

Q3 West Dearne Settled Arable Slopes

The landscape character area classified as *D3 West Dearne Settled Arable Slopes* is underlain by middle coal measures. The complex layering of sandstones and shales with numerous coal seams, that have been eroded at different rates, has given rise to a rolling landform. The topography consists of a broad, rounded ridge, with a maximum elevation of 105m AOD at Lees Hill to the west of Ardsley. The land gently slopes towards the valley floors of the Rivers Dearne and Dove to a low point of 35m AOD in the far east of the character area. A small valley exists along the A633 at Stairfoot that contains a tributary of the River Dove. Steeper slopes are infrequent and localised.

The main land use in this character area is agriculture, punctuated by the dense settlements of Ardsley and Darfield. Other lesser land uses include commercial, industrial, landscape renewal and communication.

Agriculture is predominantly arable with occasional fields of short term ley. It is contained within a network of medium to large geometric fields. Field boundaries consist of hedgerows that are gappy and infrequently managed in places, and post and wire fences. There is a strong sense that the arable land is intensively worked; made apparent by the continued neglect of field boundaries.

Farmsteads are scattered throughout the rural parts of the landscape character area. Many have old stone buildings in various states of disrepair and some of these are currently undergoing renovation. Incongruous modern farm outbuildings and untidy areas of farm rubbish are often found next to these stone buildings.

The two large settlements found in this area sit either on the broad ridge top (Ardsley) or on the slopes from the ridge top down to the valley floor (Darfield) and so are visible from much of the character area, and from adjacent character areas. Built development on the settlement edges consists of a mixture of late 20th Century brick housing in a variety of styles and colours.

Large 20th Century warehouse style industrial or commercial buildings are found bordering the A633 at Stairfoot. These are mostly hidden from view by a depression in the landform, corresponding to a tributary of the River Dove. There is a small, reclaimed spoil heap adjacent to the Dove valley floor to the west of Darfield that has small areas of planted trees. There is a small working quarry immediately to the south of the settlement of Ardsley.

Two main roads cross the character area. The A635 runs between the settlements of Ardsley and Darfield along the top of the broad ridge. The A633 between Wombwell and Barnsley sits in a small valley and is mostly bounded by built development, so has a minimal impact on the open landscape. Road margins often consist of infrequently managed or fragmented hedgerows and degraded stone walls. A limited number of minor roads are found in this character area, most of them providing access to farmsteads. The railway line from Barnsley to Sheffield crosses the western extreme of the character area.

Poles carrying overhead wires across open land occur throughout the landscape character area. Pylons are dominant vertical elements in the east of the character area.

Mature trees are limited to infrequent clumps of deciduous trees on the valley sides, and are absent on the exposed top of the broad ridge. A small area of recently planted trees lies on reclaimed land to the west of Darfield.

There are distant views from elevated ground, occasionally interrupted by vegetation and built form. To the west are views to the suburban edge of Barnsley and landscape character area *E2 Barnsley Rolling Wooded Farmland*, and beyond that to the upland areas of the Borough. To the north and east, on the opposite side of the valley of the River Dearne (*C2 Lower Dearne River Floor*) can be seen the settlements of Lundwood, Cudworth, Grimethorpe and Great Houghton, West Haigh Wood and areas of farmland in landscape character areas *D1 North East Barnsley Settled Arable Slopes*, *D2 East Dearne Settled Arable Slopes*, and *E3 Grimethorpe*

Settled Wooded Farmland. To the south, across the Dove valley (*C4 Dove Lowland Rover Floor*), are views to the settlement of Wombwell in landscape character area *E4 Hoyland Rolling Wooded Farmland* and to land outside the Borough.