

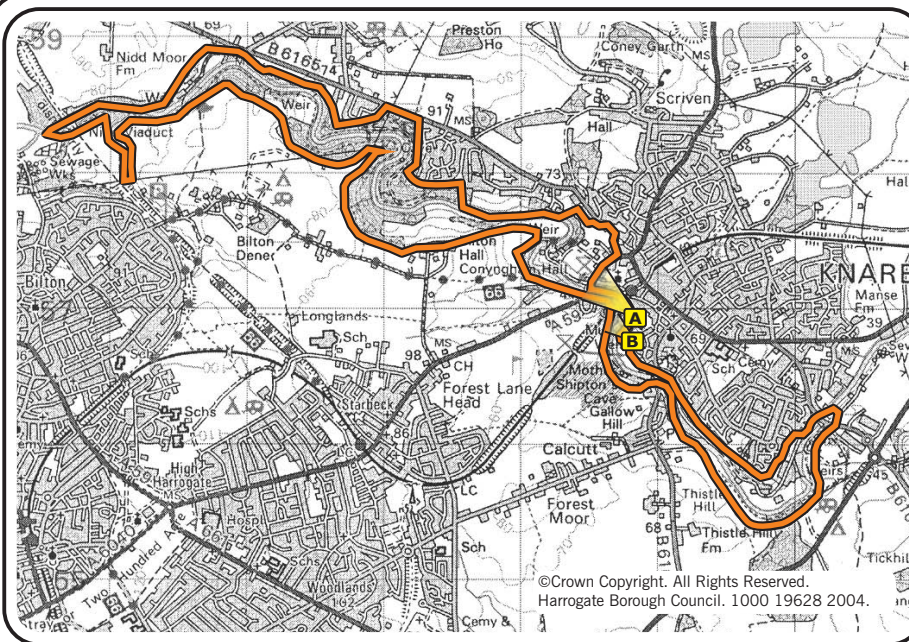
AREA 53

Approved
Feb 2004

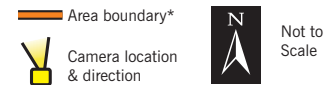
A From Knaresborough Castle showing the heavily wooded gorge.



Nidd Gorge



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 long, narrow and sinuous Character Area follows the course of the River Nidd from its confluence with the Oak Beck upstream to Gimbald Bridge downstream and covers approximately 2.6km². It is a distinctive, well-wooded steep sided valley formed during the last ice age. It marks the western boundary of Knaresborough and the eastern limits of northHarrogate/Bilton. The area is a valuable recreational resource both for local residents and visitors and is an important haven for wildlife, contributing to the biodiversity of the District.

The valley is mainly covered by deciduous woodland (some of it Ancient Semi-Natural) with pockets of coniferous planting. The trees provide a shady and intimate setting with views across the river into the historic town including the ruins of Knaresborough Castle. Other attractions are boating, Mother Shiptions Cave and High Bridge. As well as the Nidd there are several springs and Bilton Spa of hydrological interest.

Recent studies have identified over 40 sites of archaeological interest throughout the Nidd Gorge, indicating continuous human activity over 4000 years. The area contains many listed structures and features of historic importance: The 12th century Knaresborough Castle is a Scheduled Monument overlooking the gorge; Knaresborough is mentioned in the Domesday Survey (1086); St Robert's Cave, The Chapel of Our Lady in the Crag and St Johns Church are all ancient religious sites.

Three listed road bridges cross the Nidd (High Bridge is also a Scheduled Monument). In addition there are two

railway viaducts (one now disused). Knaresborough is an important crossing point of the Nidd.

A variety of building materials has been used in Knaresborough. Gritstone has been used for most of the bridges and some of the houses. Traditional roofs are a mix of Westmoreland slate, stone slate and pantiles. Magnesian limestone is the bedrock in the area at the eastern end of the gorge and has been used for building. Brown brick is also common. The character of this area owes much to its history and the buildings and structures which have resulted as well as to the dramatic landform and tree cover. The area is the subject of a Local Heritage Initiative project along with Character Areas 54 and 55.

Key Characteristics

Geology, soils and drainage

- Carboniferous sandstone and coal measures (Central and western end of the gorge)
- Magnesian limestone solid geology (Knaresborough and eastern end of the gorge)
- Alluvial drift geology deposited along the narrow gorge bottom.
- Soils are a mix of brown and surface water gley.

Landform and drainage pattern

- A steep sided valley with rock outcrops and crags of Magnesian limestone and carboniferous sandstone the River Nidd being the key water feature fed by the Oak Beck and Bilton Beck.



B Knaresborough Castle sits on the crag top.

Key Characteristics (Cont'd)

Land use, fields, boundaries, trees and wildlife

- Mainly woodland with Ancient Semi-Natural woodland at Bilton, Scotton Banks, Spring Wood and Grimbald Crag.
- Recreational use is also a strong characteristic of the area with footpaths and tourist attractions along the valley and some tourist attractions at the Knaresborough end of the gorge.
- On the southern side of the river is a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC).

Settlement, built environment and communications

- The main settlement is the urban edge of Knaresborough to the east and Bilton/north Harrogate the west. Knaresborough has a conservation area including the Nidd Gorge at Mother Shipton's Cave.
- Mother Shipton's Cave itself is situated in The Long Walk, a Registered Historic Park & Garden.
- Knaresborough occupies the eastern and central section of the gorge.
- Several public footpaths, including the Harrogate Ringway, run the length of the gorge.
- There are many valued historic features including an Iron Age Hill Fort, the railway viaduct, Conyngham Hall, Macintosh Park, St John's Church, Knaresborough Castle, House in the Rock and St Robert's Cave to name a few.

Sensitivities & Pressures

- The character of this distinctive area, important to the setting of Knaresborough and Bilton/north Harrogate, is sensitive to change. Change of use and new built form has the potential to have an adverse impact on the valued characteristics of the gorge and key views.
- There are pressures for additional tourism and recreation facilities in the area. Car parking, litter and footpath erosion resulting from recreation use all have an impact.

- Signs and information boards can detract from the intimate character
- Threats to features of historic interest as a result of development pressure as well as the natural process of erosion.
- Neglect of woodland possibly impacting on woodland diversity.
- Development resulting in a change of appearance to the local vernacular.
- Bank erosion/flooding and other river processes.

Guidelines

Aim: To preserve the distinctive character of this unique area and its buildings.

- All development proposals must fully assess impact on the character of the Gorge and its key characteristics as well as the key views into and out of the area.
- Historic buildings and structures need to be protected and preserved and restored.
- Techniques used to prevent erosion and protect properties and the public must cause minimal harm to landscape character and key characteristics and be in keeping with the varied vernacular of the area.
- River management and new recreational facilities should be of an appropriate scale without detriment to the intimate nature of the Gorge.

Aim: To reinforce wooded character

- Encourage management and reinstatement of native riverside trees and protection of Ancient Semi-Natural woodland.
- Planting native species can help to integrate development along the edge of settlements.

Aim: Protect and enhance key views in the area.

- New planting should aim to protect views of the church, Knaresborough Castle, the viaducts and other important focal points in the landscape.
- Opportunities to open up views of key features should be considered.

Aim: To protect and enhance environmental and habitat quality.

- Promote high standard of water quality in association with the Environment Agency.
- River bank erosion prevention measures should, where they are necessary, be low key and appropriate to location.
- Protect historically important features and their surroundings to maintain character and setting.