

Arden

Part one: Landscape assessment

Introduction

The region known as Arden is an area of former wood pasture and ancient farmlands lying on the eastern side of the Birmingham plateau. Traditionally regarded as the land between the river Tame and the river Avon in Warwickshire, Arden type landscapes also extend into north Worcestershire.

Although there are few dramatic physical features, the Arden countryside has an intimate, historic character with a strong sense of unity. Brick and timber are the chief building materials throughout the area and the many farmsteads and hamlets blend subtly with their surroundings. This is Shakespeare's 'Forest of Arden', historically a region of woodlands and 'waste', which remains today one of the more wooded parts of the Midlands.

Physical

The name Arden is derived from the old British word '*Ardu*' meaning 'high land'. This relates primarily to the northern and central parts of the region that lie across the main Severn-Trent watershed on the eastern side of the Birmingham plateau.

Human

The historical development of Arden is a major factor influencing the character of the present day landscape. In a region with few dramatic physical features it is these subtle human influences, developed over many centuries, which have created the man-made landscapes and special features that clearly distinguish Arden from other areas of the county.

Ecological

The natural vegetation of Arden is thought to have consisted of dense broadleaved woodland, dominated by oak on the light sandy soils and lime on the heavier clays and loams. Woodland clearance, from earliest times, resulted in the development of grassland and wood pasture over much of the area with heath-land on the poorer, leached soils. Marshland occurred in low-lying areas along rivers and streams. All of these habitats have been greatly influenced by land-use history and no large areas have survived. The sites of greatest ecological interest today are those that retain remnants of these ancient vegetation types. They reflect the underlying geology and soils and make an important contribution to landscape character. Some, particularly woodlands, also form prominent visual features.

Visual

Arden is characterised by a wide range of historical and ecological features, which create a landscape of intimacy and a strong 'sense of place'. Most significantly it remains a wooded landscape with mature hedgerow oaks, ancient woodlands and historic parklands. The association with former common and heath imparts a strong sense of unity and is reflected in the widespread occurrence of heathy vegetation, particularly roadside bracken. A number of remnant commons still survive but most of the larger areas have been enclosed and are today characterised by a geometric pattern of roads and small fields. The landscape retains many ancient features, in particular a pattern of irregular fields defined by thick hedgerows; a network of narrow, winding and often sunken lanes and trackways; a dispersed settlement pattern of farmsteads and hamlets; and a wealth of antiquities including castles, fishponds and moated sites. These features are woven within a farmed landscape, which in places still remains a strong rural character.

Landscape Types

Ancient Arden

A small scale farmed landscape with a varied, undulating topography, characterised by an irregular pattern of fields and narrow, winding lanes.

Arden pastures

A small scale, enclosed landscape, often pervaded by suburban influences and characterised by small fields, typically bordered by mature hedgerow trees.

Industrial Arden

A rather variable, often run-down urban fringe landscape characterised by mining settlements, spoil heaps and pockets of farmland.

Arden parklands

An enclosed, gently rolling landscape defined by woodland edges, parkland and belts of trees.

Wooded estate lands

A well wooded estate landscape characterised by a large scale rolling topography and prominent hilltop woodlands.

Arden river valleys

Narrow meandering river corridors with riverside trees and grazing meadows.

River valley wetland

A highly modified rather degraded river valley landscape strongly influenced by sand and gravel extraction and other industrial activities.

Part two: Strategies and guidelines

Introduction

Part two of the full guidelines examines recent changes that have affected the landscape in Arden and the current issues that are likely to influence change in the future. From this a series of management strategies set out the direction that is required in order to maintain and enhance regional character and local distinctiveness. These strategies are supported by a comprehensive set of landscape guidelines that provide detailed advice for farmers, foresters, developers and highway engineers. Responsibility is also placed on planners to encourage higher standards, using persuasion, planning conditions or enforcement as necessary. The same principles apply to other organisations who play a part in managing the landscape.

The guidelines show how landscape character should be conserved, restored or enhanced and have been grouped into five topics reflecting the user groups at which they are aimed.

The guidelines should be used in conjunction with the fold out map accompanying this booklet. This shows the location of the seven landscape types identified within Arden. The map also highlights areas within each landscape type where the structure and character of the landscape are in decline. These areas, termed 'enhancement zones', are indicated by hatching on the map. They represent priority areas where resources for landscape and habitat restoration should be targeted.

Please note that these area based summaries have been heavily edited and re-ordered in order to retain a manageable length for downloads. The full guidelines are essential reading when considering the landscape character of Warwickshire and contain:

- **A description of the methodology used in developing the guidelines;**
- **Full Landscape assessment by region and character area;**
- **Description of landscape change, trends and pressures by area;**
- **General development and management guidelines;**
- **Locally appropriate species lists;**
- **List of organisations to contact for further information.**

Copies are available priced £10 each, cheques made payable to Warwickshire County Council. Please contact us at landscapecharacter@warwickshire.gov.uk for more information.