

A1 Northumberland Alnwick to Ellingham

Preliminary Environmental Information Report Appendix G - Landscape Character

February 2019

National Character Areas

The key characteristics of NCA2 (**Ref 8.10**) as set out in the Natural England National Character Area Profile (**Ref 8.8**) are:

- *“Arc of sandstone hills forming distinctive skyline features including the iconic monolith of Simonside, characterised by generally level tops, north-west facing scarp slopes and craggy outcrops.*
- *Exceptional panoramic views of the coast and across the lowland Cheviot Fringe to the Cheviots and Scotland.*
- *Heather and grass moorland provides rough grazing on the upper slopes and broad tops of the ridges, interrupted by large geometric conifer plantations, giving way to improved pasture and cropping on lower slopes and valley bottoms.*
- *A mixture of piecemeal and regular enclosure, bounded by drystone walls but often broken up by coniferous shelterbelts and blocks, especially in areas of regular enclosure.*
- *Wide valleys of the Coquet and Aln rivers pierce the arc of hills, containing remnant native woodland and a patchwork of wet pastures and arable fields, often with steep-sided bluffs and fed by incised tributaries.*
- *Wet peaty flushes, mires, loughs, lakes and small reservoirs occur throughout the area.*
- *Broadleaved woodland is associated with rivers, burns, loughs, scarp slopes and country house estates.*
- *Nationally and internationally important species including Atlantic salmon, brook and river lamprey, otter, water crowfoot, hen harrier, peregrine, merlin, ring ouzel, black grouse, whinchat, golden plover, dunlin, curlew, nightjar and red squirrel.*
- *A number of large country houses set in extensive gardens and parklands with associated broadleaved woodland fringe the lower slopes.*
- *Important and complex archaeological landscape, with prehistoric ‘cup and ring’ marked rocks, bronze-age burial cists, earthwork remains of later iron-age hill fort systems, standing stones, enclosures and cairns, extensive medieval remains, bastles and castles such as Alnwick Castle, and evidence of quarrying.*
- *Scattered pattern of individual isolated farmsteads and small hamlets, served by the main market town of Alnwick and smaller service centre of Rothbury. Buildings constructed from locally quarried dressed or rubble sandstone, with slate roofs.*
- *Tranquil, rural landscape with low population and a few strategic major roads but with increasing numbers of vertical structures such as communications masts and wind turbines prominent on the skyline.*
- *Moorlands, forests and sandstone outcrops provide important recreational opportunities for activities such as walking, biking, climbing and wildlife watching.”*

The key characteristics of NCA 1 (**Ref 8.9**) as set out in the Natural England National Character Area Profile (**Ref 8.8**) are:

- *“Narrow, low-lying coastal plain with wide views east of the coast and out to sea, and west to the Northumberland Sandstone Hills and Cheviots.*
- *Carboniferous sandstones, limestones and shales characterise much of the area with Whin Sill intrusions producing dramatic landscape features such as the coastal cliffs at Bamburgh and the Farne Islands and distinctive inland local landmarks, and supporting rare, semi natural Whin grasslands.*

- *Diverse coastal scenery with the ‘hard’ coast of spectacular high cliffs, offshore islands and rocky headlands contrasting with the ‘soft’ coast of sweeping sandy bays, sand dunes, mudflats and salt marsh.*
- *The rivers Tweed, Aln and Coquet, as well as numerous smaller watercourses, meander across the coastal plain to the sea.*
- *Farmed landscape of predominantly large, open arable fields and permanent pasture, with some remnant semi-natural grassland in the valleys and coastal fringes. Fields are bounded by low, often fragmented hedgerows, grey sandstone walls and post-and-wire fences.*
- *Limited woodland cover confined to small but prominent blocks and shelterbelts adjacent to farmsteads and settlements, with larger areas of mixed broadleaved woodland in the river valleys and around the Howick estate.*
- *Holy Island, the Farne Islands and stretches of coast including the estuaries support internationally important habitats, bird populations and grey seals.*
- *Prominent and distinctive medieval castles, fortifications and religious buildings reflect the historic importance of ecclesiastical influences and the strategic defence of the coast and Anglo-Scottish border.*
- *Long history of mineral extraction including whinstone, sandstone and limestone quarrying, and open cast coal mining to the south-west of Berwick-upon-Tweed.*
- *Dispersed pattern of isolated large-scale farmsteads, small nucleated villages, fishing villages and small coastal resort towns, with buildings often single storey and commonly constructed from local sandstone with roofs of blue slate or red clay pantiles.*
- *Coastal trails, wildlife and historic sites attract large numbers of visitors to this popular area of coast, with access provided by the A1 and East Coast Main Line.”*

Regional Landscape Character Areas

The key characteristics of Farmed Coastal Plain LCT are given as:

- *“Open, coastal location, although sea views are not always possible.*
- *Gently rolling or almost flat farmland, dominated by large arable fields.*
- *Generally low-lying, with some small hills and raised plateaux.*
- *Intensive farmland, often with weak field boundary pattern.*
- *Occasional wooded estates.*
- *Large farmsteads comprising traditional and modern buildings.*
- *Belts of coniferous shelterbelts and deciduous woodland.”*

The character of 3c Rock LCA are described in further detail:

- *“This area is similar to 3b, but is generally more wooded. The transition is gradual, but this area is characterised by coniferous shelterbelts and deciduous woodland strips. Hedgerows are more common, although their condition remains variable. Belts of Scots pine are a distinctive feature. Estate influences occur at Rock House and Howick Hall, resulting in a more intimate landscape experience.”*

The key characteristics of Outcrop Hills and Escarpments LCT are given as:

- *“Flat-topped elongated ridges and rounded sandstone hills.*
- *Distinctive steep scarp faces forming stepped, often dark, skyline silhouettes.*
- *Open plateau and gentle dip slopes clothed in heather moorland, acidic grassland mosaic, coniferous forestry and peat bog/mires.*

- Steeper slopes and craggy outcrops with bracken, heather and broadleaved woodland.
- Wet pastures and semi-improved pastures on lower slopes.
- Rich muted colours and textures.
- Little or no habitation but significant archaeological remains.
- Water bodies including natural loughs and reservoirs.
- Extensive pasture grazed by sheep and cattle.
- Landscape is very open, broken up by small conifer plantations.”

The character of 8c Charlton Ridge LCA are described in further detail:

“A large tract of open upland landscape. Although plateau like, the landform is never flat. It is gently rolling at the north-west and becomes more dramatically undulating towards the south-east where there is an accompanying reduction in landscape scale. Predominant land use is extensive pasture grazed by sheep and cattle. Enclosure is infrequent and often consists only of wire fences. Consequently, the landscape is very open, broken up only by numerous, relatively small and generally rectilinear conifer plantations. The area is crossed by a small number of single track roads and footpaths.”

The key characteristics of Lowland Rolling Farmland LCT are given as:

- *“Undulating agricultural landscape with rich soils under predominantly arable cultivation.*
- *Generally little tree cover, with occasional small-scale woodlands and plantations.*
- *Medium-scale parliamentary enclosure landscape.*
- *Field enclosure by hedgerows, with frequent hedgerow trees, has become fragmented in many places.*
- *Trunk roads and prominent road alignments exert a strong influence.*
- *Locally important estate influences, with woodland, and estate villages.”*

The character of 38a Longframlington are described in further detail:

“This character area occupies undulating, relatively high ground bordering the coastal plain between the AIn and Coquet valleys. Rectilinear field units are bounded by hedgerows originating from the parliamentary enclosures. Sizeable coniferous plantations can be found around Swarland and north of Shilbottle. Although the last colliery closed in the late 1990s, coal mining was formerly a significant presence in this landscape, with collieries at Shilbottle, Whittle and Longframlington. Although full restoration is yet to have been completed, there is little physical evidence of this industry now. Other former industrial activity included lime and tile manufacturing.”

The characteristics of 38b Longhorsley are described in further detail:

“This area has a strong enclosure pattern and an intricate network of small settlements, farmsteads, hedgerow trees and woodlands. Around Longhorsley, field sizes are smaller and patterns are less regular, indicating that they are older, possibly medieval. The fertile farmland of the area is cut by two major roads, the A1 and A697, which exert a significant influence on the landscape through severance and visual and aural intrusion.”

The key characteristics of Coastal Incised Valley LCT are given as:

- *“Shallow valleys cutting through the coastal plain, with meandering rivers.*
- *More sheltered than the surrounding coastal plain, with restricted views.*
- *Arable farming, with pasture and woodland in steeper areas.*
- *Villages and larger settlements, as well as farmsteads and cottages*

- *Transport links and infrastructure, such as the East Coast Main Line, pass through.*
- *Long history of settlement, and good access links.”*

The character of 2a Lower Aln is described in further detail as:

“This valley is relatively deep and broad, and is steep-sided in places, such as below Denwick. There are significant blocks of coniferous forestry at Bilton Wood and along the Cawledge Burn. The urban edge of Alnwick is often prominent in views, although the large industrial buildings adjacent to the A1 are well screened. The modern settlement of Hipsburn is also unobtrusive in the landscape. The A1 and A1068 create the impression of a busy landscape, which combined with the settlements offers little tranquillity. The disused railway is used as a footpath, although unofficially as there are plans to reopen the line. The Alnwick Castle Registered Park and Garden extends into the west of the area.”

Local Landscape Character Areas

LCA 6 – North East Farmed Coastal Plain is described as:

“This is an intensively farmed landscape of predominantly open, mixed arable land with limited tree and woodland cover. Farms are typically large with a rectilinear enclosure pattern defined by gappy, close cropped hedgerows with wire fences. Grey sandstone walls provide local variation. A more wooded and intimate enclosed landscape is experienced locally around Embleton and the Howick estate. The A1 and the east coast mainline railway run through this character area, roughly parallel to the coast although these are not prominent due to screening landform and vegetation. Topography slopes gradually from west to east and the area enjoys views to both the sea and the fell sandstone uplands. Occasional but distinctive mature shelterbelts of beech or pine are important local features in this open landscape. The settlement pattern consists of mainly dispersed farmsteads and small nucleated settlements such as Longhoughton, Embleton, North Charlton and Rennington.”

The key characteristics of LCA6 – North East Farmed Coastal Plain are given as:

- *“Open, gently undulating mixed arable farmland with occasional small woodlands and shelterbelts;*
- *Dispersed farmsteads and compact villages; and*
- *Relatively large fields with weak enclosure.”*

LCA 11 – Charlton Ridge is described as:

“A large tract of open upland landscape. Although plateau like, the landform is never flat. It is gently rolling at the north-west and becomes more dramatically undulating towards the south east where there is an accompanying reduction in landscape scale. Predominant land use is extensive pasture grazed by sheep and cattle. Enclosure is infrequent and often consists only of wire fences. Consequently, the landscape is very open, broken up only by numerous, relatively small and generally rectilinear conifer plantations. The area is crossed by a small number of single track roads and footpaths. The influence of woodland near Alnwick gives an increasing sense of enclosure. Settlement within this landscape is limited to scattered farmsteads. There are long distance views across to the Cheviot Hills in the west.”

They key characteristics of LCA 11 – Charlton Ridge are given as:

- *“Open large-scale upland sandstone ridge, which becomes more complex and smaller scale undulating landform in the south east;*
- *Moorland and rough pasture with little enclosure; and*
- *Simple composition fragmented by blocky coniferous plantations.”*

The following landscape character area is also present within the 5km study area:

LCA 7 – Low Aln Valley is described as:

“This is a fertile valley landscape with human influences dating back to pre-historic times. The landscape is influenced by the extensive ownership of the Duke of Northumberland including the distinctive townscape of Alnwick and Alnwick castle, both of which stand on rising ground to the south of the river. The wider estate influence includes both the extensive walled grounds of Hulne Park and large tracts of farmland with estate farms and villages such as Denwick. Hulne Park includes parkland designed in part by Capability Brown, as well as woodland and heather moorland at higher elevations. From the outside, the miles of tall stone walled enclosure around Hulne Park are a highly visible statement of the control exerted by the estate over the land and are both a dominant and a distinctive feature. Further to the east beyond the A1 and recently developed area, the broad and gently sloping valley is predominantly cultivated for arable crops, with some significant blocks of deciduous woodland and hedgerow trees, but with an evident decline in the integrity of hedgerows. The Eastern part of this area is intersected by several elements of key infrastructure including some of the main transport routes through the area, electricity pylons and the East Coast mainline railway.”

The key characteristics of LCA 7 – Low Aln Valley are given as

- *“Enclosed and often small-scale landscape due to incised valley;*
- *Broadly meandering river Aln; and*
- *Adjacent, historic settlement of Alnwick with prominent castle and the walled grounds of Hulne Park”*

LCA18 Longframlington / Shibottle Rolling Farmland LCA is described as:

“This character area occupies undulating relatively high ground on the coastal plain between the Aln and Coquet valleys. The dominant influence is agriculture, characterised in the main by regular and rectilinear field units bounded by hedgerows and hedgerow trees originating from the parliamentary enclosures. Agriculture is mixed, though arable is predominant, particularly towards the east. Sizeable coniferous plantations can be found around Swarland and north of Shibottle. Ancient woodland is also found around Rugley and Swarland”.

“Intensification of agriculture is causing an ongoing decline in hedgerow condition, particularly around arable crops where functional enclosure is not required. Although the last colliery closed in the late 1990’s, coal mining was formerly a significant presence in this landscape, with collieries at Shibottle, Whittle and Longframlington. Although full restoration is yet to have been completed, there is little physical evidence of this industry now. Other former industrial activity included lime and tile manufacture. The character area is bisected by the A1 trunk road, East Coast Mainline Railway and electricity pylons. Settlement in this character area comprises numerous scattered farmhouses and clusters of settlements including the villages of Longframlington, Swarland, Newton on the Moor and Shibottle.”



The key characteristics of 18 Longframlington / Shilbottle Rolling Farmland LCA are given as:

- *“Medium scale parliamentary enclosure landscape bisected by the A1;*
- *Undulating high ground between the AIn and Coquet valleys; and*
- *Predominantly arable with declining hedgerow condition.”*