

P3 Upper Dearne Lowland River Floor

C3 Dearne Lowland River Floor is a flat valley floor associated with the River Dearne and two small tributaries to the west. The valley floor is mostly narrow but it broadens where the tributaries meet each other, where they meet the River Dearne and where the disused Barnsley canal is still present. Immediately outside the character area the land slopes up to form valley sides. The underlying geology is alluvium that was deposited by the watercourses over middle coal measures. The elevation of the character area is fairly constant, dropping gradually from 100m AOD at Silkstone in the west, to 35m AOD at the eastern boundary where it meets character area *C2 Lower Dearne Lowland River Floor* in the east.

Open water is present along the entire length of the valley floor in the form of the River Dearne, Cawthorne Dike, Silkstone Beck, a short length of the disused Barnsley Canal and small man made lakes. The River Dearne and its tributaries follow sinuous courses, with the exception of some short lengths that have been canalised.

The valley sides provide some enclosure. This is more pronounced where the valley floor is pinched between the built up areas of Barnsley and Monk Bretton on steeper valley sides. Vegetation in the form of hedgerows, ornamental planting, scrub and trees gives intermittent and localised enclosure. Views are generally restricted to parts of the valley sides and to short distances along the valley floor.

C3 Upper Dearne Lowland River Floor contains a mixture of landuses, with farmland and recreational land being most widespread. To the east of Smithy Bridge, most of the valley floor is designated for recreation as Urban Greenspace and to the west the land use is mainly farmland. Smaller pockets of land have been developed for industrial and commercial purposes. The valley floor is crossed or followed by transportation and communication corridors. Visible remnants of past activity include Monk Bretton Priory, a short section of disused canal, and occasional industrial stone buildings.

Farmland covers a large proportion of the valley floor to the west of Smithy Bridge. It consists of permanent pasture and some arable farmland. Horse grazing is evident in some riverside locations. The field pattern is irregular and sizes vary from small to large. Fields are bounded by post and wire fences and hedgerows that often contain gaps and are unmanaged. In the west of the character area, these link to larger tracts of farmland in the adjacent character areas of *E1 West Barnsley Settled Wooded Farmland* and *E2 Barnsley Settled Wooded Farmland*. Further east, the farmland is in smaller pockets that are isolated by built up areas.

The majority of the land to the east of Smithy Bridge has been restored for recreation and is designated in the Barnsley Unitary Development Plan as both Urban Greenspace and Green Belt. It contains small lakes that are used for fishing, small woodland blocks, mown grass, mature trees and a network of footpaths. It forms a green corridor between the densely built up areas on the valley sides. Two small recreational parks are also found at Darton. These consist of sports pitches and areas of mown grass interspersed with mature trees. In the character area as a whole, footpaths follow short sections of the watercourses, but there is no continuous recreational route along the valley floor.

Several major and minor roads cross the valley floor. The M1 motorway crosses at the junction of Silkstone Beck and Cawthorne Dike. It is highly visible at this location as it is situated on a raised embankment. The motorway also forms part of the western boundary of the C3 and is partially screened here by trees alongside the River Dearne. The railway line from Barnsley to Wakefield runs close to the M1 along the northern part of the character area associated with the River Dearne. Several lines of pylons run along and across the central length of the valley floor. These transportation and communication routes divide up the otherwise fairly uninterrupted, open green corridor. However, their effect on the overall character is limited, as they are narrow and vegetation provides local screening.

Small clusters of industrial and commercial building are found on the valley floor at Darton and at Old Mill where a large gas storage tank is a dominant feature despite some screening by

trees and scrub. Substantial areas of land at Old Mill are currently derelict. Residences are limited to the occasional farm building, but the valley floor is overlooked by extensive settlements in adjacent character areas on the valley sides, including Barnsley and its suburbs to the south and a broad ribbon of development between Lundwood and Kexbrough to the north.

Strips of land alongside the River Dearne and its tributaries, the disused canal and the railway line are covered with naturally occurring trees and scrub, often comprising species associated with wet ground such as willow and alder. As well as forming important characteristic elements of the landscape, this vegetation provides valuable habitat and corridors for wildlife.