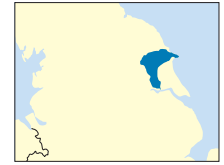


Yorkshire Wolds



Key Characteristics

- Prominent escarpment and foothills rising from the Vales of York and Pickering and falling to the plain of Holderness.
- Defined by the presence of the Chalk but with small areas of Jurassic rocks along the western fringe.
- Remnants of unimproved or semi-improved chalk grassland in steep-sided dry valleys, often defined by a hedge at the break of slope and sometimes showing signs of scrub encroachment.
- Important archaeological remains with a particular concentration of prehistoric earthworks including burial mounds.
- A large-scale landscape of rounded, rolling hills, with big skies and long views from the escarpment and plateaux, contrasting with the more enclosed, sheltered valleys.
- Fertile, chalky soils supporting mainly arable farming.
- Pattern of large, regular fields crossed by drove ways and enclosure roads with wide verges, resulting mainly from late Parliamentary enclosure.
- A generally lightly settled landscape with predominantly brick - but sometimes chalk and pantile - buildings, large scattered farmsteads on high ground, small villages in valleys, and small market towns at the fringes.
- High chalk cliffs where the outcrop reaches the coast at Flamborough Head.
- Limited extent of woodland, mainly confined to steep slopes, escarpments and the hills formed from Jurassic rocks.
- Parkland and estate landscapes with large country houses, estate villages and estate woodlands.

Landscape Character

The Yorkshire Wolds are a predominantly chalk landscape rising in a prominent escarpment from the Vale of York to the west and the Vale of Pickering to the north. From high points above the scarp, the landscape of rolling hills falls away gently to the east, eventually merging into the lower lying, flatter landscapes of Holderness. Along the western fringes of the Chalk outcrop two separate areas of Jurassic deposits create a series of foothills to the Wolds.

The Chalk creates a range of landscape features which give unity to the whole of the area and are reminiscent of more southerly chalk landscapes. They include the main escarpment, dry valleys and soil which is thin, dry and white when exposed by ploughing. The pale, olive tones of unimproved chalk grassland would once have been widespread but are now confined to only a few locations, on the steepest slopes of the dry valleys.



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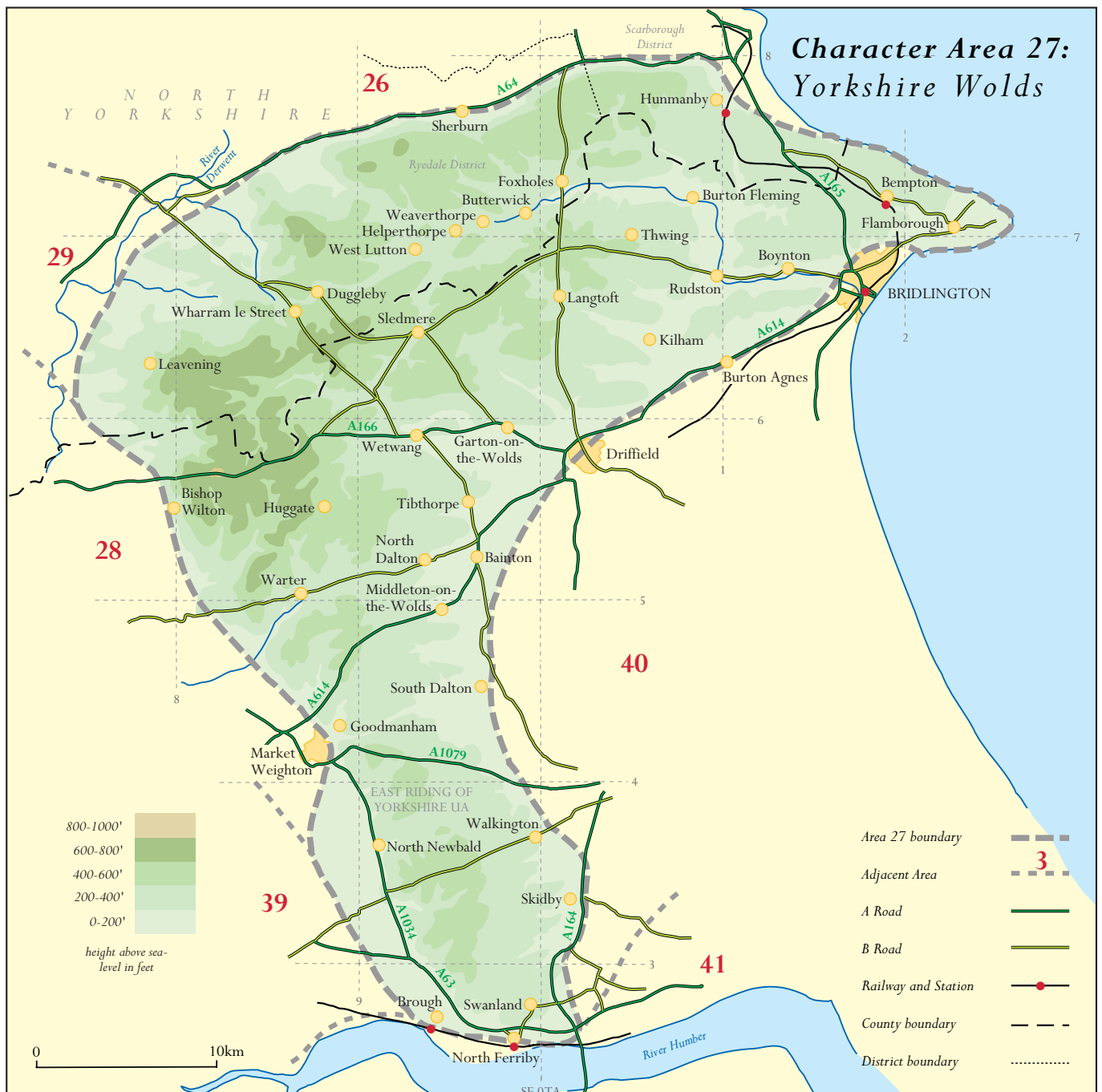
A typical Wolds view, as large arable fields bounded by low, often gappy, hedges rise gently on Thirkleby Wold.

Perhaps because it is a dry landscape, with little surface water, the Wolds are relatively sparsely populated and villages are few and far between. Those that do occur are often nestled in valleys or hollows and most have a village pond.

The unifying influence of the Chalk gives the whole of the Wolds a particularly strong identity. Variations in character within the chalk outcrop result primarily from differences in land form and the way that this, in turn, has influenced land management. The Chalk escarpment facing west to the Vale of York and north to the Vale of Pickering is broad and sinuous. In some places it is intensively farmed but elsewhere woodlands create variety, especially where valleys cut into the scarp. Where the escarpment turns to run due south, it is particularly complex and well wooded with a strong sense of enclosure.

Below the scarp, distinctive areas of foothills occur north and south of Market Weighton. They are formed from rocks of Jurassic age. Compared with the adjacent chalk landscape, the foothills are characterised by smaller fields, a higher proportion of woodland, and the occurrence of villages built of stone. The close proximity of the escarpment creates a feeling of enclosure in the landscape, heightened by the smaller-scale field systems.

High on the Wolds plateau the landscape is large-scale and generally open, with big skies being a notable feature. Here the soil is obviously chalky, there are large, gently rolling, arable fields, with generally well-maintained but insubstantial hedgerows. Parliamentary enclosure of the plateau created a pattern of straight wide drove ways and enclosure roads, hedges and dispersed farmsteads. Tree and woodland cover is limited which adds to the sense of



openness. In places the plateau is dissected by prominent dry valleys, creating a particularly complex and varied landscape. The dry valleys are distinguished by the presence of chalk grassland and scrub on some steep slopes, sometimes with a sudden and conspicuous change to cultivated arable land at the break of slope. As the plateau dips eastwards the gently sloping terrain offers long views east over Holderness. In places the chalk outcrop is cut by more significant valleys. They are broad and shallow and predominantly in arable cultivation. Long established villages, strung out along the valley, are notable features and these sites have often been settled for many centuries.

At its eastern extremity the Chalk reaches the North Sea in the high cliffs of Flamborough Head. Above the cliffs there are still remnant areas of clifftop grassland but, again, the landscape is predominantly large-scale arable farmland, albeit of a more elevated, exposed character than further inland.



The Yorkshire Wolds meet the North Sea in the spectacular chalk cliffs of Flamborough Headland Heritage Coast.

Physical Influences

The dominant physical influence on the landscape is the presence of the underlying Chalk. This creates the typical, chalky soils and the characteristic landform of scarp and dip-slope. The latter falls away to the east in a gentle, rolling plateau cut by numerous, branching, dry valleys.

The Jurassic rocks running along the western edge provide a contrast, forming a secondary escarpment. Here the underlying rocks are a mixture of mudstones, limestones and sandstones with some overlying glacial boulder clay, sands and gravels. North of Market Weighton these underlying rocks are folded, creating a complex area of foothills, while further south the landform is a more straightforward escarpment. Deposits of cover sands in this

southern area create light sandy soils which can only be successfully cultivated with high levels of fertiliser input. Some of these areas therefore support relict heathland with birch, oak and planted Scots Pine woods.

Historical and Cultural Influences

The fertile chalk soils, good grazing and light tree cover of the Wolds combined with the availability of stone suitable for making tools, made this an attractive area for early Neolithic settlers. There is evidence of widespread settlement at that time, in the remains of burial mounds as well as defensive and boundary structures. The Wolds are very rich in prehistoric earthworks with numerous important Bronze Age and Iron Age sites, especially in the Great Wold Valley and around Rudston. There were then recurrent periods of settlement in Roman, Saxon, Danish and Norman times. Many medieval villages occurred on the Wolds but were deserted and disappeared eventually due to movement of population and changes in land use. Remnants of medieval settlements do however remain and are of considerable interest with notable examples at Wharram Percy and Thixendale Park.

The Wolds have been continuously modified since Neolithic times. Until about 1700 AD much of the area was still unenclosed open fields, predominantly as sheep-walks and pastures. Daniel Defoe at this time likened the landscape to the more southerly chalk landscape of the Downs around Salisbury. There were few, if any, hedges or walls and virtually no settlement, at least on the hills and plateaux.

Parliamentary enclosure of these open field landscapes came rather later to the Wolds than to the adjacent vale landscapes of Holderness and the Vale of York. When enclosure did come, it brought many of the features of today's landscape. Hedges were planted to enclose large, regular fields. New large, brick built farmsteads appeared scattered across the open farmland and well away from traditional villages and roads. Because of their exposed position they were often surrounded by distinctive shelterbelts, sometimes planted in an H shape. New, straight, wide, drove roads were built with wide grass verges. All of these features can still be seen today.

More recently a growing emphasis on intensive cereal production has meant that some of the hedges, introduced in the Parliamentary enclosure period, have been removed returning the landscape to the open character of earlier centuries though now under cereals rather than sheep pasture. Sheep farming, however, is now returning in some parts.

Buildings and Settlement

Patterns of settlement and styles of building both vary to some degree between the main chalk outcrop of the Wolds and the area of the Jurassic hills.



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The Wolds are a generally lightly settled landscape. Scattered farmsteads, many with sheltering woodlands, often occupy prominent positions above villages, such as Newbold, which tend to be in more sheltered locations

In the Wolds the absence of surface water has meant that most significant settlements have been established around the fringes, along the spring lines to west and east, especially in the Great Wold Valley. The presence of ponds was at one time essential for the survival of the valley villages and a number of examples of these ponds remain. The villages are usually predominantly brick-built, with pantile roofs, although limestone is also sometimes used in the west. Chalk also appears in many older buildings notably near Flamborough Head which is one of the few areas where the chalk is hard enough for building. There are also estate villages, many with prominent churches, associated with the estates and landscaped parks developed in the Wolds in the 18th and 19th centuries, such as Sledmere and Warter. Outside the villages the scattered, imposing, brick farmsteads built on the plateau in the Parliamentary enclosure period, are typical features.

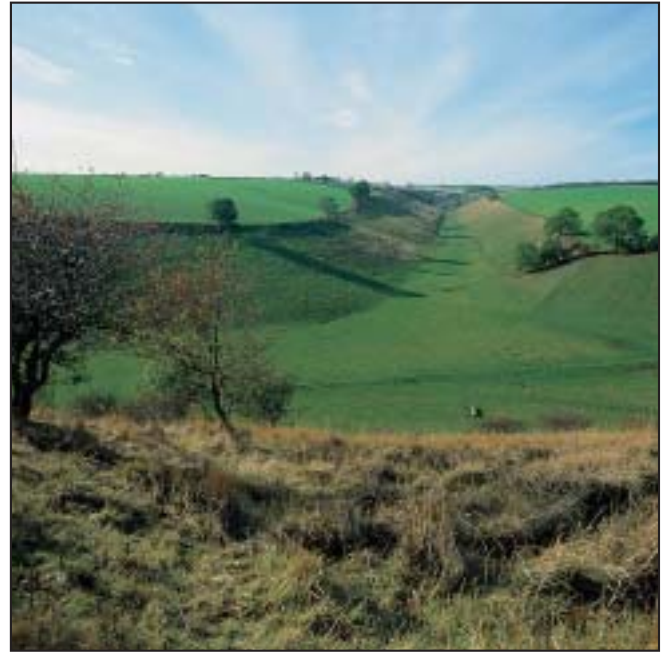
The villages in the narrow belt of Jurassic foothills are predominantly stone built. The traditional vernacular style of building here is limestone with red brick detailing and red pantiles. Many of the villages have particular strength of character because of the combination of traditional stone buildings with mature trees and old features such as market crosses, greens and dry stone boundary walls.

Land Cover

The well drained productive chalk soils mean that this landscape is dominated by arable farming. Fields are large and bounded by well-trimmed hawthorn hedges dating from the Parliamentary enclosure period. Hedgerow trees are relatively sparse but where they do occur include ash, beech, oak and sycamore.

Woods are also limited but the tall, mature, shelter belts, associated with the brick farmsteads, are important features emphasising skylines and landform. Long-established semi-natural woodland is largely confined to steep slopes in dry valleys, to some parts of the escarpment, and to the area of the Jurassic hills.

Unimproved chalk grassland is today quite limited in extent, confined to steep, dry, valley slopes, road verges, sea cliffs, quarries and road and rail cuttings. Many areas are of ecological importance. In the Jurassic hills remnants of heath and dry acid grassland also occur on the deposits of blown sand.



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The western and northern escarpment of the Yorkshire Wolds rises steeply from the Vales of York and Pickering. It is dissected by steep-sided dry valleys such as seen here at Battrel's Nose in Thixendale, where unimproved or semi-improved chalk grassland creates a habitat of high nature-conservation value.

The Changing Countryside

- Since the second world war there has been a progressive change from a more mixed farming system, with large flocks of sheep still playing an important role, to a system where arable farming dominates. There is also a move towards intensive livestock rearing and extensive outdoor pig farming is becoming increasingly apparent. New crops, such as linseed and pick-your-own crops, are appearing and will begin to affect the patterns and colours of the fields in the landscape.
- Intensification of arable farming has several potential consequences for the landscape. There is continuing loss of chalk grassland which further reduces an already small area and also causes further fragmentation. Disappearance of sheep flocks means that the remaining chalk grassland cannot be grazed and so scrub grows over it, threatening its traditional appearance and wildlife value. The high

level of chemical input, for example in intensive potato growing, can cause pollution of the chalk aquifer. Agricultural and other abstraction of water causes low flows in rivers and spring fed mires and the disappearance of seasonal chalk 'winterbournes'. Some archaeological sites are affected by soil erosion and deep ploughing.

- Hedges and hedgerow trees still remain an important feature of the landscape but in some places they are over-managed, becoming low cut and gappy, while elsewhere they are suffering from lack of appropriate management. In places there has also been inappropriate tree planting which is out of keeping with the character of the landscape.
- Development pressures occur in and around existing settlements and there is also pressure for extension of chalk quarries which could increase as restrictions on mineral extraction in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty become firmer. Over the years development of caravan sites and other types of tourist provision has affected the coastal landscape, although the issue now is more one of improving existing sites rather than accommodating new ones.

Shaping the Future

- The Wolds have a clear pattern which results from the interaction of a distinctive chalk landscape with the influences of agricultural land use and historic patterns of settlement. The maintenance and enhancement of this pattern needs to be considered for the future. The remnants of chalk grassland are exceptionally important and the scope to recreate new areas, and conserve those that exist, has already been recognised.
- Conservation and enhancement of other characteristic features such as archaeological sites, the wide verges of drove roads, hedges and woodlands (including both shelter belts and semi-natural woodland on steep slopes) is also important.
- The pattern and style of buildings and settlements is distinctive and needs to be addressed through sympathetic planning control policies, covering both the location and design of new development.



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Percy Hall is one of several parklands and estate landscapes with large country houses, estate villages and estate woodlands, which form an important characteristic of the Yorkshire Wolds.

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Glossary

relict: surviving from a previous age; uncultivated