

Appendix 3: Natural Areas

- A3.1 Natural England has identified Natural Areas covering the whole of England at a broad scale. These provide summaries of landscape character and broad flora and fauna variations across the country. The characteristics of these areas may manifest in distinctive landscapes although landscape is not the basis of their identification. Each Natural Area is unique and created through the interaction between natural and human influences. The following areas are of relevance to the Mansfield District study area: Natural Area 23: Southern Magnesian Limestone and Natural Area 32: Sherwood. The summaries of these natural areas are provided below.

Natural Area 23- Southern Magnesian Limestone

- A3.2 This Natural Area is a narrow band of Magnesian Limestone that stretches north from Nottingham through the Mansfield District study area but is never more than five miles wide. The Magnesian Limestone is described as:

'a soft rock which has weathered easily to form rounded hills, gorges and caves. It is an open landscape marked by historic limestone monuments and symbolised by ancient woodland and limestone grassland'

- A3.3 The soils are described as ideal for cultivation because they are light and dry; for this reason much of this area has been ploughed leaving only small remnants of the original vegetation. The unimproved grasslands and ancient woodlands provide valuable habitats for birds and insects such as the Brimstone Butterfly. Base-rich flushes, rivers and streams form important wetland features. Quarries, cuttings and natural outcrops expose important geological sections in the Permian Magnesian Limestone whilst limestone gorges and caves contain important Pleistocene sediments.

Natural Area 24- Coal Measures

- A3.4 The Coal Measures Natural Area is to the west of the Magnesian Limestone Ridge. The area is characterised by a number of towns and cities that developed largely as a result of the underlying coal fields. Between this network of towns and cities the landscape comprises ancient woodlands, valley wetlands and large arable fields.

- A3.5 The nature conservation interest of this Natural Area is described as lying in its *'range of habitats including the unique blend of urban plants and animals'*. Wildlife is dependent on land use and the area contains habitats which have been produced as a by-product of the industries which have historically dominated the area. Man-made features such as disused railway lines and canals are now used as wildlife corridors and form valuable refuges for nature.

- A3.6 These more urban habitats blend with the semi-natural habitats of the wider countryside which have been shaped by centuries of agriculture. The mixture of crops and livestock provides a range of habitats which

are particularly important to birds including species such as Skylarks, Lapwings and Barn Owls.

A3.7 This Natural Area comprises the lower catchments of the Rivers Derwent and Amber and the entire catchment of the River Ecclesbourne. The river valleys exert a strong influence on the landscape. *'The rivers and reservoirs provide important habitats for pondweeds, Great Crested Newts, migrating waders and breeding and wintering wildfowl. Mires and swamps are found along the river valleys.'* Woodland is infrequent although often concentrated on narrow steep-sided valleys with scattered isolated copses on higher ground.

A3.8 *'Mixed stock rearing with rough grazing and permanent pasture is the main land cover in the area. The lower, undulating foothills have variable quality grassland while the steeper slopes are characterised by scrub and woodland.'* The pockets of unimproved neutral and marshy grassland areas attract a range of butterflies such as the Rare Brown Argus and the Green Hairstreak, and birds including Grey Partridge.

Natural Area 32- Sherwood

A3.9 This Natural Area lies on a band of Sandstone stretching from Nottingham northwards through the Mansfield District study area. This area encompasses the remnant heartlands of Sherwood, historically managed as heath and wood pasture. Land use in this area is dominated by agriculture and conifer plantations although there are a number of important habitats remaining. These include heathlands, ancient broadleaved woodlands, wet woodlands and wood pasture.

A3.10 Wetlands are scarce in Sherwood, but a few rivers flow across this area's incised valleys and there are several ornamental lakes associated with the landscaped Dukeries Estates. Some of these contain important features such as reedbeds and marsh which provide habitats for wildlife, particularly breeding and wintering wildfowl.