

# Vale of Pickering



## Key Characteristics

- Low-lying flat or gently undulating Vale with land rising gently to the foothills of the North York Moors and Cleveland Hills in the north, and to the steep scarp of the Yorkshire Wolds and the Howardian Hills in the south.
- Enclosed high ground on all sides except the east where the Vale opens to the coast between Scarborough and Filey.
- Pastoral floodplains of the rivers Rye and Derwent and their predominantly northern tributaries.
- Landscape contrast between eastern and western parts of the Vale. In the east, predominantly flat, arable farmland in medium to large size rectangular fields enclosed by low hedges, drainage ditches and dykes on the peat soils in the east, colonised by reeds and willows. The clay areas in the west characterised by more grassland and tree cover.
- Relatively sparse tree cover and few woodlands overall with those which do occur being mainly mixed or coniferous in character and located more to the north and west of the Vale.
- Settlement concentrated along main transport routes on higher ground around the fringes with small nucleated settlements on lower ground in the Vale especially in the western clay area.
- Varied building materials including brick and hard sandstone brought in from surrounding uplands.
- Some parkland and historic landscapes concentrated around perimeter.

## Landscape Character

The Vale of Pickering is a flat or gently undulating, low-lying plain, at the foot of the surrounding uplands of the North York Moors and Cleveland Hills to the north, the Howardian Hills to the west, and the scarp of the Yorkshire Wolds to the

south. It provides a complete contrast to these surrounding areas and is characterised by flat-lying glacialacustrine clay and sand deposited in the former Lake Pickering which occupied much of the area during, and subsequent to, the last glaciation. As a relatively small area, it is often the surrounding hills which dominate the landscape rather than the Vale itself.

Following the last glaciation, Lake Pickering gradually drained away leaving a complex of rivers and marshes. Names in the area bear testimony to this, with frequent mention of *carrs*, *ings*, moors and marshes. The Vale is drained in the west by the river Rye, with its tributaries the Riccal, Dove and Seven. In the north and east it is drained by the rivers Derwent and Hertford with the river Rye joining the Derwent just north of Malton. The carrs, marshes, moors and wet meadows have now all been drained by humans and, as well as the rivers, the landscape is now crossed by a network of canalised water courses, cuts and drainage dykes which regulate the water table.



JOHN MORRISON

The rivers Derwent and Rye, together with their predominantly northern tributaries, drain the majority of the Vale. The Derwent is designated as a River SSSI because of its importance for wildlife. In places, such as here where the Costa beck joins the river Rye, the floodplains contain areas of permanent pasture. In many other areas, the rivers flow through intensive arable fields and have little presence in the landscape.

Drainage has created reasonably fertile soils, which are used for arable cultivation and for pasture. There are flat, open pastures, areas of intensive arable production and more



varied, undulating, enclosed, landscapes which creates diversity within the Vale as a whole. Woodland is relatively sparse overall but here too there is variation, with woods and shelterbelts being particularly prominent in certain areas, for example towards West Ayton, Wykeham and the river Derwent as well as west of the B1258.

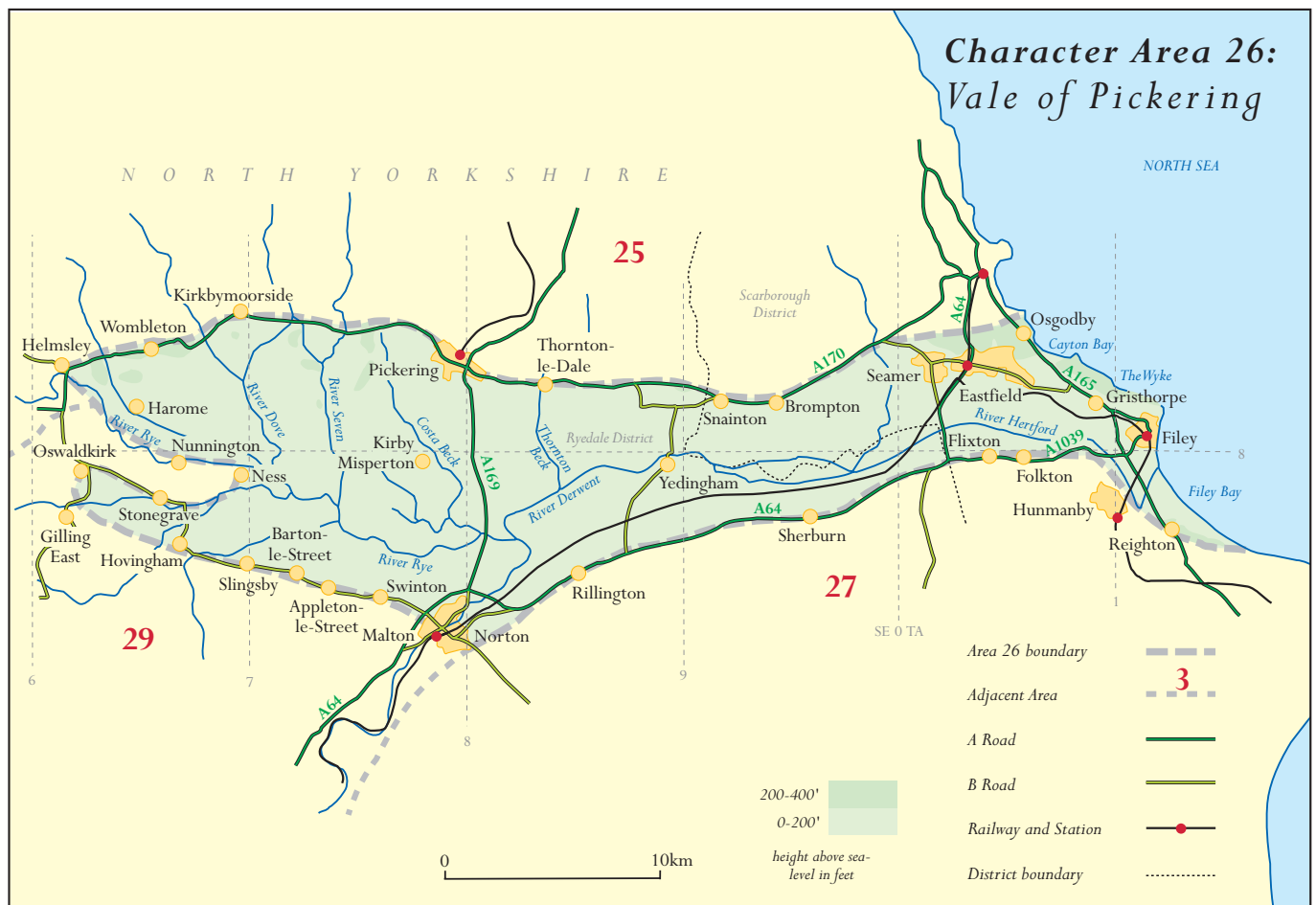


MIKE WILLIAMS/COUNTRYSIDE COMMISSION

This view over the Vale at Amotherby illustrates its predominantly flat nature, with arable farmland in medium to large size, rectangular fields enclosed by low hedges. The North Yorkshire Moors and Cleveland Hills rise in the distance, forming the northern edge to the Vale.

There are subtle but discernible differences between the eastern and western halves of the Vale. In the east, there are more peaty soils with black peat fields in the carr areas south of Eastfield. The fields are large and geometric in shape, predominantly in arable cultivation but also with many areas of grass. Views are long and the landscape generally open. This is a planned enclosure landscape with long, relatively straight roads with wide verges, well-managed, predominantly thorn hedges and relatively few, scattered, large farmsteads. Rivers and water courses, with associated crossing points, are visible but not prominent in the landscape and the overall sense is of an undisturbed, rural landscape. Further west the Vale has more varied topography being more tightly enclosed by the surrounding hills. There is more grassland on the clay soils and a tendency to greater tree cover with more hedgerow trees and small woodlands.

The coastal belt has a rather different landscape. Here the landscape was not inundated by Lake Pickering and deposits of glacial till have created a more hummocky, undulating landscape. Inland from Filey the landscape is still relatively rural and is a mixture of arable fields and pasture enclosed by hedges. North and south of Filey the influence of coastal tourism and recreation becomes much more apparent. Urban development, holiday villages, golf courses, caravan and chalet sites combine with the presence of the sea, beaches, cliffs and short coastal stream valleys to create a distinctive coastal character quite different from the rest of the Vale.



## Physical Influences

The Vale of Pickering is underlain by the youngest of the Jurassic rocks of the region, the Kimmeridge Clay, much of which is concealed by layers of glacial and glacialacustrine deposits comprising clay, sand, gravel and peat beds. Soils are dark and have been improved by marling and ploughing to create reasonably fertile and productive arable land.

The existing landform of the Vale has been strongly influenced by the last glaciation which ended about 12,000 years ago. The North Sea ice sheet advanced along the Yorkshire coast and prevented the natural drainage of the ice-free country inland. The drainage of the river Derwent and streams flowing into the Vale was impeded by the ice sheet and its deposits and thus glacial Lake Pickering was formed. The glacialacustrine deposits remaining, after the waters of the lake had gradually drained away, now create the landscape of the Vale of Pickering. The glacial effects account for the bizarre course of the river Derwent which, after being blocked from a sea outlet in Filey Bay by glacial till, turns west across the Vale and then south to cut through the Howardian Hills below Malton before eventually running into the Ouse below Selby.

After the retreat of the glaciers and drainage of the lake, the Vale was left in a marshy state until the rivers Rye and Derwent gradually formed channels for themselves. Later on, drainage channels were cut and streams embanked by drainage engineers to aid the cultivation of the land so that dykes and canalised water courses are now characteristic of the Vale landscape, acting as field boundaries in places. The hamlets of High and Low Marishes provide a reminder of the watery origins of the landscape.

## Historical and Cultural Influences

Despite the marshy and lightly forested nature of the Vale, it was attractive to early settlers and the earliest known evidence of human presence in the area dates back to the Mesolithic Period, around 7,500 BC. The most important remaining settlement of this period is that at Star Carr, Seamer, near Scarborough where, due to waterlogged conditions, a considerable quantity of organic remains as well as flint axes, blades and tools have survived. The development of farming during the succeeding Neolithic Period (around 3,000 BC) is evident in the distribution of earthen long barrows throughout the area, including a site at Eberston, and archaeological finds in King Alfred's Cave. Bronze and Iron Age remains have been found on the fringes of the Vale of Pickering, in Scarborough and surrounding villages.

The impact of Roman life in the Vale was less marked than in other areas of Yorkshire although there are small sections

of Roman Road and sites of Roman villas, such as that east of Helmsley, which indicate that some of the native aristocracy may have abandoned their stock-raising activities and adopted Roman values and economic organisation.

Remnants of the Medieval Period, between the 11th and 15th centuries, are evident across the Vale in the form of castles, fortified manor houses and churches. Pickering castle and motte, for example, dates back to 1220. There are also notable examples of medieval strip fields at Middleton.

Wealthy landowners during the 17th and 18th centuries have had an influence on the landscape by creating fine buildings and estates such as Wykeham Abbey estate, Nunnington Hall and Eberston Hall.

The flat Vale has always provided a convenient route for infrastructure. The main roads (A64, A169, A170) run along the higher fringes of the Vale while the Scarborough to York railway traverses the Vale. The overhead electricity supply is a more recent infrastructural development.



Drainage ditches and dykes are found on the peaty soils in the east of the Vale. Intensive arable agriculture dominates the landscape, as here at Allerston.

## Buildings and Settlement

The settlements of the Vale of Pickering form a striking group relating to the physical structure of the Vale and surrounding landform. On the northern side of the Vale, villages and towns appear in close proximity to each other just above the old lake margin and at the foot of the Corallian Group limestone dip-slope. This is now approximately the course of the A170 from Helmsley to Scarborough. In this location water was obtainable from springs and shallow wells and the villages stood above flood level at the meeting place of contrasting soils. Strip parishes



are conspicuous features here, some extending far to the north and taking in sections of the adjacent moorlands. Such linear settlements have a characteristic pattern of long burgage plots stretching between the main street and a back lane. A similar distribution of fringe villages appears on the southern boundary of the Vale.

Most other areas of the Vale show an entirely different settlement pattern with smaller villages, more widely spaced and associated with relatively more dispersed settlement in the form of cottage groups, small hamlets and isolated farmsteads in areas of rising ground. This results from relatively late enclosure of the carr lands following their drainage. Settlements are linked by long narrow lanes and tracks with wide grass verges and edged by solid well-managed hedges. This dispersed pattern gives much of the Vale a strongly rural almost remote and inaccessible feeling, despite the presence of the Scarborough to York railway and the A169 which crosses the area.

While the current roofing material is pantiles, there is clear evidence in the steep roof slopes of buildings in this area that thatch was used historically. A number of villages still retain thatched cottages. Building materials vary from soft limestones and sandstones to harder grit stones which tend to occur closer to the edge of the Tabular Hills to the north-west within the North Yorkshire Moors and Cleveland Hills joint Character Area.



Marton Common lies in the western part of the Vale where heavier clay soils support a more mixed agricultural system, characterised by more permanent grassland and tree cover than in the eastern parts.

### Land Cover

The land use pattern is dominated by arable land. There are also large stretches of floodplain pasture along the rivers which would once have provided hay for winter feed for

livestock but are now mainly grazed. The heavier clay soils to the west support a more mixed agricultural system, with beef production being important and more grassland being present. The Vale is notable for the high proportion of arable land present, in relation to grassland, and for the large size and geometric nature of the arable fields, both of which reflect the good agricultural quality of the land.

Dispersed tree groups and plantations, both coniferous and broadleaved, break up the monotony of the gently undulating Vale with tree cover increasing significantly from east to west. Hedgerows act as the main form of field and road boundary and range from tall, thick hedges to low cut gappy fragments. The lower hedges are mainly hawthorn with a variable level of mature hedgerow trees, such as oak, ash, willow and poplar.

### The Changing Countryside

- Intensification of agriculture has led to a breakdown of field boundaries and a consequent loss of hedgerow trees in some areas. As a result the landscape is becoming more open and changing in structure. Trees and wildlife habitats have been lost along river banks as a result of over-engineering and river management. Drainage is also causing shrinkage of the peat in places, resulting in exposure of tree roots. Drainage and deep ploughing may also be causing some damage to archaeological sites.
- Development pressures for road building and housing are a potential source of visual intrusion in the open landscape. The possible re-routing of the A64 trunk road may have a significant visual impact from surrounding higher ground and may affect archaeological sites scattered across the Vale. There are pressures for extraction of sand and gravel and for further tourism development at the coast. This could lead to increased traffic, especially caravans, on the A64 and A165 bringing further pressures for road improvements and potential consequences for the landscape.
- Other forms of development which could affect this landscape are those related to the development of the inland gas field which has been discovered in the area. This may be developed further and there are plans for a gas treatment plant and possibly a gas-fired power station in the vicinity. Pylons have already made an impact and any additional lines would add to their intrusive appearance in this flat landscape. Pressures for housing development are not at present a major concern but infill in some rural villages is having an effect in changing their character.

### Shaping the Future

- River and coastal management practices are important influences on this landscape. There is scope for

continued landscape enhancement by means of management plans for both the Rye and the Derwent as well as the Filey coast. As far as the rivers are concerned, there may be scope both to alter management practices, so that they are more sympathetic to landscape and wildlife, and to recreate features such as river meanders.

- Opportunities also exist to enhance the landscape through hedgerow restoration, new woodland planting and re-creation of wetland habitats

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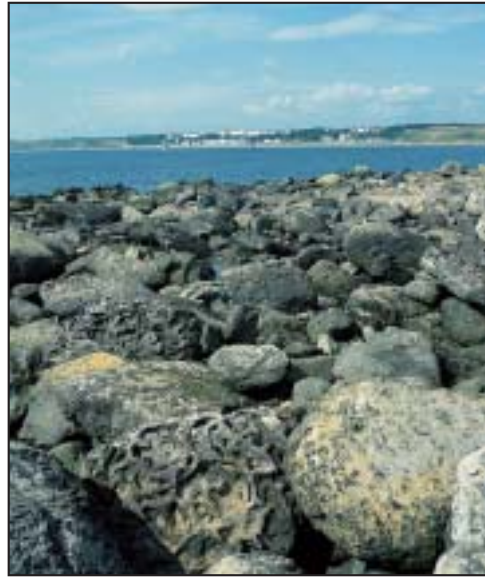
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SIMON WARNER

The eastern edge of the character area is formed by the North Sea, although a low ridge of glacial moraine divides the Vale from the coast. The resort of Filey shelters behind Filey Brig, a rock spit which briefly continues the south-eastward trend of the coastline.

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### Glossary

*carr*: a marshy copse

*ings*: local term for wetland areas, often associated with mining subsidence