

**AREA G** High Eastern Farmland**Key Characteristic Features**

- Elevated large scale sloping plateau dissected by dry valleys.
- Open rural landscape with generally expansive views.
- Extensive network of drystone walls.
- Isolated farms.
- Woodland generally follow the landform.
- Shallow and elevated valleys of pasture.

**Landform and Context**

High eastern farmland is found at the eastern end of the Tabular Hills and lies above 100m AOD with a high point at Givendale Head Farm that is 230m AOD. To the north and west the area is bounded by the North York Moors National Park, whilst to the east the area is bounded by the Ryedale District boundary and to the south by *linear scarp farmland* that abuts the Vale of Pickering.

Limestone and calcareous gritstones of the Tabular Hills dip slope underlie the area, which slopes fairly consistently to the Vale of Pickering, increasing in steepness only in the vicinity of the A170 due to the effects of the Helmsley – Filey fault line discussed previously. The *high eastern farmland* has been carved into sweeping forms by relatively broad dry valleys, which have eroded the upland to leave undulating ridges that extend southwards becoming progressively steeper and more indented down the dip slope.

**Land Use and Landscape Pattern**

This is a rural landscape in which arable farmland predominates, but which also includes some substantial areas of pasture particularly in the upper reaches of the dry valleys. Fields tend to be medium to large and regularly shaped. A defining feature of this landscape is that, in addition to hedgerows, drystone walls often bound the fields although many of these are now falling into disrepair. The field boundaries generally date back to the period of Parliamentary Enclosures. Even around the settlements, there is little evidence of the relic open-field medieval fields found elsewhere in the Fringe of the Moors. There has been a long standing tradition of sheep farming in the areas as evidenced by Malton Cote, which dates back to the medieval period when it was a grange or upland sheep farm, possibly under monastic influence.

The fields of improved pasture, mostly grazed by sheep, tend to be smaller sized and more elongated in response to the valley terrain along which they are associated. The use of post and wire fencing as stock proofing is increasingly common along these grassland valleys.

Although the grasslands in higher valleys are visually distinctive, most have been semi-improved and have lost the diversity of species more typical of unimproved calcareous grassland.

A noticeable characteristic of the scenery, particularly during ploughing and sowing, is the visible presence of limestone in the thin soil. Most of the land is classed as MAFF Grade 3 agricultural quality, although at altitude this gives way to Grade 4 quality land.

Woodlands generally follow the landform and are confined to the lower reaches of the dry valleys where the slope gradients are steeper and the valley profiles deeper and narrow. Although none of the woodlands in the valleys of the *high eastern farmland* can be classed as 'ancient' (i.e. continuously wooded since 1600) they are important ecological resources. In particular, Chafer Wood in Netherby Dale merits designation as a SINC. Like other woodlands locally, it is ash dominated and contains small pockets of calcareous scrub that includes a number of rare species.

Additional visual interest in this elevated farmland is provided by the Scamridge dyke system near Malton Cote. These earthworks sweep across the area in a series of embankments and ditches and are commonly associated with scrub and grassland. Both are SAM's and provide, together with the many tumuli, evidence of prehistoric use of the area dating from the Neolithic period and later Bronze Age. The northern end of the Scamridge system provides additional historic interest. Here it divides into many 'fingers', remnants of a commercial rabbit warren, dating back to medieval times. Similar to the grange at Malton Cote, this early farming was possibly under monastic influence.

Lanes through the area are orientated in a broadly north south direction extending into the hills from the A170. Many of the lanes are cul-de-sacs and are essentially private, providing access only to the isolated farmsteads. Typically, the lanes have narrow grass verges that are bounded by drystone walls.

There are a number of disused quarries scattered across the area. These are often geologically or ecologically important and some, such as Wilton Heights Quarry, have been designated as SINCS.

Coniferous plantations become increasingly more common with elevation. The most extensive of these is found around Given Dale in the west of the area. This serves to visually link Given Dale with Dalby Forest, which extends westwards and northwards into the North York Moors National Park.

### Settlement

Settlement in this area comprises scattered farms. There are no villages or hamlets and the area has a remote, isolated quality.

The farms tend to be large and are constructed predominantly from locally quarried limestone. Traditionally roofs are constructed in red pantile although in places slate is also used. Walls around farms tend to be drystone, with characteristic shelterbelt plantations of mature ash. These associations serve to create an attractive more domestic scale, in an otherwise open and expansive landscape.

### Subjective Response

An expansive, open landscape affording generally large scale panoramic views across a relatively harmonious scenery. The gently rolling terrain of more elevated areas produces many horizons and a strong sense of scale and distance. With increasing elevation and proximity to the National Park, the influence of the higher moorland becomes more pronounced, and there is a greater sense of enclosure despite the exposed setting of the area. On lower slopes, as the land becomes more dissected by deeper, steeper valleys, proximity to the Vale of Pickering creates a scenery that, whilst expansive and open, feels less elevated and exposed. A peculiar aspect of this landscape is that it feels remote, despite the relative proximity of urban areas and the intensity of agricultural production, which itself seems unusual at these altitudes.



Source: Environment Agency

Netherby Dale (GR 901 842)

# Area G

## High Eastern Farmland

Newer farm buildings are usually at a scale and style appropriate to their landscape setting and architectural context.



Shelter belts serve to provide local enclosure around farmsteads

Malton Cote Farm

Coniferous plantations often serve to contain more distant views



Steeper valley sides remain pasture and contrast with the predominantly arable land

Netherby Dale

### Sensitivity to Change

The *high eastern farmland* has a large scale and sweeping character, which is likely to be highly sensitive to development. The broad, rolling form of the relief ensures that most of the landscape is highly visible, in foreground and middle ground views since any one area might be seen from a number of different aspects. Detailed visual analysis, which takes account of the full range of possible viewpoints is an essential prerequisite to any form of built development and should also be considered in relation to changing patterns of land use related to forestry and agricultural practice. Where present, woodlands tend to be linear in nature and restricted to the steeper valley slopes where they do not afford good screening potential. The coniferous plantations in the west of the area appear out of character and are more characteristic of the higher moorland of the National Park.

### Landscape Guidelines

#### Landscape Strategy

**This is a predominantly farming landscape that, despite pressures from agricultural intensification, retains a strongly rural character, comprising arable and pastoral fields cut across by broad dry valleys, which become strongly incised and densely wooded in their lower reaches. Drystone walls are an important feature of this landscape, setting it apart from areas of otherwise similar elevated farmland to the west. A further defining quality of this landscape is its sense of remoteness, imparted by virtue of its elevation, lack of settlement, and presence of densely wooded incised linear valleys. Landscape strategies should aim to conserve and enhance these existing qualities and seek to resist development or inappropriate land management.**

#### Land Management

The visual structure of this landscape should be assessed from a distance to ensure that the relationship between the higher land and its adjacent landscapes is well balanced.

Land management practices should aim to conserve the existing pattern of fields, hedgerows and small woodlands. Further field enlargement should be avoided.

Management strategies should aim to emphasise the variations of scale within this landscape, for instance between the narrow, deeply incised valleys and the surrounding farmland, since these make an important contribution to the overall visual character.

Distant panoramic views from the higher land out across the Vale of Pickering are a feature of this landscape. This should be considered when planning landscape change.

Farm buildings, copses and hedgerows are valuable features adding complexity and diversity to this otherwise fairly uniform landscape. Attractive features should be conserved and those that have a negative visual influence should be identified as a priority for removal, upgrading or screening.

Priority should be given to the retention, protection and enhancement of the setting of the many archaeological features, which are an important characteristic of this landscape.

A further priority is the conservation and restoration of calcareous grassland on the south facing dry valley slopes and on sites of archaeological importance and in disused quarries. Management should discourage the improvement of species-rich calcareous grassland by the application of artificial fertilisers, and should seek to control overgrazing. Scrub clearance, thinning and appropriate grazing regimes should be considered as necessary. Any re-seeding of arable land should use a suitable grassland seed mix, of local provenance where possible, which reflects the species found in unimproved grasslands within the local area.

It is important that the tradition of quiet enjoyment of this countryside is maintained through the control of new recreational facilities. Inappropriate large scale facilities such as golf courses or large caravan parks could introduce a suburbanising influence and should be strictly controlled.

Specialist studies that take full account of geological, nature conservation and aesthetic issues are required to determine the best approach to quarry restoration, and ensure the conservation of rare or localised species. In some cases restoration might include the chamfering back of rock faces, elsewhere it may be preferable to retain quarries intact to preserve their already significant geological or nature conservation interests.

### Field Boundaries

The scale of its patchwork of fields, hedgerows and drystone walls determines the visual structure of this landscape. Future management should ensure that the existing network is conserved and strengthened along current alignments. Traditional hedgerow management techniques should be promoted, avoiding mechanical over-flailing.

Field hedgerows and drystone walls should be reinstated along historic field boundaries where they have been removed due to agricultural intensification and field enlargement. New hedgerows should use locally occurring native species, whilst drystone walls should employ traditional materials and methods of construction.

### Trees and Woodlands

All existing woodlands, copses and shelterbelts should be conserved.

The valley woodlands are visually important, they lend much to the area's aesthetic appeal, and should be conserved and managed to achieve a balanced age structure by thinning, coppicing and replanting as necessary. If no survey data is available, woodlands should be surveyed before any management work is carried out, to ensure any rare or localised species are conserved. Any work should take into account the impact on these species, and suitable mitigating measures should be taken.

Each woodland should be considered individually and, in some cases, a decision will need to be taken to conserve a rare species, possibly at the expense of biological diversity.

Ideally, ten year management plans should be prepared for the important sites, which take into account the objectives of conservation of rare species, and of biological diversity.

In areas of new planting, the species mix and the proportion of each species planted should reflect that found in existing ancient semi-natural woodlands in the area. The dominant species are ash, pedunculate oak, downy birch and wych elm, plus understory species including holly, field maple, guelder rose and blackthorn.

In keeping with the existing pattern, new woodland planting should be predominantly linear and should be confined to the valleys to ensure that the more open character of the surrounding farmland is maintained.

New planting should be of broad-leaved native species preferably of local provenance. Management practices should encourage the replacement of exotic conifers by native broad-leaved species.

Around Given Dale, the selective and progressive replanting of the large scale conifer plantations with native broad-leaved species should be considered to help restore a more natural landscape structure. The composition and form of plantation edges should be carefully controlled.

Clear fell areas should be designed with deeply indented edges and scattered groups of retained trees and woodland management techniques should be encouraged to promote visual and ecological diversity.

New planting, in small copses and as individual specimen trees should be considered in the vicinity of the some of the farmsteads, particularly where there is a need to integrate and partially screen new modern farm buildings.

### Settlements and Buildings

To conserve the remote rural character of this landscape, development should be strongly resisted.

Traditional farm buildings should be conserved where possible. Although conversion of redundant buildings may be appropriate, this should be handled sensitively if the traditional architectural features and rural setting are to be retained. All efforts should be made to resist suburbanisation by inappropriate construction and detailing.

Wherever possible, the rationalisation of farm buildings and the removal of modern farm buildings that have become redundant should be considered.

### Infrastructure

The small scale character of the rural lanes and tracks should be conserved and verges and banks managed to encourage native grassland and wildflower species.

### Priorities for Action

- Resist development.
- Conserve the existing landscape pattern of medium to large scale fields, broad dry valleys and deeply incised wooded dales.
- Conserve and, in many places, construct new drystone walls and re-plant hedgerows.
- Conserve and restore calcareous grassland habitats, including disused quarries.
- Undertake specialist studies of quarries with a view to possible restoration to enhance their ecological value, where appropriate or necessary.
- Manage valley woodlands.
- Ensure the conservation of important archaeological sites.