

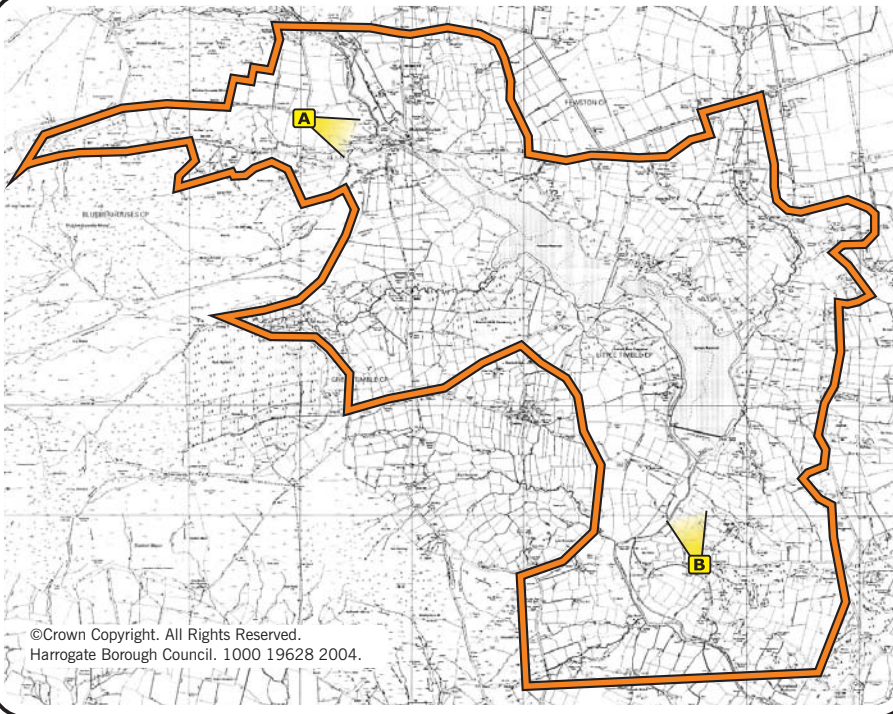
AREA 16

Approved
Feb 2004

A Looking south-east from Hall Lane.

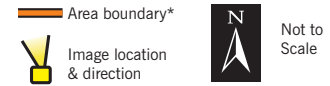


Middle Washburn Valley



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HARROGATE DISTRICT Landscape Character Assessment



* NB Due to the nature of landform, surface treatment and soil/geology composition Character area boundaries cannot be delineated precisely and should be considered "transitional".



Description

This valley landscape consists of the Blubberhouses to Norwood Bottom reach of the River Washburn and covers 18.6km². In the 19th century the river was dammed at two points to create Fewston and Swinsty Reservoirs which together have a surface area of around 1.6km² and a combined length of 4.1km.

The V-shaped valley curves around the reservoirs and has the appearance of being relatively shallow with broad, undulating sides that offer dispersed views across the water. Where the valley floor has not been flooded it is deeper and narrower with channelled views enclosed by the steep valley sides and woodland.

Large, dense conifer plantations surround the reservoirs and are in turn surrounded by a diverse pattern of field enclosures. Early enclosures are small and random in arrangement and contrast with the slightly larger, rectilinear fields typical of parliamentary enclosure and bound by stone walls. The grass fields are intensively managed.

Small hamlets and numerous hill farms and houses are scattered throughout the valley some of them built when the Washburn Textile industry was thriving. The building stone was locally quarried. The area is within the Royal Forest of Knaresborough, a former medieval hunting park. Dob Park Lodge is an early 17th century lodge on the upper valley side.

Telegraph poles are a visual detractor in the area and the conifer plantations have an adverse impact. There is a network of public footpaths including the Harrogate Dales Way Link and a permissive Right of Way around the reservoirs.

The area is a valuable resource for both local people and tourists and is within the designated Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Key Characteristics

Geology, soils and drainage

- Millstone grit solid geology overlain with till drift geology.
- Slowly-permeable, seasonally-waterlogged. Fine loamy and fine loamy over clayey soils.

Landform and drainage pattern

- Broad, V-shaped valley landform rising between 100m in the valley bottom to approximately 250m AOD.
- The River Washburn is the principal water-course flooded at two points to form Fewston and Swinsty Reservoirs.
- Thackray Beck and Spinksburn Beck are major tributaries contributing to Fewston and Swinsty Reservoirs respectively plus several minor tributaries incise the valley sides.

Key Characteristics (Cont'd)

Land use, fields, boundaries, trees and wildlife

- Improved and semi-improved grassland intensively managed for livestock.
- Small to large fields bound by stone walls of various conditions often reinforced with post and wire fencing plus some post and rail fencing.
- Very large forestry conifer plantations around the reservoirs plus Beecroft Moor Plantation.
- Deciduous clumps around settlement plus few individual trees along field boundaries.
- Ancient Semi-Natural woodland at Blubberhouses, Folly Hall Wood and Ellers Wood.
- Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation:
 - West End Meadow, waterlogged ground dominated by rushes and supporting wetland plants;
 - Fewston and Swinsty Reservoirs, open water with fringing vegetation of rushes sedges and flowering plants.
- Evidence of past quarrying for local stone for buildings and walls.

Settlement, built environment and communications

- The main settlements are Blubberhouses, Fewston, Fewston Bents and Wydra plus scattered farmsteads and houses of various sizes and a few isolated barns.
- Traditional building materials include local sandstone and stone slate roofs.
- Dob Park Lodge and Swinsty Hall are buildings of historic interest.
- The A59 Skipton Road follows part of the course of a Roman road.
- Public footpaths include the Harrogate Dales Way Link and a permissive Right of Way around the reservoirs.

Sensitivities & Pressures

- The Reservoirs are distinct, man-made features made more dominant due to the large areas of conifer plantations surrounding them.

Sensitivities & Pressures (Cont'd)

- The pastoral character of the area has been altered in the past as a result of the creation of the Reservoirs. This has led to the loss of some of the distinctiveness between the upper and middle valleys of the Washburn.
- Development pressure is limited but barn conversions and new single houses in the countryside are in demand.

Guidelines

Aim: To enhance and promote the distinctive character of the valley.

- Liaise with the Forestry Commission and Yorkshire Water in implementing the Forest Management Plan for the areas around the reservoirs. Encourage the diversification of the conifer plantations to soften their appearance.
- Maintain field pattern through the repair, restoration and management of field boundaries.
- Resist development which will impact upon field pattern and views within the area.

Aim: To preserve vernacular buildings and settlement pattern within the valley.

- Where development is allowed ensure that design conforms to vernacular.
- The many scattered farmsteads and houses in the area is a key characteristic. However, additional development, which reduces spacing between existing, should be resisted to prevent loss of scattered appearance of vernacular buildings in the countryside.

Aim: To promote understanding of the historic origins of the area and protect important historic and archaeological features.

- Further historical research would increase the knowledge of the origins of character in this area and provide information when making decisions regarding landscape change.
- Identify and protect historic features and characteristics of the area.
- Develop links with the Community Archaeology Project in the area.



Northwards from Jack Hill Lane.