

# Landscapes of Worcestershire

## Landscape Type Information Sheet

# Principal Wooded Hills

### Landscape Type Description

An upstanding, wooded landscape with a sloping, in places steeply undulating topography, often on the edge of higher ground. This is a landscape of large, irregularly shaped ancient woodlands and wooded streamlines, typically forming an interlocking pattern with surrounding hedged fields. The woodlands are a key visual element within the landscape.



### Key Characteristics

#### Primary

- Varied, often steeply sloping, topography
- Large, often interconnecting, blocks of ancient woodland

#### Secondary

- Organic pattern of hedged fields, derived from assarting
- Frequent, narrow wooded valleys or dingles
- Medium-framed views
- Patches of rough grassland and scrub
- Sparsely settled pattern of farmsteads and wayside dwellings



This is a landscape in which the intrinsic character is derived from the pronounced relief and the dominant, flowing woodland cover, resulting in a strong sense of unity and visual integration. These are landscapes where the nature of the physiography, particularly the steepness of slope, has inhibited clearance for agricultural use in the past. These areas have, therefore, retained significant cover of ancient semi-natural woodland into which only slight clearances, usually of an assarted nature, have taken place. Sparse settlement is usually associated with these areas. Woodland cover remains very much the dominant land cover, typically occurring in extensive, interlocking belts. Where clearance has taken place in the past, the presence of strong hedgelines with good representation of hedgerow tree cover contributes to the visual integration of the landscape. The ancient semi-natural status of these woodlands renders them to be a very important nature conservation asset.

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The visual cohesion of these landscapes is all important, particularly between the open spaces and the woodland cover. These are very visible landscapes, and tend to frame long distance views, and as such their composition and unity is particularly important. The development of woodland shapes that are unsympathetic to the topography, together with the modification of the mixed broad leaf composition of these woodlands, most notably through the introduction of conifer blocks, can severely interrupt the unity of the landscape. The presence of conifer dominated skylines is particularly damaging.

The nature conservation value of these woodlands is also significantly reduced by deviations away from their inherent species composition. Hedgerow trees and wooded streamsides are a vital component in achieving visual integration between the areas of historic clearance and the overall wooded character. In these areas, the hedgerow tree stock tends to be dominated by mature and veteran trees, and the visual integration will become diluted if tree populations are not perpetuated. The woodland component has become fragmented in places by more recent clearances, which again tend to damage the unity of the landscape.

It is important to retain the dominance of the woodland in this landscape together with the integrated pattern of open spaces. As a rough guide, woodland cover of up to 60-70% could be aimed for, although this could well vary in areas of differing geology. A lower proportion of woodland cover might be more appropriate in the Cotswold Wooded Hills where a greater amount of piecemeal clearance took place historically, many of the grassland areas being of significant nature conservation interest.

Emphasis should be placed upon both restoring the ancient semi-natural character of the woodland cover and to maintaining an overall interlocking pattern of woodland throughout the area, seeking to unite fragmented sections of woodland. Although opportunities for new woodland planting exist, the historical significance of the old patterns of woodland clearance need to be recognised and protected along with boundary hedges of assart origin. The perpetuation of hedgerow and streamside tree cover should be encouraged, aiming to secure tree populations of even age distribution.

The overall management strategy for the wooded hills should be primarily one of conservation together with an element of restoration, seeking to conserve and restore the pattern of woodland cover of the landscape together with the ancient broadleaved character of the woodlands themselves.

### Landscape Guidelines

- conserve and restore the ancient broadleaved character of all woodlands
- seek to restore the wooded character of the area through large scale woodland planting in areas where the interlocking pattern has become diluted
- conserve and restore the irregular pattern of assarted fields
- strengthen the wooded character of hedgelines and streamlines through re-planting or natural regeneration
- new woodland planting and felling coupes should be carefully designed to take particular account of their visual impact

For more information visit our website [www.worcestershire.gov.uk/lca](http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/lca) or contact the Worcestershire County Council Environmental Policy Team on 01905 766038