

## P2 Lower Dearne Lowland River Floor

The landscape character area classified as *C2 Lower Dearne Lowland River Floor* is an extensive flat valley floor associated with the River Dearne and two small tributaries. Outside the character area the land slopes up to form broad valley sides. The width of the valley floor varies; in some locations it is wide and in other areas, where it is pinched by sloping landform, it is narrow. The underlying geology is mainly alluvium, which has been deposited by the watercourses over middle coal measures. Areas of middle coal measures on the sides of the valley floor remain uncovered. There is also a small area of boulder clay, which was deposited by a glacier, and two small pockets of sand and gravel. The elevation of C2 is fairly constant, dropping gradually from approximately 50m AOD around much of the edge of the character area, where the ground starts to slope up at the valley sides, to approximately 15m AOD where the River Dearne flows out of the south east corner of the Borough.

Open water is present along the length of the character area in the form of the River Dearne, streams, dikes, subsidence flashes and man made lakes. The River Dearne follows a sinuous path through the valley, except for a short length in the south of C2 where it has been canalised. Some lakes and flashes are quite large, and groups of open water bodies, such as the Old Moor Wetland Centre, cover extensive areas. As well as being dominant features in the landscape, these large water bodies and surrounding washlands provide important habitats for wildlife, particularly for birds. For example, areas of land in the south of C2, around the Old Moor Wetland Centre and Broomhill Flash, are designated as nature conservation sites.

The flat landform bounded by gently sloping valley sides and scattered vegetation allows relatively open views both within and out of the character area. A diverse mixture of landuses, including housing, industry, reclaimed colliery spoil tips and farmland, can be seen outside the character area, close to the character area boundary, or higher up on the valley sides. Settlements on ridgetops in surrounding character areas dominate the skyline, bringing an urban influence to the overall character of the landscape. Views along the valleys, which are not interrupted by landform, can be open and distant.

The valley floor is covered in a diverse range of land uses, which reflect the wide range of functions the valleys have had over the years. Land use includes agriculture, recreation, residential, commercial, industry, communication, landscape renewal and nature conservation. In recent years much of the land has undergone significant change. Collieries which were located in the valley bottom, where the coal seams were closest to the surface, have now closed, and the land has mostly been reclaimed. Some of this reclaimed land has been developed, or is in the process of being developed, for commercial use. One area of land west of Grimethorpe is still being worked and is in the process of being reclaimed.

Most of the historical industrial features have been removed and the land reclaimed to create a new, immature landscape. Recent tree planting along the a newly constructed A6195, which runs along or close to the edge of the character area between Wombwell in the south and Grimethorpe in the north, contributes to the immature character of the landscape. The dismantled railwaylines that run along much of the length of C2, visible where they form embankments above the flat valley floor, and where they are covered by scrub vegetation, are signs of the past industrial activity. Small areas of scrub and trees are scattered throughout the character area, often associated with reclaimed or abandoned land, dismantled railwaylines, watercourses and newly landscaped areas.

Areas of farmland have survived the extensive industrial development, and are a reminder of the landscape that existed more widely before the industrial revolution. This farmland is now interspersed amongst, and often fragmented by, a diverse range of old and new landuses and features including reclaimed industrial land, newly developed industrial and commercial sites, roads, dismantled railwaylines and watercourses within the character area, and settlements that lie mostly outside the character area. The majority of the farmland is intensively farmed arable land, and some is pasture. Fields vary in size and shape, and are either unenclosed or bounded by degrading, gappy hawthorn hedges.

A key characteristic of C2 is its open appearance, free of substantial areas of built development. The valley floor provides an undeveloped green frame and corridor that winds its way through the more developed valley sides and hill tops in adjacent character areas. It is largely free of residential development, which is mainly located on valley sides outside the character area. In certain locations housing or commercial development protrudes into the open corridor adjacent to roads that cross the valley (e.g. where the A635 crosses the River Dearne west of Darfield, where the A628 crosses the valley west of Cudworth and where the B6096 crosses the valley between Wombwell and Darfield).

Localised clusters of new, large warehouse style buildings are prominent features in the relatively open landscape. The scale and mass of these buildings are much larger and more bulky than other buildings in the character area, or than most buildings visible in adjacent character areas. Most industrial/commercial development in C2 is quite new. However, some pockets of industry that appears to have been present for some years are present, including a large scrap yard in a spur of C2 between Carlton and Shafton Two Gates.

Linear development, mainly in the forms of roads, but also overhead power lines, is common. The valley floor has provided an open corridor for the construction of these features. The A6195 has been constructed with a number of roundabouts with spurs leading to sites on reclaimed land, indicating that the land is likely to be developed in future.