

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

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Introduction: using this guidance

1. For the purposes of description the Structure Plan area has been broken down into nine **Regional Character Areas**, based on a map of countryside character prepared by the former Countryside Commission and English Nature. These are in turn broken down into a series of **landscape character types**. This terminology is discussed in more detail in the Supporting Documentation to the Supplementary Planning Guidance, which has been bound as a separate volume.

2. The first chapter of this volume gives a general introduction to the landscapes of the Structure Plan area. In each subsequent chapter the overall landscape character of one of the Regional Character Areas 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 on Map 3 of 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 1 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 summarises 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 recognisable 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 feedback 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.

Chapter 1: the countryside of the Structure Plan area as a whole

> *Staffordshire*, bounded on the *North* with *Cheshire*, *East* with *Derbyshire* and *Leicestershire*, on the *West* with *Shropshire*, and on the *South* with *Worcester* and *Warwickshires*; is divided by the *Trent* into the *North*, and *South*, or rather into the *North-East* and *South-West* parts; And the *North-East*,...subdivided again into the *Moorelands* and *Woodlands*; which latter lying between the *Trent, Tene,* and *Dove*, others choose rather to call the *middle* part of *Staffordshire.*
>
> Robert Plot (1686), p.107.

1. The loss of the great Forest of Needwood which constituted the *Woodlands* reduced the effectiveness of Robert Plot's division of Staffordshire, but later commentators continued to describe the county in terms of three well-delineated physical regions. These are the northern hills, the central plain and the southern plateau. In the north-east, the land rises up to the extensive Palaeozoic sandstone and limestone uplands of the Peak District. Much of this upland edge to the county is between the 120m and 250m contours, dissected by a series of parallel rivers which flow from north-west to south-east into the River Trent. On the western side of the high hills lie the North Staffordshire coalfields, beyond which, on the western and southern edges of the coalfields, there is a border of sandstones forming a more elevated landscape.

2. The central plain is a low-lying tract of gently undulating landform, underlain predominantly by Triassic mudstones, formerly known as the Keuper Marls. A series of small rivers feeds the River Trent, which rises in the north near Stoke and sweeps eastwards in a great curve.

3. The southern plateau protrudes like an arrow head into the central plain, rising to 224m at one point on Cannock Chase. This elevated plateau is composed of coal measures, bounded by a wide rim of Triassic sandstone, the prominent feature of Cannock Chase consisting of the 'pebble beds' of the Sherwood Sandstone Group.

4. It has been customary to regard the English highlands as that area lying above the 1000 foot (approximately 300m) contour, with a less clearly defined upland zone which may begin variously between 400ft (120m) and 800ft (250m) above sea level. Whichever measurement is chosen, Staffordshire sits astride the boundary between the lowlands and the highlands, and the hills of the north of the area are in effect the foothills of the Pennine chain. Edees (1972) noted that the county's geographical position partly accounts for the diversity of its flora, which includes some northern plants at the southern limit of their range and some, more at home in the south-east, which are at their northernmost station.

5. The county also straddles another boundary, between two types of cultural landscape that have been recognised for centuries. The Elizabethan topographer William Harrison noted that:

> it is so, that our soil being divided into champaine ground and woodland, the houses of the first lie uniformlie builded in every town togither, with streets and lanes; whereas in the woodland counties (except here and there in great market towns) they stand scattered abroad, each one dwelling in the midst of their owne occupieng.
>
> (Cited by Homans, G.C. (1941) p.21)

6. 'Woodland' can be taken to refer to regions that were not necessarily well wooded, but which were enclosed directly from woodland, and which were characterised by hedges and hedgerow trees. The distinction was also recognized by Thomas Tusser, in his *Five hundred pointes of good husbandrie* (published 1573), in contrasting 'seuerall' and 'champion' country.

7. The contrast is still apparent on the ground. The extent of the champion (or champagne) country generally matches the Central Province identified in a rigorous study of rural settlement in England (Roberts and Wrathmell, 1995). This is the swathe that extends from north-east Yorkshire through the east Midlands to Somerset and is characterised by nucleated settlements and by surviving areas of ridge and furrow which mark the former open and commonable fields which were subject to extensive parliamentary enclosure. In Staffordshire the Mease Lowlands and Trent Valley Washlands Regional Character Areas fall within this Province, and the rest of the county within the 'woodland' of the Northern and Western Province.

8. A contemporary landscape historian (Rackham, 1986) has offered a new nomenclature for the lands on each side of this boundary.

> ...the Lowland Zone...is divided by a remarkable contrast. On the one hand, as in Essex or Herefordshire, we have the England of hamlets, medieval farms in hollows of the hills, lonely moats and great barns in the clay-lands, pollards and ancient trees, cavernous holloways and many footpaths, fords, irregularly-shaped groves with thick hedges colourful with maple, dogwood, and spindle – an intricate land of mystery and surprise. On the other hand there is the Cambridgeshire type of landscape, the England of big villages, few, busy roads, thin hawthorn hedges, windswept brick farms, and ivied clumps of trees in corners of fields; a predictable land of wide views, sweeping sameness, and straight lines. These I call Ancient Countryside and Planned Countryside. As slight research will show, the one is the product of at least a thousand years of continuity and most of it has altered little since 1700 (though...some areas have signs of deliberate planning in remote antiquity). The other is, in the main, a mass-produced, drawing-board landscape, hurriedly laid out parish by parish under Enclosure Acts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; but occasionally there survive features, notably woods, that the enclosure commissioners failed to destroy. The distinction between the two landscapes is often very sharp: it bisects each of a dozen parishes on the Cambridgeshire – Suffolk border.

9. This division is not universally favoured: there is a suggestion about it of a rush to judgement of landscape quality, and it can be criticised as overly simplistic. The landscapes which resulted from the late enclosure of heathland, which shaped so much of Staffordshire's countryside, do not fit easily into the classification, and a distinction between 'waste-derived' and 'surveyor enclosed' landscapes was favoured for the purposes of the work leading to this Guidance. The latter are those

which resulted from the laying out of field boundaries following a predefined pattern, whether through parliamentary enclosure or private treaty, and whether the land previously had been open field, heathland or forest. Waste-derived landscapes tend to be of earlier derivation and consequently less is known about their evolution, but they lack the visual evidence of the influence of the drawing board and the surveyor. Despite the preference for this more morphological distinction, Rackham's division of landscapes is now in common usage, and in the interests of compliance with established landscape assessment terminology (e.g. Warnock, 1994) occasional reference to ancient or planned landscapes is inevitable.

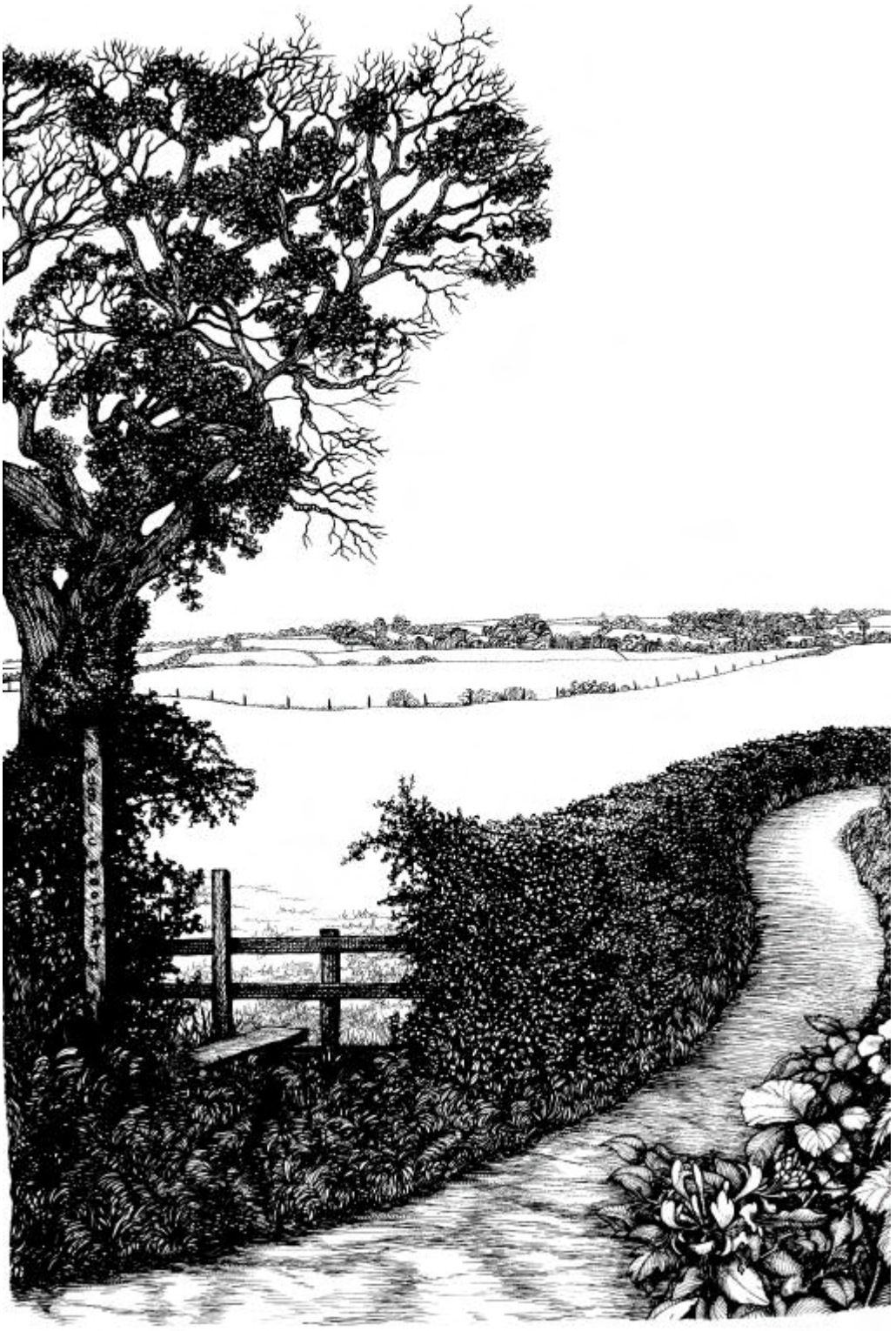
10. The Plan area has a diverse farming pattern. It is predominantly a permanent pasture area with dairying the main farm type (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, 1996). However, in the south, in Lichfield and South Staffordshire Districts where land quality is better, cropping predominates. The combination of higher quality agricultural land and a good communications network in the south gives farm businesses there the flexibility to adapt to changing markets and price fluctuations in agricultural commodities. However, the area also has to endure the pressures of demand from the urban population for non-agricultural uses such as built development, as well as access to the countryside. This results in trespass, theft and vandalism, but also in opportunities for farm gate sales and horseyculture.

11. In the north of the Plan area the range of agricultural enterprises is small as a result of the physical limitations of the land, and flexibility for farming change is limited. The communications network is less accessible, and farms are remote from potential customers. The quality of landscapes of this area favour tourism development, with opportunities for farm diversification.

12. Overall, the woodland cover of the Plan area is below the average for the UK, but equal to the average for England (approximately 6.6%), degradation being greatest in the old industrialised areas. Where the sandstones give rise to higher landforms, as on Cannock Chase, Hanchurch Hills and to the north-east, large areas of new coniferous planting form obvious features in the landscape.

13. The development and character of the Plan area can be read, not only in the landscape itself but also in the buildings upon it. The many small rural towns, villages, hamlets and farms, as well as the number of prestigious gentry estates such as Alton Towers and Shugborough, illustrate how the work of men and women has shaped the countryside.

14. Rural buildings emphasise the considerable variety in the geography of the county. The low stone farmsteads of the peaks in the north-east can be contrasted with the neat timber-framed cottages of the Trent washlands. However there are also common features to be found: many timber-framed houses commonly use the midlands square panels and 'post and truss' construction. Timber-framed houses of higher status may be distinguished by the smaller panels or elaborate close studding which display their wealth. The later three-storeyed brick farm house of three to five bays with casement or sash windows under gauged brick arches can be seen almost everywhere except, perhaps, the windswept moorland.

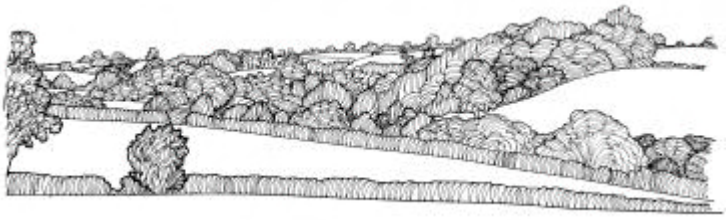


The Staffordshire Plain


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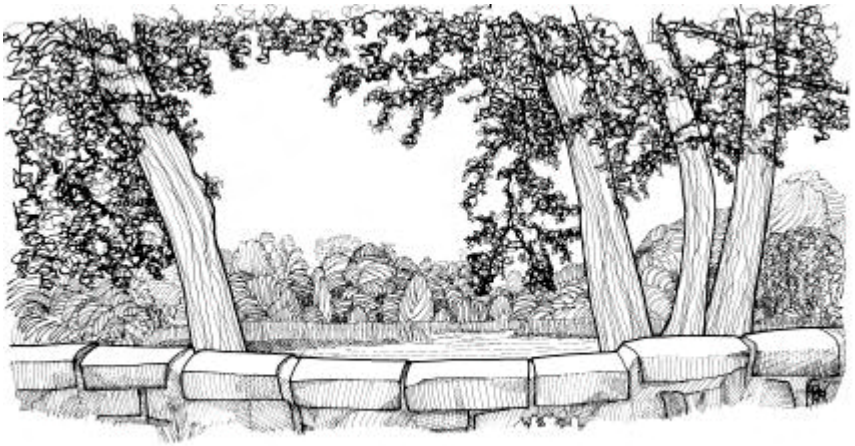












Chapter 2: Regional Character Area 61 - Staffordshire Plain

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.

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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.

9. 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 incorporate Staffordshire blue bricks in the decorative patterns which display the taste of the local nineteenth-century landowner.

21. The scale of the landscape tends to be dictated by woodlands and hedgerow trees, except where localised prominent small hills and valleys show up the field pattern. Where intensification is now removing these features the scale is increasing in consequence. There is no significant commercial forestry in the area, but broadleaved woodlands are an important element in the landscape, where landcover is being removed. Distinctive long stream valleys with ancient semi-natural woodland are often known locally as drumbles. Wild cherry *(Prunus avium)* is a distinctive woodland tree of this area, and the impeded drainage of the clay soils often favours thickets of blackthorn *(Prunus spinosa)* and scattered alder buckthorn *(Frangula alnus)* in the understorey. The ground flora of ancient woodlands is often more diverse than in other parts of the county: the remnant of Wrinehill Wood provides a particularly good example.

22. The dispersed pattern of small rural towns, small to medium sized farms and individual properties is under commuter pressure, resulting in property improvements and some erosion of rural character.

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	recreate/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

<u>Tree and woodland planting</u>

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
	recreate/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
	recreate/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
	recreate/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
	recreate/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

Tree and woodland planting

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.

Ancient clay farmlands: parkland

The parklands of Chillington, Oaken and Somerford fall 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.

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

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	very high
	recreate/regenerate	high
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	very high
	increase the number of such features	lower
Lowland wood pasture and parkland	maintain and safeguard	very high
	restore degraded sites	very high
Reedbeds	maintain and create	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.

Ancient redlands

This is a rather ill-defined landscape type in Staffordshire. Occurring on older rocks than any of the landscapes described above, it is characterised by Upper Palaeozoic mudstones and sandstones and a dissected undulating topography with a muted upland feel. The non-calcareous brown soils support stock rearing with mixed farming in an irregular pattern of hedged fields with a good scatter of small woodlands, most of which are of ancient origin. The settlement pattern is dispersed, with hamlets and scattered farmsteads.

Visual character

This is a landscape of mixed arable and pastoral farmland, very much dependent on the interaction of a rolling landform with numerous woodlands in determining its scale. Field pattern varies, from being intact and a strong element in the landscape in areas where it continues its stock control function, to being a fairly weak visual element in other areas as the hedges are replaced by lines of fencing. Landform variations are very important in defining the differing scales and character, with areas of rolling or strong small-scale landform undulations allowing or controlling views across the landscape. These give way to areas of more pronounced steep sandy slopes of sheep pasture in places.

The woodlands, predominantly broadleaved but some with a conifer content, have a large visual influence on the landscape as a result of their interlock and relative position on the higher ground and in valleys. Adjacent large areas of broadleaved and coniferous woodlands also have a large impact on the appearance of the landscape, enclosing views and giving the whole area an impression of being well wooded in character. The numerous mature hedgerow oaks that coalesce visually in places reinforce the landcover pattern and wooded appearance of the landscape, whilst elsewhere a more open character is given by a much lower density of hedgerow oak and ash. Here, small-scale woodlands associated with stream corridors, ridge tops and farm buildings provide localised relief from an open smoothly textured landscape.

Settlement within this landscape reflects its ancient character, with narrow winding lanes, often sunken, linking hamlets, scattered houses and farms. Medium sized farms of Staffordshire red brick and halls with associated parkland impart a localised, distinctive character, as do parcels of more regular field pattern and straight roads.

Generally, this is a landscape where everything is on view, including intrusive elements such as commuter properties, main roads and electricity pylons.

Characteristic landscape features

Hedgerow field pattern with mature hedgerow oaks and some ash; broadleaved woodland; pronounced rolling landform; narrow sunken lanes; steep sandy slopes; well treed stream corridors and field ponds; parkland and pasture farming; isolated red brick farmhouses; straight lanes.

Incongruous landscape features

Expanding urban edge; busy main roads; power lines.

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. ancient woodland, semi-natural grasslands and riparian and wetland vegetation).

Potential value of new planting

Very high. New planting, especially of larger woodlands, would be of value to direct views away from adjacent urban edges, and to restore a wooded landscape structure to the more open areas. The strategic siting of new native woodland could be of great value in reducing the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland.

A significant part of the area falling within this landscape type is also within the boundary of a Community Woodland Zone as defined in the Newcastle under Lyme Local Plan. Within this area the Borough Council will encourage the establishment of new woodlands with similar objectives to those of Community Forest Areas, albeit on a smaller scale.

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	very high
	recreate/regenerate	medium
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 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
Peat bogs	maintain and enhance	very high
	restore former raised bogs	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	medium
	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

Care should be taken to ensure the survival of existing hedgerow tree features. There is the capacity to take a wide range of woodland sizes, from small to medium scale associated with existing vegetation patterns, to larger scale on the flatter ground. Any new areas of woodland should be designed to retain long distance views through the landscape from important viewpoints. A conifer element is appropriate, but with attention to softening the edges with a broadleaved character. Care is needed on the steeper slopes with woodland shape and internal design.

Design in villages

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

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
	recreate/ 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 estatelands: farmlands

This is a variant of the basic landscape type in which traditional landed estates are uncommon. There is little woodland, and very little, if any, of ancient origin.

Visual character

This is a landscape of intensive arable farming, where hedgerow tree cover of oak and occasional ash is sparse and hedgerows are well trimmed and in decline. Many hedgerows have now been removed to increase field size and this has created an open, smoothly textured landscape with extensive views across it. A gently undulating landform results in the landcover elements being viewed as individual components of the landscape and field pattern showing up from elevated viewpoints.

Woodland cover in this medium to large-scale landscape tends to be small-scale broadleaved and conifer plantations. Visually, woodland edges, stream corridors and trees associated with farm buildings provide localised relief and control views.

Characteristic landscape features

Well treed stream valleys; small broadleaved copses; intensive arable farming; hedged field pattern; gently undulating landform.

Incongruous landscape features

Sand and gravel quarrying. Extensive fencing where field pattern is being lost. Improved commuter properties.

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, in particular heathland and related habitats.

Potential value of woodland planting.

High. There is a particular need for the planting of larger woodlands, to restore a landcover structure to a landscape that has deteriorated due to intensive arable farming.

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/diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	very high
	maintain trees	very high
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	medium
	increase the number of such features	medium
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	high
	restore degraded sites	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	high
	restore	medium
	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

The existing field pattern needs reinforcing by additional hedgerow replanting with hedgerow trees. New woodlands should be designed to the existing remnant - although visually important - field pattern. The scale of planting can vary from small scale adjacent to existing vegetation to large scale planting of field size and above. A species mix of both conifers and broadleaves is acceptable provided care is taken with design of edges.

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
	recreate/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

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
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: estatelands

This is the landed estate variant of the basic landscape type. Plantations on ancient woodland sites are particularly well represented in these landscapes.

Visual character

This is a landscape of mixed arable and pastoral farmland, the scale of which is very much dependent on the interaction of the strongly rolling landform with numerous plantation woodlands. The predominantly coniferous woodlands, with some broadleaved content, have a large visual influence on the landscape as a result of their interlock and relative position on the higher ground. This often results in only edges and skylines being visible.

Field pattern, of a small to medium scale, is intact and a strong element in the landscape, with little signs of deterioration as it continues its stock control function in most areas. The large number of mature hedgerow oaks reinforces this landcover pattern.

The scale of the landscape is reduced considerably in areas where the landform becomes more pronounced and divided by steep slopes and incised valleys.

Settlement of this landscape reflects its ancient character, with narrow winding lanes, often sunken, linking large farms and tied cottages. Several halls with associated parkland impart a distinct character to specific areas.

Characteristic landscape features

An intact hedgerow pattern with hedgerow oaks; well treed stream corridors; large plantation woodlands; intensive mixed arable and pasture farming with large farms; strongly rolling landform with steep sided small valleys.

Incongruous landscape features

Hard edges to, and lack of diversity of single species conifer plantations.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The single area falling within this landscape character type is of high landscape quality. The factor which is currently most limiting to that quality is probably the loss of characteristic semi-natural vegetation, in particular heathland and semi-natural ancient woodland, to coniferous afforestation.

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. However, the strategic siting of new native woodland could be of value in reducing the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland, especially if it were linked to the restoration of semi-natural character of those woods. Such planting would also help to maintain the present well-treed landscape and improve visual links to surrounding, predominantly broadleaved areas, and could introduce some variation in age structure and species to existing 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	very high
	restore degraded sites	high
	recreate/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	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	high
	restore degraded areas	medium
	create new areas	lower
Lowland wood pasture and parkland	maintain and safeguard	high
	restore degraded sites	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	lower
	create/re-create new areas	lower

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

Specific guidelines

<u>Tree and woodland planting</u>

The current spatial relationship between woodlands and open space should be maintained by keeping woodlands to a small to medium scale. Coalescence of woodlands, visually linking them together and disturbing the balance with open spaces, should be avoided. Both broadleaved and conifer planting are acceptable but surrounding broadleaved areas must be taken into account in the design of woodland edges and links to hedgerows.

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
	recreate/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
Lowland heathland	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

<u>Tree and woodland planting</u>

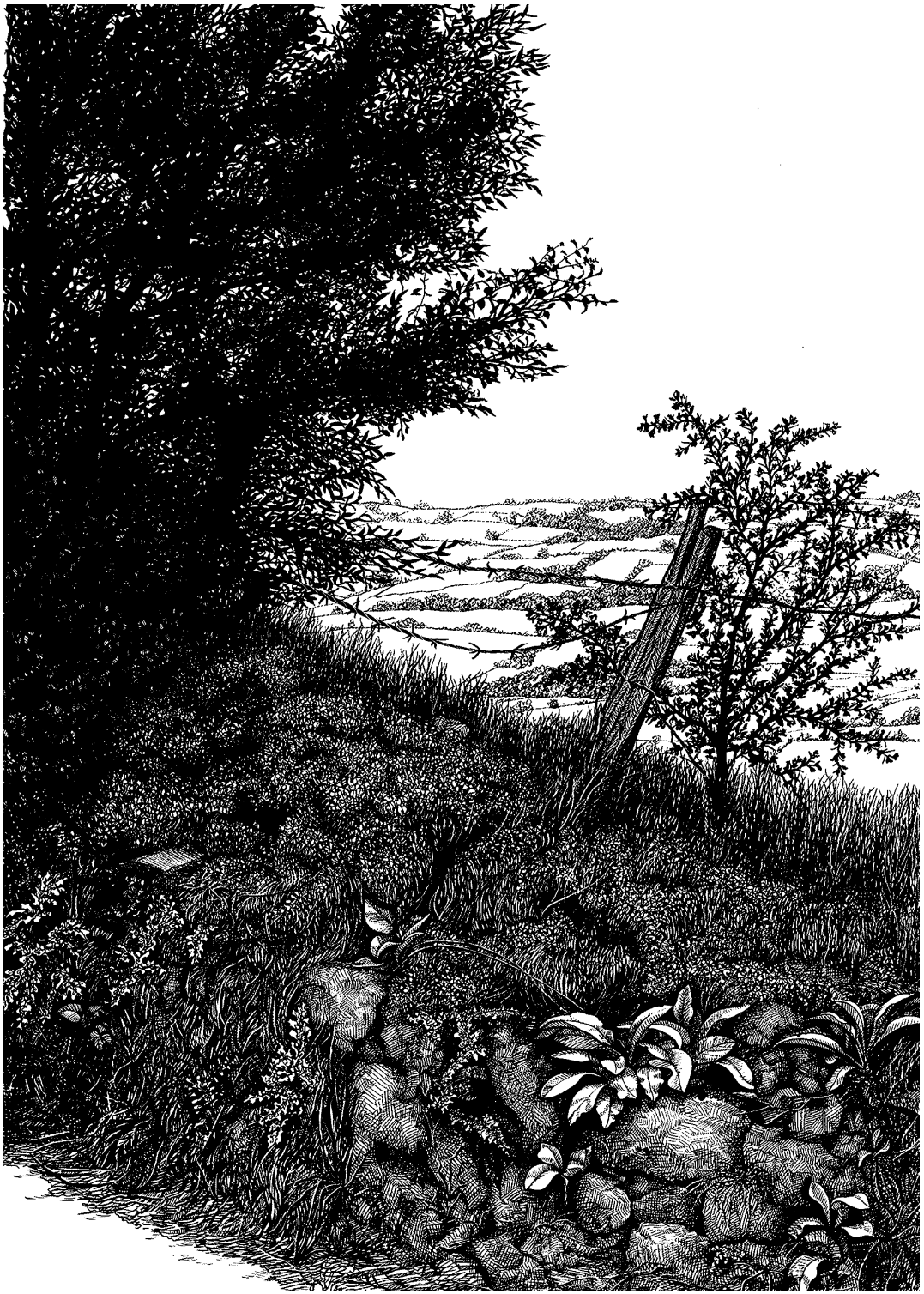
Extension of the existing woodland would have to be of small to medium scale and with a greater broadleaved content to help integration of the large plantations into the surrounding landscape. Planting should respond to landform to retain the current interlock between woodland and open space and to avoid 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

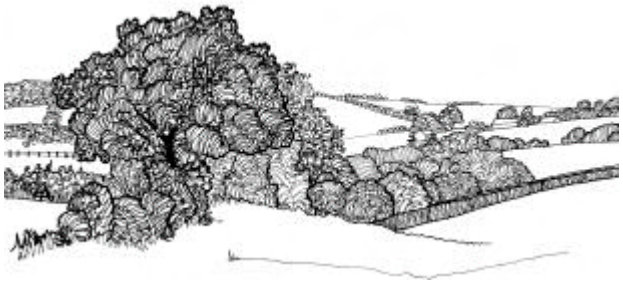
Trentham Park falls within this variant of the general landscape type. Each parkland is a unique product of its original design and its evolution over time. Consequently, any proposals for development or land use change which would affect such a landscape should be informed by a detailed historic landscape 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.

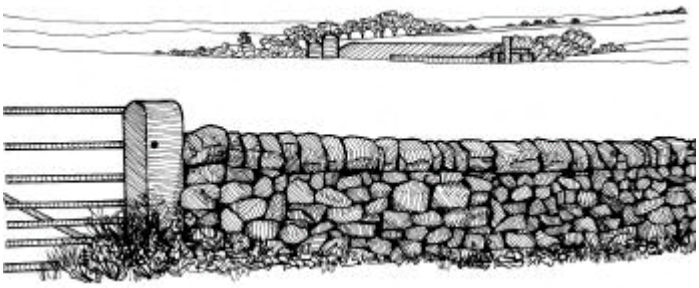
Particularly important Biodiversity Action Plan targets applying to this landscape include the conservation and management of existing ancient woodland, wood pasture and parkland, and the conservation, management and restoration of lowland heathland. Further details of these habitat targets can be found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

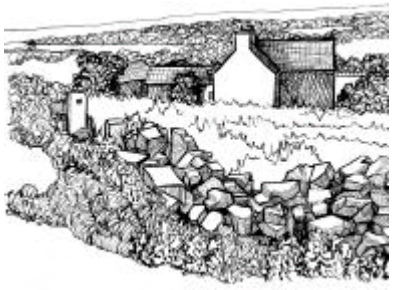
This landscape character type is very sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.



The Potteries and Churnet Valley











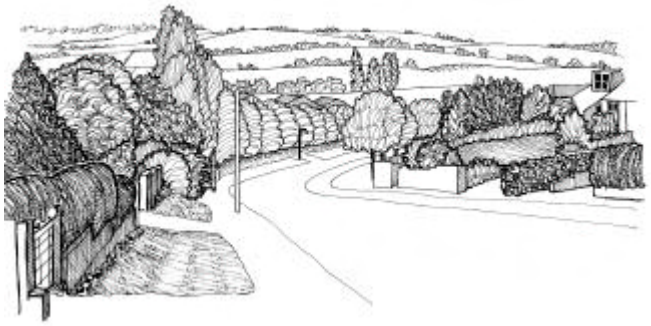












Chapter 3: Regional Character Area 64 - Potteries and Churnet Valley

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.

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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.

Riparian alluvial lowlands

These are landscapes of levels and lowland river valleys, where alluvial soils and occasional peat overlie alluvial drift and Triassic mudstones.

Visual character

These river valley 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 with willow, alder and poplar predominating along the river, stream and dyke courses. Woodlands are a prominent feature in the valley, associated with adjacent parkland and consisting of small blocks and belts of broadleaves. These woodlands are very important in controlling views through the landscape and, together with considerable surrounding woodlands on valley sides, give the impression of a very well wooded landscape. Hedgerows vary, with some areas intact and well looked after whilst deterioration in other places is resulting in remnant hedgerows and extensive wire fences. The parkland influence is also apparent in the presence of typical parkland style fencing.

There is little settlement in the area, with adjacent village development having only a limited impact on small areas. All roads skirt the area and consist of small, narrow lanes such that there is no access except by public footpaths. This results in a rural landscape of quiet, peaceful character with few pressures for change.

Characteristic landscape features

Flat river valley with pastoral floodplain farming; waterside tree species along watercourses of poplar, willow and alder; broadleaved estate woodlands; parkland fencing; hawthorn hedges and hedgerow trees.

Incongruous landscape features

Introduction of some wire fencing.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factor which currently limits landscape quality is the relatively poor survival of characteristic (i.e. riparian and wetland) vegetation. The two areas of the Dove Valley falling within this landscape character type 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.

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

Potential value of new woodland planting.

Generally low. This landscape is potentially sensitive to further woodland planting because of flood control constraints and competing priorities for restoration of wetland and wet grassland to meet biodiversity targets. There may be opportunities for the establishment of small areas of carefully sited floodplain woodland, following Environment Agency guidance, and where such planting is possible without risk it should be given a very high priority. Otherwise the priority should be conservation and restocking of existing woodlands, to maintain the well wooded 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	restore degraded sites	medium
	recreate/regenerate	lower
Ancient/diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	medium
	maintain trees	medium
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	medium
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	medium
Lowland wet grassland	maintain and enhance existing areas	lower
	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
Wet woodland	maintain, enhance and restore	very high
	prevent further loss	very high
	increase the number of such woodlands	very high

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

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

Waterside poplar, willow and alder are most characteristic of these landscapes and these species would, therefore, most appropriately predominate in any new planting. The intimate enclosed character which is so important to the area can be retained and reinforced by additional small scale or hedgerow planting. Views through these flat landscapes are important, and keeping any larger scale planting away from roads and rivers will greatly help to retain and enhance these views.

New planting can be better fitted into the landscape if designed to link with existing hedgerow trees and woodlands. The irregular spacing of riverside copses and groups of trees will help to avoid the creation of continuous woodland cover along the watercourses and to maintain wetland habitats.

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 and areas of remnant heath. There is a dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets and farmsteads, with urban influences in places.

Visual character

This is a low grade pastoral landscape where the landcover elements have been allowed to deteriorate to the point where field boundaries are marked by isolated beech, birch and stunted oak, remnant overgrown thorn and holly and lines of fencing. Fields consistently appear overgrazed and poorly drained, with rushes and rough grass present.

The higher areas of this landscape are marked by the introduction of drystone walls, often also associated with stone outcropping and fairly extensive areas of heathland. Woodlands reflect the local heathland character with the dominance of birch and stunted oak.

Overall this is a landscape in which the difficulties facing traditional pasture farming and increasing horseyculture combine to jeopardise the future well being of the landscape fabric. Difficulties with future care and pressures from the adjacent conurbation will probably result in the continued decline of this landscape, which is now in need of restoration.

Characteristic landscape features

Drystone walls and remnant hedgerows with overgrown thorn; small areas of relic heathland; gently sloping landform.

Incongruous landscape features

Urban fringe farming with introduction of horseyculture; extensive fencing for stock control, some use of inappropriate materials; signs of over-intensive grazing.

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 proliferation of incongruous features and the relatively poor survival of characteristic semi-natural vegetation (i.e. ancient woodland, heathland and semi-natural grasslands).

Potential value of new woodland planting.

Of high value, to restore some structure to a landscape in which hedgerows have deteriorated and views across the landscape are opening up; to direct views away from the conurbation edge and screen edge development and urban edge artefacts; to diversify land use away from the current low grade farming.

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	high
	recreate/regenerate	high
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 acidic grassland	maintain, enhance, restore and buffer	medium
	prevent further losses (except to heathland restoration)	high
	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
Lowland wet grassland	maintain and enhance existing areas	medium
	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	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
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

Tree and woodland planting

There is generally no restriction on the size of woodland planting that would be appropriate. Large scale planting of more than field size could easily be accommodated as could field corner planting associated with existing trees and hedgerows. Planting to the landcover pattern would be appropriate for most of the landscape, but design to respond to steeper slopes would be needed in places. Broadleaved or conifer planting would maintain the present character. Heathland areas would need to be avoided but planting of a heathland character around the edges would provide visual links and extend the heathland character out into the surrounding landscapes.

Settled plateau farmland slopes

These landscapes, which are related to the type described above, occupy the slopes running down from the plateau top, with consequent higher visibility.

Visual character

This is a landscape of small scale, low intensity pastoral farming where an intact ancient hedgerow pattern and dense tree cover dictate visual enclosure and limit views. This is combined with a gently undulating landform and small-scale valley features to give occasional views across to the distance.

Variations in vegetation cover influence the individual character of different areas, although tree species consist predominantly of oak and ash, with alder and willow along stream courses. Hedgerows have, on the whole, been allowed to grow up to individual thorn and holly trees and these contribute strongly to the filtering of views across the landscape. Where hedgerow maintenance is still being practised, scale tends to become larger, smoothing the landscape and showing up the landform more clearly. Small broadleaved scrub woodlands have localised influence and elsewhere there are areas of low-lying wet fields.

Closer to the urban edge, the landscape becomes more of an open urbanised river valley characterised more by the influences of surrounding residential and industrial areas and the recreational pressures they exert on the declining agricultural landscape, than any intrinsic features of the landscape itself. This flat open landscape is deteriorating due to these pressures such that hedges are becoming replaced by post and wire fences for stock control and individual sheds and barns are present.

Characteristic landscape features

Low intensity pasture farming; well treed stream corridors and field ponds; low lying wet fields; ancient hedgerow pattern; gently undulating landform with flat open river valleys.

Incongruous landscape features

Visual influence of urban edge; 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 semi-natural grasslands). The small area to the north and east of Forsbrook 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.

Potential value of new woodland planting.

Very high: large scale planting would be an appropriate mechanism for landscape regeneration in the urban fringe.

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	high
	recreate/regenerate	high
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 heathland	re-create or create new heathlands	lower
Lowland wet grassland	maintain and enhance existing areas	lower
	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
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

Planting should reflect the scale and extent of existing landcover. Small scale planting, of field corners or hedgerow trees, would be appropriate except where, mainly on the urban fringe, deterioration in the landscape structure has produced very much more open landscapes, where large scale planting would be appropriate. A largely broadleaved component would reflect the existing character. Any conifer content should not be dominant.

Dissected sandstone uplands

In the Midlands this landscape type, with the related highland fringe and cloughs and valleys, appears to be restricted to Derbyshire and northern Staffordshire, on upland Carboniferous and Permo-Triassic sandstones. They are characterised by their deeply dissected hills and heavily wooded valleys, with ancient woodland very well represented. In addition, the acid sands, brown earths and stagnogley soils would originally have supported vegetation communities transitional between lowland and upland heath, and some remnants survive, but the major land uses now are stock rearing and forestry. The field enclosure pattern is regular, with medium sized fields, and the settlement pattern is dispersed but sometimes quite dense.

Visual character

This is a landscape of small to medium scale, low intensity pastoral farming where an intact hedgerow pattern and large numbers of hedgerow trees dictate visual enclosure and limit views. The undulating landform does however show up the field pattern and allow distant views, particularly where farm intensification has locally increased the scale. Localised variations in landform, particularly small-scale valley features, and increased tree cover combine to foreshorten views and reduce the apparent scale in other places so that parts of the landscape remain hidden from view.

Variations in vegetation cover influence the individual character of different areas; tree species are predominantly oak and ash, with sycamore being more dominant on higher ground. Hedgerow maintenance is variable, from well trimmed, giving the appearance of smooth lines across the landscape, to gappy with grown up individual thorn and holly trees. There is very little apparent visual difference between the hedged areas and smaller areas of stone walls, but fences are increasingly being introduced for stock control.

The ancient character of this landscape is strongly reinforced by the dispersed settlement pattern and winding sunken nature of the numerous small lanes. Isolated old brick and sandstone farms and individual cottages are beginning to appear run down, with derelict old farming machinery increasingly associated with the properties.

Although there is little within this landscape to indicate its closeness to adjacent highland fringes, gradual increases in stone walls in some areas, the pronounced rolling nature of the landform and the introduction of stone as a building material, together with distant views of the higher ground, are gentle reminders of the transitional position these landscapes occupy between the highlands and lowlands.

Characteristic landscape features

Small to medium scale field pattern of hedgerows with some introduction of stone walls; hedgerow trees; strongly undulating landform with small stream valleys; low intensity pasture farming; a dispersed pattern of settlements linked by small sunken lanes; red brick and stone buildings.

Incongruous landscape features

Stock control fencing; isolated field trees; untidy, run down appearance to farmsteads.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are a decline in the condition of some of the characteristic landscape features described above, the introduction of some incongruous features, and the relatively poor survival of characteristic semi-natural vegetation (i.e. ancient woodland, semi-natural grasslands and heathland).

A small area 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

Overall, new woodland planting would be of moderate value, to replace landcover elements as farming intensification in some areas results in a more open landscape, and to restore the balance between the effects of landcover and landform in dictating views. The strategic siting of new native woodland could be of great value in reducing the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland.

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
	recreate/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	lower
	increase the number of such features	lower
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

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Lowland heathland	protect existing heaths from development and damaging activities	very high
	re-create or create new heathlands	very high
Reedbeds	maintain and create	lower
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	high
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	lower
	create/re-create new areas	medium

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

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

The hedgerow pattern is generally strong enough to dictate the scale and pattern of any woodlands. Planting should link to existing woodlands and hedgerows and can vary between field corner planting to large-scale plantations in the more open areas. Small scale planting should link into settlements, be on lower slopes or extend existing woodlands. Planting of steeper slopes should respond to landform in areas with weaker hedgerow pattern or with larger plantations.

Broadleaved or conifer planting is appropriate, but a broadleaved character to the edges is needed to link into existing vegetation. 'Stepping stone' plantations, sited to reduce the isolation of existing ancient woodlands, should comprise locally native species.

Dissected sandstone highland fringe

This landscape type is found at higher elevations than the type previously described.

Visual character

This is generally a small to medium scale pastoral landscape with smaller scale intimate pockets linked with localised landform, although there are always views out to adjacent valley and highland landscapes. Views across the area pick up highlights such as wooded valleys, woodland clumps and villages, giving the impression of a rich mosaic of open ground and woodland. Strong visual links with the adjacent highlands give this landscape a unified character with its strongly rising landform, deeply incised by small-scale stream valleys.

Tree cover is predominantly linked with these small valleys as ribbons of broadleaved woodlands of oak, rowan, birch, beech and sycamore, whilst the more recent introduction of conifer plantations increases the locally wooded feel to areas. Field boundaries are still having some effect in reducing the scale of the landscape, but for the most part extended lack of maintenance has now resulted in most hedgerows becoming sparse lines of trees, overgrown gappy thorn and, locally, holly, linked by lines of post and wire fencing. Dry gritstone walls nearer to the highland edge are variable in quality with the well-maintained areas imparting a smoother, more cared for appearance to the landscape. Evidence of stone walls, associated with narrow, steep, winding lanes and stone built farmhouses is a consistent feature of this landscape. Farms are now tending to develop an untidy character.

Characteristic landscape features

A pronounced rounded landform dissected by small stream valleys; upland pasture farming; conifer plantations and small wooded valleys; field pattern of both stone walls and hedges; stone buildings; an open highland edge.

Incongruous landscape features

Extensive lines of fencing; busy roads; run-down appearance to farms.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factor which currently limits landscape quality is the condition of the landscape's characteristic features, such as its hedges, walls, farmsteads and buildings.

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

Potential value of new woodland planting.

Low. This is one of the Structure Plan area's few landscapes which are regarded as sensitive to woodland planting, which could erode existing character and quality. There are limited opportunities for the small scale extension of woodland up valleys, to reinforce the mosaic of woodland and open spaces.

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	high
	recreate/regenerate	medium
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	medium
	increase the number of such features	medium
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
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	high
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	lower
	create/ re-create new areas	medium
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

Tree and woodland planting

Planting should be restricted to the lower areas and valleys to maintain the visual interlock between the woodlands and the open spaces. The field pattern is strong enough to dictate the pattern and scale of any new planting but this should also reflect the small-scale landform elements.

Both broadleaves and conifers are acceptable to reflect the existing character of the woodlands in the area.

Dissected sandstone cloughs and valleys

This landscape character type occupies the larger river valleys (principally the Churnet), and the steep wooded valleys or cloughs that run into them.

Visual character

The landscape is characterised by its deeply incised wooded valleys running through a smoothly undulating upland pastoral landscape of regular and irregular fields. Hedgerow condition varies from well trimmed and intact to very gappy, with grown up individual trees. The proximity to the highlands is constantly reinforced throughout the landscape by the stone architecture, drystone walls and dominant views to higher ground.

The scale of the landscape very much depends on the position from which it is being viewed. Small intimate wooded valleys alternate with distant views, although the narrow sunken nature of the lanes with extensive hedgebanks and tall hedges often also confines views when travelling through the area.

Farming varies from large intensive pastoral sheep and cattle farms, to collections of smallholdings. Sand and gravel quarries are very much an obvious feature of the area and localised early industrial influences are important.

The birch/oak woodlands characteristic of this area, especially on the steep valley sides away from the influence of farming, are now being added to in places by conifer plantations on the flatter upper areas.

Characteristic landscape features

Steeply sloping landform with incised valleys; broadleaved and conifer woodland; stone walls and buildings; small sunken enclosed lanes; low intensity pastoral farming.

Incongruous landscape features

Past and present sand and gravel quarrying; industrial sites; stockproof fencing; busy main roads.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are a decline in the condition of some of the characteristic landscape features described above and, to a lesser extent, the introduction of some incongruous features and the loss of some of the semi-natural vegetation characteristic of this landscape type (i.e. ancient woodland, semi-natural grasslands and heathland).

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

Potential value of new woodland planting.

Rather variable across the area representing this landscape type. It would be of particular value as a major component of the restoration of sand and gravel quarries, and the strategic siting of new native woodland could be very valuable in reducing the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland. With these exceptions further woodland planting would generally be of moderate 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	very high
	restore degraded sites	medium
	recreate/ regenerate	lower
Ancient/ diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	very high
	maintain trees	very high
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	very 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	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	medium
	restore	high
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	lower
	create/ re-create new areas	medium
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

Tree and woodland planting

Design of woodlands both to landform and field pattern needs to be considered as appropriate. Both edge details and internal design of woodlands are important and the scale of any planting should vary to reflect the scale of the landscape. Small to medium scale planting in valley bottoms, where a retention of the interlock between woodland and open space is important, could give way to larger forestry planting in the upper areas where agriculture is in decline and where there are already large coniferous plantations.

Conifers are appropriate to the areas, although links to existing woodlands and field pattern need to reinforce the broadleaved character. 'Stepping stone' plantations, sited to reduce the isolation of existing ancient woodlands, should comprise locally native species.

Dissected sandstone cloughs and valleys: forest

This is a variant of the previous landscape character type, in which woodlands and forest are the visually-dominant land use.

Visual character

This is a landscape of deeply dissected wooded valleys and associated streams, with a pronounced rounded landform above the valley sides. Farming is of low intensity pasture, where hedgerows are being poorly maintained and do not feature strongly in the landscape, except as fence lines with individual thorn trees. Stone walls are present in the area, although predominantly associated with the upper areas and roadsides, indicating the transitional position this landscape occupies on the upland edge. Traditional, valley side broadleaved woodlands have been augmented by large areas of newer coniferous forestry to give a very wooded appearance to the landscape. Small farms, villages and hamlets are linked by small enclosed lanes and parkland has a strong influence on the character of the area, with typical fencing and introduced tree species. This is a much visited tourist area.

Characteristic landscape features

Large broadleaved woodlands; large coniferous plantations; parkland; deeply dissected stream and river valleys; small winding sunken lanes; low intensity pasture farming.

Incongruous landscape features

Quarrying; a major theme park; deteriorating hedgerows; ownership boundary/ security fencing.

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 introduction of some incongruous features.

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

Potential value of new woodland planting.

The strategic siting of new native woodland could be of great value in reducing the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland. With this exception, further new planting is a low priority: the more appropriate emphasis would be on the conservation and restocking of existing woodlands, and the restoration of semi-natural character to plantations on ancient sites, to maintain the present well wooded 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	very high
	restore degraded sites	high
	recreate/ regenerate	lower
Ancient/ diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	very high
	maintain trees	very 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	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	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	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	very high
	restore	high
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	high
	create/ re-create new areas	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

Woodland planting predominantly needs to be designed to respond to landform, respecting important viewpoints and maintaining the interlock with open spaces. Care must be taken not to fill the landscape with much additional planting. 'Stepping stone' plantations, sited to reduce the isolation of existing ancient woodlands, should comprise locally native species.

Dissected sandstone cloughs and valleys: parkland

Alton Park, which accommodates Alton Towers, 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 these and other parks and gardens.

Particularly important Biodiversity Action Plan targets relevant to this landscape are the maintenance and enhancement of ancient and semi-natural broadleaved woodland, and the maintenance, safeguarding and restoration of wood pasture and parkland.

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

Gritstone highland fringe

This is a landscape type of the Dark Peak, which has only marginal representation at the highest elevations of the Structure Plan area. The Palaeozoic sandstones, or millstone grit, form a deeply dissected plateau with stagnogleys and peat soils which support upland grassland and some small patches of remnant moorland. The predominant land use is stock rearing, in medium to large sized walled fields of a regular pattern; there are few woodlands other than on the steep sides of cloughs. Settlement comprises mainly farmsteads in a dispersed pattern at low density, although some expanded hamlets exert an urban fringe influence.

Visual character

This is a landscape characterised by long distance views across the simple, often steeply sloping landform and out to adjacent highland areas. The pastoral farmland and rectangular pattern of gritstone walls, many in good condition, are important in defining the strong upland character.

Where hedgerows are present, they are deteriorating badly to individual grown up bushes with fencing taking over the stock control function. Hedgerow trees, of predominantly beech, rowan and thorn, are sparse and do not feature strongly or interrupt views. Woodlands are confined to conifer plantations at the boundaries of the area and thin broadleaved woodlands up stream valleys.

Many fields have been reduced to rough grass as farming practice deteriorates and heathland vegetation starts to dominate on the higher areas. The increased presence of improved residential is urbanising the general appearance of some areas.

Characteristic landscape features

Prominent upland ridge landform; gritstone walls; small ancient lanes; pastoral farming; extensive views; conifer plantations; wooded valleys; heathland.

Incongruous landscape features

Urbanised improved commuter dwellings; deteriorating walls and hedges; poor quality pasture.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

Two quite separate areas within the Potteries and Churnet Valley are representative of this landscape character type; they are the area centred on Biddulph Common and Biddulph Park, to the west, and a small but distinctive area to the north-west of Stanton, in the east. They differ in terms of the factors that limit landscape quality. In the westerly example the most critical factor is the loss of some of the semi-natural vegetation (i.e. moorland, acidic grasslands and clough woodlands) characteristic of this landscape type; in the eastern area such habitat has survived better, and here it is a decline in the visual condition of characteristic landscape features that is most important in limiting landscape quality.

The western area 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.

Of rather variable value. In the more westerly example of the landscape type the strategic siting of new native woodland could be of great value in reducing the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland. It could also be a beneficial alternative land use if pasture farming becomes increasingly unprofitable, and field quality further deteriorates. In the easterly example significant new planting could detract from the landscape character of the Weaver Hills and their surroundings.

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
	recreate/ regenerate	high
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	medium
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
Heathland/ moorland	protect existing heaths from development and damaging activities	very high
	re-create or create new heathlands	very high

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
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	high
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	high
	create/ re-create new areas	high

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

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

Both broadleaved and coniferous planting is appropriate. Planting design must respond to landform and increase in scale on the upper slopes. Any large scale planting would change the character of the area and must establish an interlock between the new woodlands and open spaces. Whole field planting should be visually linked to existing woodland and small-scale landform features and avoid areas of heathland present on the upper slopes.

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

Gritstone uplands

This landscape character type is closely related to the type described above, but is found at lower elevations.

Visual character

This is an upland landscape with strongly undulating slopes, and many localised steep sided valleys rising to an upland plateau of generally open bleak character. The landform provides a range of scales from the small intimate scale of valley bottoms to a medium scale with extensive views offered from the higher ground.

The farmland is characterised by an apparent decline in farming fortunes, resulting in deteriorating and shabby hedgerows of individual overgrown thorn trees and universal fencing, with only the occasional well maintained hedgerow. Trees, particularly beech, ash and sycamore, are predominantly associated with individual buildings. In places field boundaries are of deteriorating drystone walls. The size of fields varies from small to medium in different parts of the landscape with low intensity pastoral sheep and cattle farming predominating. Small streams and their associated linear woodlands provide an important structural element to the landscape.

The landscape has a strong upland but urbanised character particular to its position between the conurbation and the upland, and reflecting historical land uses. The high population density in the form of numerous scattered farms, spreading nearby settlements and improved individual properties increases the urban nature of the landscape, with its upland feel reinforced by the use of stone as a building material and uninterrupted views out to adjacent moorlands. Settlements are linked by a considerable network of small, steep, sunken winding lanes.

Characteristic landscape features

Upland ridge landform with small steep side valleys; extensive areas of broadleaved woodland; small steep sunken lanes; gritstone walls and stone dwellings; pasture farming; hedgerows and hedgerow trees; extensive views; large farms; many individual residential properties.

Incongruous landscape features

Introduction of fencing for stock control. Large farm buildings. Inappropriate urbanisation of commuter dwellings.

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 (i.e. ancient woodland, heathland and semi-natural grasslands) and, to a slightly lesser extent, the loss of characteristic landscape features and the poor condition of those that remain.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Very high, to restore a landcover structure to those areas showing the effects of hedgerow decline; to provide a unifying feature in the landscape to accommodate urban growth and screen its visual consequences. The strategic siting of new native woodland could be of great value in reducing the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland.

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
	recreate/ regenerate	high
Ancient/ diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	medium
	maintain trees	medium
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	high
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	lower
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
Heathland	protect existing heaths from development and damaging activities	high
	re-create or create new heathlands	high
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	high
Unimproved neutral grassland	maintain and safeguard existing areas	very high
	restore	high
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	very high
	create/ re-create new areas	very high

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

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

A range of scales of planting is appropriate to reflect location, with small scale planting appropriate in the valley bottoms and increasing in scale up the hillsides to large scale planting on the upper slopes.

Detailed design of woodlands needs to take account of edge treatments to tie into existing woodlands and field pattern. The shape should respond to landform and care is needed over the shape of lower edges and the effect on the ridge skyline.

Broadleaved planting would be most appropriate to the existing character of the area and any new planting should retain the interlock between the woodlands and open spaces to avoid interrupting views across the landscape. 'Stepping stone' plantations, sited to reduce the isolation of existing ancient woodlands, should comprise locally native species.

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.

Coalfield farmlands: minerals working and restoration

This is a variant of the basic landscape type, in which the present character has been determined largely by mineral working.

Visual character

This landscape has undergone a complete transformation due to recent opencast and deep coal mining activities and clay extraction. As a result of these activities the original landscape has been destroyed and a new landscape superimposed on the area.

This is now a mixture of restored sites which have had little time to develop any maturity of landscape features. It is characterised by a field pattern of wire fences and recent hedgerows and plantations, resulting in an exposed uninteresting landscape. Older mining activity is characterised by the occurrence of pioneer birch and willow encroaching into the areas, with little return to an agricultural use. Landform in these areas is often smoothed off, with some steep slopes remaining only where extensive regrading works have not occurred.

Proximity to the urban edge results in extensive recreational pressures, with present low intensity farming increasingly having to compete with public open space needs. Further pressures will continue, resulting in a landscape in a constant state of change for years to come, although scale will continue to be reduced as extensive woodland planting, taking place or proposed, approaches maturity.

Characteristic landscape features

Remnant pioneer woodland; dominant ridge landform; new planting; footpath and public access provision; industrial artefacts.

Incongruous landscape features

Smooth restoration contours; unrestored opencast remnants; post and 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 prevalence of incongruous features; the poor survival of historic elements that contribute to landscape character, such as field, settlement and road patterns; the rawness of an essentially newly-created landscape, and the poor representation of characteristic semi-natural vegetation.

Potential value of new woodland planting.

Very high, as an instrument of innovative landscape regeneration. 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.

Significant parts of the areas falling within this landscape type are also within the boundary of a Community Woodland Zone as defined in the Newcastle under Lyme Local Plan. Within

these areas the Borough Council will encourage the establishment of new woodlands with similar objectives to those of Community Forest Areas, albeit on a smaller scale.

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	high
	recreate/ regenerate	high
Ancient/ diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	lower
	maintain trees	lower
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	medium
	increase the number of such features	medium
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	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

Large scale woodland planting related to landform would be appropriate in most areas. Where restoration has already involved large amounts of planting, maintenance and replacement of failures is the most important requirement.

Ancient plateau farmlands

This upland landscape type is restricted to the north of the county, on the coal measures and millstone grit. There are influences from early mining activity, but they are less pronounced than in the coalfield farmlands. The topography is varied but always undulating and often steeply sloping. Some acidic grassland and wet heath survives on the non-calcareous stagnogley soils, but dairying and stock rearing predominate in small hedged fields of an irregular pattern. Small woodlands, often of ancient origin, are well represented. The settlement pattern is dispersed and rather dense.

Visual character

A low intensity pastoral landscape where the landcover elements have deteriorated to the point where field boundaries are marked by isolated sycamore and oak trees, remnant overgrown thorn and holly and lines of fencing. Fields consistently appear overgrazed and poorly drained, with rushes and rough grass present. On the urban fringe, new or recently improved properties and horse grazing as the predominant land use further erode the character of the area.

The more upland areas are marked by the introduction of drystone walls, often also associated with stone outcropping and fairly extensive areas of heathland. Woodlands reflect the heathland character with the dominance of birch and stunted oak.

Overall this is a landscape in which the difficulties facing traditional pasture farming and increasing horseyculture combine to jeopardise the future well being of the landscape fabric. Difficulties with future care and pressures from the adjacent conurbation will probably result in the continued decline of this landscape, which is now in need of restoration.

Characteristic landscape features

Walled and hedged field patterns; heathland; small broadleaved and conifer woodlands; gently undulating landform; low-grade pastoral farming; many isolated properties.

Incongruous landscape features

Extensive fencing; deteriorating hedgerows; urban expansion; power lines and electricity sub-station.

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 proliferation of incongruous features, as listed above.

Potential value of new woodland planting.

Very high, if heathland areas are avoided, to restore some structure to a landscape in which hedgerows have deteriorated and views across the landscape are opening up, to direct views away from the conurbation edge and screen edge development and urban edge artefacts, and to diversify land use away from the current low grade farming.

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	high
	recreate/ regenerate	high
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	lower
	increase the number of such features	medium
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
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	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

There is generally no restriction on the size of woodland planting that would be appropriate. Large scale planting of more than field size could easily be accommodated, as could field corner planting associated with existing trees and hedgerows. Planting to the landcover pattern would be appropriate for most of the landscape, but design to respond to steeper slopes would be needed in places. Broadleaved or conifer planting would maintain the present character. Heathland areas would need to be avoided but planting of a heathland character around the edges would provide visual links and extend the heathland character out into the surrounding landscapes.

Ancient slope and valley farmlands

This is a close relative of the previous type, occupying the slopes and valleys running down from the plateau top.

Visual character

This is a strongly undulating or sloping landscape interrupted by localised smaller scale steep sided stream valleys. These provide a range of scales from small and intimate in the valley bottoms to the larger scale, with extensive views offered from the higher ground. The generally intact ancient field pattern, hedgerow trees, and ribbons of broadleaved woodland running up side valleys are all subordinate to the strong effects of localised landform, but they provide important structure to the landscape. The woodlands, both broadleaved and coniferous in nature, have a strong visual influence on the landscape as a result of their interlock and relative position on the surrounding higher ground.

The field pattern, predominantly irregular but with some geometrically planned areas, is deteriorating in places. There is some hedgerow removal, some general decline until only overgrown individual thorns remain, and some areas in which hedges are well trimmed but gappy, with extensive fencing. The size of fields varies from small to medium scale, with low intensity pastoral sheep and cattle farming predominating. Hedgerow trees of ash, oak and sycamore are never numerous enough to interrupt views through this enclosed landscape.

Settlement reflects its ancient character, with narrow winding lanes, often sunken in nature, linking small farms. Halls and associated parkland impart their particular character on specific areas. Throughout the area, the high population density in the form of scattered farms, spreading nearby settlements and early mining activities, increases the urbanised nature of this landscape. On the edge of the conurbation there are a number of detractors, such as old industrial developments linked with a canal, areas of old housing and factories, together with later developments such as ribbon housing development and sewage works.

In upland areas nearer to the moorland edge, field boundaries are of drystone walls giving a smoother, more cared for appearance to the landscape. In these areas, buildings are more generally of local stone and associated with groups of sycamore, giving a particularly strong local character.

Characteristic landscape features

Strong ridge and valley landform; small dissected stream valleys; small sunken lanes; low intensity pasture farming; intact hedgerow pattern; drystone walls and stone buildings; hedgerow trees; broadleaved valley woodlands; conifer plantations; many isolated properties.

Incongruous landscape features

Expanding urban edge; fencing; present and past quarrying and mining activities; busy roads; power lines; localised industrial and residential expansion.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are a decline in the condition of some of the characteristic landscape features, a proliferation of the incongruous features as listed above, and the loss of some of the semi-natural vegetation characteristic of this landscape type (i.e. ancient woodland and hedgerows, semi-natural grasslands and wet heathland).

Potential value of new woodland planting.

Generally of high value, to reinforce the unifying effect of woodland on a landscape in which the urbanising elements and isolated settlements will become visually subservient or screened; to provide urban tree planting and a woodland setting to residential and industrial expansion; as a major component of sand and gravel quarry restoration and screening; to mitigate the visual impact of earlier unsympathetic conifer plantations by modifying them following current forestry design guidelines; to restore the landcover structure of the landscape following gradual decline due to lack of maintenance of the hedgerow pattern; to reduce the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland through the strategic siting of new native woodland.

Significant parts of the areas falling within this landscape type are also within the boundary of a Community Woodland Zone as defined in the Newcastle under Lyme Local Plan. Within these areas the Borough Council will encourage the establishment of new woodlands with similar objectives to those of Community Forest Areas, albeit on a smaller scale.

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	medium
	recreate/ regenerate	medium
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	high
	increase the number of such features	medium
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

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Lowland heathland	protect existing heaths from development and damaging activities	very high
	re-create or create new heathlands	very high
Peat bogs	maintain and enhance	high
	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	high
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	medium
	create/ re-create new areas	lower
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

Woodland planting of a small to medium scale is generally appropriate in this landscape, from field corner to field size, tying into the existing woodlands and hedgerows with attention to edge detail and predominantly of a broadleaved character.

Because of the steeply sloping nature of the valley sides, the woodlands need also to respond to landform as appropriate and care needs to be taken over the internal design of species blocks, although some conifer content is appropriate.

The scale of woodland planting needs to reflect its position within the landscape, with small-scale tree planting schemes more appropriate in the valley bottoms, increasing in scale up the slope. Planting should be kept away from popular viewpoints and the interlock between planting and open areas retained to respect views through the area.

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

Ancient slope and valley farmlands: minerals working and restoration

This is a variant of the former landscape type, in which the visually-dominant land use is active mineral working, or the results of recent restoration.

Visual character

This landscape has undergone a complete transformation due to recent opencast coal mining activities. As a result of these activities the original landscape has been destroyed and a new landscape superimposed on the area.

Older mining activity around the periphery is characterised by the occurrence of pioneer birch and willow encroaching into the areas. Following restoration the new pattern of wire fences bears little relationship to the smooth rounded artificial landform. Hedges and trees on this site are beginning to mature, mitigating the initial exposed and uninteresting character, but this is still an immature landscape in the earliest stages of development.

Characteristic landscape features

Immature woodland planting; pioneer birch woodland; extensive footpath network.

Incongruous landscape features

Smoothly rounded landform; fence 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 prevalence of incongruous features; the poor survival of historic elements that contribute to landscape character, such as field, settlement and road patterns; the rawness of an essentially newly-created landscape, and the poor representation of characteristic semi-natural vegetation.

Potential value of new woodland planting.

Extensive planting to an agreed restoration plan has been carried out. Maintenance of existing plantations is more important than additional planting. 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.

Significant parts of the areas falling within this landscape type are also within the boundary of a Community Woodland Zone as defined in the Newcastle under Lyme Local Plan. Within these areas the Borough Council encourages the establishment of new woodlands with similar objectives to those of Community Forest Areas, albeit on a smaller scale.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

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

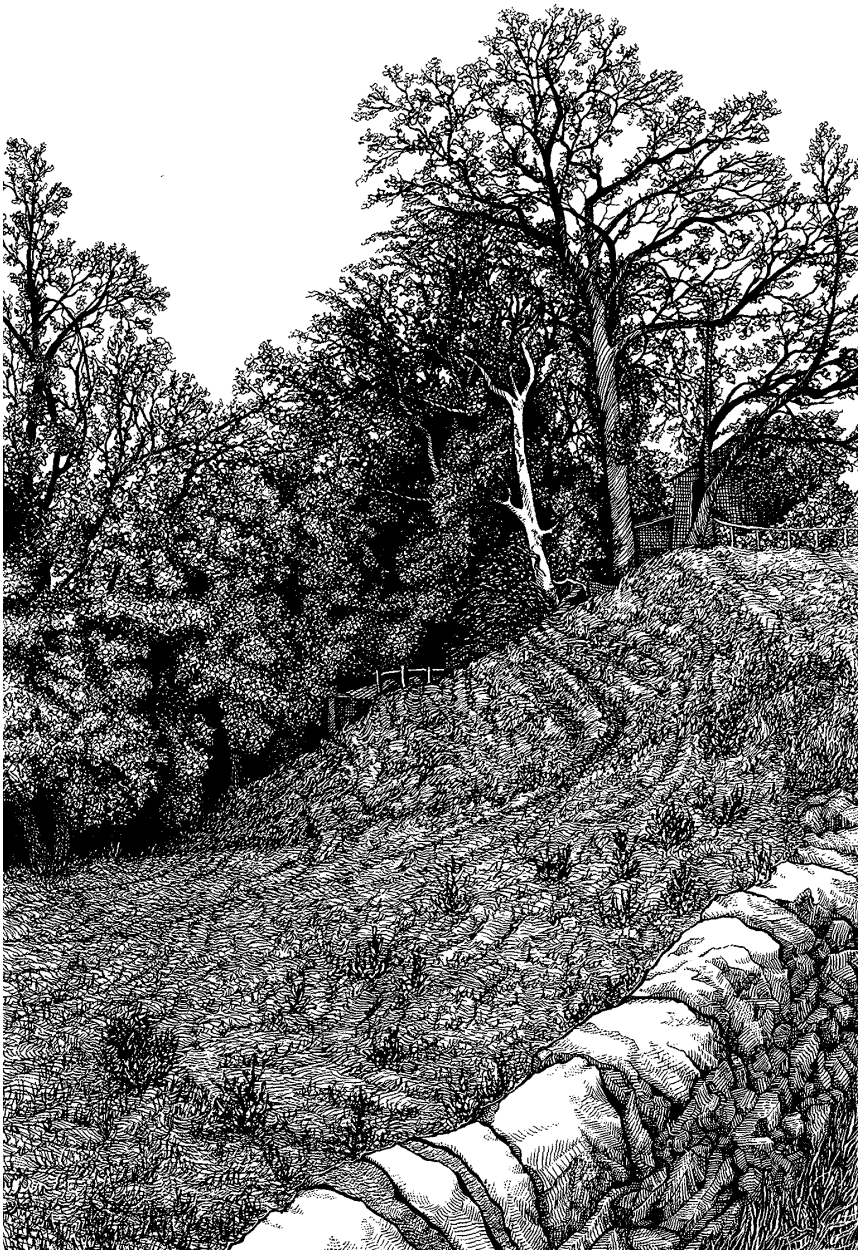
Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
Ancient/ semi-natural broadleaved woodland	maintain and enhance	high
	restore degraded sites	high
	recreate/ regenerate	high
Ancient/ diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	lower
	maintain trees	lower
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	medium
Arable field margins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

<u>Tree and woodland planting</u>

There is little scope for additional planting, except as replacement for failed new plantations and small scale planting schemes to add to existing woodland as appropriate.



The South West Peak









Chapter 4: Regional Character Area 53 - South West Peak

This chapter describes the landscapes of that small part of the larger South West Peak 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 a detailed description of the single landscape character type that occurs within it.

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South West Peak

1. The Plan area claims only a small part of this Regional Character Area, most of which lies within the Peak District National Park. It is the most elevated part of the Plan area, rising to about 460m O.D. near Thornecliffe, north-east of Leek, and the wettest, with annual precipitation reaching 1,200mm. The underlying Palaeozoic rocks are Carboniferous sandstones and grits (the Millstone Grit), forming a deeply dissected plateau with poorly draining base poor and humic soils. To the north, in the Peak District, these acidic soils are dominated by moorland vegetation, and there are extensive areas of blanket peat deposits. At the lower elevations of the Plan area there is more productive farmland, and streams have cut deep cloughs which support their own distinctive plant communities. The area is characterised by acidic grassland with remnants of transitional (lowland/upland) heath. Tree cover in the stream valleys and the few heathy woodlands is never dominant. Sycamore is characteristic here, and bay willow occurs occasionally on streamsides.

2. There is little to suggest Roman or earlier occupation, and the Domesday Book describes a sparsely populated and economically backward area. Current settlement comprises mainly farmsteads in a dispersed pattern at low density, although some expanded hamlets exert an urban fringe influence. The present farming landscape is largely an eighteenth century construction, with regular walled field boundaries, plantations and architecture dating from approximately the same time. Here the relationship between buildings and landscape seems closer than anywhere else in the county. Farmsteads hug the hill sides, their low-pitched tiled roofs pressing down on one and a half or two storey rough-hewn gritstone walls to avoid the harsh moorland climate. In the surrounding fields isolated stone barns can still occasionally be seen.

3. The agricultural land quality is mainly poor - grades 4 and 5 - and this is reflected in the cropping which is predominantly permanent pasture. The main farm type is dairying but with substantial numbers of beef and sheep farms. About two thirds of units are part time by MAFF criteria, but it is likely that a significant number are run as full time units employing one person. The small scattered farms show signs of a decline in farming fortunes, with deteriorating walls, localised areas of overgrown hedgerows and encroaching rough grass and scrub.

4. A single landscape character type – the gritstone highland fringe, which is representative of the lower elevations of the Dark Peak – is represented within the Structure Plan area. A detailed description of the type follows.

Visual character

This is an upland landscape adjacent to the Peak highlands with a simple strong landform of uniformly rising ground to skyline ridges enabling long distance views. The sloping landform is dissected in places by small lateral stream valleys, but these have little influence on the large-scale openness of the area.

The highland influence is very strongly evident in the presence of stone walls and buildings, and sparse vegetation cover. The gritstone walls are generally in poor condition and continuing to deteriorate, now being increasingly associated with additional fencing to maintain their stock proof quality. The strongly rectangular field pattern is clearly visible overlain on the rising landform, although localised areas of poorly maintained overgrown hedgerows soften the valley bottom with coalescence of shrubs and trees.

Isolated pockets of trees, associated in places with stream valleys and farms, and scrubby heathy woodland, never become obvious enough to affect the large scale sweeping landform. Sycamore and beech tend to dominate the woodland copses and linear features, although ash is present in places and alder and overgrown thorn dominate the valley bottoms. Tree growth becomes stunted on the upper slopes.

The small scattered pastoral farms are showing signs of deterioration, with scrub and rough grass encroaching into many fields and an impression of general neglect of field boundaries and buildings. Some modernised buildings and further urbanisation associated with the main road corridors have an additional detrimental influence on the area.

Characteristic landscape features

Strong rectangular pattern of gritstone walls; conifer plantations; a large-scale upland landform with steep slopes; broadleaved woodlands and shelterbelts; stone farmsteads, upland pasture farming.

Incongruous landscape features

Busy, urbanised roads; quarrying; fencing; modernised commuter properties; camping sites; neglected field boundaries.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

These are landscapes of generally high or very high quality, with few limiting factors. The most critical of these is the incipient decline in the condition of some of the characteristic landscape features, noted above.

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

Potential value of new woodland planting.

Rather variable. Ipstones Edge is one of the Structure Plan area's few landscapes which are regarded as sensitive to woodland planting, which could erode existing character and quality. Elsewhere, new woodland planting could be of moderate to high value, where a reduction in the scale of the landscape is desirable, or where recreational demands could be better met by increasing landcover structure.

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
	recreate/ regenerate	high
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	medium
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
Heathland/ moorland	protect existing heaths from development and damaging activities	very high
	re-create or create new heathlands	very 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	high
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	high
	create/ re-create new areas	high

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

There is an opportunity to modify the character of this open landscape by increasing tree cover through medium to large scale planting of both conifers and broadleaves. Plantations should reflect the large scale of the present landscape by increasing in size up the slope.

Planting design should respond to landform on the slopes, and to localised valley features, avoiding the planting of whole fields and ensuring well designed integrated shapes and interlock with open spaces. Interruption of the skyline should be avoided with the provision of a suitably scaled gap between any planting and the skyline.

The valley bottoms can accommodate a range of scales of new planting and can be designed to respond to field pattern in these flatter areas. New planting should tie into existing planting, especially if the former is of a small scale.



The White Peak



Chapter 5: Regional Character Area 52 - White Peak

This chapter describes the landscapes of that small part of the larger White Peak 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 a detailed description of the single landscape character type that occurs within it.

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White Peak

1. Like the South West Peak this is a small part of a Regional Character Area which has its greatest extent in the Peak Park. It owes its distinctive character to its underlying Carboniferous limestone, which has formed a plateau, incised by steep-sided dales. Other features of the area as a whole, typical of karst scenery, include swallow holes and caves, gorges, and exposed rock faces which weather to a pale grey. That part within the Structure Plan area, around Cauldon Low, is a wide open, strongly rolling and often deeply-dissected limestone plateau with a large-scale regular field pattern of walls which are generally well maintained. Limestone quarries have a pronounced impact, and are often visible from extensive surrounding areas.

2. There is evidence for considerable activity in prehistoric times. Although little remains to indicate settlement sites there is extensive evidence of burial activity in the form of barrows, which are clustered on high ground. There is now little settlement except on the fringes, which have some small nucleated villages.

3. The soils are rankers and non-calcareous shallow brown earths derived from wind blown deposits. Woodland is sparse and restricted to steep valley sides, but on the higher ground clumps of sycamore provide focal points. Wych elm *(Ulmus glabra)* is also characteristic but increasingly scarce. The major nature conservation interest lies in the limestone grasslands, which contribute a distinctive character to this well cared-for pastoral landscape.

4. The farming pattern is similar to that described for the South West Peak, with stock rearing and some mixed farming, but with less visible evidence of decline. The style of traditional farm buildings is also similar, with the notable exception of the building stone, which is limestone. There is rather little settlement except on the fringes, which have some small nucleated villages.

5. A single landscape character type – the limestone highland fringe – is represented within the Structure Plan area. A detailed description of the type follows.

Visual character

An area of limestone upland characterised by an open, strongly rolling landform with few elements to provide any enclosure within the landscape. The character of the area reflects the nature of the adjacent highland, with the smooth texture of a pastoral landscape and intact field pattern of well maintained limestone walls. The large-scale regular pattern is visually superimposed on the strong landform and does little to restrict or control views within the area. Field pattern is associated with scattered isolated sycamore, ash and large old hawthorn trees.

Mature stands of sycamore on the high ground present focal points. Their position against the horizon makes them very prominent features but they have little enclosing effect on the landscape. Within the area are localised, steeply incised valleys containing stone farmsteads and coniferous and broadleaved shelter belt plantations. These features, again, have little influence on broad views across the landscape. Limestone workings have a pronounced impact, often being visible from extensive surrounding areas.

In summary, this is an upland landscape characterised by broad open views and a strong visible pattern of limestone walls.

Characteristic landscape features

Intact limestone walls in a regular geometric pattern; smooth, strongly rounded landform; open upland character; pasture farming; sycamore woodlands on high ground and farm shelter belts.

Incongruous landscape features

Extensive limestone quarries; stock control fencing.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

These are landscapes of high quality, with few limiting factors. The most critical of those factors is the introduction of incongruous elements at the very different scales represented by fencing and large limestone quarries, and loss of some of the landscape's characteristic semi-natural vegetation in the form of calcareous, neutral, and, rarely, acidic grasslands.

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

Potential value of new woodland planting.

Low. This is one of the Structure Plan area's few landscapes which are regarded as sensitive to woodland planting, which could erode existing character and quality. Limited planting could be of value to mitigate the extensive visual impact of limestone quarrying in the area from surrounding viewpoints, and as shelter belts for farming and residential properties.

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
	recreate/ 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	medium
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	medium
	increase the number of such features	lower
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

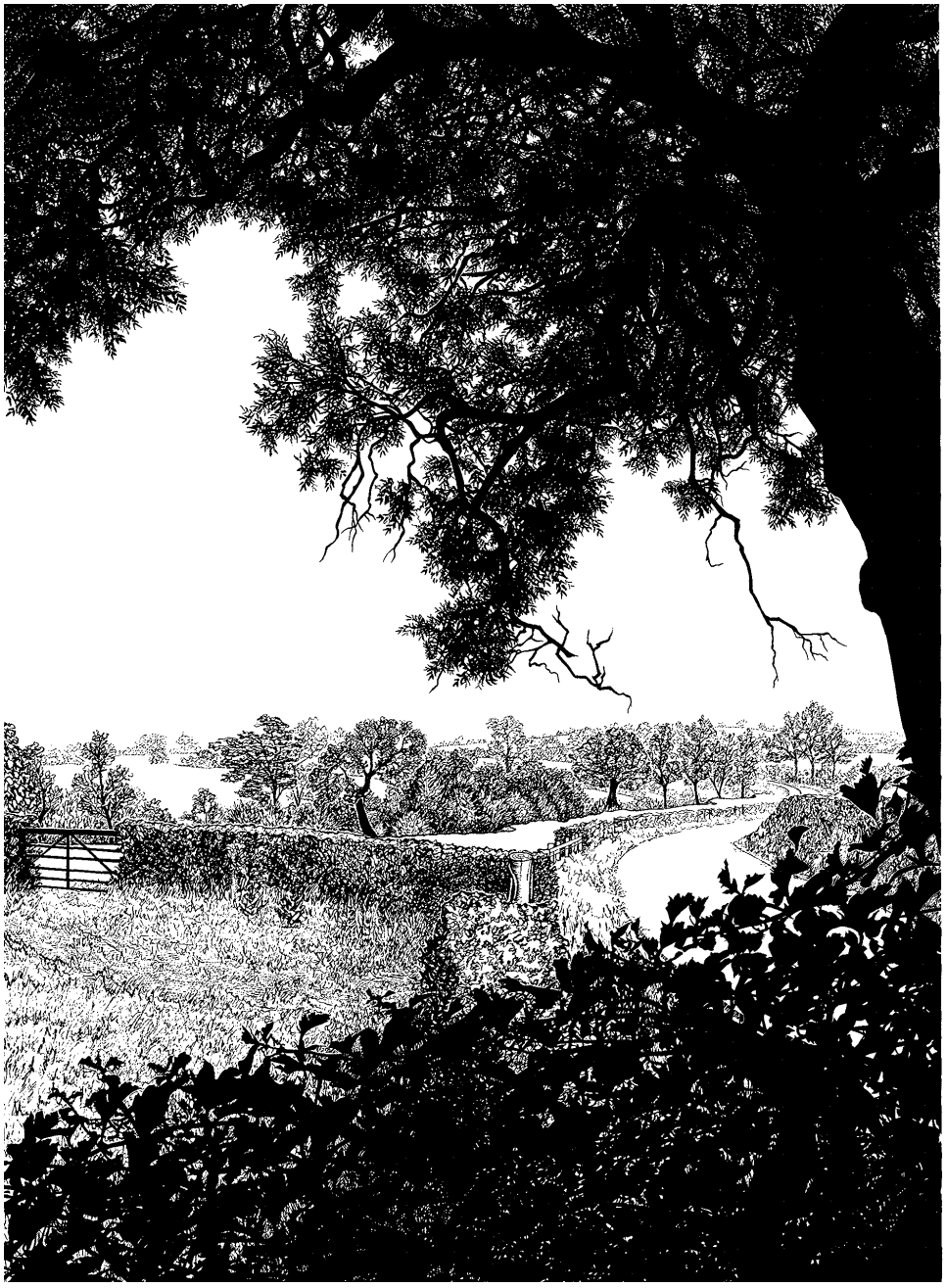
Calcareous grassland	safeguard remaining areas and adjoining land	very high
	restore semi-improved grasslands	very high
	link fragmented sites through habitat creation	very high
Rivers and streams	maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water	medium
	maintain the quality of all natural existing channel features	high
Unimproved neutral grassland	maintain and safeguard existing areas	very high
	restore	high
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	very high
	create/ re-create new areas	very high

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

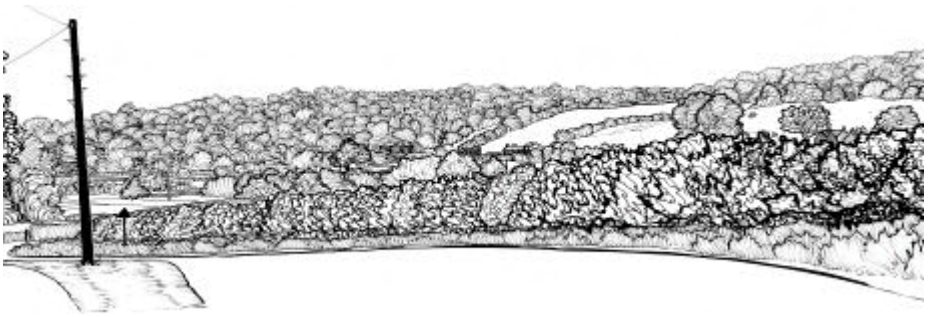
The openness of this limestone upland area indicates that the position and scale of future woodland should be carefully considered on an individual basis. This must ensure that existing field patterns and the open nature of the landscape are maintained.

The areas of steeply incised valleys could accept a more flexible approach to woodland planting. Broadleaves and coniferous planting in these areas could be designed to fit into the landscape as small to medium sized blocks or shelter belts with little overall impact. Care is needed with siting to avoid visual encroachment into the more open areas.

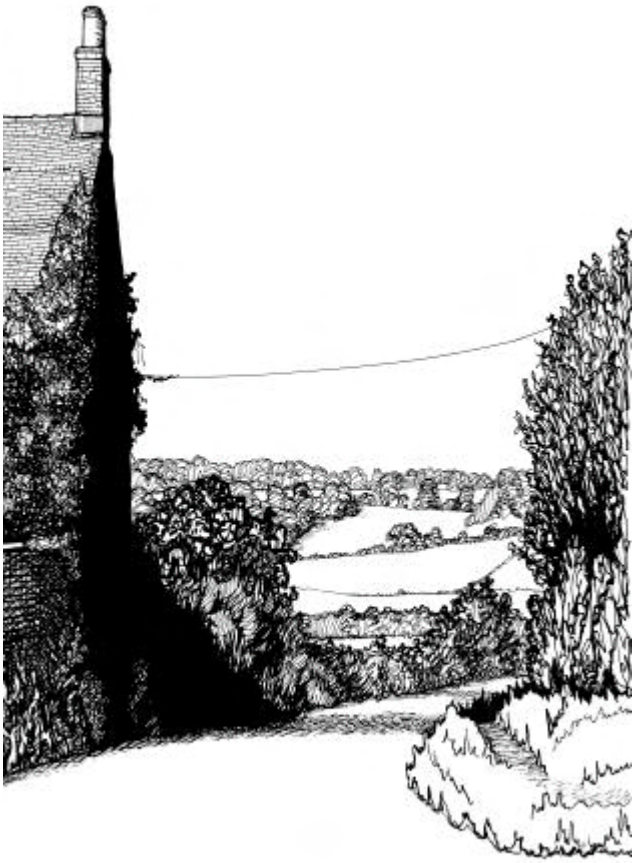


Needwood Claylands





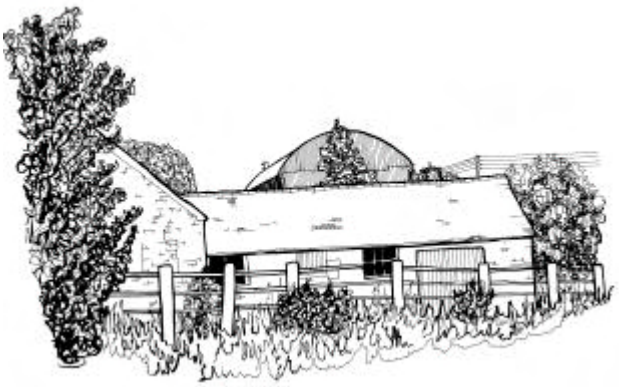












Chapter 6: Regional Character Area 68 - Needwood Claylands

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.

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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.

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
	recreate/ 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
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	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	high
	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 farmlands: estates

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

Visual character

This is a wooded pastoral landscape of steeply sloping stream valleys running off the adjacent plateau. The woodland is predominantly broadleaved and principally located in valleys or hill tops and there are areas where the woodlands visually coalesce to give a forested feel. Hedgerow trees are predominantly mixed age oak with evidence of succession and their large number contributes strongly to the wooded character of the area.

The field pattern is of both medium scale ancient and planned origins. Hedgerows are largely intact, although there is evidence of some localised neglect where fences are beginning to appear. Manors with attendant parkland have a strong localised effect on the landscape. The area is well populated with hamlets and medium sized farms served by a network of both straight and winding lanes.

In summary this is a peaceful well cared for landscape where the woodlands interlocking with both the fields and the landform are the dominant characteristics.

Characteristic landscape features

Broadleaved woodlands; steep sided stream valleys; extensive hedgerow oaks; intact hedges; manors/ parkland; narrow lanes and hedge-banks; hamlets; dissected rounded landform; pastoral farming.

Incongruous landscape features

Power lines; inappropriate village expansion.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

These are landscapes of high quality, with few limiting factors. The most critical of those factors are the loss of some of the semi-natural vegetation (e.g. ancient woodland, wood pasture and unimproved grassland) characteristic of this landscape type, and to a lesser extent, the slightly ‘raw’ feel of a landscape of relatively recent origin.

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

Potential value of new woodland planting.

The landscape is already of a well-wooded appearance and there is no visual value in additional woodlands being added except to maintain this character into the future. The higher priority is the conservation and restoration of existing woodlands. However, 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	high
	restore degraded sites	lower
	recreate/ regenerate	lower
Ancient/ diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	medium
	maintain trees	medium
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	medium
	increase the number of such features	medium
Lowland wood pasture and parkland	maintain and safeguard	high
	restore degraded sites	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	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>

Conservation of hedgerows and hedgerow trees is important to the character of the area and the main visual aim in planting any additional woodlands should be to enlarge existing areas on the hilltops and in valleys, whilst retaining the views across the middle slopes. New planting should respect the existing broadleaved character of the landscape and the introduction of conifer would not be particularly appropriate. '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.

Settled plateau farmlands: forest

This is a variant of the basic landscape character type in which forestry is the visually-dominant land use. Any proposals for significant change in this area should be formulated with reference to the UK Forestry Standard and Forest Design Guidelines.

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
	recreate/ regenerate	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.

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
	recreate/ 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

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
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
	recreate/ 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

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
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.

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
	recreate/ 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

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
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	lower
	restore degraded areas	lower
	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	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

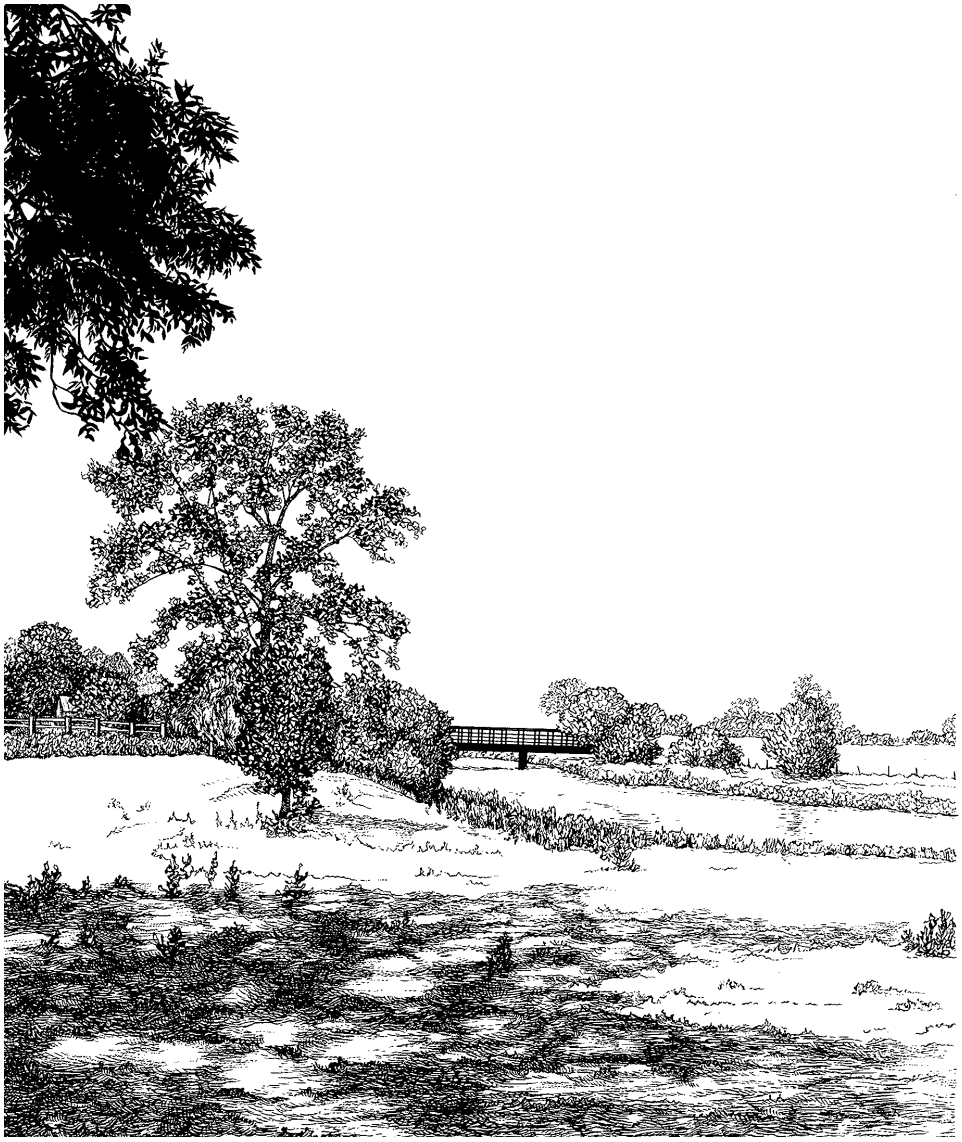
Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

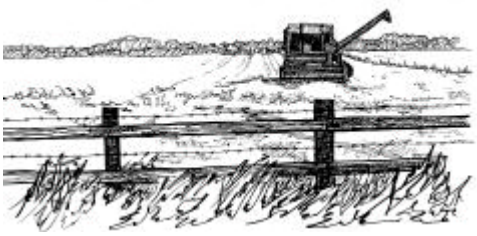
Subject to the need for detailed assessment of the suitability of planting sites, noted above, all scales of woodland planting are appropriate provided the margins are varied to reflect local scale and maintain views through the landscape. Field pattern is strong enough for new planting to tie into this 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.

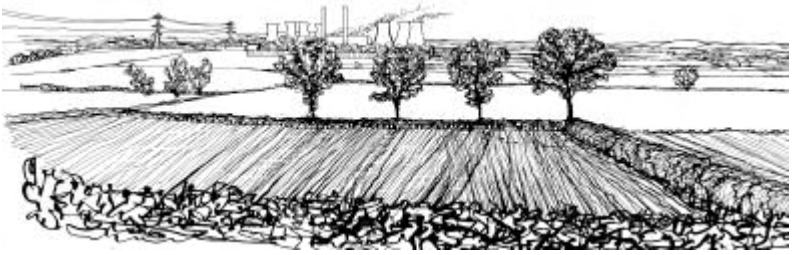
Small scale planting schemes should build on existing tree cover and follow valley bottoms. The area is predominantly broadleaved and new planting should reflect this, although some conifer content is acceptable, as are conifer plantations where this character is already present. 'Stepping stone' plantations,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



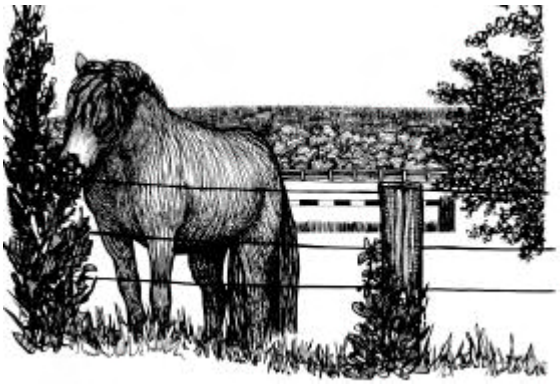
Trent Valley Washlands











Chapter 7: Regional Character Area 69 - Trent Valley Washlands

This chapter describes the landscapes of the Trent Valley Washlands Regional Character Area. This is that part of a more extensive 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.

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Trent Valley Washlands

1. Opening out between the forests of Needwood and Cannock, the wide, flat valley watered by the rivers Trent and Tame has historically been more intensively occupied than many parts of the county. It is, of course, characteristically flat, with alluvial soils overlying Triassic mudstones. It is a major source of sand and gravel, the working of which is creating significant areas of open water, of value as habitat and for recreation.

2. Colonisation of this area began early, certainly by the late neolithic, with intensive settlement during the prehistoric period and the construction of henge monuments and barrows. The area continued to be important during the Roman period, when Icknield Street passed through it. At least two large estates seem to have existed. The medieval period saw the establishment of nucleated settlements with arable farming close by. The lower lying areas closest to the rivers were probably used for pasture. There was a general move away from arable towards pasture around the end of the medieval period and this led to some village shrinkage and desertion. Present field boundaries and roads retain traces of earlier landscapes of all periods. There are few visible monuments remaining, although much of the archaeological landscape survives in the form of cropmarks.

3. The richness of the region's soil and consequent long-standing agricultural economy is reflected in the scale and age of its buildings. Timber framing is found throughout the area, but groups of typical examples can be seen in the oldest nucleated settlements such as Mavesyn Ridware, Kings Bromley, and Alrewas. In many of these timber-framed buildings square panelled walls still support thatched roofs. Some thatch has been replaced by tile, but even where this has occurred, the use of gentle slopes to carry roofs across dormer windows continues to give the eaves the characteristic eyebrow-like appearance found throughout the region. Brick nogging has now replaced traditional materials in many timber framed buildings and its strong red colour gives a continuity where later cottages stand alongside them.

4. The region's even landform also enabled easy and, therefore, concentrated canal construction in the late eighteenth century. Fradley saw the linking of the Coventry Canal to the Trent and Mersey in 1789 and the introduction of a distinctive group of industrial buildings into the rural landscape.

5. The land quality is mainly grade 3, and overall is above average for the county. Modern farming in this area is mainly intensive arable cropping, with some limited dairying and sheep rearing, in large regular hedged fields. Hedges and hedgerow trees are important in a landscape such as this, because they determine the nature of views across it. The hedgerow pattern is beginning to break down to the point of becoming indiscernible in places, with subsequent increases in scale.

6. Lines of willow *(Salix spp.)* alder *(Alnus glutinosa)* and poplar *(Populus spp.)* mark the location of dykes and watercourses. The most common and distinctive tree is the crack willow *(Salix fragilis)*, but others found here include a distinctive and shrubby variety or sub-species *(S. fragilis* var*. decipiens)*, white willow *(S. alba)*, almond willow *(S. triandra)* purple willow *(S. purpurea)* and osier *(S. viminalis)*. Purging buckthorn *(Rhamnus cathartica)* is a rare but locally distinctive shrub of the dyke-sides. The rare native black poplar, which has been recorded here in the past and which would have contributed a particular character to the floodplains, has been replaced almost entirely by modern hybrid forms that lack its presence. The only woodlands of any note occupy an old, slightly elevated river terrace on the Trent,

north of Lichfield. The soils here are brown sands and sandy gleys, and the hedgerows and woodlands contain some heathland species.

7. The wet grasslands and open water of the valleys are of particular value to breeding and over-wintering waders and wildfowl, and some of the more open arable farmland supports the county's largest population of corn bunting.

8. The large nucleated villages of the river valleys have, in places, undergone recent commuter expansion, and one result has been the conversion of surrounding small-scale fields to pony pasture. Main road and rail transport routes cut through the valleys, and extensive sand and gravel extraction is causing large-scale landscape 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 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, with willow, alder and poplar predominating along the river, stream and dyke courses. Hedgerow pattern varies from predominantly irregular to small areas with straight hedgerows and a regular pattern. Hedgerows are intact and well looked after mainly in the pastoral areas, whilst deterioration in other places is resulting in remnant hedgerows and extensive wire fences.

The landscape is predominantly of a medium scale with some areas of a smaller scale where increased tree cover prevents views and other areas, mainly linked to the introduction of arable farming, where the scale is increased. In these latter areas the flat even expanse of arable production is unrelieved by the few scattered remnants of hedgerow trees, not related to boundaries on the ground. The only landcover patterns are created by the open lanes and associated dykes servicing isolated farmsteads. The Victorian farmhouses are now associated with large modern agricultural buildings.

Views across the landscape are variable: some areas appear well treed as a result of grown up thorn and extensive tree cover, whereas in the narrower valleys or open arable areas there is little to restrict through views. The surrounding rising land and woodland edges provide the only relief in these landscapes, with the river unseen and visually unimportant.

Habitation tends to occur adjacent to the floodplain. Where roads cross these areas they are generally small winding lanes, with fast through routes running along the edges. Canals feature strongly and contribute to local character.

An increasing feature of this landscape is the occurrence of active and reclaimed sand and gravel extraction sites, with visually intrusive processing plants, stockpiles and open excavations.

Adjacent built up areas considerably change the character of the landscape where present, by visually dominating the landscape features. In these areas, pressures on the use of land for transport routes, power supply, sewage treatment and other typical land uses, e.g. for horse pasture, erode the character of a predominantly rural landscape.

Characteristic landscape features

Flat valley landform and floodplain; river channel with meanders, shallows and marginal vegetation; canal; waterside tree species; drainage channels and ditches; hedgerow oaks; narrow lanes; poplar planting and small woodlands; red brick buildings; flood pasture and hedged fields; arable farming.

Incongruous landscape features

Urban edge; busy main roads; sand and gravel extraction; railway; industrial development; post and wire fencing; large modern farm buildings; disintegrated field pattern.

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 poor survival of historic elements that contribute to landscape character, such as field, settlement and road patterns; the poor representation of characteristic semi-natural (i.e. riparian and wetland) vegetation, and, to a lesser extent, the introduction of the incongruous landscape features listed above. Part of the river valley from Broad Meadow to Comberford, to the north and west of Tamworth, 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.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Relatively low, and potentially sensitive because of flood control constraints and competing priority for restoration of wetland and wet grassland to meet biodiversity targets. These conflict to an extent with landscape interests, as visually there would be benefit in large scale planting. However, 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.

Part of the area of this type falls within the National Forest and within the Burton upon Trent Urban Forestry Strategy area.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

Very high, especially in areas of lower landscape quality. Minerals extraction and subsequent restoration provides opportunities, *inter alia*, for creation of reedbeds, riparian habitat and open water, and for re-profiling of the river channels. 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
	recreate/ regenerate	medium
Ancient/ diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	high
	maintain trees	high
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	medium
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 acidic grassland	increase the number of such sites	lower
Lowland wet grassland	maintain and enhance existing areas	very high
	restore degraded areas	very high
	create new areas	very high
Reedbeds	maintain and create	very 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	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 (where not in conflict with other objectives)	very high

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

Other measures of value in mitigation or compensation

Some areas of this landscape type fall within the Central Rivers project area. This project has developed a framework strategy to guide the regeneration and enhancement of the area's landscape, nature conservation and recreation value, to identify development opportunities, and to maximise the tourist potential of the area. More detailed work, to refine and implement that strategy, should identify other measures of value in mitigation or compensation. Improvements to the setting of the National Memorial Arboretum would be of particular value.

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

Specific guidelines

Habitat creation and management

New pools should if possible be shallow and sinuous, with islands. To be of the greatest value new reedbeds should be not less than 20 ha. in area. Opportunities should be taken, where possible, to reinstate the former river channel and backwater features.

Tree and woodland planting.

Waterside poplar, willow and alder are most characteristic of these landscapes and these species would, therefore, most appropriately predominate in any new planting. It would be particularly valuable to plant limited numbers of native black poplars of Staffordshire provenance within the river floodplain.

The intimate enclosed character that is so important to some areas can be retained and reinforced by additional small scale or hedgerow planting. Views through these flat landscapes are important and keeping any larger scale planting away from roads and rivers will greatly help to retain and enhance these views.

New planting can be fitted into the landscape better if designed to link with existing hedgerow trees and woodlands. The irregular spacing of river-side copses and groups of trees will help to avoid the creation of continuous woodland cover along the water courses and to maintain wetland habitats.

In the areas of extensive arable farming, only large scale planting would be appropriate, unless linked with remnant landcover elements or farm complexes. Sand and gravel extraction is resulting in opportunities to create a new landscape character of interlocking water bodies and large blocks of woodland. Here the design of edges is particularly important and views through the landscape should be retained.

The planting of wet woodland, and in particular floodplain woodland, will help to meet Biodiversity Action Plan targets where there is no opportunity for creating other desirable habitats such as wet grassland, and where this would not conflict with flood control measures. Location and design must be approved by the Environment Agency. In this respect the Rugeley Town Council has indicated that the planting of new woodland on the floodplain at Station Road/Trent Valley, Rugeley, would be of great benefit to the land.

The planting of woodland and short rotation coppice buffer strips to arable crops to intercept field run-off would bring environmental benefits.

Further guidelines may be found in the National Forest Strategy.

Terrace alluvial lowlands

This landscape character type shares features with that described above, but it relates to older river terraces, more remote from the floodplain.

Visual character

This is a flat landscape, predominantly of intensive arable and improved pastoral farming. The field pattern tends to be mainly large scale and regularly shaped although there are pockets of ancient, irregularly shaped fields. This difference is indistinct on the ground, however, as the lack of landform results in views through the landscape being controlled by the intactness of the hedgerows and density of the tree cover. In proximity to villages the scale reduces to a landscape of very small, irregularly shaped fields with plentiful hedgerow oaks controlling views to a maximum of one field distance. These areas are now characterised by low intensity pastoral farming and horse keeping.

Throughout the arable areas the loss of stock control function has led to sculpted, gappy and overgrown thorn hedges. Scattered hedgerow oaks partially filter views through the landscape, with distant views becoming an important feature. In the few places where small woodlands are present their edges coalesce with hedgerow trees to give a strong sense of enclosure. Streams and ditches also reinforce this enclosure with lines of willows and alders. In areas where vegetable growing takes place, hedgerows have been removed, hedgerow trees are sparse and the sense of enclosure has been lost as the scale of the landscape has increased.

A widely spaced network of straight roads and lanes services the scattered farmsteads and act as commuter runs for extended rural villages which still retain much of their original character. Adjacent busy roads intrude into the quietness of the area.

Characteristic landscape features

Small broadleaved woodland; hedged fields and hedgerow trees; waterside tree species along ditches; flat landform; intensive mixed pasture and arable farming; large fields; lush improved pasture; scattered farmsteads; straight roads and small winding lanes; traditional village character; canal.

Incongruous landscape features

Stag headed trees; electricity pylons; sand and gravel quarrying; large modern farm buildings; horse pasture; busy roads; fencing; village expansion.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factor which most limits landscape quality is the relatively poor representation of characteristic semi-natural vegetation. Other factors which limit quality to a lesser extent are a loss of some characteristic landscape features; a decline in the condition of those features that remain, and an increase in the representation of incongruous features. Two discrete areas falling within this landscape character type 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. They are the terrace to the west of the A38 road, from Barton under Needwood to Shobnall, and that to the east of Handsacre and south of Kings Bromley.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Moderate to very high: this is a National Forest Preferred Area. Hedgerows, hedgerow trees and small copses will contribute to the enclosed small scale and respond to the strong landcover pattern without subverting it. Occasional farm woodlands and spinneys would be appropriate to reflect the small-scale landscape of ancient hedged fields. Extensive new planting would not be appropriate in former parkland landscapes.

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
	recreate/ regenerate	medium
Ancient/ diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	high
	maintain trees	high
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	medium
Arable field margins	maintain, improve and restore	high
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	medium
	increase the number of such features	high
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

These landscapes have, as a whole, an intact field pattern that, although tending to deteriorate in places, remains quite strong. Fitting new woodlands into these existing field boundaries, as discrete blocks, will retain character.

There are various opportunities for tree and woodland planting, but generally this should be at medium to large scale to reflect the open landscape character. Large commercial plantations, estate forestry and farm woodlands of field size would be particularly valuable. Hedgerow and field corner sized planting are only appropriate where existing vegetation locally reduces the scale of the landscape. Small scale woodlands would most appropriately be accommodated within the existing strong hedgerow pattern. These landscapes are not generally characterised by straight edges and geometric shapes: new woodland planting could, therefore, most successfully reflect the present character by being designed with irregular shapes and margins. These are predominantly landscapes of a broadleaved character and the use of broadleaves in future planting will help to retain that character and is to be encouraged, as is the regeneration and replanting of hedgerow oaks. In these flat landscapes, the woodland edges become the most important feature responsible for the character of the woodland and hence the landscape as a whole. A broadleaved character to the margins should therefore be aimed for.

It is important to the character of these farmlands to retain views across the landscape. This can best be achieved by avoiding solid wooded edges adjacent to roads and public rights of way and being careful over producing extensive wooded skylines. How these woodlands relate to the steeper sloping valley sides may need some detailed attention.

Streamside willow features are an important valley characteristic and these need to be respected by keeping new planting away from them whenever possible. Enhancement of these features by additional planting of suitable species would be of benefit to the valley character.

Further guidelines may be found in the National Forest Strategy.

Design in villages

The village of Barton-under-Needwood, which falls largely within this landscape character type, has produced its own Village Design Statement.

Lowland village farmlands

This is an example of a landscape type found extensively in the Mease Lowlands. Large nucleated villages occupy a rolling lowland landscape of mixed farming and cropping in a semi-regular pattern of medium and large hedged fields with scattered small woodlands and shooting coverts. The soils are non-calcareous brown earths, with some stagnogleys, over Triassic mudstones.

Visual character

A landscape of flat to gently rolling intensively farmed arable land. The field pattern tends to be mainly large scale and regular although there are pockets of irregularly shaped ancient fields. This difference is indistinct on the ground, however, as the landform allows views through the landscape to be controlled more by intactness of the hedgerows and density of the tree cover.

Throughout the arable areas, the loss of stock control function has led to both sculpted, gappy and overgrown thorn hedges. Trees tend to be stag headed oak, ash and thorn with their density varying from scattered to numerous in places and resulting in open or slightly filtered views through the landscape. In the few places where small woodlands are present their edges coalesce with hedgerow trees to give a strong sense of enclosure.

The major roads and canal have a strong localised influence as the landform and sparse vegetation cover ensures that they are very visible. The area is also served by a widely spaced network of both straight and narrow winding lanes servicing the scattered large 19th century farmsteads. The flat topography and varying density of hedgerows and tree cover means that views out of the area to woodland edges in adjoining areas are important.

Commercial and post-war residential developments frequently impinge on the character of this landscape and more recent development is now increasingly spreading into the area, to further erode this character.

Characteristic landscape features

Waterside tree species along river and ditches; canal; flat landform; hedgerows and hedgerow trees; small ancient lanes; intensive arable and vegetable farming; small woodlands.

Incongruous landscape features

Busy roads; urban edge; stag-headed trees; power lines; fences; sand and gravel extraction.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are: the poor representation of characteristic semi-natural vegetation (in particular, unimproved neutral grassland); the rawness of a relatively recently-created landscape, and the loss of some characteristic landscape features. The poor condition of those features that remain is also locally-limiting to landscape quality. The greater 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.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Very high, with benefits to the landscape, and to biodiversity, particularly with respect to reducing the fragmentation of ancient woodland cover. There would also be benefit from the addition of larger woodlands. This is, accordingly a suitable landscape for implementing 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	medium
	restore degraded sites	high
	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	medium
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	high
	increase the number of such features	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	restore	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

Tree and woodland planting

There are various opportunities for tree and woodland planting, but generally this should be at medium to large scale to reflect the open landscape character. Large commercial plantations, estate forestry and farm woodlands of field size would be particularly valuable. Hedgerow and field corner sized planting are only appropriate where existing vegetation locally reduces the scale of the landscape.

It is important to the character of these farmlands to retain views across the landscape. This can best be achieved by avoiding solid wooded edges adjacent to roads and public rights of way and being careful over producing extensive wooded skylines. How these woodlands relate to the steeper sloping valley sides may need some detailed attention.

These landscapes have, as a whole, an intact field pattern that, although tending to deteriorate in places, remains quite strong. Fitting new woodlands into these existing field boundaries, as discrete blocks, will retain character.

In these flat landscapes, the woodland edges become the most important feature responsible for the character of the woodland and hence the landscape as a whole. A broadleaved character to the margins should, therefore, be aimed for, although conifers are acceptable within this predominantly broadleaved woodland planting.

Streamside willow features are an important valley characteristic and these need to be respected by keeping new planting away from them whenever possible. Enhancement of these features by additional planting of suitable species would be of benefit to the valley character.

Lowland village farmlands: parkland

Drayton Manor 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 these and other parks and gardens.

Settled heathlands

This infrequent landscape type is associated with areas of glacial and alluvial drift that formerly supported heathland. The relatively small area of this type in the Trent Valley is associated with the alluvial drift of an old river terrace. 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 of this type are quite well wooded, although there may be few hedgerow trees. The settlement pattern is dispersed, and urbanised in places.

Visual character

This is a flat, intensively farmed landscape characterised by a well-wooded appearance due either to the high percentage of interlocking woodlands or coalescence of stunted hedgerow oaks and overgrown hedgerows. Remnant heathland character is evident in the presence of birch, bracken and gorse.

Tree cover defines the medium scale of both the arable landscape of irregular fields, and pastoral areas of a more regular pattern. These areas of planned landscape are given a sense of apparent naturalness by the woodland cover and grown-up hedgerows. The land use of mixed arable and pastoral farming gives way to intensive arable agriculture associated with the WWII airfield site.

The presence of railways and electricity pylons and the intrusive nature of the individual residential properties erode the quality of the area. The complete localised dominance by relics of the airfield, now a rapidly expanding industrial estate, further degrades the area, although views across the landscape are to surrounding woodland.

There is a notable change in character of this landscape type where land use has been extensively modified due to its proximity to the village. Here the landscape is of a small to intimate scale with irregularly shaped fields subject to low intensity pastoral farming and horse keeping. The plentiful hedgerow oaks are small in size and hedgerows of hawthorn and elm are generally intact but being allowed to grow up, controlling views across the area to a maximum of one field distance. There appears to be a general trend towards arable cropping in those fields not used for horse keeping, with an attendant decline in hedgerows and opening up of views. The associated village still retains much of its original character, whilst now increasing rapidly in size due to commuter expansion. To some extent this is eroding the quality of the landscape, but the rural feel is retained due to its enclosed nature. The lanes passing through the area are commuter runs for and adjacent busy main through routes intrude into the quietness of the area.

Characteristic landscape features

Interlocking woodlands and woodland edges; flat landform; straight roads; canal; relic heathland; well-defined hedgerows and numerous hedgerow trees; Staffordshire red brick rural villages.

Incongruous landscape features

Stunted oaks; surviving infrastructure of the former airfield, notably hangars, runways and perimeter tracks; subsequent peripheral commercial and industrial development; wire fencing; busy roads; commuter expansion.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

With the exception of the area around the former airfield, these are landscapes of high quality, with few limiting factors. Overall, the most critical of those factors is the loss of some of the semi-natural vegetation (particularly heathland and acidic grasslands) characteristic of this landscape type. The landscape quality of the former airfield is limited by the loss of characteristic landscape features; the poor condition of those features that remain; the prevalence of incongruous features; the rawness of an essentially newly-created landscape, and the poor representation of characteristic semi-natural vegetation.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Very high around the former airfield; high to moderate elsewhere. There would be benefits to biodiversity, particularly with respect to reducing the fragmentation of ancient woodland cover. There could also be some benefit to protection of groundwater quality. New woodland planting would be of moderate value in the smaller scale areas. The conservation of existing landscape features is likely to be of more benefit, unless there is a need e.g. to plant in association with new development.

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
	recreate/ 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
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
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

New woodland planting should respond to the existing woodland structure and retain the existing scale of woodlands and open spaces. Small to medium scale woodlands with selective larger scale planting, e.g. of commercial broadleaved or coniferous plantations, would be of value.

Existing woodlands and their visual relationship with each other are important influences on the character of these landscapes. New woodlands will integrate successfully into the landscape if they reflect the existing character in their design and species composition. Design considerations to be addressed can include:

- The treatment of edges to preserve varied margins and graded profiles.
- Retention of interlock between woodlands and open spaces, with significant views retained through the landscape.
- Care over the way the woodlands can potentially affect the adjoining skyline.

Because of the presence of ancient woodlands, added care over sympathetic choice of species may be needed. ‘Stepping stone’ plantations, sited to reduce the isolation of existing ancient woodlands, should comprise locally native species. Field pattern is usually a dominant landscape character in these areas and planting to field boundaries will enable new woodlands to be fitted successfully into this pattern.

In the small-scale landscapes with a great sense of enclosure generated by hedgerows and hedgerow trees there are only very restricted opportunities for additional woodland if the present character is to be retained. Hedgerow and field corner planting are the most appropriate scale for this type of landscape.

Restricted small scale, field sized woodlands could be accommodated within the existing strong hedgerow pattern. These landscapes are not generally characterised by straight edges and geometric shapes. New woodland planting could, therefore, most successfully reflect the present character by being designed with irregular shapes and margins.

These are predominantly landscapes of a broadleaved character. The use of broadleaves in future planting will help to retain the present character and is to be encouraged. The regeneration and replanting of hedgerow oaks will also help.



Mease Lowlands

Chapter 8: Regional Character Area 72 – Mease Lowlands

This chapter describes the landscapes of the Mease Lowlands Regional Character Area. This is that part of the more extensive Mease/Sence Lowlands 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 south-eastern 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.

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Mease Lowlands

1. This is a relatively small Regional Character Area that also extends into north Warwickshire, south Derbyshire and Leicestershire. An area of Triassic mudstones and sandstones, drained within Staffordshire by the River Mease, has developed a complex mosaic of neutral to base rich argillic brown earths and stagnogley soils. The landform is gently rolling with shallow valleys.

2. The fertile agricultural land watered by the river Mease generated a series of prosperous villages along its passage through this region, including Elford and Clifton Campville, which were noted as royal manors in the Domesday Book. In the medieval period the area supported a lowland arable economy with nucleated villages based around a church and manor house, typical of the 'Midland Belt' of open-field villages. There was a later move toward pastoralism.

3. The quality of the soil is reflected in the high standard of the buildings, such as the large timber-framed Old School House in Edingale whose framing style is also common to north Warwickshire, echoing the extent of this Regional Character Area. Manor House in Harlaston also exemplifies regional quality. Here the timber frame uses close studding at ground floor level as well as square framing on its jettied first floor. Later buildings such as the eighteenth century Manor Farm, Clifton Campville, with its gazebo and dovecote, use the Mid-Staffordshire mellow orange-red bricks used throughout the region.

4. With the exception of the more irregular pattern of development at Elford the villages in this region stand on land rising just above the Mease valley floor and are linear in form with the focal point of the church clearly discernible in each one. The strongly nucleated settlement pattern is a particularly distinctive feature of the area, which has never been industrialised.

5. The agricultural land quality is higher than the average for the county, at Grade 3 or better. This is now largely an arable area growing mainly combinable crops including oilseed rape, peas and beans. There are also some more demanding crops grown, including potatoes, brassicas and root vegetables. The grassland area supports dairying and sheep in the main. The area as a whole has a well-kempt appearance. The field pattern is generally large scale and regularly shaped. The hedgerows are in the main closely cropped, made up only of hawthorn, and becoming gappy, as there is little current stock control function. Hedgerow trees are sparse and predominantly pedunculate oak and ash *(Fraxinus excelsior),* the latter often afflicted by ash dieback. The English elms that formerly graced the hedgerows survive now only as shrubby sucker regrowth. There are pockets of field sized broadleaved plantation woodland which have a marked visual effect in this open landscape, but there is no commercial forestry, and only one recorded woodland of ancient origin. This is a well-ordered landscape of open views and quiet rural character.

Lowland village farmlands

These landscapes owe much of their present character to the enclosures, by Parliamentary Act or agreement, of open fields. Large nucleated villages occupy a rolling lowland landscape of mixed farming and cropping in a semi-regular pattern of medium and large hedged fields with scattered small woodlands and shooting coverts. The soils are non-calcareous brown earths, with some stagnogleys, over Triassic mudstones.

Visual character

This is a landscape predominantly of intensively farmed arable land with a well-ordered and kempt appearance. The field pattern is generally of large scale regularly shaped fields, with some areas of ancient pattern being present one field back from the road in places. The gently rolling landform does not, however, allow this ancient pattern to register strongly. The hedgerows are of mainly closely cropped thorn becoming gappy with little current stock control function. Hedgerow trees are sparse and predominantly oak and ash with areas showing signs of widespread dieback. In the vales these hedgerow trees coalesce to give a wooded effect.

The eye tends to move through this landscape easily and focuses on the many large farmsteads or the intervisible village church spires before moving along the intermediate skylines to the long views. This is a well-ordered landscape of open views and quiet rural character.

Characteristic landscape features

Very gently undulating landform; intensive arable farming on large regular fields; closely cropped hedges; broadleaved plantation woodlands; tree lined pastoral stream corridors; large red brick farm complexes with modern additions; nucleated villages; intervisibility of church spires.

Incongruous landscape features

Presence of urban edge; dieback of oak and ash trees; electrified main railway line.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

These are landscapes of generally high quality, with few limiting factors. The most critical of those factors is the loss of some of the semi-natural vegetation – in particular unimproved neutral grassland - 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. The southern half of the area which conforms to this landscape type, from Wiggington to Thorpe Constantine, 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

Generally of moderate value. The landscape is becoming more open as a result of agricultural intensification. New woodland planting can therefore restore the land cover structure now being lost and reduce the scale of the landscape. The planting of larger woodlands would be particularly appropriate here, in line with one of the key actions of the government's England Forestry Strategy.

A relatively small part of the area falling within this landscape type, around Edingale, is also within the boundary of the National Forest. With the exception of the corridor of the River Mease this is a 'preferred area' for further woodland planting.

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
Ancient/ diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	high
	maintain trees	high
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	medium
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
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

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

Specific Guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

Large scale woodland planting would be appropriate. Links to existing woodlands or hedge pattern are important and views through the landscape need to be retained. This is a landscape whose notable characteristic is distant views, particularly intervisibility of villages, and therefore care must be taken over the introduction of too many woodlands. The introduction of some coalescence and interlock with surrounding unplanted fields is important. On the flatter landscapes, edge treatment becomes very important and these should be essentially broadleaved in character, though some introduction of conifers would be acceptable. Only occasionally will landform be particularly strong, or the landscape open enough in character, to require woodlands to be designed to landform.

Further guidelines may be found in the National Forest Strategy.

Lowland village farmlands: parkland

The parkland of Thorpe Hall, Thorpe Constantine, falls within the parkland variant of this 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 very sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.

Coalfield farmlands

Where they occur elsewhere in the Plan area 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. These landscapes have a much stronger affinity with those of Arden – traditionally regarded as the land lying between the river Tame and the river Avon in Warwickshire - than with the Mease Lowlands, and they are mapped thus in the Countryside Agency's recent authoritative publication (*Countryside Character Volume 5: West Midlands.* Countryside Agency, 1999). However, they survive here as such small fragments that it is not possible to define the boundaries of Arden within Staffordshire with any authority. They have been included with the Mease Lowlands for convenience.

Visual character

This is a landscape now very much reduced to pockets of original farmland within an area of rapidly expanding commercial and residential development. The character of the areas unaffected by development is of a small to medium scale landscape of mixed arable and pasture farming. Hedgerows are either closely cut and gappy in the arable areas, or now becoming very overgrown and strong features as lines of thorn trees in the areas of pasture. Mature oak and ash trees are strong features.

The area is characterised by its very sunken winding lanes and small farms of typical Staffordshire red brick. Views are, however, now always to the urban edge and horse pasture is increasingly evident.

Characteristic landscape features

Numerous hedgerow oak and ash; very divided undulating landform; red brick small farms; mixed arable and pastoral farming; ancient irregular field pattern; sunken narrow lanes.

Incongruous landscape features

Rapid commercial and residential urban fringe expansion; busy roads; power lines.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are the prevalence of incongruous features as listed above, and the relatively poor survival of characteristic semi-natural vegetation (e.g. acidic grassland and wet heath). The relatively poor survival of historic elements that contribute to landscape character, such as field, settlement and road patterns, and a decline in the condition of characteristic landscape elements also tend to limit quality.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Of very high value, especially if planting is of large broadleaved woodlands, to provide a new landscape structure for housing and industrial expansion, and to mitigate the impact of new road construction.

Potential value of other habitat provision and management

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

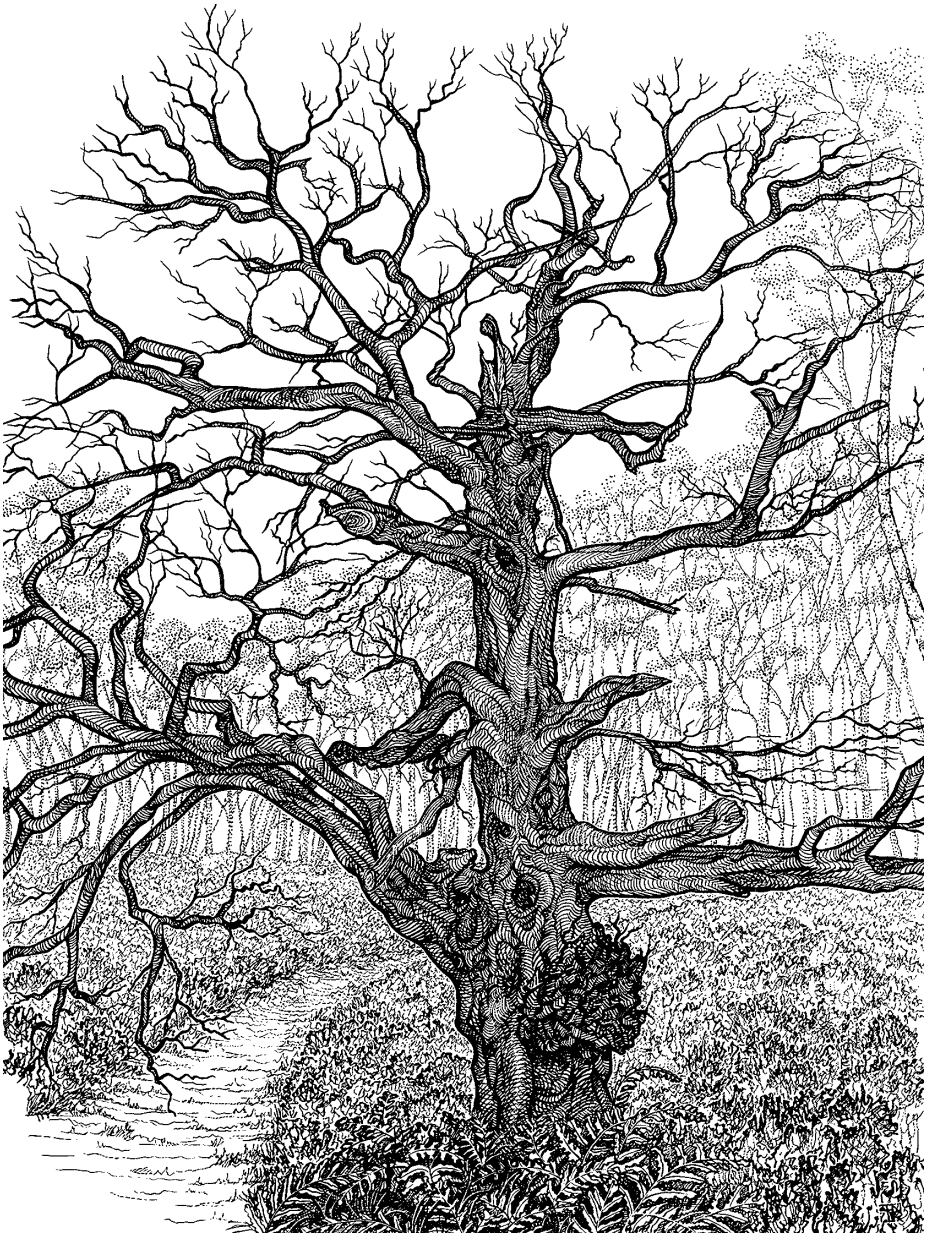
Habitat type	**Objective or target**	**Priority**
Ancient/ semi-natural broadleaved woodland	restore degraded sites	high
	recreate/ regenerate	high
Ancient/ diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	high
	maintain trees	high
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	medium
Arable field margins	maintain, improve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

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

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

This is a small-scale pastoral landscape in which, usually, the only appropriate planting would be small woodland edge and field corner planting. The very rapid urban expansion into this area, and main arterial through routes do, however, require some substantial planting to screen and mitigate the impact of these developments. This large scale planting should still be broadleaved in character.



Cannock Chase and Cankwood







Chapter 9: 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.

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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.

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
	recreate/ 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 high

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.

Settled plateau farmland slopes

These are landscapes of the slopes on the edges 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 a landscape of gently rolling landform with more pronounced slopes and undulations in places, allowing medium and long distance views across to urban edges or surrounding landscapes. The landcover pattern is no longer sufficiently strong to control views, for the most part consisting of a deteriorating irregular pattern of hedged fields with sparse, regularly spaced stag-headed hedgerow oaks and occasional ash. Hedgerows have generally deteriorated to become very gappy, or collections of individual overgrown thorns, or are missing altogether with large amounts of fencing. There are, however, still areas where the field pattern is more intact and the landscape remains at a smaller scale, with hedgerow trees coalescing in the valleys to give a more wooded feel. The isolated presence of woodlands within the landscape has a strong localised effect on the visual quality of the area, with narrow broadleaved belts, ancient woodlands and estate plantations limiting views.

The proximity of the urban edge strongly influences the general character of the landscape. Some areas retain a peaceful, strongly rural character of clustered farmsteads and roadside cottages despite that proximity, whilst others are busy, noisy areas, dissected by major transport corridors, railways, quarries and power lines which, associated with a rapid decline in the maintenance of the landscape, are resulting in a disjointed, neglected character.

A network of winding ancient lanes makes the area readily accessible and subjected to commuter pressures. This, combined with encroachment of housing and industry urbanises the general character with deterioration of landscape quality most noticeable at the immediate urban fringe.

Characteristic landscape features

Hamlets and villages; irregular fields; narrow winding lanes and hedge banks; hedgerow oaks; irregular pattern of mixed hedges; parklands with estate woodlands; red brick farm buildings; rolling landform; mixed arable and pasture farming.

Incongruous landscape features

Busy main roads; urban expansion; railways; quarries; power lines; extensive fencing; horseyculture; stunted oak trees.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The factor which appears most critical in limiting landscape quality is the prevalence of the incongruous features listed above. 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 heathland) are also contributory factors. The area to the north of Burntwood 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.

Potential value of new woodland planting

These landscapes fall within the Forest of Mercia and new planting will generally be of very high value, with potential to provide a strong unifying element to those areas with deteriorating landcover pattern, and to screen urban components of the landscape or direct views through it to surrounding rural areas.

The planting of larger woodlands would be particularly appropriate in the western area falling within this landscape type. More care in locating new planting would be required in the area north of Burntwood, to ensure that opportunities for the restoration of heathland are not compromised.

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	high
	recreate/ regenerate	high
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 heathland	protect existing heaths from development and damaging activities	high
	re-create or create new heathlands	high
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
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

Large scale mixed woodlands are appropriate for the majority of this landscape, except where field pattern remains intact and of a smaller scale. In those areas field sized woodlands of a small to medium scale or field corner planting would not interrupt views and would increase the wooded appearance of the valleys.

Large-scale woodlands should be designed to interlock and still allow views through the landscape whilst screening urban edges, power lines, quarries and busy roads. Scale should change with the position of slopes, increasing up slopes and with shapes designed to landform where the field pattern has deteriorated, and also on the upper slopes and hilltops.

Planting would generally not be appropriate in areas with potential for restoration of heathland.

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

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. The land use has undergone a change in recent years, from predominantly dairying towards mixed farming with intensive arable cropping. There is generally a varied pattern of small to medium sized hedged fields with a scatter of small woodlands, often of ancient origin.

Visual character

This is an area of intensive arable farming and improved grassland characterised by an irregular, largely intact pattern of medium to large-scale fields and considerable areas of horse pasture and rough grazing around the settlements. The landform is of a rounded and undulating character with gentle slopes and small stream valleys allowing both medium and long distance views across the landscape. Hedgerow trees, which are even aged mature oaks and some ash, are now few in number and seen as individual elements but with the field pattern showing up strongly on the rolling landform. Hedges are now either becoming overgrown, well trimmed and gappy or fragmented, with the introduction of post and wire fencing for stock control. Woodlands are infrequent, generally broadleaved and of a small to field sized scale. Streamside corridors with willow have a strong localised influence in reducing the scale, especially where associated with more pronounced landform.

The landscape generally has a peaceful rural feel to it with its network of narrow winding lanes, often with high hedgebanks, and clustered farmsteads, individual roadside houses and expanded commuter villages. These properties have a traditional character but are now largely becoming modernised and extended. Much of the tree cover in this landscape is associated with this settlement pattern. Where nearby urban influences impact strongly on the landscape the landcover elements are in decline, with lanes now heavily used as through routes, and large scattered farms now diversifying. The landscape there becomes one of an undistinguished character where no one element visually dominates but with an urban fringe feel due to adjacent industrial areas and to the introduction of non-traditional activities.

Characteristic landscape features

Irregular hedged fields; rolling landform; narrow winding lanes and hedgebanks; hedgerow oaks; dispersed settlement pattern; arable and improved pasture farming; wooded stream valleys.

Incongruous landscape features

Busy main roads; evidence of commuter pressures; horseyculture; introduced exotic tree species; inappropriate property improvements; fencing; power lines; urban expansion; railway; industrial estates.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

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

Potential value of new woodland planting

Significant parts of the areas falling within this landscape type are also within the boundary of the Forest of Mercia. New planting would generally be of moderate to high value, to act as a buffer to urban expansion where appropriate, and to maintain a structure to those areas where landcover pattern is declining. Particular care would be required in locating new woodlands in the distinctive small-scale landscape around Longdon, but here the strategic siting of new native woodland could be of great value in reducing the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland.

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
	recreate/ 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	lower
	increase the number of such features	lower
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
Unimproved neutral grassland	maintain and safeguard existing areas	high
	restore	high
	link adjacent sites through habitat creation	high
	create/ re-create new areas	high

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

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

Planting should predominantly be of a small to medium scale to reflect field size, and should be designed to field pattern. Where that pattern is beginning to break down a larger scale would be appropriate. Care should be taken, however, not to introduce an excessive amount of planting such that woodlands coalesce and views through the landscape are restricted. The current broadleaved character should be reflected in any new woodland with very restricted opportunities for the introduction of conifers. 'Stepping stone' plantations, sited to reduce the isolation of existing ancient woodlands, should comprise locally native species.

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

Settled heathlands

This rare landscape type is associated with areas of glacial and alluvial drift that formerly supported heathland. There is a distinction to be made, between landscapes of the alluvial drift of old river terraces, and of the glacial drift of other gently rolling lowland areas. Only the latter type is found in this Regional Character Area. 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. The settlement pattern is dispersed, and urbanised in places.

Visual character

This is a landscape of mixed arable and pastoral farming on a flat to gently rolling landform where the fabric of the landscape is breaking down under increasing pressure from adjacent urban areas. Deterioration of the medium scale field pattern is leading to large scale open areas with gappy hedges, grown up thorn trees and scattered stunted oaks. Further away from the urban pressures the overall impression is of a landscape more cared for and in good condition, with hedgerows being well maintained to an even height and reinforcing the smooth texture of the landscape. Stream valleys and the canal route are associated with a subtle change in character of the landscape, with low-lying wetter pasture areas and waterside tree species.

The landscape is characterised by its heathland origins, particularly in the regular, more recently enclosed farmland, with a strong presence of bracken and birch in the woodlands and hedgerows. In the flatter areas, hedgerow trees are predominantly small sized oaks, and sufficiently numerous to coalesce and give filtered views that stop within two to three fields. The landscape therefore has a strongly 'wooded' character but in reality contains little woodland.

A network of both ancient and straight lanes dissects the area with numerous individual houses and small farms. Railways, power lines, busy main roads and motorways combine with encroachment of housing and industry to reduce the quality of this landscape.

Characteristic landscape features

Mixed arable and pasture farming; flat to gently rolling landform; hedged fields; regular and irregular hedgerows; oak and birch hedgerow trees; straight and winding roads; wooded stream valleys; bracken; broadleaved woodlands.

Incongruous landscape features

Busy main roads; large length of post and wire fencing; urban encroachment; power lines; electrified railway.

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 – and a decline in the condition of some of the characteristic landscape features listed above.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Very high, to maintain a structure to the landscape in areas where agricultural intensification is resulting in the breakdown of field pattern and an enlargement of scale, and to reinforce the heathland origins of the area by woodland planting of appropriate species. The planting of larger woodlands would be particularly appropriate. Significant parts 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	maintain and enhance	lower
	restore degraded sites	high
	recreate/ regenerate	high
Ancient/ diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	high
	maintain trees	high
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	high
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
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	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

The landscape could easily take much more woodland provided it was predominantly of a broadleaved character and reflected the heathy origins of existing woodlands.

Planting should be designed to field pattern. Interlock between woodlands and open fields is important in the flatter areas to continue to allow views through the landscape; long edges along roadsides should be avoided. In the areas of undulating landform, woodlands should predominantly be kept to the hollows, but there is no need for this to be exclusive.

If conifers are included particular care needs to be taken with the design of edges and skylines of overtopping conifers.

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

Settled heathlands: estates

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

Visual character

This is a landscape of intensively farmed arable estatelands with large blocks of managed woodlands. The weakness of the large-scale planned field enclosure pattern and sparse hedgerow trees ensures that it is the edges of the broadleaved and conifer plantations that define the scale of the open spaces. The gently sloping landform results in the whole landscape being very visible and enables views through woodland spaces.

This is a highly managed landscape except for the now redundant single species hedgerows that are either sculpted and gappy or missing altogether.

The estate character of the area is reinforced by the 19th century estate farms, cottages and lodges, and straight widely spaced lanes. The character of the landscape is modified by remnant parkland, with increased tree cover of parkland trees and the presence of ponds and lakes. The landscape is continuing to change with the introduction of alternative land-uses such as golf courses.

Characteristic landscape features

Large plantation conifer and broadleaved woodlands; very gently sloping landform; historic parkland; estate farms and cottages; straight lanes; large arable fields.

Incongruous landscape features

Golf courses; extensive fencing.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are the rawness of an essentially newly-created landscape, and the relatively poor representation of characteristic semi-natural vegetation such as heathland and ancient woodland. 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 important in preventing such a loss.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Very high, to ensure the maintenance of a well wooded estate landscape, and to strengthen and restore the existing parkland character by appropriate planting to the original parkland design. The area falling within this landscape type is 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	maintain and enhance	lower
	restore degraded sites	high
	recreate/ regenerate	high
Ancient/ diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	medium
	maintain trees	medium
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	medium
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	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
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>

Existing woodlands can be enlarged by additional planting provided that open views through the landscape are retained. In addition, the planting of new field sized and shaped woodlands should follow the same guideline. Mixed woodlands are appropriate but care must be taken over design of edges.

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

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
	recreate/ 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	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 sites	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

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
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
	recreate/ 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 estatelands: parkland

The parklands of Ingestre and Swinfen 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.

Sandstone terrace estatelands

This is an uncommon landscape character type. It shares many of the characteristics of the sandstone estatelands LCT, but it occurs exclusively on old river terrace.

Visual character

This is a flat landscape with a well-wooded appearance stemming from a number of linear broadleaved woodlands, particularly along roadsides, and from coalescence of hedgerow oaks and overgrown hedgerows. Remnant heathland character is very evident in the presence of birch, bracken and gorse, giving a strong character to this predominantly small to medium scale landscape. It is very diverse, with its many different styles of residential properties, changes from pastoral to arable agriculture in places with associated variations in landscape maintenance, and a wide variety of different tree species. The presence of railways and electricity pylons and the intrusive nature of the individual residential properties erode the quality of the area.

Characteristic landscape features

Predominantly pasture farming; flat landform; strong hedgerow pattern; hedgerow trees; linear woodlands associated with roads; heathland character in tree and roadside species; distinctive original heathland edge settlement pattern.

Incongruous landscape features

Power lines; new housing of differing styles; electrified railway line; introduction of stockproof fencing.

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 representation of characteristic semi-natural vegetation, in particular heathland and ancient woodland.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Of high value. There is potential for woodland creation reflecting the existing heathland character and position such that planting is sympathetic to the existing field pattern. The strategic siting of new native woodland could be of some value in reducing the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland.

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
	recreate/ 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	very high
Canals, lakes and ponds	maintain and enhance water bodies and catchments	lower
	increase the number of such features	lower
Reedbeds	maintain and create	lower
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	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

Inclusion of oak, birch and pine in the woodland planting is appropriate particularly along visible edges in this flat landscape, to reflect the local heathy character of existing woodlands. An interlock of the woodland blocks to create views of one to two fields depth is desirable, whilst keeping larger scale planting away from already well planted road edges.

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

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
	recreate/ 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

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
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

Tree and woodland planting

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: estates

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

Visual character

This is a landscape of intimately mixed arable and pastoral agriculture and woodlands. Woodland cover is high, showing distinct character variation according to its position within a landform of interlocking rounded hummocks and appreciable slopes. On the high ground, woodlands tend to be mixed commercial plantations with a high proportion of conifers, not always well shaped to landform. The mid-slopes tend to be farmed with a pattern of medium scale regularly shaped fields bounded by largely intact thorn hedges. Hedgerow trees are scarce and generally of mature oak. Lower ground is a mixture of agriculture and broadleaved woodlands.

The area is highly visible from the surrounding main road network, but there is little access into it. Views through this landscape tend to be of a short distance, moving sinuously through valleys before being truncated by woodlands. The intimate interlock of woodland and fields overlying a distinctive landform has a powerful character.

Characteristic landscape features

Mixed commercial woodlands; intact regular field pattern; rounded hilly landform; wooded broadleaved stream valleys.

Incongruous landscape features

Sand and gravel quarrying; busy main roads.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

These are landscapes of high quality, with few limiting factors. The most critical of these are the slight rawness of a cultural landscape of relatively recent origin, and the relatively poor representation of characteristic semi-natural vegetation, in particular heathland.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Of high value within discrete areas, to mitigate the impact of sand and gravel quarrying and poorly designed existing woodlands, and as an element of the sympathetic restoration of old sand and gravel workings to fit into the character of a well-wooded landscape. The strategic siting of new native woodland could be of great value in reducing the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland.

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
	recreate/ 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	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)	medium
	increase the number of such sites	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	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	medium

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

Specific guidelines

Tree and woodland planting

This landscape is already well wooded and this character could be maintained by restricting new planting to replacement of felled crops, and small-scale extension of existing woodland to retain gaps and therefore views through the landscape. Extensive new planting could result in the present gaps being joined to produce a forest landscape.

All planting should reflect the present situation of broadleaved woodlands on the lower ground with larger scale commercial woodlands on the higher ground.

At present, woodlands are not always well shaped to landform and this could be remedied by additional well-designed woodland planting.

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

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.

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
	recreate/ 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: forest

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

Visual character

These are wooded landscapes occupying the visually important higher ground and steeply sloping edges of flat to gently rolling dissected sandstone plateaux. Variations in woodland type alter the visual character of the landscape, from the mid greens of the deciduous oak and birch woodlands to the dark evergreen hues of the monoculture Scots and Corsican pine plantations. The openness and seasonal changes of the deciduous woodland contrast strongly with the conifer plantations where they are managed on a clear fell system. Here the ordered pattern of the internal landscape varies, from the open spaces of the newly planted areas, through the darkness of the mid-rotation, to the high canopy and more open stands of trees in the older plantations. The extent of planting in many places creates a strong impression of visual enclosure, where virtually all horizons appear wooded.

Remnant heathland vegetation survives along rides, roadsides and in clearings, and more strongly within the broadleaved woodlands. Roads tend to skirt these forested areas; where present they are often straight, and lined with beech trees. Remnant military installations are still evident in places.

Characteristic landscape features

Dissected plateau landform; large-scale commercial coniferous forests; large broadleaved woodlands; heathland vegetation.

Incongruous landscape features

Sand and gravel quarrying.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are the rawness of an essentially newly-created landscape, and the relatively poor representation of characteristic semi-natural vegetation. One of the areas falling within this landscape type is 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

Low. The restocking and restructuring of existing plantations, following current design guidelines and a Forest Design Plan, is a higher priority

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	lower
	recreate/ regenerate	lower
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
Lowland wood pasture and parkland	maintain and safeguard	high
	restore degraded sites	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	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>

Follow Forest Design Plan to achieve better integration between open heathland areas and woodland planting.

Particular emphasis should be placed on shaping edges of plantations to landform slopes and linking sympathetically into open spaces. Introduce more diversity into the internal landscapes of the large coniferous blocks.

Sandstone hills and heaths: minerals working and restoration

This is a variant of the basic landscape character type, in which minerals working and/ or restoration is the visually-dominant land use.

Visual character

These are areas of unrestored and newly-restored coal mining or quarrying activity, where the future landscape character will depend upon proposals for further restoration and future maintenance to reflect the character of sandstone plateau landscapes.

Characteristic landscape features

Regenerating heathland; birch and oak scrub woodland.

Incongruous landscape features

Bare unrestored land; inappropriate landform with steep slopes.

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 prevalence of incongruous features; the poor survival of historic elements that contribute to landscape character, such as field, settlement and road patterns; the rawness of an essentially newly-created landscape, and the poor representation of characteristic semi-natural vegetation such as heathland.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Very high, to restore unsightly areas of past mining and quarrying activity to a character appropriate to their surroundings. These are examples of the former industrial land, the planting of which is one of the key actions in the government's England Forestry Strategy.

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	lower
	recreate/ regenerate	lower
Arable field margins	maintain, improve and restore	lower
Lowland acidic grassland	increase the number of such sites	high
Lowland heathland	re-create or create new heathlands	high

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

Specific guidelines

<u>Tree and woodland planting</u>

Follow specific landscape restoration plans drawn up for the individual areas to reflect the heathland/woodland mosaic of the surrounding landscapes.

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

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 subdivision into landscape character sub-types.

Visual character

This is a landscape of mixed arable and pasture farming, the heathland origins of which are strongly evident in the species composition of woodlands, roadside verges and canal corridors. The medium scale fields are mainly of an irregular pattern with numerous hedgerow oaks, although in areas of later enclosure of heathland the regular field pattern is more open with fewer hedgerow oaks and some regular plantations.

Hedgerows are generally now becoming gappy or overgrown, with removal evident in places, but the pattern still appears largely intact and the flat landform results in very limited views of only two to three fields distance. Streamside vegetation of willow and alder is important in reinforcing the well-wooded feel to the landscape, which in reality contains little woodland.

This is an area close to, and being pressurised by, the urban fringe, with post war ribbon development and visible adjacent built up areas. Past mining activities have had an impact on the landscape and there are therefore derelict mining sites, now becoming revegetated with pioneer birch woodland, and new mixed woodlands on recent reclamation sites.

A network of narrow winding lanes serves the large 19th century farms that characterise the area.

Characteristic landscape features

Flat landform, mixed arable and pasture farming; heathy pioneer woodlands; commons; medium scale hedged field pattern; hedgerow oaks; well treed brook courses; narrow winding lanes; canal.

Incongruous landscape features

Derelict land; busy roads; industrial estates; urban edges; old industrial artefacts.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are: a decline in the condition of some of the characteristic landscape features; the poor survival of historic elements that contribute to landscape character, such as field, settlement and road patterns; and the poor representation of characteristic semi-natural vegetation such as acid grassland and wet heath.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Very high, to maintain a wooded character to the landscape as field patterns decline, to restore areas of derelict land to reflect the character of the surrounding landscapes, and to screen intrusive elements within the landscape. 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
	recreate/ 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 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
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	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

The more intact areas do not need large areas of additional woodland that would obliterate the existing pattern and block views through the landscape. New woodlands should be field sized and broadleaved in the main, reflecting the heathy character of the landscape. Areas of conifers are acceptable provided they have a broadleaved character to the edges.

Where the landscape scale becomes larger in areas of arable farming or reduced tree cover, large scale estate woodland would be appropriate, with views retained by restricting planting to at least one field back from roads, and taking care over edge design.

This landscape is in need of additional hedgerow planting and restoration of a strong pattern of hedgerow trees, reintroducing coalescence through the landscape and halting the decline in the landcover fabric.

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

Coalfield farmlands: minerals working and restoration

This is a variant of the basic landscape character type, in which minerals working and/ or restoration is the visually-dominant land use.

Visual character

This landscape has undergone a complete transformation due to recent opencast coal mining activities. As a result the original landscape has been largely destroyed and a new landscape superimposed. There are still important areas of heathland as remnants of the original ecological character of the area before mining took place on a large scale.

Older mining activity is characterised by the occurrence of pioneer birch and willow encroaching into the areas, with little return to an agricultural use. Landform in these areas is often smoothed off, with some steep slopes remaining only where extensive regrading works have not occurred.

Following restoration, the new field pattern of wire fences bears little relationship to the artificial machined landform. Hedges and trees are beginning to mature, mitigating the initial exposed uninteresting character, but this is still an immature landscape in the earliest stages of development.

Characteristic landscape features

Smoothly rounded landform; immature woodland planting; pioneer birch and willow woodland; regular large-scale fields.

Incongruous landscape features

Extensive fencing of new imposed field pattern.

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 prevalence of incongruous features; the poor survival of historic elements that contribute to landscape character, such as field, settlement and road patterns; the rawness of an essentially newly-created landscape, and the poor representation of characteristic semi-natural vegetation, such as wet heath and acidic grassland.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Very high, except in those areas of surviving heathland, which are sensitive to further planting. With that exception, large scale woodlands could be designed to create an exciting new landscape in these areas of little current visual interest. These are examples of the former industrial land, the planting of which is one of the key actions in the government's England Forestry Strategy.

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	high
	recreate/ regenerate	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
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	lower
	prevent further loss	lower

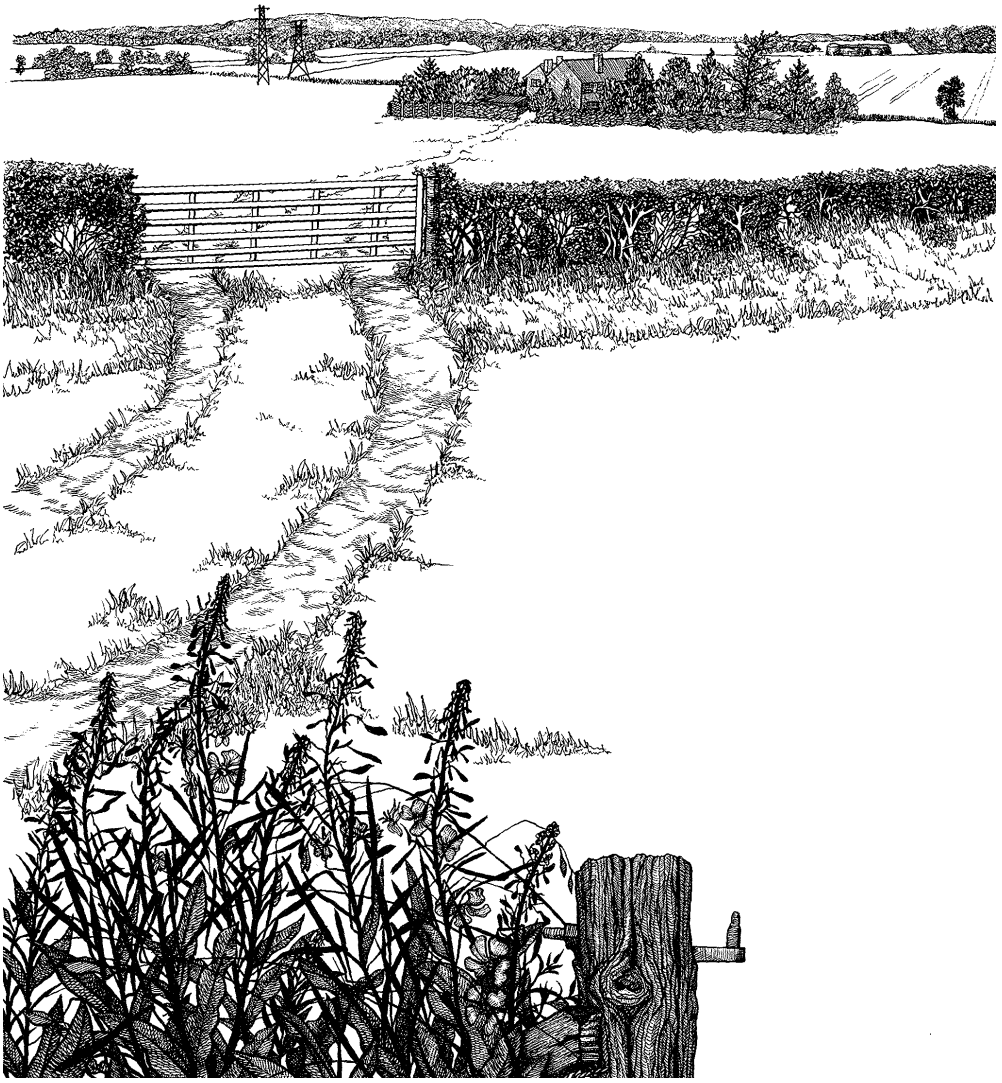
Further details of these habitat targets can be found in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Specific guidelines

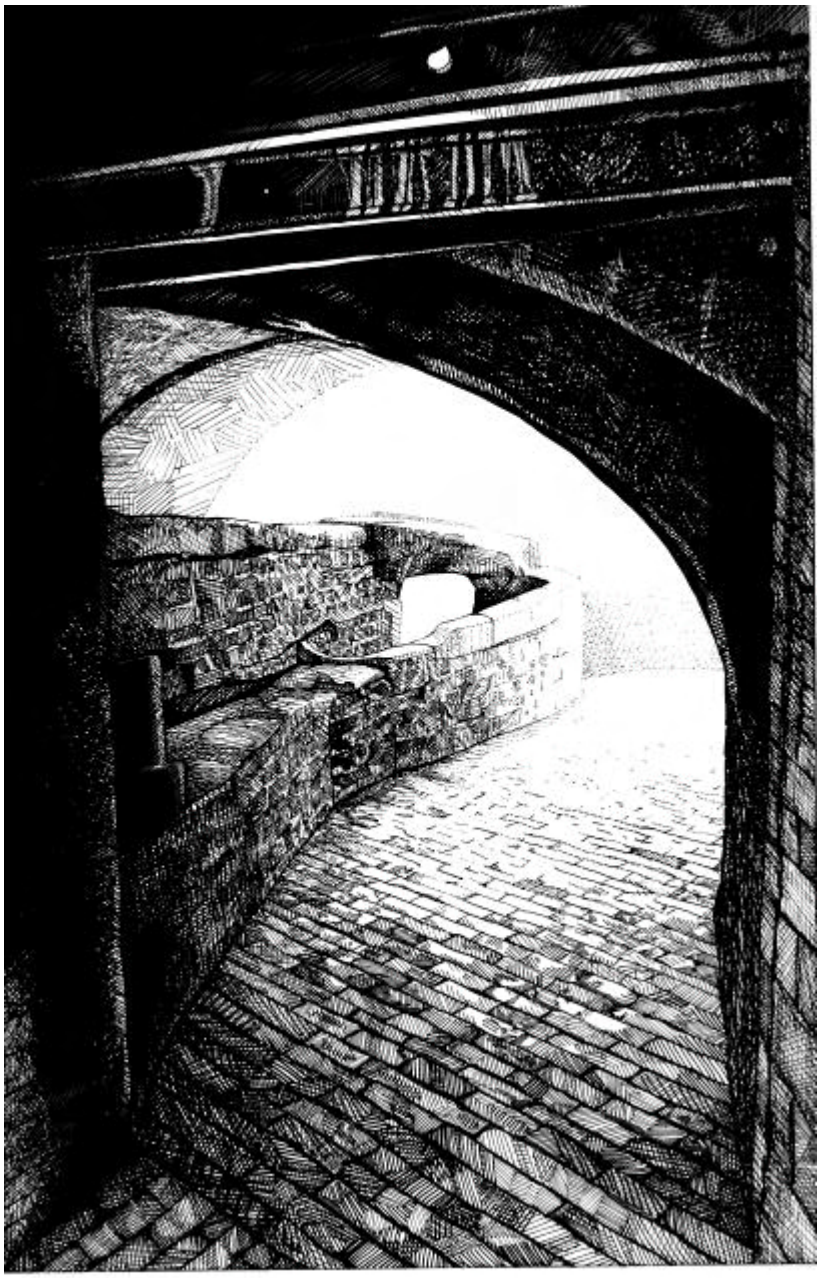
<u>Tree and woodland planting</u>

Design of large scale woodlands based on Community Forest Design Guidelines are appropriate for these landscapes to produce interest, framing views through to surrounding areas and reducing scale to increase their recreational potential. Planting should predominantly be shaped to the new landform to help mitigate the often-inappropriate present design of woodlands and field pattern.

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

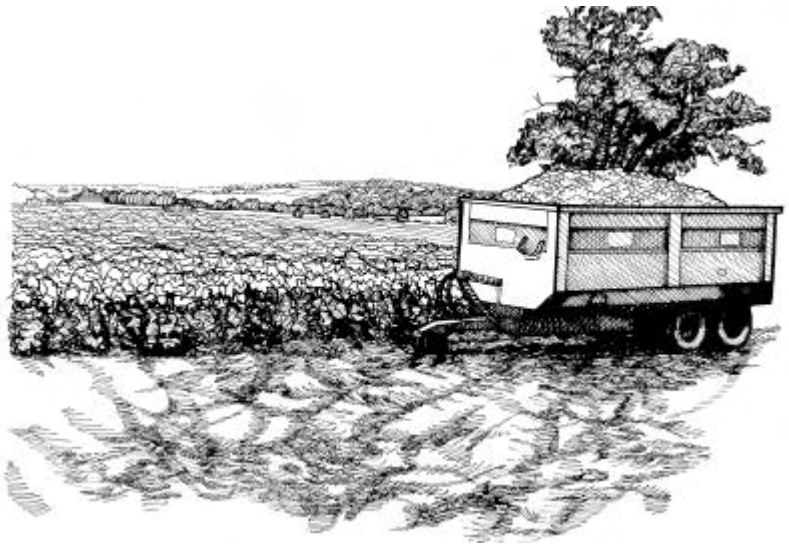


Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau









Chapter 10: Regional Character Area 66: Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau

This chapter describes the landscapes of the Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau 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, the sub-types, that occur within it.

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Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau

1. This Regional Character Area lies around the catchment of a central section of the Severn and lower Stour rivers. The part within Staffordshire is an area of Permo-Triassic sandstones with a pronounced rolling landform. Unusually for a lowland area, the landform is dominant over the landcover in defining its character. Soils are, in the main, base poor free draining brown sands with some podzols and brown earths. In the north of the area glacial drift has given rise to poorly draining base poor stagnogley soils. Palaeozoic rocks make a reappearance in the extreme south-west, as Carboniferous marls, sandstones and conglomerates. The landform here is gently undulating and the soils are brown earths and argillic brown earths.

2. Early occupation in this area is evidenced by the hillfort above Kinver. Few other traces of prehistoric settlement are known. There was evidently much Roman activity here, with a Roman road running through the area and a major occupation centre at Greensforge. During the medieval period much of this area was Kinver Forest, in existence by Domesday. Most of it was disafforested by the middle of the fourteenth century although Iverley remained forest for a further 300 years. The extreme south western corner of the county was never under forest law, but it was well wooded; the chain of ancient woodlands in Vermin Valley, near the county boundary, harbour wild service trees which are good indicators of woodland antiquity.

3. During the medieval period the economy was pastoral, with arable cultivation close to settlements. The fields were enclosed by agreement, probably in the sixteenth century. The eighteenth century saw the enclosure by Act of Parliament of large areas of former heathland. Extensive heathlands still survive and, with woodlands, are prominent as hill and ridge top features, especially around Kinver.

4. Kinver Forest was the most westerly of the wood and heathland areas of Staffordshire to influence the style of building which grew up around and within it. Good examples of the resulting variety of timber-framed buildings can be seen in Kinver itself in the walls of close-studding at nos. 30-31 and small square-panelling at no. 17 on the High Street. Both forms are used in the walls of Clifford House at the bottom of Kinver Hill. Here also are examples of holes in the sandstone cliff of Kinver Edge being used as outhouses, the most unusual of all the regional building types in the county. Elsewhere in Kinver the later mid-red brick predominates and buildings using it have frequently incorporated stepped gables, a distinctive form in the town, which mark their division from the roofs of adjacent properties.

5. The Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal brought some notable industrial architecture to the south of the area, and the valleys of the Smestow Brook and River Stour had a number of water-powered industries along their course. Kinver remains the largest settlement in the region although, despite some prosperity from its mills in the eighteenth century, it has not expanded greatly beyond the initial limits of the speculative medieval borough. The buildings on its High Street form a compact continuous frontage where in smaller villages elsewhere in the region, for instance at Pattingham in the north, red brick cottages, pubs and outbuildings cluster around a winding narrow street which quickly becomes a country lane.

6. Weston-under-Lizard in the far north is dominated by the designed landscape and estate buildings of Weston Park whose boundary is delineated by a twelve foot high wall of local stone. This, with the grounds of Enville Hall in the south, is a good example of eighteenth and nineteenth century landscaping.

7. This area probably contains the best quality agricultural land in the county, with a significant proportion at Grades 1 and 2. This quality is reflected in the farming pattern, which is predominantly cropping and horticulture. In addition to cereals substantial areas of more demanding crops such as potatoes and sugar beet are grown. The horticultural crops are mainly vegetables, conveniently marketed in the West Midlands. The areas of permanent pasture are used mainly for dairying, beef and sheep, and some outdoor pigs are kept on the free draining soils in the south-west.

8. There is some commercial forestry, on traditional estates. Corsican and Scots pine tend to predominate on the more free-draining sites, with mixed broadleaves on lower slopes and in valley bottoms. Ancient woodlands are rather sparsely represented. The weak, prominently regular field pattern and the deteriorating or closely trimmed hedges with few trees have little effect in reducing the scale of the open, intensively farmed arable landscapes of the lower slopes. Along the valley bottoms there is increased tree cover, and lines of alder, willow and poplar, including an occasional native black poplar.

9. The proximity of the large conurbation to the east influences the greater part of this area, in the busy nature of the road network and considerably expanded hamlets stemming from a formerly sparse settlement pattern.

10. The south west of the area, characterised by irregular, medium scale fields and a network of narrow lanes, was a former stronghold of English elm. Despite its loss the area still gives the impression of being well wooded, because of the number of hedgerow pedunculate oaks, but there is a noticeable lack of regeneration and promotion of these trees, and some hedgerow removal. If these problems cannot be addressed the peaceful, well-kempt feeling of this part could be lost.

Ancient redlands

This is a rather ill-defined type in Staffordshire. It is characterised by Upper Palaeozoic mudstones and sandstones and a dissected undulating topography with a muted upland feel. The non-calcareous brown soils support stock rearing with mixed farming in an irregular pattern of hedged fields with a good scatter of small, often ancient woodlands. The settlement pattern is dispersed, with hamlets and scattered farmsteads.

Visual character

This is a landscape of mixed arable and pastoral farming in a medium scale ancient landscape with a well-kempt appearance. The undulating landform results in views across the landscape through and over the dense cover of mature hedgerow oaks to surrounding woodlands outside the unit.

The pattern of the hedgerows is shown up from the elevated viewing positions available from the network of narrow lanes, with the stream corridors of poplars and willows becoming obvious features in the landscape. Overall this is a quiet peaceful farmed landscape giving an impression of being well wooded, due to a combination of small broadleaved woodlands, dense coverage of mature hedgerow oaks and woodland edges of surrounding landscapes.

There are problems of non-regeneration of oak trees and hedgerow removal, and if these cannot be addressed the appearance of the landscape could change dramatically.

Characteristic landscape features

Mixed arable and pastoral farming; strong medium scale hedged field pattern; mature hedgerow oaks; tree lined brook courses; undulating landform; red brick farmsteads; narrow winding lanes.

Incongruous landscape features

Isolated field oaks, as a result of hedgerow removal.

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 (in particular ancient woodland) characteristic of this landscape type, and the potential loss of hedges and hedgerow oaks.

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

Potential value of new woodland planting.

Generally moderate, although the strategic siting of new native woodland could be of great value in reducing the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland. The decline of the hedgerow pattern could be arrested by conservation hedgerow planting schemes.

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
	recreate/ regenerate	lower
Ancient/ diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	medium
	maintain trees	medium
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	medium
	increase the number of such features	medium
Lowland wet grassland	maintain and enhance existing areas	high
	restore degraded areas	medium
	create new areas	medium
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	lower
	create/ re-create new areas	lower
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

Additional woodland varying from field corner to field sized planting would be appropriate and should be of predominantly broadleaved character to link with the strong hedgerow pattern and extensive hedgerow oaks.

The strong landform in places will result in woodland design needing to reflect the landform in those areas, with planting predominantly in valley bottoms whilst keeping mid-slopes open. Hedgerow oak conservation needs targeting to avoid further decline of this landscape.

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

Ancient redlands: parkland

The parklands of Enville Hall 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 very sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.

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. Subdivision of the basic landscape type is on the basis of the influence of traditional estates and of parkland and forest.

Visual character

This is a varied agricultural landscape of intensive arable production but with pockets of less intensive pastoral farming. The rolling landform gives way to flatter land along the river valleys, but there are dominant ridge features with scarp slopes. Prominent large-scale hill and ridge top woodlands visually dominate the area, whilst on the mid-slopes, woodlands are sparser and of medium scale. Many of the woodlands have a heathy character to them. This is a landscape that appears far more wooded than it actually is, with prominent positioning of woodlands and the coalescence of mature hedgerow oaks in places. The slopes in turn give way to well-treed valleys where lines of poplars can occasionally be found. Increased numbers of mature hedgerow oaks locally provide filtered views of three to four fields distance.

The unifying feature of this varied landscape is the dominance of landform over a weak medium scale regular and irregular field pattern, although that pattern is very visible because of its position on the slopes.

This is an area that is influenced by a number of halls, with attendant parkland and associated estatelands. Farms are large, with extensive modern buildings and there are characteristic home farms and estate cottages. Villages are expanding with the increase in commuter dwellings and small lanes show the obvious signs of becoming well used rat-runs. Where farmland abuts the conurbation the landscape reflects this influence, hedgerow deterioration being more evident and horseyculture becoming frequent.

Characteristic landscape features

Estate plantations; heathy ridge woodlands; hedgerow oaks; well treed stream valleys; smooth rolling landform with scarp slopes; red brick farmsteads and estate cottages; mixed intensive arable and pasture farming; large hedged fields; halls and associated parkland; canal.

Incongruous landscape features

Power lines; village expansion; urban edge; modern farm buildings; deteriorating hedgerows; commuter dwellings; busy 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 features that remain, and the spread of incongruous features listed above.

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 extend existing woodland into the more open arable areas to increase the landcover structure, reducing the scale and directing views through the landscape. The planting of larger woodlands would be particularly appropriate.

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
	recreate/ 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	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 calcareous grassland	safeguard remaining areas and adjoining land	high
	restore semi-improved grasslands	medium
	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
Reedbeds	maintain and create	high

Habitat type	Objective or target	Priority
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	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

The existing ridge planting should be extended down the slopes, reflecting their heathy character. Woodlands should be of large scale to fit into the land-cover pattern, but predominantly shaped to landform and increasing in scale up the slopes. Field corner planting is not appropriate. On the lower ground large scale broadleaved or mixed woodlands, shaped to field pattern or localised landform, would fit into the existing character of the landscape. Overall a large amount of additional woodland would be appropriate, provided long belts alongside roads are avoided, views through the landscape are retained and care is taken not to enclose areas completely with additional woodland.

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 a landscape of intensive arable farming on a flat to very gently undulating landform characterised by a very sparse scattering of isolated mature oak trees and redundant hedgerows. Although hedgerows are generally in poor condition, being gappy and sculpted or overgrown, they influence scale by interrupting immediate views. In some areas the farmland is enclosed by considerable areas of broadleaved and coniferous plantation woodland which, together with large numbers of hedgerow oaks, begin to filter and control views through the landscape, giving a more enclosed character.

The local river courses and canal do not have a high visual impact, but their presence is associated with increased tree cover in the valleys and the introduction of waterside tree species.

This is essentially a bland but productive landscape that is developing an unkempt character, not helped by the appearance of some set aside land. The strongest influences on this landscape are the long views out to rising ground and the urban fringe features of busy main roads, ribbon development, power lines and well used ancient lanes. The area accommodates large numbers of visitors and the suburban influence of local expanding settlements is marked.

Characteristic landscape features

Conifer and birch woodlands; hedged field pattern; hedgerow oaks; gently rolling landform; tree lined stream courses; narrow lanes.

Incongruous landscape features

Visible intrusion of urban edges; power lines; set-aside agricultural land; urban fringe commuter features; plant nurseries.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are the loss of characteristic landscape features, the spread of incongruous features, and a decline in the condition of landscape elements.

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

Potential value of new woodland planting

Of very high value overall, to restore a landscape structure to the areas of intensive arable farming where tree cover is scarce. Uninterrupted views across the landscape could be modified by a new structure such that the effect of the urban fringe and detracting elements in the landscape are lessened. The strategic siting of new native woodland could be of value locally in reducing the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland.

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	high
	recreate/ regenerate	high
Ancient/ diverse hedgerows	maintain and manage	medium
	maintain trees	medium
Hedgerows	plant species-rich hedges	medium
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
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
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 more wooded areas within this landscape will not take much more planting, except small-scale additions to existing woodlands, without unacceptably increasing the sense of enclosure. In the more open landscapes of arable farming and very much more scarce tree cover, there is the potential for radically altering the landscape by extensive additional woodlands. These should be shaped to field pattern and of field scale and mainly broadleaved in character to reflect the ancient field pattern. It would be appropriate to relate the woodlands to each other by spacing them one field apart but linked by hedgerows and increased hedgerow tree cover. Planting adjacent to the river and canal corridor needs greater care with species and woodland size.

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

Sandstone estatelands: parkland

The parklands of Weston Park, Wrottesley Hall and Patshull 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 very sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.

Sandstone estatelands: forest

This is a variant of the basic landscape type, in which forestry is the visually-dominant land use. Any proposals for significant change in this landscape should be formulated with reference to the UK Forestry Standard and Forest Design Guidelines.

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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.