

Vale of York



Key Characteristics

- Low lying, generally flat or gently undulating land, crossed by obvious ridges formed by the York and Escrick glacial moraines.
- Underlain by glacial deposits resting on Triassic sandstone and mudstone and Lower Jurassic mudstone to the east.
- Floodplains of several major rivers notably the Ouse, the Derwent and the Wharfe, but also the Ure, Nidd and Foss.
- Washland and hay meadows in the river floodplains.
- Medium- to large-sized open fields intensively cultivated for arable crops but with some dairy farming.
- Low, flailed, intermittent hedges forming field boundaries with sparse, scattered hedgerow trees.
- Scattered small woods, with more extensive conifer plantations on sandy soils, together creating an impression of wooded farmland in some areas.
- Remnants of heathland commons on sandy soils.
- Distinctive character of settlements, especially the linear villages with buildings set back behind wide grass verges.
- Distinctive mottled brick used in buildings, combined with pantile roofs.
- Scattered, large, brick-built farmsteads.
- Focus on city of York with roads radiating from the city and York Minster providing a focal point visible in views from the surrounding area.

Landscape Character

The Vale of York is a transitional vale landscape marking the change from the more varied topography and mixed farming of the Vale of Mowbray to the north, to the flat, open land of the Humberhead Levels to the south. It is a

broad area which is bounded by the ridge of Magnesian Limestone which rises to the west and by the Howardian Hills and the Yorkshire Wolds to the east. The low ridge of the Escrick Moraine, which trends to the north-east, marks the southern limit and the transition to the Humberhead Levels.



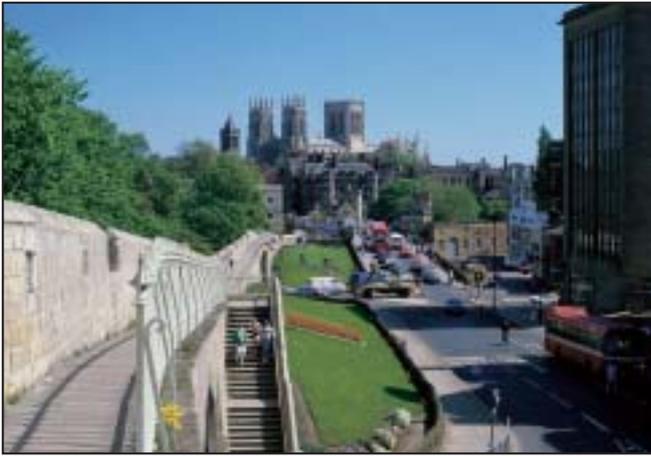
MIKE WILLIAMS/COUNTRYSIDE COMMISSION

The major rivers which cross the Vale of York are one of its most important characteristics. The Swale, seen here near Helperby, joins the Ure, changes name to the Ouse and flows through York before crossing into the Humberhead Levels to the south and joining the Humber Estuary.

This is a low-lying, mainly flat landscape though minor ridges and glacial moraines provide subtle local variations in topography. There are also frequent stream courses and drainage channels which link with the main rivers which cross the Vale. The floodplains of the Ouse, the Derwent, the Ure, the Nidd and the Fosse create much of this flat landscape.

The soils, formed from glacial till, sand and gravel are generally fertile and the majority of the land is in arable use with extensive areas of wheat, sugar beet and potatoes. Fields are medium to large size and enclosure is by low, flailed often intermittent hedges with few hedgerow trees. This gives the landscape a generally large-scale, open, well-tended character where production is the main emphasis of land





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York is the main settlement in the Vale and tends to dominate the area both economically and physically. The Minster, built from stone brought in from the Southern Magnesian Limestone ridge to the west, is a prominent landmark drawing the eye to the city from much of the surrounding countryside.

Physical Influences

As with the Vale of Mowbray to the north, the solid geology of the Vale of York comprises Triassic sandstone and mudstone and Lower Jurassic mudstone and is completely cloaked by varied drift deposits. They include glacial till, which forms a marked bench in the east, sand and gravel as well as both terminal and recessional moraines left by the ice-sheet. The York Moraine forms a curving ridge extending from York eastwards to Sand Hutton. The Escrick Moraine has a similar trend and lies about 8 km to the south. The northern section of the Vale is underlain by deposits of clay, sand and gravel left by a glacial lake formed just north of the Humberhead lake as the ice-sheet stagnated. The main rivers and streams also laid down river alluvium consisting of clay, silt and sand. These lacustrine and alluvial deposits provide good loamy soils, while the clays are calcareous and have sometimes been used for liming other soils. The glacial till bench along the eastern fringe of the Vale, at the foot of the adjoining Howardian Hills, creates more varied topography in this area and provides a transition to the hills beyond.

Historical and Cultural Influences

It seems probable that, even before the coming of the Romans, the drier land in the Vale, away from the river valleys would have been extensively cleared for pastoral farming and small-scale cropping and contained some dispersed settlement. The Romans established a legionary fortress at what was to become the major Roman centre of Eboracum, now York, using the higher ground of the York Moraine where it was directed by the then tidal river Ouse. The area around was significantly influenced by the Romans, with evidence of forts and signal stations as well as roads. Commons, often of a heathy character, were widespread in the Vale and some of these still survive today on the poor, wind-blown, sandy soils. Open

fields also persisted in some areas until enclosure in the 18th century. There was, however, quite widespread enclosure of both common pastures and open fields before the 18th century. Parliamentary enclosure completed the process and there was then widespread improvement of farmland by draining and marling.

In earlier centuries wheat and rye were the main crops grown, often together on the sand land, and large areas of grassland also remained. Crops such as potatoes and carrots were only introduced early in the 20th century. The second world war saw a reduction in livestock and an increase in deeper ploughing and use of fertiliser became more apparent. Since then there has been further progressive intensification of farming, with only the sand lands being resistant to improvement because of their tendency to blow and their requirements for high levels of fertiliser inputs.

Buildings and Settlement

York is the main settlement in the Vale and tends to dominate the area around it, both economically and physically. It is a magnificent historic city and all the main roads in the Vale radiate from it. The Minster, built from stone brought from the Southern 'Magnesian Limestone' ridge to the west, is a highly visible landmark drawing the eye to the city from many of the outlying areas. The city is expanding around the fringes and there are also significant satellite villages like Upper and Nether Poppleton and Haxby to the north and Bishopthorpe and Copmanthorpe to the south.



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A low lying, generally flat or gently undulating vale of medium to large-sized fields, intensively cultivated for arable crops. Hedges tend to be low and gappy, as seen here at Cundall, and woodland cover is generally low, although there are some conifer plantations.

Easingwold is a substantial rural town lying in the north of the Vale and has a distinctive intricate layout and a fine combination of open spaces, buildings and landscape features. The villages, like those in the Vale of Mowbray,



Farmsteads are often large, indicating agricultural prosperity dating from the 19th century. They are built, like most of the traditional buildings in the vicinity, in characteristic mottled bricks with pantile roofs.

exhibit the typical linear vale form of mottled brick houses with pantile roofs facing each other on either side of a main street. Wide grass verges and special features like village greens, ponds, streams and mature trees often combine with the village church and pub to create a very attractive whole. Farmsteads are larger here than in the more northerly Vale of Mowbray, with examples of the more prosperous agriculture dating from the 19th century. They are built, like most of the traditional buildings in the vicinity, in the characteristic mottled bricks and have pantile roofs. Older farmhouses are usually associated with a complex of large, more modern farm buildings.

Land Cover

Arable land is by far the most prominent land cover throughout the vale and grass is now relatively infrequent. This reflects the steady move away from livestock rearing and dairy farming. There are few flood meadows left along the river valleys although some still remain along the Derwent, primarily in its lower reaches.

The sand lands support substantial areas of remnant heaths and semi-natural, often ancient, deciduous woodland some

of which is common land. There are also large areas of conifer plantation, as well as small farm woods, shelterbelts and game coverts, all of which add diversity and interest to the landscape. This is particularly important because hedges and hedgerow trees have been in decline and the landscape is becoming more open.

The remaining semi-natural habitats, including heathland, water meadows, pastures, riversides, wetlands, small woodlands and hedgerows are all of great importance for nature conservation.

The Changing Countryside

- Agriculture has made a positive contribution to the character of the area but, more recently, intensification of farming has had a significant effect on the landscape and has led to loss of hedges and hedgerow trees, a decline in the condition of those that remain and the loss of unimproved grassland. This continues to make the landscape more open with larger fields and fewer trees.
- Use of fertilisers is leading to eutrophication of the rivers and pollution of ground water while pressure for water

abstraction is leading to low flows in streams and general lowering of the water table. River management operations have led to loss of riverside trees, and flood meadows have largely been lost to agricultural improvement.

- Development pressures are significant around York where there is a particular demand for housing especially in nearby villages. Schemes for substantial residential development continue. Many of the rural villages are attractive to commuters which can create demands for new development and emphasises the need to protect their special character.
- Road building and enhancement schemes are also having an effect and there is particular pressure for golf course and driving range development and for the establishment of garden centres in rural areas. The volume of traffic in the area, especially visitor traffic to York and to the coast, has had a significant impact on the tranquillity of the landscape.

Shaping the Future

- There may be scope to enhance this landscape by attempting to create new, larger areas of heathland on appropriate areas of sandy soil.
- New tree planting should be appropriate to the history of the Vale and its particularly open character. Management of the existing, scattered, farm woodland should be addressed. The historic Forest of Galtres provides a good opportunity for interesting woodland planting.
- There is scope for progress in enhancing the riverine landscape by integrated approaches to catchment and river corridor management.
- Where hedges and hedgerow trees have declined, restoration and replanting may be appropriate to improve wildlife habitat and to strengthen landscape structure.
- Appropriate design of new development would ensure that the character of settlements is enhanced.

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JOHN MORRISON

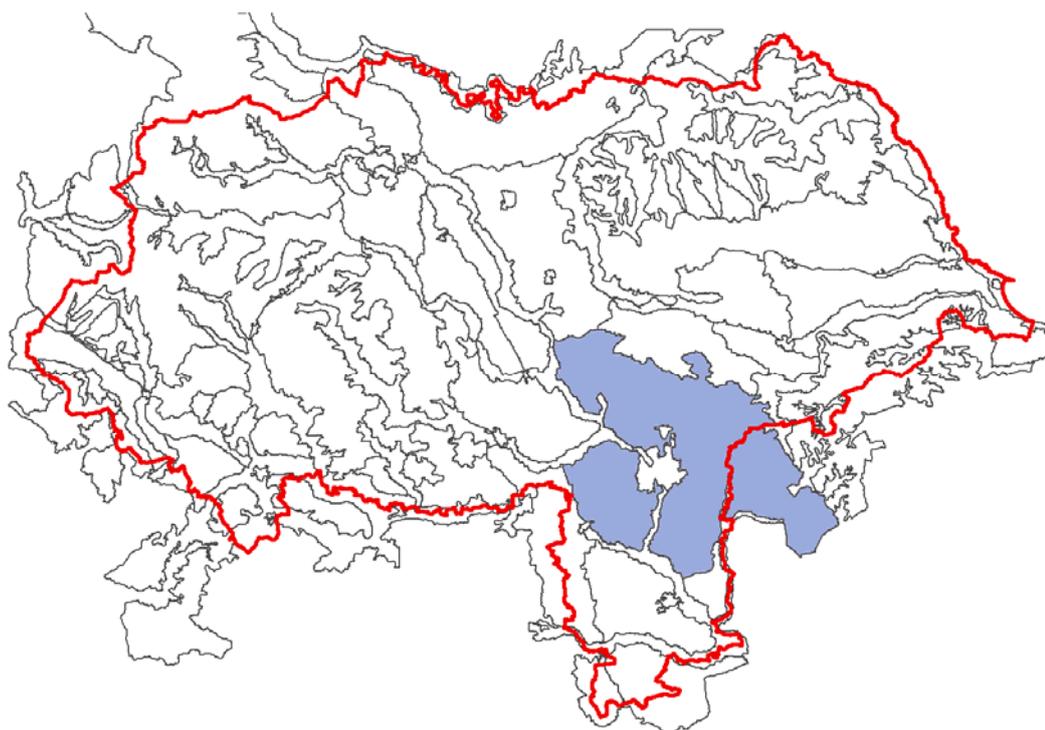
The village of Sutton-on-the-Forest lies to the north of York. It is typical of Vale villages, which tend to be linear in form, with mottled brick and pantile roofed homes facing each other across a broad main street. Wide grass verges and special features like village greens, ponds, streams and mature trees often combine with the village church and pub to create very attractive settlements.

Glossary

esker: long, narrow, sinuous ridge, usually sand and gravel, deposited by stream flowing under former glacier or ice-sheet

eutrophication: the process of becoming over-rich in nutrients

Vale Farmland with Plantation Woodland and Heathland (28)



CHARACTERISATION

Key Characteristics

- A patchwork of low lying, predominantly arable fields, often delineated by a network of mature hedgerows and interspersed with patches of regular-shaped mixed and coniferous plantation woodlands;
- Large heathlands are key features on sandy soils;
- Distant visual containment is provided by higher Landscape Character Types to the east and west;
- Strong sense of openness throughout much of this Landscape Character Type;
- Scattered settlement pattern of towns, villages and farmsteads within the landscape around the main historic City of York (which forms part of the Urban Landscapes Primary Landscape Unit);
- A network of trunk roads linking the larger settlements and towns.

Description

- 5.7.9 This low-lying, gently undulating vale landscape is enclosed to the west by rising landscape of the Magensian Limestone Ridge Landscape Character Type and to the east by the Wooded Hills and Valleys and Chalk Wolds Landscape Character Types. Small patches of coniferous and mixed woodland are scattered across the landscape, which provide a sense of enclosure in places. Large rivers (such as the Ouse, Foss, Kyle and Derwent) and small stream corridors are also key landscape and ecological features. Remnant grasslands including 'Ings' meadows on the river floodplain and numerous scattered farmsteads and small villages contribute to a diverse landscape pattern. The landscape encompasses a patchwork of arable fields which are generally delineated by hedgerows. Copses and shelterbelts are also key features. Fragmented areas of heathland are present on sandy soils (for example at Strensall, Allerthorpe and Skipwith). Despite the presence of villages and towns, there is a sense that this is a

predominantly rural landscape. Pockets of parkland associated with country houses such as Rufforth Hall Park, Beningborough Hall and Bilton Hall contribute to a diverse and interesting landscape pattern. Views to surrounding higher landscapes contribute to recognisable sense of place.

Definitive Attributes

Geology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The bedrock geology is overlain with a series of surface deposits Diamicton occurs towards the edges of the vale Sand and gravel river terraces and clay and silt deposits are evident in the centre of the Vale adjacent to the rivers
Topography & Drainage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broad, low-lying vale landscape which is enclosed to the west by the rising ground of the Magensian Limestone Ridge and to the east by the Chalk Wolds and Wooded Hills and Valleys
Land Cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The land cover is predominantly arable interspersed with areas of improved grassland and numerous pockets of coniferous plantation woodland Several large areas of lowland heathland (Strensall Common, Allerthorpe Common and Skipwith Common are key landscape features)
Enclosure / Field Pattern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large areas of modern improved fields which have seen a large degree of boundary loss since the first edition OS map cover much of this area Significant areas of planned parliamentary enclosures which consist of medium sized regular fields defined by straight hedges
Settlement Pattern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scattered settlement pattern of villages and farmsteads which are situated with the landscape surrounding the historic city of York Towns at the periphery of York (such as Haxby) are also key features Traditional farm buildings and associated features Local vernacular materials include mottled brick and pantile
Visible Historic Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catterton Hall moated site and adjacent building platform Two Roman forts, two Roman camps, vicus, Iron Age enclosure, Bronze Age barrows and Neolithic henge monument west of Newton Kyme Beningborough old deer park Rufforth Hall Park Bilton Hall Humberton DMV Sheriff Hutton Castle and Deer Park Ornamental parkland associated with Moreby Hall consisting of extant ornamental parkland with formal gardens Aldby Park Skipwith Common National Nature Reserve with airfield Long Marston battlefield

EVALUATION

Forces for Change

Agricultural Change and Land Management

- Lack of management of existing plantation woodlands can lead to gradual decline;
- Gradual increase in woodland planting related to woodland management schemes;
- Neglect in hedgerow management, leading to a decline in the quality of hedgerows;
- Neglect of parklands, resulting in a loss of characteristic features;
- Decline in grasslands as a result of grazing pressure.

Development and Infrastructure

- Pressures for housing and industry around York, towns and villages along main road corridors, and on redundant airfields can impact on rural character;

- New development within historic villages may not be consistent with the historic form of the village and the vernacular materials and design of buildings;
- There is pressure for the development of infrastructure within the vale possibly including new housing and commercial facilities, overhead transmission lines and cables, pipelines, roads, energy and services infrastructure;
- Pressure on farm businesses is likely to lead to changes in land management and diversification of farm businesses, which may lead to the creation of new landscape features, such as fishing ponds

Climate Change

- Flooding is likely to pose an increased risk in lowland areas and farmers should consider planting flood resistant crops in flood plains wherever possible;
- Agriculture will have to adapt to use less water, carbon and other resources, and reduce runoff of water, soil, fertiliser and pesticides into adjacent watercourses. There is potential to introduce buffer zones to water courses.

Mineral Extraction

- Watercourses are sensitive to pollution from mineral extraction;
- The effect of lorries and traffic in rural areas should be considered as they have the potential to introduce noise and congestion.

Sensitivity to Change Issues

- Moderate visual sensitivity overall. Whilst there is a strong sense of openness within much of the farmland as a result of the flat or gently undulating topography, patches of plantation woodland disrupt views to adjacent Landscape Character Types in places;
- Moderate ecological sensitivity overall. Much of this Landscape Character Type comprises improved agricultural fields. There are, however, large areas of lowland heathland at Strensall Common, Allerthorpe Common and Skipwith Common and a network of remnant lowland heaths outside these major areas which provide key ecological habitats and are designated for their ecological value;
- Moderate landscape and cultural sensitivity overall. In places, historic landscape patterns are compromised by modern developments and infrastructure and hedgerows are gappy. There are, however, numerous historic landscape features present, including parkland landscapes, historic villages and prehistoric earthworks.

GUIDANCE

Guidance for Managing Landscape Change

Physical and ecological character

- **Manage, restore** and **thicken** hedgerows for landscape structure and biodiversity;
- **Replace** and **plant** new hedgerow trees;
- **Retain** and bring back into active management existing copses, shelterbelts and small woodlands to improve carbon storage levels and aid water infiltration;
- **Plan** for the significant extension and enhancement of riparian and wetland habitats assisting the adaptation of biodiversity to climate change and aid flood management;
- **Seek** opportunities for wetland creation and restoration.
- **Ensure** effective catchment management to sustain water quality;
- **Encourage** conservation of existing key habitats and landscape features and expand the resource through habitat restoration and re-creation guided by ecological networks;
- **Seek** opportunities to revert arable farmland to permanent pasture, particularly in floodplains or areas of archaeological interest;

- **Introduce** arable conservation headlands, pollen and nectar mixes, to encourage birds, invertebrates and rare arable plants;
- **Incorporate** miscanthus and short rotation coppice into the landscape – keeping plantations relatively small, in scale with local woodland cover (and avoid planting on pasture or obscuring water courses or historic features);
- **Restore, extend** and **link** existing fragmented areas of broadleaf woodland and actively manage these;
- **Protect, enhance** and **link** existing areas of lowland heathland to increase habitat linkages.

Cultural and Historic Character

- **Protect** the scattered settlement pattern of towns, villages and farmsteads and avoid settlement on the floodplain;
- **Conserve** and **enhance** local vernacular (mottled brick and pantile) through restoration of traditional farmsteads, farm buildings and associated features;
- **Minimise** disturbance and damage to archaeological sites resulting from cultivation;
- **Strengthen** historic field systems and patterns through hedgerow planting and management;
- **Protect** and **manage** parklands, retaining veteran trees and reintroducing wood pasture
- **Ensure** that highway improvement schemes respect and reflect local character and encourage the use of traditional signage where possible;
- **Protect** the setting of historic buildings such as Rufforth, Beningborough and Bilton Halls;
- **Seek** opportunities for educational access to historic farm buildings and to interpret the farmed environment.

Aesthetic and Perceptual Character

- **Conserve** open views along and across the river floodplains towards adjacent Landscape Character Types;
- **Protect** and **enhance** public enjoyment of the landscape, including appreciation of the sense of escapism it provides, through identifying opportunities to create new circular routes or links to existing public rights of way.

Signposts to Further Characterisation Information

National Character Area

- NCA 24: Vale of York
http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/jca80_tcm6-5676.pdf

Local Landscape Character Assessments

- York Landscape Appraisal (December 1996)
- http://www.york.gov.uk/environment/Planning/Local_development_framework/LDF_Evidence_base/landscapecharacterappraisal/
- Selby Landscape Character Assessment (1999)

THE SKIPWITH LOWLANDS



Key Characteristics

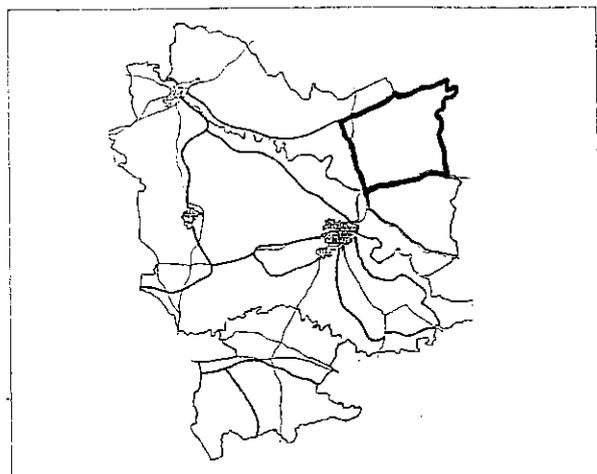
- flat wooded arable farmland, visually enclosed and characteristically estate-managed
- extensive area of semi-natural lowland heath of high conservation value
- many scattered farmsteads and cottages have a unity of style, reflecting estate ownership
- unimproved pastoral scenery of the narrow river Derwent floodplain which is of high conservation value
- the Riccall mine, developed on the former Riccall airfield
- wide grassy verges

The Skipwith Lowlands lie in the north-east corner of Selby District, at the foot of the Escrick moraine. The lowlands lie entirely within the Humberhead Levels Regional Character Area, where landform is flat or very gently undulating, and underlying Permo-Triassic Bunter Sandstones are overlain by thick deposits of glacial drift. These deposits include extensive areas of wind-blown sand on which well-drained sandy acidic soils have developed that are generally of poorer agricultural quality. The narrow valley corridor of the river Derwent forms the eastern boundary of the area, while the broader floodplain of the river Ouse lies to the west. The A163 Selby-Beverley road forms the southern boundary of the character area, and represents a transition to more open agricultural landscapes beyond.

The lowlands have a strong rural character which, apart from the Riccall mine, is generally unaffected by industrial or urban development. Much of the area comprises flat wooded arable farmland that is visually enclosed and characteristically estate-managed. Lowland heath that has developed on Skipwith Common provides a

distinctively varied, colourful and textured landscape. Semi-enclosed farmland provides a transition to the unimproved traditional pastoral scenery of the narrow river Derwent floodplain.

There are no large settlements within the Skipwith Lowlands. However there is extensive buried evidence that the area was intensively settled and farmed by Iron Age/Romano British times. This includes a distinct and complex system of cropmarks that extends between Riccall Common, Adamson farm, Skipwith and High

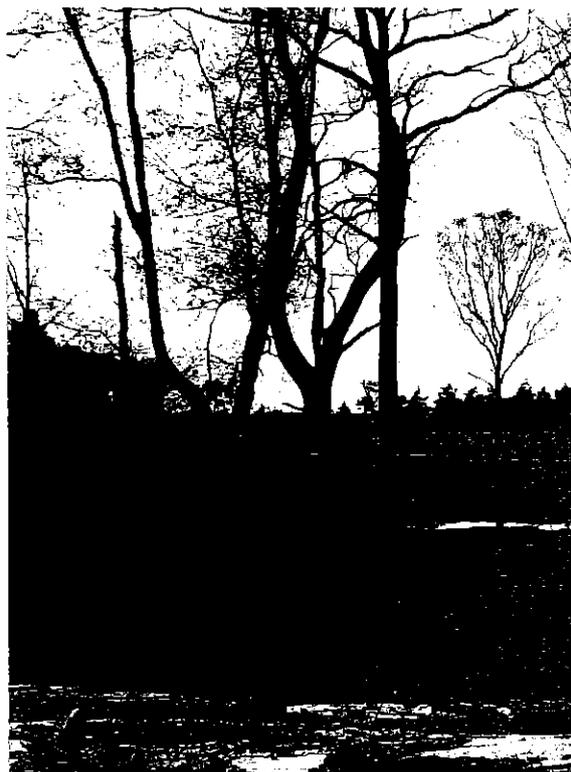


Farm to the south-west of Thorganby. The small scattered villages of Thorganby, Skipwith and North Duffield all have early origins and are recorded in the Domesday Book.

A limited area of open arable farmland occurs adjacent to the A19 road. Cultivated for cereals and other crops, its large fields are subdivided by gappy and low-cut hedgerows. The character of this area is influenced by structures associated with the Riccall mine and the remnants of the WWII Riccall airfield on which the mine is located. Woodland blocks which characterise the flat wooded farmland provide a backdrop to the open farmland. To the north of North Duffield lines of mature broadleaf trees interrupt wider views from the semi-enclosed flat arable farmland.

Large fields of cereals and other arable crops are generally characteristic of the flat wooded farmland, with high-quality turf production established near Thorganby Gale. Partially fragmented and gappy hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees sub-divide the fields, but the hedgerows that line the network of minor roads are typically thick and well-managed, with numerous mature hedgerow oaks, and wide grassy verges. Scattered farmsteads and cottages are features of interest, and typically have a unity of style and finish that results from their ownership by a landed estate. Woodland blocks and belts are key features of the local landscape, and their frequency reflects the relatively poorer quality of land for crop production. Most are mixed coniferous and broadleaf plantation woodland, and some are replanted on ancient sites, including Hollicarrs wood and Common Wood, providing habitats of nature conservation value. Local wooded character is enhanced by the woodland belts and clumps of trees, which are designed features of the landscaped parkland associated with Escrick Park.

The sandy acidic nature of local soils has also led to the development of an extensive area of lowland heath on Skipwith Common SSSI, which is the largest single tract of this habitat type in the north of England. Managed as a nature reserve, a diverse range of semi-natural habitats are present which provide a varied, colourful and textured landscape of high conservation value. These include silver birch woodland and scrub, heather and damp and dry heath, with areas of marsh and open



water. Scrub woodland is also developing along a stretch of disused railway to the north-east of the Common, and creates a wildlife corridor between Skipwith Common and the woodlands to the north.

The river Derwent is an important landscape feature that is apparent in many local views, unconfined by the grassy embankments that line the river Ouse. It would have played a key role in the transport system of the wider area from at least the medieval period. The narrow river floodplain is characterised by open pastures and alluvial flood meadows, with areas of fen and marshland. Drainage ditches sub-divide the pastures and are often reedy, and there are frequent patches of willow scrub and areas of standing water. The agriculturally unimproved riverine landscape fringing the river Derwent is of exceptional nature conservation interest, particularly for wetland birds including Bewick's swan. It is protected within the Derwent Ings and River Derwent SSSIs and the Lower Derwent Valley SPA, SAC NNR and RAMSAR sites. Thicket Priory is a feature of interest within the river floodplain. It occupies the site of a medieval Benedictine priory, and its grounds have a parkland-like quality that adds variety to the riverine landscape.





Changes in the Landscape

- Intensification of arable farming in some parts has led to the under-management of field hedgerows and hedgerow trees, and some loss of field pattern, and the degradation or destruction of buried archaeological remains. The structure of the landscape has been partially eroded and is becoming more open as a result. Development of semi-natural scrub woodland along dismantled railway lines provides valuable wildlife corridors. Decline in the frequency of hedgerow trees within farmland
- Increase in semi-natural character and conservation value of the Derwent valley following designation.
- Expansion of lowland heath habitats at Skipwith Common following its designation and protection as a nature reserve.

- FWF** Flat Wooded Farmland
- FOF** Flat Open Farmland
- LH** Lowland Heath
- M** Modified
- PV** Pastoral Valley
- P** Parkland

