

AREA 104

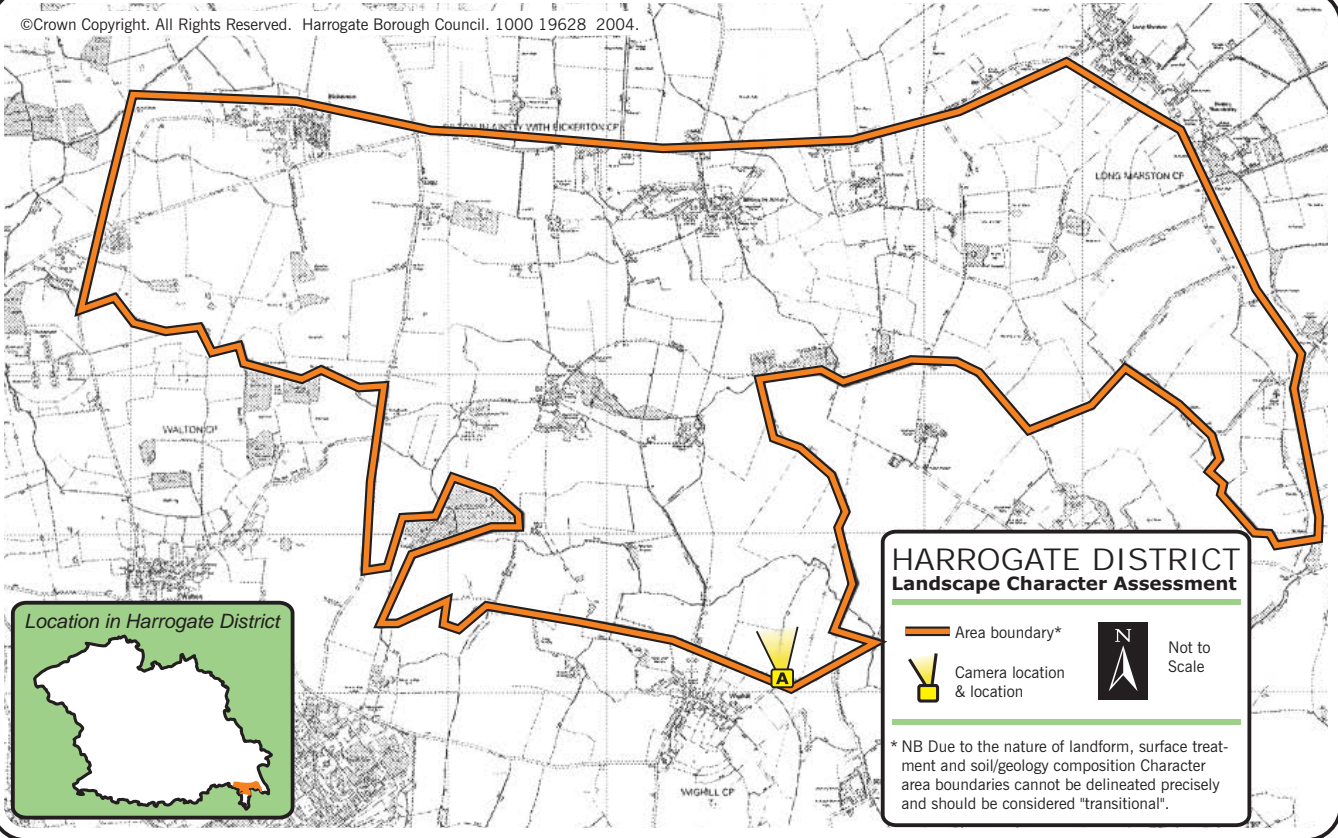
Approved
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A View north over farmland north of Wighill.



Bilton-in-Ainsty rolling farmland

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Description

This moderate scale area covers around 16.5km² and is situated in the southeast corner of Harrogate District east of Wetherby. The undulating landform slopes gently southwards towards the Wharfe valley distinguishing it from the flatter Vale of York and it includes areas outside the District boundary to the southeast (York) and southwest (Leeds).

The large country houses and estates with parkland at Bilton Hall and Bickerton Grange are set in an open and intensively farmed arable landscape. Bilton-in-Ainsty is the main settlement in the area located on the higher ground to the north. There is evidence of settlement since the Bronze Age. The church at Bilton-in-Ainsty is late Norman. The dominant traditional building material is red brown brick with slate or pantile roofs. Render and limestone buildings also feature occasionally. Materials for new housing in the villages tends to be in keeping but some of the details are not.

The area is reasonably well-wooded with extensive views from higher ground. Field boundaries consist of hedgerows with some hedgerow trees. Field size is medium to large.

Points of interest are the Park Pale (historic boundary) and the site of Priory at Syningthwaite founded by Cistercian Nuns in the late 12th century and well as the country houses and church.

The area is easily accessible by road with connections to the A1(M) in the west of the area.

Key Characteristics

Geology, soils and drainage

- Solid geology is Sherwood sandstone overlain with sandy till and till drift geology.
- Mixture of deep, fine loamy or coarse loamy, slowly permeable and well-drained brown soils.

Key Characteristics (Cont'd)

Landform and drainage pattern

- Undulating landform between 15m and 44m AOD.
- The River Foss is located on the eastern boundary of the district in this character area and drains north towards the river Ouse. The north west part of the area generally drains into the Nidd and a network of ditches drains the southern part of the area towards the Wharfe. Sike Beck collects water from the springs and lakes towards Long Marston and from Bilton in Ainsty.
- Lots of scattered ponds plus a small reservoir.

Land use, fields, boundaries, trees and wildlife

- Grade 2 agricultural land, predominantly arable with some areas of improved grass.
- Parkland remnants at Bickerton Hall (no longer in existence) and Bilton Hall.
- Fields are medium to large, bound by fragmented hedges with occasional hedgerow trees.
- Scattered trees within fields appear to follow lost field boundaries.
- Several blocks of woodland and plantations in the area including two blocks of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland at Home Farm near Syningthwaite Priory, and Nova Scotia wood.
- Some of the names of woods indicate the possibility they may be Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (if they are under 2 hectares they would not be registered nor protected as such).

Settlement, built environment and communications

- Main settlements are Bickerton and Bilton-in-Ainsty the latter has a village Conservation Area).
- Several scattered farmsteads.
- The main building materials are red brown brick with slate roofs and some Magnesian limestone and pantile roofs.
- Syningthwaite Priory and the site of Bickerton Hall plus associated fishponds are within Harrogate District. Outside the District (but within in the Character Area) is Healaugh Priory. The area has been farmed for many centuries.
- Rudgate (a Roman road) runs north to south and the B1224 York to Wetherby Road runs east to west across the character providing connections to York, the A1(M) and Wetherby.
- There are a few public footpaths and bridleways that provide pedestrian access to Bilton-in-Ainsty.

Sensitivities & Pressures

- The setting of the two villages on the higher ground in the Character Area and the villages in the neighbouring districts are sensitive to change. The influence of parkland characteristics in the area

Sensitivities & Pressures (Cont'd)

has been eroded over time and this has had an impact on the setting of the villages as well as the character which is now dominated by intensive agricultural use.

- Historic patterns and features make an important contribution to character and are sensitive to neglect. Intensive and large-scale farming practices have impacted on the historic characteristics of the landscape.
- Public access to features and places of historic interest in the area is limited.
- Woodland, hedgerows and hedgerow trees help to highlight landscape pattern on the undulating landform. Their neglect and loss will impact on the distinctive character.
- Impact of new dwellings, on vernacular in particular, in existing settlement can be detrimental.

Guidelines

Aim: To conserve and enhance the historic elements of character.

- Several hedges and field boundaries appear to be on lines of historic interest and should be preserved.
- Identify hedgerows of historic, archaeological and wildlife importance using the Hedgerow Regulations criteria.
- Encourage appropriate planting of hedgerow gaps and new hedgerow trees and the restoration of hedgerow boundaries along historic lines where they have been lost.
- Research and survey small woodland blocks (under 2 hectares) in the area to determine their origins. Where they are Ancient Semi-Natural in origin investigate methods for their protection.

Aim: To enhance woodland and tree cover to respect landscape pattern and increase diversity of land cover.

- Promote woodland management in consultation with local landowners and interested stakeholder organisations such as the Forestry Commission, the Woodland Trust and English Nature.
- Encourage the extension of small woodland blocks with appropriate native planting mixes linking with existing woodland in the area and beyond.

Aim: To preserve settlement pattern and characteristics.

- Promote the use of materials and detailing appropriate to the vernacular of the area.
- Avoid extensions to domestic curtilage that will impact upon the setting of villages and farmsteads.