

Landscape Character Description

This landscape character area is in the north western part of Charnwood Forest and is bordered by Whitwick and Thringstone to the west and Shepshed to the north. It is characterised by distinctive landscape features such as rocky outcrops, pockets of heathland, heavily wooded slopes and a high proportion of dry stone walls.

The landform is strongly rolling with numerous knolls, exposed plateaux and sheltered valleys. The rocky outcrops often form distinctive scarp ridgelines, although in places they are surrounded by clumps of woodland and are not visible during the summer months. Between the plateaux are broad valleys which have a high woodland content. Plateaux are open and exposed and are often topped by rocky outcrops with pockets of heathland and gorse, such as at Ives Head and Warren Hills, open access land to the immediate north of Whitwick.

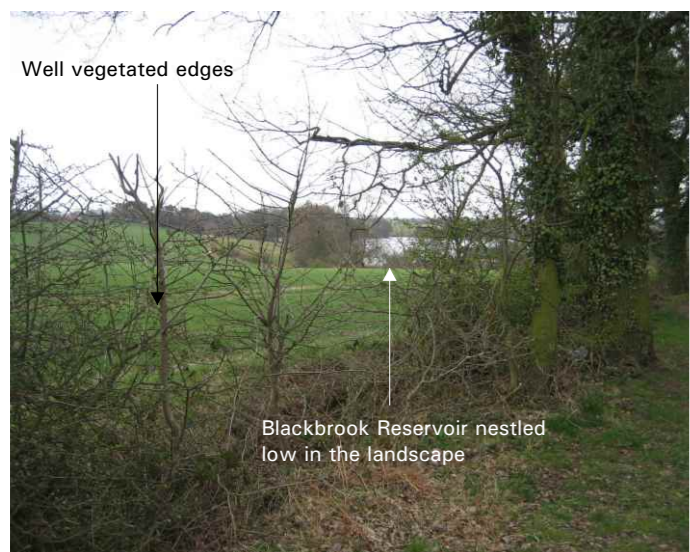
Land use in the area is mixed. It is predominantly pastoral farming and rough grazing in large fields on higher ground. A small proportion of arable farming occurs on the lower slopes in the valleys and is concentrated within the northern fringes of the character area. Blackbrook Reservoir is to the north of the character area and forms a local feature. It is nestled into the landscape and has wooded boundaries which reduce its prominence within the wider landscape.

Field pattern varies depending on the topography. On higher ground fields tend to be irregularly shaped and of a medium to large size. There is a very high proportion of dry stone walling, although in localised areas many are in need of restoration. In the valleys the fields have a regular pattern and are smaller in size.

Hedgerows in these locations are more common although there are some dry stone wall boundaries around woodlands. The hedgerows are well maintained and generally in good condition with only localised evidence of fragmentation.

Hydrology is limited to a few small well vegetated streams meandering through the landscape and Blackbrook Reservoir which is recessive in the landscape due to its well wooded edges.

High ground offers long views over the surrounding landscape and urban areas, particularly towards Shepshed and the flatter agricultural landscape beyond, and also over Bardon Hill and the industrial areas around Coalville and Ibstock. Views from the valleys are channelled and restricted by the landform and woodland. From these areas the landscape feels remote due to the absence of built form within views. There are some views up to pockets of heath and gorse around exposed rocky outcrops.



Part of the M1 motorway is within the character area. The motorway is mostly within a cutting and is not a prominent feature in the landscape. The A512 Ashby Road is a prominent feature in the northern part of the character area.

Woodland and Tree Cover

The character area contains a patchwork of dense woodland and open farmland. Woodland is mixed and includes clumps in fields, linear strips and shelter belts, coniferous and mixed plantation blocks and deciduous semi-natural woodland. Woodland tends to be mature and is prominent on ridgelines. Clumps of woodland are sometimes on knolls and surround rocky outcrops. These outcrops are only visible in the winter months when the outline is visible on the skyline through the woodland. Hedgerow trees are infrequent, although in some places there are trees along wall and hedge boundaries. Scrub follows the sinuous line of the streams through some low lying fields and is present in some heathland on higher ground.

Built form in the landscape

Built form is minimal in this character area with only a scattering of farmsteads, large individual properties and small hamlets such as Oaks in Charnwood. The larger settlements of Thringstone, Whitwick and Shepshed are along the western and northern fringes. They appear indistinct in the landscape due to mature woodland on higher ground around their fringes.

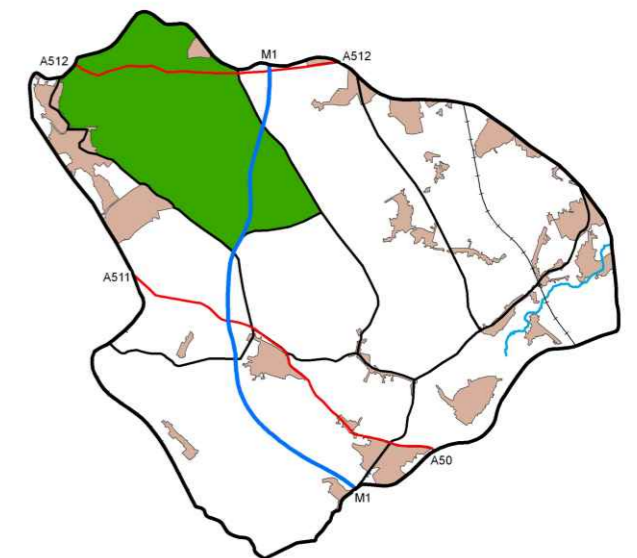
The backdrop to development is predominantly wooded and buildings are not generally visible on the skyline, but appear nestled amongst trees. Glimpsed views of the pitched roofline of buildings are often all that is visible in the landscape. The church at Oaks in Charnwood is visible through mature woodland and Mount St Bernard Abbey is visible amongst trees along Abbey Road and Oaks Road. The ruins of Grace Dieu Priory and the Grace Dieu Manor School are localised features set within mature woodland.

Built development includes a mix of granite, red brick and render finished buildings. Scattered farmsteads and older buildings within the landscape are more commonly constructed from granite. Roofs tend to be constructed using slate with Swithland slate being common; newer properties use dark grey tiles. This dull colour ensures that built development appears recessive in the landscape. Boundaries to the majority of properties are formed by granite walls both of a rubble style and as dry stone walls. Ornamental hedgerows are often located behind these walls on slightly higher ground.

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KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Rocky outcrops surrounded by gorse, heath and scrub
- Woodland clumps around rocky outcrops on high ground
- Rolling farmland with a high woodland content
- Enclosure varies from long and open views on the high topography to a strong sense of enclosure in the wooded valleys
- Field enclosure is usually dry stone walls
- Built form is limited to small hamlets and individual farmsteads nestled into the well wooded landscape
- Larger settlements located along the western fringes tend to be on lower slopes and surrounded by mature woodland on higher ground



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Ongoing Pressures Likely to Effect Change

Farming management styles have a direct effect on the landscape. Hedgerow management and drystone wall maintenance is important in this landscape and is often dependent on farm management.

The M1 runs through the character area and pressure may arise in the future through infrastructure improvements which may increase the motorway's prominence within the landscape. Noise, large buildings and structures associated with quarrying can impact on surrounding landscapes. This particularly affects rural areas where its peaceful character is disrupted and where structures are incongruous and visually prominent. Expansion of this industry may affect landscape character of the surrounding area. There are several large quarries adjacent to this character area although there is only one small quarry which is south of the A512 at Shepshed and is well screened by woodland.

Green Infrastructure

Green infrastructure in the area includes footpaths and small lanes which are useful for cycling. The only long distance path is the Ivanhoe Way located in the south western corner. There are other public footpaths through the wooded farmland and good links out from Whitwick and Thringstone. There is the opportunity to augment existing well used footpath links to increase accessibility to areas used for informal recreation from urban centres such as Shepshed, Thringstone and Whitwick.

The M1 forms a restrictive boundary through the landscape and limits accessibility across the motorway, however road bridges passing under and over the motorway enable routes for cyclists.

Ability of the Landscape to Accommodate Change

LANDSCAPE STRENGTH

Strength of the landscape is considered to be **strong**. The fringes of the area are urban to the north and west and have a localised effect on the character area, however, vegetated boundaries reduce their influence. The majority of the character area contains distinctive and characteristic features which create a strong sense of place.

LANDSCAPE CONDITION

The landscape condition is considered to be **good**. The landscape features, such as the walls and hedgerows, are generally intact and create a strong pattern in the landscape. There is some evidence of dry stone walls which require management. This should be monitored and where possible repairs undertaken to ensure the condition of this distinctive landscape is maintained.

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

The recommended landscape management strategy is **conservation** to ensure maintenance of high quality landscape and retention of landscape features.

Recommendations

- Conserve the integrity of key features such as the woodland, rocky outcrops, areas of heathland and strong landscape pattern formed by the dry stone walls and hedgerows.
- Conserve the open exposed heathland areas with rocky outcrops, ensure that management practices are in place to contain and prevent scrub establishment.
- Enhance the dry stone walls as landscape features through repair of existing damaged walls and creation of new ones where possible. Future opportunities may arise through schemes to restore former quarry sites.
- Conserve the wooded nature of the character area and the appearance of built form nestled in the landscape. Built form should also retain its scattered and small form. The strongly defined and vegetated edges of larger settlements should be retained and augmented through new planting.
- Ensure that new open spaces reflect the nature of the area through including small rocky outcrops and woodland, and encouraging heathland establishment on slopes and higher ground.
- Ensure the retention of mature hedgerow trees and encourage land owners to provide new hedgerow tree planting to ensure the long-term retention of these features.
- Continue careful management of the area's well used footpaths to retain their informal character and prevent footpath erosion and damage to vegetation in close proximity.

