

Landscape Character Description

This character area follows a linear ridge of high ground approximately north-south through the central part of Charnwood Forest. It extends from the southern fringes of Loughborough and Shepshed in the north towards Cropston in the south. This is a landscape which has a dramatic and wide ranging influence due to its elevated position compared with surrounding areas. The height ranges from 85m around Cropston Reservoir to 248m at Beacon Hill.

There are a number of small watercourses through the area which have a localised influence on the topography. These are generally well vegetated and are subtle features of the landscape. The watercourse through Bradgate Park is more formalised including walled banks, channels, small weirs and bridges. Cropston Reservoir is within the southern part of the character area and is characterised by mature coniferous trees on its boundaries and rising land with rocky outcrops immediately adjacent.

The land use within this landscape is a combination of agricultural farmland which is almost entirely pasture, with areas of open informal parkland, heathland and bracken and large blocks of woodland.

Field pattern includes regular, small to medium sized fields becoming larger on high ground. Field pattern is largely absent within public open spaces and parkland. Fields are usually bounded by drystone walls although hedgerows are present on lower slopes.

Bradgate Country Park is the largest area of informal open space in the character area and is distinctive due to its small blocks of woodland enclosed by stone walls, rocky outcrops and large swathes of rough grassland and heath. The lower slopes comprise; remains of the former Bradgate Hall, a meandering stream, ornamental trees and localised rocky outcrops. Deer roam freely through the parkland.

Beacon Hill is characterised by agricultural land with open rough grassland, prominent rocky outcrops at the top and woodland on lower slopes. From the public vantage points of Bradgate Country Park and Beacon Hill there are extensive long ranging views across Leicestershire and beyond. Other open space within the northern part of the character area is generally wooded and more enclosed. Knolls containing rocky outcrops and small woodland groups are common in the northern part of the character area. Views within the northern part of the character area and on lower lying land tend to be enclosed and only over short distances due to landform and mature woodland.

Roads tend to be small lanes although these can be busy at holiday times. There are several car parks serving country parks which have a localised urbanising effect where they are openly viewed.

Woodland and Tree Cover

This character area has an abundance of woodland both broadleaved and coniferous. Woodland tends to be on the rising slopes with the highest points being more open and prominent vantage points. These viewpoints are sometimes marked by man-made or natural features such as Old John Tower within Bradgate Country Park or rocky outcrops at Beacon Hill. Almost all woodlands are enclosed by drystone walls around their perimeters. In some places newer woodland is contained by timber stockproof fencing which appears out of character. Pockets of newer woodland are present throughout this character area. Often whole fields or significant belts along field margins have been planted.

Hedgerow trees are frequent although there are localised areas where they are more sparse such as to the immediate west of Beacon Hill and Broombriggs Hill. Here the land becomes more open.

Veteran oak trees and occasionally beech are present as avenues along roads, which reinforces an enclosed character within the lower lying land. The oak trees in Bradgate Park are distinctive due to their age and form which is often gnarled and twisted in appearance.

Built Form within the Landscape

A few detached properties are present, often set within mature wooded gardens minimising their prominence within the landscape. Long linear settlements such as Swithland and Newtown Linford and clustered settlements such as Woodhouse Eaves are on lower slopes. They appear nestled into the landscape below woodland on higher slopes. Built form is well integrated into the landscape, aided by the high proportion of woodland cover.

Building materials are predominantly local granite and slate. Swithland and Newtown Linford are characterised by large detached properties and smaller cottages with a high proportion of thatch used in both old and new properties. Woodhouse Eaves has a larger proportion of modern houses although it has granite buildings and is nestled within the slopes of the surrounding hills. Beacon Hill and Bradgate Country Park are a feature in the background of views above the rooflines of the villages.

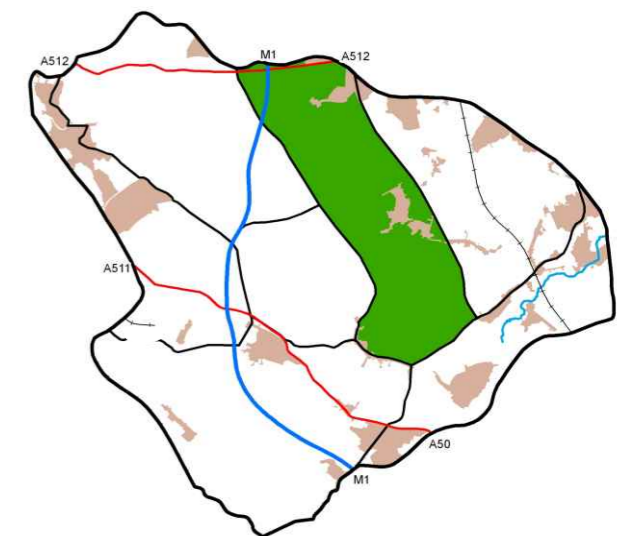
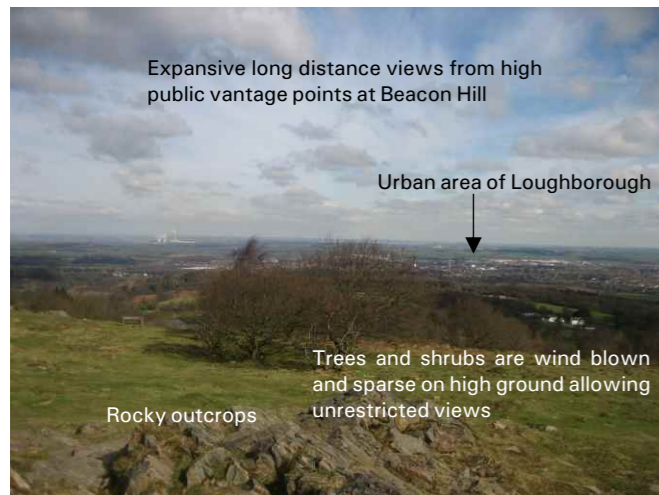
Property boundaries are usually constructed of granite with a number of drystone or rubble walls present. A small proportion of ornamental hedgerows and brick walls border newer properties.

The remains of Bradgate Hall are a local feature within the landscape. The building was constructed with granite at its base and red brick above. The building remains are enclosed by a high boundary wall.

Bradgate and Beacon

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Large tracts of informal open space with distinctive rolling hills. The highest are prominent rising above the surrounding countryside
- Localised knolls and wooded rocky outcrops often within open space
- Frequent blocks of both coniferous and broadleaved woodland on slopes which contrasts with open parkland and heathland
- Cropston Reservoir surrounded by coniferous woodland
- Distinctive ancient trees within Bradgate Country Park and mature oak and beech trees line the roads
- Prominent landmark of Old John Tower at high vantage point
- Small linear settlements on lower slopes characterised by granite stone and high proportion of thatch
- Detached properties set within mature wooded gardens
- Drystone walls are a feature of property boundaries and open spaces; hedgerows used as field boundaries on lower slopes



Ongoing Pressures Likely to Effect Change

Loss of heathland to bracken and scrub through lack of management would have a significant effect on localised rocky outcrops and open land, particularly around Bradgate Country Park.

Increased tourism pressures may have an influence on the informal nature of country parks and result in erosion of informal footpaths, damage and intrusion of car parking, signage and tourist facilities. New facilities may also weaken village character at tourism hot-spots.

Natural decline or disease could result in the loss of distinctive trees within Bradgate Country Park. Consequently pressures to remove or undertake tree-works for reasons of safety could affect their appearance and erode the strength of these characteristic features.

Increased prominence of development particularly along urban fringes. Maturation of young woodland planting will increase woodland cover, potentially creating beneficial screening.

Green Infrastructure

Routes through the central part of the character area include the Leicestershire Round, footpaths and lanes. These provide long distance recreational opportunities and important links between Beacon Hill, Bradgate Country Park, Out Woods and the wider area.

Public rights of way provide links between Woodhouse Eaves, The Brand, Swithland, Cropston and Newtown Linford and connect to the wider countryside.

Open access within country parks maximises public use and heightens the experience of the landscape.

Ability of the Landscape to Accommodate Change

LANDSCAPE STRENGTH

The character is considered to be **strong** and intact. The key features are easily distinguishable and contribute to a distinctive sense of place. The landscape also exerts strong influence over surrounding landscape character areas. There is little evidence of loss of the area's strength through urbanising influences or fragmentation of landscape features.

LANDSCAPE CONDITION

The landscape is in **good** condition with limited evidence of loss of landscape features. Bracken is evident within former heathland and will represent an ongoing management issue. The pattern of country parks, farmland and woodland is strong and in good condition.

Landscape Condition	Good	MODERATE <i>Enhance</i>	MODERATE - GOOD <i>Conserve and Enhance</i>	GOOD <i>Conserve</i>
	Moderate	POOR - MODERATE <i>Enhance and Restore</i>	MODERATE <i>Enhance</i>	MODERATE - GOOD <i>Conserve and Enhance</i>
	Poor	POOR <i>Restore/Create</i>	POOR - MODERATE <i>Enhance and Restore</i>	MODERATE <i>Enhance</i>
		Weak	Moderate	Strong

Strength of Landscape Character

The recommended landscape management strategy is **conservation**. Emphasis should be given to protecting important features to ensure that the condition of the landscape and strength of character remains high.

Recommendations

- Conserve areas of heathland through management of scrub and bracken to prevent encroachment within country parks and other areas where appropriate.
- Retain and enhance the balance of woodland and open areas of heathland to provide variety and interest.
- Conserve the heritage and landscape features on high ground through appropriate management.
- Protect the rural character of the landscape ensuring that new tourism developments are sensitive, in keeping with the rural environment and do not introduce urbanising influences.
- Preserve the small linear characteristics of the local villages and retain their wooded boundaries. The use of stone and thatch within building construction should be promoted.
- Promote new woodland planting around fringes of farmsteads, villages and car parking facilities to reduce their influence on the landscape.
- Conserve and promote the installation of new stone walls around woodland planting areas.
- Protect the ageing stock of specimen trees within Bradgate Country Park and along roads within the character area and where possible, replant to ensure the continuation of this feature.
- Preserve the informal character of the country parks.

