

## Q2 East Dearne Settled Arable Slopes

*D2 East Dearne Settled Arable Slopes* are predominantly distinguished by both topographic and land use character. The underlying geology is a complex layering of sandstones and shales with numerous coal seams. These middle coal measures underlie the majority of the area, with fluvial processes of the River Dearne and its tributaries leaving drift alluvium deposits over the solid strata in some locations. The landform ranges from 70m AOD to 15m AOD traversing through sinuous undulations to subtle slopes that level out to an almost flat landscape in the areas of lowest elevation. This changing topography provides local variation in landscape character largely due to the varying degrees of intervisibility and sense of enclosure.

The landscape is characterised by three dominant land use patterns – agriculture, industry and landscape renewal. Their very different physical qualities and juxtaposition make for an unusual mosaic of urban and rural form.

Agriculture is predominantly intensive arable farming contained within a pattern of medium to large fields. There is often no obvious sense of enclosure due to loss of hedgerows and where intermittent boundaries occur they fragment rather than unify the farmland. Within the areas of arable farmland, dikes are a common occurrence in the south; running to meet the River Dearne on the southern boundary.

The industrial landscape is largely historic with spoil heaps, disused tips and old open cast workings providing strong visual clues to this previously thriving industrial core. Outmigration from the old mining settlements of Thurnscoe, Goldthorpe and Bolton Upon Dearne are further proof of the industrial decline experienced in this area. As well as these towns and villages, there are some smaller settlements such as Little Houghton, Middlecliffe and Billingley the latter of which has strong local material and vernacular qualities, and is designated as a Conservation Area.

Landscape renewal is evident through measures to mitigate the impacts of previous industrial activity. Reclaimed spoil heaps and large swathes of tree planting, such as those along the A6195, are all indicators of landscape restoration and provide opportunities for improved aesthetic and ecological value. This can be extended to include the disused railways cutting through the character area – providing important wildlife rides.

With the exception of pylons and some unmanaged, tall hedges, there are few vertical elements within the rural landscape. This equates to a seemingly simplistic and uniform character with little to break up the horizontal plane.