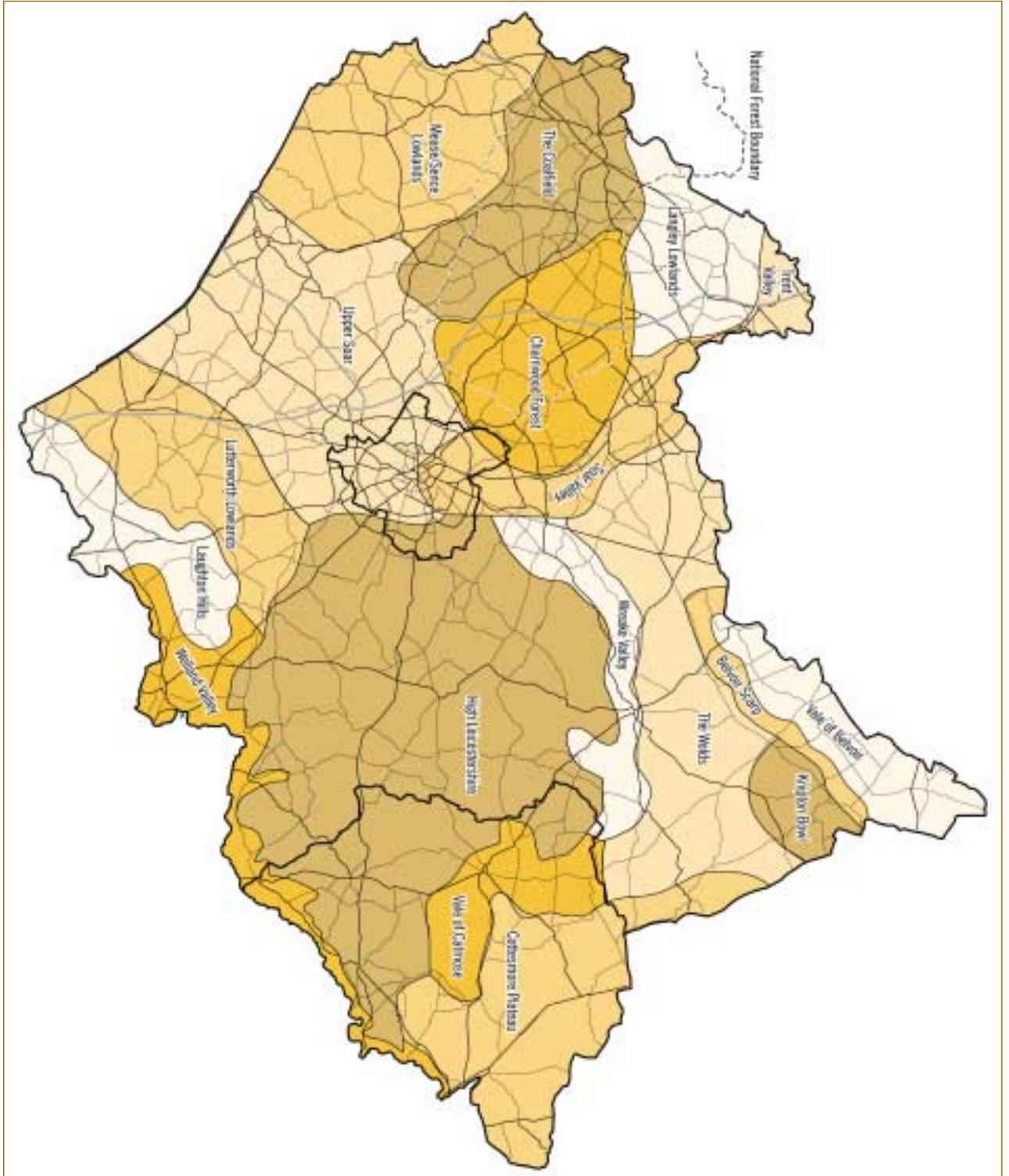


Fig. 7
Landscape Character Areas
Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland



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5.08 Upper Soar

This character area forms a large elongated basin, running south-west to north-east. Its south-western end is dissected by a series of ridges which run broadly south-west to north-east. These ridges often give long views over the whole of the character area and beyond. The landscape is generally open and gently rolling.

Boundaries with Charnwood Forest and the Coalfield to the north, and with High Leicestershire to the east, are defined by a steepening of slope and a greater average height. The Sence/Soar watershed divides the area from the Mease/Sence Lowlands to the west. The A5, following the line of the Roman Watling Street, forms the south-western boundary of the area and the Leicestershire/Warwickshire border. A high ridge helps to define the southern part of the area's south-eastern boundary with the Lutterworth Lowlands, although this division is less clearly defined nearer to Leicester.

The Upper Soar is an area of mixed urban and rural landscapes. Leicester and its adjoining settlements lie at its north-eastern end. At its south-western end, around Hinckley, Burbage, Barwell and Earl Shilton, the character area is also predominantly urban. Elsewhere agriculture is the main land use and although this is always mixed, to the north-west of the area the emphasis is more on arable, whilst to the south-east pasture is slightly more dominant. Farming gives the impression of being well-managed. Well defined, usually regular, fields are divided by generally low cut hedges of thorn, elm and field maple. However, there are localised variations in hedgerow pattern and some arable areas in particular have suffered from the loss of hedges and hedgerow trees. Oak and ash are the two most common hedgerow trees. In the valley bottoms groups of willow and alder are locally significant alongside minor watercourses.

The area has little woodland, the cluster of medium sized woodlands to the south-east of Burbage Common forming the only significant woodland cover. Elsewhere woodlands are small and scattered. Two slight concentrations of these small woodlands in the north of the area represent traces of the old Leicester Forest West and Leicester Forest East.

Parkland is found at Kirby Mallory and Normanton Turville, and in more urban settings at Enderby and Blaby, but is not a significant feature of this area. Disused railway lines are a locally important feature in the south-east of the area. They are often associated with small woodlands and other sites of ecological value, and their often well-vegetated appearance is important in an area that generally lacks tree cover. Localised areas of heath-grassland habitat are found at Croft and Burbage Common.

Within a central band running roughly south-west to north-east between Hinckley and the edge of Leicester the settlement pattern is one of large villages, such as Croft, Stoney Stanton, Sapcote and Countesthorpe, which display evidence of their industrial heritage. However, with the exception of the larger villages, such as Broughton Astley/Primethorpe, individual settlements remain clearly separated by open countryside. Towards Leicester the settlements become larger centres, such as Blaby, Whetstone, Narborough and Enderby, and urban influences tend to be more marked. Elsewhere within the area, to the north and south of this central band, villages are smaller and more scattered.

Within Leicester and its adjoining settlements urban influences tend to override the Upper Soar landscape character. However, the River Soar corridor remains a significant open space through much of the built up area and is of high ecological and amenity value. Its tributary stream of the Wash Brook/Saffron Brook is associated with the open space of the Oadby/Leicester/Wigston Green Wedge and the eastern River Sence and Grand Union Canal run along the southern limit of the built up area.

The M1 cuts roughly north to south through the centre of the area and the M69 bissects it, running north-east/south-west from Leicester to Hinckley. The A47 runs roughly parallel to the M69, about two miles to the north of it. A fairly dense network of B-roads and more minor roads links the area's villages.

The Fosse Way also runs north-east to south-west through the area, again broadly parallel with the M69, but two to three miles to the south of it, linking with the A5 (Watling Street) at the county boundary with Warwickshire. From Narborough to Sapcote the line of the Fosse is represented by the B4114; beyond Sapcote it is a minor road or track.

Localised outcrops of intrusive igneous rocks are found towards the centre of the area and have been quarried for roadstone and aggregates. Only Croft Quarry is still active; others have been used as landfill sites (eg at Enderby) or left in their disused state (eg at Stoney Cove). However, these often well-wooded outcrops provide locally distinctive features within the flatter surrounding landscape.

Croft Quarry is visible from many points but the combination of the Croft Hill outcrop and the quarry's valley bottom site limit its impact on the landscape. The Caterpillar works to the south of Desford are extensive but unobtrusive. Powerlines and pylons are a noticeable feature throughout the area. Both the M1 and M69 motorways are now well screened and their presence, and that of the motor racing circuit at Mallory Park, is generally felt as background noise.



Distinctive features

- ◆ elongated basin
- ◆ open rolling landscape with distinct high level ridges
- ◆ large villages with evidence of industrial past
- ◆ urban influences from larger settlements and Leicester
- ◆ mixed agriculture - arable emphasis to west, pasture to east
- ◆ little woodland
- ◆ local rock outcrops and former quarries
- ◆ River Soar corridor a significant feature through built up area

Issues

- ◆ lack of woodland management
- ◆ loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- ◆ further urban development and increased urban influences
- ◆ insensitive siting of new built development
- ◆ road widening

6.08 Upper Soar

OBJECTIVE

- To enhance the appearance of the agricultural, urban and suburban landscapes which comprise the character area

GUIDELINES

- Enhance the existing woodland resource through improved management
- Increase woodland cover in small to medium sized blocks
- Strengthen the hedgerow network through improved management and new planting
- Increase tree cover through new planting of scrub and willow fringe to streams
- Enhance the amenity and ecological value of the River Soar corridor

6.09 Lutterworth Lowlands

OBJECTIVE

- To conserve and enhance the rural character of the lowland agricultural landscape

GUIDELINES

- Increase woodland cover through planting in blocks of all sizes
- Maintain and strengthen the existing hedgerow network through improved standards of hedgerow management and new planting
- Increase tree cover through new hedgerow tree planting
- Ensure that restoration schemes for mineral workings respect the pattern of the local landscape and contribute to an overall increase in tree cover