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Darlington Landscape Character Assessment

Prepared by LUC for Darlington Borough Council
December 2015

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1 Introduction

Background

- 1.1 This report presents a description and evaluation of the landscape of the Borough of Darlington. It has been prepared on behalf of Darlington Borough Council to provide part of the evidence base for forthcoming development planning documents.
- 1.2 No previous landscape character assessment (LCA) has been carried out for the Borough of Darlington, and as a result there is a perceived gap in the available evidence on landscape character and landscape sensitivity. In particular, the report has been commissioned to inform a review of potential housing sites, although the findings of the LCA are more widely applicable to a range of land use planning policies and decisions.

Landscape character assessment

- 1.3 Landscape character comprises the distinct set of elements that makes a landscape recognisable, and gives it a unique 'sense of place'. Landscape character assessment is the process of mapping, classifying and describing the patterns and variations which contribute to the character of a landscape.
- 1.4 The European Landscape Convention (ELC) came into effect in the UK in March 2007 and is adopted and promoted by the Council of Europe. The ELC definition of landscape is all embracing: ***"Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors."***¹
- 1.5 Following the introduction of the ELC, a broader approach to 'landscape' has been pursued at a national level, grounded in the principle that all landscapes matter, regardless of location or condition. The ELC makes it clear that landscapes do not stop at urban boundaries.

National planning policy

- 1.6 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)² states that development plans should "*contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment*" by, among other things "*protecting and enhancing valued landscapes*" (paragraph 109). "*Conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, including landscape*", is one of the strategic priorities to be set out in Local Plans (paragraph 156).
- 1.7 Landscape character assessment is seen as a key part of the evidence base for Local Plan preparation, including consideration of historic landscape character and, where appropriate, assessments of landscape sensitivity (paragraph 170).
- 1.8 The NPPF recommends the use of "*criteria based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting protected wildlife or geodiversity sites or landscape areas will be judged*" (paragraph 113). It is stated that Local Plans should "*identify land where development would be inappropriate, for instance because of its environmental or historic significance*" (paragraph 157). The need for detailed justification is a theme throughout the NPPF.

¹ Council of Europe (2009) *European Landscape Convention*. Article 1.

² Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) National Planning Policy Framework.

- 1.9 The associated online Planning Practice Guidance on landscape highlights the need for local authorities to recognise the intrinsic character of the countryside, and set out policies for its conservation and enhancement.³
- 1.10 The Darlington Landscape Character Assessment contributes to the aims of national planning policy by:
- Providing reliable evidence of the intrinsic character of the landscape; and
 - Highlighting aspects of the landscape which are sensitive to change.

Study area

- 1.11 The study area has been defined as the whole of the Borough of Darlington administrative area. It was agreed with Darlington Borough Council (DBC) that areas within the 'development limit' as revised in 2013 would be excluded from the LCA. The assessment therefore covers the 'rural' part of the Borough, as shown in **Figure 1.1**.
- 1.12 Landscape does not stop at administrative boundaries, but continues seamlessly beyond Darlington into County Durham, North Yorkshire, and the Borough of Stockton-On-Tees. Although landscapes beyond the Borough boundary are excluded, their character still has an indirect effect upon that of the study area, most obviously along the Tees Valley which includes land on both sides of the river.
- 1.13 Although no local-scale LCA has been carried out for the Borough of Darlington, the area is covered by National Character Areas (NCA), which are defined for the whole of England. Darlington is mainly within the *Tees Lowlands* NCA, with small areas in the north of the Borough falling within the *Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau* NCA and the *Durham Coalfield Pennine Fringe* NCA. These areas are very extensive and their descriptions are necessarily broad-brush, but provide the context in which more detailed study can be carried out.
- 1.14 In addition, local and regional character assessments have been carried out for the neighbouring areas of County Durham, North Yorkshire and Stockton-On-Tees. These LCAs have been reviewed (**Appendix 1**), and areas of continuous character are identified.

Approach and guidance

- 1.15 The approach to the study follows the guidance provided in the following documents:
- Natural England (2014) *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment*.
 - Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013) *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*. 3rd Edition. Routledge.
 - Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2002) *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland*.
 - Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2004) *Topic Paper 6: Techniques and criteria for judging landscape sensitivity and capacity*.
- 1.16 Landscape character assessment can be carried out at a variety of scales, identifying increasingly detailed changes in character at smaller and smaller scales. Due to the relatively small size of the Borough, the Darlington LCA has been carried out at a scale of 1:25,000.
- 1.17 The guidance on LCA recommends a division between the processes of characterisation and the making of judgements to inform decisions. As such, the description of the landscape character of each area is presented separately to the sensitivity assessment which has been undertaken for the area.

³ Planning Practice Guidance: Natural Environment: Landscape. [<http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/natural-environment/landscape/>] accessed 29 April 2014.

Landscape description

- 1.18 The study has identified variations in landscape character and describes these for the rural parts of the Borough. The LCA has defined ten distinct landscape character areas, each of which is separately described. Character areas are geographically distinct, with their own unique set of characteristics and sense of place.

A note on boundaries

The mapped boundaries of character areas at 1:25,000 are relatively precise, following clear features which can be identified on the ground. However, in some cases these boundaries are indicative of a more gradual transition between one character area and another, rather than an abrupt change. It must also be recognised that there are variations within each character area at smaller scales.

Although the urban area of Darlington did not form part of the study area, landscape character does not stop at the settlement boundary. Different factors influence character in built-up areas, but the underlying landscape characteristics can still be recognised, particularly in less densely developed areas. In particular, landscape character is consistent between rural areas and key green corridors within Darlington, such as the Cocker Beck and River Skerne.

Sensitivity assessment

- 1.19 As well as providing a description of each character area, the Darlington LCA provides an assessment of landscape sensitivity across the Borough. The aim of this is to ensure that landscape is given due importance in planning decisions, and an evaluation has been undertaken to identify areas which are more and less sensitive to development. The focus of this work is based around sensitivity to residential development, though the evaluation is generic enough to inform decisions on a wider range of land uses.
- 1.20 The project brief clarifies that this sensitivity assessment should indicate locations with potential to accommodate additional development *"at sites adjoining, or in close proximity to, existing development limits, and therefore where Darlington's development limits could be adjusted to facilitate growth for future Local Plan reviews"*. For each character area, following the discussion of general sensitivity, a statement is made on the particular sensitivities applicable to areas adjoining settlements and development limits. Attention has mainly been given to locations at the periphery of Darlington and Middleton St George, as the Council has identified development pressures in these areas. The sensitivity of individual development sites in these areas has been examined in a separate report.⁴
- 1.21 In line with the recommendations in Topic Paper 6,⁵ the assessment of landscape sensitivity is based on an assessment of landscape character using carefully defined criteria. Criteria selection is based on the attributes of the landscape most likely to be affected by development, and considers both 'landscape' and 'visual' aspects of sensitivity. The criteria chosen for the study are also aimed at highlighting:
- the role the landscape plays in providing a setting to development; and
 - the function of landscapes as valued spaces for a range of ecosystem services (natural, cultural and perceptual).
- 1.22 **Table 1.1** overleaf sets out the landscape and visual criteria used for the assessment of sensitivity in this LCA. For each character area, information is presented against each of these criteria to inform judgements about landscape sensitivity to built development.

⁴ LUC (2015) Landscape Sensitivity of Potential Housing Sites in Darlington Borough. Darlington Borough Council.

⁵ Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2004) *Topic Paper 6: Techniques and criteria for judging landscape sensitivity and capacity*

Table 1.1 Sensitivity assessment criteria and definitions

| Criteria | Criteria description |
|--|--|
| LANDSCAPE | |
| Topography | Smooth, gently undulating or flat landforms are likely to be less sensitive to development than a landscape with dramatic or distinct landforms such as prominent ridges or steep slopes. |
| Scale (landform and component landscape features) | <p>Larger scale and more open landforms are likely to be less sensitive than smaller scale, enclosed landforms. Areas with more open fields are also less sensitive than smaller, more intricate field cover.</p> <p>Existing human-scale features in the landscape, in the form of buildings or trees, will influence the scale of development that can be readily accommodated in the landscape.</p> |
| Landscape pattern and complexity (including sense of time-depth) | <p>Landscapes with smaller-scale, more irregular field patterns are likely to be more sensitive to the introduction of development than landscapes with large, regular scale field patterns because of the potential for loss of characteristic landscape patterns.</p> <p>Distinctive landscape elements including areas of woodland, water and semi-natural habitats indicate increased sensitivity owing to their contribution to landscape diversity, which would be reduced were they to be removed.</p> <p>This criterion can also relate to the historic character of the landscape, where designated or undesignated heritage assets – including historic field patterns – may indicate increased sensitivity to modern development.</p> |
| Perceptual qualities | <p>Landscapes that are relatively tranquil tend to have increased levels of sensitivity, compared to landscapes that contain overt signs of modern development. Development in more tranquil landscapes will introduce new and uncharacteristic features which may detract from this characteristic, which may be especially valued close to built-up areas.</p> <p>Tranquillity is affected by human activity and disturbance, including the presence of large scale built development, as opposed to a landscape with a traditional rural feel with fewer modern human influences.</p> |
| VISUAL | |
| Skyline character and visual prominence | Prominent and distinctive and/or undeveloped skylines, or skylines with important landmark features, are likely to be more sensitive to development because new buildings/structures may detract from these skylines as features in the landscape. Important landmark features on the skyline might include historic features or monuments. |
| Visual sensitivities and intervisibility, including to adjacent landscapes (urban and rural) and seascapes | Visually prominent landscapes which overlook or are overlooked by settlements or other landscapes are likely to be more sensitive to development than those which are more hidden or less widely visible. |

Strategic green corridors

- 1.23 The evaluation has also had regard to the strategic green corridors defined in the Darlington Green Infrastructure Strategy.⁶ Four strategic corridors are identified (numbering as per the GI Strategy report):
- 1 River Tees
 - 3 River Skerne
 - 4 River Skerne to Faverdale
 - 5 Darlington, Middleton St. George, A66/A67 to Stockton
- 1.24 These areas are assumed to be of relatively higher sensitivity to development, in that any proposals must be sensitively sited and designed in order to contribute to the aims of the GI Strategy.

Discussion of landscape and visual sensitivity

- 1.25 For each character area, sensitivity is discussed in two different ways. Firstly, based on the criteria evaluation, the general sensitivity of the character area is described. This is an outline of the 'inherent' sensitivity of the landscape to change, and aims to highlight the most sensitive aspects and features of the area in question. This is discussed in relation to both landscape and visual criteria. A list of key 'sensitivities' in each area is recorded, to inform assessment and evaluation of future proposals.
- 1.26 Secondly, a more focused examination has been undertaken of the specific sensitivity to housing development in areas adjacent to a development limit as defined in the local plan. All areas located at development limits are considered, although attention was drawn by the Council to the periphery of Darlington and Middleton St George in particular. This part of the assessment seeks to illustrate the potential effects of housing development on the landscape and views, with reference to the setting of the settlement in question. This assessment has informed, and been informed by, the more detailed work undertaken for individual housing sites.⁷

⁶ Darlington Borough Council (2013) Darlington Green Infrastructure Strategy 2013-2026.

⁷ LUC (2015) Landscape Sensitivity of Potential Housing Sites in Darlington Borough. Darlington Borough Council.

2 Landscape Classification

The landscape of Darlington

- 2.1 The Borough of Darlington lies on the north side of the valley of the River Tees, and the landscape of the area is one of gently sloping farmland between higher ground in the north-east, and the River Tees in the south. Darlington lies upstream from the major conurbation of lower Teesside, and downstream from the North Pennines where the Tees rises. The highest ground is around 220m near Royal Oak, with the lowest below 10m along the Tees, south of the airport. Topography is illustrated in **Figure 2.1**.
- 2.2 Beneath the ground are sedimentary rocks of the Permian and Triassic Periods. These range from sandstones in the south-east of the Borough, some 200-250 million years old, through the Magnesian Limestones west of Darlington, to older sandstones of over 300 million years ago. These last form the prominent ridge in the north-east of the Borough, though elsewhere geology is relatively weakly expressed being overlaid by glacial till. Bedrock geology is illustrated in **Figure 2.2**.
- 2.3 The glacial clays have weathered to form good arable soils, being mainly classed as grade 2 and grade 3 agricultural land. Accordingly the area has a long history of farming, without the impact of mining as seen elsewhere in County Durham. The Romans passed through this area, building a bridge and fort at Piercebridge on Dere Street, their main road north. Darlington itself arose as a market town in the Anglo-Saxon period, located on the River Skerne which once had several mills. The country around was scattered with numerous villages, not all of which remain today though their remains can be viewed as earthworks, such as those at West Hartburn and Coatham Mundeville.
- 2.4 Although these outlying villages faded from the 16th century, Darlington continued to grow through the 18th and 19th centuries, partly due to its location on the Great North Road. The Stockton & Darlington Railway, from Shildon to Stockton-On-Tees, opened in 1825 as the world's first passenger rail service. Later, Darlington was joined to the national network and now lies on the East Coast Main Line. RAF Middleton St. George, constructed in World War II, later became a civilian airport and is currently known as Durham Tees Valley Airport.
- 2.5 The current boundaries of the Borough were defined in 1974, and it became a unitary authority in 1997. While Darlington has continued to expand as a settlement, and large-scale commercial development has taken place to the north at Newton Aycliffe, the Borough of Darlington remains strongly rural. A number of small sites of nature conservation interest remain despite intensive farming and widespread historical drainage of wetland and carr. These include remaining marshes, ponds, grassland, and woodlands.

The landscape classification

- 2.6 The examination of landscape character across Darlington has identified ten distinct landscape character areas. These are listed in **Table 2.1** below and illustrated on **Figure 3.1**.
- 2.7 A mix of arable and pasture predominates across the area, in large planned fields. Variety in the landscape is mainly due to topography, and this has been the key driver in identifying the areas listed below. Among Darlington's more distinctive landscape features are the raised ridge of Houghton Bank and the incised Tees Valley. There are also more subtle contrasts, as between the flat land south and east of Darlington, and the more undulating landscape around Great Stainton. The River Skerne and Red House Beck both flow through small but distinct valley features, while the Newbiggin Beck to the east flows through a broader vale around Bishopston. To the north-west of Darlington, the A68 follows a watershed between the River Skerne and the Cocker Beck, which forms part of the broad swathe of southward-facing farmland west of the town.

Table 2.1 Landscape character areas

| No. | Name |
|-----|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Houghton Bank |
| 2 | Red House Beck |
| 3 | Denton and Walworth Farmland |
| 4 | Whessoe and Dene Beck |
| 5 | Upper Skerne Valley |
| 6 | Great Stainton Farmland |
| 7 | Bishopston Vale |
| 8 | Middleton Farmland |
| 9 | Lower Skerne and Hurworth Moor |
| 10 | Tees Valley |

3 Landscape Character Areas

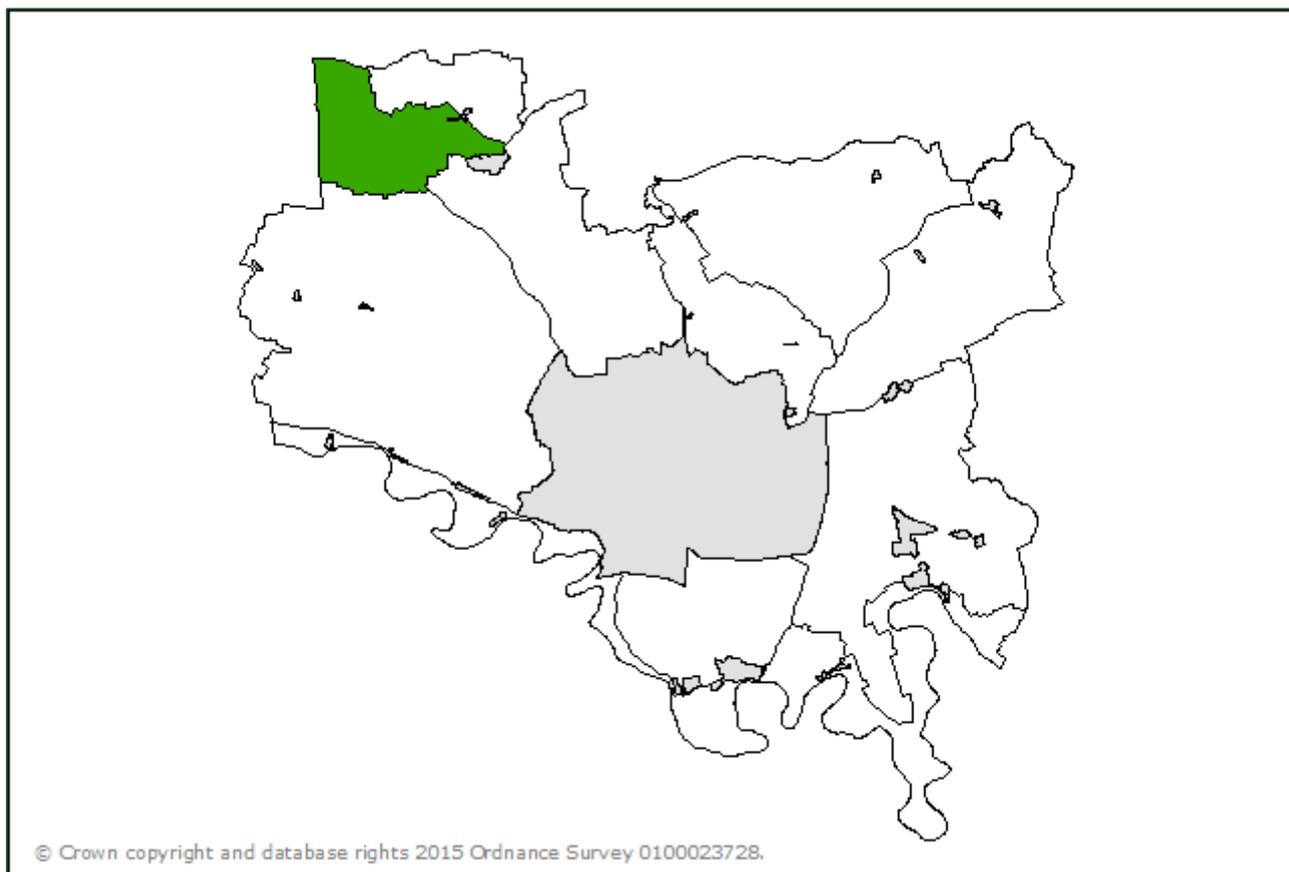
Introduction

- 3.1 This chapter provides details on each landscape character area, as defined in **Table 2.1** and illustrated in **Figure 3.1**. For each character area the following descriptive information is included:
- A brief description of the location and extent of the area;
 - A map of the area and representative photographs; and
 - A written description of the landscape, presented in a standard format covering:
 - Geology, topography and drainage;
 - Landcover and land use;
 - Woodland and habitats;
 - Cultural heritage;
 - Settlement and access; and
 - Views and perceptual qualities.
- 3.2 The sensitivity evaluation for each character area is also presented, including:
- An assessment of the whole area against each of the sensitivity criteria in **Table 1.1**;
 - A discussion of the general landscape and visual sensitivity of the area to development; and
 - A more focused examination of the landscape and visual sensitivity of settlement edge areas to housing development.

Character area 1: Houghton Bank

Location and extents

This character area occurs at the north-west of the Borough, and comprises high ground that lies to the north of Houghton-le-Side. The village of Heighington is located at the eastern end of this ridge, which extends west and north into County Durham. The A68 follows the line of the ridge through Houghton Bank and Royal Oak. The area is shown in more detail in Figure 3.2.



Representative photographs



Pasture on Shackleton Beacon Hill



Local stone walls at Royal Oak

Landscape character description

This character area comprises a steep-sided, flat-topped small plateau or broad ridge. The high point of around 215m occurs on the Darlington/County Durham boundary, close to a communications mast. Within County Durham the ridge continues west to the village of Bolam, and falls away rapidly to the River Gaunless in the north. Within Darlington, the ridge wraps around the upper valley of the Red House Beck to the north-east, and extends eastward to the village of Heighington. The southern boundary of the ridge is formed by the steep drop at Houghton-le-Side.

The ridge is formed of sandstones of the Pennine Lower Coal Measures and Stainmore Formation, dating from the Carboniferous period. These are overlain by glacial till on all but the steepest slopes. Soils are mainly seasonally wet, acid loamy and clayey soils. The area is drained by small becks running north-east and east.

The area comprises enclosed farmland, under a mix of arable and pastoral cultivation. A greater proportion of pasture, grazed by sheep, is evident than elsewhere in the Borough, with large areas of hay/silage production. Field boundaries are regular, and vary from medium-large enclosures in the north, to smaller rectangular fields north of Houghton-le-Side. Field boundaries are generally hedges, though there are some stone walls in places. Hedges are of hawthorn or occasionally beech, with ash trees. The smaller fields tend to retain more intact hedgerows with more trees, while larger fields have the weakest boundaries, with many gaps in hedgerows.

There are several woodland plantations in the area, the most prominent of which is the large broadleaf woodland on Shackleton Beacon Hill. This woodland is associated with Redworth Hall and there is further mixed estate woodland around the house. Coniferous plantations occur on the plateau, and there are prominent stands of broadleaf trees on the steep slopes either side of Houghton-le-Side.

Shackleton Beacon is described as "the best example of an Iron Age hillfort in County Durham".⁸ Although now covered in woodland, the earth banks can be seen on the ground, together with the remains of a windmill which formerly stood here. The windmill was rebuilt as a folly, part of the estate of Redworth Hall which stands in wooded parkland just south of Redworth village. The Roman Dere Street ran north-south across the ridge; the route today is followed by the B6275. Near the top of the slope the road passes the 9th-century Legs Cross, an Anglo-Saxon boundary marker, suggesting the longevity of the modern Council boundary which follows the Roman road.

This area is adjacent to the large village of Heighington and the smaller village of Redworth, with small settlements at Royal Oak and Houghton-le-Side. A series of dwellings and farms are located either side of the A68, including the prominently sited Legg's Cross and High House Farms at the brow of the southern slope. Buildings are constructed from local stone; brown or buff coloured sandstones with pantile roofs.

The area includes a section of the A68 which is routed along the spine of the ridge, past the old coaching inn at Royal Oak. To the north-east is the A6027, which follows a lower course, and a network of minor roads link these two. Rights of way include footpaths linking Heighington and Redworth, and paths radiating from Houghton-le-Side, along and across the ridge.

The elevated ridge offers broad panoramas to southward, looking across the gently sloping farmland below towards the Tees and the North York Moors beyond. Darlington itself cannot be seen in these views. To the west there are views from Royal Oak towards the Pennines, and to the north-east the fringes of Shildon and Newton Aycliffe can be seen, including prominent industrial buildings. There are distant views to Teesside in the east.

The elevation, combined with the lack of field trees and larger fields, gives an open exposed character to the north of this area. This is emphasised by the availability of long views to the Pennines. The southern part of the ridge has more settlement and overlooks more settled landscape, reducing the sense of exposure. The area has an occasional upland fringe character which is not found elsewhere in the Borough.

⁸ Heighington, Shackleton Beacon. *Keys to the Past*. [<http://www.keystothepast.info/Pages/pgDetail.aspx?PRN=D1453>] Accessed 10 August 2015

Landscape sensitivity assessment

Criteria evaluation

| Criteria | Sensitivity description |
|--|--|
| LANDSCAPE | |
| Topography | An elevated area, forming the highest ground in Darlington. The area comprises a smooth ridge running broadly east-west, with a steep slope to the south and a gentler northward slope down to the Red House Beck. |
| Scale (landform and component landscape features) | The ridge is of a moderate scale, not especially broad. It contains many smaller scale landscape features including hedges, trees and farmsteads. |
| Landscape pattern and complexity (including sense of time-depth) | The farmland is enclosed in medium to large fields, with a greater continuity of field boundaries in some areas. The pattern is simple and rectilinear for the most part, with regular plantations of mature broadleaf and coniferous woodland. Time depth lies in the Roman Road which cuts across the ridge, and on Shackleton Beacon where several layers of historical land use are visible. |
| Perceptual qualities | A relatively open, exposed landscape in the northern part, due to relatively few trees and long views. The areas of smaller enclosure feel less exposed. |
| VISUAL | |
| Skyline character and visual prominence | The ridge has a key role as the skyline perceived from the western half of the Borough. Its broad gentle profile is seen from a number of locations. |
| Visual sensitivities and intervisibility | The area is highly visible from the south and east, since it forms the highest ground in Darlington. There are also long views out from the ridge, looking across the Tees Valley to the south and west to the Pennines. |
| GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE | |
| Strategic green corridors | No strategic green corridors cross this area. |

Landscape and visual sensitivity to built development

- 3.3 Houghton Bank is a relatively open landscape of medium to large fields, with a simple pattern of rectilinear enclosures and some upland fringe characteristics. There is limited visual diversity, though the area is broken up by coniferous and broadleaf enclosures, and by field trees in parts. The area is not extensive, though it provides important connectivity across the moors into County Durham. The small size of the plateau or broad ridge indicates higher sensitivity than might be expected for a larger extent of this landscape type.
- 3.4 The open nature of the landscape and the broad views it offers indicate higher sensitivity, as this is one of the least settled parts of Darlington, and one of the more tranquil areas despite the presence of the A68. The visual prominence of this ridge at the north-west corner of the Borough also indicates increased sensitivity, particularly to developments that would be seen on the skyline.
- 3.5 Key sensitivities within this landscape include:
- Elevated landform and visual prominence in many views from the western part of the Borough;
 - Open skyline, uninterrupted but for two communications masts of moderate height;
 - Relative tranquillity away from the A68;
 - Long views in all directions, but most distinctively across the Tees Valley to the North York Moors;
 - Traditional building types and forms;
 - Estate landscape of Redworth Hall, including Shackleton Beacon woodland; and
 - Historic features including Dere Street, Legs Cross and Shackleton Beacon hillfort.

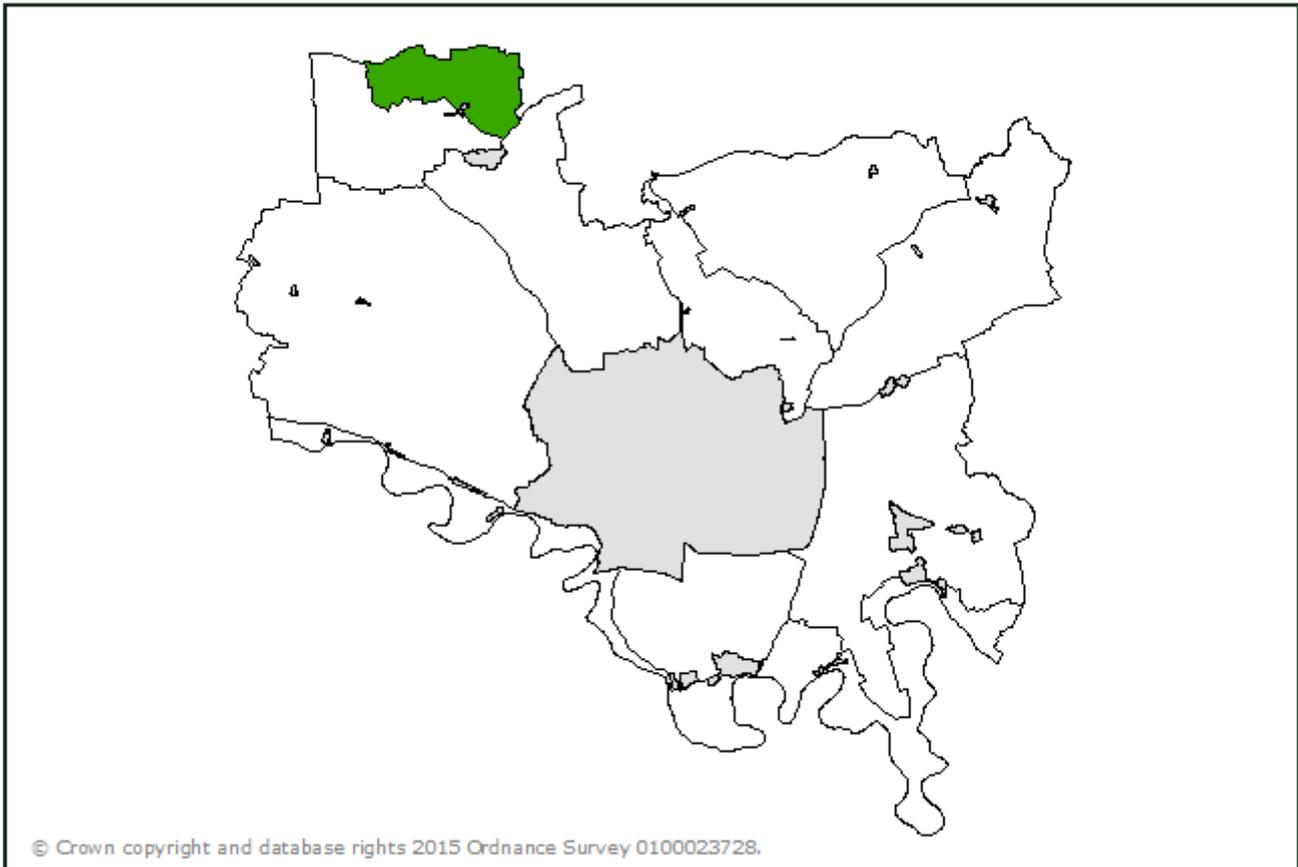
Key sensitivities at settlement edges

- 3.6 There are two settlements which lie adjacent to this character area: the small village of Redworth to the north-east and the larger village of Heighington to the south-east.
- 3.7 Redworth comprises a traditional village green, with a row of houses along the northern side and farmsteads at each end. More modern development is located at the junction of the village green and the A6072, extending across the main road into character area 2. The area of character area 1 that is adjacent to the development limit forms part of the parkland and woodland surrounding Redworth House. Development affecting this estate landscape would impact on the setting of both house and village, and the important relationship between the two. This location is therefore considered to be highly sensitive to development.
- 3.8 Heighington is among the larger villages in the Borough, and is centred on a broadly rectangular green around the parish church. More recent development has expanded the village on all sides, but to the west in particular. The area of character area 1 that is adjacent to the development limit is to the north of the village, between the allotments to the west and Beech Crescent in the east. Part of this area includes playing fields and the school, and is within the conservation area, and is therefore of high sensitivity due to its recreational value. The ground rises to the north of Heighington, particularly to the north-west. Hope Farm is seen on the skyline from the settlement edge. Development in this area would potentially be seen on the skyline in wider views, and could push the development over the ridge onto the north-east facing slopes beyond Hope Farm.

Character area 2: Red House Beck

Location and extents

This character area lies at the north-west of the Borough, and comprises the bowl-shaped valley of the Red House Beck. The beck drains the high ground to the south and west, and flows eastward to Newton Aycliffe. The character area lies between Shildon in the north and Newton Aycliffe in the east, with Heighington to the south. The small village of Redworth is at the south edge of the area on the A6072. The area is shown in more detail in Figure 3.3.



Representative photographs



Open farmland near Scholl Aycliffe



The valley near Redworth Grange

Landscape character description

The valley of the Red House Beck forms a shallow bowl, fringed by high ground at around 150m, falling to around 100m to the east. The surrounding ridges are gentle and broad, with a gradual transition to the higher ground of Houghton Bank to the west and south-west. The Red House Beck flows eastwards from these higher areas, and continues through Newton Aycliffe to become a tributary of the River Skerne.

Beneath this valley is the limestone of the Raisby and Ford Formations, part of the Magnesian Limestone which extends north and south, but is only weakly expressed here in comparison to locations in Durham. A disused limestone quarry lies immediately east of the Borough boundary. There are glacial sands and gravels in the valley floor, with loamy and clayey soils, relatively acid where drainage comes from the sandstone ridge to the west, but more lime-rich to the north.

Pasture is the most common landcover, though with a large minority of arable land. Pasture is grazed by sheep and cattle, with several horse paddocks in the area. Pastoral fields tend to be smaller, with strong hedges and hedge trees, while arable enclosures are larger and occasionally bounded only by fences. There are important lines of mature trees, such as along the Red House Beck, and around the straightened section of the A6072. Field boundary trees are most commonly ash and sycamore, set within hedges of predominantly hawthorn with occasional greater diversity. There are few woodlands in the area, though a belt of mixed woodland forms part of the eastern boundary, framing the settlement of School Aycliffe.

The small village of Redworth is the only settlement set within this area, and comprises mainly 20th-century houses east of the A6072, with the older village core to the west. The village is visually contained by mature trees around the perimeter. There are several large farmsteads within the valley, including substantial farmhouses such as the grade II* listed Middridge Grange, as well as more functional structures. There are fishing ponds along the valley, including a purpose-built complex at Jubilee Lakes.

The A6072 traverses the valley from north to south on an engineered section of road – the former roadway remains as a track to the west. Otherwise only a farm track crosses the valley, and a minor road runs west from Redworth. Several public footpaths and bridleways cross the valley, linking the settlements of Redworth, Shildon and School Aycliffe.

The valley is relatively open and can be appreciated as a whole from slightly higher elevations, though closer to the beck there is a more contained intimate character, particularly where there are mature trees. To the north, industrial buildings at the Future Business Park (formerly George Reynolds Industrial Estate) are prominently sited on the skyline of the valley. New planting alongside these buildings will screen views in time, but they currently impinge on the otherwise undeveloped character of the valley. Away from the A6072 this is a quiet landscape, used for informal recreation by residents of Redworth and School Aycliffe.

Landscape sensitivity assessment

Criteria evaluation

| Criteria | Sensitivity description |
|--|--|
| LANDSCAPE | |
| Topography | An enclosed, bowl-like valley, shallow and relatively gentle. |
| Scale (landform and component landscape features) | Medium scale valley landscape, containing mainly smaller-scale buildings and trees, with occasional larger farm buildings. |
| Landscape pattern and complexity (including sense of time-depth) | The pattern of the landscape is relatively simple, being related to the valley landform with smaller pastoral enclosures along the beck, and broader arable fields on the upper slopes. The distribution of farmsteads and remaining smaller field boundaries indicate some time depth, locally fragmented by the A6072. |
| Perceptual qualities | A generally quiet landscape, away from the A6072. It is largely undeveloped though there is large-scale development and suburban-type housing just outside the area's boundary. |
| VISUAL | |
| Skyline character and visual prominence | Skylines define the valley landscape, though they are not of especially distinctive form. The broad, gentle ridges frame the landscape, giving a flat skyline seen from most angles, with occasional trees being the main skyline features. |
| Visual sensitivities and intervisibility | The area is visible from the immediate vicinity, and is seen from the A6072 which passes through. |
| GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE | |
| Strategic green corridors | No strategic green corridors cross this area. |

Landscape and visual sensitivity to built development

3.9 The valley of the Red House Beck is a medium-scale self-contained landscape. There is some visual diversity, though the area is open and with few visual foci. The small extent and enclosed nature of the landscape indicates moderate sensitivity, though the very low level of development currently present suggests that significant additional built development would be out of character. The area is relatively tranquil, only interrupted by the A6072 and by the presence of industrial buildings in the adjacent area, the latter of which will be mitigated over time by a new plantation at its perimeter. The skylines in the area are the most visible parts of the landscape, and the whole area is overlooked by higher ground to the west and south. There are important connections for wildlife along the Red House Beck with woodland and wetland in the Newton Aycliffe area.

3.10 Key sensitivities within this landscape include:

- Lack of existing built development;
- Small scale of the village of Redworth;
- Enclosed pastoral valley landscape, with an often intimate and relatively tranquil character;
- Traditional nuclear farmsteads built and occasional historic farmhouses;
- Views over the valley from the A6072; and
- Open skylines which are widely seen from this and adjacent landscapes.

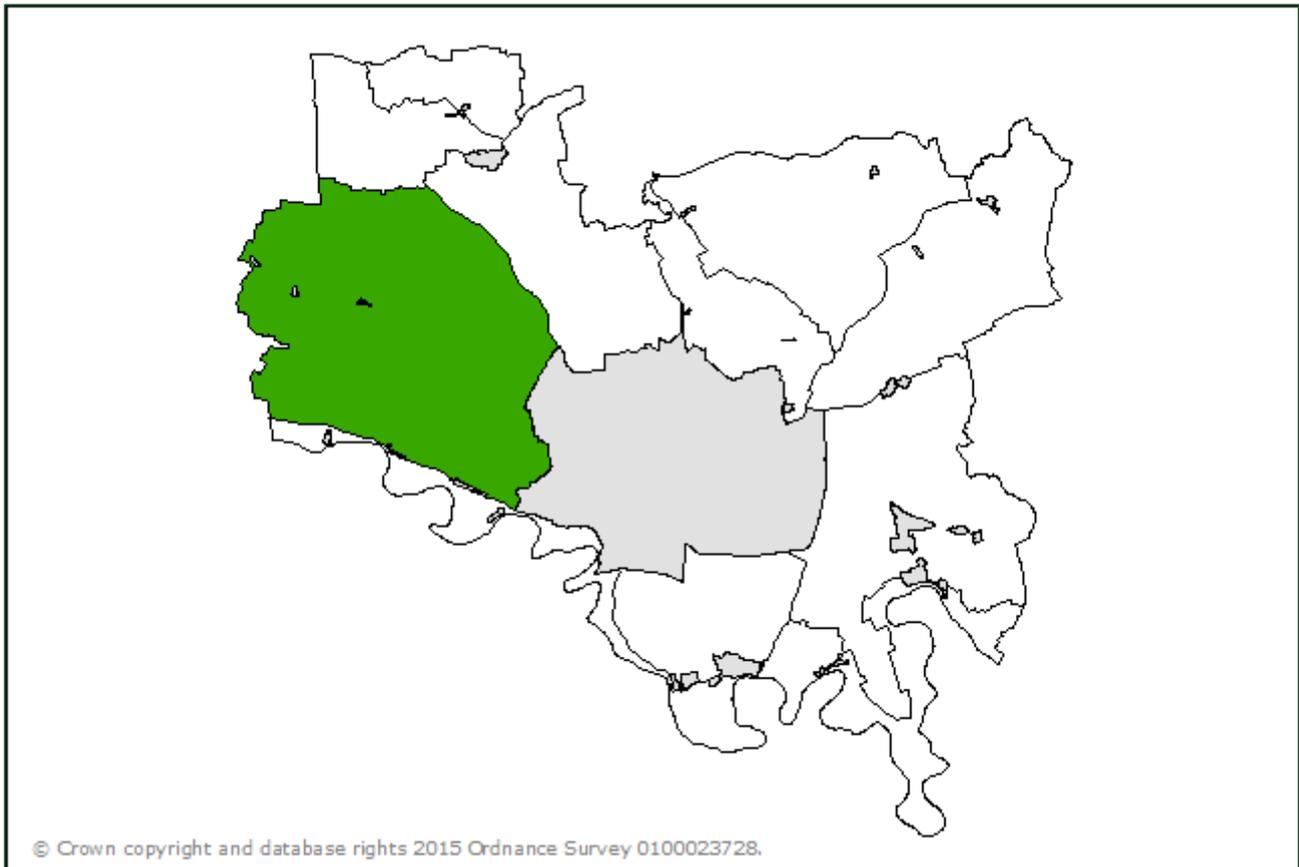
Key sensitivities at settlement edges

3.11 The small village of Redworth is the only settlement which lies adjacent to this character area. It comprises a traditional village green with a row of houses along the northern side and farmsteads at each end. More modern development is located around the A6072, extending across the main road into the Red House Beck character area. This part of the village is visually contained by mature trees within garden grounds. These provide reasonable settlement boundaries to the village.

Character area 3: Denton and Walworth Farmland

Location and extents

This character area lies to the west of the Borough, and comprises the flat or gently sloping farmland that shelves down from Houghton Bank in the north to the River Tees in the south. It is bounded to the south by the A67 which approximately marks the edge of the incised Tees Valley. To the east the area extends up to the edge of Darlington. The A68 follows a low ridge running north-west from Darlington to Houghton Bank, marking the watershed between this southerly-sloping area and the easterly facing Whessoe and Dene Beck. The area is shown in more detail in Figure 3.4.



Representative photographs



Farmland near Walworth Gate



View south-west from Burtree Gate

Landscape character description

This area slopes generally from around 130-140m at its northern edge, to between 70 and 50m along the A67. There is also a gradual downward slope from west to east, and a flattening of the topography compared to the landscape in County Durham to the immediate west. The slope is generally even, though there are steeper slopes around Walworth and Denton Grange. Individual low hills are set within this gentle slope, and several small becks have eroded shallow gullies in places. The flattest parts of the area occur to the south-east.

The area is underlain mainly by limestones of the Raisby and Ford Formations, part of the Magnesian Limestone group, though there is little visible expression of this. To the west, the limestone gives way to the sandstones of the Stainmore Formation. The steep slopes around Walworth correspond to a boundary of the limestone with an outlying finger of sandstones. The limestone nature of the slopes is clear at Limekiln Banks where the evidence of quarrying and a listed limekiln can be seen. Glacial boulder clay masks the underlying rock. Soils in the area are generally loamy or clayey, seasonally wet, and slightly acid but base-rich. Soils become more acid in the western part of the area. The area is drained by a series of small becks which rise on Houghton Bank and flow either south into the Tees, e.g. Piercebridge Beck, or south-east to join with the Cocker Beck that flows through Darlington to join the Skerne. The natural drainage pattern has been augmented in the past with ditches cut to drain the wetter carrs that form between higher ground.

There is a mix of arable and pastoral landholdings, generally divided into large fields which are more or less rectilinear. The winding courses of becks often define field boundaries, introducing irregularity to some areas, though in others, such as at High Carlbury, the planned nature of the enclosures is clear. Smaller fields only remain in the context of villages, such as the small linear pastures around Killerby. Hedges of blackthorn and hawthorn are the dominant boundary type, though they vary in character. Often they are continuous and clipped low, though some hedges are gappy and many have been removed altogether. In more intensive arable areas hedges have been replaced by wire fences.

A number of prominently located deciduous and mixed plantations form important features in this landscape. Few of these are over 10 ha, but their distribution lends a more wooded character to the northern part of the area. The plantations adjoin shelterbelts in places, again comprising dense mixed woodland. More natural woodland, with frequent willow, occurs along the many becks in the area. Estate woodland and parkland trees around Walworth Castle further contributes to this wooded character. The many field boundary trees include oak and sycamore alongside the more common ash, though there are some areas where trees are notably absent, possibly reflecting different approaches to hedgerow management across landholdings. Local wildlife sites include Denton Quarry in Limekiln Wood, and Ulnaby Beck. Natural habitats are largely confined to woodlands, hedges and watercourses.

Small nucleated villages are regularly dispersed across the area, though settlement was once more widespread. There are large deserted medieval villages at Ulnaby and Walworth, with smaller abandoned settlements at Archdeacon Newton and Summerhouses. There was formerly extensive ridge and furrow across this area though intensive arable production has removed this feature. The village of Ulnaby is recorded from the 12th century, but declined from the 16th century due to changes in land ownership and management – the village lands were probably enclosed by the 17th century when only three houses remained.ⁱ Today the earthworks remain visible within pasture around Ulnaby Hall, and are scheduled along with other sites. Walworth Castle, listed at grade I, is a 17th-century country house set in parkland, with its own scheduled deserted village to the north.ⁱⁱ The built heritage of the area is rural in character, including many listed farm buildings.

The present villages in the area retain this strongly rural character, with many being constructed of locally quarried limestone. Whitewashed farm buildings stand out at Denton and Killerby. Traditional village layouts are in evidence at Killerby and at Summerhouses which retains an open green. Farmsteads are spaced across the area, retaining much local character alongside more functional buildings. There is very little development which is entirely non-rural in character, though there is the suburban style ribbon settlement of Merrybent along the A67 and an agri-industrial site near Piercebridge.

The A1, A67 and A68 are the major transport corridors in the area, but skirt this landscape leaving a network of smaller roads connecting the villages. The B6275 runs directly north-south, following Dere Street Roman Road north from Piercebridge. The Barnard Castle railway once passed through the area, its trackbed still in evidence. A number of public footpaths and bridleways link the villages, and there is a long-term plan to reuse the railway line to provide access.

The more elevated parts of this landscape offer long views southward across the Tees Valley. From the northern edges of the area there are views to the North York Moors and Yorkshire Dales, as well as the Pennines to the west. Further down the slope, views are more limited and extend to a flat or gently sloping horizon, generally with trees along the skyline. Locally, views are limited by topography and some areas are visually contained despite the low profiles of the gentle hills. Woodland contributes to this sense of enclosure, and where there are fewer trees the openness of the landscape is notable. The landscape has a strongly rural character with a clear impression of the long use of the land for agriculture. Though fringed by major roads, with the A1 having the most pervasive influence, the majority of this area is quiet and rural. There is very little overt modern development, and the sheltered valleys and woodlands provide tranquil sites within the intensively farmed landscape.

At its eastern edge this character area is bounded by the Darlington development limit. The underlying character of the landscape is continuous across this boundary, and extends into the farmland south of Junction 58, and along key green corridors that extend into western Darlington. These include the recently-developed open spaces in the West Park area, and the linear open spaces along the Cocker Beck and Baydale Beck.

ⁱ Grindey, C; Jecock, M; Oswald, A. (2008) *Ulnaby, Darlington: An archaeological survey and investigation of the deserted medieval village*. English Heritage Research Department Report Series no. 13-2008.

ⁱⁱ Walworth Castle. The National Heritage List for England. [<http://list.historicengland.org.uk/resultsingle.aspx?uid=1121175&searchtype=mapsearch>] Accessed 27 August.

Landscape sensitivity assessment

Criteria evaluation

| Criteria | Sensitivity description |
|--|--|
| LANDSCAPE | |
| Topography | Gently undulating and generally sloping down from north to south, with a slight slope down from west to east. Low rounded hills and very shallow valleys. |
| Scale (landform and component landscape features) | Large scale landform of wide shallow valleys and open hill tops. Long views and large fields in more open areas give a large scale, though countered by numerous human-scale features such as rural buildings and trees. |
| Landscape pattern and complexity (including sense of time-depth) | The area has a relatively simple pattern of gently undulating landscape and medium-large fields. Time-depth is evident in the Roman Road and most visibly in the rural heritage of villages and farms, emphasised by the earthworks of deserted medieval villages. |
| Perceptual qualities | Elevated areas with long views tend to be open and slightly exposed. More visually contained areas are located between hills. Away from the busy roads this is a tranquil rural landscape. There is very little overt modern development in this area. |
| VISUAL | |
| Skyline character and visual prominence | Skylines are flat or gently sloping in most views, often with woodland or field trees on the horizon line. There are few areas where skylines are a prominent feature, though some of the low hills are locally important. |
| Visual sensitivities and intervisibility | Long views southward are an important feature from more open parts of the landscape. The northern side of this landscape is overlooked from Houghton Bank, which enables panoramic views across the Tees Valley and beyond. |
| GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE | |
| Strategic green corridors | The southern fringe of the area falls within the 1km buffer of the River Tees, within strategic green corridor 1. |

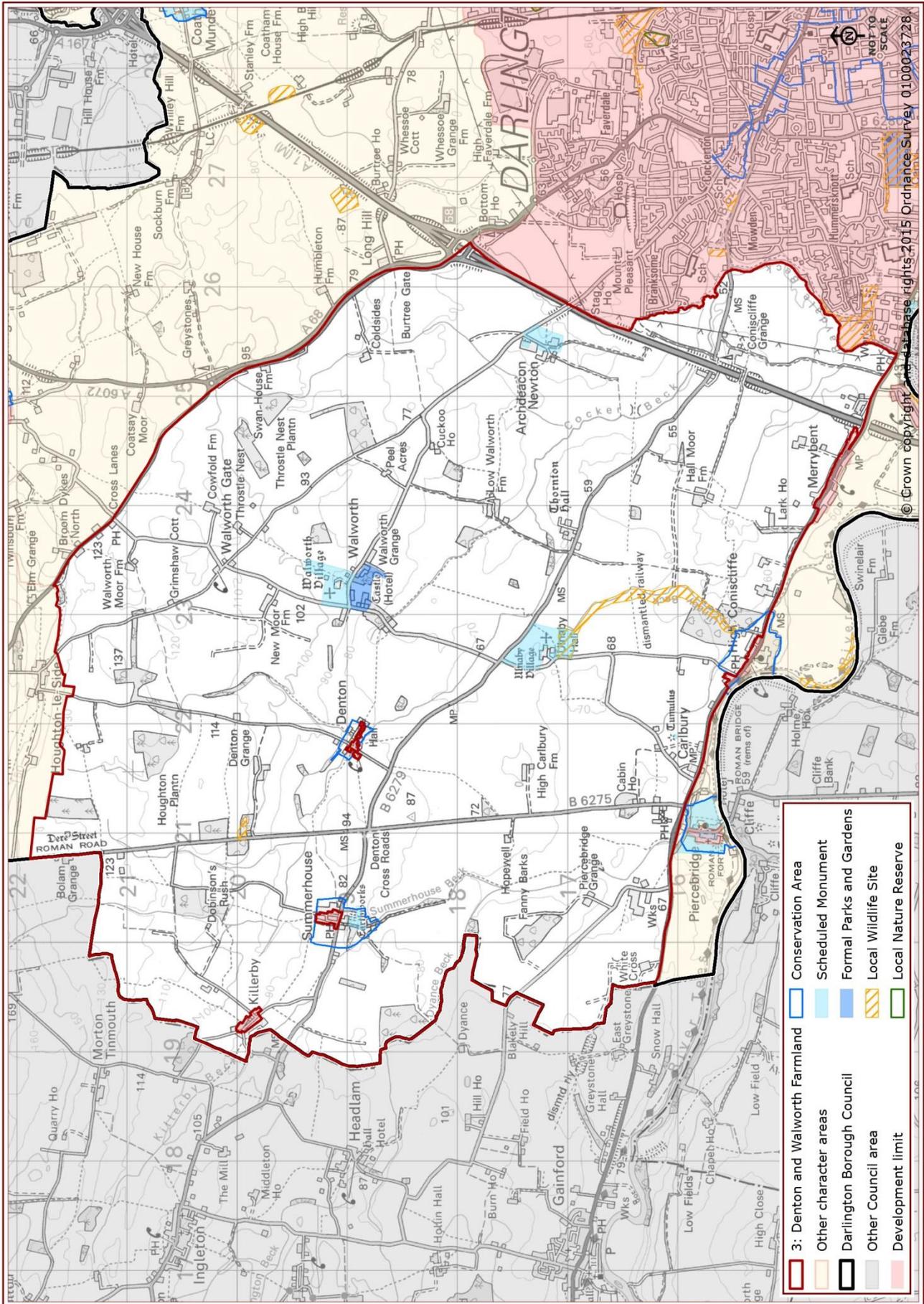
Landscape and visual sensitivity to built development

- 3.12 The openness and larger scale of this landscape allow long views across large arable fields. Smaller-scale areas of pasture surround the small villages. Although intensively farmed, this area retains a strongly rural character with very little overt modern development and important woodlands and riparian habitats. There are large farms and an agri-industrial site near Piercebridge, but otherwise rural tranquillity is prevalent away from main roads. Aside from agricultural buildings, the area would generally be of higher sensitivity to significant development which would be out of character.
- 3.13 Key sensitivities within this landscape include:
- Strongly rural character with little modern development;
 - Locally prominent low hills;
 - Frequency of woodland plantations and shelterbelts;
 - Historic character and form of small villages, including local building materials and styles;
 - Remains of medieval settlement, and surviving historic dwellings and farm buildings; and
 - Long views across the landscape to the North York Moors, Yorkshire Dales and Pennines.

Key sensitivities at settlement edges

- 3.14 This character area adjoins the western boundary of Darlington. The settlements of High Coniscliffe and Merrybent are located on the A67 to the south, and the villages of Killerby, Summerhouses and Denton are inset within the character area.
- 3.15 The A1 motorway provides a strong divide in the landscape between the more rural western part of this character area, and the smaller eastern section which is more influenced by its proximity to the urban area. The land to the north of this eastern section has already been allocated for housing and is within the development limit. The area to the south remains in agricultural use. The Cocker Beck runs through this area, with pastoral fields forming a natural extension of the open space which follows this watercourse into central Darlington. The tributary Baydale Beck forms the current settlement edge, which is also well provided with open space and mature woodland along the beck, along both sides of the development limit. To the south is the Broken Scar waterworks and local wildlife site. Community woodland has been established in association with recent development at Merrybent Drive. The landscape of this area shows less of the rural tranquillity which is prevalent further west, and it is visually contained. These areas are considered to be of lower overall sensitivity, subject to more detailed analysis. The key green corridors extending from within Darlington and on through this landscape are of locally higher sensitivity than the surroundings. Locations to the west of the A1 are likely to be more sensitive, since they are more detached from the urban area.
- 3.16 The settlements along the A67 are very linear in form. Though their immediate settings are not of particular sensitivity, further ribbon development would increase the suburban character which is experienced along this route. High Coniscliffe is a conservation area, the boundaries of which take in its landscape setting as a roadside village.
- 3.17 Of the smaller rural villages, both Denton and Summerhouses are conservation areas, the latter including an extensive landscape setting. All three villages are small and self-contained, with traditional forms that render them sensitive to all but the smallest additional developments.

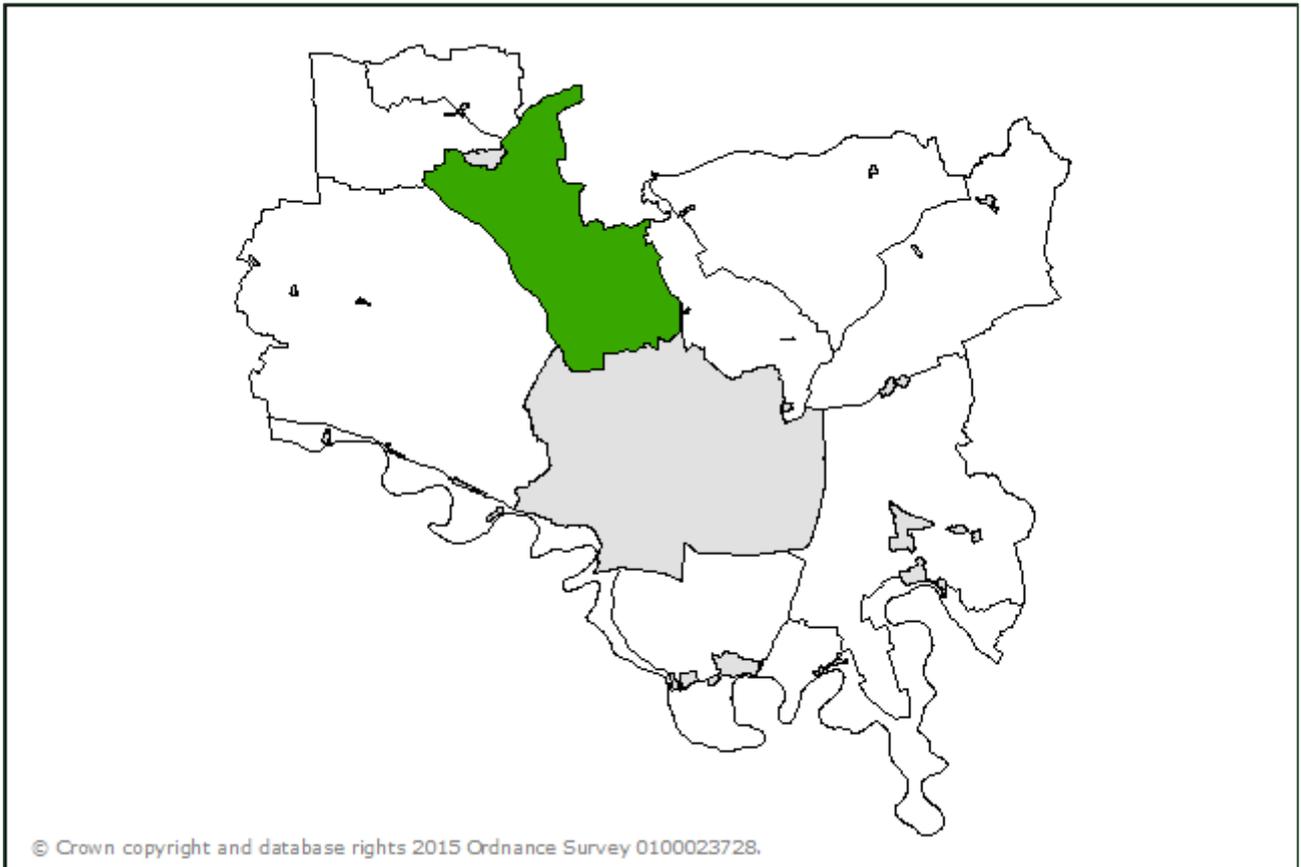
Figure 3.4 Denton and Walworth Farmland



Character area 4: Whessoe and Dene Beck

Location and extents

This character area lies to the north of Darlington, and extends towards Newton Aycliffe and Heighington. It is bounded by the A68 to the west, which approximately follows the watershed between eastward and southward flowing streams. It comprises gently rolling farmland which is traversed by the A1(M) and the Tees Valley Railway Line. To the east is the Skerne Valley (character area 5). The area is shown in more detail in Figure 3.5.



Representative photographs



View west from Coatham Lane



Extensive pasture east of Burtree Gate

Landscape character description

This area slopes generally from around 140m at the north-western edge, to around 70-80m across much of the southern part of the area. The terrain is undulating, comprising a series of shallow valleys and low rounded ridges that separate them. There is a general east-west trend to these ridges, though this is less pronounced in the south. The underlying geology is Magnesian Limestone, but this is completely masked by glacial till. There are substantial deposits of glacial sands and gravels in the southern part of the area. The main watercourse is the Dene Beck which rises west of Heighington and meanders south-eastwards towards Coatham Mundeville where it joins the Skerne. The southern part of the area has several drainage ditches linking to the Dene Beck and south to the West Beck, but areas of marsh and carr remain in low-lying areas. Soils in the area are generally loamy or clayey, seasonally wet, and slightly acid but base-rich.

Farmland is primarily arable, though with significant pastoral landholdings, and grazing land along the Dene Beck. Fields are irregular in shape, and medium or large in size. Field sizes become slightly smaller on the higher ground near Heighington, and in pastoral areas. Carr and wet grasslands are set within this pattern, adding visual diversity and habitat interest. There are few woodlands, with the only sizeable stand of trees at Cumby's Plantation. However there are shelterbelts and farm woodlands, as well as semi-natural riparian woodland, which contribute to visible tree cover. Visible woodland also includes the recent plantations around commercial buildings in Newton Aycliffe, just outside the Borough boundary, Cumby's Plantation and the adjacent shelterbelts are of dense mixed character, with ash, sycamore and pine. Willow is more common along watercourses, and there is some regenerating scrub on the carrs. Hawthorn hedges predominate, and are generally in good condition though outgrown in some locations. Ash trees are common in field boundaries throughout the area.

There is little settlement in this area, though it is adjacent to the villages of Heighington and Coatham Mundeville. The small suburban settlement of School Aycliffe extends into this area. A medieval village was located at Whessoe, and its site is marked on OS maps though there is limited visible evidence and the site is not scheduled. Coatham Mundeville also has an extensive medieval village site which is scheduled and comprises several visible earthworks on the boundary of this character area and the Upper Skerne (area 5). The conservation area of Heighington includes the area around Trafalgar House which provides important setting to the village. There are a small number of listed farm buildings in the area, with other period farms as well as more utilitarian structures. Running north-south through this area, the route of the Stockton & Darlington Railway remains in regular use. Features associated with the railway include a listed crossing keeper's cottage on Coatham Lane.

Aside from large-scale farm buildings, the principal modern feature in the area is the A1(M) which cuts through the south of the area. The A68, A167 and A6072 run along the east and west edges of this area. Otherwise there are few roads: the B6444 linking Newton Aycliffe; and Burtree Lane which crosses the area further south. Both are busy, though Burtree Lane retains a semi-rural character. High-voltage power lines also cross this southern area. Although outside the character area boundary, commercial buildings at Faverdale and in Newton Aycliffe are visible from within it. A good network of public footpaths and bridleways connects this area with Heighington, Coatham Mundeville and Newton Aycliffe, though links south into Darlington are fewer.

This is a relatively contained landscape, sloping eastward but with fewer long views. There are southward views from the A68 across the Tees Valley, and to the south-east the North York Moors can be seen in the distance. From within this area the horizon is more commonly close by, with a flat or gently undulating skyline dotted with trees or plantations. Local high points, such as along Burtree Lane, offer views north towards Heighington. Though predominantly rural, and with limited built development, the A1(M) and other busy roads combine with visible large-scale development in adjacent areas to reduce the sense of tranquillity. Traffic noise pervades much of this landscape. At Faverdale, the southern edge of the area has an urban fringe character, arising from scattered houses, power lines and commercial developments, including the very large Argos depot and its broad access roads. The underlying landscape character of this area extends south across the development limit into Darlington, particularly along the green corridor that follows the railway to the Brinkburn nature reserve.

Landscape sensitivity assessment

Criteria evaluation

| Criteria | Sensitivity description |
|--|---|
| LANDSCAPE | |
| Topography | This area comprises an undulating series of valleys and ridges. Although low the ridges are relatively elevated compared to surrounding terrain. |
| Scale (landform and component landscape features) | The landscape is generally open and of medium to large scale, though with areas of smaller scale contained in the valleys. There are frequent human-scale features such as farms and trees. |
| Landscape pattern and complexity (including sense of time-depth) | Patterns are simple, with medium-sized arable and pastoral fields, with scattered trees. Riverside woodlands are distinctive along the Dene Beck, and there are areas of wet carr along the A1(M) corridor |
| Perceptual qualities | Often intensively farmed, this landscape is also crossed by the A1(M) which reduces tranquillity in the south of the area. There is also traffic noise from the A68 and B6444. Large-scale development at the edges of Darlington and Newton Aycliffe is locally visible. |
| VISUAL | |
| Skyline character and visual prominence | There are no landmark features in this area. Skylines are generally gentle and undistinguished, formed by the layers of low ridges and often seen with trees. |
| Visual sensitivities and intervisibility | The central part of the area, around Dene beck, is hidden from most views. The outer areas are more intervisible, being overlooked from surrounding roads and from the A1(M). The rising ground between Whessoe Grange and Tutin Hill, at the south of this area, forms a backdrop to Darlington in some views. |
| GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE | |
| Strategic green corridors | Strategic green corridor 3 River Skerne includes the area around Coatham Mundeville within the 1km buffer of the river. Strategic green corridor 4 River Skerne to Faverdale overlaps with this area, and takes in all of the southern part of the character area, between West Beck and the A167 |

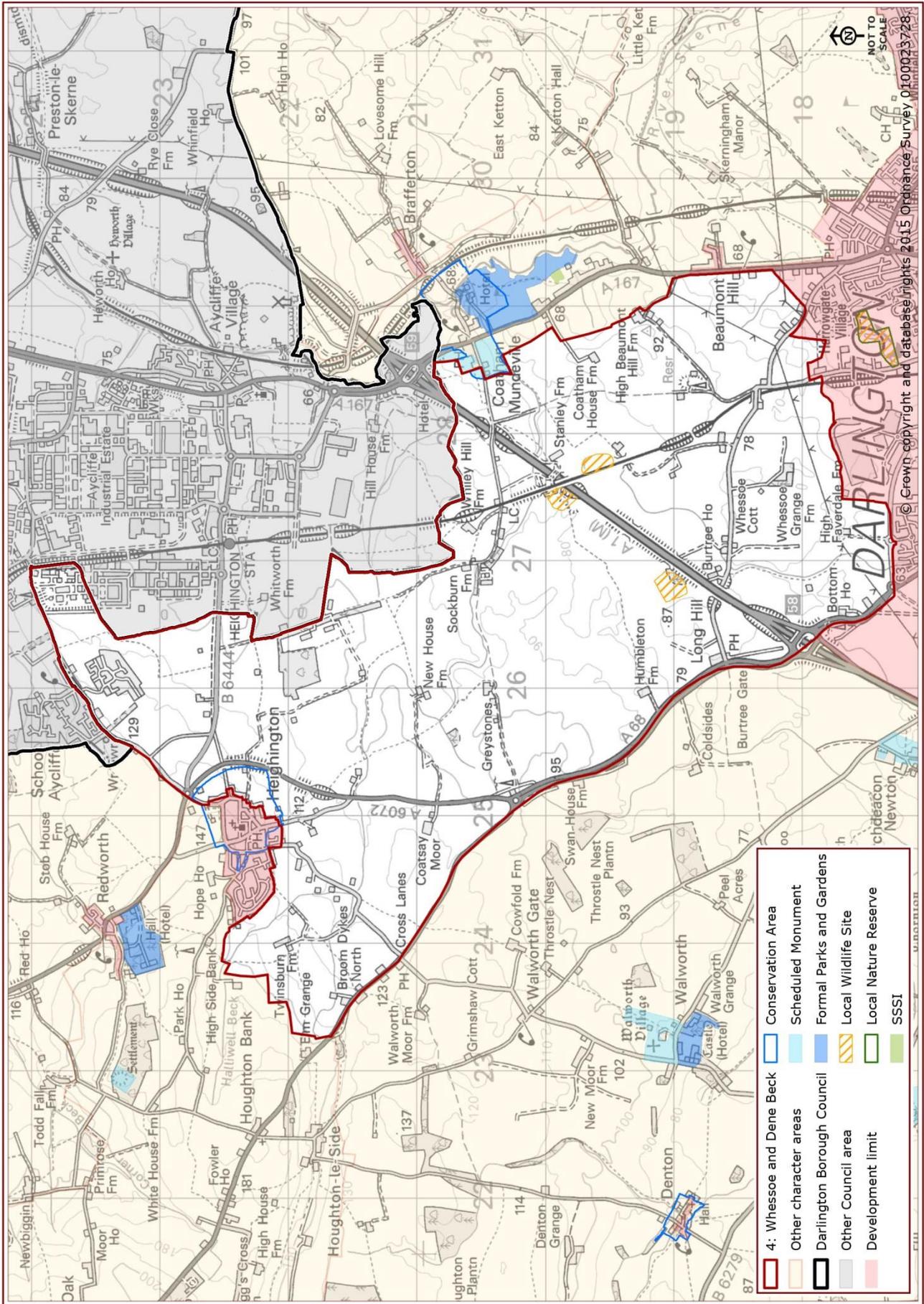
Landscape and visual sensitivity to built development

- 3.18 The generally open and gently undulating nature of the landscape indicates lower overall sensitivity, though there are areas inset which are of increased sensitivity, including the more elevated and visible parts of the landscape, as well as the enclosed woodland along the Dene Beck. There are strong human influences at the fringes of this landscape, though it remains a rural area with remnant wetland carr, and provides important connections between town and country, for people and wildlife.
- 3.19 Key sensitivities within this landscape include:
- Rural character, particularly north of the A1(M);
 - Visible high ground, including the broad ridge at Whessoe which provides containment to the settlement of Darlington;
 - Remaining areas of carr and marsh, both designated and undesignated;
 - Field trees, riparian woodland and shelterbelts; and
 - Importance of providing connectivity between town and country, for people and wildlife.

Key sensitivities at settlement edges

- 3.20 The northern edge of Darlington is adjacent to this character area, and the village of Heighington is at the north-east edge. Part of School Aycliffe also lies within this character area.
- 3.21 At the northern edge of Darlington there is a mix of modern housing developments, large business parks and some smaller areas of light industry. High voltage overhead power lines cross the countryside and the A1(M) travels in a north-south direction and as such provides less containment to any potential residential expansion in this area. The countryside is relatively elevated and open in character, providing a rural setting to a number of scattered period farmsteads. Residential development here would erode the rural setting and potentially encourage further residential development into countryside further north. The maintenance of the River Skerne to Faverdale strategic green corridor, connecting the built up area to the wider landscape, is also a consideration for this area. Accordingly, these areas are considered to be of higher overall sensitivity, subject to more detailed analysis.
- 3.22 Heighington is among the larger villages in the Borough, and is centred on a broadly rectangular green around the parish church. More recent development has expanded the village on all sides, but to the west in particular. Character area 4 wraps around the village. To the east the conservation area extends out to the A6072 offering little scope for development in this direction. The southern and western edge of the settlement is potentially less sensitive, though there is public open space and a relatively robust settlement boundary.
- 3.23 The part of School Aycliffe within Darlington comprises a single relatively modern housing development, set back from the road on a former hospital site. There is a strong wooded settlement boundary around the estate, with parkland fronting the road. The surrounding gently sloping farmland has a good woodland structure, and potentially small-scale infill development could be inserted without significant detriment to the landscape.

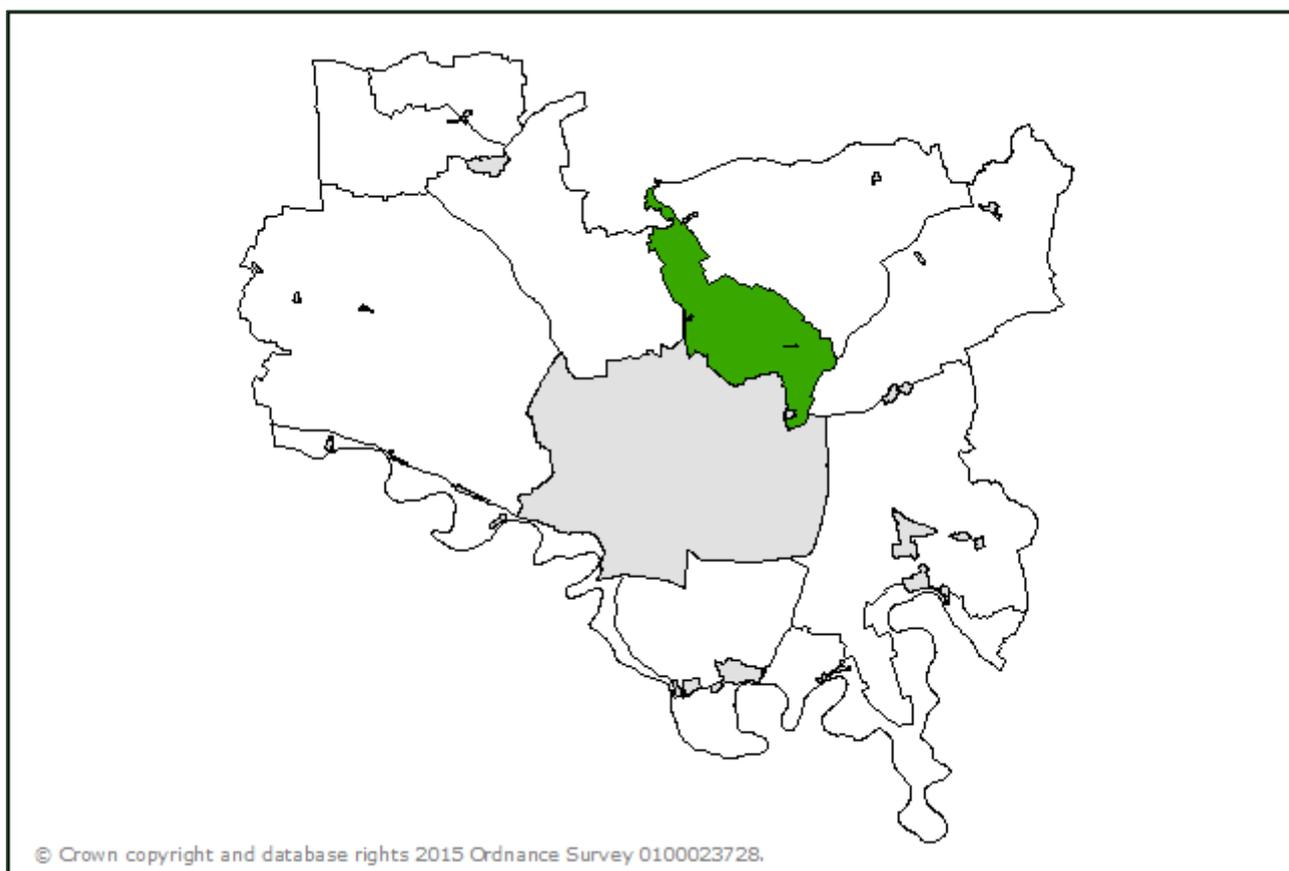
Figure 3.5 Whessoe and Dene Beck



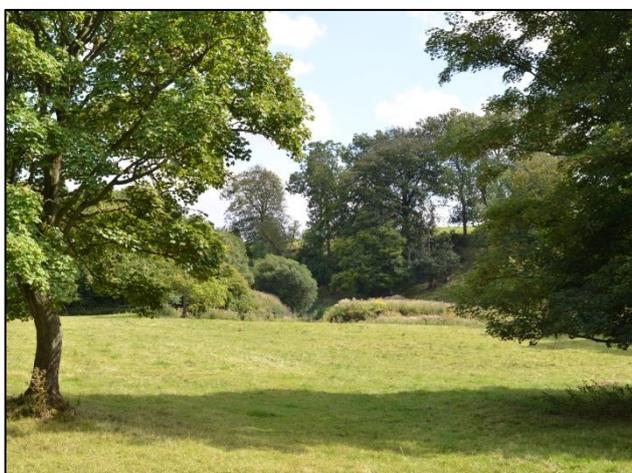
Character area 5: Upper Skerne Valley

Location and extents

This character area comprises the shallow but distinct valley of the River Skerne as it flows from the northern boundary of Darlington, past Brafferton and Coatham Mundeville, then meandering past Barmpton to Great Burdon. This area includes the farmland adjacent to the north-west boundary of Darlington, and dispersed housing along the A167. The area is shown in more detail in Figure 3.6.



Representative photographs



The wooded valley at Barmpton



Houses near Coatham Mundeville

Landscape character description

The River Skerne flows through an incised valley from west of Newton Aycliffe to Great Burdon where it enters the built up area. The valley floor falls from around 65m in the north to under 45m at Great Burdon, while the valley sides rise to around 80m in places. The valley sides are generally gently sloping, though there are steeper slopes around Barmpton and Skertingham. The river itself is not large, generally less than 10m across and broadening to form shallows. It is not fast flowing but meanders gently across the narrow floodplain, forming pools and riffles. The Skerne is fed by smaller becks which flow down from the surrounding landscape through shallow side valleys. The river flows through an area of alluvial deposits and glacial sand and gravel, overlying Magnesian Limestone which has historically been quarried along the riverside. The soils, in common with neighbouring areas, are generally loamy or clayey, seasonally wet, and slightly acid but base-rich.

The floodplain of the valley and steeper slopes are generally grazed, while flatter areas on the valley sides are arable. The northern area comprises smaller fields, and to the south there are large arable fields where smaller enclosures have been amalgamated. These arable areas have weaker field boundaries with gappy hedgerows and few trees. Denser hedges are found around pastoral areas and smaller fields, with numerous ash trees. Riparian woodland contributes strongly to the valley character, and the central area of the valley is notable for the absence of trees on the river bank. At Coatham Mundeville, riparian woodland combines with plantations around Hall Garth and the golf course, and trees along the A167 and railway line, to create a well wooded character. Further south, around Skertingham, there is an extensive recently established plantation that connects with riparian woodland and other plantations on the adjacent farmland. Around Barmpton there is another concentration of woodland on steeper slopes, with riparian woodland continuing to be a feature as far as Great Burdon. The habitat value of the woodland is augmented by other habitats including wetlands and former quarries, and Redcar Field, protected as a SSSI for its fen meadow vegetation.

In the north of the area is the village of Coatham Mundeville, now comprising a small number of dwellings around the A167, it was once more extensive. Earthworks associated with a deserted medieval village form a large scheduled monument to the west of the A167. The conservation area also extends east to cover Hall Garth, a 17th-century manor house now in use as a country club, and the adjacent mill buildings. Hall Garth and the buildings by the A167 are constructed from local limestone. South on the A167 are a number of 20th century houses with long private gardens backing on to the valley. These become smaller and closer-spaced on the approach to Darlington. 20th-century settlement backs on to this area to the south, with a mixed settlement boundary. The wooded golf course provides a more robust boundary in the central part of the area. The village of Barmpton, comprising a single row of houses and farm buildings, has a working rural character. Great Burdon retains its village character on the edge of Darlington's suburbs.

The northern section of the valley contains the A167 on its west side and the East Coast Main Line railway on the east. The A1(M) junction is located just to the north of Coatham Mundeville. Further south there are few roads, with Barmpton Lane accessing the village only. Public footpaths and bridleways in the area include Salters Lane, a road once used to transport salt from the coast. The route crossed the Skerne on the medieval Ketton Bridge, though construction of the railway caused the river to shift southward, leaving the bridge stranded by a lane. The dense network of paths is well used by local residents, with car parking available for Skertingham woods.

The area is visually contained, being framed by higher ground. There are views along the valley in places, though often these are obscured by woodlands and the meandering nature of the landform. The raised land at Skertingham offers more prospects, and this area is overlooked from adjacent housing. The valley is also seen from the A167 and from trains on the East Coast Main Line. Generally the valley has an intimate, tranquil character, particularly around Barmpton and other areas with limited road access. Traffic noise in the north, the more intensively farmed areas, and the urban fringe to the south, all locally reduce tranquillity.

The Skerne flows south into Darlington, where the open land is similar in character to the wider Upper Skerne Valley. The river is the focus of a key green wedge bringing rural character into the built-up area and connecting with Rockwell Local Nature Reserve.

Landscape sensitivity assessment

Criteria evaluation

| Criteria | Sensitivity description |
|--|--|
| LANDSCAPE | |
| Topography | Incised valley landscape, with slopes that become steeper around Barmpton. Small areas of flat floodplain. Higher ground adjoining the valley is gently rolling. |
| Scale (landform and component landscape features) | The valley is a small-scale landscape, contained by rising ground and with trees and traditional buildings that give a human scale. Open areas adjoining the valley are larger in scale, though still with human-scale features. |
| Landscape pattern and complexity (including sense of time-depth) | The valley contains a complex land cover of smaller fields, trees and small areas of woodland. The landscape pattern conveys a sense of time depth where traditional buildings remain, such as the combination of trees and manor house at Barmpton, or the old mill at Hall Garth. Arable areas alongside the valley have a more simple landscape pattern. |
| Perceptual qualities | The A167 and railway line have some impact on the tranquillity of the valley, though further south-east there is relatively little human influence and the valley is strongly rural. The urban edge of Darlington has an influence to the south and west, with houses along the A167. Buildings in this landscape tend to be small and traditional in character. |
| VISUAL | |
| Skyline character and visual prominence | Skylines along the valley are not especially distinctive, though for the most part they are undeveloped. Buildings along the A167 are visible on higher ground from within the valley. |
| Visual sensitivities and intervisibility | This is not a prominent landscape, being set below the surrounding countryside it is visually contained. There are glimpsed views into the valley from the A167 and railway line, but the main visual feature is the rural views along the quieter sections of the valley. |
| GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE | |
| Strategic green corridors | Strategic green corridor 3: River Skerne includes the whole of this character area within the 1km buffer of the river. |

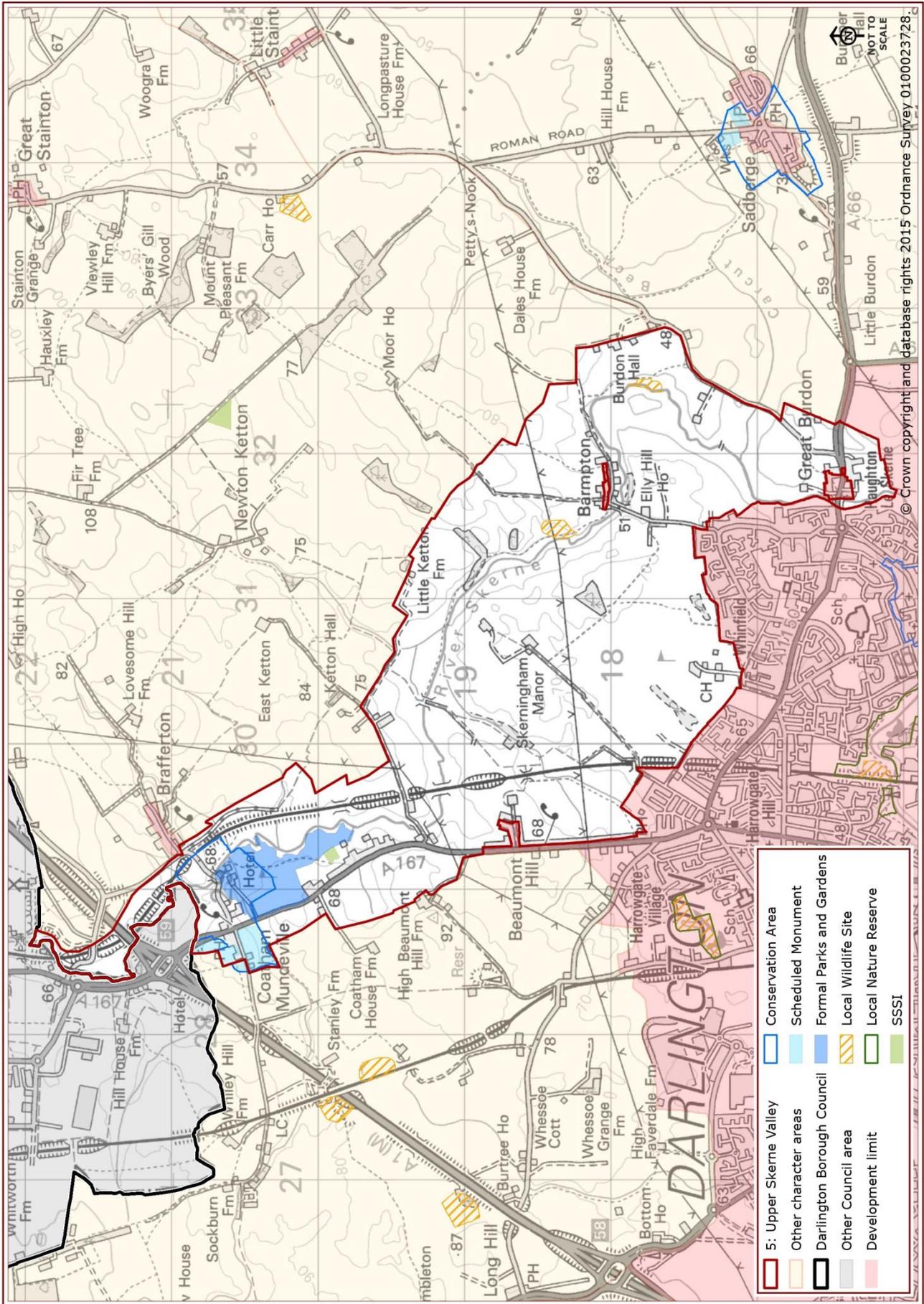
Landscape and visual sensitivity to built development

- 3.24 This is a visually contained valley landscape with slopes that are occasionally relatively steep. Even the gentler slopes are steeper than many in the Borough. Though the section alongside the A167 is affected by traffic noise and some built development, it retains a strongly rural character emphasised by riparian woodland and traditional buildings. The section downstream towards Barmpton is more secluded with important areas of woodland. This rural character is maintained to the south, with woodland north of Great Burdon reducing the visibility of newer development along Barmpton Lane. The river is the spine of a strategic green corridor and this landscape provides important connectivity between town and country.
- 3.25 Key sensitivities within this landscape include:
- Enclosed and often well-wooded character;
 - Intimate, tranquil valley landscape of small scale;
 - Overlooked from key transport routes;
 - An important recreational landscape with a dense network of accessible routes;
 - Historic features along the valley including buildings, bridges and quarries; and
 - Strategic green corridor providing connections for wildlife and habitats.

Key sensitivities at settlement edges

- 3.26 The northern edge of Darlington lies adjacent to this character area, including the northward extension of the development limit around housing on the A167. The hamlet of Barmpton is within the area, and there is housing further north on the A167 to Coatham Mundeville.
- 3.27 At the north-eastern edge of Darlington mainly modern housing developments define the settlement edge. Harrowgate Village forms a very linear north/ south settlement along the A167. Allotments, playing fields and a large golf course soften the transition between residential areas and the countryside and contribute to robust settlement boundaries. The countryside in this area gently rises to the north, and includes some larger areas of woodland to the north of Low Skerningham. The softer transition between the settlement of Darlington and the adjacent countryside indicates that the areas adjacent to the settlement, and set above the valley, are of lower overall sensitivity, subject to more detailed analysis.
- 3.28 The valley provides a rural setting to scattered period farmsteads and the historic villages of Great Burdon and Barmpton. The valley landscape is unlikely to accommodate further development without altering its character. The conservation area at Coatham Mundeville, including Hall Garth, covers a large area in the north of the valley. In the south, the Skerne helps to maintain the separate character of Great Burdon, and forms an important green corridor leading into the built-up area of Darlington. Aside from the elevated land around Skerningham mentioned above, the Upper Skerne Valley is of generally higher sensitivity to built development.

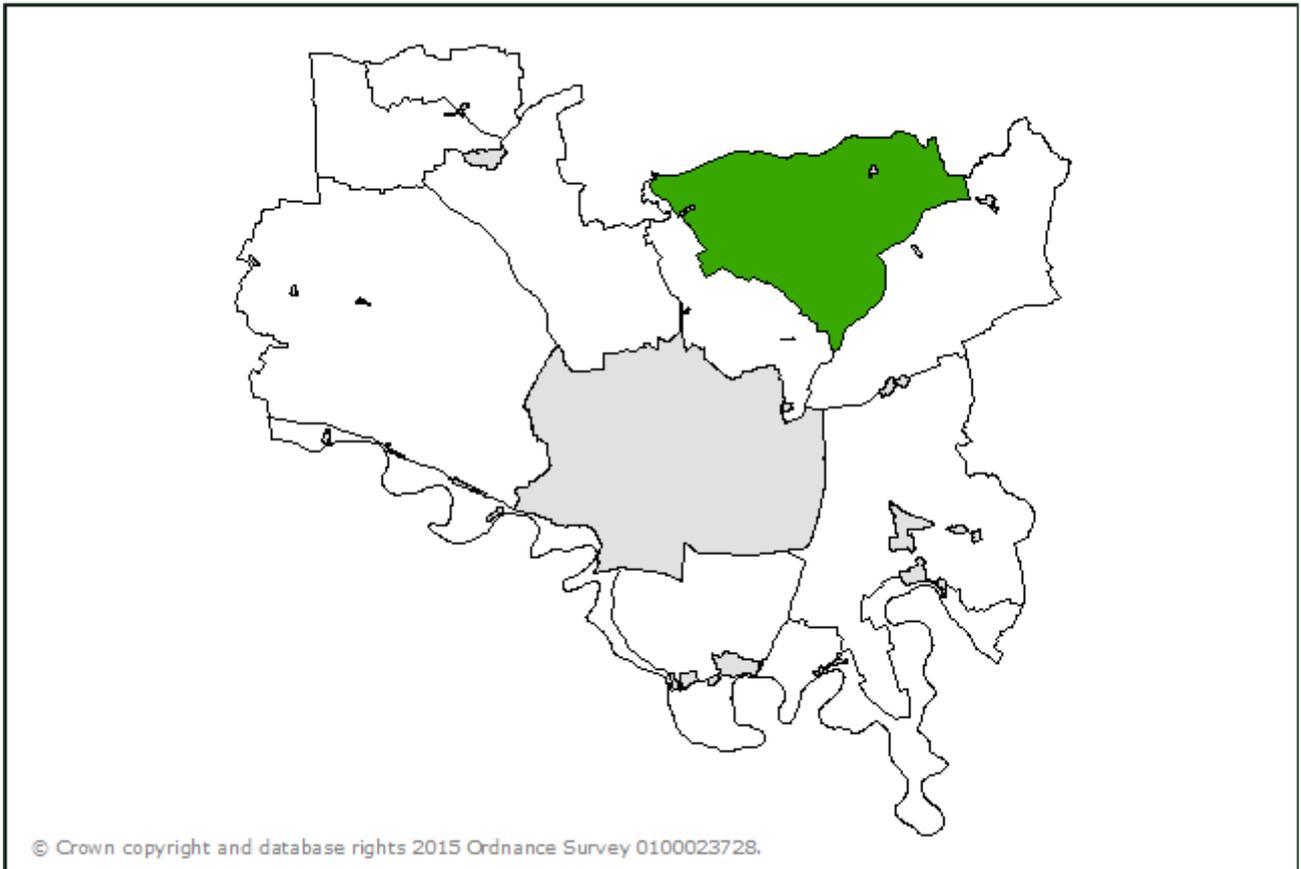
Figure 3.6 Upper Skerne Valley



Character area 6: Great Stainton Farmland

Location and extents

This character area occurs at the north-east of the Borough, and comprises higher ground that lies between the River Skerne to the west and the lower-lying vale to the south-east. The village of Great Stainton is located at the north-eastern corner of this area of undulating elevated ground, which extends north into County Durham. The area is shown in more detail in Figure 3.7.



Representative photographs



Elevated farmland seen from Salters Lane



Viewley Hill Farm from Byer's Gill

Landscape character description

This character area comprises a gently undulating landscape with a mixture of broader elevated areas and gentle, round hills and small enclosed valleys. The high point of 112m occurs at Whinny Hill on the Darlington/County Durham boundary. Within County Durham the land begins to slope gently down towards the industrial land of Newton Aycliffe to the north-west, and the flatter carrs to the north. The land in the south of this character area slopes gradually down to a flat, gently undulating vale over which views are attainable from most of this area.

The higher ground is formed largely of Magnesian Limestone with slowly permeable, seasonally wet soils which are slightly acidic, loamy and clayey. The land is drained radially from high points at Whinny Hill and Bracken Hill, by multiple small gills which form streams such as Newton Beck that flows into the Skerne to the south-east, and Little Stainton Beck to the south-west which joins the Newbiggin Beck in character area 7.

The area comprises enclosed farmland, under a mix of arable and pastoral cultivation. A greater proportion of pasture, grazed by cows and sheep, is evident than elsewhere in the Borough. Field boundaries are regular, and vary only slightly, with smaller enclosures around farmsteads and settlements like Great Stainton. Field boundaries are generally hedges, though there are patches of fences or mixtures of fence and hedge in places. Hedges are predominantly of hawthorn and blackthorn, with ash and sycamore trees. The smaller fields tend to retain more continuous hedgerows with more trees, while larger fields have weaker boundaries where hedges have been replaced by fences.

There are several woodland plantations in the area, the most prominent of which are a series of moderately sized, predominantly broadleaf woodlands which run north to south along the west side of Elstob Lane from Petty's Nook to Great Stainton. The woodlands include Catkill Lane, Nova Scotia and Galloping Hill plantations, as well as Square Wood and Byer's Gill Wood.

The course of a Roman road runs through the area, and it also includes the small nuclear villages of Great Stainton and Brafferton and the hamlet of Newton Ketton. Great Stainton is located on a prominent hilltop, and is laid out around a village green. A number of dwellings and farms are dispersed evenly throughout the area, sometimes atop small hills. Buildings are generally constructed from brick, with pantile roofs.

Few roads run through the area; those that do tend to be relatively straight due to the gentle nature of the topography. Lime Lane runs west from Great Stainton across the highest ground of this character area, and there are further connections provided by farm tracks such as Salter's Lane and Catkill Lane. A dense network of public footpaths and bridleways connect the settlements in this area with Barmpton and Coatham Mundeville, and with the wider landscape.

In terms of semi-natural habitats, the woodlands in the centre-east of this landscape character area provide shelter and habitats for various species, while broad verges and small becks may act as pathways for species travelling between habitats. Newton Ketton Meadow is a small SSSI in the centre of the area, and there is a local wildlife site at Carr House Pond.

Higher ground, such as Whinny Hill, offers panoramic views in all directions, though in slightly lower ground views tend to be focussed to the east, south and west. In the small enclosed valleys between rounded hills, a sense of enclosure can be found. There is almost no overt modern development apart from large farm buildings, and the very few roads mean that this is a strongly rural and tranquil area.

Landscape sensitivity assessment

Criteria evaluation

| Criteria | Sensitivity description |
|--|---|
| LANDSCAPE | |
| Topography | A more rolling terrain than elsewhere in the Borough, and relatively elevated, with rounded hills and enclosed valleys, though with few strongly distinctive landforms. |
| Scale (landform and component landscape features) | Open and large in scale on elevated ridges, but much smaller in scale in visually contained areas. Many human-scale features including trees and farmsteads, and small villages. |
| Landscape pattern and complexity (including sense of time-depth) | Irregular patterns of small fields remain around villages, giving a sense of time depth. Woodland plantations contribute to this, and increase the diversity of landcover across this area. |
| Perceptual qualities | A strongly rural area with little overt modern development, aside from the large farm buildings that cluster around more traditional farmsteads. The area is generally quiet with few roads passing through, and there are many opportunities to access this rural landscape. |
| VISUAL | |
| Skyline character and visual prominence | Skylines in this area are formed by the rounded hills and ridges of higher ground, often with trees, though these are not particularly distinctive for the most part. The church spire at Great Stainton forms an important landmark feature. |
| Visual sensitivities and intervisibility | These elevated areas are widely visible, particularly from the flatter ground to the south and east. The church spire at Great Stainton is visible in the wider landscape, and the rising ground provides containment to the Bishopton Vale (character area 7). The Skerne Valley is framed by this landscape, which is also seen from locations in County Durham to the north. |
| GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE | |
| Strategic green corridors | The south-western fringe of this area is within the 1km buffer associated with strategic green corridor 3 River Skerne. |

Landscape and visual sensitivity to built development

3.29 The Great Stainton Farmland is a quiet rural landscape, which is relatively elevated above the surrounding terrain. This contributes to its higher sensitivity to built development, since there is little development in the area at present. The higher ground is widely visible and there are important areas of woodland. Villages in the area are small in scale and traditional in form and character.

3.30 Key sensitivities within this landscape include:

- Strongly rural character without modern development and few roads;
- Prominent hilltop site and intact layout of Great Stainton;
- Visually important woodlands on the skyline, particularly when seen from the vale to the south;
- Long views from open elevated locations, including from roads around Great Stainton; and
- Many field boundary trees contribute to landscape character.

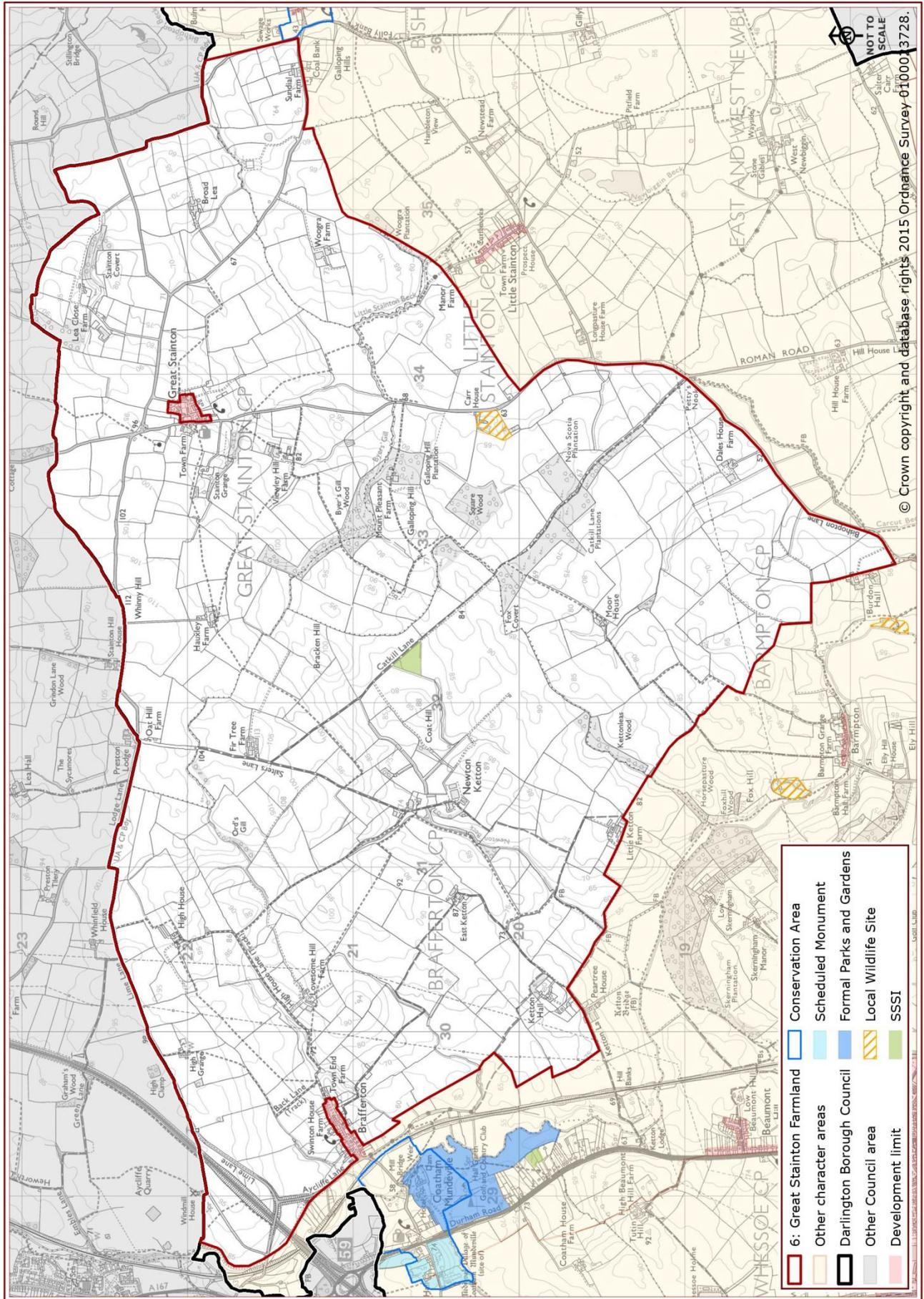
Key sensitivities at settlement edges

3.31 The small villages of Brafferton and Great Stainton are the only settlements within this character area.

3.32 Brafferton is a linear village, with two rows of houses facing a linear village green. The main street is a no-through route running uphill, terminated by a farmstead. The adjacent wooded valley slopes will be sensitive to all but the smallest built developments, but there is little or no scope to expand this village without fundamentally altering its form and character.

3.33 Great Stainton is similarly traditional in form, though arranged as a compact cluster around the green and hotel. The immediate surroundings comprise small pastoral fields with trees, preserving historic field boundaries, and would be of high sensitivity to even small built developments.

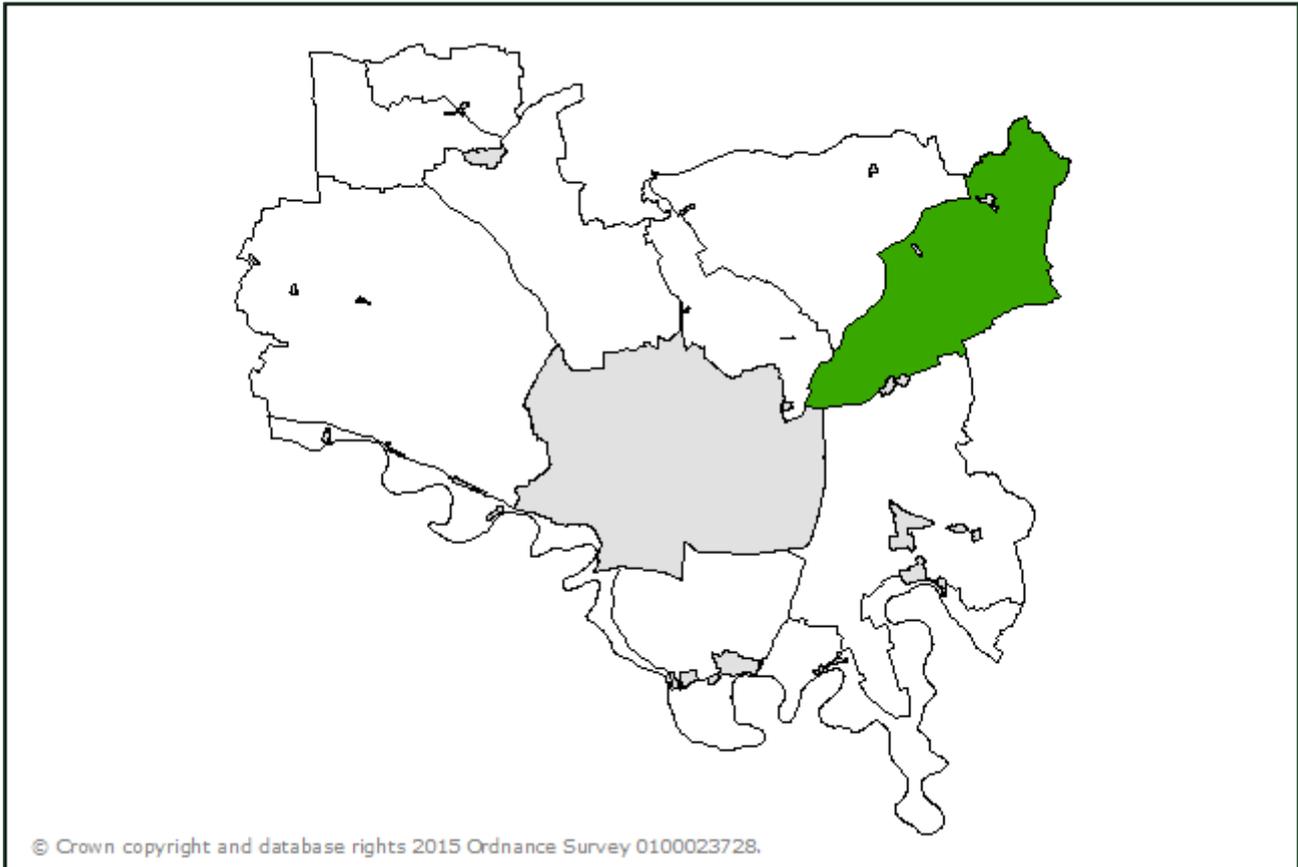
Figure 3.7 Great Stainton Farmland



Character area 7: Bishopton Vale

Location and extents

This character area is to the north-east of Darlington, extending away from the main settlement towards Bishopton and into Stockton. It comprises a low-lying vale of flatter land between the elevated landscape of the Great Stainton Farmland to the north, and the low ridge to the south on which Sadberge is built. At its northern edge, the incised course of the Bishopton Beck marks the Borough boundary as well as a transition to a more varied landscape around Stillington. The area is shown in more detail in Figure 3.8.



Representative photographs



View south from near Little Stainton



The western vale from Norton Back Lane

Landscape character description

This character area comprises a flat, sometimes gently undulating vale which is contained by rising ground to the north and south. The vale becomes broader and more open to the east of the area. There is a high point of 65m to the west of Hill House Farm, which constitutes the most distinct hill in this character area. Otherwise the elevation is almost entirely within the range of 50-60m, justifying the several place names that include 'flatt'. At the north edge of the area, the Bishopton Beck is incised into the land, creating a locally notable valley which winds around to Whitton where steep slopes flank the beck.

The landscape is underlain by sandstones, though these are masked by deposits of glacial till. A number of small water bodies suggest poor drainage, albeit that artificial drainage will have reclaimed much of the arable land from wetter carr. A number of becks run roughly parallel to the north-west and south-east borders of this character area, along the lowest parts of the vale. The drainage pattern is complex, with the high point at Hill House Farm forming a watershed between the Carcut Beck draining into the Skerne, and the Newbiggin Beck which meanders around to eventually flow to the north-east. These becks are augmented by more angular drainage ditches in places.

The area comprises enclosed farmland under a mix of arable and pastoral cultivation. Pastoral use occurs more in the north-eastern end of the area, including livery grazing, while the south and west of the area is dominated by wheat fields. Field boundaries are irregular, and vary from large enclosures on the lower ground at the bottom of the vale, to smaller rectangular fields around the settlements of Little Stainton and Bishopton to the north of the character area. Field boundaries are generally low hedges, though there are some fences in places. Hedges are often gappy, and interspersed with occasional ash trees.

There are no significant woodland plantations in this area, but occasional clumps of ash trees do occur, with riparian scrub along watercourses. In terms of semi-natural habitats, there are series of small water-bodies in the lower, broader part of the vale in the centre and east of the area, though these are not protected by designation.

This area is adjacent to the village of Sadberge, which is sited on a ridge to the south-west. To the north of the character area, beneath more elevated ground to the north-west, lie the small settlements of Little Stainton and the larger village of Bishopton. Little Stainton comprises a single street, while Bishopton is grouped around its church. A dispersed series of dwellings and farmsteads are located along the bottom of the vale.

Castle Hill at Bishopton is the remains of a medieval motte and bailey castle. The central mound is surrounded by a ditch and earth bank, with further earthworks including a large enclosure surrounded by a ditch and a rectangular enclosure to the north of the mound. The castle was probably built in 1143 during a feud between Roger Conyers, Lord of Bishopton, and the Bishop of Durham. The scheduled site is included within the envelope of the conservation area. There are several historic listed buildings in Bishopton and other small settlements in this area. Buildings are often constructed from local stone; brown or buff coloured sandstones with pantile roofs.

Several roads extend from the nuclear village of Bishopton, and follow the edges of the vale. Roads are very sparse in the centre of the character area, with only two roads crossing the vale, one of which is marked as a Roman road on the OS map. A small number of public footpaths also cross the vale, with several paths radiating from Bishopton.

The vale has a visually contained character, with views attainable only from irregular high points such as at Hill House Farm. Here, views of Roseberry Topping to the south-east are just attainable as the vale broadens to the east and becomes less contained by higher ground in the north and south. To the north-east, pylons and wind turbines can be seen in the distance across the flat landscape. There are overhead power lines within this landscape, following the south side of the vale, and engineered reservoirs to the east. Although rural, the vale occasionally has a less well maintained character, especially in intensively farmed areas where field boundaries have been removed. The settings of Bishopton and Little Stainton are more strongly rural, with a context of smaller fields around each.

Landscape sensitivity assessment

Criteria evaluation

| Criteria | Sensitivity description |
|--|--|
| LANDSCAPE | |
| Topography | A generally flat or very gently undulating landscape with limited topographic variety, except around the Bishopton Beck. |
| Scale (landform and component landscape features) | Very large scale landscape across most of the vale, comprising large arable fields with limited enclosure. Areas of pasture in the north-east and fields around villages tend to be smaller in scale and have more trees as well as human-scale traditional buildings and houses. |
| Landscape pattern and complexity (including sense of time-depth) | Irregular, traditional field patterns occur around both Bishopton and Little Stainton. Time depth is most evident in the motte and extensive earthworks around Bishopton. Elsewhere there are fewer distinctive landscape features, though there is a series of ponds along the Newbiggin Beck. |
| Perceptual qualities | The Bishopton Vale is rural but for the most part has an intensive, man-modified character arising from historical drainage and relatively few trees or hedges. Overhead power lines cross the area, though there is little movement since no major roads cross the area. The villages have a much stronger sense of traditional rurality. |
| VISUAL | |
| Skyline character and visual prominence | This landscape does not contribute to skyline character. Skylines are indistinct or obscured by scattered trees. |
| Visual sensitivities and intervisibility | The area is overlooked from higher ground to south, around Sadberge, and north from the Great Stainton area. There are long views along the vale and across the flat landscape towards Stockton and Tees and Hartlepool, and to the edge of the North York Moors to the south. |
| GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE | |
| Strategic green corridors | No strategic green corridors cross this area. |

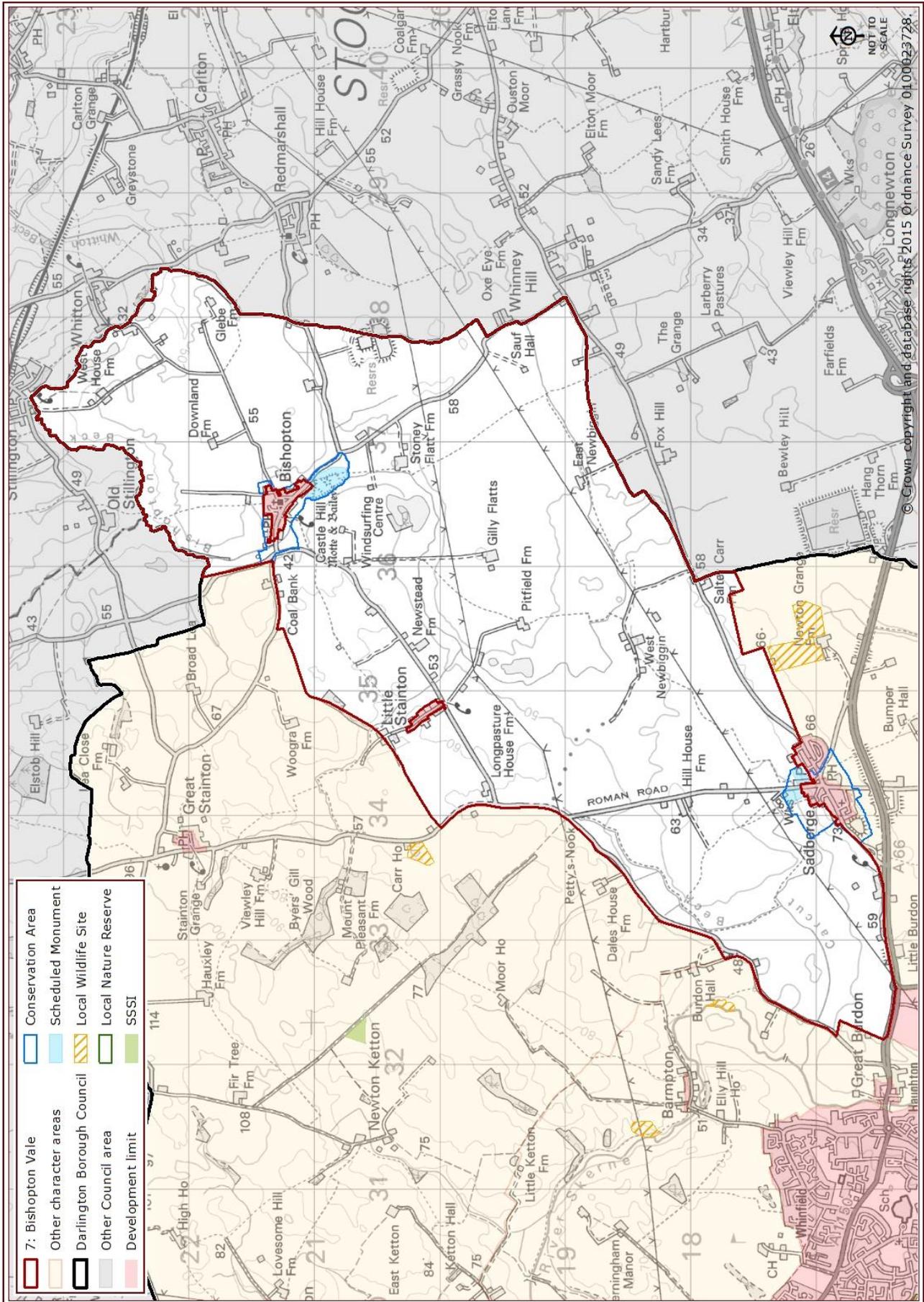
Landscape and visual sensitivity to built development

- 3.34 The flat low lying nature of this landscape indicates lower sensitivity overall, particularly in the more open and intensively farmed areas. Development may offer opportunities to enhance landscape structure across this area. The villages and their immediate settings of smaller scale traditional field patterns are more sensitive to intervention, as is the incised valley of the Bishopton Beck. Locally important ponds and woodlands provide some landscape diversity in this otherwise intensive arable landscape.
- 3.35 Key sensitivities within this landscape include:
- Open nature, with long views and overlooked from higher ground;
 - Areas of more rural character particularly in pastoral areas with smaller fields;
 - Rural context and setting of villages, particularly Bishopton conservation area and its motte;
 - Connected series of water bodies along the Newbiggin Beck; and
 - Distant views to Roseberry Topping.

Key sensitivities at settlement edges

- 3.36 The villages of Bishopton and Little Stainton are located within this character area, while the larger village of Sadberge is at its southern edge.
- 3.37 Bishopton is grouped around its parish church and is triangular in form, being arranged along three converging roads and hemmed in by the Bishopton Beck. The village has many mature trees and generally robust settlement boundaries. The surrounding landscape comprises small pastoral fields. The 12th-century motte is located to the south, and there are horse paddocks and agricultural buildings on other sides. The motte and the landscape to the west of the village are within the conservation area. The surrounding landscape is low lying and of generally lower sensitivity overall. However, development to the south would straddle the Beck, and potentially impact on the setting of the motte. Extensions to the village could unbalance the traditional form if not very carefully considered.
- 3.38 Little Stainton comprises a single no-through road with houses along each side. The houses are backed by small pastoral fields, and to the east these are wooded. There is little or no scope to expand this village without fundamentally altering its form and character.
- 3.39 Sadberge is located on a hilltop and has grown up around a crossroads. The older part of the village is within a conservation area which is drawn to include the sloping ground to north and south that provides the setting to the village. The eastern part of the village is outside the conservation area, but further development in this location would result in a linear settlement stretched out along the ridge and potentially prominent from the wider landscape.

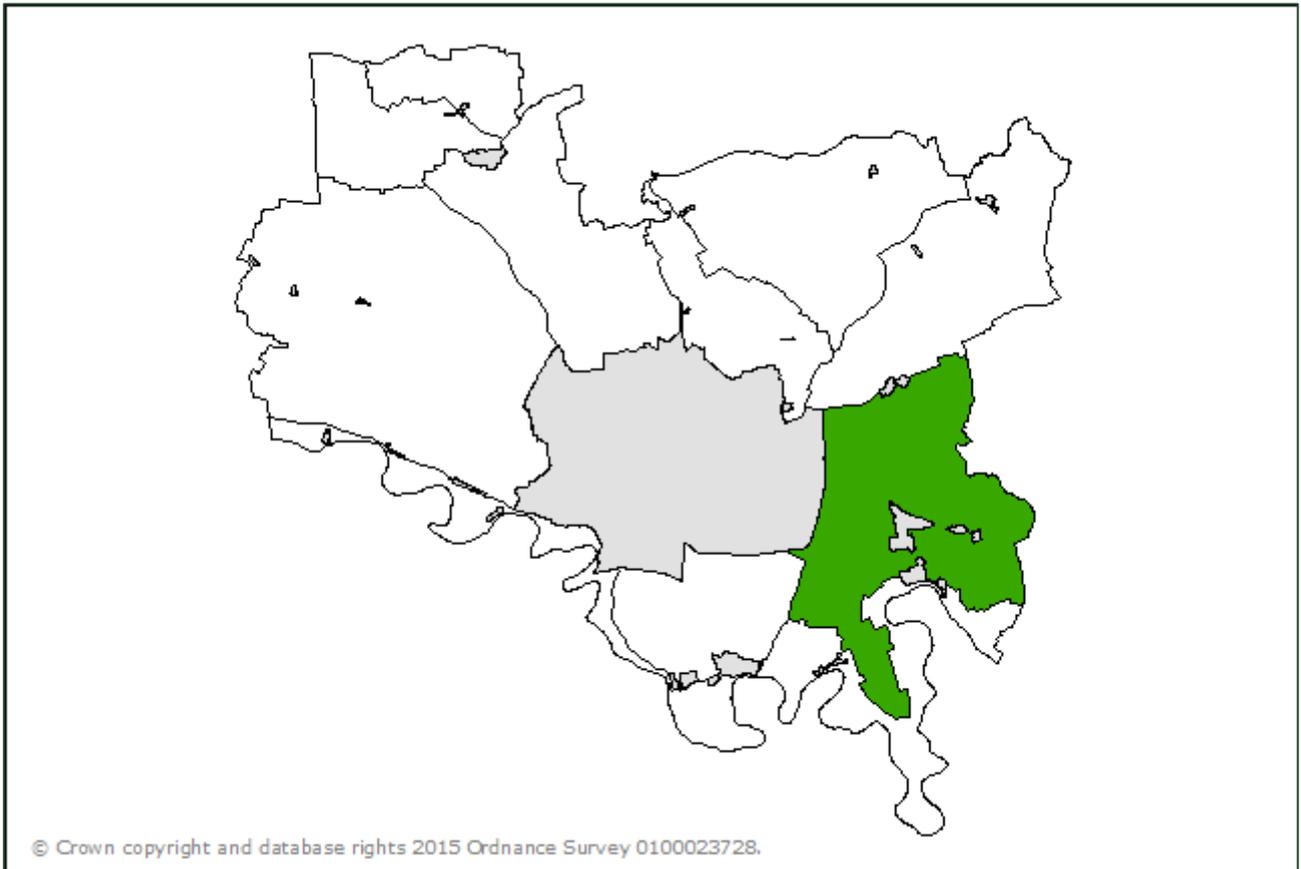
Figure 3.8 Bishopston Vale



Character area 8: Middleton Farmland

Location and extents

This character area occurs at the east and south-east of the Borough, and comprises a plateau-like area that lies to the north of the River Tees. The villages of Middleton St. George and Middleton One Row are located within this area. The A66 forms the western boundary, before running from west to east past Sadberge in the north. The A67 and the railway line also cross the area, running roughly parallel past Middleton St George. The area is shown in more detail in Figure 3.9.



Representative photographs



Earthworks at West Hartburn medieval village



Community woodland at South Burdon

Landscape character description

This character area comprises a largely flat area with patches of undulating land around small hills and small enclosed valleys. The high point of around 90m occurs on Tofts Hill in the north-western corner of the character area, and the land generally slopes gently down to elevations of 40-50m at the edge of the Tees Valley to the south. Within this plateau-like area are a series of streams flowing into Neasham Stell, which are incised forming steep-sided gullies.

The geology comprises late Permian sedimentary rocks, mainly mudstones and sandstones. These are not visibly expressed in the area, being overlain by glacial till and, in smaller areas, by glacial sand and gravel. Multiple very small water bodies throughout the area suggest relatively poor drainage. This is reflected by the dominant soil type in the area - slowly permeable, seasonally wet soils which are slightly acidic, loamy and clayey. Further south towards the river the soil types become more freely draining and less clayey, probably reflecting the fertilising nature of the sediment deposition processes acting on the floodplain.

The area comprises enclosed farmland, under a mix of arable and pastoral cultivation. Field enclosures are generally regular, but vary in size. Smaller pastoral enclosures around farmsteads and settlements contrast with very large arable fields which are the result of field amalgamation. Field boundaries are generally hedges, though there are patches of fences or mixtures of fence and hedge in more intensively arable locations. Hedges are predominantly of hawthorn and blackthorn, with field tree species including ash and horse chestnut. The smaller fields tend to retain more intact hedgerows, while more intensively farmed areas have larger fields and more open hedges.

There are several woodland plantations in the area, the most prominent of which is the large newly-established mixed woodland at South Burdon. This community woodland comprises predominantly native broadleaved woodland on with areas of managed grassland and open water habitats. Other areas of woodland occur throughout the area: in the small enclosed beck valleys; small farm plantations; estate woodland at Middleton Hall; and along the A67.

The medieval deserted settlement of West Hartburn is located on farmland to the north of the A67. Two rows of cottages remained in 1823, and according to tradition the chapel and burial ground were at Long Newton or Goosepool. The site is a scheduled monument and comprises low but visible earthworks under grazing land. Buildings within this character area vary in age and style; traditional buildings are commonly constructed from brick, including the listed Sadberge Hall. Industrial heritage takes the form of the trackbed of the Stockton & Darlington Railway, now disused.

The A66, A67 and the railway line form a west-east transport corridor which passes through this character area, while the A66 forms a border of the character area as it passes south-north along the eastern edge of Darlington. There is a network of roads around and between the settlements of Middleton St. George, Oak Tree and Middleton One Row, but otherwise roads are limited to the north-south route between Sadberge, Middleton St George and Neasham. The village of Middleton St George and the adjacent Oak Tree are of mixed character, and the surrounding landscape varies from small wooded pastures to commercial sites and horse paddocks. To the east of Oak Tree is Durham Tees Valley Airport, with an extensive area of commercial buildings to the north of the runways.

There is good recreational access into this landscape, with a cycle way following the course of the Stockton & Darlington Railway and connecting Middleton St George with Darlington and the South Burdon community woodland. A dense network of public footpaths surrounds Middleton St George with links to the River Tees and the wider countryside.

From unwooded higher ground, such as along Neasham Road, there are views west to the industrial edge of Darlington and beyond to the Pennines in the distance. To the south-east there are some glimpsed views of Roseberry Topping. The transport corridor running through this character area means that the sound of road traffic is a continuous factor in its perceptual character. There are quieter pockets, such as along Neasham Stell and within the South Burdon community woodland.

The open land to the west of the A66, although largely allocated for development, provides continuity of landscape character with the Middleton Farmland. The same gently undulating farmland can be seen sloping down in the north to the River Skerne which is an important green wedge at the edge of Darlington. The wetlands at Red Hall provide an open space link between former Stockton & Darlington Railway and this green wedge.

Landscape sensitivity assessment

Criteria evaluation

| Criteria | Sensitivity description |
|--|---|
| LANDSCAPE | |
| Topography | Generally flat or very gently undulating landscape. The incised valley of Neasham Stell is inset within this even landform. |
| Scale (landform and component landscape features) | The open flatter areas are of larger scale, though with some human-scale features such as trees and farm buildings. Neasham Stell is of smaller scale and with more frequent trees. |
| Landscape pattern and complexity (including sense of time-depth) | The majority of this area comprises very large open arable fields giving a simple pattern overall. Within this context are areas of greater complexity around settlements and at South Burdon woodland. Time depth is limited except in isolated locations such as remnant designed landscapes, as well as the former railway line. |
| Perceptual qualities | This area is crossed by two major road corridors and contains part of the airport. The remaining area includes settlement and intensive farmland and tranquillity is limited to the enclosed Neasham Stell. South Burdon woodland is also relatively tranquil. |
| VISUAL | |
| Skyline character and visual prominence | Skylines are not distinct within this landscape, being flat or gently convex, and often obscured by field trees. |
| Visual sensitivities and intervisibility | The area is visible from main roads passing through the area, though roadside vegetation can obscure some views. The area is not widely overlooked, except from settlements that are set within it. There are some long southward views from the more elevated locations towards the North York Moors. |
| GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE | |
| Strategic green corridors | Strategic green corridor 5 crosses this landscape, following the former line of the Stockton & Darlington Railway from Darlington through South Burdon community woodland, Middleton St George and past the airport. |

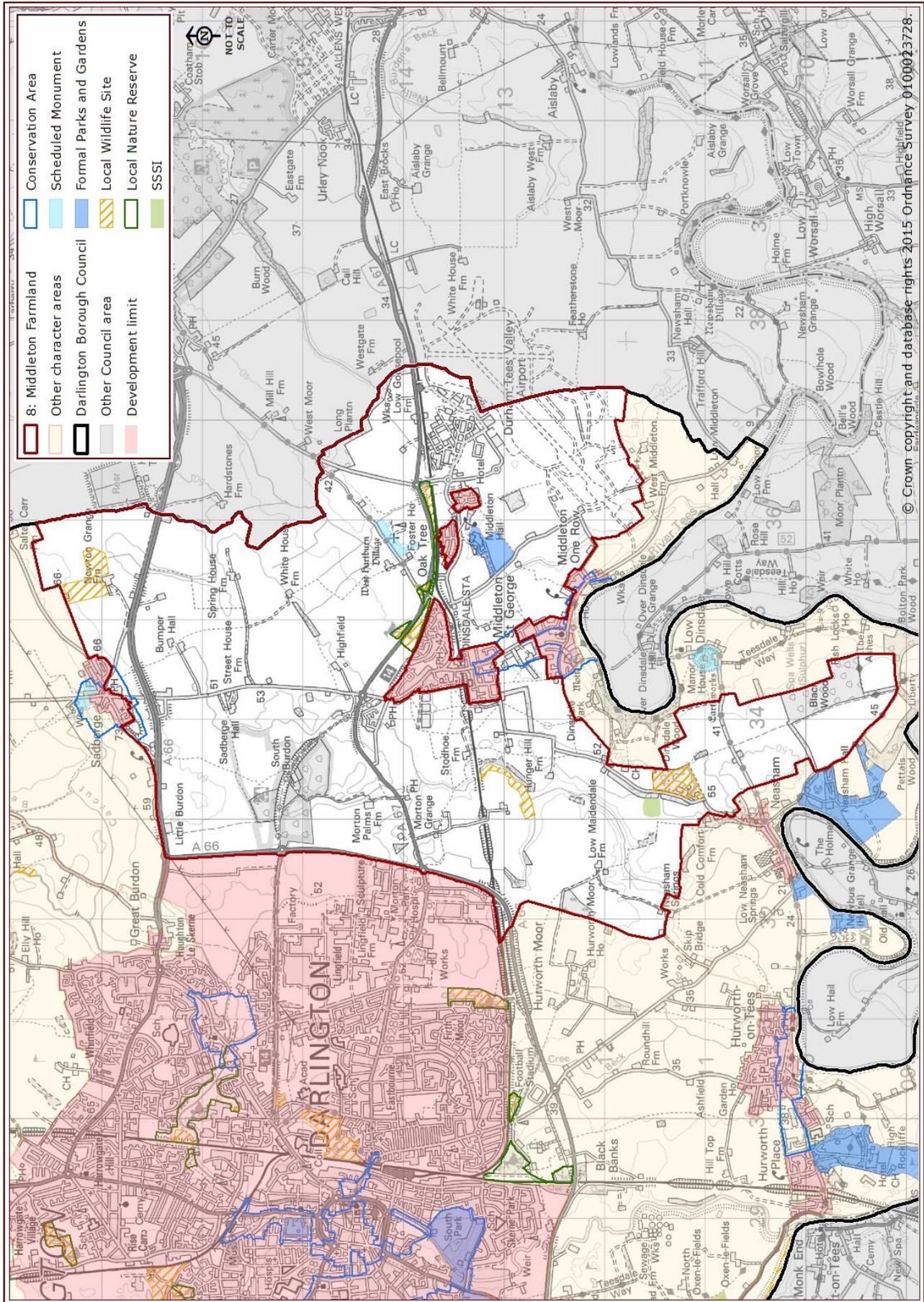
Landscape and visual sensitivity to built development

- 3.40 The larger scale and generally limited landscape diversity, alongside the influence of modern infrastructure, indicate lower sensitivity. However, the landscape provides important connectivity for people and wildlife along the disused railway line, to the Tees and more locally around Neasham Stell. The latter area is a more intimate landscape feature which provides separation between settlements. There are also slightly elevated locations which are locally more sensitive, as well as the new woodland at South Burdon. The landscape has a key role in settlement setting around Middleton St George and Middleton One Row.
- 3.41 Key sensitivities within this landscape include:
- Visibility of the landscape from major roads through the area;
 - A recreational landscape with good access and community woodlands;
 - Strong settlement boundary formed by the A66 to the east edge of Darlington;
 - Visibility and long views from/to raised areas above the Tees Valley, such as along Neasham Road; and
 - Remaining woodlands and field boundary trees contribute to character.

Key sensitivities at settlement edges

- 3.42 The settlements of Middleton St George, Middleton One Row and Oak Tree are located within this character area, while Sadberge is on its northern edge. The development limit of Darlington follows the A66 along the western edge of the area.
- 3.43 Middleton St George is spread out between the historic settlement of Middleton One Row to the south and more modern housing development further north. There is a gap between the two areas around Almora Hall. Due to the often inward looking, cul-de-sac nature of modern housing the role the surrounding countryside plays in the setting of residential areas around the northern parts of the village is weaker. The reservoir and A67 also present some potential settlement boundaries in this northern area. As such the settlement edges indicate a lower sensitivity to residential expansion, subject to further detailed analysis.
- 3.44 Within the more historic, southern end of the settlement parts of the surrounding countryside play a key role in providing a gap between the northern and southern part of the settlement, and this is recognised in the conservation area boundary around Middleton One Row. The core of Middleton One Row is a very complete southward-facing village. Therefore, settlement edges around the southern part of Middleton St George and Middleton One Row display a higher sensitivity to residential development.
- 3.45 Oak Tree forms a small, modern settlement to the west of Durham Tees Valley Airport and is contained by commercial buildings to the east, the runway to the south and the A67 to the north. To the west a retirement village at Middleton Hall is set in parkland. The countryside in this area is not particularly sensitive as it is relatively flat, has views contained by hedgerows and woodland, and the landscape has already been altered by modern development. There may be some opportunities to further extend this modern settlement, subject to further detailed analysis.
- 3.46 Sadberge is located on a hilltop and has grown up around a crossroads. The older part of the village is within a conservation area which is drawn to include the sloping ground to north and south that provides the setting to the village. The eastern part of the village is outside the conservation area, but further development in this location would result in a linear settlement stretched out along the ridge and potentially prominent from the wider landscape.
- 3.47 Darlington is currently contained by the A66 dual carriageway which forms the development limit. There are large development allocations west of the A66 which are not yet built up, and expansion east of the A66 is unlikely to be appropriate. There are sensitive features including South Burdon woodlands and Neasham Stell in this area. To the west of the A66, the green corridor linking the Stockton & Darlington Railway, the Redhall Wetlands and the River Skerne provides an important connection between town and country.

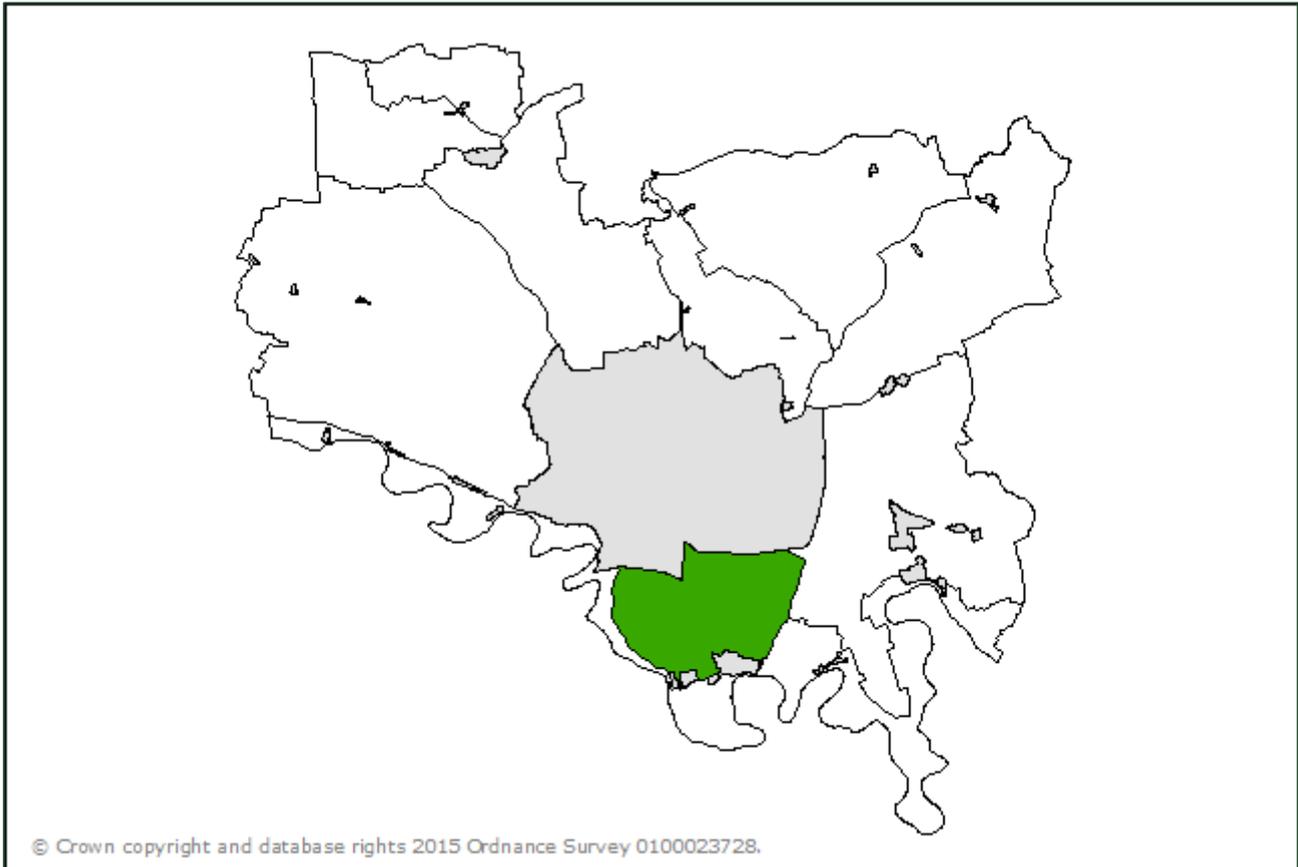
Figure 3.9 Middleton Farmland



Character area 9: Lower Skerne and Hurworth Moor

Location and extents

This character area lies in the south of the Borough, and covers the area between Darlington and Hurworth. It includes the lower section of the River Skerne between the A66 and Hurworth Place. The area is bounded to the west by the A167, and to the east it extends to Hurworth Moor, taking in the stadium and other commercial land use north of Hurworth-on-Tees. The area is shown in more detail in Figure 3.10.



Representative photographs



Open farmland near the stadium



Low-lying ground near the River Skerne

Landscape character description

This character area comprises the gently undulating land to the north of the floodplain of the River Tees, and includes the floodplain of the lower Skerne. The area is contained to the west by the A167 as it runs north-south to Hurworth Place. Beyond the eastern border, the land slopes down to wooded, incised valleys, unlike the becks which run through this character area which are not incised into the landscape. The elevation of the whole area is between 30 and 40m. A river terrace east of the Skerne provides local topographical variety.

The landscape is underlain predominantly by Permian sandstones overlain by glacial till, glacial sands, and alluvial deposits, with a number of small water bodies suggesting impeded drainage. A number of becks run north-south as tributaries to the River Tees which flows to the south of the character area.

The area comprises enclosed farmland under a mix of arable and pastoral cultivation. Field boundaries are irregular, with small fields around settlements and farmsteads, and larger fields in the less accessible areas. Field boundaries are generally hedges, though there are patches of fence or a mixture of fence and hedge in places. Hedges are predominantly of hawthorn, and their condition is variable across the area. Hedges are interspersed with ash and sycamore trees.

To the east of the area there are several coniferous woodland plantations. There are various areas of woodland to the west of the area, varying from dispersed woodland within Stressholme golf course to wooded banks on the east side of the River Skerne. The Geneva Wood nature reserve lies at the very north of the character area, a 25 year old plantation site of predominantly Scots Pine. These woodland areas, along with the River Skerne, Cree Beck and various small water bodies, provide a range of semi-natural habitats. The most important of the water bodies are the Hell Kettles, fed by calcareous springs and protected as SSSI for their swamp vegetation.

This character area lies adjacent to the small settlements of Hurworth Place and Hurworth-on-Tees, which include a mix of housing types and periods. Many dwellings and farmsteads are dispersed throughout the area. Buildings are constructed from a variety of materials, though brick is frequent.

There are several indicators of the urban fringe location of this character area. In the north lies Darlington Mowden Park Rugby Club, a large modern sports stadium. There is also a large sewage works in the centre-west of the character area, on the banks of the River Skerne. The East Coast Main Line railway runs south-north through the middle of the area. The A66 runs along the northern edge of the character area, fragmenting this locality and contributing traffic noise. The A167 forms the western boundary, but otherwise roads in the area are restricted to the north-south routes across Hurworth Moor. Most infrastructure is focussed either at Hurworth on the southern boundary, or the fringes of Darlington to the north.

The area has an enclosed feeling, with views attainable from irregular high points such as Springfield Farm and Hurworth Moor. In the Skerne floodplain in particular there is a strong sense of a wide, flat but enclosed area. Urban fringe influences including commercial land use along the Hurworth Moor roads reduces the rurality of this landscape, which has limited tranquillity.

The northern boundary of this area follows the Darlington development limit, though the underlying landscape is continuous across this line. In the west, the floodplain of the Skerne continues to the north of the A66, with flat pasture, parkland and playing fields forming a green wedge at the southern settlement boundary. This continues into wooded golf courses and the more formal South Park, providing continuous link between the town centre and the rural area. Geneva Woods nature reserve provides a further green wedge, and in the east of this area Salter's Lane forms a green link between the rural area and Maidendale nature reserve.

Landscape sensitivity assessment

Criteria evaluation

| Criteria | Sensitivity description |
|--|--|
| LANDSCAPE | |
| Topography | Flat or very gently undulating, with little topographical variation except at the edge of the Skerne floodplain. |
| Scale (landform and component landscape features) | A medium-large scale landscape with frequent buildings and trees that provide enclosure and introduce human scale. |
| Landscape pattern and complexity (including sense of time-depth) | Limited complexity and time depth across most of this landscape, aside from occasional stands of mature trees. Urban fringe areas have more fragmented pattern, with Geneva Wood local nature reserve being a distinctive feature. In the Skerne floodplain, fossilised meanders provide local interest, showing where the river has changed course over time. Hell Kettles SSSI is among a number of sites with nature conservation interest. |
| Perceptual qualities | The urban fringe influence in this area includes such land uses as the stadium, sewage works and smaller commercial premises. The A66, railway line and busy minor roads introduce noise into the landscape. |
| VISUAL | |
| Skyline character and visual prominence | Skylines are not a key feature of this landscape, with the flat landscape generally having low, obscured skylines. |
| Visual sensitivities and intervisibility | Views into or out from this landscape are relatively limited, with no adjacent higher ground. Occasional views south across the Tees are available from higher ground. |
| GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE | |
| Strategic green corridors | Strategic green corridor 3 River Skerne includes the western part of this area, within 1km of the river. The south and west of the area is also within 1km of the River Tees and falls into strategic green corridor 1. |

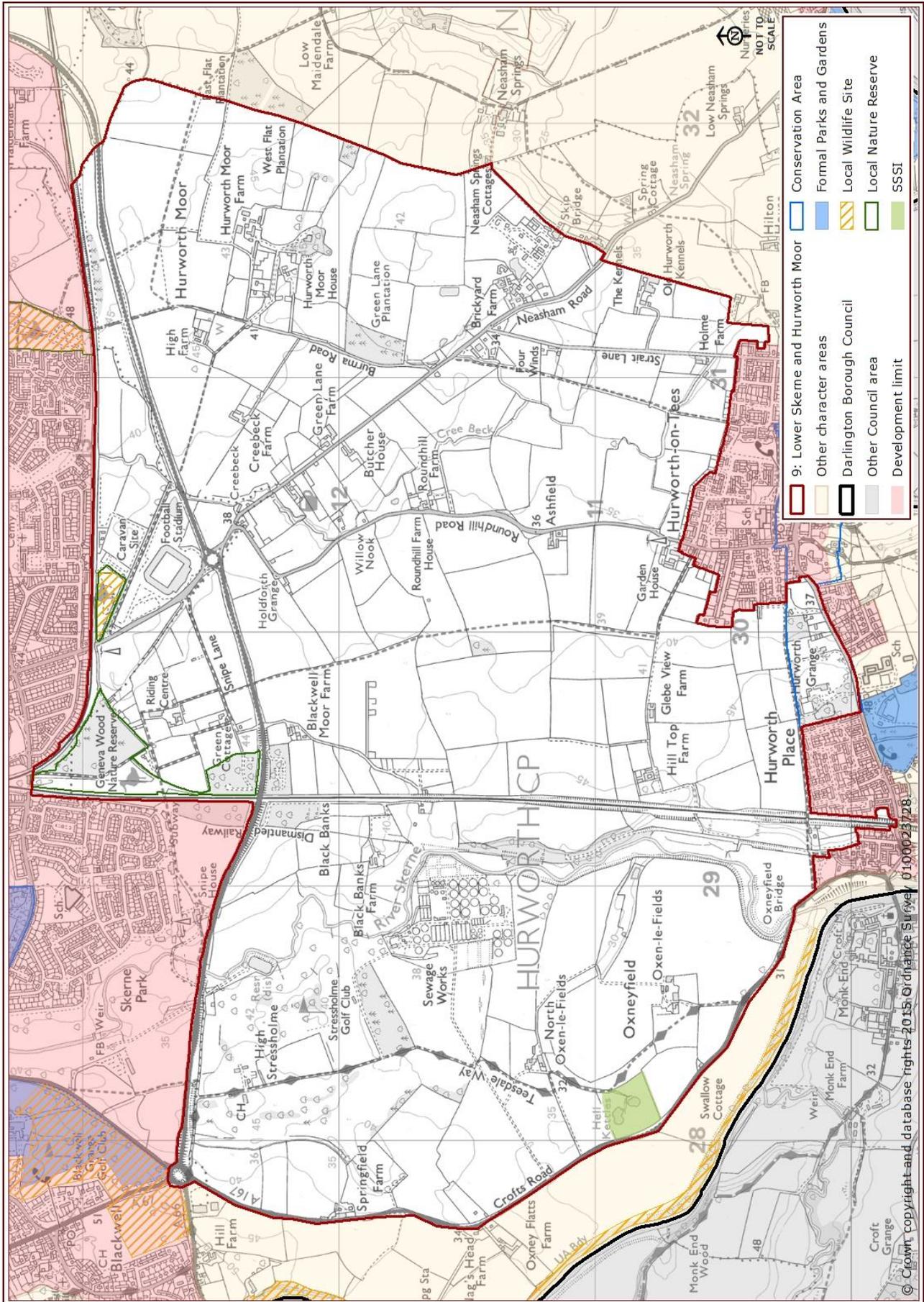
Landscape and visual sensitivity to built development

- 3.48 The flat landscape and influence of infrastructure and settlement fringe indicate reduced sensitivity across this landscape, although there are important areas of local and national biodiversity interest. The floodplain of the Skerne is part of a key green corridor providing connectivity between town and country, towards the River Tees.
- 3.49 Key sensitivities within this landscape include:
- Proximity to Darlington and extent of urban fringe character;
 - Habitat value of protected and unprotected sites;
 - Important connectivity along the Skerne and Tees green corridors; and
 - Recreational value of this landscape, with accessible sites and routes.

Key sensitivities at settlement edges

- 3.50 The southern edge of Darlington forms the northern boundary of this character area, with the smaller settlements of Hurworth Place and Hurworth-on-Tees to the south.
- 3.51 The southern boundary of Darlington is relatively fragmented, with local nature reserves and wildlife sites alongside settlement edge land use such as the stadium. Skerne Park and the A66 form a stronger boundary to the west. This area is of some recreational importance with accessible open space and sports facilities, and serves as a green wedge providing important connections for people and wildlife. Extending the development limit to the A66 in the east would retain a strong settlement boundary without impacting unduly on this character area, though further local study would be required to examine the impact on local nature reserves. The key green links through this area should be retained. Extending the settlement boundary beyond the A66 would encroach on this landscape, and reduce the separation between Hurworth and Darlington, eroding the character of this area.
- 3.52 Hurworth Place and Hurworth-on-Tees are adjacent settlements of mixed character at the south of this area. Hurworth-on-Tees retains its historic core around a linear village green close to the river, which together with the grange to the west is a conservation area. More recent development has expanded the settlement northward. Hurworth Place includes older houses near the Tees to the west, and has expanded eastward to meet the edge of the Hurworth-on-Tees conservation area. The landscape to the north-west of the settlement includes the slope at the edge of the Skerne floodplain which is of higher sensitivity. The northern edge of these settlements is of lower overall sensitivity, being flat open farmland for the most part. Further detailed study would be required to understand the impact on the villages, and caution should be exercised in relation to any proposal which could diminish the separation between the two settlements.

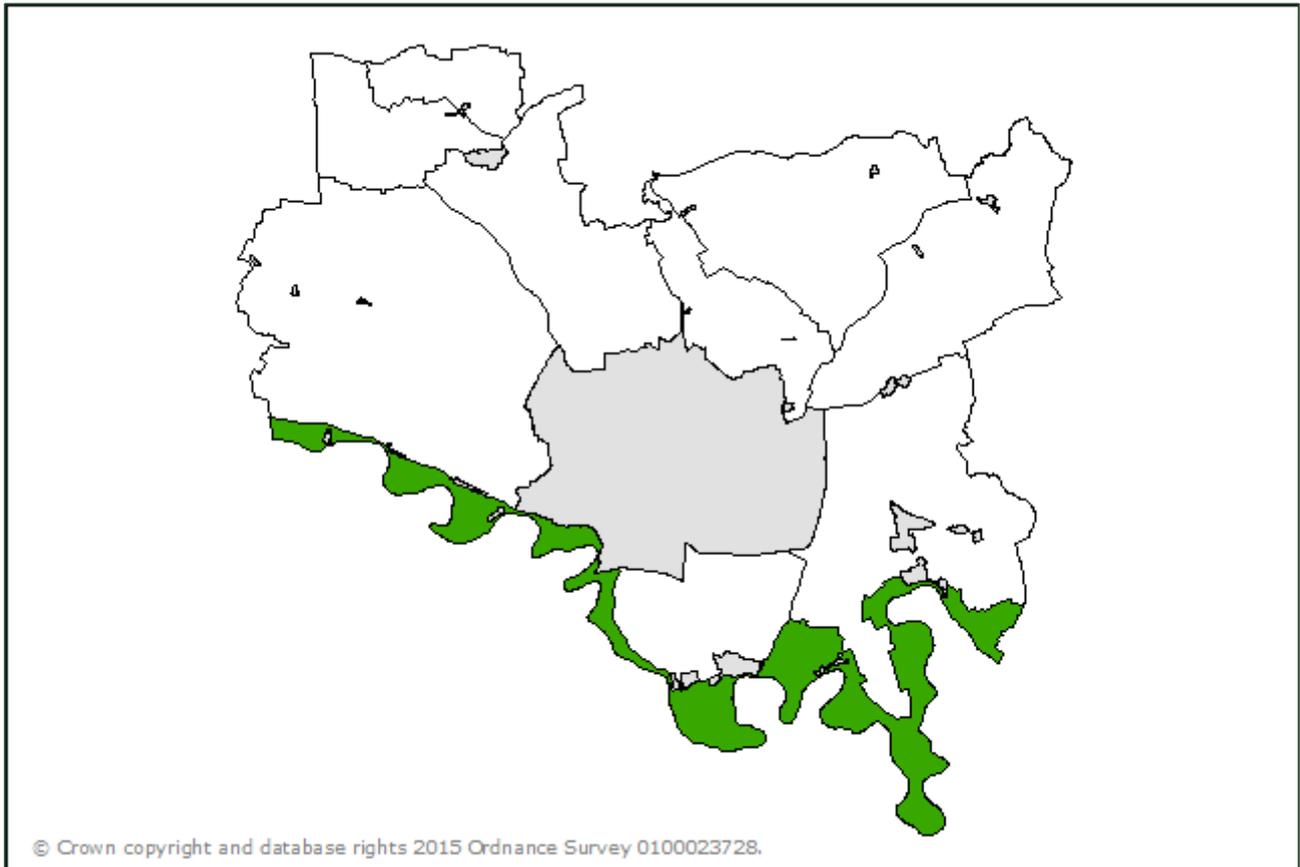
Figure 3.10 Lower Skerne and Hurworth Moor



Character area 10: Tees Valley

Location and extents

This character area forms the southern boundary of the Borough. The sinuous course of the Tees cuts an incised valley into the lowland landscape, and forms the traditional boundary between Yorkshire and County Durham. Several villages are located along the river, from Piercebridge in the west to Middleton One Row in the east. The river is crossed by six road bridges, and the valley character area is mirrored on the southern side of the Tees. The area is shown in more detail in Figure 3.11.



Representative photographs



Flood defences at Neasham



The wooded River Tees at Low Dinsdale

Landscape character description

This character area comprises the flat or gently sloping floodplain on the north bank of the River Tees, and occasionally steeper incised valley sides, as it passes to the south of Darlington. The area is contained to the north by the A67 and A167, and further east is marked by the riverside settlements and then by the edge of the increasingly incised valley. The land generally slopes very gently down from west to east, with the flow of the river. Higher points occur occasionally, between the meanders of the river, such as at Neasham Hill (53m), though generally higher ground is an extension of the gently undulating farmland to the north of this character area.

The foundations of this character area are largely on floodplain deposits including alluvium and river terraces, but the underlying geology is a mixture of Magnesian Limestone lying to the west of Blackwell Bridge, and sandstones to the east. Soils are freely draining and loamy, and slightly acidic in patches. Several tributaries run through the area into the River Tees, including the River Skerne and smaller becks. Flood defences are prominent features in parts, particularly at Neasham where a large bank separates the village from the river.

The area comprises enclosed farmland, under a mix of arable and pastoral cultivation. Field boundaries are generally hedges, though there are areas where only fences remain due to field amalgamation. Hedges are predominantly of hawthorn, and while many are intact there are areas where substantial gaps appear in hedgerows. Ash and sycamore are the principal field boundary trees. Field boundaries show the fossilised evidence of changes in the course of the Tees, clearly visible to the south of High Coniscliffe for example. The river is lined with riparian woodland along most of its banks, forming the most significant area of woodland in the Borough. Although usually narrow, this woodland strip is more or less continuous, and broadens on steeper slopes around Dinsdale. Other woodlands are associated with golf courses, estate plantations and around the settlement at Blackwell Bridge.

There are multiple historic sites in this character area, linked to the reliable fertility of the floodplain and the strategic importance of the Tees. The Roman fort at Piercebridge was probably built in the 1st century AD where the main road north, Dere Street, crosses the river. Most remains from this site belong to around 300AD or later, and are protected by an extensive scheduled monument that surrounds the village. There are medieval mottes at Middleton One Row and possibly at Blackwell, and a medieval manor at Low Dinsdale. Several large country houses are sited by the river, including Dinsdale Park and Neasham Hall. The pumping station at Broken Scar water works, which retains its original engines, is an important example of Victorian industrial heritage.

This character area includes the small settlements of Piercebridge, High Coniscliffe, Merrybent, Low Coniscliffe, Hurworth Place, Hurworth-on-Tees, Neasham and Middleton One Row, each of which has its own distinctive character. Traditional settlement forms include the roadside layout of High Coniscliffe, the single-sided Middleton One Row facing the river, and Piercebridge facing inwards to the green. A number of dwellings and farms are dispersed throughout the area, more so in the east than the west. Buildings are generally constructed from limestone in the west, and from brick in the east.

In terms of semi-natural habitats, the River Tees and its wooded banks provides a rich series of habitats, with many sections protected as local wildlife sites. The area is an important green corridor for wildlife species. Riparian meadows also provide habitat, such as Janet's Meadow local wildlife site at High Coniscliffe. The Teesdale Way follows the north side of the river, linking villages and making use of several footbridges. There are also riverside pubs and a picnic site at Broken Scar. The area south of Hurworth is almost entirely occupied by a golf course and playing fields.

Several roads run parallel to the river Tees, generally being A-roads in the west and minor roads in the east. The A1(M) crosses the river just to the west of Low Coniscliffe: this and other main road bridges contribute noise of traffic to these localities. However, along much of the river there is very little development, and there are many intimate and secluded sections of the river banks which have a highly tranquil character.

Landscape sensitivity assessment

Criteria evaluation

| Criteria | Sensitivity description |
|--|---|
| LANDSCAPE | |
| Topography | Steeper incised valley areas are of greater sensitivity than the more gently sloping areas further west. The floodplain and river terrace features are of locally higher sensitivity. |
| Scale (landform and component landscape features) | Away from the river the landscape increases in scale where its character reflects that of the adjacent farmland. The river itself is more wooded and enclosed, with a smaller scale that is of higher sensitivity. Traditional buildings are frequent along the river providing a human scale which is locally affected by modern river crossings. |
| Landscape pattern and complexity (including sense of time-depth) | An intricate riparian landscape of woodlands and river terraces results in a complex landcover over much of the area. Simpler patterns of large fields take over beyond the immediate vicinity of the river. Time depth is most apparent around the Roman remains at Piercebridge, but is apparent in traditional villages along the Tees – examples including High Coniscliffe and Low Dinsdale – and the Victorian pumping station at Tees Cottage. |
| Perceptual qualities | Riverside locations are often quiet and tranquil, influenced by the slow-moving river, surrounding riparian woodland and traditional villages. This is not significantly undermined by large-scale flood defences such as at Neasham, though the major road crossings of the A1(M) and A66 do have a local impact on tranquillity. |
| VISUAL | |
| Skyline character and visual prominence | Skylines in the area are indistinct for the most part, formed by the wooded valley side or fading into the surrounding farmland. There are landmark features in the bridges along the river, spires in riverside villages, and the pumping station chimney at Tees Cottage. |
| Visual sensitivities and intervisibility | The river valley is an enclosed landscape, and is not immediately overlooked from many locations. There is very little visibility of the river from the A67 for example. The meandering nature of the river means that there are few long views along the valley. The Tees woodlands are a feature in some longer views across the wider area. |
| GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE | |
| Strategic green corridors | The River Tees is the spine for strategic green corridor 1, which follows the length of the river and includes almost all of the character area. |

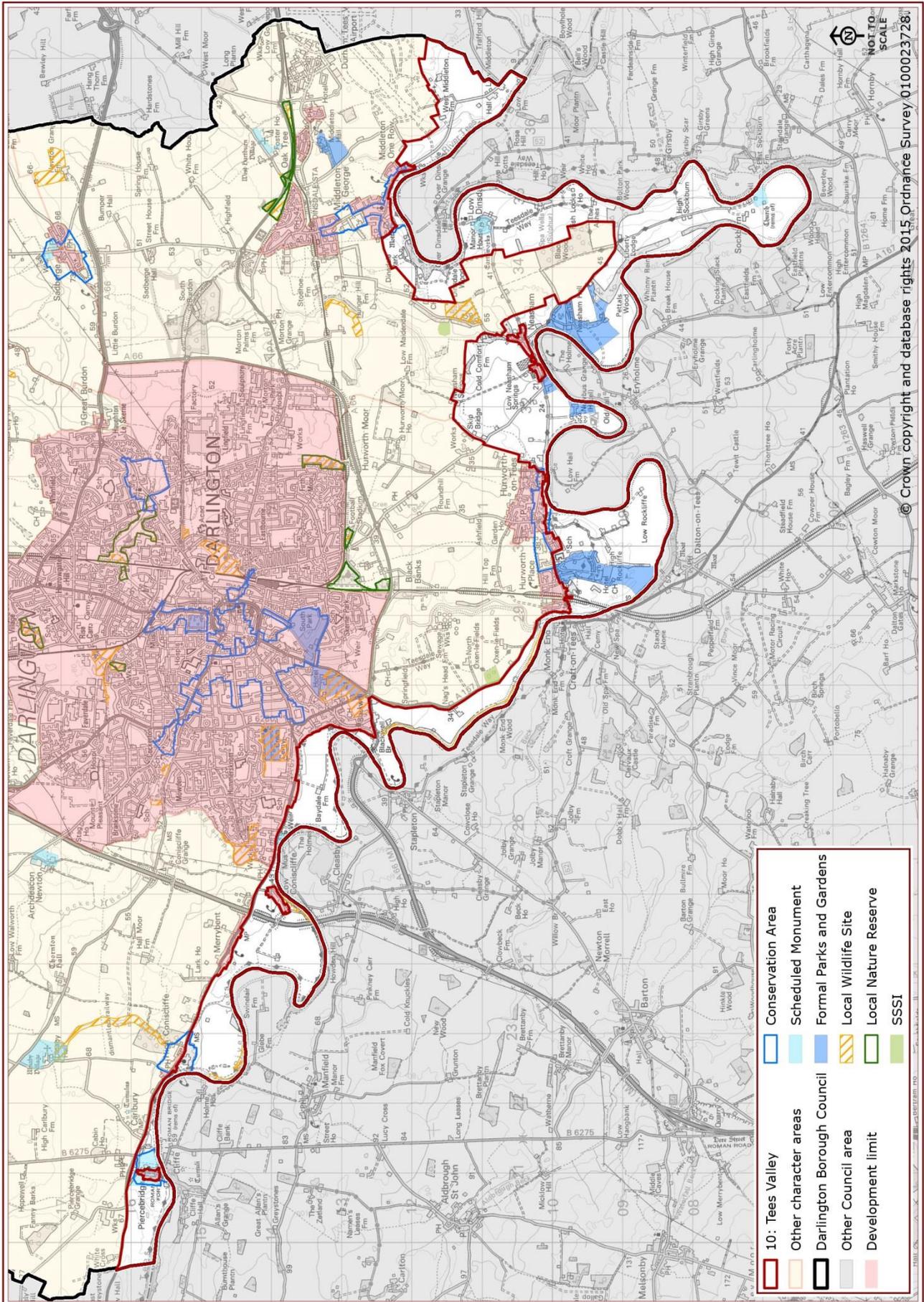
Landscape and visual sensitivity to built development

- 3.53 The Tees Valley is generally sensitive to built development along its length, but particularly in the more incised and wooded areas which tend to be more in the east. There are sensitive landscape features such as the areas of parkland around Neasham and a golf course at Rockcliffe Park by Hurworth Place. The Teesdale Way traverses most of this character area, emphasising its importance as a corridor for wildlife and people. Historic character is reflected in bridges and settlements the length of the river, and more recent infrastructure only has a localised influence.
- 3.54 Key sensitivities within this landscape include:
- Tranquil character along much of the riverside;
 - Traditional settlement pattern of nuclear villages related to the river;
 - Extensive riparian woodland forms a significant habitat resource;
 - Riparian meadow habitats contribute to important wildlife corridor;
 - Important historical sites and monuments along the river; and
 - Strategic recreational corridor, with the Teesdale Way running the length of the area.

Key sensitivities at settlement edges

- 3.55 There are a number of settlements along the river valley. From west to east these are Piercebridge, High Coniscliffe, Merrybent, Low Coniscliffe, the southern edge of Darlington, Hurworth Place, Hurworth-on-Tees, Neasham and Middleton One Row.
- 3.56 Each of these settlements has its own character and sensitivities, though some general characteristics can be observed. Their settlement form in many cases has been directed by their riverside location: this is clearly seen in Middleton One Row and Neasham where the village green is combined with the river bank. Some, but not all, of these villages have grown around bridging points, but all are linked to the riverside by footpaths and other links.
- 3.57 The riverside villages of Piercebridge, High Coniscliffe, Low Coniscliffe, Neasham and Middleton One Row have little physical room for expansion. Development along the riverside would encroach on the valued riparian woodland and habitats, and would erode the traditional form of these settlements, most of which are conservation areas.
- 3.58 At Hurworth Place and Hurworth-on-Tees, there are areas between the settlement and the river, though most of this area is occupied by recreational facilities and parkland, and is of higher sensitivity to development. The south-west edge of Darlington is also physically separate from the river, but expansion here would push development onto the open floodplain which is of higher visual sensitivity. Of the settlements partly within this area, only the setting of the more modern village of Merrybent is of relatively lower sensitivity to development, being located on the arable land away from the river itself.

Figure 3.11 Tees Valley



Appendix 1

Existing landscape character assessments

Introduction

This appendix reviews relevant existing landscape character assessments, including the National Character Areas that cover the Borough, and the studies which cover the neighbouring areas of North Yorkshire, Stockton-On-Tees and County Durham. The character types and areas described in this appendix are shown in **Figure A1.1**.

National Character Areas

Tees Lowlands

The Tees Lowlands includes much of the borough of Darlington, as part of the wider Tees Valley from Staindrop in the west to the river mouth. The area includes the Middlesbrough conurbation as well as the fringes of the North York Moors and the landscape around Sedgefield. The key characteristics for this NCA are reproduced below. Not all are relevant to the Darlington area.

- A broad, low-lying and open plain of predominantly arable agricultural land, with low woodland cover and large fields, defined by wide views to distant hills.
- A large area of urban and industrial development around the Tees Estuary, much of which is on reclaimed land, contrasts with the quieter rural areas to the south and west.
- Major industrial installations around Teesmouth form a dramatic skyline, but are juxtaposed with expansive mudflats, sand dunes and salt marshes which are nationally and internationally designated for their assemblage of waterfowl.
- Slow-moving rivers Tees and Leven meander through the landscape with steep, well-wooded banks.
- A distinctive area of low-lying farmland with remnants of former wetland habitat in the flood plain of the River Skerne to the north-west.
- Permo-Triassic red mudstones and sandstones are masked by glacial drift and alluvial material but can be seen outcropping at the coast in places.
- Principal transport corridors, power lines and energy infrastructure are conspicuous elements in the landscape. Industrial development fringing the tidal reaches of the River Tees contrasts with the surrounding rural landscape.
- Brownfield sites where semi-natural vegetation has started to regenerate on previously developed land.
- Green corridors such as minor valleys and former railway lines provide links between urban areas and the surrounding countryside.

Durham Coalfield Pennine Fringe

This NCA covers a broad band of upland fringe to the east of the North Pennines. It includes the landscape of Northumberland and County Durham from the Tyne valley in the north to the Tees in the south. Only the south-east corner of this NCA extends into the Borough of Darlington. The key characteristics for this NCA are reproduced below, though not all are directly relevant to the Darlington area.

- A rolling upland landscape of broad, open ridges and valleys with a strong west–east grain.
- A transitional landscape with pastoral farming on higher ground in the west giving way to arable and mixed farming in the valleys and to the east.
- A landscape heavily influenced by the mining and steel industries, in particular to the north and east, with scattered mining and industrial settlements of terraced and estate housing occupying prominent sites linked by a network of main roads.
- Open cast coal workings forming intrusive features in some areas, and restored open cast areas giving a manmade feel to parts of the landscape. Early restoration sites are often

lacking in character, topography and natural and historic features, while later schemes are of more value for wildlife and amenity.

- Numerous small plantations of conifers or mixed woodland, as blocks or shelterbelts, on hillsides; in places more extensive conifer woodlands on ridgetops and hillsides.
- Wide, open, windswept ridges of regular, large fields bounded by drystone walls and fences and crossed by straight roads, with isolated farmsteads.
- Broad valleys of arable and mixed farmland with low hedges, with hedgerow trees, strips of broadleaved woodland following rivers and streams, and conifer plantations on valley sides.
- Narrow, steep-sided river valleys sheltering fragments of ancient woodland.
- Scattered small country houses, set within parkland and well-wooded estates.

Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau

This NCA covers a roughly triangular area with South Shields, Hartlepool and Newton Aycliffe at its three corners. It includes the City of Sunderland as well as the County Durham coast, and is strongly defined by the underlying limestone geology. Only the southern-most tip of this NCA extends into the Borough of Darlington. The key characteristics for this NCA are reproduced below, though not all are directly relevant to the Darlington area.

- Open, large-scale landscape with big fields, low hedges and few trees on the plateau tops, incised with stream valleys along limestone escarpment to the west and denes running down to the coast to the east.
- Dramatic coastline with exposed cliffs of limestone and boulder clay, undulating series of small, sheltered bays and headlands, flower-rich Magnesian Limestone grassland, steep-sided wooded coastal denes, and sand dunes and beaches that support large populations of waders and seabirds.
- Striking west-facing limestone escarpment forming a series of spurs and vales, heavily quarried but still supporting a mosaic of limestone grassland, scrub and woodland.
- Strong influence of historic mining industry on both local culture and the landscape, in the form of ex-coal mining towns and villages with distinctive surrounding areas of allotments and pony paddocks, reclaimed colliery sites, disused and existing railways, and industrial archaeology.
- A productive farmed landscape with a high proportion of large arable fields and some pasture for sheep and cattle grazing.
- Small, fragmented patches of limestone grassland supporting unique combinations of rare plant and invertebrate species.
- Historic villages subject to a high degree of 20th-century expansion.
- Widespread urban and industrial development in the north and major transport corridors throughout.

North Yorkshire and York Landscape Characterisation Project

This large-scale study looked at the character of the whole of North Yorkshire, and defined 39 County landscape character types (LCT). Only one of these, the Gritstone Valley, occurs alongside the Borough of Darlington. The key characteristics of this LCT are presented below.⁹

Gritstone Valley

This LCT covers the River Tees along the southern boundary of the Borough. The LCT has been drawn to include the northern bank as well as the southern side, and the extent of this LCT has informed the boundary of character area 10 in the Darlington Landscape Character Assessment.

⁹ Chris Blandford Associates (2011) *North Yorkshire and York Landscape Characterisation Project*. North Yorkshire County Council.

- A series of relatively narrow valleys which cut through adjacent Gritstone Moors and Fells;
- A patchwork of species rich grasslands with a diverse range of ecological habitats along the valley floors;
- Rich legacy or agriculture, quarrying, mining, textiles and water supply activities;
- Network of minor roads connecting villages, hamlets;
- Predominantly rural landscape with associated sense of tranquillity;
- Tree cover is generally sparse within the Upper Nidderdale Valley Reservoirs;
- Reservoirs and conifer plantations are key landscape features which impart a human influence; and
- Predominantly rural landscape with an associated strong sense of tranquillity.

Stockton-On-Tees Landscape Character Assessment

This assessment divides the Borough of Stockton-On-Tees into a large number of landscape units at field parcel scale. These are grouped into seven landscape character areas which represent areas of consistent character. These are described in the report with a summary of their characteristics. These summaries are reproduced below for the two character areas which adjoin the Borough of Darlington.¹⁰

Thorpe and Billingham Beck Valley

This character area lies to the north-east of the Borough, and includes the landscape around Stillington and Whitton.

- Green corridor stretching from the rural areas of the Stockton on Tees Borough into the heart of the conurbation creating a 'Green Wedge' between Stockton and Billingham;
- Wide beck valley gradually narrowing as it extends into Billingham Beck valley extending between Stockton and Billingham;
- Field sizes vary from medium well defined fields to larger field pattern in the west with poorly maintained hedgerows;
- Land use consisting mainly of semi improved and improved pasture along the valley floor and extending up the sides;
- Transport links include A19, A177 and Stockton to Darlington railway line cutting through the agricultural landscape; and
- A network of minor roads creates a complex vehicle network across the area. Public footpath links are limited.

West Stockton Rural Fringe

This character area lies to the east of the Borough of Darlington, and includes all of the landscape between Redmarshall in the north and the River Tees in the south, including the eastern half of the airport.

- Flat open arable farmland;
- Large areas of recently planted Community Forest within arable setting;
- Enlarged fields with fragmented and absent hedgerows;
- Strong influence of urban development to west;
- Significant infrastructure includes Teesside Airport and the A66;
- Small isolated villages and farmsteads;

¹⁰ WYG Environment (2011) *Stockton-On-Tees Landscape Character Assessment*. Stockton-On-Tees Borough Council.

- Electricity transmission towers and large substations create a significant detractor across the landscape and on the outskirts of Stockton;
- Long distant views towards North York Moors; and
- Isolated areas of historic interest.

County Durham Landscape Character Assessment

This assessment defines a number of broad landscape character types (LCT) across the County. The Durham Landscape website presents key characteristics and descriptions for each of these types. Seven of the LCTs adjoin the northern and western boundaries of the Borough of Darlington, and the key characteristics of each are presented below.¹¹

Lowland Plain

This LCT covers the landscape to the north of the Borough, including Newton Aycliffe and the farmland to the east.

- Open lowland plain;
- Permian rocks are masked by a thick mantle of glacial clays, sands and gravels;
- Gently rolling or undulating topography with areas of flat or hummocky terrain;
- Seasonally waterlogged brown and reddish-brown clay soils with pockets of brown earths and brown sands;
- Mixed but largely arable farmland of cereals and oil-seed rape;
- Semi-regular patterns of old enclosures, often fragmented by amalgamation into large arable fields;
- Low clipped hawthorn hedges;
- Relics of rigg and furrow in older pastures;
- Few trees – thinly scattered hedgerow ash, oak and sycamore;
- Sparsely wooded but with some heavily wooded areas of old parkland and estate farmland;
- Nucleated pattern of small green villages connected by winding lands. Many shrunken or deserted medieval villages;
- Scattered farms;
- Busy trunk roads and overhead transmission lines in places;
- A visually open and broad scale landscape with long distance views to the Cleveland Hills to the south;
- Heavily wooded areas create a greater degree of enclosure and a more intimate scale; and
- A sparsely settled rural landscape.

Limestone Escarpment

This LCT includes the farmland between Shildon and Newton Aycliffe, to the north-west of the Borough.

- A low escarpment, deeply dissected in places to form a series of short valleys between well-defined spurs;
- Occasional steep sided incised valleys and glacial melt-water channels;
- Gently rounded topography of soft Magnesian limestones covered in places by glacial drift;

¹¹ Durham County Council. County Durham Landscape Character. [<http://www.durhamlandscape.info/Pages/CountyDurhamLandscapeCharacter.aspx>] Accessed on 28 July 2015.

- Thin calcareous soils over limestones with heavier clays on boulder clay and brown earths on glacial sands and gravels;
- Open, predominantly arable farmland, with pasture on steeper slopes;
- Remnants of limestone grassland on the thin soils of scarp slopes, spurs, ridge tops and incised valleys;
- Varied limestone plant communities in abandoned limestone quarries;
- Semi-regular patterns of medium and large-scale fields bounded by low, clipped hawthorn hedges;
- Few trees – thinly scattered hedgerow ash;
- Sparsely wooded – ancient ash woodlands and areas of hawthorn scrub on steep spurs and vale-sides;
- Occasional small 'green' villages on ridge tops and valley floors. Scattered mining towns and villages;
- Large limestone quarries often in prominent locations on ridges and spurs;
- A visually open landscape with panoramic views across the surrounding lowlands; and
- Rural in character in places but with a semi-rural or urban fringe quality in settled areas.

Coalfield Upland Fringe

This LCT occurs in a small area around Brusselton at the north-west corner of the Borough.

- Broad ridges and shallow valley heads;
- Gently rounded topography of drift free, thinly bedded sandstones, mudstones, shales and coals;
- Occasional steep bluffs and incised denes;
- Heavy, seasonally waterlogged clay soils with pockets of peaty soils supporting heathland vegetation;
- Pastoral land use of improved or semi-improved pasture with some arable cropping on drier ridges;
- Regular grids of parliamentary enclosures bounded by dry stone walls or overgrown hawthorn hedges;
- Occasional older field systems;
- Few trees - scattered hedgerow oak, ash, rowan or birch;
- Sparsely wooded - scattered conifer plantations and shelterbelts;
- Isolated farms connected by straight enclosure roads – occasional old 'green' villages of local stone on ridge top sites;
- Scattered mining villages of stone and brick and occasional larger towns;
- Occasional relics of the mining industry including small spoil heaps, coke ovens and waggon ways;
- Telecommunications masts and wind turbines prominent on some ridges;
- Extensive areas of restored opencast land – often open and relatively featureless; and
- A visually open landscape with commanding views across adjacent valleys to distant ridges.

Coalfield Valley

This LCT includes the Hummerbeck Valley which lies to the north of Bolam and to the west of Royal Oak. This LCT also occurs around Shildon to the north.

- Broad, well defined valleys with occasional narrow floodplains and incised denes;

- Rounded topography of thinly bedded sandstones, mudstones, shales and coals overlain by glacial boulder clays;
- Heavy, seasonally waterlogged, clay soils;
- Mixed farmland of improved pasture and arable cropping;
- Sub-regular field patterns of old enclosures bounded by thorn hedges. Occasional regular Parliamentary enclosures;
- Scattered hedgerow Oak, Ash, Sycamore and Beech;
- Variable woodland cover – open in places but wooded elsewhere with ancient oak-birch woods in narrow denes and along watercourses, and blocky conifer plantations on valley sides;
- Scattered mining towns and villages connected by busy modern roads;
- Occasional older 'green' villages linked by narrow winding roads;
- Extensive areas of restored opencast land and reclaimed colliery land – often open and relatively featureless;
- Scattered relics of the mining industry - small spoil heaps, coke ovens and railway lines;
- Occasional ornamental parklands;
- An open landscape, relatively broad in scale but defined by enclosing ridgelines; and
- A strongly rural landscape in places but with a 'semi-rural' or urban fringe quality in its more settled areas.

Gritstone Vale

This LCT occurs on the steeper farmed slopes south of Bolam, to the west of Houghton Bank.

- Broad rolling vale, incised by the narrow denes of rivers and streams;
- Gently rounded topography of thinly bedded sandstones, limestones and mudstones overlain by glacial drift;
- Mosaic of heavy, seasonally waterlogged clay soils and more fertile brown earths;
- Mixed farmland of improved pasture and arable cropping;
- Semi-regular, sometimes linear, patterns of old enclosures bounded by thorn hedges, with occasional dry stone walls;
- Abundant hedgerow ash, oak and sycamore;
- Ancient ash and oak woodlands in narrow denes. Scattered coniferous or mixed plantations;
- Areas of old parklands and heavily wooded estate farmland;
- Nucleated settlement pattern of small green villages centred on the historic market town of Barnard Castle;
- Scattered farms;
- Buildings of local stone with roofs of stone, slate or clay pan tile. Farms of the Raby Estate painted white;
- Narrow winding lanes and some busy modern highways;
- Occasional disused army camps;
- A well timbered landscape creating a high degree of enclosure in places, but with broad scale panoramic views across the vale from higher vantage points;
- A tranquil settled rural landscape.

Lowland Vale

This LCT covers the sloping farmland north of the River Tees, along the western boundary of the Borough.

- Broad lowland vale;
- Varied Carboniferous and Permian rocks are covered by a thick mantle of drift;
- Gently rolling or undulating topography of glacial moraines, boulder clays and sands and gravels. Occasional flats;
- Seasonally waterlogged loamy clay soils and more free-draining brown earths;
- Mixed, but predominantly arable farmland – a mosaic of improved pasture and arable cropping;
- Semi-regular patterns of old enclosures bounded by thorn hedges;
- Relics of rigg and furrow in older pastures;
- Scattered hedgerow ash, oak and sycamore – abundant in places;
- Sparsely wooded but with some heavily wooded areas of old parkland and estate farmland;
- Nucleated pattern of small green villages connected by narrow, winding, hedged lanes;
- Buildings of local stone with roofs of clay pan tile. Farms of the Raby Estate are painted white; and
- The high incidence of hedgerow trees creates a degree of enclosure in places, but the landscape remains fairly broad in scale with views to distant high ground.

Lowland River Terraces

This LCT occurs along the River Tees to the south-west of Darlington.

- Flat, narrow floodplain fringed in places by low, steep-sided bluffs;
- Coarse loamy and sandy soils on alluvial river terrace drift;
- Meandering rivers with alternating riffles and pools;
- Arable cropping on the floodplain;
- Semi-improved pastures on bluffs;
- Low hawthorn hedges with scattered hedgerow oak and ash;
- Fragments of rigg and furrow survive in older pastures;
- Ancient oak woodlands on steeper bluffs;
- Narrow riparian woods or tree lines of alder, oak, ash and willow on river banks;
- Old villages closely associated with the river, often on bridging or fording points;
- Buildings of local stone with roofs of slate or clay pan tile;
- Occasional recreational sites – lidos and caravan parks;
- A visually enclosed landscape of an intimate scale; and
- A settled but tranquil rural landscape of high scenic quality and historical depth.