

## The Levens Parish Landscape

The Levens landscape forms part of a wider landscape described as 'Morecambe Bay Limestone'. It shares many characteristic aspects of this landscape with other areas around Morecambe Bay, such as those around the limestone outcrops at Arnside and Whitbarrow. These landscapes are not homogenous and comprise several elements, of which the Countryside Commission in 1998 listed the following:

- Conspicuous limestone ridges rising above the low lying pastures and wetlands.
- Low undulating farmland of pastures divided by dry stone walls with areas of scrub and broadleaved woodland.
- A richness of semi-natural habitats, including limestone scrub, semi-natural coppice woodland, herb-rich grasslands, peat fenlands and mosslands.
- Inland, scrub woodland and unimproved grassland on gently undulating hills divided by shallow valleys with hedgerows and damson orchards.
- Stately homes set in parkland landscapes with well-maintained gardens.

### Levens and the Cumbria Landscape Classification

Cumbria County Council has published on its website a detail account of the main types of landscape that occur within the county (<http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/planning-environment/countryside/countryside-landscape/land/Landscape.asp>).

Levens Parish falls predominantly into two landscape types, Type 3b Coastal Limestone: wooded hills and pavements and Type 8b Main Valleys: Broad valleys. The more detailed description of these landscape types and their vulnerability is given below.

#### Type 3b Coastal Limestone: wooded hills and pavements

**General description** – A landscape of low, rolling wooded hills pasture and mainly drained mossland, terminating in attractive and varied coastal and estuarine features including cliffs. The pasture is divided into small to medium sized fields bounded by stone walls and hedges. A complex of narrow winding lanes, enclosed by high hedges threads through the area. Woodland cover is extensive and includes former coppice woodland as well as some natural yew woods.

**Subjective impression** – A generally intimate, small scale, enclosed landscape but becoming larger scale and more open in places. With its pattern of land cover, topography and richness and variety of features this landscape has a varied, almost complex character that is balanced and calm. Textures from managed, where farming predominates, to rough, where for example limestone outcrops occur. Colours are mostly muted. An unusual or rare landscape that is interesting to view and which rarely fails to please the eye.

**Important features (Associations)** – There are no designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest in Levens Parish but some Ancient semi-natural woodland is found.

**Vulnerability to change** – Comes from agricultural management including the loss of boundary features, from scrub encroachment and from neglect of parkland and other historic

sites. The intimate small-scale landscape is highly sensitive to urban development, improvements of the narrow lanes, further loss of landscape features and excessive recreational pressures.

## **Type 8b Main Valleys: Broad valleys**

**General description** – These are main broad valley features which remain predominantly rural in character. Whilst generally broad and large in scale, the topography can vary. Sometimes it forms plains or deeper or narrower valleys. Land cover is mixed but predominantly pastoral with plantations, scrub and other woodlands present. Fences and hedges form most boundaries but stone walls are also found. Field boundaries and woodland often appear neglected.

The Kent Valley comprises a weakly defined lower valley, generally less than 50m above sea level, merging into a glacial drumlin field to form a broader valley between limestone escarpments to the west and foothills to the east. The undulating landform broadens to form a flat plain at the mouth of the river. There is a mixed land cover pattern of farmland, parkland and small woods and a small-scale pattern of improved fields and meadows, generally enclosed by thick hedges with occasional stone walls and fences. Field and hedgerow trees are frequent. The woodland is predominantly broadleaved with some coppice and mixed plantations. Parkland dominates the southern part of the valley. The Kent itself has meanders, narrow rocky sections with falls, historic bridges and weirs. Main roads are conspicuous and noisy elements. Views tend to be shortened and frustrated by undulations, woods and hedges.

The Lyth Valley is consistent in character with the flat moorland drained for pasture at the mouth of the Kent but is more strongly defined by limestone escarpments to the east and west. Damson orchards are an attractive feature of the valley.

**Subjective impression** – These landscapes are generally medium in scale and enclosed with considerable variety. They are mostly balanced, calm and managed, with muted colours. The Kent Valley is seen as busier and more colourful than the Lyth Valley.

**Important features (Associations)** – Levens Parish includes part of the River Kent Special Area of Conservation and Levens Hall and Park.

**Vulnerability to Change** – In the Kent Valley development pressures including new housing, caravan parks and new farm buildings have had a localised impact. There are heavy recreational pressures associated with easy access from Kendal.