

VIA Background Paper

Landscape Character, Special Landscape Value and Quality Report 2013/2014.

Our Neighbourhood, Our Landscape.

Baseline Data and Definitions

This report explains in detail landscape character, scenic beauty, visual amenity and landscape quality, and its relevance to our Neighbourhood.

Landscape Character

Explanation and Introduction

Landscape character is the identification and description of tracts of landscape that have a unity of character with similar patterns or recurring features such as 'a regular pattern of fields enclosed by dry stone walls'. This allows us to identify areas with similar landscape characteristics, identify key characteristics that give the area its sense of place. Key features that define character include geology and landform, soils and land use, ecology, tree cover, enclosure, transport patterns and the built environment.

It helps identify which features and elements should be conserved, managed and enhanced, and guide decision making, relating to landscape issues. It can for example help decide which hedgerow trees and the hedgerow species mix that are most appropriate to plant to reinforce local character. It can also identify the type of buildings and settlement pattern in the area and thus inform future planning decision for the locality.

Landscape character has been described by Natural England at the national level and these are called **National Character Areas**, Derbyshire County Council has further sub-divided these into **Landscape Character Types** which are described in the document 'The Landscape Character of Derbyshire'¹ which can be used at a local level for County and District matters. This report identifies the National Character Area (NCA) and summarises these Landscape character types (LCT'S) and relates them specifically to Ildridgehay & Alton, and Ashleyhay parishes.

It is important to recognise that this assessment work doesn't label areas as attractive or unattractive, high or low quality. By describing the landscape character types it should help people understand the landscape of their neighbourhood and assist in decision making and planning.

The VIA parishes lie within the **Derbyshire Peak Fringe and Lower Derwent National Character Area 50**, and is described as '*An undulating well-wooded, pastoral landscape on rising ground between the Derbyshire Coalfield and the Peak District*'

Within this the Derbyshire Landscape Character Assessment subdivides the National Character Areas (NCA's) into more detailed Landscape Character types (LCT's).

¹ The Landscape Character of Derbyshire 2003 DCC

<http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/environment/conservation/landscapecharacter/default.asp>

Within in the *Peak Fringe and Lower Derwent* there are four to Landscape Character types (LCT's) represented in the Parishes. These are;

- *Enclosed Moors and Heaths*
- *Wooded Slopes and Valleys*
- *Wooded Farmlands*
- *Riverside Meadows*

These are described in more detail in relation to the Parish in the VIA Countryside narrative and in table below and shown on Figure1. A general survey of the Parish confirms that these descriptions do indeed represent different landscape types of the neighbourhood.

Landscape Character Type (LCT)	Summary of key characteristics
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Enclosed Moors and Heaths



An open farming landscape on broad rolling summits with patches of remnant moorland. Dry stone walls enclose regular fields and straight roads join occasional sandstone farmsteads.

Very upper slopes and tops around Alport Heights.

Wooded Slopes and Valleys



This is a landscape of small pastoral fields on undulating, rising ground. Woodlands many semi-natural on steeper slopes, some of ancient origin, along steep slopes and valley sides, with densely scattered hedgerows and streamline trees contribute to a strongly wooded character

Upper sides of the Ecclesbourne valley around Tinkerley and Storer farms.

Wooded Farmlands



This is a mixed farming landscape on undulating ground. Woodlands, hedgerows and streamline trees contribute to a strongly wooded character, of small, organic woodlands, some of ancient origin, with densely scattered hedgerow and watercourse trees.

Lower slopes of the Ecclesbourne valley around Alton Manor, Idridgehay & Ireton Wood

Riverside Meadows



Broad, flat flood plains hold meandering rivers, with scattered trees along the river bank. Scattered boundary trees and transport routes punctuate the pastoral landscape

Flat land South of Barnsley lane adjacent to the River Ecclesbourne

Scenic Beauty

Whilst landscape character is objective, people's perception of the quality of their landscape in the Neighbourhood was considered an important aspect. As part of this definitions were explored to assist in clarifying what we mean in the plan by landscape beauty and help capture resident's opinions.

*“Natural beauty relates, first and foremost, to unspoiled rural areas, relatively free from the effects of urbanisation and industrialisation. It does not apply only to landscape where nature may appear to dominate but includes rural landscapes which have been shaped by human activities, including, for example farmland, fields and field boundaries, designed parkland, small settlements, larger villages and small towns, provided that they are integral to, and in keeping with, the character of the ‘landscape’”.*³

*“Natural beauty is related to landscape character, in that it will find expression in areas of landscape which has a degree of unity and distinctiveness in character and a strong sense of place. Landscape character is, however, found everywhere whereas natural beauty is found in valued landscapes”.*⁴

For the purpose of this report scenic beauty is defined as where views of the landscape are considered to be impressive or beautiful.

The Neighbourhood survey revealed that 88% wanted to protect the landscape/ scenic beauty of the area so by default local residents must consider the landscape of the area to be beautiful and be worthy of special protection.

Visual Amenity

Visual amenity can be defined simply as *“pleasant qualities, attractiveness or desirable place”*. Whilst a more holistic definition of visual amenity is *“those values which create the appeal of a particular place”*⁵ This includes aesthetic values, natural scenic values, heritage values and popular, shared and recognised values.

The Neighbourhood Plan discusses the high amenity value of the parishes; it describes its pleasant qualities, attractiveness and shows how it is a desirable place to live, work and visit.

Tranquillity

Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) commissioned a survey to establish the qualities people valued most in the English countryside. Nearly three-quarters (72%) said that tranquillity topped the list. CPRE commissioned researchers to create a highly detailed new approach to defining tranquillity. By using these findings to

³ 'On the Meaning of Natural Beauty in Landscape Legislation' Abstract form 'A Statement on Natural Beauty'. Paul Selman and Carys Swanwick - Department of Landscape, University of Sheffield.

⁴ 'On the Meaning of Natural Beauty in Landscape Legislation' Abstract form 'A Statement on Natural Beauty'. Paul Selman and Carys Swanwick - Department of Landscape, University of Sheffield.

⁵ Wikipedia 2014.

create a national tranquillity map, it is possible to assess the likelihood of finding tranquillity in any given locality.

In testing what tranquillity meant to people and the different factors which make up 'tranquillity' CPRE found the following⁶;

What tranquillity is – the top 10 survey response

1. *Seeing a natural landscape*
2. *Hearing birdsong*
3. *Hearing peace and quiet*
4. *Seeing natural looking woodland*
5. *Seeing the stars at night*
6. *Seeing streams*
7. *Seeing the sea*
8. *Hearing natural sounds*
9. *Hearing wildlife*
10. *Hearing running water*

What tranquillity is not – the top 10 survey responses

1. *Hearing constant noise from cars, lorries and/or motorbikes*
2. *Seeing lots of people*
3. *Seeing urban development*
4. *Seeing overhead light pollution*
5. *Hearing lots of people*
6. *Seeing low flying aircraft*
7. *Hearing low flying aircraft*
8. *Seeing power lines*
9. *Seeing towns and cities*
10. *Seeing roads*

Tranquillity helps improve quality of life and helps the economy. Rural areas rely on tranquillity to attract visitors.

A recent study by Derbyshire County Council⁷ using CPRE data in relation to Derbyshire shows that **the VIA neighbourhood is one of the most tranquil areas in the Borough and indeed the County.**

The Neighbourhood survey revealed that 78% wanted to protect the tranquillity and peace and quiet of the area.

⁶ <http://www.cpre.org.uk/what-we-do/countryside/tranquil-places>

⁷ The Landscape Character of Derbyshire DCC. Revised 2014.
<http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/environment/conservation/landscapecharacter/default.asp>

Landscape Value and Quality

Special Landscape Areas (SLA's)

Derbyshire County Council in the 1970's as a function of the Structure Plan work identified areas of high landscape quality and generated a policy framework within which these areas could be conserved and enhanced. This resulted in identifying areas of high visual quality and identifying areas of high landscape value. The majority of the parishes of Idridgehay & Alton, and Ashleyhay were identified as being of high landscape quality and were afforded extra protection and consideration as they were included in Amber Valleys Special Landscape Area policy EN6 of the adopted Local Plan in 1985. See the plan in the main Neighbourhood Plan that shows SLA.

The exiting planning policy states;

Planning permission for new development, including conversions of and extensions to existing buildings, will only be permitted in Special Landscape Areas, if it does not have an adverse effect on the landscape quality or character.

The draft new policy in the Local Plan states;

Development proposals including agricultural development, conversions of existing buildings and extensions to existing buildings will only be supported in the Special Landscape Area, as shown on the following proposed changes to the policies map, where they can demonstrate that they do not have an adverse impact on the visual quality of the landscape.

The Environment Group during early informal Neighbourhood public consultations found that parishioners valued the scenic countryside in which they lived and worked. The Environment Group decided to try and validate the quality of the landscape in the parish today, since it was adopted in 1985 as AVBC Environment Policy **EN6.Special Landscape Areas**⁸(SLA). As way forward was decided to;

- include relevant questions in the Neighbourhood Questionnaire
- look at the original methodology that was used to define the SLA

This report focuses on the latter using a desktop study followed by limited on site verification as to the quality of the landscape today.

The Neighbourhood survey revealed that 85% wanted to protect the SLA status in the

⁸ *Special Landscape Areas are the areas of finest Derbyshire landscape outside the Peak District National Park. Special planning policies have been applied in these areas since 1985, to preserve and enhance their character.*

Policy EN6 SLA Planning permission for new development, including conversions of and extensions to existing buildings, will only be permitted in Special Landscape Areas, if it does not have an adverse effect on the landscape quality or character

area.

Landscape Quality

The Peak District National Park (PDNP) was designated in 1951, one of the main factor being its stunning scenery. National Parks are beautiful and spectacular places protected by law. The SLA was designed to guide development and protect and enhance the finest Derbyshire landscape outside the PDNP.

The first part of this work involved a Visual Quality Analysis. Part of the assessment included an objective desktop analysis which included factors such as landform, land-use and landscape features by looking at OS maps and 1971 aerial photographs. 'Contributing factors' included scenic hills (landform), land use such as moorland, and landscape features such as woodland, hedgerows hedgerow trees, and water. 'Detracting factors' included residential, built areas, mines, tips and quarries, other light industry, motorway, railways and power lines.

2013 Landscape Quality Analysis.

In order to verify that the SLA in the VIA neighbourhood was still part of the finest landscape in the Borough and indeed in Derbyshire it was decided to re-examine 'contributing' and 'detracting' factors by comparing historic and recent aerial photographs. The work used the 1971 black and white aerial photographs used in the original SLA work and the 2006 Aerial colour photos as both were available in the Derbyshire Historic Environment Record Office.

The following analysis was made comparing positive contributing factor still present, with those that have been lost and the appearance and extent of any detracting feature.

The table below shows the results.

SLA Comparison of Aerial photographs 1971 with 2006

AREA East to West	Alport Heights	Ashleyhay	Idridgehay	Alton Manor	Ireton Wood	Total
SHEET NUMBER	1	2	3	4	5	
B & W ARIAL FLIGHT NUMBER	12/103	12/155	12/157	12/258	12/256	
Contributing factors lost since 1971						
Lost boundary trees	0	39	12	9	4	64 *
Lost sections of field boundaries	8	18	8	5	4	43
Felled woodland	0	1 copse	0	0	0	1
Removed water bodies	0	0	0	0	0	0
Assessment of contributing factors						
Hedgerow trees - majority intact	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Field boundaries - majority intact	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Woodland - majority intact	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Additional water bodies	0	0	0	2 ponds	0	
Additional Detractors to 2006						
Out of scale residential, built areas, mines, tips and quarries, other light industry, and power lines, big sheds	0	0	0	0	0	

*Estimate from photograph to indicate trend

** Additional changes since 2006 not available on aerial photos but see text for overall assessment

Summarised.

Whilst there has been some small loss of boundary trees and sections of boundaries overall the woodland, tree cover and small to medium field pattern is intact. The landform remains unchanged. Overall there has been limited and well controlled by planning policies. A drive round the area confirmed that most features are in good condition, hedges and dry stone walls well managed.

It is a well treed and wooded rural landscape in the River Ecclesbourne. The landscape is punctuated by the small village of Idridgehay, rural hamlets and scattered gritstone farmsteads. The wooded slopes and dense hedged fields give way to regular fields enclosed by gritstone walls around Alport Heights which affords stunning views of the area.

The fabric of the landscape is still intact, it has a degree of unity and distinctiveness in character with a strong sense of place. It still has those special qualities that warranted this area worthy of inclusion in the Special landscape area.

Summary

The four landscape character types of *the Peak Fringe and Lower Derwent NCA Enclosed Moors and Heaths, Wooded Slopes and Valleys, Wooded Farmlands and Riverside Meadows* as defined by the Landscape Character of Derbyshire are indeed truly represented across the Neighbourhood, in addition the key characteristics such as tree cover, boundaries are intact and in good condition which together with the distinct traditional vernacular architecture and settlement pattern imparts a strong sense of identity across the landscape types within the Neighbourhood plan areas.

The majority of the area was designated in the 1985 as part of a Special Landscape Areas valued for its areas of high visual quality and landscape value, and afforded extra protection and consideration. It is part of an area covered by a specific planning policy designed to guide development and to protect and enhance the finest Derbyshire landscape outside the PDNP.

A survey showed that there has been little change in the landscape since it was designated as a Special Landscape Area.

The landscape today still has these special attributes. It still has high visual quality and landscape value; in addition it is valued by local residents and visitors and warrants extra protection and consideration

Views of the landscape are considered to be impressive or beautiful. Indeed the area affords high amenity value; it has pleasant qualities including tranquillity, and is a desirable place to live, work and visit.

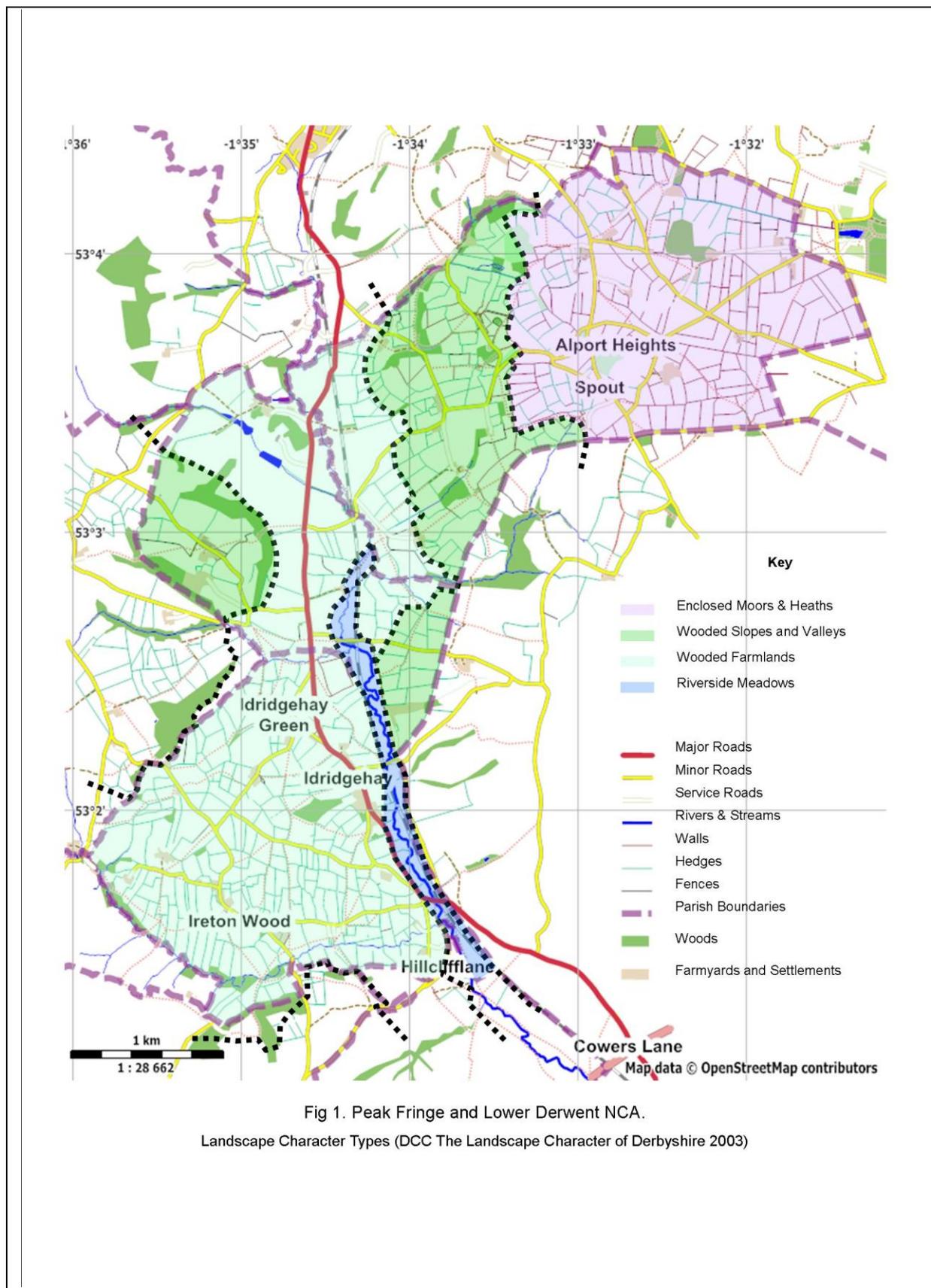


Fig 1. Peak Fringe and Lower Derwent NCA.

Landscape Character Types (DCC The Landscape Character of Derbyshire 2003)