

**Leicester
Leicestershire
and
Rutland**

**Landscape
and
Woodland
Strategy**

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1. Introduction and Executive Summary



Part of the richness of the English countryside lies in its variety of landscapes and the way in which the landscape can change across a short distance, so that even within a single county several areas of distinctively different landscape character may be identified.

Landscape character is something which exists everywhere. It is an expression of pattern within the landscape resulting from particular combinations of natural and historical factors which make one place different from another. Landscape character areas are areas which have a unity of character and a distinctive sense of place when viewed from a county-wide perspective. Some landscape character areas are well known - for example within Leicestershire and Rutland, the Wolds, Charnwood Forest and the Vale of Catmose are terms which form part of our everyday language. But landscape character exists everywhere, even though it may be easier to recognise in some areas than others and even though some areas may be perceived as being more attractive than others. The individual distinctiveness of landscape character areas is weakened by such things as the standardisation of agricultural practices, unsympathetic development, and the loss of local landscape features.

The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy identifies eighteen distinctive character areas within the two counties, and including the City of Leicester. The Strategy provides guidelines for conserving and enhancing these distinctive landscapes.

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland together form one of the least wooded areas of England, with only 3.3% woodland cover (*Forestry Commission, 1983*). Current Government policy is to achieve a steady expansion of the national woodland area and the Strategy also looks at ways of expanding the woodland cover of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland in ways appropriate to each landscape character area.

Most of the land within Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland is privately owned and managed, and key decisions affecting its appearance are taken by individuals. The Strategy aims to inform landowners, farmers, planners, developers and individuals of the unique character of their "patch", and to provide guidelines for the management of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland landscape. District councils may also wish to use the landscape character approach of the Strategy to develop Supplementary Planning Guidance. The Strategy's guidelines are not an attempt to preserve an unchanged landscape, nor to return it to some idealised historical past. Change is inevitable. The challenge is to accommodate change whilst maintaining distinctive local differences in landscape character.

It is not intended in this document to give specific technical advice on countryside and woodland management, but it is proposed that such information will be made available in partnership with others.

Executive Summary

The Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy sits within the context of the Structure Plan and seeks to give guidance on issues which are outside the planning control process but which affect the appearance and character of the landscape.

The Strategy assesses the nature of the existing landscape and woodland of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland and describes eighteen distinctive landscape character areas within the three authorities' areas.

The character area boundaries and the Strategy document have been the subject of detailed consultations with the district councils. A broad range of other organisations with land use interests, and the general public, have also been consulted.

The Strategy has three main objectives :

- 1 To conserve and enhance the character, diversity and local distinctiveness of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland's landscapes**
- 2 To identify appropriate opportunities for new woodland planting to increase the woodland cover of the Strategy area**
- 3 To encourage the sustainable management of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland's existing woodland resources to produce timber and provide environmental and social benefits.**

Guidelines and mechanisms are set out for achieving each of these objectives. The Strategy also sets out objectives and guidelines for individual landscape character areas, with the emphasis on conserving and enhancing existing landscape features and increasing woodland cover in ways appropriate to the character of each area.

Partnerships are essential to the implementation of the Strategy and the participation of a wide range of organisations is identified as being necessary to achieve the Strategy's objectives.

As much of the land within the Strategy area is in private ownership, the objectives of the Strategy must be achieved not through direct control but through indirect influence and persuasion and an opportunistic approach to partnership working. In the light of this the Strategy has not set quantified targets. However, mechanisms for monitoring landscape change are in place.

2. Policy Background

2

2.01 Introduction

The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy sits within a broader framework of environmental policies at several levels. This chapter sets the Strategy within this wider context.

2.02 Structure and Local Plans

The Leicestershire Structure Plan 1991-2006 sets strategic land use planning guidance and provides the context for more detailed Local Plans, which are mostly prepared by district councils.

Several current Structure Plan policies relating to development are underpinned by the concept of Areas of Particularly Attractive Countryside, which were identified by a landscape assessment study in 1970. In accordance with the most recent Government guidance in PPG7, future Structure Plan policies are likely to take an approach which does not attribute greater value to one area over another, but which is based on landscape character.

More specific Structure Plan policies relate to Woodlands (EP10), Landscape Improvements (EP11) and the National Forest (EP12), to recreation and leisure in Charnwood Forest (LP4) and around Rutland Water (LP5), and to the Restoration Aftercare and Afteruse of mineral workings (MWDP3). These policies are set out in detail in Appendix 3 and the Strategy builds on them.

The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Structure Plan 1996-2016 is approaching deposit stage and once adopted will replace the Leicestershire Structure Plan 1991-2006.

Local Plans develop the policies and general proposals of the Structure Plan and relate them to specific areas of land. They provide a detailed basis for development control and for co-ordinating and directing development and other land uses. Appendix 4 lists the Local Plans covering Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. The district based Local Plans contain a range of policies related to environmental issues, covering such matters as the protection of woodlands and trees, and the need for landscaping schemes to be approved for new developments. However, planning permission is not required for all types of development and considerable permitted development rights pertain to development associated with agriculture. Furthermore, there is very little planning control over alterations to the landscape, such as the enlargement of fields, which can significantly affect the character of the landscape and in most cases local authorities can only seek to obtain this sort of control through negotiation with landowners. It is hoped that the Strategy will help to give some weight to such discussions, as well as providing guidance on appropriate ways of applying broad policies in the different character areas within a district.

2.03 Leicestershire County Council strategies

2.03.01 Sustainability Appraisal Scheme

The County Council's Sustainability Appraisal Scheme was published in October 1998 and sets the context for actions by the authority to move towards sustainable development. This is defined as development that improves the quality of life for everyone at the same time as protecting the environment for future generations.

The Scheme sets out the County Council's sustainability policies and provides guidelines for making its day to day operations more sustainable. Local distinctiveness and environmentally sensitive land management are included amongst the points for consideration in any sustainability appraisal.

2.03.02 Countryside 2000

Countryside 2000 was a Strategy for Action produced in January 1989 as the County Council's response to the changes which were likely to take place in the Leicestershire countryside over the following decade. It concentrated on how the countryside could meet and respond to recreational changes and landscape pressures.

It recognised the importance of the Leicestershire countryside for the intrinsic value of its scenery, as well as being a place to live, work and spend leisure time, and its action points have guided the County Council's broad countryside management programmes since its publication.

In particular it established a Countryside Priority Area, defined as being subject to urban pressure, having high potential for the development of recreation, access and education initiatives, and presenting particular opportunities for landscape enhancement. This continues to be an improvement area.

2.03.03 Nature Conservation Strategy

The Nature Conservation Strategy was published in May 1994 and aims to provide a framework for the management and development of the Leicestershire nature conservation resource, and the enhancement of the whole of the Leicestershire landscape. Its policies are mainly habitat related and it should be seen as running in parallel with the Landscape and Woodland Strategy.

2.03.04 Rural Strategy

The Leicestershire Rural Strategy is co-ordinated by the Leicestershire Rural Partnership, which consists of Leicestershire County Council, district councils, the Countryside Agency, the East Midlands Development Agency, the Leicestershire Health Authority, Leicestershire and Rutland Rural Community Council, Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Parish Councils and Leicestershire Training and Enterprise Council. The Rural Partnership is currently reviewing the Rural Strategy published in 1995 and a new Consultation Draft of the Rural Strategy and Action Plan was launched in June 2000.

The agricultural diversification and market towns/rural centres project areas within the Rural Strategy and Action Plan have links to the Landscape and Woodland Strategy.

2.03.05 Tourism Strategy

The 1996 Tourism Strategy, covering Leicestershire, the City of Leicester and Rutland, sees one of the strengths of Leicestershire and Rutland tourism as, “... *beautiful and accessible countryside, much of which is unspoilt*”. However, it recognises the need to conserve natural heritage sites and the disadvantages of traffic congestion and physical erosion which can lead to environmental damage from the over-use of fragile rural areas.

The Tourism Strategy also recognises that there are increasing opportunities for “*green and sustainable*” tourism, particularly within the National Forest, but also building on Rutland Water’s internationally important bird interest and Leicester’s role as Britain’s first Environment City.

204 Local Agenda 21

The United Nations Agenda 21 report was endorsed at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio. This set out a global programme of work towards achieving sustainability, covering all aspects of community development and quality of life. In 1994 the UK Government produced a national Sustainable Development Strategy and Action Plan. This was followed by the publication of a new strategy in May 1999. Local Agenda 21 programmes to promote sustainable development and improve quality of life are now being produced by local authorities.

The Forum For A Better Leicestershire (Fable) is Leicestershire’s response to Local Agenda 21. It is a partnership of groups and organisations, involving Leicestershire County Council, district councils, Leicester City Council, business representatives, universities, voluntary groups and others. The aim of Fable is to develop an inspiring vision of a sustainable future and to set about making it happen. Leicestershire’s Local Agenda 21, *Ways Forward for a Better Leicestershire*, was published in May 1998. This sets out ideas for the future of the county, based on the results of consultation with interest groups and the general public, and includes proposals for action relating to all aspects of quality of life including health, education, crime and safety, work, food, energy and wildlife. The work of Fable is complemented by similar processes in the City of Leicester, Rutland and the district council areas.

205 Leicester Riverside Strategy

Within the City of Leicester, a Riverside Strategy and Corridor Study has been commissioned through a partnership between the City Council, British Waterways, the Environment Agency, Countryside Agency and English Nature. The work covers the broad waterway corridor through the City represented by the Riverside Park, most of which is of high nature conservation and amenity value. The final draft of the Strategy and Study was approved by the City Council in

September 1999 as a basis for defining and taking forward a co-ordinated long term programme for riverside regeneration within the City. The Strategy will support further detailed guidance and initiatives to conserve and enhance this part of the valley of the Soar.

2.06 Regional Character Areas and Natural Areas

The landscape character approach has been largely developed and promoted by the Countryside Agency (formerly the Countryside Commission). In 1996, jointly with English Nature, it published the Character of England map, accompanied by summary Regional Character Area descriptions, each including characteristic features of nature conservation and landscape interest. These areas do not constitute any sort of designation but form a framework for other countryside related policies and programmes. For example, MAFF is now using these areas as the basis for targeting its Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

Three of the Regional Character Areas - Charnwood, High Leicestershire and Leicestershire Vales - lie wholly within the Strategy area, with nine more - Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Wolds, Trent and Belvoir Vales, Kesteven Uplands, Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield, Trent Valley Washlands, Northamptonshire Vales, Northamptonshire Uplands, Mease/Sence Lowlands and Melbourne Parklands - lying partially within it. These Regional Character Areas (Fig 1) show a broad correlation with the general pattern of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland landscape character areas. However, the coarser grain appropriate to a nation-wide assessment inevitably leads to some minor differences in boundary details and the omission of some character areas which are seen as significant at the finer county level.

The Regional Character Areas have been aggregated by English Nature into larger Natural Areas having similar types of wildlife and natural features. Four of these cover the Strategy area - the Coal Measures, Charnwood Forest, Trent Valley and Rises, and Lincolnshire and Rutland Limestone (Fig 2). A profile has been produced for each Natural Area that describes and evaluates its nature conservation resource and establishes objectives for the maintenance and enrichment of its nature conservation interest. The Strategy guidelines support the objectives of these profiles.

2.07 The UK Forestry Standard

The UK Forestry Standard (1998) was prepared by the Forestry Commission and sets out the criteria and standards for the sustainable management of all forests and woodlands in the UK. It is linked to guidelines agreed at Helsinki in 1993 and the subsequent Pan-European Criteria for sustainable forestry. It can be used as a basis for the development of forest monitoring and certification schemes.

The Landscape and Woodland Strategy seeks to link into the criteria developed for the UK Forestry Standard which are based on the forest resources of soils, water, trees, biological diversity, workforce, communities, heritage and landscapes.

Fig. 1

Countryside Commission Regional Character Areas

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland

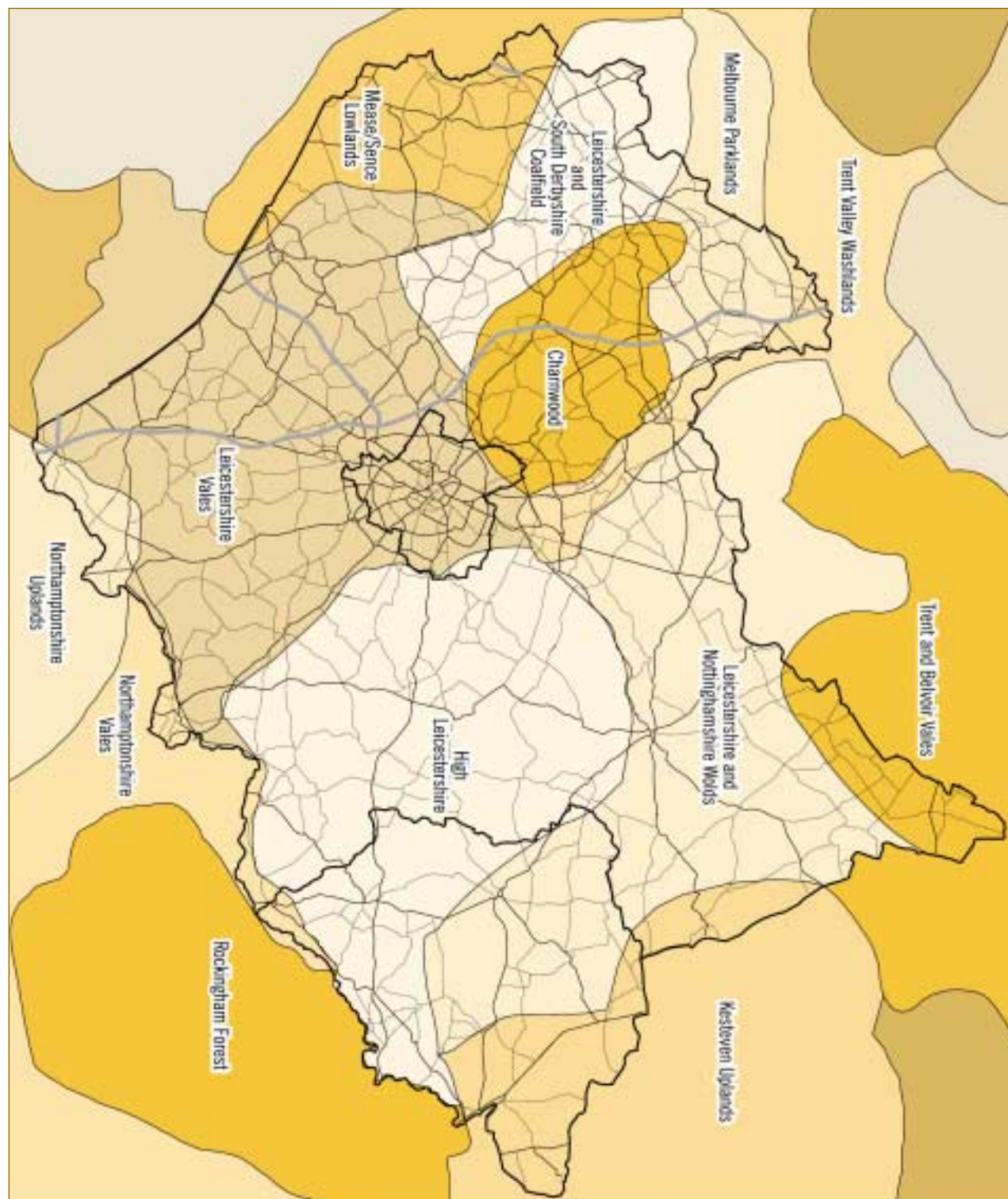
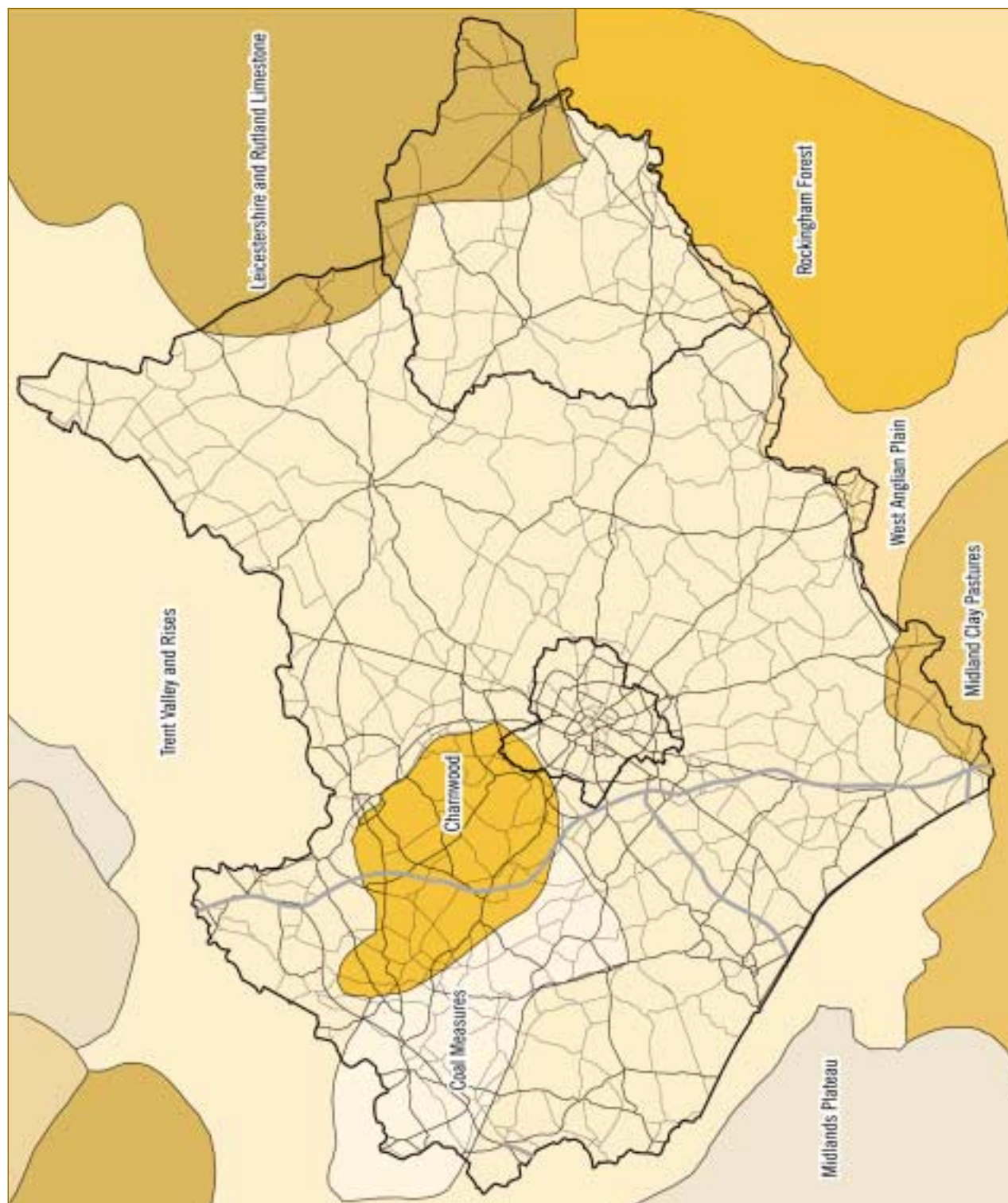


Fig. 2

English Nature Natural Areas

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland



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208 England Forestry Strategy

The England Forestry Strategy was published in 1999. Government policy is for sustainable management of existing woods and forests, and steady expansion of the woodland area to provide more benefits for society and the environment. The Strategy is based on four key programmes covering forestry for rural development, for economic regeneration, for recreation, access and tourism, and for the environment and conservation. Further details are given in Chapter 4 and Appendix 5.

The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy sits within the framework set by the England Forestry Strategy.

209 Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan

As one of five key documents the 1992 Earth Summit agreed a Convention on Biological Diversity. In response to this the UK Government published Biodiversity : the UK Action Plan in 1994. A Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan Audit was produced in 1996, followed in 1998 by the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).

The BAP sets out a vision for wildlife in the area in 2005 with targets for achieving this and outline mechanisms for delivery. It proposes a halt to the decline of biodiversity and the restoration of some of what has already been lost, through seventeen habitat action plans and fourteen species action plans. These will be supplemented by further plans as part of an ongoing process of plan production and revision. Some of the habitat action plans in particular have concerns which are shared with the issues addressed in the Strategy guidelines.

The BAP also identifies fifteen Biodiversity Areas, many of which show a clear correlation with the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland landscape character areas.

210 National Forest Strategy and Biodiversity Action Plan

The National Forest covers 502 sq km, of which about 256 sq km lies in the north-west of Leicestershire. The National Forest Strategy envisages woodland ultimately covering about one-third of the Forest's area, compared to about 6% at its inception. Land planted or committed for planting at March 2000 amounted to just over 11% of the Forest's area.

A landscape assessment was carried out in advance of the preparation of the National Forest Strategy and identified six regional landscape character areas. Four of these - the Mease Lowlands, Midland Coalfield, Charnwood, and Calke Uplands - accord broadly with the

Mease/Sence Lowlands, Coalfield, Charnwood Forest, and part of the Langley Lowlands landscape character areas identified in this Strategy.

The National Forest Strategy identifies "*preferred areas*" for woodland planting and "*sensitive areas*" where new planting may be limited by river floodplains, archaeological sites, historic parklands and areas of ecological value or geological interest. It also provides guidance on the nature and location of new planting so that it reflects the scale and character of the existing landscape in each of its regional landscape character areas or "*forest strategy zones*". The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy seeks to reinforce the vision set out in the National Forest Strategy.

The National Forest Company has also produced its own Biodiversity Action Plan. It includes twelve action plans for habitats of national importance, four for habitats of local importance, and seven for individual species. These action plans interlink with those of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland BAP.

2.11 Local Environment Agency Plans (LEAPs)

LEAPs are action plans prepared by the Environment Agency based upon local river catchments. They look at the catchment area in terms of its natural resources and identify key environmental issues to be addressed.

Much of the Strategy area is covered by the Welland and Soar LEAPs which were published in January and June 1998 respectively. A smaller part is covered by the Environment Agency's Tame Catchment Management Plan which preceded the production of LEAPs. This plan will be replaced by the Burton, Nuneaton and Tamworth LEAP which is currently in preparation. Another small part of the Strategy area is covered by the Lower Trent and Erewash LEAP. The consultation draft of this was published in February 1999, with the final plan scheduled for publication in November 1999.

LEAPs take an overview of the local environment, look at environmental issues and options for their resolution, and set targets. Their action plans will have five year horizons and be monitored annually. Although LEAPs cover a broader range of issues than the Strategy, the documents have many concerns and objectives in common.

3. The Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape*

3

301 Introduction

Leicestershire and Rutland lie at the heart of England, together bordering Nottinghamshire to the north, Lincolnshire to the east, Northamptonshire to the south and Warwickshire to the south-west, and touching on Derbyshire and Staffordshire at Leicestershire's western tip. The River Soar runs roughly south to north through Leicestershire, to join the River Trent just north of Kegworth. W. G. Hoskins regarded the Soar as forming a sharp dividing line between the east and west of the county, and to some extent this division is still apparent with the areas to the east of the Soar being generally more rural and those to the west being generally more industrialised and populated. Hoskins described Leicestershire as being, *"... generally dismissed by those who have merely driven through it on the A6 as flat, pretty well covered with red-brick towns and villages, with somewhere in the unseen background a lot of fox-hunting going on."* The truth then, as now, is that Leicestershire and Rutland are counties of considerable variety and complexity in their landscapes. This diversity is created by the varied physical and human influences that have acted on the land over time and by the underlying variations in the land itself.

The natural features of Leicestershire and Rutland have been described in detail in other publications and this chapter merely aims to give a brief description of the main factors which have influenced the development of the present day landscape character. It is the interaction of the different elements described in this chapter which has given rise to the landscape character differences described in Chapter 5.

302 Geology

The wide range of rock ages and types is a particular feature of Leicestershire and Rutland's geology (Fig 3: Solid Geology). However, over substantial parts of Leicestershire the underlying rocks are largely buried under a cover of unconsolidated sediments such as boulder clays (Fig 4: Drift Geology). This has the effect of creating landscapes where character area boundaries are not always clearly defined because of a lack of strong physical features. Along the valley of the Soar, and to a lesser extent along the Welland, Wreake and Trent, there are deposits of sands and gravel and the working of these has in places had a significant effect on present day landscape character.

The rocks of Charnwood Forest are some of the oldest in England and Wales. They consist of a mixture of Pre-Cambrian volcanic and sedimentary rocks, folded by later earth movements. The special geology of the Charnwood Forest area makes a strong contribution to its distinctive character. Younger intrusive igneous rocks occur around the edges of Charnwood Forest and have been quarried extensively for roadstone, for example at Shepshed, Cliffe Hill and Groby, and further south at Enderby, Stoney Stanton, Sapcote and Croft, with generally localised visual effects on landscape character.

* For the purposes of this chapter references to Leicestershire should be taken to include the area of the City of Leicester.

Fig. 3

Solid Geology

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland

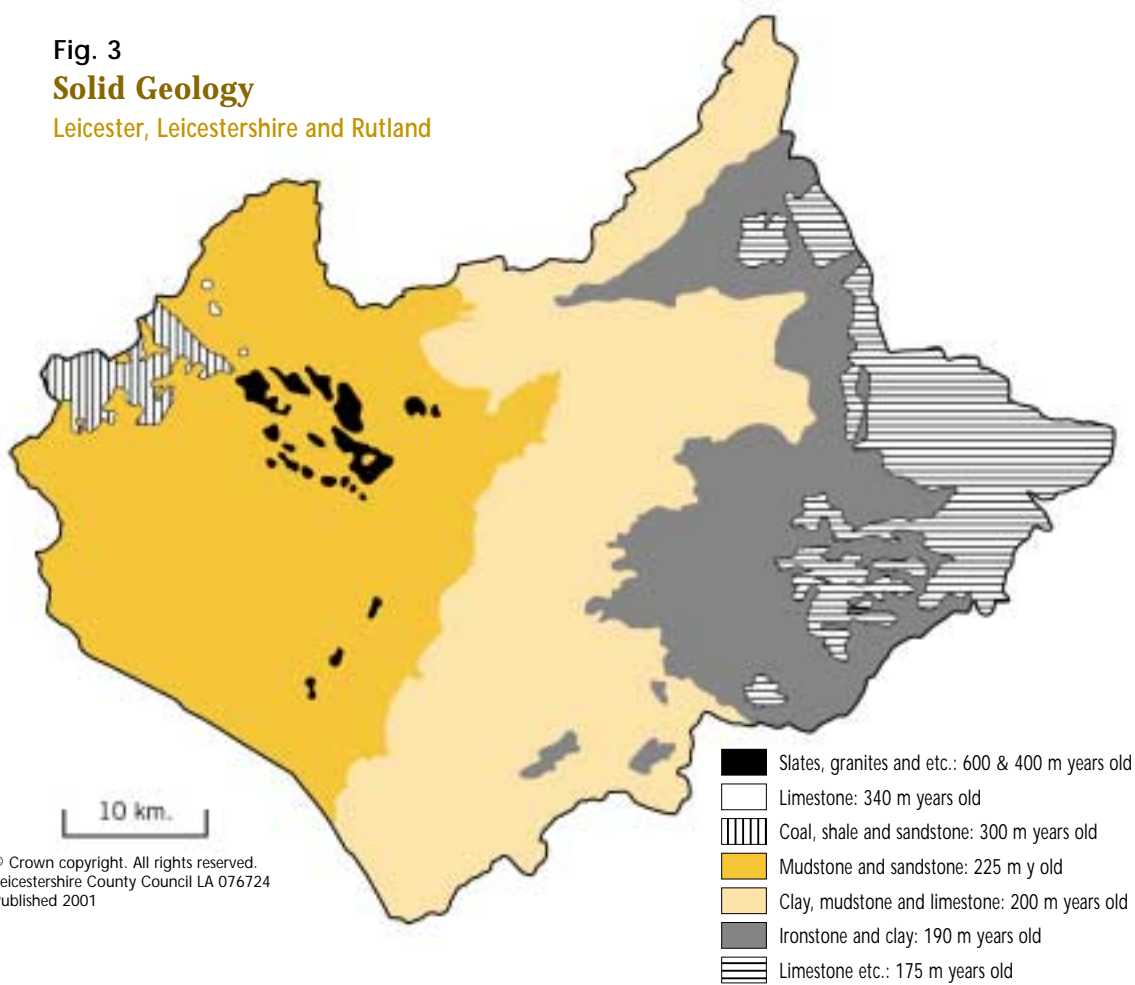
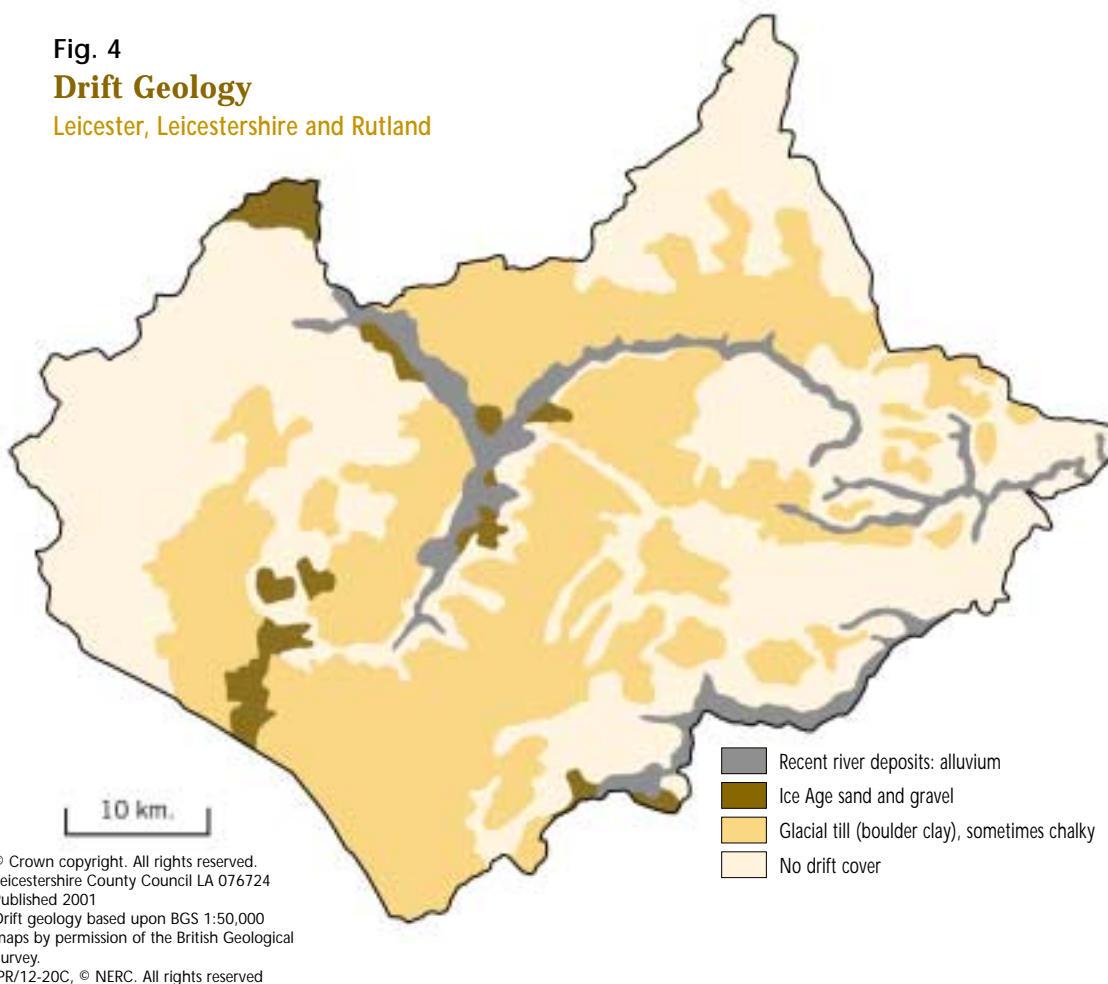


Fig. 4

Drift Geology

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland



The geology of the western half of Leicestershire consists of layers of younger Carboniferous and Triassic rocks, including sandstones and Carboniferous Limestone. The latter outcrops at Breedon Hill and Cloud Hill and is quarried at both locations with a significant impact on the Langley Lowlands landscape character area. The Carboniferous rocks consist in part of extensive Coal Measures, the working of which has influenced the present landscape character of much of the north-western part of Leicestershire, with many coal seams north of Measham and Heather lying within reach of open-cast mining techniques. The Coal Measures are very variable and include layers of fireclays and brick clays that have both been worked extensively. The Triassic Mercian Mudstone Group (Keuper Marl) underlies much of the west of Leicestershire and typically gives rise to a moderately undulating landscape. The Keuper Marl is also worked for brick making.

To the east of the River Soar the rocks consist of more recent Jurassic clays, ironstones and limestones. Thick clay formations alternate with thinner layers of limestones and ironstones, with the harder bands of limestone tending to stand out as small ridges. The highest parts of east Leicestershire, including the Belvoir Scarp and the Loughton Hills, consist of Marlstone that has formed a resistant capping above the clays. All of these rocks have been quarried in the past. Older workings were often on a modest scale and have not had a dramatic visual impact on the landscape but may have left features such as disused small pits and quarries which contribute to local landscape character. Opencast ironstone working was carried on around Eastwell and Eaton and near to Harston, Sproxton and Buckminster until the early 1970s but these workings have largely been restored to agricultural use.

In the extreme east of Leicestershire and in Rutland, even younger Jurassic limestones predominate, such as the pale stone quarried at Ketton that is used both as a building stone and for cement.

The geology is reflected visually in the landscape in traditional building materials. Much of Leicestershire building is in brick, but in eastern Leicestershire and Rutland warm brown ironstone is a common material. In the extreme east of the two counties the edge of the Lincolnshire limestone is reached and this is reflected in the building stone. Charnwood Forest is also a major area of stone building, usually with the distinctive Mountsorrel red granite and often also with locally quarried Swithland slates. Stone building is also in evidence around local outcrops such as those at Enderby, Stoney Stanton, Sapcote and Croft.

303 Landform and drainage

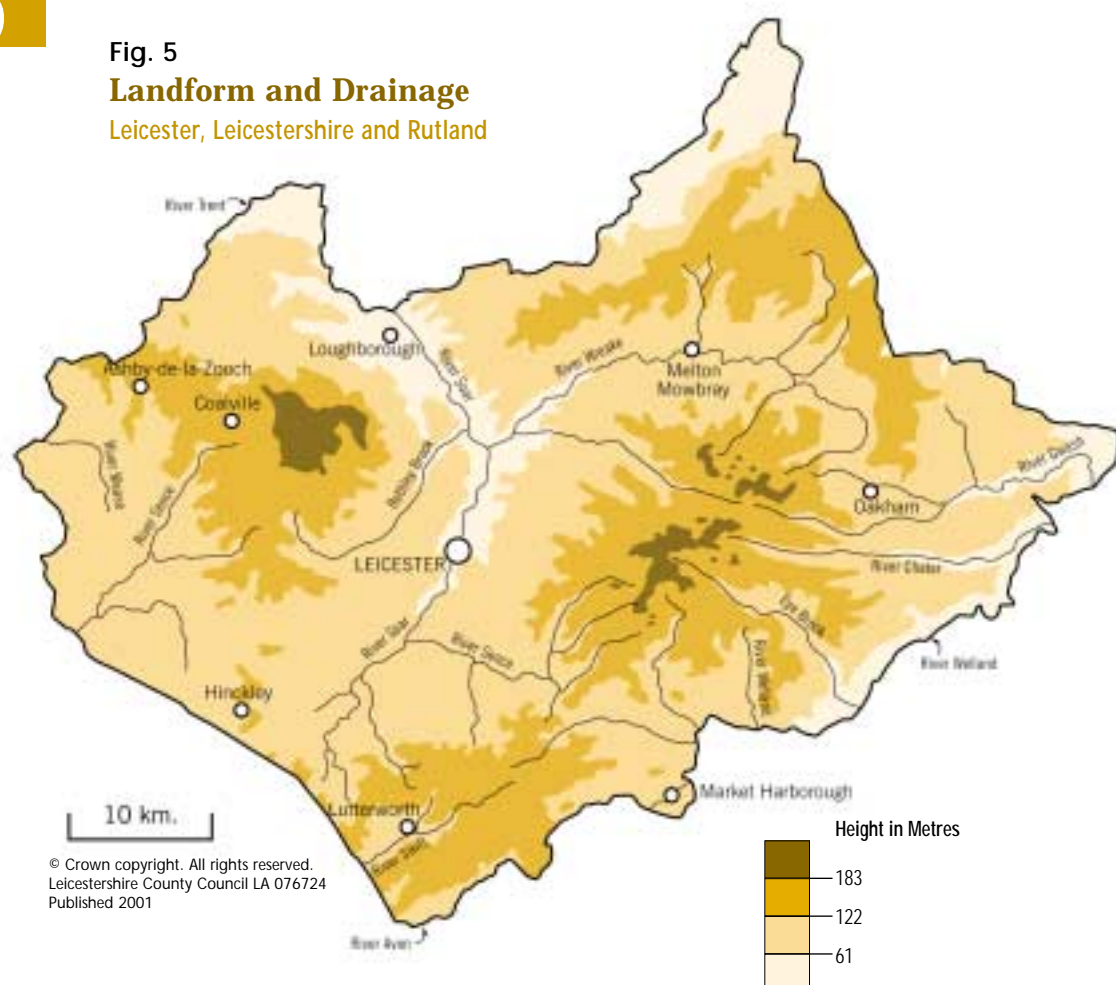
Leicestershire and Rutland are generally of moderate elevation, lying mainly between 60m and 180m above sea level. The lowest point in the two counties is near to the confluence of the Soar and Trent below Kegworth (27m) and the highest at Bardon Hill in Charnwood Forest (278m).

As Fig 5 shows, the broad floodplain of the Soar tends to divide Leicestershire roughly east/west with the Wreake forming its only major tributary. The Soar flows northwards to join

Fig. 5

Landform and Drainage

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland



the Trent, which for a few miles forms Leicestershire's northern boundary, and much of Leicestershire drains to the Trent either via the Soar or via the Mease.

The Pre-Cambrian rocks of Charnwood Forest form an isolated and distinctive area of high relief to the west of the Soar. Tilting, folding and erosion have created distinctive outcrops that contribute much to the area's landscape character. Swift flowing streams drain off this high area north and east into the Soar and south-west into the western River Sence. From Charnwood Forest a broad band of moderately high land extends westwards to the Leicestershire county boundary and beyond. The remainder of western Leicestershire typically consists of gently rolling landforms with few major contrasts in relief.

To the east of the Soar and south of the Wreake erosion of the Jurassic Lias Clays has resulted in a high, dissected plateau with numerous small stream valleys with clay floors and marlstone slopes, flowing either west or north into the Wreake or directly into the Soar, or south and east into the Welland or eastern River Sence. This ridge and valley topography forms the basis of the High Leicestershire landscape character area.

To the east of this plateau lies the broad shallow valley that forms the Vale of Catmose. The northern part of this valley drains to the Wreake, whilst the southern part drains to the Welland. To the east of the Vale lies another plateau area. In its northern part this rises steeply from the Vale before sloping gently to the east. In its southern part it has been more cut into by rivers

draining to the Welland, forming a gently rolling landform with shallow but sometimes steep-sided valleys separated by broad ridges.

In the southern part of Leicestershire a band of moderately high land, extending roughly from Market Harborough in the east to Lutterworth in the west, drains to the Avon and its tributary the Swift.

To the north of the Wreake lies the undulating upland of the Wolds, terminated by the abrupt Marlstone escarpment of the Belvoir Scarp which falls dramatically to the flat claylands of the Vale of Belvoir to the north-west. Much of the Wolds drains southwards to the Wreake/Eye and thence to the Soar.

Groby Pool, on the south-eastern flanks of the Charnwood Forest upland, is probably the only lake of natural origin within the area. A number reservoirs constructed in the late nineteenth century, including Swithland, Cropston, Thornton and Blackbrook, are located around Charnwood Forest fed by streams flowing off the higher land. Elsewhere reservoirs such as Saddington, Knipton and Eyebrook contribute visually and ecologically to the landscapes immediately around them, and Rutland Water now has a significant influence on the landscape character of the Vale of Catmose.

As a comparison of Fig 5 and the landscape character area map will show, Leicestershire and Rutland's landscape character areas are strongly influenced by landform, which in turn directly reflects the counties' solid and drift geology.

304 Climate

Climate affects landscape character through its effects on the natural vegetation and the constraints that it places on land use, including the choice of woodland and forestry species. To some extent it also influences our perception of the landscape - for example, in areas which are frequently windy or experience a high proportion of foggy or snowy days.

Within Leicestershire rainfall varies from 560mm in the south-east to around 700mm in the north-east and north-west. In Rutland the average rainfall is around 685mm. These figures compare with an average of 940mm for England and Wales, placing Leicestershire and Rutland amongst the drier counties on a national basis. Snow or sleet falls on 17-19 days a year on average, with snow lying for 12-15 days. Variations in precipitation and the length of time for which snow lies are mainly linked to elevation and a marked difference can be experienced within a very short distance, as for example between Charnwood Forest and the Soar Valley immediately to the east.

On average the growing season (i.e. minimum mean temperature exceeding 6°C) runs from April to mid November. Frosts are liable to occur over nine months of the year with the most severe frosts generally occurring in December, January and February. June, July and August are

usually free of frost. Local variations in temperature are related to the heat-island effect of the City of Leicester, and to a lesser extent the smaller urban areas, and to elevation. The latter is particularly marked in the case of Charnwood Forest and the higher parts of High Leicestershire, where it is reflected in place names such as Cold Overton and Cold Newton.

The prevailing wind in both counties is from the south-west, with winds from between the south-west and north-west predominant.

305 Soils and land use

Leicestershire and Rutland contain a mixture of soil types, their distribution reflecting mainly their parent material and local drainage conditions.

The soils weathered from the rocks of Charnwood Forest are often thin, stony and acidic. The Coal Measures to the west of Charnwood give rise to soils that are generally sandy and rather poor. Elsewhere in the western part of Leicestershire, the soils are mainly neutral clay loams.

The soils of eastern Leicestershire and Rutland are also largely clays, but more variable in character than those of western Leicestershire. The Lias Clays give rise to difficult to work clay soils, traditionally mainly under pasture, whilst the limestones and ironstones give lighter, more loamy soils more suited to arable usage. The better soils are thus generally found capping the hills and ridges. The Marlstone gives rise to reddish easily worked soils which are often calcareous and loamy or marl in character.

In terms of agricultural classification the counties' soils are predominantly Class 3, with relatively small areas of particularly good or particularly bad land. Soils in relation to forestry and woodlands are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Traditionally Leicestershire and Rutland were renowned as green counties, famous for their grasslands, dairy herds and sheep flocks, and with an extensive network of hedgerows, field ponds and fox covers, although much of this pattern of landscape dates only from the enclosures of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Much of the original natural woodland was probably cleared very early on and it is likely that the counties' present woodland cover of only 3.3% represents a situation that has existed for many centuries.

Agriculture remains the main land use in Leicestershire and Rutland but the proportion of land in arable cultivation has increased at the expense of pasture since World War II. Many hedgerows and field ponds have also been lost over the same period. Land cover statistics produced in 1994 from satellite mapping by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology show the following present day picture:

Land cover type	Total hectares	%	
Urban and suburban	31,624	12.40	
Tilled land	111,700	43.82	
Managed grassland	89,280	35.01	
Rough grass/bracken	865	0.34	
Heath grass/shrub heath	661	0.26	
Woodland*	10,920	4.29	
Bare ground	2,737	1.07	
Water	1,313	0.51	
Unclassified	2,677	1.05	

* includes areas of garden trees

Source: Land Cover Map of Great Britain, ITE Monks Wood, December 1994

306 Landscape development

Before Neolithic times the Leicestershire and Rutland landscape was largely wooded, occupied by a hunter-gatherer population. Neolithic farmers began to clear the woods and it is believed that tree clearance in the two counties during Neolithic and Bronze Age times was very widespread, so that by 1000BC much of the original woodland had probably been cleared.

Iron Age and Roman Leicestershire and Rutland was a predominantly agricultural landscape with the population distributed mainly in dispersed farmsteads. Iron Age hill forts existed at Burrough Hill and Breedon. The pattern of Roman roads largely radiated out from Leicester (Ratae Coritanorum), which was a regional capital of some importance, and is still evident in the landscape today. Watling Street, which ran from London to Wroxeter, still provides part of Leicestershire's boundary with Warwickshire. The Fosse Way which ran through Leicester north to Lincoln forms much of the line of the present day A46 and the road is still referred to locally as "*the Fosse*".

Between the withdrawal of the Romans and the Norman Conquest, first Anglo-Saxons and then Danes colonised the east Midlands, moving into Leicestershire and Rutland via the Rivers Trent and Welland, and selecting the best favoured sites for their settlements. This colonisation led to a change in the pattern of settlement from one of dispersed farmsteads to one of villages surrounded by collective open field farming systems. By Domesday most of the counties' villages and hamlets were in existence and the widespread evidence of ridge and furrow is an indication of how much land was ploughed at some time or another during the medieval period. At least fifty-five medieval hunting parks are known to have existed in Leicestershire and eleven in Rutland. Some of these still influence the counties' landscapes in both rural and urban areas - for example, Abbey Park in Leicester represents the remnants of the Abbot of Leicester's deer park, and elsewhere lowland wood-pasture habitats with ancient trees are traces of their existence.

Within this early established settlement pattern the population of Leicestershire and Rutland grew steadily until outbreaks of plague in the second half of the 14th century reduced it dramatically. This led to the desertion or severe reduction in size of some villages during the following hundred years or so, and a change from arable cultivation to grassland. Some of the earlier hunting parks were also abandoned at this time.

From the late 15th century onwards landowners enclosed land by planting hedges to form more manageable fields for sheep and cattle pasture, sometimes also leading to the loss of villages. New parkland creation at around the same time sometimes had the same effect, as at Noseley and Quenby where villages were depopulated and ploughland converted to sheep pasture. Enclosure continued steadily through the 16th and 17th centuries. Hoskins estimated that about 25% of Leicestershire was enclosed by the early 17th century and about 60% by the time of the first Enclosure Act in 1734. These earlier enclosures often have more irregular fields than the Parliamentary Enclosures which subsequently completed the enclosure process. There were of course wide local variations. For example, parts of the Welland Valley and Charnwood Forest were not enclosed until well into the 19th century. As well as the generally regular hedgerows, enclosure landscapes were also marked by the presence of field ponds for watering stock and fox covers created on poorer pasture areas to replace natural cover cleared by enclosure. Enclosure was often accompanied by the realignment of minor roads and their reconstruction to a standard width, giving characteristically straight rural roads with wide verges.

The 17th and 18th centuries were not only a great time of enclosures but also saw the making of many parks and the building of associated country houses. Between about 1660 and 1750 French and Dutch influences resulted in the development of formal park landscapes. Although many of these were swept away by the creation of naturalistic park landscapes in the latter part of the 18th century, some traces of such formal park landscapes remain, particularly in the form of avenues of trees, as at Stanford Hall and Burley on the Hill. In the second half of the 18th century Capability Brown and his followers dominated parkland design, creating typical English parkland landscapes with extensive sweeps of grass, groups of trees, lakes and vistas. Much of the parkland of Leicestershire and Rutland is characterised by this approach and Exton, Stapleford and Staunton Harold provide good examples.

One notable area of distinctively different landscape development is the historic mining landscape around Coleorton in the north-west of Leicestershire, where coal mining dates back at least to the 13th century. A dispersed pattern of settlement arose in connection with small scale mining, together with small fields, a dense network of footpaths, and bell pits and their associated spoil heaps. These features still contribute to the distinctiveness of this part of the Coalfield landscape character area.

Canals had localised impacts on the landscape from about 1770, as did railways in the following century. The Soar and Wreake Navigations were the earliest, followed by the Charnwood Forest Canal (completed 1796), Grantham Canal (1797), Oakham Canal (1804), Ashby Canal (1804) and Grand Union Canal (1814). The first railway line to open was the Leicester to Swannington line in 1832, and the last the Great Central line from Manchester and Sheffield to Marylebone in 1899. During the intervening 67 years over 400kms of railway (excluding mineral lines) were built within Leicestershire alone. Many of these canals and railways have been closed or fallen into disuse and in this form they frequently provide local landscape features, often with associated small woodlands or lines of trees and concentrations of sites of ecological value.

The development of the railways encouraged the development of coal mining in the north-west of Leicestershire, creating a host of new settlements in the form of colliery villages and small towns during the second half of the 19th century. At around the same period manufacturing industries began to develop. Although knitting frames were first introduced to the area at Hinckley in 1640, it was not until the first half of the 18th century that rapid development of the local framework knitting industry took place in Leicestershire, concentrated broadly along the valley of the Soar both north and south-west of Leicester, and not until the mid-19th century that power-driven machinery was introduced. The footwear industry developed from around the mid-19th century, located predominantly in Leicester and the surrounding villages, and in the south-west of Leicestershire in and around Barwell and Earl Shilton. Engineering industries also grew up, originally based on the mechanisation of the hosiery and footwear industries. The chief influence of these industrial developments upon landscape character has been through their effects on settlement pattern and development, which in turn has influenced the development of the major roads.

The past 40-50 years have seen a change from predominantly pasture farming to arable, stimulated in part by agricultural subsidies. Many hedgerows have been removed to create larger fields. Others have been overmanaged, or allowed to decline when there was no longer any need for them to function as a stockproof barrier. Hedgerow trees have also been lost, both to Dutch Elm Disease in the 1970s and through the removal of hedgerows. Woodland has also been lost to agricultural land use and urban development, although since the 1980s there have been attempts to reverse this trend. The decline in pasture has also led to a decline in field ponds and the loss of grazing animals from the landscape. The changing nature of farming has led to a change in farm buildings away from traditional brick or stone built barns, to larger storage or factory farming units.

Over the same period much countryside has been lost to built development and roads. Although built development has been fairly well regulated by firm planning policies, development layouts and building designs may not always have been appropriate to their local areas. The conversion of redundant farm buildings to dwellings, garden extensions, and ornamental planting have all contributed to a creeping suburbanisation of the countryside. The renovation of old buildings also has biodiversity implications because of their importance for rare species such as bats and barn owls.

Roads have had impacts not just through the land lost to new road corridors and widening or safety improvements to existing roads, but through the severance of field patterns and the introduction of urban features such as kerbs and signs to rural areas. Individually these impacts may be minor but cumulatively they erode local character.

Mineral resources have also been widely exploited, often on a much larger scale than in earlier times, affecting the landscape in terms of their visual impacts both during and after their working. Although there has been a decline in the number of field ponds, the development of large water features as a consequence of mineral extraction and farm diversification has resulted in a net increase in the counties' total area of standing water in the period since the 1960s.

307 Landscape change

Predicting future landscape change is very difficult and many of the factors which might bring about changes in the landscape are beyond the control or influence of the planning system. The main factors which might be expected to enter the equation are discussed briefly in this section. However, whilst seeking to maintain local character and diversity it must be remembered that the present day landscape reflects the changes that have taken place over hundreds of years, and that change is not necessarily a negative influence.

3.07.01 Agricultural land use

The appearance and character of the countryside have traditionally been dependent on a viable agricultural sector. Agriculture will continue to be the main land use within the Strategy area and the need to maintain a flexible and efficient agricultural industry must be recognised alongside other considerations.

Planning controls can influence such matters as farm diversification and the development of farm-based recreational and tourism facilities, but land use itself is most strongly influenced by agricultural policy, and one of the most significant influences on the appearance of the English landscape is the European Community's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The European Commission has set out changes in a document, Agenda 2000, which seeks to reduce the production-related support for agriculture and allow member states greater discretion in allocating their budgets.

In summary the proposals for CAP reform are based on:

- reduction in production-related support for the beef, cereal and, to a lesser extent, dairy sectors
- medium term compensation for loss of income to farmers
- abolition of compulsory set-aside.
- introduction of ceilings for covering all direct income payments but greater discretion in the criteria chosen in making payments to farmers.

The detailed land management impacts of these proposals are difficult to assess but changes in the following areas are likely:

- a long term reduction in land values, particularly in less productive land classes, which could have the effect of making woodland planting a more attractive investment
- member states will have a fixed overall budget and be able to balance forestry funding against a series of other agri-environment measures - it is unlikely that forestry will have ring fenced funding
- rural development is likely to be increasingly integrated, presenting opportunities for multi-purpose forestry to access funds from development, tourism, environment, job creation and agricultural diversification programmes.

The higher profile given to environmental protection and sustainable development within CAP and the emphasis on more extensive, low-input farming, and agri-environment schemes, may

lead to a more environmentally aware agricultural system. In the long term new incentives may encourage more environmentally sensitive farming with perhaps a return to more traditional mixed farming regimes.

In accordance with the Agenda 2000 proposals the England Rural Development Programme 2000-2006 has been prepared by MAFF in consultation with farmers and a wide range of bodies with rural interests. The Programme aims to switch farm spending from production support to schemes which boost the broader rural economy, advance environmentally beneficial farming practices, and help to modernise and restructure the farming industry. Key features of the Programme are :

- Agri-environment measures - substantial expansion of agri-environment schemes, mostly directed towards the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, to bring about improved conservation of the landscape, wildlife and historic heritage of the countryside. There will also be a significant increase in support for conversion to organic farming.
- Woodland - increased support for both the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme and the Woodland Grant Scheme. A new Energy Crops Scheme will provide grants and other support to encourage planting of short rotation coppice and miscanthus (elephant grass) in suitable locations.
- Rural enterprise - a new Rural Enterprise Scheme to provide project based support for the development of more sustainable, diversified and enterprising rural economies and communities. A new Processing and Marketing Grant aims to encourage innovation and improve marketing of quality agricultural products.
- Livestock and dairy production - livestock payments will continue to be made on a headage basis but will be controlled by quotas, headage limits and stocking densities. An Extensification Payment Scheme is to be introduced. This will require producers to declare if they wish to participate in the Scheme and if so undertake to keep their stocking densities below certain limits.
- Training - a new Vocational Training Scheme to broaden the skills base of the agriculture and forestry workforce.

The funding for the above measures will be found from modulation of direct payments to farmers under the CAP commodity regimes from 2001. These cuts will be introduced at 2.5 % rising to 4.5 % in 2005 and 2006. The reduction in direct payments will affect most farms, whilst the rural development measures are likely to benefit only the smaller number of farms that are providing environmental and public benefits or are restructuring.

3.07.02 Woodlands and hedges

Forestry and woodland matters are covered in more detail in Chapter 4. However, the proposed programme actions of the England Forestry Strategy (set out in Appendix 5) clearly have implications for changing the appearance and character of many landscapes, and within the National Forest area the target of one-third woodland cover will radically change the character of parts of Leicestershire.

It is perhaps too early to tell whether or not the 1997 Hedgerow Regulations will have much impact in stemming the loss of hedges. However, as the Government has already announced an intention to review them and as few Hedge Retention Notices have been served to date, it seems likely that their impact will be limited.

Should a fox hunting ban be approved there would be particular implications for the Leicestershire and Rutland countryside in terms of small woodland and hedgerow management.

3.07.03 Urban growth and countryside around towns

Although the planning system proved to be an effective mechanism for protecting the countryside in the second half of the 20th century, intense development pressures remain. In 1996 the Government estimated that 4 million new homes would be required over the next twenty years, of which it suggested that 40% might need to be built on greenfield sites.

The countryside around towns is particularly vulnerable, affected amongst other things by the development of roads, shopping centres, science parks, retail parks, sewage farms and organised recreational activities. The tendency of all of these developments is to weaken the underlying landscape character of these areas.

Both around towns and in the wider countryside, there are also threats to landscape character through a creeping suburbanisation brought about through such things as the creation of pony paddocks, extension of gardens, use of standardised building and landscaping materials, and planting of inappropriate tree species and flowering bulbs.

The anticipated continuing growth of car ownership and road transport will have impacts on landscape character through road developments and improvements and recreational traffic pressures on rural areas. Recreational land uses can also change the appearance of the landscape - for example in the case of golf courses, where the land is still open and substantially free from built development, but the character of the landscape is often lost.

3.07.04 Other factors

In recent years the demand for communications towers and masts has increased and their positioning can have a significant impact on the landscape. Planning consent is required for the erection of some of the more obtrusive types of equipment, but some developments are permitted under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995. Against this it should be remembered that a few masts may contribute to the character of an area by creating landmark features - for example, the Waltham transmitter on the Wolds.

Whilst debate continues on global warming, any climatic changes would have effects on the appearance and character of the Leicestershire and Rutland landscape. In the relatively short term there could be alterations to existing patterns of agriculture, through shifts in the type, range and viability of cropping and cultivation. Over the longer term, there could be changes to the distribution of native plant species and habitats, and implications for existing plant and animal biodiversity, and the potential for future woodland.

4. Leicestershire and Rutland Woodlands*

4

4.01 Introduction

Leicestershire and Rutland have a woodland cover of 3.3% (*Forestry Commission, 1982*) compared to an average of 7.3% for the English counties. Both counties are intensively farmed with 78% of land in agricultural use.

The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy incorporates the aims of the Government's sustainable forestry policy, which is outlined in The UK Forestry Standard, 1998 and A New Focus for England's Woodlands (England Forestry Strategy), 1999. Together with the three authorities' Structure Plan policies these aims may be summarised as:

- sustainable management of existing woodland
- continued steady expansion of the woodland area to provide more benefits for society and the environment.

Detailed Structure Plan policies relating to landscape and woodlands are given in Appendix 3. The England Forestry Strategy is based on the above aims and has the following four key programmes (a detailed list of proposed actions is given in Appendix 5) :

- 📌 **Forestry for Rural Development** covers forestry's contribution to the rural economy including timber and marketing opportunities, and the management of existing and planting of new woodlands to deliver more economic benefits.
- 📌 **Forestry for Economic Regeneration** outlines the opportunities for woodlands to play a positive role in strategic land use planning. These include restoring former industrial land and creating a green setting for future urban and urban fringe development.
- 📌 **Forestry for Recreation, Access and Tourism** describes what can be done to promote more and better quality public access to woodlands. The programme includes opportunities for woodlands to continue to be used for a wide range of recreational activities that support the tourist industry.
- 📌 **Forestry for the Environment and Conservation** covers the role that woodlands have in conserving and enhancing the environment and our cultural heritage. Woodlands have an important role in delivering both national and local Biodiversity Action Plan targets and in achieving climate change objectives. This programme also considers the impact that woodland creation may have on the environment and other land uses.

Implementation of the England Forestry Strategy will be achieved, amongst other means, through partnership initiatives, a more flexible Woodland Grant Scheme and the targeting of areas for woodland creation through regional and local agendas.

Draft Regional Planning Guidance for the East Midlands endorses a regional woodland planting target of an additional 65,000ha by 2021. Within Leicestershire and Rutland a reasonable share of the region's target would be 14,346ha of new woodland planting

* For the purposes of this chapter references to Leicestershire should be taken to include the area of the City of Leicester

(including 6,780ha in the Leicestershire part of the National Forest). Overall this would represent just over a two and half times increase in woodland cover, approximately half of which would be located within the National Forest. This would provide a woodland cover for Leicestershire and Rutland of 8.6% by 2021.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the European Commission is proposing changes to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). These changes, which have not yet been endorsed by the member states, relate to the enlargement of the European Union and are referred to as Agenda 2000. This package includes the introduction the Rural Development Regulations, which will replace the existing regulation on the afforestation of agricultural land and other forestry measures, and will seek to achieve better integration of environmental, forestry and rural support measures. The Agenda 2000 package also includes proposals for reform of the structural funds that include a clearer commitment to promote sustainable development and environmental protection.

The potential changes in land use arising from the above factors are not controlled by planning legislation and in order to manage and guide such changes a strategy is required which identifies the opportunities for and constraints on new woodland planting. At the same time, the counties' existing woodland is of considerable landscape and nature conservation value and this is recognised in the Strategy. Chapter 6 covers landscape and woodland objectives and guidelines both county-wide and for each landscape character area.

4.02 Soils for forestry and woodland

Soil is an important factor influencing both the nature of existing woodlands and the establishment of new woodlands. The classification of soils for forestry is concerned principally with the physical characteristics that influence root development, and hence tree stability, and the chemical properties that affect nutrient availability.

Physical factors such as soil depth, soil water regime, aeration and compaction control root growth and function. The ability of soils to provide nutrients will depend on the mineral composition of the soil, whether derived from bedrock or drift material. It is these characteristics which determine the selection of woodland species and the rates of growth which may be achieved, particularly for productive conifer species.

The basic soil classification for forestry is divided into three categories :

- **brown earths** freely drained, loamy textured, slightly acid soils; usually fertile with good rooting conditions.
- **lowland gleys** mainly heavy clay soils, often calcareous in the subsoil; poor aeration in winter restricts rooting to the topsoil but the soils are usually fertile.
- **calcareous soils (rendzinas)** found on chalk and limestone rocks; where they are shallow over bedrock they provide difficult conditions for tree growth because of lime induced chlorosis.

In general soils are not a significant constraint to the establishment of woodlands in Leicestershire and Rutland. Those derived from solid geology are mainly brown earths in the west and rendzinas in the east. Those derived from drift geology tend to be surface water gleys in the central part of the Leicestershire and ground water gleys associated with alluvial deposits in the river valleys such as the Soar and the Wreake.

A wide range of industrial and mineral extraction sites are found in the Strategy area, with associated disturbance to the natural soils. Such sites provide opportunities for woodland planting as part of land restoration schemes but often their soils are poor in structure due to compaction by heavy machinery. Soil materials on restoration sites may have other undesirable properties such as extremes of texture and stoniness. Prior to woodland planting on these sites it is often necessary to relieve compaction by ripping to improve drainage and aeration, thus allowing tree roots to penetrate the soil.

4.03 The Leicestershire and Rutland woodland resource

Leicestershire and Rutland together cover an area of 255,293ha of which 8861ha (3.3%) is woodland and 199,128ha (78%) is agricultural land. These figures are based on the Forestry Commission's Census of Woodland and Trees 1979-82, which surveyed all woodlands over 0.25ha using Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 maps and aerial photographs. The size of woodland blocks is defined as, small 0.25-9.99ha, medium 10.00-50.00ha and large over 50.00ha.

Since 1991/92 there has been 1120ha of new tree planting in Leicestershire and Rutland under the Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme. This total planting area consists of 978ha of broadleaves and 142ha of conifers. The largest areas of planting were within the National Forest boundaries in the districts of North West Leicestershire and Hinckley and Bosworth.

TABLE 1
LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND WOODLAND PLANTING 1992 - 1998

Source: Forestry Commission 1998

	Broadleaves area ha	Conifer area ha
Blaby DC	33.62	2.59
Charnwood BC	74.49	6.64
Harborough DC	149.99	14.25
Hinckley and Bosworth BC	240.38	25.13
Melton BC	98.73	10.97
N.W. Leicestershire DC	248.74	74.55
Oadby and Wigston BC	0.00	0.00
Rutland UA	138.16	8.13
Total	978.61	142.26

4.03.01 Ancient woodlands

The term ancient woodland applies to woodlands that have existed from 1600 without having being cleared for uses other than woodland.

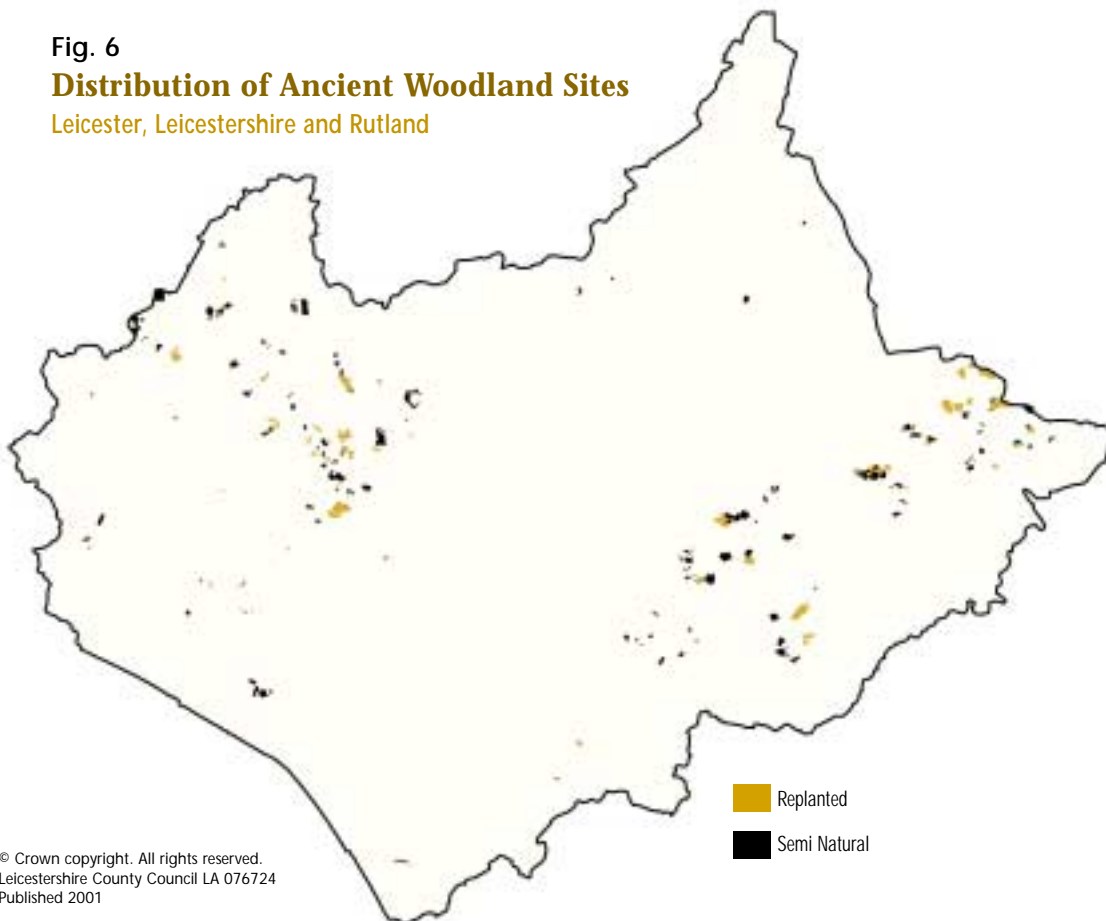
English Nature compiled a Register of Ancient Woodlands in 1983, which was revised in 1990. This identified 146 ancient woodland sites in Leicestershire and Rutland, totalling 2,575ha or 53% of all woodland in the two counties. Thirty-five of these sites have a statutory nature conservation designation and all are protected by a specific policy in the Structure Plan (see Appendix 3).

The counties' remaining ancient woodlands are concentrated into discrete areas which are characterised by distinct plant communities. As Fig. 6 shows, most of the ancient woodland that is left is found on the heavy clays of the former Leicester Forest, Leighfield Forest and the poor soils of Charnwood Forest.

Fig. 6

Distribution of Ancient Woodland Sites

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland



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4.03.02 Distribution of forest types and principal species

TABLE 2

LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND AREA OF WOODLAND BY FOREST TYPE

Source: Forestry Commission, 1983

	Area ha.	% of Total
Mainly Coniferous High Forest	879	11
Mainly Broadleaved High Forest	5536	72
Total	6415	83
Coppice with Standards	7	<1
Coppice	8	<1
Scrub	1258	16
Cleared	53	1
Total	7741	100

The two categories of mainly conifer or broadleaved high forest were derived by allocating each high forest stand to either the broadleaved or conifer category, depending on if 50% or more of the area comprised broadleaved or conifer species.

More than 80% of the woodland area is High Forest whilst, Coppice, Scrub and Cleared account for the remaining 20%.

- 🌲 **Mainly Coniferous High Forest** - this accounts for less than 15% of the High Forest area. Over 80% of the conifer planting was carried out from 1940 onwards and the area under this forest type has doubled since 1947. The Forestry Commission has planted mainly Norway spruce whilst private owners have tended to plant European larch and Scots pine.
- 🌲 **Mainly Broadleaved High Forest** - there has been considerable increase in this forest type since 1947. Two thirds of oaks originated before 1900, whilst a third of the ash and sycamore appeared in the decade 1941-50 as a result of re-planting and natural regeneration on sites that had been devastated or felled during World War II.
- 🌲 **Coppice and Coppice with Standards** - this type of forest management has declined significantly since the end of the 19th century with only 7ha. of Coppice with Standards and 8ha. of Coppice currently in active management. Areas under previous coppice management have now become High Forest, either by the standards closing the canopy or by singling of coppice stems.
- 🌲 **Scrub** - this is woodland that is of poor form with unmarketable species such as hawthorn and elder. There has been very little change in the total area of scrub over the years.
- 🌲 **Cleared** - this area may have been converted into agriculture or developed for other uses.

TABLE 3

LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND AREA OF HIGH FOREST BY PRINCIPAL SPECIES

Source: Forestry Commission, 1983

	Total area of all woodland - ha	% of all species
Scots pine	231	20.4
Corsican pine	60	5.3
Lodgepole pine	6	0.6
Sitka spruce	5	0.5
Norway spruce	312	27.6
European larch	213	18.9
Japanese/hybrid larch	39	3.4
Douglas fir	7	0.6
Other conifers	103	9.1
Mixed conifers	154	13.6
Total conifers	1130	100.0
Oak	1546	29.2
Beech	345	6.5
Sycamore	391	7.4
Ash	1336	25.4
Birch	361	6.8
Poplar	219	4.1
Sweet chestnut	28	0.5
Elm	58	1.2
Other broadleaves	259	4.9
Mixed broadleaves	741	14.0
Total broadleaves	5285	100.0
Total	6415	

4.03.03 Native woodland types

Woodland stand types are classified using the National Vegetation Classification (NVC) developed by Rodwell (1991). Three principal types of native woodland are found in Leicestershire and Rutland.

🌿 Ash- Field Maple with Dog's Mercury - NVC Woodland W8

This woodland type is found on the calcareous clay soils, basic brown earths and rendzinas that occur in eastern Leicestershire and Rutland. Ash is the dominant tree with oak and field maple. Other trees found include birch, holly, crab apple and grey willow. The shrub understorey is predominantly hazel and hawthorn and, depending on local soil type, can include blackthorn, elder, guelder rose, goat willow, dogwood and wild privet. The ground flora tends to be species-rich and includes dog's mercury, bluebell, wood anemone, primrose, common dog violet, yellow archangel, lords and ladies and ramsons.

🌿 Oak- Birch with Bluebell - NVC Woodland W10

This woodland type is found typically on moderately acidic brown earths and base - poor gley soils such as those of Charnwood Forest. Oak and silver birch are the dominant trees, with both pedunculate and sessile oak species occurring. Sessile oak is found principally in Charnwood Forest and on the border between Rutland and

Lincolnshire at Newall Wood, which is located on glacial sand and gravel. Other trees associated with this oak woodland include holly, rowan and downy birch. The shrub layer consists of hazel and hawthorn, with other species such as blackthorn, elder, guelder rose, gorse and broom. The field layer consists of bluebell, wood anemone and honeysuckle, but is often dominated by brambles and bracken.

Alder Woodland with Stinging Nettle - NVC Woodland W6

This woodland type is restricted to the banks of streams and marshy ground - a good example can be found adjacent to Groby Pool. Alder and crack willow are the dominant tree species, with downy birch, ash, pedunculate oak, holly and goat willow. The shrub layer consists of grey willow, elder, hawthorn, guelder rose and blackthorn. The field layer typically consists of stinging nettle, common reed, great willowherb and butterbur.

4.03.04 Ownership of woodlands

In Leicestershire and Rutland 85.7% of woodland is in private ownership — this compares to the national average of 66.0%. Local authorities and the Forestry Enterprise own a modest 8.1% and 6.2% of the woodland area respectively. These figures indicate the importance of private woodlands for the landscape character of the two counties.

TABLE 4
LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND OWNERSHIP OF WOODLANDS

Source: Forestry Commission, 1983, updated 1998

Owner	Area owned - ha
Forestry Enterprise	542 ha. (40ha to be sold)
Local Authorities	370 ha.
Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust	340 ha.
Woodland Trust	290 ha. (120ha mature woods, 170ha new planting)
Private Owners	7199 ha.

4.03.05 Small woodlands

In Leicestershire and Rutland there are a significant number of woodlands that are less than 10ha in area.

TABLE 5
LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND AREA OF SMALL WOODLANDS

Source: Forestry Commission, 1983

	Woodlands 0.25-1.99ha	Woodlands 2.00-9.99ha
Total number of woods	1022	502
Total area of woods	1191ha	2006ha
Mean area of woods	1.20ha	4.00ha

The 1524 small woodlands are evenly distributed in the two counties. They tend to be prominent features in both agricultural and urban areas and contribute significantly to

landscape character. Small woodlands are also important sites for nature conservation.

4.03.06. Non-woodland trees

The 1979-82 Forestry Commission census estimated that 919,130 non-woodland trees were present in the two counties, divided into three groups :

- 🌳 isolated trees - 37%
- 🌳 clumps (groups of trees less than 0.25ha in area) - 25%
- 🌳 linear features (strips of woody vegetation less than 20m wide and more than 25m long) - 38%.

Isolated trees

The estimated total of 343,170 isolated trees was divided into two categories. 246,940 trees were growing on major land use boundaries such as hedges, walls and banks, while 96,480 trees were found to be growing in open positions, which includes trees growing in urban areas. The principal species were oak and ash, with cypresses the predominant urban tree.

Clumps

There were 80,480 clumps covering 1355ha and containing 229,560 trees. Ash and oak were the predominant species.

Linear features

The census found 1220km of linear features, which included avenues and narrow shelter belts. They contained 346,400 trees of which ash predominated, although sycamore and lime were found in significant numbers.

Management of non-woodland trees

Non-woodland trees, which are found in gardens, hedgerows, clumps and as avenue trees, make up an area of 2058ha which is significant when compared with the total woodland area of 7741ha. The non-woodland trees have an important visual impact both on the urban and rural landscape. It is therefore of concern that significant numbers of hedgerow ash in particular are showing signs of die-back. Mature or veteran trees are an important habitat for wildlife and consequently are covered by a Habitat Action Plan in the counties' Biodiversity Action Plan. In addition lowland wood-pasture and parklands that are made up of open grown ancient trees and a matrix of often unimproved grassland have also recently been covered by a Habitat Action Plan.

Trees in urban and suburban areas are recognised for their amenity value in that they soften the built environment, provide screening and filter pollution. They have recently come under increasing threat from the installation of underground communication cables in verges and footways and from property owners concerned about subsidence.

The amenity value of trees and woodlands is protected by Tree Preservation Orders, administered by County and District Councils. Trees in Conservation Areas are also protected

and an owner must give the relevant District Council six weeks notice prior to carrying out felling operations. This allows the District Council to make a Tree Preservation Order on the tree if it has visual amenity value.

4.04 Woodland management and new planting

4.04.01 Management of existing woodlands

Woodlands in Leicestershire and Rutland have been subject to management for many centuries and this has influenced both the structure of the woodlands and their species composition. The industrial revolution of the 19th century and the rapid technological changes of the 20th century together made redundant the woodland products that had traditionally been derived from small diameter coppice timber. Consequently the traditional management practices of 6-7 year cutting cycles for hazel and 15-20 year cycles for ash and oak had practically ceased by the 1940s. The majority of these woodlands were then converted to conifer or broadleaved high forest and the coppice layer only retained where sporting uses were the main objective.

The present day management of existing woodlands is variable throughout the two counties, with some small woods being intensively managed for fox hunting and other field sports whilst others have had no management in the last 50 years. A significant number of woodlands, particularly in the Charnwood Forest area, have been protected by Tree Preservation Orders since 1949 and consequently some woodlands appear to have been undermanaged in the past.

Tree felling is subject to control by the Forestry Act 1967, administered by the Forestry Commission. A woodland owner must apply for a Felling Licence if he intends to fell more than 5 cubic metres of timber in any one quarter, 2 cubic metres of which may be sold and 3 cubic metres must be retained for use on the estate.

Ancient and ancient semi-natural woodlands are of particular importance for nature conservation and future management of these woodlands is important if their value is to be conserved. The Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan is useful in providing guidelines for management and the England Woodland Strategy outlines actions that the Forestry Commission will take in guiding the management of ancient and ancient semi-natural woodland. These include establishing the English Native Woodlands Partnership, targeting the Woodland Grant Scheme to reverse the fragmentation of existing ancient semi-natural woodlands, and helping with the preparation of management plans.

Leighfield Forest has a number of large to medium sized ancient semi-natural woodlands and has been identified as an area where new native woodlands could be established to reverse the fragmentation of ancient woodland. The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust is co-ordinating with government agencies, landowners and Leicestershire County Council to develop an Action Plan for the Leighfield Forest area. The Forestry Enterprise, as the owners of

ancient semi-natural woodlands that have been planted with non-native species in the past, are developing policies to restore these Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) to a semi-natural character.

There is a growing interest in developing alternative woodland management systems to that of clear felling and replanting. These woodland management systems are commonly in use in Europe and are referred to as Continuous Cover Forestry. These systems generally promote establishment of new trees by planned natural regeneration. It is therefore essential that the woodland owner draws up a long term management plan. The England Woodland Strategy includes a proposal to provide funding to support the introduction of Long Term Plans for the management of woodlands.

4.04.02 New woodland planting

The Strategy objectives and guidelines in Chapter 6 identify new woodland planting as an objective for all character areas, although the principal tree species and preferred size of wood may differ. The England Forestry Strategy identifies four key target areas for woodland creation:

- 🌱 planting of larger woodlands, where they can bring greater benefits
- 🌱 planting of woodlands in countryside around towns to provide both access for the public and to involve local people in establishing and managing community woodlands
- 🌱 restoration of former industrial land
- 🌱 reversing the fragmentation of ancient woodland

The choice of species and layout of new woodlands depends on the aims and objectives of the landowner and physical factors such as annual rainfall, soil type and exposure.

Landowners usually have more than one objective when considering woodland planting and often wish to combine timber production, sporting uses, nature and landscape conservation in their planting proposals. There is guidance available from the Forestry Commission on the choice of species for timber production and on the successful establishment of new native woodlands, either by planting and by natural colonisation where it is found to be occurring. The choice of species to be planted when establishing new native woodland should be based on the NVC woodland type found in the character area. Although the scientific understanding of the origin of native species is still very limited, recent work by the Forestry Commission has identified map-based local seed zones for native species. This will allow landowners to identify which species of native tree and shrub are located in their area and, using the numbering system on the map, to specify the most appropriate local seed zone for plant material.

It is important that the expansion of woodland cover does not affect the distinctiveness of the local landscape character area or damage areas of existing important habitat. To ensure that this does not occur the Forestry Commission subjects each Woodland Grant Scheme application to a range of environmental checks. The application is then added to the Public Register of New

Planting that is placed on the Forestry Commission's website. Leicestershire County Council's Archaeological Section within the Museums, Arts and Records Service is a consultee on all Woodland Grant Schemes within the county, and schemes over 10ha are subject to statutory consultation with the relevant County Council.

New regulations on the environmental impact assessment of forestry projects came into force in England and Wales in September 1999. The scope of the regulations includes afforestation, deforestation, forest road works and forest quarry works that may have significant environmental effects. Thresholds for projects in non-sensitive areas are 5ha for afforestation, 1ha for deforestation, 1ha for forest road works and 1ha for forest quarry works. The Forestry Commission will monitor the requirements for environmental impact assessments through Felling Licence Applications and the Woodland Grant Scheme. Taking into consideration the average area of planting schemes and felling operations, it is unlikely that many forestry projects in Leicestershire and Rutland will be subject to environmental impact assessments.

4.04.03 Timber production

Timber production is one of the objectives of woodland management. The sale of timber represents the owners' return on their capital investment and the rates of return vary from 0.5 to 2.0% for hardwoods and up to 7.0% for softwoods. Historically the value of timber in general has increased at a rate slightly above that of inflation, but fluctuations in demand for timber can affect prices in the short term and influence the decisions of woodland owners to carry out thinning or felling operations.

The principal timber producing species in the two counties are:

- 🌲 **Conifers (softwoods)** - Scots pine, Corsican pine, larch, Norway spruce.
- 🌳 **Broadleaves (hardwoods)** - ash, beech, oak, poplar, sycamore.

There tends to be a ready market for good quality large dimension hard and softwood, provided it is available in sufficient quantity to make it economic to harvest and transport to sawmills.

There are a number of small sawmills in the two counties, providing a local market for both hard and softwood timber that is mainly utilised for fencing and pallets. A few of the larger estates have retained their own sawmilling facilities. Low value timber such as hard and soft small round wood, has to be transported by road up to 150miles to paper or chipboard mills located on the North Wales coast and Welsh Borders respectively. The development of the National Forest will result in marketable quantities of small round wood that may encourage the development of local timber processing facilities. An alternative development could be the siting of either a biomass power station or a number of small scale biomass heat and power plants in the National Forest area, to take advantage of the supplies of small round wood and timber residues. If this development should it occur would make the planting of Short Rotation Coppice on farm land a more viable land use.

There is an increasing interest in the use of coppice timber for traditional woodland products

such as Windsor chairs and charcoal manufactured in portable metal kilns. However, the volume of timber utilised in these operations remains small.

Marketing timber is very dependent on price and haulage distance to the sawmill or processing plant and a network of reliable felling contractors. To bring together woodland owners with small parcels of timber to sell and potential buyers, a marketing service called Woodlots has been set up. This is a subscriber service that is available to all sellers and purchasers of timber and timber products. A further recent development has been the setting up by the Forestry Commission, in partnership with other government agencies, local authorities and woodland management projects, of an East Midlands Regional Timber Marketing Group to co-ordinate research into the regional woodland resource and potential new markets for wood. An important new market for wood has been identified as biomass energy. The Forestry Commission is currently in discussion with a company that is running a biomass heating scheme called Wood Heat in south-west England, with the intention of exploring the possibilities of setting up a similar scheme in the East Midlands Region.

Due to high exchange rates and the availability of cheap imports from the Baltic States there have been recent difficult economic conditions for home grown timber. In order to give home grown timber a marketing advantage and comply with consumers' expectations that they are purchasing a sustainable and environmentally friendly product, the Forestry Commission, together with forestry industry bodies, has set up the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS). This scheme provides a chain of certification for both the woodland owner and the timber processor which verifies that the timber or timber products have been produced from woodlands and processed in such a way that they comply with international environmental standards. The timber or timber product will then carry a stamp to confirm that it has been certified and complies with the international environmental standards. It is hoped that the UKWAS will give home grown certified timber an advantage over non-certified imported timber and subsequently invigorate the home grown market, giving landowners the confidence to plant more woodland.

5. Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape Character Areas

5

5.01 Introduction

The first Leicestershire county landscape appraisal (including Rutland and the City of Leicester area) was completed in 1976 and identified twenty-three "*landscape character zones*" based on a consideration of geology, landform, soils, land capability, vegetation, woodland, land use and field pattern.

Over the two decades since the landscape character zone map was prepared there have been significant forces of change affecting the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland landscape including :

- continued urban growth
- new road building, including the M42 and M69 and many local by-passes
- out of town retail and commercial developments
- continuing agricultural change
- Dutch Elm Disease in the late 1970s
- development of the new landscape around Rutland Water
- closure of pits in the coalfield
- development of the National Forest

In assessing the character areas described in this chapter, a preliminary study was made of background maps and overlays of landform, woodland distribution, sites of ecological significance, geology, soils and landcover. Despite the influences listed above, it was concluded from this desk study that the 1976 landscape character zones were still broadly valid. The 1976 character map was therefore taken as a draft plan and subjected to field checking using a structured survey form based on guidance from the Countryside Commission's CCP423 Landscape Assessment Guidance (1993) and the Forestry Authority's Landscape Assessment for Indicative Forestry Strategies (1993).

The main field survey work was carried out between 9th May and 13th June 1995 by nine members of Leicestershire County Council's Landscape Team. The objective of the field survey was to visit sample viewpoints in each of the 1976 landscape character zones to establish a clear idea of their visual character and at the same time to confirm or modify their boundaries. The survey forms also provided for an assessment of landscape condition and vulnerability to be made. Further details of the methodology used are available on request from Leicestershire County Council.

Following completion of the field survey a series of discussions were held amongst the survey team, leading to the reduction in the number of landscape character areas, various boundary changes, and the revision of some character area names.

From this process a revised Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland landscape character area map and a brief written description of each character area was produced. Preliminary consultations with other local authorities, English Nature and the Countryside Commission led to some further revisions.

The study concentrated on the visual character of the countryside and, in line with the landscape character assessment guidelines current at the time, did not address issues of built design. The Strategy guidelines therefore concentrate on landscape and woodland issues. It is hoped that district councils and others may wish to take up the production of guidance on built design, perhaps through such mechanisms as Countryside Design Summaries and Village Design Statements. In all character areas there is a need to ensure that the design of any new built development respects the scale and character of its landscape setting.

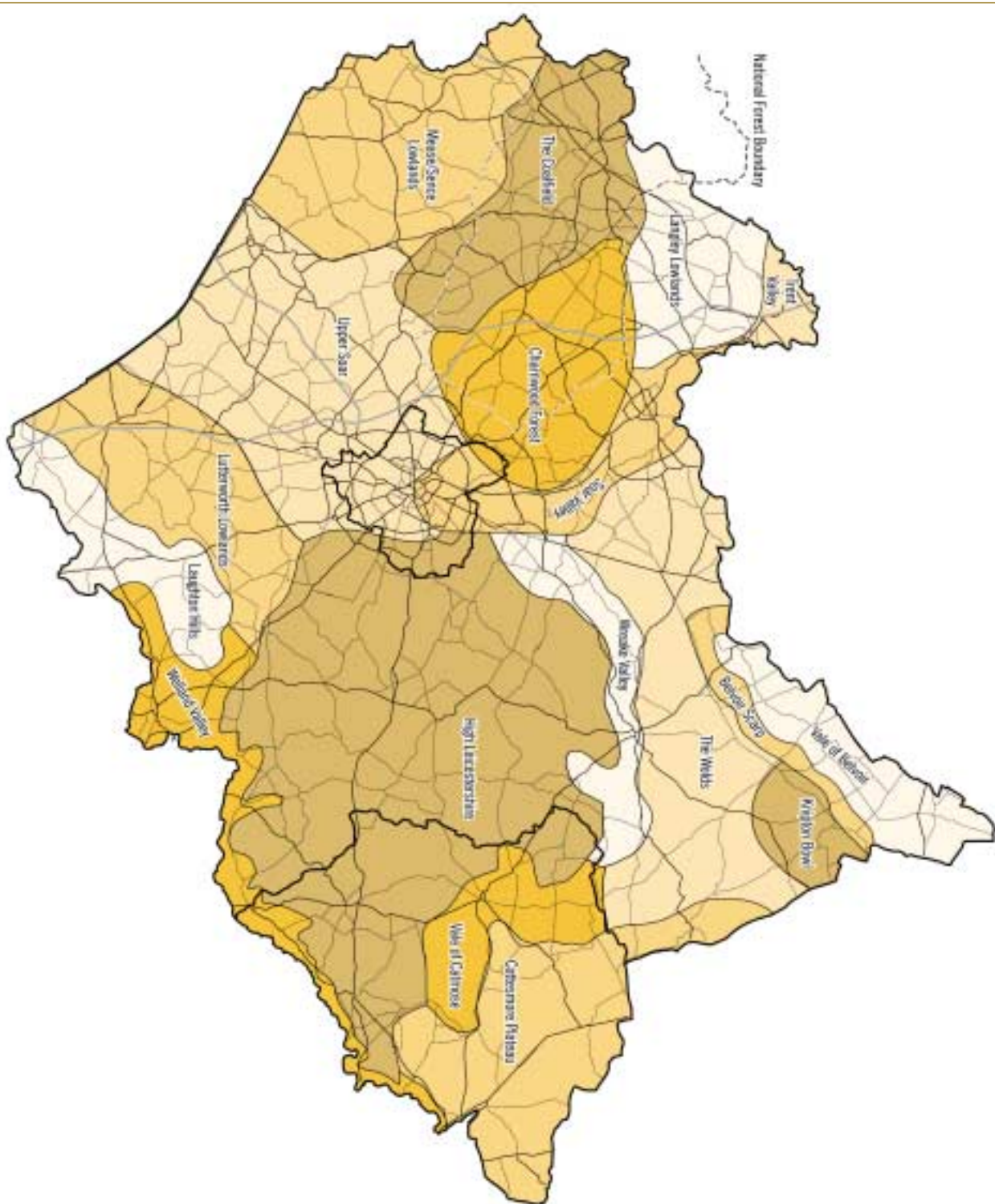
Two particular points should be borne in mind in looking at the landscape character area map and descriptions. Firstly, not all character areas have a sharply defined boundary with each of their neighbours. In some cases, for example the Belvoir Scarp, a strong physical feature produces a clear boundary line. Elsewhere, particularly in areas of less varied topography, boundary lines may be less clearly defined. Generally landscape character area boundaries should be regarded as transitional zones of varying widths, where the characters of two or more adjoining areas shade into one another.

The second point relates to urban centres. These present a particular difficulty when looking at landscape character, as the features of urban development tend to override the features which combine to produce landscape character. However, the decision was taken to retain urban areas within the landscape character areas as the underlying landscape character may sometimes be perceived within Green Wedges, river corridors and other open spaces.

Green Wedges are specifically defined within the Structure Plan. They are areas of land of open and undeveloped character between built up areas on the fringes of Leicester and its adjoining settlements, Loughborough, Coalville and Hinckley. They contain farmland, mineral workings, roads, railways and rivers and face particular pressures for recreational uses because of their proximity to residential areas. However, although individual Green Wedges may support similar uses and face similar pressures, they lie within several different landscape character areas.

This chapter gives a broad description of each of the eighteen Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland landscape character areas in turn and highlights key features and specific landscape and woodland issues for each area. A map showing these areas is given opposite (Fig. 7) and included as a fold-out page at the end of the Strategy.

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland



5.02 Trent Valley

This character area is a mainly flat open floodplain, bounded by the River Trent to the north and west, by the River Soar to the east, and by the lower slopes of the Castle Donington escarpment to the south. The Trent forms the county boundary with Derbyshire and the Soar that with Nottinghamshire, and the Leicestershire character area's boundaries are thus generally administrative rather than physical, although it is in fact part of a broader character area.

Although the land use is predominantly agricultural, including both arable and pasture, the character of the area is heavily influenced by the power generating industry, sand and gravel extraction and roads. Only small parts of the area - such as the parklands around Lockington and Hemington - avoid such intrusions.

Fields are generally enclosed by mainly hawthorn hedgerows. The management of these is not consistent - in some places they are closely trimmed, whilst in others there is evidence of degradation, disappearance or replacement with post and wire fencing. Woodland is virtually absent from the area. Its limited tree cover is provided by hedgerow trees, willows along streams and ditches, localised parkland trees, and a few small copses.

Ratcliffe on Soar power station is situated outside, but immediately adjacent to, the eastern boundary of the character area and is imposingly present in many views. The area is heavily criss-crossed by high voltage power lines and few open views are unaffected. The area is also strongly influenced by former and current extractive activities. Some former sand and gravel workings have been restored to agricultural use; others have been retained as open water for recreational purposes including marina development.

These man-made lakes and pools provide wildlife habitats, particularly for birds. The Trent itself, and the valley's network of open drainage ditches and small streams, also provide a concentration of sites of ecological value. Lockington Marshes is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The area includes several small villages, connected by minor roads, with the two larger settlements of Kegworth and Castle Donington on its southern boundary where the ground rises to the adjoining Langley Lowlands character area.

Roads, including the A6 trunk road and M1 motorway, and to a lesser extent other A-roads, dissect the area and their impact in terms of noise and visual intrusion is often felt. The new Derby Southern Bypass (A50) runs through the area and a new junction of this road with the M1 has recently been completed. The proximity of East Midlands Airport, situated to the south of the area on an elevated plateau is not unduly visually intrusive, though it results in frequent aircraft noise.



Distinctive features

- ◆ flat open floodplain
- ◆ mix of arable and pasture land
- ◆ influence of extractive and power generating industries
- ◆ influence of transport infrastructure
- ◆ lack of woodland
- ◆ small areas of parkland around Lockington and Hemington
- ◆ range of wetland habitats

Issues

- ◆ further road, industrial and extractive development
- ◆ expansion of marina development
- ◆ loss of hedges and hedgerow trees
- ◆ loss or culverting of small streams and open drainage ditches

5.03 Langley Lowlands

This character area is one of rolling landform dissected by minor watercourses draining northwards towards the Trent or eastwards to the Soar. It borders the two valley character areas of the Trent and the Soar to the north and west and has boundaries with the Coalfield and Charnwood Forest character areas to the south-west and south-east respectively. The extreme western part of the character area, around Staunton Harold, lies within the boundary of the National Forest.

Agriculture is a mixture of pasture and arable. Fields are medium to large and enclosed by well-kept mixed hedgerows. Many hedgerow trees are present, mainly oak and ash, and these add to the wooded character of the area.

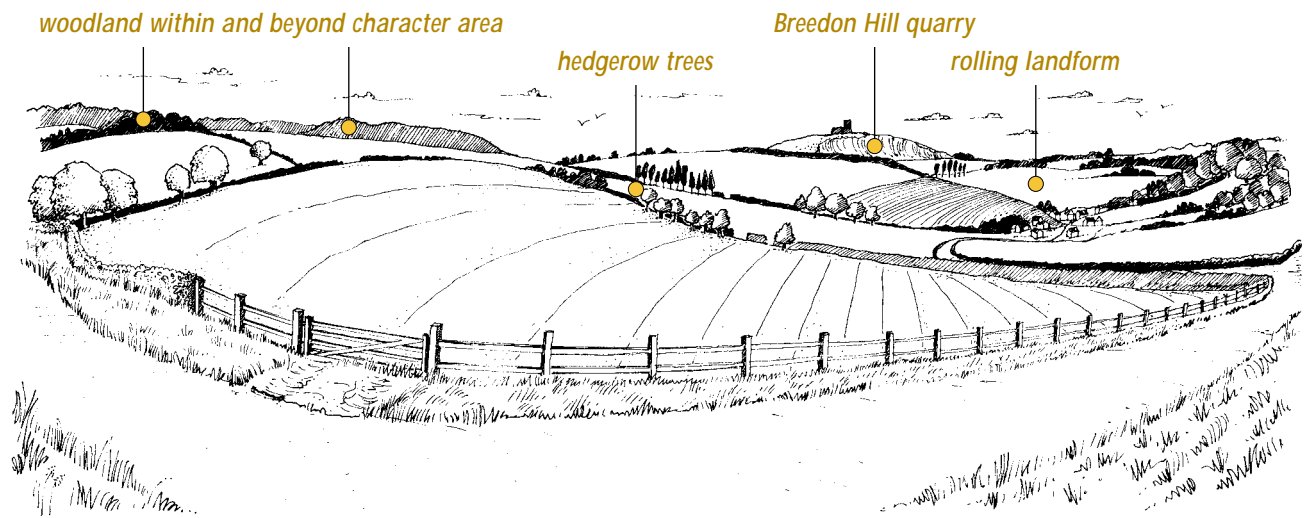
Woodland is mostly deciduous and occurs in the form of small game coverts, with larger blocks of ancient woodland sites at Cloud Wood, Pasture Wood, Piper Wood and Spring Wood. Other large blocks of woodland lie beyond the area's boundaries, for example at Calke and Melbourne and in Charnwood Forest, and their influence on the character of the Langley Lowlands is significant, providing tree-clothed backdrops and wooded horizons to most views.

Parkland trees are also present around Langley Priory and Garendon Park. Donington Park includes the surviving remnants of a medieval deer park, with a fine population of ancient oak trees, which are of ecological as well as landscape value and which have resulted in the Park being declared a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) on account of the invertebrate fauna associated with the trees. The parklands around Staunton Harold have a significant impact on the local landscape in the western part of the area. Staunton Harold park has a cluster of visitor attractions and is one of Leicestershire's most visited tourist sites.

Industrial and commercial activity is generally limited and small scale, the most visually and audibly intrusive, as well as the greatest traffic generators, being East Midlands Airport, Breedon Hill and Cloud Wood quarries, and the Donington Park motor racing circuit. The visual impact of East Midlands Airport is localised, but there are frequent audible reminders of its presence in air traffic movements and expansion of the airport and associated development is currently underway (November 1999). Away from the immediate environs of Donington Park the motor racing circuit is well screened by the local landform, as well as recently introduced earthmounds and tree planting. Breedon Cloud workings present an intrusive scar which the surrounding woodland fails to mitigate. Breedon Hill, by contrast, is more awesome than detracting. The outcrop of Carboniferous Limestone rising steeply out of the surrounding landscape provides a prominent local landmark which is visible as far away as Derby. The site is also of interest for a range of ecological and archaeological features.

A number of small villages are spread throughout the area, connected by quiet, narrow, winding lanes. A pattern of smaller fields surrounds some of the villages. Towards the west of the area, around Staunton Harold, the settlement pattern tends to be of scattered farms and hamlets. The small towns of Castle Donington to the north and Shepshed to the south lie on the boundaries of the character area.

Several A-roads run through the area, generally following higher ground, and connecting with larger settlements in Leicestershire and beyond. The area is bisected by the A42/M42, running roughly south-west/north-east, which in places, and particularly at its junction with the M1 just outside the boundary of the character area to the north-east, is visually and audibly intrusive.



Distinctive features

- ◆ rolling landform
- ◆ well wooded appearance influenced by woodland within and beyond the character area
- ◆ quarries at Breedon Hill and Breedon Cloud
- ◆ many hedgerow trees
- ◆ villages linked by narrow winding lanes
- ◆ parkland influences

Issues

- ◆ loss or decline of woodland through inadequate management
- ◆ insufficiently mitigated quarry extensions
- ◆ loss or overmanagement of hedgerows and hedgerow trees through arable intensification
- ◆ road widening/improvements and new junctions (eg. M42)
- ◆ visitor pressures on historic parkland at Staunton Harold
- ◆ expansion of East Midlands Airport and associated development

5.04 Soar Valley

The Soar Valley is an elongated floodplain, with its eastern slopes rising to the Wolds and its western slopes to Charnwood Forest and the Langley Lowlands. It also runs into the valley character areas of the Trent to the north and the Wreake to the south-east, and abuts the Upper Soar and High Leicestershire areas at its southern tip.

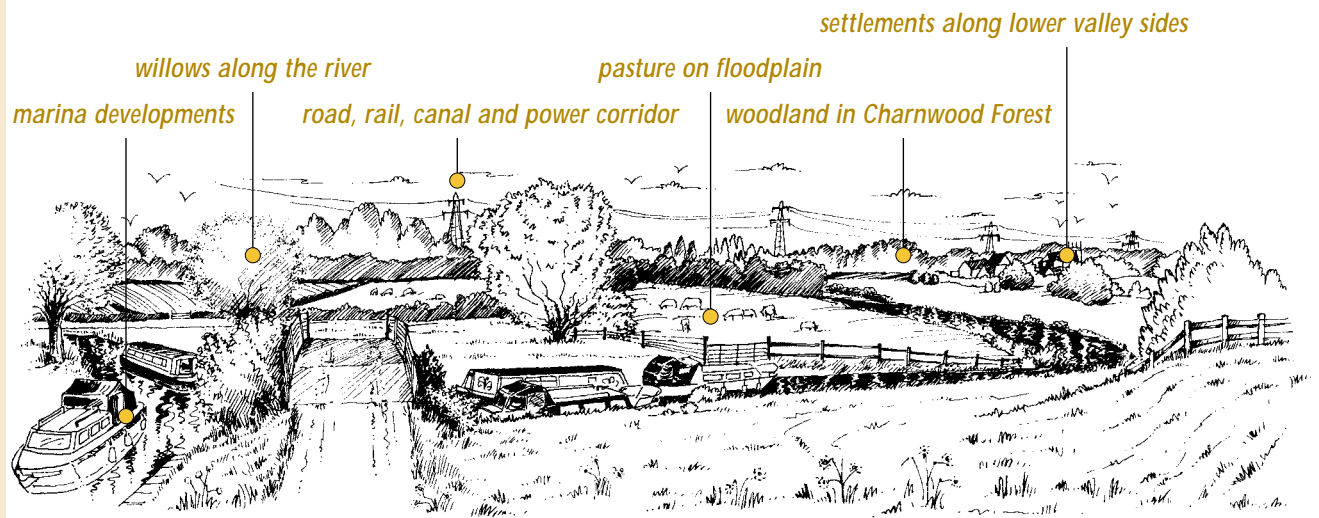
Land use is mixed depending on topography and soils. To the north of the built-up area of Leicester, the floodplain itself is almost wholly agricultural and predominantly pasture. Above the line of the valley edge settlements, where the character area is in transition, the valley side slopes are predominantly arable. The valley itself has almost no woodland, although woodland within the Charnwood Forest character area forms the backdrop to views of the western side of the valley. Along the valley floor groups of willows follow the line of the river.

Sites of ecological value within the area are concentrated along and adjacent to the river, the flood meadows being particularly important for breeding birds. Loughborough Meadows are one of the few remaining sites of wet grassland habitat within Leicestershire and Rutland. Within the City of Leicester the River Soar corridor remains a significant open space through much of the built-up area and is of high ecological and amenity value.

At the southern end of the character area the urban influence of Leicester dominates the landscape. Elsewhere, the valley is characterised by a number of small to medium sized settlements. These are generally situated on the slightly higher land at the edges of the floodplain. Rothley, Mountsorrel and Quorn form an almost continuous belt along the south-western valley slopes, on the boundary of the character area with Charnwood Forest. Sileby and Barrow-upon-Soar follow a similar pattern on the eastern slopes. These large villages, together with Cossington, Birstall and Hathern, are centres of generally small scale industrial and commercial activity. The gypsum works at Barrow-upon-Soar are a conspicuous feature within the open valley landscape. The larger heavy industry and university town of Loughborough lies towards the north of the area.

The valley contains the recently re-routed A6 trunk road, which now passes on embankment through the floodplain. The Nottingham-London railway line follows the valley and is also on embankment in many sections. Pylons and overhead cables also follow the valley.

Gravel extraction is still in progress in the south of the area, around Cossington and Wanlip. Old gravel workings to the east of Birstall form the Watermead Country Park, which provides a valuable wildlife and recreational resource close to the built-up area of Leicester, and forms part of the Birstall/Leicester/Thurmaston (Soar Valley North) Green Wedge. The river, and the sections of the Grand Union Canal which run parallel with it, are serviced by a number of marina developments. Together with camping and caravan sites these make the area around Sileby, Barrow-upon-Soar and Quorn popular with tourists.



Distinctive features

- ◆ elongated floodplain
- ◆ pasture on floodplain, arable on upper valley sides
- ◆ City of Leicester at southern end, elsewhere settlements along lower valley sides
- ◆ very little woodland but influenced by woodland in adjoining Charnwood Forest character area
- ◆ willows along river
- ◆ road, rail, canal and power corridor
- ◆ marina developments and other water-based recreational uses
- ◆ gravel extraction

Issues

- ◆ inadequately screened road, industrial, residential, leisure and extractive development in open valley landscape
- ◆ loss of woodland on the Charnwood Forest ridge
- ◆ loss of pollarded willows
- ◆ further conversion of pasture to arable
- ◆ urban pressures on countryside

5.05 The Coalfield

The Coalfield is an area of gently undulating landform, dominated by mixed farmland and the past and present effects of coal mining and clay extraction. It is bounded to the east by the steep rise to Charnwood Forest and to the south by less clearly defined boundaries with the Mease/Sence Lowlands and Upper Soar character areas. To the north lies the more rolling and wooded Langley Lowlands character area. The western boundary is defined by the county boundary with Derbyshire, although the character area extends into the neighbouring county.

The Coalfield character area is distinguished by a denser settlement pattern than almost any other part of Leicestershire. Large former mining villages characterised by 19th century terraced housing follow the main road lines. Roadside groups of cottages are also characteristic. Many towns and villages have recent residential development at their fringes. Visible relics of the industrial past include old colliery sites, spoil heaps, subsidence flashes and former railway lines, some of which have developed into sites of ecological significance. The area's industrial heritage is also forming the basis for tourist developments such as the Snibston Discovery Centre and Moira Furnace.

Although urban and industrial influences are rarely far away, there remain substantial areas of open, mainly arable, farmland. The area has few woodlands but hedges, hedgerow trees and small copses sometimes give a wooded effect locally. There are local concentrations of woodland in the centre of the area, around Alton Grange, in the west around Willesley, and in the north around Coleorton. The latter includes woodland associated with Coleorton Hall and the large ancient woodland site of Rough Park.

The Coalfield once contained extensive areas of heathland. This has now been lost to agricultural improvement although many heath related place names bear testimony to its former extent. However, coal extraction has enabled some small scale re-establishment of heathland vegetation on restored or naturally revegetated sites.

The western part of the area, north of Measham and west of Packington, is most strongly affected by present day coal and clay working, and the associated road traffic. However, the character of this part of the area is also increasingly being influenced by the restoration of mineral workings and the development of the National Forest.

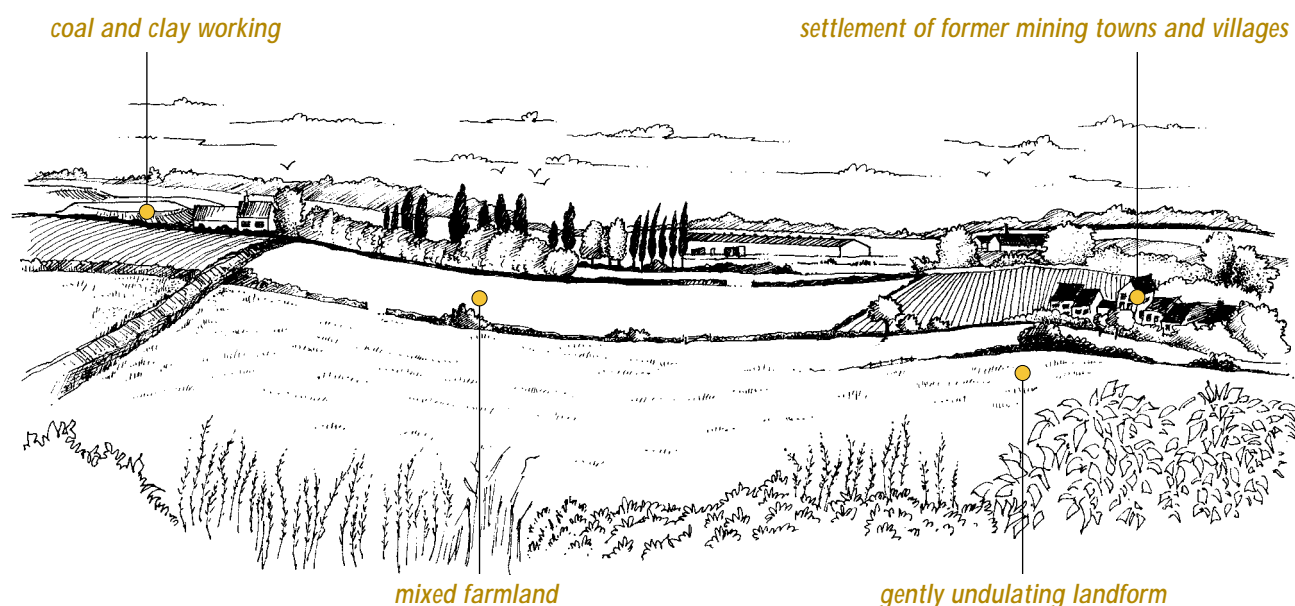
In the central part of the area, around Packington and Normanton-le-Heath, there are few settlements and large, undulating arable fields dominate. There is evidence of hedges becoming gappy or having been removed between fields, but roadside hedges are generally well-managed. Large scale open-cast workings at Coalfield North just to the north-east of Heather are currently under restoration. The old market town of Ashby-de-la-Zouch is the largest settlement within this part of the area. It has many reminders of its historic past but has seen substantial residential and commercial expansion to its northern edges in recent years.

East of Heather and Normanton-le-Heath the landscape is generally open. Fields are bounded by low hedgerows, with few hedgerow trees and little woodland. Coalville is the main town but large villages, many with former coal mining associations, are scattered throughout this part of the area (eg Ibstock, Ellistown, Bagworth). The Bardon 21 warehousing development to the east of Coalville has expanded rapidly onto greenfield sites in recent years. Closer to the town there are a number of estates of light industrial development. Bardon Quarry lies just outside the character area boundary but views of Bardon Hill and the traffic associated with the quarry are also notable features of this part of the area.

In the extreme north-east the area around Newbold, Coleorton and Griffydam is particularly distinctive. This was a medieval coal mining area, dating back to at least the 13th century. A dispersed

pattern of settlement arose in connection with the small scale mining, together with small fields, a dense network of footpaths, and bell pits and their associated spoil heaps. These features are reflected in the present day landscape which comprises a mixture of pasture in small irregular fields often with overgrown hedges, small linear settlements and scattered individual cottages, and an intensive network of public footpaths. This pattern is unique within Leicestershire and gives this part of the character area a strong sense of intimacy.

The Coalfield character area has good connections to the national road network being crossed in the north by the A50, linking the M1 with Coalville and Ashby-de-la-Zouch, and in the west by the A42, running south-west to north-east between Measham and Ashby-de-la-Zouch, linking south to Birmingham and north to the M1. In the south of the area the B586 forms the east-west link and in the east the A447 connects north-south. A network of more minor roads connects the numerous villages.



Distinctive features

- ◆ gently undulating landform
- ◆ effects of past and present coal and clay working
- ◆ relatively dense settlement pattern of former mining towns and villages
- ◆ mixed farmland with generally low woodland cover
- ◆ most of area within the National Forest
- ◆ distinctive landscape character around Coleorton

Issues

- ◆ further loss of trees and hedges
- ◆ poor hedgerow management
- ◆ open character of much of the area means that most new development is conspicuous
- ◆ lack of or poor quality restoration of mineral workings

5.06 Charnwood Forest

Charnwood Forest is particularly distinctive mainly due to the underlying pre-Cambrian rocks which result in a varied, hilly landform with exposed crags and rocky knolls and fast-flowing streams. Beacon Hill (248m) and Bardon Hill (278m) are two of the most prominent outcrops. The general elevation helps to give the whole area a distinctive feel and affects the local climate. The area borders the Soar Valley to the east, Langley Lowlands to the north, Coalfield to the west, and Upper Soar to the south. The boundary with each of these adjoining character areas is fairly clearly defined by topography.

The area has a high concentration of mixed deciduous and coniferous woodland, including many ancient woodland sites and a significant proportion of Leicestershire and Rutland's wet woodland habitat. In places hedges and hedgerow trees also contribute to the well-wooded appearance of the area. The western two-thirds of the area is part of the National Forest and there has been recent woodland planting associated with this. Although the area has relatively high woodland cover, there is also a high concentration of unmanaged woodland, much of which is protected by the Leicestershire County Council Charnwood Area Tree Preservation Order 1949.

The area is characterised by an intimate mixture of woodland and farmland in mixed arable and pasture uses. There are also substantial areas of parkland and estate landscapes (eg Bradgate Park, Roecliffe Manor, Maplewell Hall, Charnwood Hall and Grace Dieu Priory). Bradgate Park is a fine example of a medieval deer park with ancient oak pollards. The area's acidic soils support pockets of heathland vegetation, particularly around rocky outcrops, where the land has never been taken into cultivation. Large heath-grassland sites still remain and fast flowing streams running off the higher ground are important for their specialist fauna. The largest area of reedbed habitat (6ha) in Leicestershire and Rutland is found at Swithland Reservoir. Ecologically the area is recognised as of national significance as the south-eastern limit to many species' ranges.

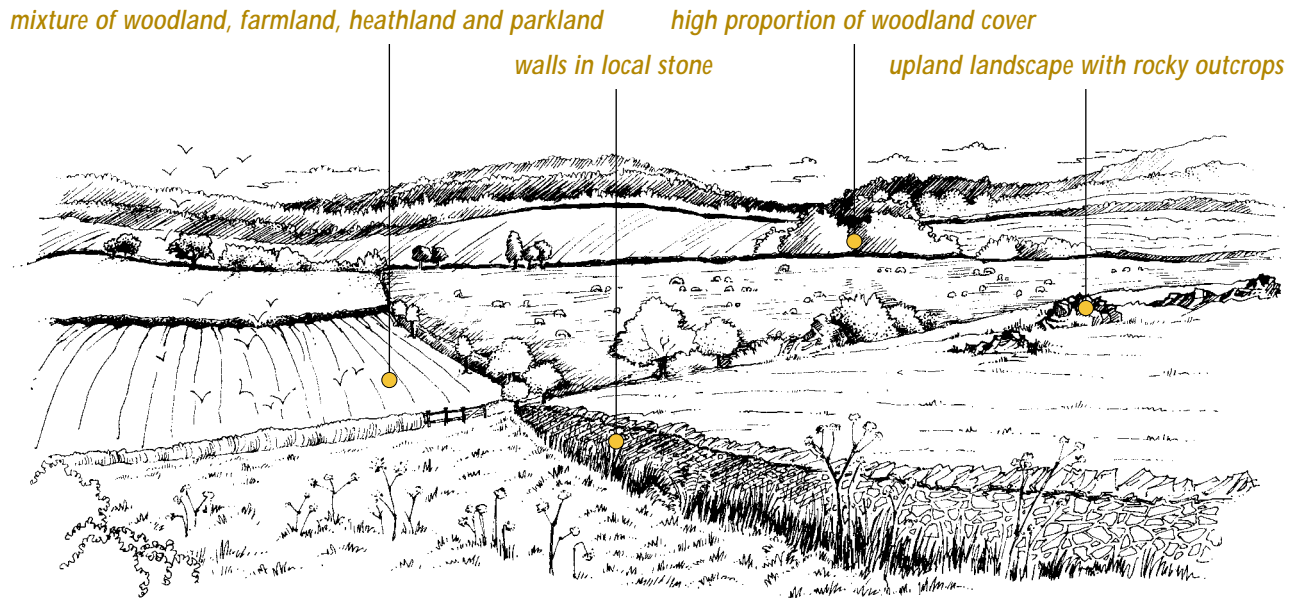
The field pattern varies considerably within the character area. Around Charley Hall and north-east of Markfield, irregular fields often bounded by mixed hedges are the result of medieval enclosures. By contrast, around Newtown Linford, long narrow rectilinear fields with regular stone walls result from 18th and 19th century parliamentary enclosures. The settlement pattern is generally one of scattered farms and other dwellings, with large villages (eg Anstey, Groby, Ratby, Markfield, Whitwick, Rothley, Mountsorrel, Quorn) mainly around the edges of the area. The southern fringes of Shepshed and Loughborough also fall within the area. The use of local stone in vernacular buildings and drystone walls helps to give the area its strong and distinctive character. However, many stone walls are suffering from lack of maintenance.

The underlying rock still supports a quarrying industry. The quarries are generally well hidden within the landform but can be visually intrusive from some viewpoints. The telecommunications masts at Copt Oak and Bardon Hill are also conspicuous.

The hilly nature of the area gives many long distance views over the surrounding countryside. Open water areas at Cropston and Swithland Reservoirs and Groby Pool add to the visual diversity of the landscape. The area is attractive to visitors, particularly the country parks at Beacon Hill, Broomriggs and Bradgate Park, and the village of Newton Linford, and traffic and other visitor pressures create localised problems.

The M1 runs north-south through the character area and is locally intrusive visually and in terms of traffic noise. The A511 linking Leicester with Coalville and Ashby-de-la-Zouch crosses the south-western corner of the area. The remainder of the area is criss-crossed by a network of minor roads, often running in very straight lines across the landscape.

The special character of this area was recognised in the 1932 Leicestershire Regional Planning report, which recommended that it should be preserved as a National Park. The post-war Hobhouse Report subsequently recommended that Charnwood Forest should be designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).



Distinctive features

- ◆ upland landscape with rocky outcrops and fast-flowing streams
- ◆ high proportion of woodland cover
- ◆ distinctive mixture of woodland, farmland, heathland and parkland
- ◆ part of the National Forest
- ◆ buildings and walls in local stone
- ◆ many sites of ecological value

Issues

- ◆ lack of woodland, hedgerow and hedgerow tree management
- ◆ poor state of repair and/or part removal of drystone walls
- ◆ insensitive or inadequately mitigated built development
- ◆ pressure to extend existing quarries
- ◆ visitor pressures in popular areas

5.07 Mease/Sence Lowlands

The Mease/Sence Lowlands landscape character area lies in the westernmost part of Leicestershire. The northernmost parts of the area lie within the National Forest. About half of the character area's boundary is with Warwickshire to the west and south-west. The remainder of the boundary is with the Coalfield to the north-east and Upper Soar to the east. Much of the area lies between about 75m and 120m in height, falling gently from north-east to south-west and taking in most of the catchment area of the River Sence, as well as the River Mease and its southern tributaries. The small streams feeding into the Sence and Mease create a distinctive pattern of small valleys and give an undulating landform.

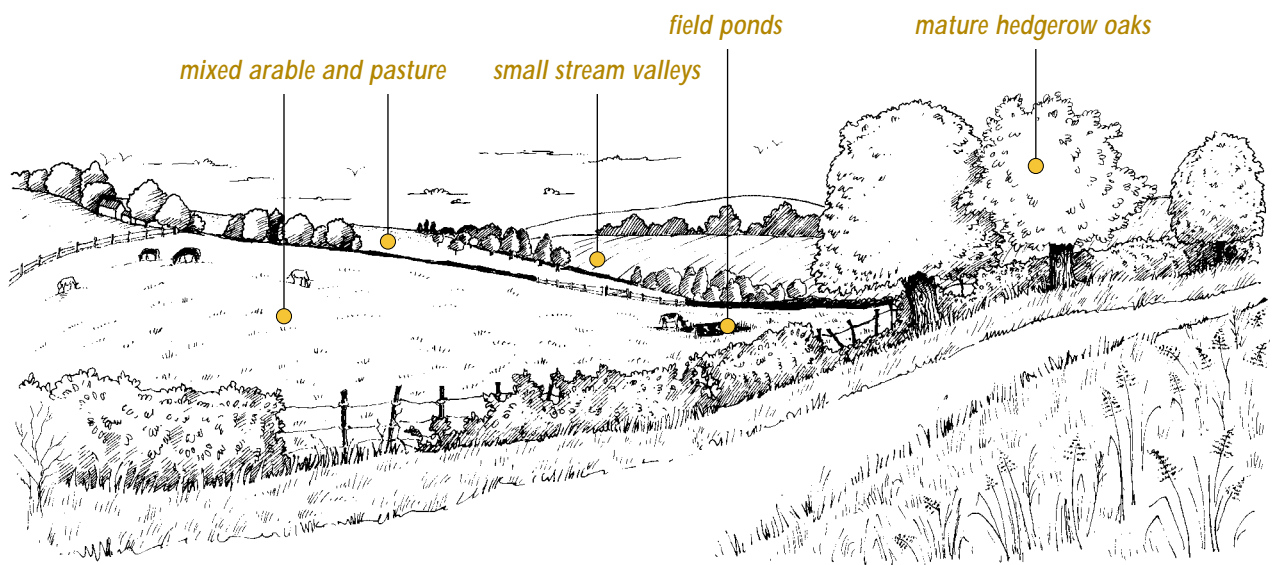
This is a rural landscape with most land in agricultural use. Arable is predominant overall, but arable and pasture are frequently mixed and there are localised areas where each dominates. The small stream valleys are characterised by pastureland.

The area generally has little woodland. However, there are local concentrations in the substantial belts of woodland around Gopsall Park towards the north of the area, a concentration of scattered small woodlands in the east around Market Bosworth and Bosworth Park, and the larger Ambion Wood immediately south of Bosworth Field. These woodlands provide many sites of ecological significance, as do the Sence and Mease and their tributaries, the Ashby Canal, and the Battlefield railway line and the disused sections of railway line to the north and south of it. Willows are frequently found along the lines of the two rivers and their tributary streams, and willows around field ponds are another characteristic feature of the area.

One of the most significant landscape features of this area is the frequency of the hedgerow trees, often mature oaks. In those parts of the area where arable cultivation dominates, hedges and hedgerow trees have been lost to large fields with insignificant hedges which give localised areas of open and exposed character. Elsewhere, the frequency of the hedge trees together with the woodlands, streamside and canalside vegetation, and tree cover associated with the villages and disused railway lines, all serve to contribute to a generally well-treed effect.

Market Bosworth is the only settlement of any size, with the Bosworth Battlefield being a significant tourist attraction. Elsewhere the settlement pattern is one of small villages and individual farmhouses evenly scattered throughout the area and linked by a network of minor roads.

The A444 runs roughly north-south through the centre of the area and the A447 follows a similar line along its eastern boundary, but neither intrudes significantly upon the landscape.



Distinctive features

- ◆ undulating landscape with frequent small valleys
- ◆ mixed arable and pasture
- ◆ willows associated with streams and field ponds
- ◆ frequent hedgerow trees, mainly mature oaks
- ◆ generally well-treed appearance although little woodland
- ◆ many sites of ecological value

Issues

- ◆ loss of hedges and hedge trees
- ◆ mature hedgerow oak and ash ageing
- ◆ planting of inappropriate species in rural hedges and verges
- ◆ loss of field ponds
- ◆ further conversion of pasture to arable

5.08 Upper Soar

This character area forms a large elongated basin, running south-west to north-east. Its south-western end is dissected by a series of ridges which run broadly south-west to north-east. These ridges often give long views over the whole of the character area and beyond. The landscape is generally open and gently rolling.

Boundaries with Charnwood Forest and the Coalfield to the north, and with High Leicestershire to the east, are defined by a steepening of slope and a greater average height. The Sence/Soar watershed divides the area from the Mease/Sence Lowlands to the west. The A5, following the line of the Roman Watling Street, forms the south-western boundary of the area and the Leicestershire/Warwickshire border. A high ridge helps to define the southern part of the area's south-eastern boundary with the Lutterworth Lowlands, although this division is less clearly defined nearer to Leicester.

The Upper Soar is an area of mixed urban and rural landscapes. Leicester and its adjoining settlements lie at its north-eastern end. At its south-western end, around Hinckley, Burbage, Barwell and Earl Shilton, the character area is also predominantly urban. Elsewhere agriculture is the main land use and although this is always mixed, to the north-west of the area the emphasis is more on arable, whilst to the south-east pasture is slightly more dominant. Farming gives the impression of being well-managed. Well defined, usually regular, fields are divided by generally low cut hedges of thorn, elm and field maple. However, there are localised variations in hedgerow pattern and some arable areas in particular have suffered from the loss of hedges and hedgerow trees. Oak and ash are the two most common hedgerow trees. In the valley bottoms groups of willow and alder are locally significant alongside minor watercourses.

The area has little woodland, the cluster of medium sized woodlands to the south-east of Burbage Common forming the only significant woodland cover. Elsewhere woodlands are small and scattered. Two slight concentrations of these small woodlands in the north of the area represent traces of the old Leicester Forest West and Leicester Forest East.

Parkland is found at Kirby Mallory and Normanton Turville, and in more urban settings at Enderby and Blaby, but is not a significant feature of this area. Disused railway lines are a locally important feature in the south-east of the area. They are often associated with small woodlands and other sites of ecological value, and their often well-vegetated appearance is important in an area that generally lacks tree cover. Localised areas of heath-grassland habitat are found at Croft and Burbage Common.

Within a central band running roughly south-west to north-east between Hinckley and the edge of Leicester the settlement pattern is one of large villages, such as Croft, Stoney Stanton, Sapcote and Countesthorpe, which display evidence of their industrial heritage. However, with the exception of the larger villages, such as Broughton Astley/Primethorpe, individual settlements remain clearly separated by open countryside. Towards Leicester the settlements become larger centres, such as Blaby, Whetstone, Narborough and Enderby, and urban influences tend to be more marked. Elsewhere within the area, to the north and south of this central band, villages are smaller and more scattered.

Within Leicester and its adjoining settlements urban influences tend to override the Upper Soar landscape character. However, the River Soar corridor remains a significant open space through much of the built up area and is of high ecological and amenity value. Its tributary stream of the Wash Brook/Saffron Brook is associated with the open space of the Oadby/Leicester/Wigston Green Wedge and the eastern River Sence and Grand Union Canal run along the southern limit of the built up area.

The M1 cuts roughly north to south through the centre of the area and the M69 bissects it, running north-east/south-west from Leicester to Hinckley. The A47 runs roughly parallel to the M69, about two miles to the north of it. A fairly dense network of B-roads and more minor roads links the area's villages.

The Fosse Way also runs north-east to south-west through the area, again broadly parallel with the M69, but two to three miles to the south of it, linking with the A5 (Watling Street) at the county boundary with Warwickshire. From Narborough to Sapcote the line of the Fosse is represented by the B4114; beyond Sapcote it is a minor road or track.

Localised outcrops of intrusive igneous rocks are found towards the centre of the area and have been quarried for roadstone and aggregates. Only Croft Quarry is still active; others have been used as landfill sites (eg at Enderby) or left in their disused state (eg at Stoney Cove). However, these often well-wooded outcrops provide locally distinctive features within the flatter surrounding landscape.

Croft Quarry is visible from many points but the combination of the Croft Hill outcrop and the quarry's valley bottom site limit its impact on the landscape. The Caterpillar works to the south of Desford are extensive but unobtrusive. Powerlines and pylons are a noticeable feature throughout the area. Both the M1 and M69 motorways are now well screened and their presence, and that of the motor racing circuit at Mallory Park, is generally felt as background noise.



Distinctive features

- ◆ elongated basin
- ◆ open rolling landscape with distinct high level ridges
- ◆ large villages with evidence of industrial past
- ◆ urban influences from larger settlements and Leicester
- ◆ mixed agriculture - arable emphasis to west, pasture to east
- ◆ little woodland
- ◆ local rock outcrops and former quarries
- ◆ River Soar corridor a significant feature through built up area

Issues

- ◆ lack of woodland management
- ◆ loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- ◆ further urban development and increased urban influences
- ◆ insensitive siting of new built development
- ◆ road widening

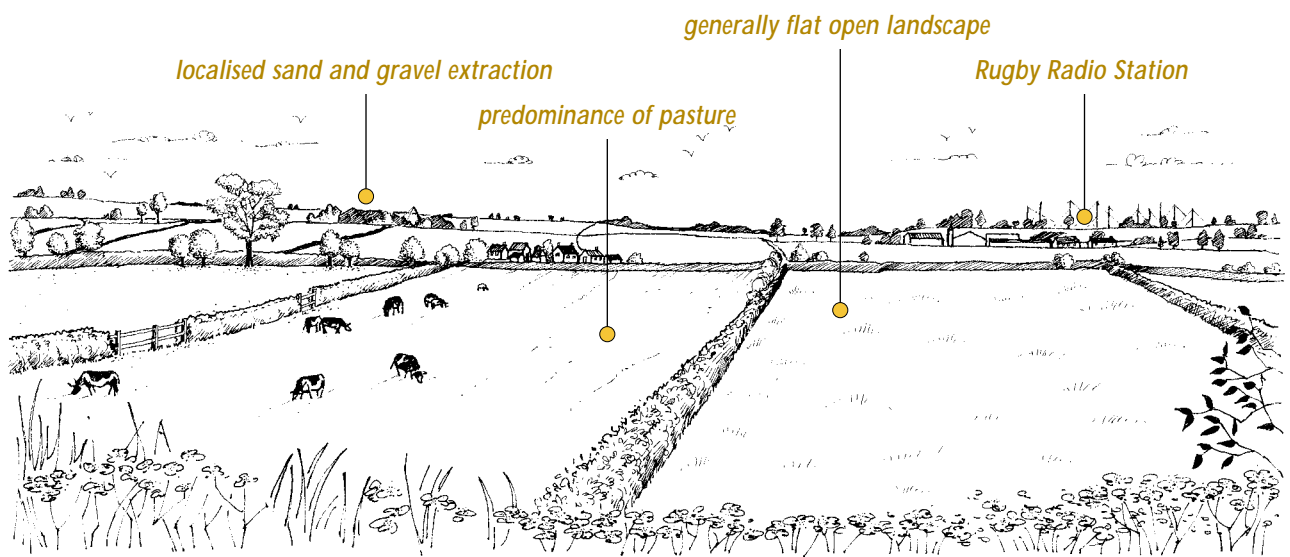
5.09 Lutterworth Lowlands

This is a mainly rural area of flat to slightly undulating farmland. In its southern half the area is defined by the catchment area of the upper part of the River Swift, whilst in the north the headwaters of a number of tributaries of the River Soar flow roughly northwards. The boundaries of the area with adjoining character areas are indistinct in places due to the absence of strong topographical features, particularly with the Upper Soar to the north-west. In the south-west the character area boundary follows the Leicestershire/Warwickshire boundary along the A5 (the Roman Watling Street). The boundary with High Leicestershire to the north-east reflects the change in topography from the flatter Lutterworth Lowlands to the more rolling High Leicestershire landscape. To the south-east the boundary with the Laughton Hills to the east is also defined by generally rising ground.

Farming is mixed, with an overall predominance of pasture, although there are localised areas where arable uses are dominant. Fields are generally medium sized and bounded by hedges. Tree cover is low, being mainly in the form of hedgerow trees of ash and oak. Only a few scattered small woods are present. Parkland, with associated woodlands and a greater density of tree cover, is significant at Wistow in the north-east and around Misterton and Cotesbach in the south. High hedges and woodland screen planting around the proving ground at Bruntingthorpe Airfield give a locally well-wooded effect. Regeneration of woodland along the dismantled railway line south of Lutterworth is also locally significant. The dismantled railway line running north to south through the area, just to the west of the M1, is of ecological value over much of its length. Sites of ecological significance are also provided by the woodlands and parklands, and the many small tributary streams of the Swift and Soar.

Lutterworth, lying at the south-western end of the area, is the only town of any size within the area. In the north-east the large villages of Fleckney and Kibworth Beauchamp show a combination of urban and rural influences. Elsewhere there is an even spread of small villages and individual farms throughout the area. Lutterworth has expanded significantly in recent years with mainly residential development. The development of the locally prominent warehousing and distribution centre of Magna Park has also taken place a few miles to the west of the town, adjacent to the A5. Sand and gravel extraction occurs around Dunton Bassett and Shawell but in the rather flat, open landscape views tend to be limited by a lack of elevation and the workings are only of local visual significance. In the south-western part of the area, Rugby Radio Station (outside the county boundary in Warwickshire) is prominent in many views.

The M1 motorway runs north to south through the western part of the area, roughly parallel to the A426, and the A50 runs north to south through its eastern part. The A4303/A4304 runs east to west across the south of the area linking Lutterworth with Market Harborough to the east and the A5 to the west. Traffic noise from these main roads is locally intrusive. A network of minor roads links villages and farms throughout the area.



Distinctive features

- ◆ open landscape, flat or slightly undulating
- ◆ rural area with few large settlements
- ◆ mixed farming with predominance of pasture
- ◆ low tree cover
- ◆ localised sand and gravel extraction
- ◆ parkland locally significant

Issues

- ◆ loss of hedges and hedgerow trees
- ◆ lack of hedge management
- ◆ continued mineral working in some areas
- ◆ unsympathetic development, particularly on the edges of settlements

5.10 Laughton Hills

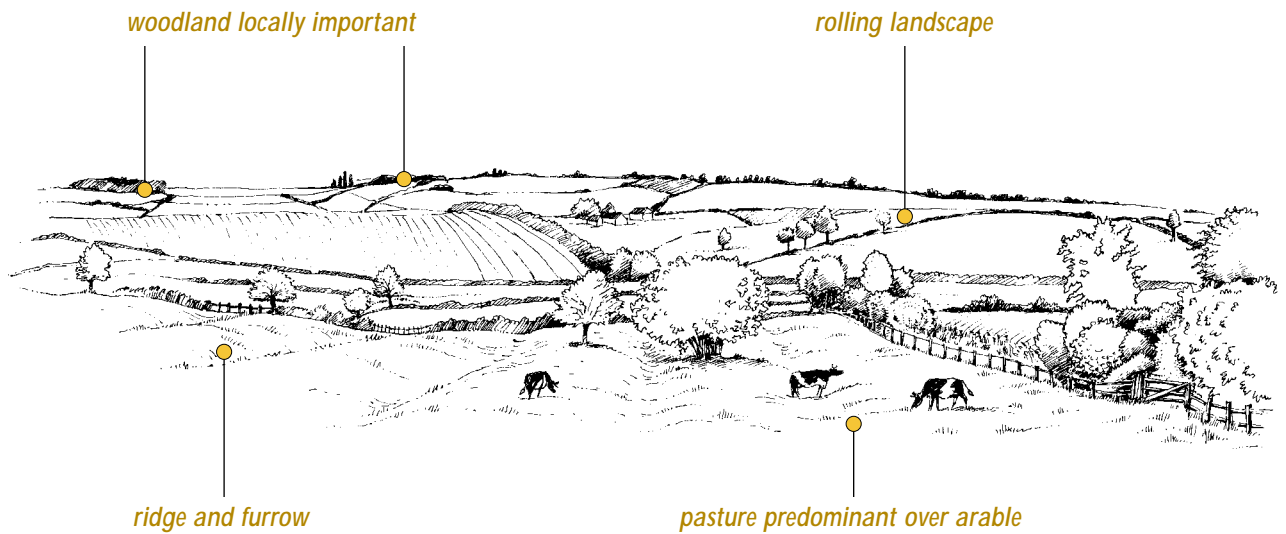
This is an high rolling area, slightly lower and flatter in the south where minor tributaries of the River Avon drain southwards off the ridge of the hills. It represents the northern end of an upland character area which extends south-westwards into Northamptonshire and its southern boundary is formed by the Leicestershire/Northamptonshire border. The north-western and north-eastern boundaries, with the Lutterworth Lowlands and the Welland Valley respectively, are defined by topography.

This is largely a rural area of farmland. Agriculture is mixed but with pasture predominant over arable, particularly in the north. Fields are of medium size and bounded by hedges and there are occurrences of ridge and furrow. Woodland is generally limited. Tree cover is greatest in the northern half of the area with both hedgerow trees and small to medium areas of woodland, notably along the line of the Laughton Hills themselves and around Gumley. To the south tree cover occurs mainly as hedgerow trees, but there are significant woodlands around Stanford Park and North Kilworth House. Ash is the dominant hedgerow tree throughout the area. There is extensive parkland at Stanford Park, North Kilworth House and around the village of Gumley. Horse chestnuts and other large ornamental trees are common within villages such as North and South Kilworth. The most distinctive part of the area is its northern half, around Mowsley, Laughton and Gumley, where the Laughton Hills and Mowsley Hills rise steeply from the Welland Valley. Gated roads are a feature of this part of the area.

In the north of the area there are the small villages of Laughton, Mowsley and Gumley. In the south a line of large villages - Husbands Bosworth, North Kilworth, South Kilworth and Swinford - runs north-east to south-west. Some of these settlements have grown significantly and the adjoining countryside shows some evidence of being poorly managed.

The junction of the M1 and M6 motorways, and the A14, in the extreme south-western corner of the area causes visual disruption and noise on a local scale but its impact is not widespread. The A4303/A4304 runs east to west across the central part of the area linking North Kilworth and Husbands Bosworth with Market Harborough to the east, and with Lutterworth and the M1 to the west. The A50 also passes through the central part of the area, running north to south and again passing through Husbands Bosworth.

The Grand Union Canal passes through the south and east of the area, closely shadowed by the dismantled railway in the south, and these two features provide a number of sites of ecological value. The area's woodlands and parklands also provide concentrations of sites of ecological value, as do Saddington Reservoir in the north and Stanford Reservoir on the area's southern boundary. Stanford Park is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). On the eastern edge of the area Foxton Locks Country Park, with its 23m staircase of locks and the remains of the Inclined Plane, is one of Leicestershire's most visited tourist attractions.



Distinctive features

- ◆ high rolling area, slightly lower and flatter in south
- ◆ rural character
- ◆ pasture predominant over arable
- ◆ ridge and furrow
- ◆ parkland and woodland locally important

Issues

- ◆ lack of hedgerow management or overmanagement
- ◆ hedgerow trees dying back or becoming overmature
- ◆ lack of woodland management
- ◆ loss of hedgerows, trees and woodland
- ◆ inappropriate new woodland planting could upset the existing balance of the landscape in the core area
- ◆ unsympathetic built development at the edges of settlements

5.11 High Leicestershire

This area consists of a hilly plateau dissected by radiating watercourses which have formed moderate to steep sided valleys separated by broad ridges. The central part of the area reaches over 210m. The area is bounded to the north by the Wreake Valley, to the east by the Vale of Catmose, to the south by the Welland Valley and Lutterworth Lowlands, and to the west by the Upper Soar. The landscape is often open and on a large scale with extensive views.

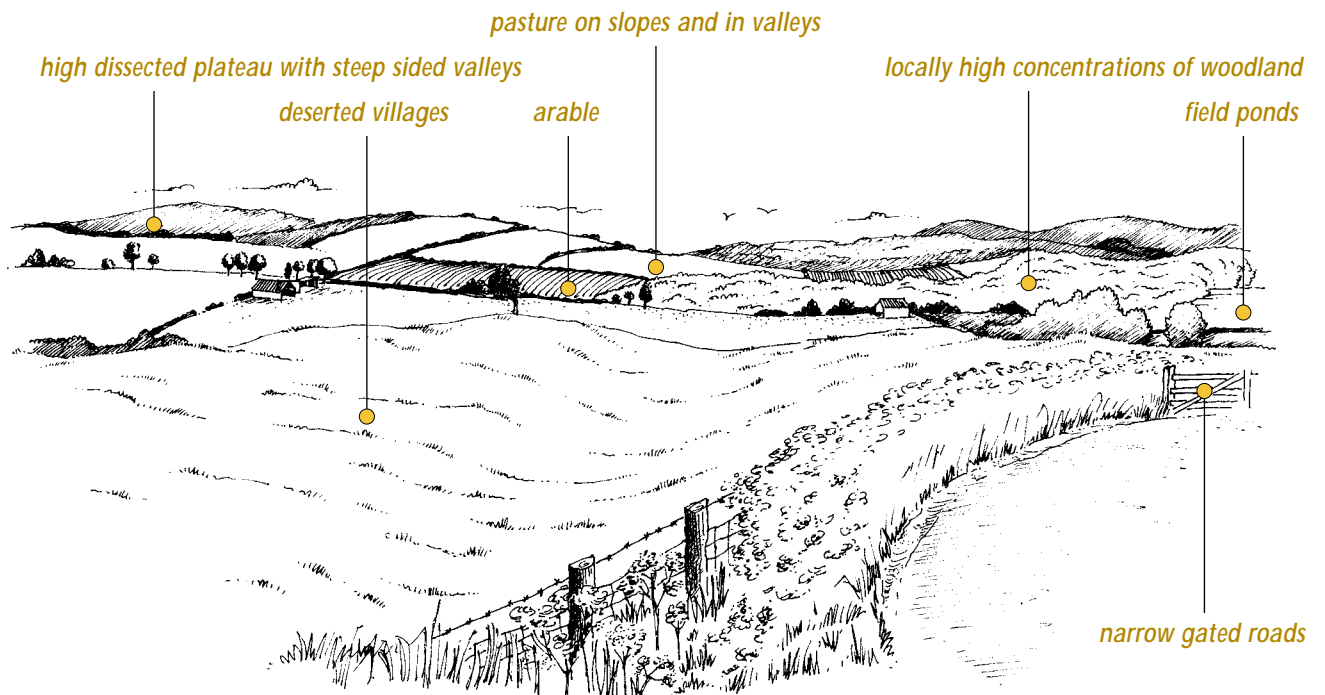
This is a very rural area. Land use is a mixture of arable on the flatter and more gently sloping ridge areas and grassland mainly on the steeper slopes and in the valley bottoms. Ridge and furrow is fairly well distributed throughout the area and reflects the intensity of arable cultivation here in the early Middle Ages. Field ponds are also characteristic.

The field pattern is mainly one of regularly shaped fields bounded by thorn hedges with mainly ash, and in a few places oak, as hedgerow trees. These enclosure hedges contrast with the older mixed species hedges that form the more sinuous parish boundaries. The hedges are generally well trimmed but are at risk of excessive cutting and subsequent loss of vigour, although there is some evidence of a return to traditional cutting and laying of hedges.

Woodland is a significant feature throughout the area. Towards the centre and south of the area large ancient woodland sites, such as Owston Woods at over 50ha, represent the remains of the old Leighfield Forest. Elsewhere woodlands are generally small to medium in size. The woodlands tend to be broad-leaved, mainly ash and oak, but there are also mixed conifer and broadleaved plantations associated with 19th century sporting estates and a number of mature poplar plantations. In general the woodlands tend to be even aged and there is little evidence at present of systematic management or new woodland planting. Parkland is an important component of the landscape throughout the area, the most notable concentration being around Baggrave, Quenby and Lowesby. Woodlands and parklands provide many sites of ecological value, particularly in the central of part of the area. Other concentrations of sites of ecological value are provided by small watercourses, disused railway lines, and Eyebrook Reservoir in the south-east of the area.

In the west of the area the fringes of the City of Leicester and the centres of Scraptoft, Thurnby and Oadby lie within the area. Apart from these suburban and urban influences, Uppingham, in the south-east of the area, is the only town of any size. Small villages, hamlets and farms are scattered throughout the area. Deserted villages are one of the area's distinctive features, particularly towards the west eg Ingarsby, Cold Newton, Noseley and Hamilton.

Another distinctive feature is the network of narrow gated roads connecting isolated hamlets and farms. The only major roads within the area are the A47 running east to west roughly through its centre and the A6003 running north to south towards its eastern extremity, neither of which is seriously intrusive upon the landscape. The A6 cuts across the south western corner of the area. National Grid powerlines run north to south through the heart of the area and are present in many views, and as in many other areas, telecommunications masts are increasingly a feature.



Distinctive features

- ◆ high dissected plateau with steep sided valleys
- ◆ arable on flatter ridges, pasture on slopes and in valleys
- ◆ locally high concentrations of woodland and many ancient woodland sites
- ◆ parkland important
- ◆ ridge and furrow
- ◆ narrow gated roads
- ◆ deserted villages
- ◆ field ponds

Issues

- ◆ lack of management or overmanagement of hedgerows
- ◆ loss of hedgerow trees
- ◆ lack of woodland management
- ◆ possible decline of fox covert woodlands if hunting is banned
- ◆ loss of field ponds
- ◆ ploughing out of ridge and furrow, and damage to the remains of deserted villages
- ◆ unsympathetically designed or sited farm buildings and other built development

5.12 Welland Valley

This character area is a wide shallow river valley stretching from Stamford in the north-east almost as far as Husbands Bosworth in the south-west. The River Welland forms the boundary between Leicestershire and Northamptonshire, making the area described part of a wider landscape character area which extends south-east into Northamptonshire. To the north rising ground defines the boundary between the Welland Valley and the adjoining High Leicestershire and Laughton Hills character areas. There is also a short and less distinct northern boundary with the Lutterworth Lowlands.

Land use is mainly agricultural, with mixed arable and pasture. The floodplain supports predominantly pasture in medium sized fields enclosed by mixed hedges. However, the River Welland has been badly affected by engineering works in the past, much of the valley has been subjected to modern agricultural methods and many ecologically important semi-natural grasslands have been destroyed. On the better drained gently sloping valley sides ridge and furrow grassland is common, but again the traditional landscape has been lost in many places as these fields have been cultivated and hedges removed to form larger arable fields.

The hedges are predominantly hawthorn with some field maple and dog rose. Hedgerow trees are mainly ash, oak and field maple and, along with waterside willows, these make up much of the area's limited tree cover. Particularly to the east of Market Harborough the River Welland has tight meanders which may be traced by the presence of groups of old willows, many of which have been pollarded in the past. There are no wooded areas on the floodplain except for a few field corner stands of poplar.

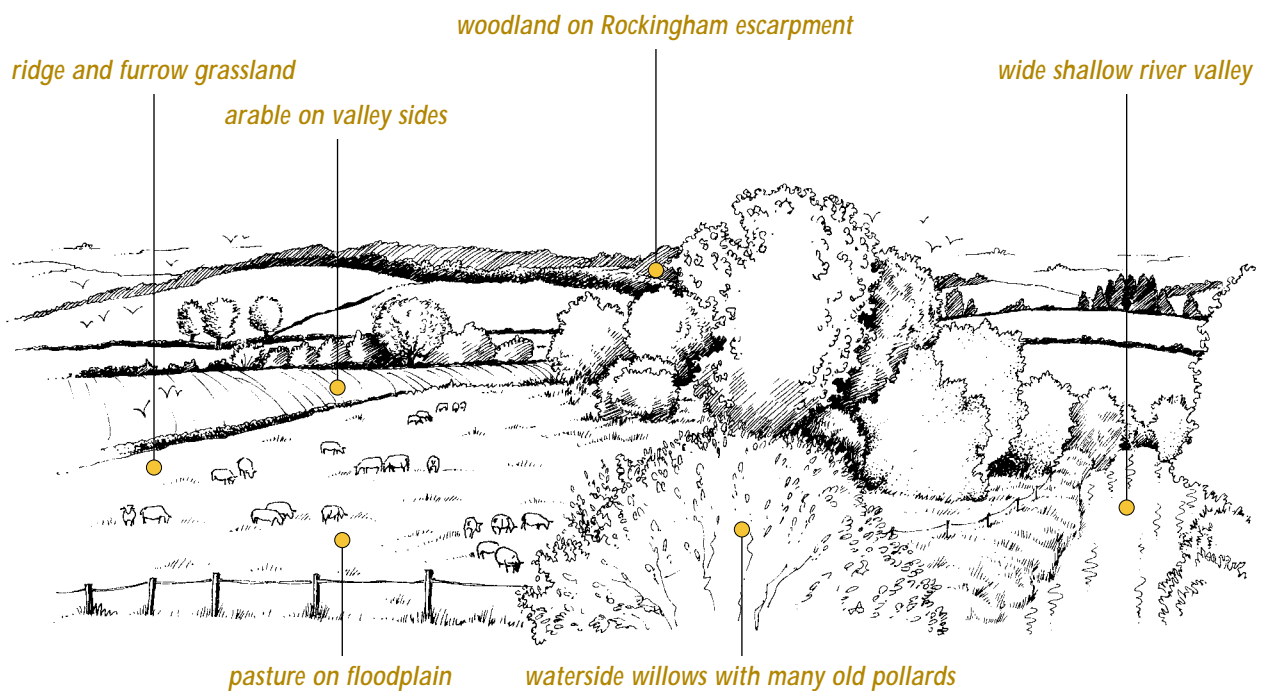
Towards Stamford in the north-east the floodplain narrows and its character becomes more influenced by the more wooded valley sides of the adjoining Rockingham Forest character area in Northamptonshire. There is also more extensive willow planting along the river in this part of the area. North and west of Market Harborough the valley is more open and its character becomes less distinctive.

Views across the area are often extensive but are generally bounded by ridgelines belonging to the Laughton Hills, High Leicestershire, and Northamptonshire. Several features stand out in the open valley landscape, notably the Welland Viaduct at Harringworth, village church steeples, the abandoned railway line which runs the length of the eastern part of the valley from north of Medbourne to Barrowden, and the wooded Rockingham escarpment in Northamptonshire.

In the south-west of the area, the urban area of Market Harborough, including Great Bowden and Lubenham, is locally dominant. However, its location in the valley below local ridgelines which tend to enclose it, means that it is generally well contained within the wider landscape. Elsewhere the area's villages are generally small settlements situated just above the edge of the floodplain. The villages are nuclei of exotic tree species with chestnuts being very prominent.

The A4303/A4304 runs east to west to the west of Market Harborough and the A6 runs north-west from Market Harborough towards Leicester, roughly paralleled by the railway. East of Market Harborough the valley is crossed by the A6003 at Caldecott, the A47 at Tixover and the A1 at its easternmost end. The Market Harborough bypass is locally of considerable significance within the landscape. The Grand Union Canal, with its branch to Market Harborough, is also significant on a local scale rather than being visually dominant.

The canal branch and dismantled railway lines to the west of Market Harborough and in the east of the Welland Valley form linear concentrations of sites of ecological value.



Distinctive features

- ◆ wide shallow river valley
- ◆ pasture on floodplain, arable on valley sides
- ◆ ridge and furrow grassland on valley sides
- ◆ waterside willows with many old pollards
- ◆ lack of woodland

Issues

- ◆ removal or lack of maintenance of hedges and trees
- ◆ lack of new willow planting and neglect for pollarding of old willows
- ◆ ploughing of ridge and furrow grassland and wetland meadows
- ◆ improving species-rich meadows by fertilising and/or draining
- ◆ unsympathetic built development and further spread of main urban area

5.13 Wreake Valley

The Wreake Valley is a flat bottomed, east-west oriented river valley with an average width of 1.5 – 2.5 kilometres. Its usually gently sloping sides form sometimes indistinct boundaries with the neighbouring character landscape areas of The Wolds to the north and High Leicestershire to the south. To the west the Wreake Valley runs into the Soar Valley and in the extreme east it has a very short boundary with the Vale of Catmose.

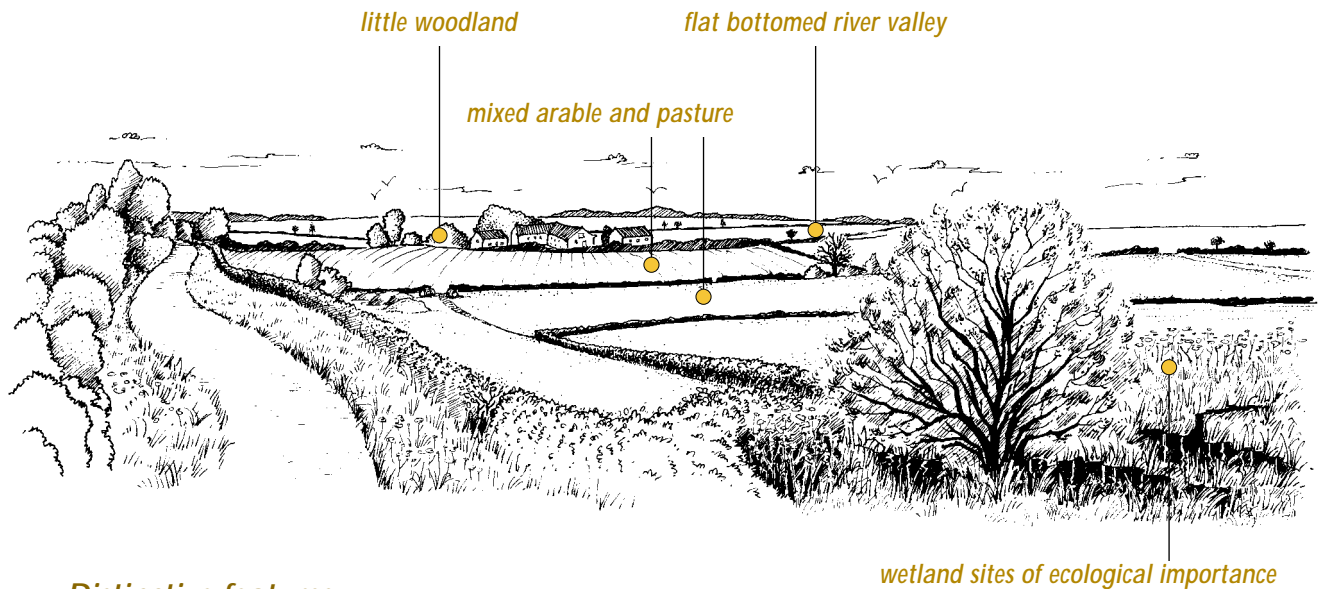
Agriculture is mixed arable and pasture, with arable tending to predominate in the area to the east of Melton Mowbray, where the River Wreake becomes known as the River Eye. In the valley bottom field sizes and boundary types vary considerably. Fields are often interspersed with small copses of willow and poplar especially close to the Wreake itself. Away from the valley bottom the fields tend to be larger and more regular in shape. Hedges, which are often gappy and poorly maintained, are predominantly thorn with some blackthorn. Hedgerow trees are scarcer in the east than in the west, but ash is the dominant hedgerow tree throughout, with oak also present in some places. Woodlands are few apart from in the east, where there are scattered small plantations, with more substantial mixed deciduous and conifer woodlands around Stapleford Park.

Evidence of the historical development of the landscape is found in many places. Fields often show the influence of ridge and furrow, old pollards, hedgebanks, and enclosure. Roads tend to be narrow and often winding, especially within the settlements. Parkland is found at Brooksby and Stapleford, the latter having a widespread influence on the landscape.

A network of open drainage ditches and small streams, the River Wreake, field ponds and wetlands combine with mixed, predominately stock farms, to create a broad range of ecological associations. The River Eye has been declared an SSSI and is listed in the Nature Conservation Review as a nationally important site, although this recognition has not protected it from the degrading effects of agricultural intensification. Former gravel pits, now flooded, create locally important water features and wildlife habitats to the south of Asfordby and to the south of East Goscote.

At the valley's western end the urban influences of Syston and East Goscote detract from an otherwise rural character. Between Ratcliffe-on-the-Wreake and the outskirts of Melton Mowbray the valley is, with the exception of Asfordby, predominately rural in character. The villages here tend to be small, meandering and crowded onto higher land along the valley sides, giving them views across the valley which are an important element of their settings. Melton straddles the valley and acts as a physical divide between its western and eastern sections. Its industrial margins are apparent in many views. East of Melton the settlements are much smaller, more dispersed and of a far stronger rural character than to the west of the town and this part of the area has a feeling of remoteness.

The A607 follows the valley between Syston and Melton Mowbray, again emphasising the contrast between the west and the east of the character area, where the B676 is the major road. The A607 runs just above the floodplain, again providing many views across the valley. Several other major (A606, A6006) and minor roads converge on Melton. Elsewhere minor roads link the area's villages and those crossing the river valley are often subject to flooding when river levels are high. The Peterborough - Leicester railway line also follows the valley.



Distinctive features

- ◆ flat bottomed river valley with gently sloping sides
- ◆ mixed arable and pasture
- ◆ little woodland
- ◆ urban influence of Melton Mowbray
- ◆ more rural character in the east
- ◆ widespread features of historical and ecological (particularly wetland) interest

Issues

- ◆ neglect and loss of hedges and hedgerow trees
- ◆ neglect and loss of riverside pollards
- ◆ lack of woodland management
- ◆ potential impact of further mineral extraction
- ◆ potential impact of any large scale road, housing or industrial development
- ◆ potential impact of splitting up and/or development within large parkland estates

5.14 The Wolds

This is a rural character area of rolling landscape with numerous stream valleys draining south to the River Wreake/Eye, west to the Soar and north towards the Trent. The boundaries of the area with the Belvoir Scarp and Knipton Bowl in the north-east, the Soar Valley in the west and the Wreake Valley in the south are defined by drainage pattern and/or elevation. To the east the area borders the Cottesmore Plateau, whilst to the north-west the Wolds character area continues into Nottinghamshire.

The western part of the area is generally more rolling than the east, where the landscape becomes less undulating and more open, in a gradual transition to the Cottesmore Plateau. Agriculture is the main land use. This is generally mixed, with arable on the broad open ridges and pasture in the valleys, although arable tends to predominate over pasture towards the east. Fields are generally regular in shape and bounded by thorn hedges. Field sizes vary. Ash is the dominant hedgerow tree with some oak.

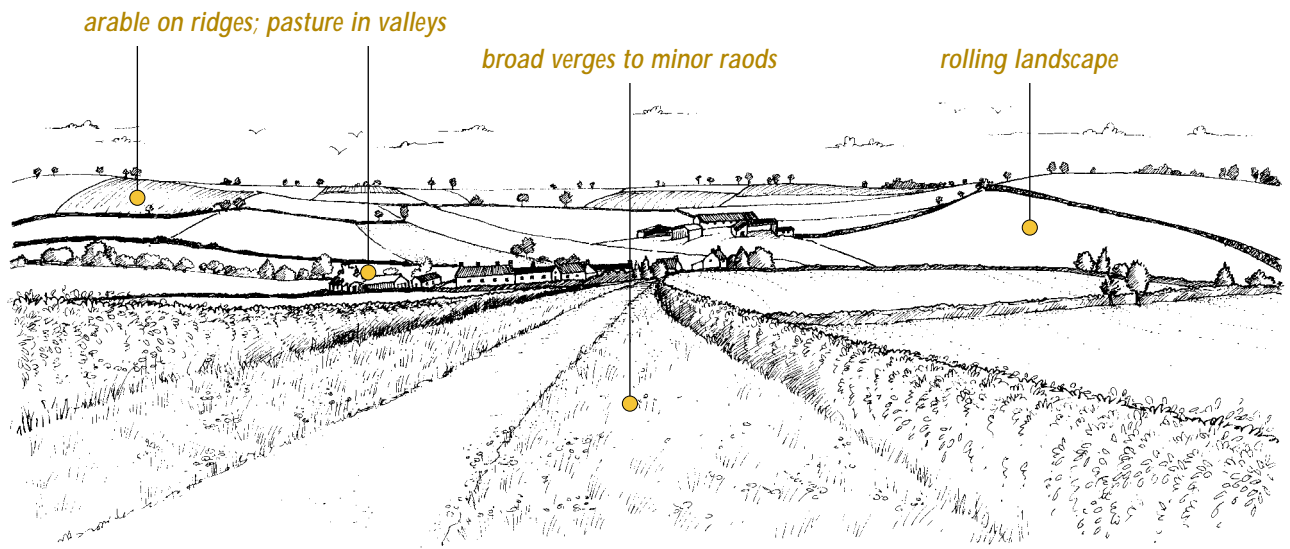
Woodland cover is low and such woodlands as do occur are small in size. Particularly towards the east of the area many of the small woodlands are managed for field sports. Woodlands, streams, springs and flushes, disused railway lines and roadside verges provide sites of ecological interest scattered throughout the area. Field ponds are a traditional feature of the landscape and also often of ecological value. There is little parkland within the area.

The large market town of Melton Mowbray, although lying mainly within the Wreake Valley landscape character area, has a significant impact on the central parts of the area. Recent commercial and residential developments on its fringes extend its impact on the surrounding landscape. Large scale coal mining works north of Asfordby in the 1980s and 1990s had a massive impact both visually and in terms of the services they required. With the recent closure of the mine the future of this part of the area is uncertain. However, the area benefits from many blocks of new woodland planting developed to screen views of the mine. Elsewhere the settlement pattern is one of small and medium sized villages and individual farms.

Towards the east of the area there is evidence of old small scale ironstone workings which have now become grassed over. Bescaby landfill site is currently in operation just to the north of Waltham-on-the-Wolds. Gypsum is extracted from beneath the Wolds. The works just to the east of Barrow-upon-Soar in the extreme west of the area are not a conspicuous feature within the Wolds character area, but are prominent within the landscape of the Soar Valley.

Away from the localised areas of intensive activity around Melton and Asfordby this remains largely a rural area with limited development. There is a wide range of local variation in character detail dependent on specific features, such as the disused airfield at Wymeswold, the Garthorpe point-to-point course, and the low stone walls around and within villages such as Sproxton, Stonesby, Saltby and Waltham-on-the-Wolds. The Waltham transmitter mast to the north of Waltham-on-the-Wolds is a prominent landmark.

Most of the major roads crossing the area - the A6006, A606 and A607 - radiate from Melton Mowbray. The A46 follows the line of the Roman Fosse Way running in a straight line north to south through the western part of the area. Broad grass verges are characteristic of the area's minor roads.



Distinctive features

- ◆ rolling landscape drained by numerous stream valleys
- ◆ mixed farmland - arable on ridges, pasture in valleys
- ◆ urban and industrial influences of Melton Mowbray and Asfordby
- ◆ small to medium sized villages and individual farms
- ◆ little woodland or parkland
- ◆ local variation in character detail
- ◆ broad grass verges to minor roads

Issues

- ◆ agricultural change
- ◆ loss of hedges and hedgerow trees
- ◆ neglect or loss of field ponds
- ◆ unsympathetic built development
- ◆ uncertainty over future of Asfordby mine area

5.15 Belvoir Scarp

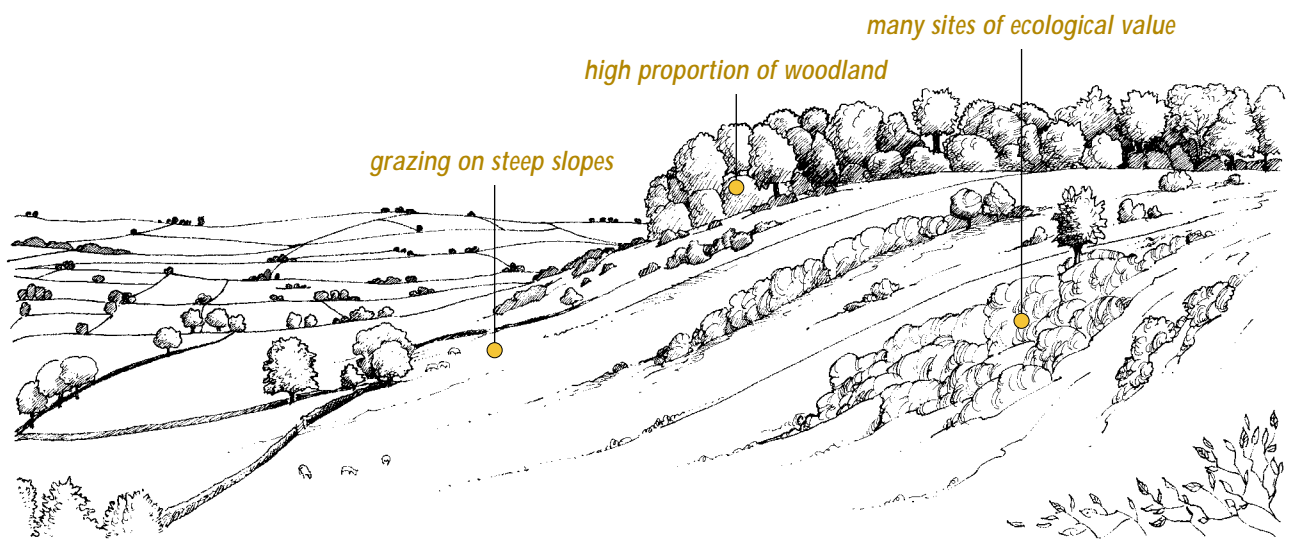
This is a long narrow character area formed by a steep escarpment running south-east to north-west. The height of the top of the scarp varies, reaching a high point of 148m. The area borders The Wolds and the Knipton Bowl to the south-east and the Vale of Belvoir to the north-west.

Agriculture is dominated by permanent grazing due to the steepness of the scarp, although arable farming does occur towards the bottom of the scarp where the land is less steep. The field pattern is generally medium to large scale in both permanent grassland and arable areas.

Most of the scarp is well treed, either with woodlands or with scattered trees, scrub and hedgerow trees. The greatest concentration of woodland is around and immediately to the south-west of Belvoir Castle at the north-eastern end of the scarp, where it is at its steepest. An area of parkland at Old Dalby in the south-west of the area adjoins the substantial block of woodland formed by Old Dalby Wood. Many of the woodlands are of ecological value. Old Dalby Woods and Stonepit Spinney are both ancient woodland sites, and Harby Hill Wood is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) noted for its colonies of wild daffodil.

The steepness, narrowness and relatively small size of this character area mean that settlement is limited, with only the villages of Stathern and Old Dalby lying within the area. Several minor roads cut north-west to south-east through the scarp, linking the Wolds and the Vale of Belvoir.

Views from the top of the scarp are extensive, predominantly over the Vale of Belvoir.



Distinctive features

- ◆ steep escarpment giving a long narrow character area
- ◆ grazing on steep slopes, arable on flatter areas towards bottom of scarp
- ◆ high proportion of woodland with many sites of ecological value
- ◆ limited settlement
- ◆ extensive views

Issues

- ◆ continuation of woodland management

5.16 Vale of Belvoir

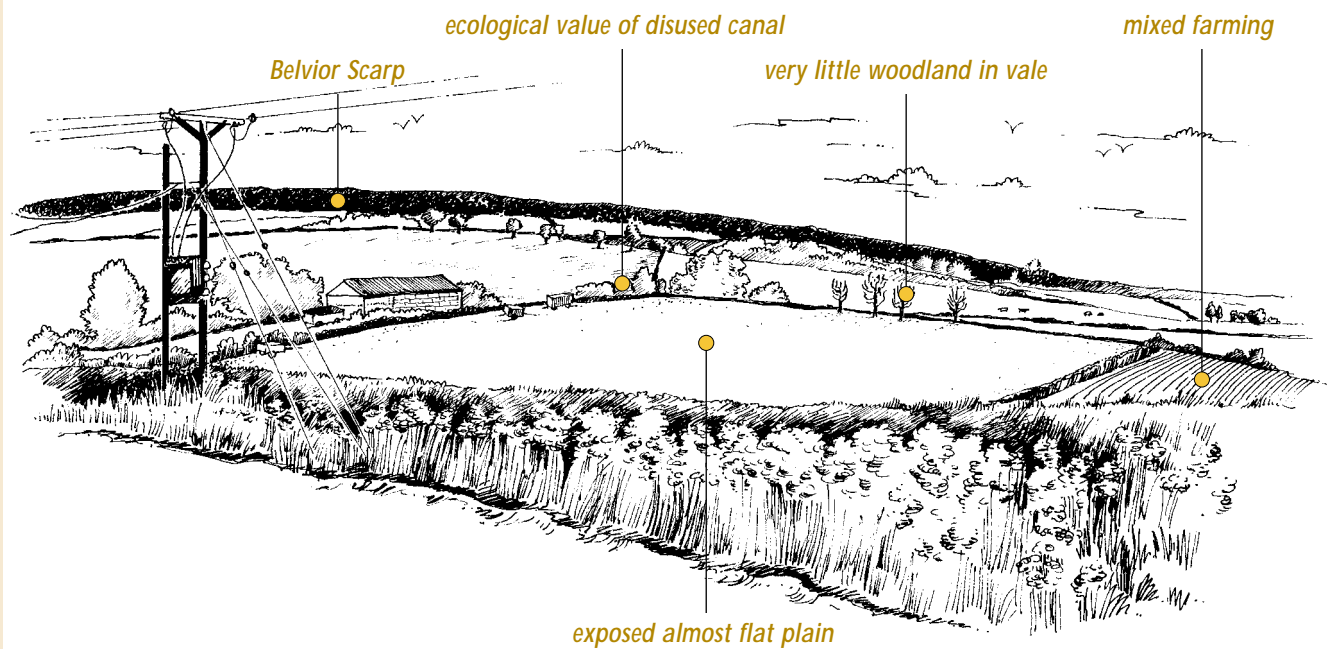
This character area is the southern part of an exposed, almost flat, plain which stretches from the foot of the Belvoir Scarp north and north-eastwards into Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire.

Farming is mixed, with some traditional dairying but also some extensive large scale arable farming, particularly towards the eastern end of the area. There is hardly any woodland apart from some small field corner spinneys and fox coverts, and the area relies largely on hedges and hedgerow trees for its limited tree cover. An avenue of young horse chestnuts along the approach to Belvoir Castle from the Vale will become a significant local feature in time.

The area is rural in character and the villages within it are generally small and little affected by modern development. The villages run in a fairly evenly distributed line along the Vale, from Nether Broughton in the south-west through Long Clawson, Hose, Harby, Plungar and Redmile to Bottesford and Muston in the north-east. They generally lie just above the 50m contour and the line of the disused Grantham Canal. Although sites of ecological value are sparsely distributed in this area, the canal is of ecological interest along almost the whole of its length. The disused railway line which cuts north to south through the centre of the area provides another linear concentration of ecologically significant sites. In the extreme north-east, Muston Meadows National Nature Reserve is an important wetland site with a large area of natural reedbed and a significant area of neutral grassland habitat.

The only major road within the area is the A52 which cuts across the north-eastern end of the area, immediately to the south of Bottesford. Minor roads follow a fairly regular pattern with the north-east/south-west road along the Vale crossed at right angles by roads coming down off the Belvoir Scarp.

Visually the area is heavily influenced by the Belvoir Scarp which dominates all views to the south and most views to the east, with Belvoir Castle itself being a prominent landmark over a much wider area.



Distinctive features

- ◆ exposed almost flat plain
- ◆ mixed farming, arable predominant in the east
- ◆ very little woodland
- ◆ ecological value of disused canal
- ◆ small, regularly distributed villages
- ◆ Belvoir Scarp important in many views

Issues

- ◆ loss of hedgerow trees
- ◆ overmanagement of hedges
- ◆ unsympathetic built development

5.17 Knipton Bowl

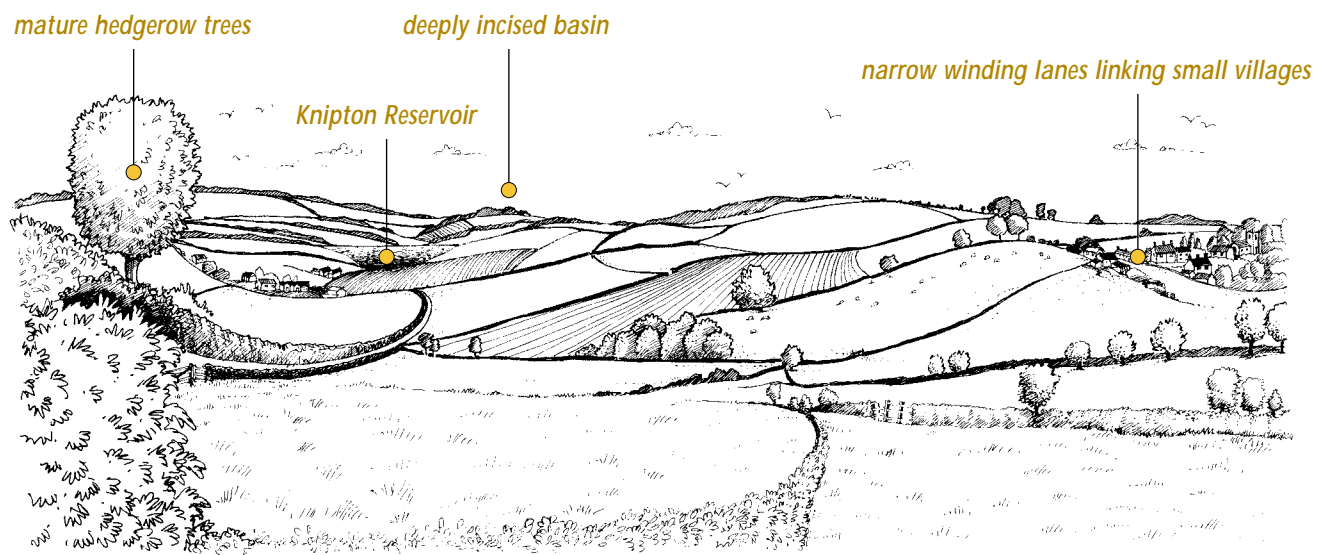
This is a small, deeply rural character area. It takes the form of a clearly defined north-east facing basin, deeply incised by the River Devon and its tributary streams flowing off the Wolds to the south and the dip slope of the Belvoir Scarp to the north-west. The land slopes, steeply in places, down into the basin which consists of a rolling landscape with a number of deep valleys.

Agriculture throughout the area is a mixture of pasture and arable. Fields are divided by hawthorn hedges, many of which include mature and declining hedgerow trees.

The north-eastern part of the area is well wooded with mature, mainly deciduous woodland. These woodlands, together with Knipton Reservoir and the River Devon provide a local concentration of sites of ecological value. This part of the area is strongly influenced by the Belvoir Estate and includes a small area of parkland. Hedgerows around Knipton village include large specimens of beech, sycamore, oak and lime.

The south-western part of the area also includes some small pockets of deciduous woodland but here the hedgerows and hedgerow trees are more significant in providing tree cover. On the southern edge of the area, Croxton Park represents the remains of medieval parkland and is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its unimproved rough pasture, ancient trees, lichen flora and diversity of breeding birds.

The distribution pattern of the area's several villages is denser than that of the adjoining Wolds character area. The villages are small and compact and, with the exception of Eastwell, all are designated Conservation Areas. The A607 passes along the south-eastern boundary of the area but elsewhere the roads are narrow winding lanes. Glimpses of Knipton Reservoir, Belvoir Castle, and the village churches provide important visual contributions to the character of the area and the Waltham transmitter mast on the Wolds is a prominent landmark in many views.



Distinctive features

- ◆ deeply incised basin
- ◆ mixed farming
- ◆ many mature hedgerow trees
- ◆ well wooded in its north-eastern part
- ◆ Knipton Reservoir
- ◆ parkland influences locally
- ◆ narrow winding lanes linking small villages

Issues

- ◆ loss of hedges and hedgerow trees
- ◆ loss of woodland
- ◆ potential impact of built development

5.18 Vale of Catmose

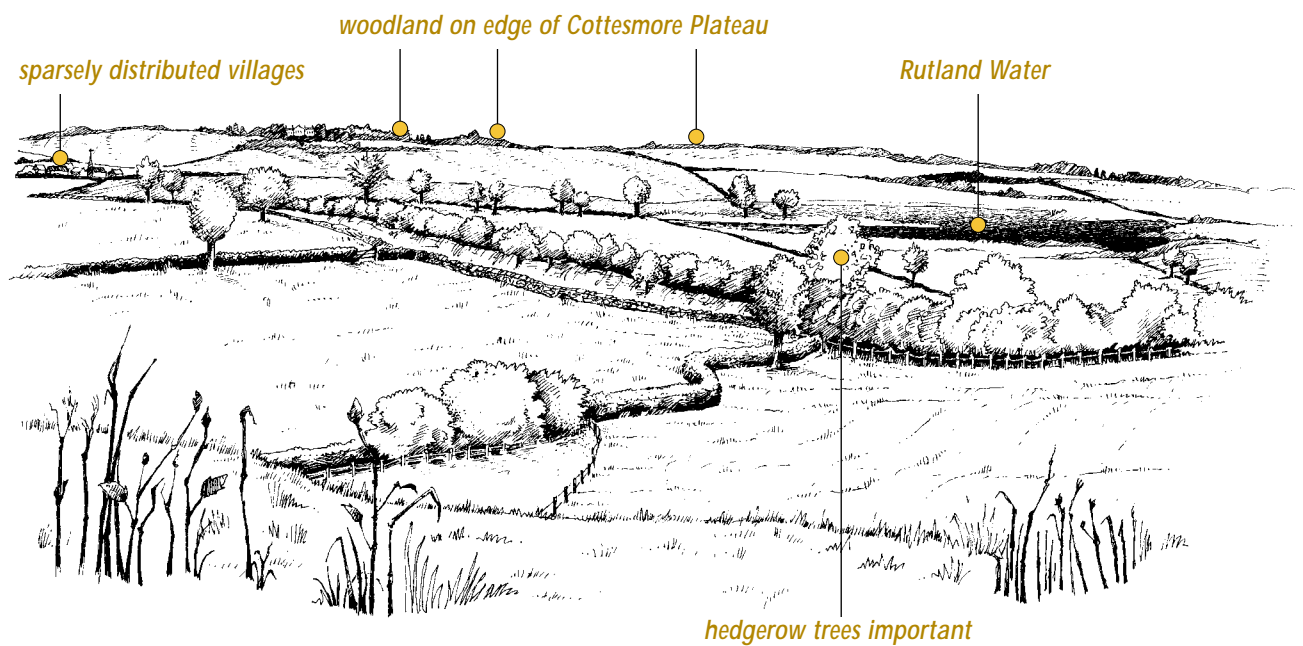
This character area is a broad, flat-bottomed, elongated and curved basin defined to the west and south by a distinct rise to the rolling hilly ground of High Leicestershire, to the north by the rising ground of The Wolds, and to the east by the edge of the Cottesmore Plateau.

The Vale may be split into two parts with the northern end running north to south, Oakham acting as a central “hinge”, and the southern end running east to west. The woodland around Burley, on the edge of the Cottesmore Plateau on the opposite side of the Vale from Oakham, is visually very important throughout the area, linking with woodlands around Barnsdale when viewed from the southern part of the area. The southern part of the Vale of Catmose, east of Oakham, is taken up largely by Rutland Water, although views of the water body itself are limited from many of the roads in the area, with the exception of the A606 along its northern shore. New tree planting around the reservoir is well established although it does not yet provide a mature landscape. The areas immediately around the reservoir are well maintained by Anglian Water and are perhaps even a little over-tidy in appearance. Rutland Water is a popular recreational resource. It is also a site of international importance for wildfowl and has been declared a Special Protection Area and a Ramsar site.

The northern part of the Vale is more rural. Farming is mainly arable on the sides of the Vale, with pasture slightly predominant on the flatter land along the bottom of the Vale, for example around Ashwell. Fairly large fields are bounded by low thorn hedges, often starting to become gappy. Hedgerow trees, predominantly ash, are not frequent but are visually important in a rather open landscape which lacks significant woodland within the character area boundaries.

The old Oakham-Melton Mowbray Canal is a recurring and locally significant feature in the northern part of the area, with water still present in some places and associated hedgerow vegetation along much of its length. It provides many sites of ecological value.

Oakham is the only settlement of any size and villages are sparsely distributed elsewhere within the character area. The prison at Ashwell is not intrusive in the landscape. The A606 runs along the north shore of Rutland Water and the A6003 along its western end, meeting at Oakham from where the A606 continues north-westwards. Several minor roads also converge on the town. The Peterborough to Leicester railway line follows the line of the Vale. Low flying aircraft from Cottesmore intrude upon the character area creating a noise nuisance and, to a lesser extent, visual intrusion.



Distinctive features

- ◆ broad, flat-bottomed, elongated and curved basin
- ◆ rather open landscape
- ◆ very little woodland, but woodland around Burley and Barnsdale (in the Cottesmore Plateau character area) visually important
- ◆ Rutland Water important for recreation and nature conservation
- ◆ sparsely distributed villages
- ◆ disused Oakham-Melton Mowbray canal

Issues

- ◆ agricultural change
- ◆ loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- ◆ noise nuisance from low-flying aircraft

5.19 Cottesmore Plateau

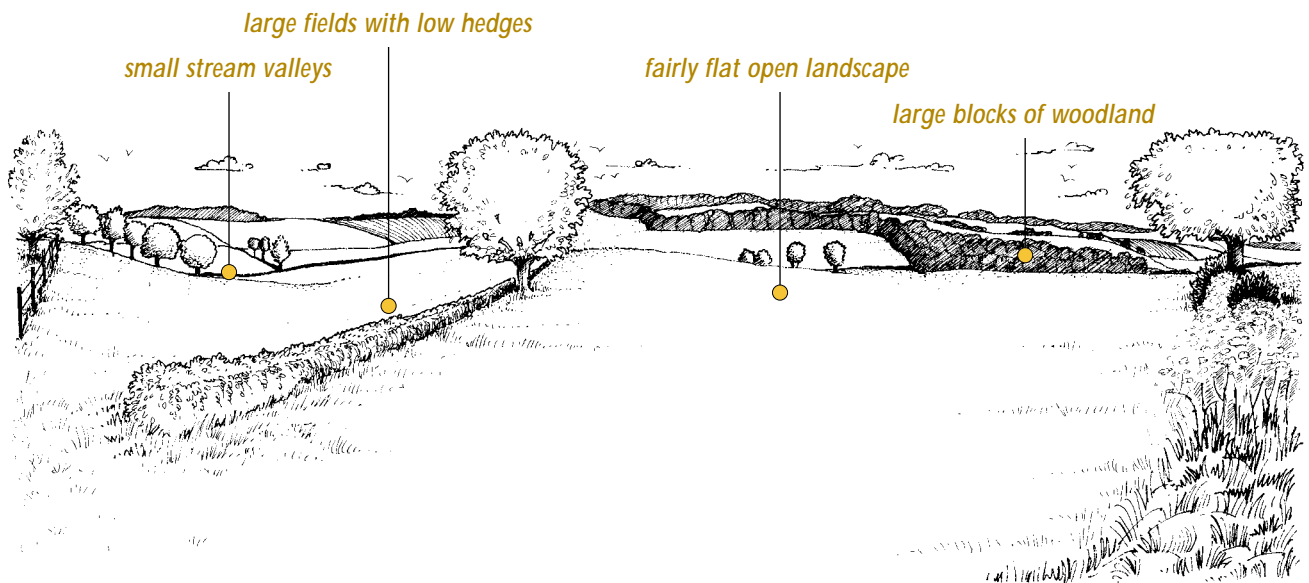
This area is fairly flat and open. From the scarp rising from the eastern edge of the Vale of Catmose, the Cottesmore Plateau dips gently from west to east. To the north and south the area's boundaries with the Wolds and High Leicestershire respectively are less well defined by topography. In its southern half the Cottesmore Plateau is cut into by the River Gwash running roughly first north to south and then west to east below Empingham. Elsewhere the area is cut into by a few small streams flowing eastwards into Lincolnshire. The stream valleys are not of great depth but often have quite steep sides and lines of streamside trees, which create local pockets of more intimate landscape within the open plateau.

Agriculture is dominated by mainly large arable fields with low thorn hedges. Towards the east of the area drystone walls start to become a feature, sometimes alone, sometimes in tandem with a thorn hedge, and often showing signs of starting to fall into disrepair. Hedgerow tree cover is variable. In some areas, particularly where hedges have been removed to enlarge fields, it is very limited. Other areas, for example between Tickencote and Empingham, are notable for their mature hedgerow trees - mainly ash but also oak, sycamore and lime. There has been considerable recent hedgerow tree planting around Cottesmore Airfield, although often using inappropriate species, such as cherry and rowan. A recently planted row of poplars associated with the airfield east of Thistleton will soon become a significant local feature, as will the avenue of young oaks planted along the verges at the southern entrance to Cottesmore village. In the north of the area avenue trees are a notable feature around the Buckminster Estate.

The central part of the area is relatively well wooded with generally medium to large sized woodland blocks. These woodland blocks, and others across the border in Lincolnshire, create the boundaries to long views even in the most open parts of the area. Many of the woodlands are ancient woodland sites with significant ecological value. Parkland is present at Buckminster, Clipsham, Exton, Burley and Tickencote. At Exton much the parkland is hidden from public view by the surrounding belts of woodland which link up physically and visually with the Barnsdale Avenue woods and then with the substantial woodlands around Burley. Important examples of species-rich calcareous grassland habitat are found in old quarries (eg Ketton, Bloody Oaks) and on roadside verges.

The central part of the area is heavily influenced by the presence of the Cottesmore Airfield. Although the airfield buildings and associated service housing are drab in appearance, they are generally situated some distance from the surrounding roads and thus the main visual impact of the airfield lies in the fact that it creates an area from which other landscape elements are largely absent. However, noise from aircraft and from general airfield operations is locally intrusive. There are also disused airfields within the area near Saltby in the north and Edith Weston in the south. Neither of these has more than a very local visual impact. Ketton quarry and cement works are a major feature in the extreme south of the area, but from many viewpoints within the character area they are relatively well-screened with typically only the tops of the works chimneys visible.

There are no large settlements within the area, the settlement pattern being one of small to medium sized villages and scattered individual farmsteads. Although the A1 passes through the eastern part of the area, for much of its length its route is in or near woodland which minimises visual intrusion, although traffic noise is locally intrusive. The B668 running south-west/north-east linking Oakham with the A1 runs through Burley, Cottesmore and Greetham. Elsewhere a fairly sparse network of minor roads links the area's villages.

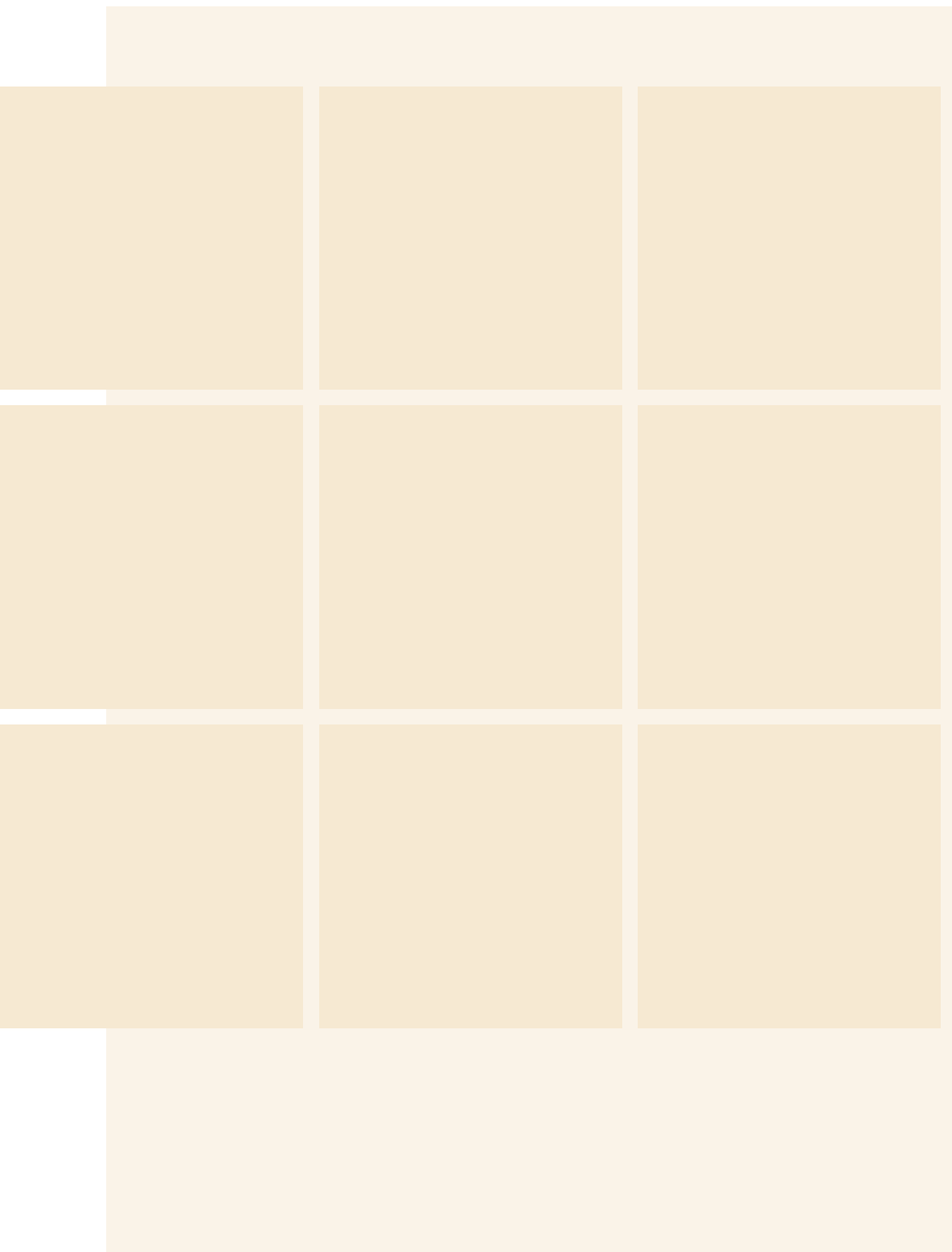


Distinctive features

- ◆ fairly flat generally open landscape
- ◆ River Gwash and small stream valleys give pockets of more intimate landscape
- ◆ predominantly arable with large fields and low hedges
- ◆ large blocks of woodland, many of ecological value
- ◆ drystone walls towards the east
- ◆ parkland locally important
- ◆ influence of Cottesmore Airfield
- ◆ species-rich limestone grassland on road verges

Issues

- ◆ further hedgerow and hedgerow tree losses
- ◆ deterioration and loss of drystone walls
- ◆ planting of inappropriate species in rural hedges and verges
- ◆ deer browsing in ancient semi-natural woodlands



6. Landscape and Woodland Objectives and Guidelines

6

6.01 Strategy objectives and guidelines

6.01.01 Strategy objectives and guidelines

The following broad objectives apply to the whole of the Strategy area:-

- 1 To conserve and enhance the character, diversity and local distinctiveness of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland's landscapes
- 2 To identify appropriate opportunities for new woodland planting to increase the woodland cover of the Strategy area
- 3 To encourage the sustainable management of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland's existing woodland resources to produce timber and provide environmental and social benefits.

Guidelines and mechanisms for achieving these objectives are set out in Table 6 (pages 78 - 79).

More specific objectives and guidelines apply to individual landscape character areas and are given in sections 6.02 to 6.19. These character area objectives and guidelines have been generated from the issues identified in Chapter 5. For the purpose of these guidelines woodland block sizes are defined as, small 0.25-9.99ha, medium 10.00-50.00ha, large over 50.00ha.

6.01.02 Current initiatives

A number of initiatives already exist which, directly or indirectly, provide mechanisms for achieving the Strategy's objectives.

The Leicestershire County Council *Landscape Conservation Grant Scheme* encourages good landscape management through its grants for hedge planting, hedge laying, pond creation and restoration, tree planting, small woodland management and drystone wall restoration. Recent modifications to this grant scheme will enable it to assist more fully in achieving some of the objectives of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland BAP Habitat Action Plans.

The recent publication by MAFF of the *England Rural Development Plan 2000-2006* addresses the issues of support for agriculture, forestry and the wider rural economy. Funding for the support measures will be channelled through MAFF.

MAFF's *Countryside Stewardship Scheme* also encourages traditional landscape management practices on a whole farm basis, with the aim of showing that conservation and public enjoyment of the countryside can be combined with commercial farming and land management. The Scheme targets particular types of landscapes, habitats and historic features which are reviewed on an annual basis.

The Forestry Commission's *Woodland Grant Scheme* encourages the planting and management of woodlands for timber production, environmental and social benefits. Areas must exceed 0.25ha and applicants are required to manage their woods in accordance with an approved five year plan. Restoration of derelict land that includes woodland planting may be funded by the Regional Development Agency.

The *Farm Woodland Premium Scheme* (FWPS), administered by MAFF and the Forestry Commission, encourages the conversion of agricultural land to woodland. The FWPS offers annual payments for 15 years to replace the income foregone from farming the land.

Within the area of the National Forest, the National Forest Company provides grants for woodland planting through its *Tender Scheme and Locational Supplement*, and assists with small scale landscape improvements through its *Programme Development Fund Grants*.

Leicestershire County Council runs a *Local Landmark Grant Scheme* which aims to help parish councils and other community groups to conserve and create features which contribute to local distinctiveness. In a similar vein, the Countryside Agency is developing a *Local Heritage Initiative* to help people record and care for their local landscapes, landmarks and traditions.

Leicestershire County Council has also recently launched its *SHIRE Grants Scheme* which provides support for local communities and individuals who wish to take action to improve the county's environment.

The *Leicestershire Environmental Action Fund* (LEAF) Limited has been established by Leicestershire County Council, Hanson and SITA as an independent Environment Trust. It enables communities to take advantage of landfill tax rebates and apply for grants for environmental projects.

In partnership with others, Leicestershire County Council runs two countryside management projects. The *Landmark North West* and *Stepping Stones Countryside Management Projects* both have the aims of improving woodland cover, countryside access and environmental improvement through increased community involvement within their respective areas.

Individual district councils may also run grant schemes or other initiatives which can help fulfil the Strategy's objectives.

It should be noted that all of the above initiatives may be subject to change.

In addition to the above initiatives, Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council, Rutland County Council and district, town and parish councils all have responsibilities for the management of their own landholdings and can use their influence through the demonstration of good practice.

6.01.03 Monitoring

Much of the land in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland is in private ownership, and the impact of the Strategy and the success of the initiatives described in section 6.01.02 depends on individual landowners and local communities working in partnership with local authorities and other public bodies. The objectives of the Strategy must therefore be achieved not through direct control but through indirect influence and an opportunistic approach. In the light of this, it has not been felt realistic to set quantified targets for private land within the Strategy. However, mechanisms for monitoring landscape change are in place.

In 1991 Leicestershire County Council commissioned a complete aerial photographic survey of the county. A project to interpret a sample of these photographs and compare them with aerial photographs taken in the 1960s was then undertaken to assess land use change (*Gilbertson, Mawson and Keeling, 1992*). It is proposed to bid for funding to commission a new aerial photographic survey for Leicestershire in 2001, which will allow further land use change monitoring.

Existing initiatives such as the Biodiversity Action Plan and Countryside Stewardship Scheme have their own monitoring arrangements, which will provide information on those areas where the aims of the Strategy overlap with those of other initiatives.

The 1995 field survey, which formed the basis for the identification of the landscape character areas, will provide a baseline for monitoring and review of the Strategy. Field survey forms and the accompanying photographic archive will enable local or county-wide re-assessments to be made.

TABLE 6
STRATEGY OBJECTIVES AND GUIDELINES

Objective	Guidelines	Mechanism(s)
1 To conserve and enhance the character, diversity and local distinctiveness of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland's landscapes	1 Inform landowners, planners, developers and individuals about the special character of their local areas	1 Publication and dissemination of Landscape and Woodland Strategy
	2 Promote the use of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland landscape character areas as a basis for planning and landscape management decisions	1 Publication and dissemination of Landscape and Woodland Strategy 2 Input to review of Structure Plan policies
	3 Support appropriate landscape management works for each landscape character area	1 Leicestershire Landscape Conservation Grant Scheme 2 Countryside Stewardship Scheme 3 National Forest Company grants within National Forest area 4 Advice to farmers and landowners
	4 Support community groups in conserving and enhancing their local environments	1 Landmark North West Countryside Management Project 2 Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project 3 Leicestershire Local Landmark Grant Scheme 4 Leicestershire SHIRE Grants Scheme 5 LEAF grants 6 Countryside Agency Local Heritage Initiative 7 National Forest Company grants within National Forest area
	5 Support the implementation of the Habitat Action Plans within the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland BAP and the National Forest BAP	1 Leicestershire Landscape Conservation Grant Scheme 2 National Forest Company grants within National Forest area
	6 Ensure where possible that the design of new woodland planting is of an appropriate scale to complement the character of the local area	1 Use of landscape character areas in evaluating mineral restoration proposals. 2 Woodland Grant Scheme applications

Objective	Guidelines	Mechanism(s)
2 To identify appropriate opportunities for new woodland planting to increase the woodland cover of the Strategy area	1 Support appropriate new woodland planting for each landscape character area based on local NVC type - where appropriate new planting should be located so as to provide links between ancient semi-natural woodlands	1 Leicestershire Landscape Conservation Grant Scheme 2 Woodland Grant Scheme applications 3 National Forest Company grants within National Forest area
	2 Seek, in partnership with others, the development of a community forest within the countryside around Leicester	1 Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project 2 Woodland Grant Scheme
	3 Support the implementation of the National Forest Strategy	1 National Forest Company grants within National Forest area
	4 Promote the use of the Woodland Grant Scheme	1 Advice to farmers and landowners
	5 Encourage restoration of mineral extraction sites to woodland where appropriate	1 Minerals Planning Authority
	6 Promote woodland planting within S106 agreements for large scale developments	1 County and District Planning Authorities and Local Plan and Development Control processes
3 To promote the sustainable management of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland's existing woodland resources to produce timber and provide environmental and social benefits	1 Support woodland management works, including the restoration of semi-natural woodland on ancient sites that are currently growing plantation woodland	1 Leicestershire Landscape Conservation Grant Scheme 2 Woodland Grant Scheme 3 National Forest Company grants within National Forest area 4 Publish an information leaflet on basic woodland management and sources of further professional assistance and grant aid
	2 Improve the management and conservation of mature trees in woods, parks and hedgerows	1 Advice to farmers and landowners 2 National Forest Company grants within National Forest area 3 Arrange awareness training for those involved in woodland, parkland and hedgerow management
	3 Promote new markets for small roundwood thinnings	1 Work in partnership with Forestry Commission and National Forest Company

6.02 Trent Valley

OBJECTIVE

- To restore and enhance the river floodplain character of the valley landscape

GUIDELINES

- Increase tree cover through planting and management of small woodlands and wet woodland including streamside willows
- Conserve and restore the hedgerow network through improved hedgerow management and new hedgerow planting including hedgerow trees
- Protect the parklands, woodlands and tree groups which contribute strongly to the unspoilt character of the areas around Lockington and Hemington
- Encourage the retention of open drainage ditches, small streams and other wetland habitats
- Obtain high quality restoration schemes for mineral workings with a high proportion of land returned to permanent grassland wherever feasible
- Promote the creation of reedbeds and other floodplain wetland habitats as afteruses for mineral extraction sites
- Enhance the appearance of the local landscape through well designed and adequately mitigated schemes wherever further infrastructure or extractive development is necessary
- Seek to establish, in partnership with others, an agreed plan for a broad range of environmental improvements to the Trent and Soar Valleys

6.03 Langley Lowlands

OBJECTIVE

- To conserve and enhance the area's rural character and well wooded appearance.

GUIDELINES

- Conserve the existing woodland resource through improved management
- Increase woodland cover through new planting in medium sized blocks
- Conserve and enhance the hedgerow network through the retention and proper management of hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Minimise the impact of future quarry extensions through sensitive design and mitigation measures
- Protect and restore the historic parkland around Staunton Harold through improved visitor management and landscape restoration measures

6.04 Soar Valley

OBJECTIVE

- To restore and enhance the traditional valley floodplain landscape

GUIDELINES

- Increase tree cover through planting of small woodlands and wet woodlands
- Conserve old willow pollards alongside watercourses through improved management
- Encourage new streamside scrub and willow fringe planting where appropriate
- Promote the creation of reedbeds and other floodplain wetland habitats as afteruses for mineral extraction sites
- Support the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland BAP in seeking to identify a large floodplain site for a wetland habitat creation project
- Enhance the appearance of the local landscape through carefully designed restoration schemes wherever further extractive development is necessary
- Seek to establish, in partnership with others, an agreed plan for a broad range of environmental improvements to the Soar and Trent Valleys

6.05 The Coalfield

OBJECTIVE

- To create a new wooded landscape as part of the National Forest, whilst conserving existing areas of special value

GUIDELINES

- Increase woodland cover in blocks of all sizes (except in the Coleorton historic mining area where only small scale planting works are appropriate)
- Conserve and enhance the hedgerow network and hedge trees through improved management and new planting
- Obtain high quality restoration schemes for mineral workings with a high proportion of land restored to woodland wherever feasible
- Encourage creation of new areas of heathland on derelict land, and as part of restoration schemes for mineral workings
- Enhance the appearance of the local landscape through well designed and adequately mitigated schemes wherever further infrastructure or extractive development is necessary
- Ensure that post-industrial sites of ecological value are conserved
- Conserve the special character of the Coleorton historic mining area

6.06 Charnwood Forest

OBJECTIVE

- To conserve and enhance the well wooded upland character of the area and gain national recognition for its special character

GUIDELINES

- Conserve the existing woodland resource through improved woodland management with targeting of the Leicestershire County Council small woodland management grant
- Increase woodland cover and provide links between ancient semi-natural woodlands, whilst respecting the area's traditional land use mix and nature conservation interest
- Conserve and enhance the hedgerow network through the retention and proper management of hedges and hedgerow trees
- Conserve existing heathland and heath-grassland areas and seek to increase their total area
- Conserve fast-flowing streams through appropriate vegetation management
- Encourage the retention and restoration of traditional drystone walls
- Improve visitor management to relieve local recreational pressures
- Continue to campaign for Charnwood Forest to be declared an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

6.07 Mease/Sence Lowlands

OBJECTIVE

- To conserve and enhance the rural character of the lowland agricultural landscape

GUIDELINES

- Increase woodland cover in small to medium sized blocks
- Increase tree cover through the regeneration and replanting of hedgerow trees and scrub and willow fringe to streams
- Conserve and enhance hedges and hedgerow trees through improved management and appropriate new planting
- Retain and enhance remaining field ponds through improved management, and encourage the restoration of old field ponds where appropriate

6.08 Upper Soar

OBJECTIVE

- To enhance the appearance of the agricultural, urban and suburban landscapes which comprise the character area

GUIDELINES

- Enhance the existing woodland resource through improved management
- Increase woodland cover in small to medium sized blocks
- Strengthen the hedgerow network through improved management and new planting
- Increase tree cover through new planting of scrub and willow fringe to streams
- Enhance the amenity and ecological value of the River Soar corridor

6.09 Lutterworth Lowlands

OBJECTIVE

- To conserve and enhance the rural character of the lowland agricultural landscape

GUIDELINES

- Increase woodland cover through planting in blocks of all sizes
- Maintain and strengthen the existing hedgerow network through improved standards of hedgerow management and new planting
- Increase tree cover through new hedgerow tree planting
- Ensure that restoration schemes for mineral workings respect the pattern of the local landscape and contribute to an overall increase in tree cover

6.10 Laughton Hills

OBJECTIVE

- To conserve and enhance the rural character of this small upland area

GUIDELINES

- Conserve and enhance the existing woodland resource through improved woodland management with targeting of the Leicestershire County Council small woodland management grant
- Increase woodland cover in small blocks which respect the existing pattern and balance of the landscape
- Encourage improved management of hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Conserve tree cover within and around rural settlements and parkland, and ensure long term tree cover through new hedgerow and parkland tree planting

6.11 High Leicestershire

OBJECTIVE

- To conserve and enhance the deeply rural and historic character of the area

GUIDELINES

- Conserve and enhance the existing woodland resource through improved woodland management with targeting of the Leicestershire County Council small woodland management grant
- Increase woodland cover in blocks of all sizes and provide links between ancient semi-natural woodlands, whilst respecting the importance of ridge and furrow, village remains and unfenced gated roads to the character of the area
- Improve management of hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Increase tree cover through new hedgerow and parkland tree planting
- Retain and enhance remaining field ponds through improved management and encourage the restoration of old field ponds where appropriate

6.12 Welland Valley

OBJECTIVE

- To conserve and enhance the traditional valley floodplain landscape

GUIDELINES

- Improve management of hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Increase tree cover through new hedgerow tree planting and field corner planting
- Conserve old willow pollards alongside watercourses through improved management
- Encourage new streamside scrub and willow fringe planting where appropriate
- Conserve and enhance the remaining species-rich wetland meadows

6.13 Wreake Valley

OBJECTIVE

- To conserve and enhance the rural character of the river valley landscape

GUIDELINES

- Conserve the existing woodland resource through improved management
- Increase woodland cover in small blocks, whilst respecting the historical and ecological features which are important to the area's character
- Improve management of hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Conserve old willow pollards through improved management
- Encourage new planting of wet woodland including streamside willow planting where appropriate
- Conserve existing wetland habitats and identify opportunities for creating new ones
- Ensure that where new mineral workings are necessary, restoration schemes respect the pattern of the local landscape and contribute to an overall increase in tree cover and wetland habitats
- Seek to establish, in partnership with others, an agreed plan for a broad range of environmental improvements to the Wreake Valley

6.14 The Wolds

OBJECTIVE

- To conserve and enhance the rural character of the rolling Wolds landscape

GUIDELINES

- Increase woodland cover in blocks of all sizes
- Strengthen the agricultural hedged character of the landscape through improved hedgerow management
- Increase tree cover through new hedgerow tree planting
- Retain and enhance remaining field ponds through improved management and encourage the restoration of old field ponds where appropriate

6.15 Belvoir Scarp

OBJECTIVE

- To conserve and enhance the well wooded character of the narrow steeply sloping scarp

GUIDELINES

- Enhance the existing woodland resource through continuing management
- Increase overall tree cover through planting of new woodlands and new hedgerow trees

6.16 Vale of Belvoir

OBJECTIVE

- Conserve and enhance the rural agricultural character of the Vale landscape

GUIDELINES

- Increase woodland cover through new planting in small to medium sized blocks
- Strengthen the hedged agricultural landscape through improved hedgerow management
- Increase tree cover through new hedgerow tree planting

6.17 Knipton Bowl

OBJECTIVE

- To conserve and enhance the well wooded, intimate, deeply rural character of the area

GUIDELINES

- Conserve and enhance the well wooded character of the area through continuing woodland management and new planting
- Ensure continuing tree cover through the regeneration and replanting of hedgerow trees
- Strengthen the agricultural hedged character of the landscape through improved hedgerow management
- Protect and seek to enhance the landscape and ecological value of Croxton Park

6.18 Vale of Catmose

OBJECTIVE

- To conserve and enhance the rural, agricultural character of the northern part of the Vale and continue to develop the new landscape around Rutland Water

GUIDELINES

- Increase woodland cover through new planting in blocks of all sizes
- Strengthen the hedged field pattern through improved hedgerow management and replanting of degraded hedgerows
- Increase tree cover through new hedgerow tree planting

6.19 Cottesmore Plateau

OBJECTIVE

- To conserve and enhance the large scale structure and spacious character of the plateau landscape

GUIDELINES

- Increase woodland cover in medium to large blocks and provide links between ancient semi-natural woodlands
- Strengthen the hedged field pattern through improved hedgerow management and restoration/replanting of degraded hedgerows
- Encourage new hedgerow tree planting to increase tree cover in areas with few hedgerow trees and maintain long term cover in areas with existing mature hedgerow trees
- Encourage the retention and restoration of traditional drystone wall boundaries
- Manage species-rich limestone grassland verges to maintain and enhance their diversity, and re-create species diversity on adjoining verges where possible
- Encourage creation of new areas of calcareous grassland habitat on land that has been used for mineral working

7. Appendices

7

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NOTES: a) Local Plans are listed separately in Appendix 4
b) Publications after October 1999 are not listed

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Appendix 1: continued

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Appendix 2: Organisations Consulted

The Public Consultation Draft, December 1999, of the Strategy was sent to the organisations listed below, some of whom were party to earlier consultations. Copies were also placed in all Leicestershire and Rutland libraries.

Blaby District Council	Leicestershire and Rutland Rural Community Council
Charnwood Borough Council	Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust
Charnwood Wildlife	Leicestershire County Council Department of Planning and Transportation
Council for the Protection of Rural England, Leicestershire Branch	- Policy and Research Group
Council for the Protection of Rural England, Rutland Branch	- Environmental Control Group
Country Landowners Association	- Environmental Management Group
Countryside Agency	Leicestershire County Council Department of Property
Derbyshire County Council	Leicestershire County Council Museums, Arts and Records Service
East Midlands Development Agency	Lincolnshire County Council
East Midlands Local Government Association	Melton Borough Council
English Nature	National Farmers Union
Environment Agency	National Forest Company
- Upper Trent Area, Midlands Region	Northamptonshire County Council
- Northern Area, Anglian Region	North West Leicestershire District Council
- Lower Trent Area, Midlands Region	Nottinghamshire County Council
- Lower Severn Area, Midlands Region	Oadby and Wigston Borough Council
Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (on behalf of MAFF)	Quarry Products Association
Forestry Commission	Rutland County Council
Government Office for the East Midlands	Staffordshire County Council
Harborough District Council	Warwickshire County Council
Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council	Woodland Trust
Leicester City Council	
Leicestershire and Rutland Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group	

Appendix 3:

Adopted Structure Plan Policies Relating to Landscape and Woodland

NOTE : These policies are currently under review. The Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan 1996-2016 is approaching deposit stage and includes revised policies which adopt a landscape character based approach and a strategy policy specifically relating to Charnwood Forest.

Strategy Policy 4: Development in the Countryside

In the Countryside (which is land beyond the existing and planned development limits of settlements, and outside of land defined as Green Wedges or areas of separation) built development or other development having a significant adverse effect on the appearance or character of the landscape will not normally be appropriate.

However, provision may be made for the re-use and adaptation of existing buildings and for limited small scale development for employment and leisure uses, where there is limited adverse effect on the appearance and character of the landscape.

Within Areas of Particularly Attractive Countryside and areas of local landscape value, provision for small scale built development for employment and leisure uses will normally only be made where there is no adverse effect on the appearance or character of the landscape.

Environment Policy 10: Woodlands

Development will not normally be permitted which would result in the loss of or damage to ancient woodlands.

Measures will be taken to encourage improved management of existing woodlands and to increase the woodland cover of the County. Emphasis will be placed on the use of appropriate broadleaved species.

Environment Policy 11: Landscape Improvements

Within the defined Countryside Priority Area or Local Landscape Improvement areas, comprehensive landscaping will be required for new development and other measures will be taken to improve the landscape.

Environment Policy 12: The National Forest

Within the National Forest, provision will be made for the planting of woodlands with public access, subject to ecological and environmental constraints. Within the rural area of the National Forest, development which facilitates its use as a woodland resource will normally be permitted. Where appropriate, proposals for development which involves new buildings, significant structures or other operations, will be required to be accompanied by proposals for creating an appropriate woodland setting.

All substantial development proposals will be required to reflect the Forest context in their accompanying landscaping and planting.

Leisure Policy 4: Charnwood Forest Area

Planning permission will not normally be granted for large new recreational facilities or the expansion of existing facilities in the Charnwood Forest area.

Leisure Policy 5: Rutland Water

Limited development of recreation, sports and tourism facilities will be allowed in the area around Rutland Water which should normally complement existing facilities and relate to the use and enjoyment of Rutland Water as a water supply, recreation, and ecological resource.

Minerals and Waste Disposal Policy 3: Restoration Aftercare and Afteruse

When granting planning permission for mineral working or the use of land for the disposal of waste materials or related development, the County Council will require restoration to an acceptable use at the earliest opportunity. After restoration has been completed the County Council will require a programme of aftercare for an appropriate period. The best and most versatile agricultural land will normally be restored to agricultural use. On other land, priority will normally be given to restoration to water recreation, forestry or nature conservation uses.

Appendix 4:

Local Plans covering Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland

Authority	Plan title	Current status
Leicestershire CC	Leicestershire Minerals Local Plan	<i>Adopted 1995</i>
Leicestershire CC	Leicestershire Waste Local Plan	<i>Public Inquiry 1999/2000</i>
Blaby DC	Blaby District Local Plan	<i>Adopted September 1999</i>
Charnwood BC	Borough of Charnwood Local Plan	<i>Deposit Draft October 1996 Public Inquiry March/November 1998</i>
Harborough DC	Harborough District Local Plan	<i>Deposit Draft February 1995 Public Inquiry summer 1996 Further Proposed Modifications June 2000</i>
Hinckley and Bosworth DC	Hinckley and Bosworth Local Plan	<i>Deposit Draft 1995 Public Inquiry October 1996/June 1997 Proposed Modifications 1999</i>
City of Leicester	City of Leicester Local Plan	<i>Adopted December 1994 Under review October 1999</i>
Melton BC	Melton Local Plan	<i>Adopted June 1999</i>
North West Leicestershire DC	North West Leicestershire Local Plan	<i>Deposit Draft May 1995 Public Inquiry late summer 1996</i>
Oadby and Wigston BC	Oadby and Wigston Local Plan	<i>Adopted October 1999</i>
Rutland UA	Rutland Local Plan	<i>Deposit Draft August 1996 Public Inquiry 1998</i>

Appendix 5: England Forestry Strategy Summary of Proposed Programme Actions

Forestry for Rural Development

Influence policies for agricultural reform

- ◆ ensure that forestry will be considered in the development of rural programmes under the Agenda 2000 proposals for a new Rural Development Regulation;
- ◆ support research into the implications of CAP reform for the transfer of land from farming to forestry.

Support strategy development of woodland resources

- ◆ publish a national woodland inventory to provide better information about England's woodland resources;
- ◆ encourage new investment in the wood-processing sector by publishing forecasts of wood production and through our policies for regional development and support for rural economies;
- ◆ ensure that the supply of timber from our woodland resource is available at the levels indicated in long-term forecasts;
- ◆ continue to provide support for regional and local marketing initiatives, including small-scale and craft uses;
- ◆ extend the range of business advice, training and local support offered to woodland businesses, particularly small producers.

Develop understanding of the rural economy

- ◆ commission a study of the economic impacts of forestry in the rural economy.

Encourage diversification

- ◆ support a targeted programme for short-rotation coppice planting and encourage the use of wood fuel for energy production using the most efficient technology

Forestry for Economic Regeneration

Promote forestry for land regeneration

- ◆ promote the role of forestry in the restoration of former industrial land by supporting research to develop cost-effective methods of establishing woodlands and establishing a national network of sites demonstrating best practice;
- ◆ promote a decision-making framework for design, planning and site-preparation requirements of woodland establishment on former industrial land and use this as basis for Government-funded work;
- ◆ consider the need for longer-term support and management of woodlands on former industrial land and explore new ways of securing their future;
- ◆ act directly through the Forestry Commission acquiring and managing land in regeneration partnerships.

Support Regional Programmes

- ◆ encourage the Regional Development Agencies to use forestry and woodland programmes in implementing their objectives;
- ◆ encourage the development of new urban forestry initiatives which can demonstrate achievement through partnership approaches.

Promote forestry through land-use planning

- ◆ review Circular 36/78 on Trees and Forestry and consider, as part of a rolling programme, how the role of woodlands might be highlighted through regional and national planning guidance;
- ◆ review the guidance in Minerals Planning Guidance Note 7 in due course and if necessary amend this to reflect revised forestry policy;
- ◆ work closely with mineral and waste planning authorities to ensure that Government forestry policies are fully reflected in development plans.

Promote forestry through land-use planning

- ◆ work with the minerals and waste industries to encourage consideration of forestry as an after-use at an early stage of planning development;
- ◆ seek opportunities to consider how the setting of future built development might be enhanced by the incorporation of wooded and other green elements, and how to encourage such development through planning guidance.

Promote environmental improvements

- ◆ create new woodlands along transport corridors as part of a programme of environmental improvements.

Appendix 5: continued

England Forestry Strategy Summary of Proposed Programme Actions

Forestry for Recreation, Access and Tourism

Increase access to woodlands

- ◆ draw on the Forestry Commission's report on woodland access in England in implementing the Strategy;
- ◆ target grants to increase the opportunities available to visit woodlands, particularly in areas where there are shortages of access;
- ◆ promote a network of forest tracks suitable for cycling as part of the National Cycle Network and our integrated Transport Strategy.

Improve the quality of information about access

- ◆ in partnership with woodland owners and others, explore ways of making up-to-date information available on woodlands to visit and improve the quality of information, building on the Forestry Commission's Walkers Welcome package.

Enhance the nation's forest estate

- ◆ give priority to acquiring freeholds of leasehold land in areas close to centres of population, particularly in the Community Forests and the National Forest, when there is a shortage of existing woodland access;
- ◆ develop the Forestry Commission's Woodland Park network close to towns and cities;
- ◆ work in partnership with sports' governing bodies to accommodate noisy or intrusive recreation in suitable woodlands and relieve pressure on sensitive sites;
- ◆ improve recreational and other facilities through private-sector partnerships.

Promote better understanding

- ◆ support research into the economic contribution that woodlands and forests make to tourism and the potential for forest-based tourism initiatives to benefit local communities;
- ◆ engage with the public to promote the benefits of trees, wood and forests;
- ◆ support the Forest Education initiative by developing the national network of local groups to encourage children and young people to better understand the importance of woods and forests.

Forestry for Environment and Conservation

Protect existing woodlands

- ◆ review the effectiveness of the existing measures for protecting ancient semi-natural woodlands and, if necessary, introduce new measures for giving them added protection;
- ◆ seek opportunities for encouraging the replacement of woodland lost to development with equivalent areas of new planting;
- ◆ introduce Long-Term Plans to guide the management of woods and forests.

Promote the environmental benefits of trees and woodlands

- ◆ support research to improve understanding of the value of the environmental benefits of trees, woodlands and forests and the environmental processes that they perform, particularly in relation to aerial and water-borne pollution;
- ◆ promote greater appreciation of the broad environmental benefits of trees and woods to practitioners, decision makers and the public;
- ◆ promote greater appreciation of the value and use of locally native trees and shrubs.

Use the Biodiversity Action Plan to guide nature conservation

- ◆ establish a framework for monitoring important woodland habitats and species linked to the National Biodiversity Network;
- ◆ establish an English Native Woodlands Partnership to co-ordinate and implement links between the Forestry Strategy and the Biodiversity Action Plan;
- ◆ target grants through the Woodland Grant Scheme to reverse the fragmentation of existing native woodlands, conserve priority species, and help with the preparation of management plans for semi-natural woods.

Protect cultural heritage

- ◆ work with archaeological authorities and others.

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Figure 4 is based on the 1:50,000 Geological Survey of England and Wales by permission of the British Geological Survey, IPR/12-20C, © NERC, all rights reserved. Figure 5 is based on Figure 11 in Leicestershire and Its Region published in 1972 by the Leicester University Press for the Local Committee of the British Association. Figure 6 is based on information provided by English Nature.

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