

Northern Lincolnshire Edge with Coversands/ Southern Lincolnshire Edge

Character Area

45/47



This description is an amalgamation of 45.0 Northern Lincolnshire Edge with Coversands and 47.0 Southern Lincolnshire Edge and is referred to in the text below as the Lincolnshire Edge.

Key Characteristics

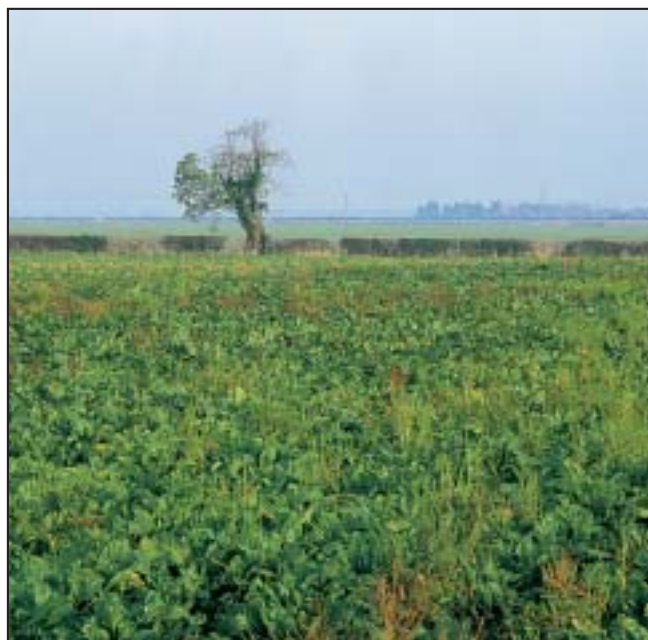
- Large-scale 'upland' arable escarpment broadly divided into north and south by river Witham at Lincoln. Area broadens to south.
- Prominent scarp slope of Lincoln 'Cliff' marks western edge of area.
- Open landscape with rectilinear fields and few boundaries. Where enclosure still present, a mixture of limestone walls, discontinuous hedges and shelter belts.
- Sparse settlement on top of escarpment. Spring-line villages to west at foot of 'cliff' and small parklands to east towards the clay vale.
- Active and redundant airfields.
- More complex landscape of the northern section includes a double scarp, urbanisation and dereliction in Scunthorpe area and the Coversands area of heath, blown sand habitats and conifer woods.
- Roman roads and ancient track ways such as Ermine Street or High Dyke follow north-south routes with one significant east-west route - Salter's Road. Green lanes occur in the southern area.

Landscape Character

The Lincolnshire Edge forms a distinctive limestone backbone to Lincolnshire running like a thread through the county from Whitton on the Humber Estuary in the north, down to Grantham in the south. It is a diverse landscape with a number of local variations. To the west of the Edge is the gently undulating Trent Vale which eventually flows into the moors and levels of Humberhead, draining to the Humber Estuary. To the east there is a gentle transition into the Central Lincolnshire Vale between the Humber and

the Lincoln. South and east of Lincoln, the Edge is bounded by a narrow finger of Fenland, which follows the river Witham into Lincoln. To the extreme south, the Edge merges into the more undulating Kesteven Uplands.

The most distinctive topographical feature of the area is the western scarp slope locally known as the 'Cliff'. This linear feature is pronounced along much of its length, for example at Welbourn, where it stands proud above the Trent Vale. However, in other locations the ridge becomes much softer, for example at Grayingham, yet it is the straightness and sharpness of the 'Cliff' which makes up for its lack of height. The simple linearity of the 'Cliff' is complicated in three areas. Firstly and most dramatically at Lincoln, where the river Witham breaches the limestone ridge to flow to the Wash; secondly from Scunthorpe to the Humber, where a second outer scarp of ironstone is present closer to the Trent; and thirdly between Leadenham and Grantham, where a two-tier scarp is present with the lower scarp formed of ironstone. North of Grantham, the Ancaster Gap cuts through the Edge at the head of the valley of the river Slea.

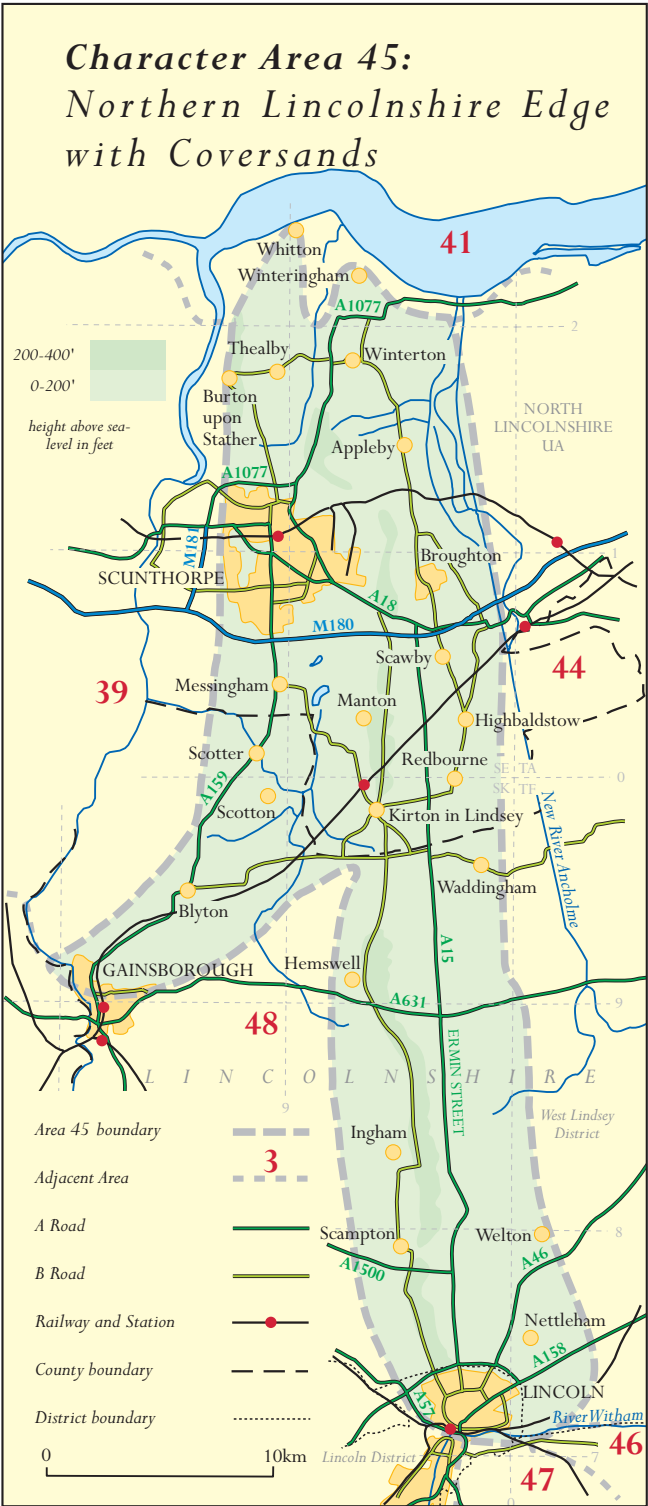


The landscape of the 'upland' plateau of the Edge is of a large scale and arable nature, with rectilinear fields, sparse gappy hedges and isolated hedgerow trees. This view is near Ashby de la Launde.

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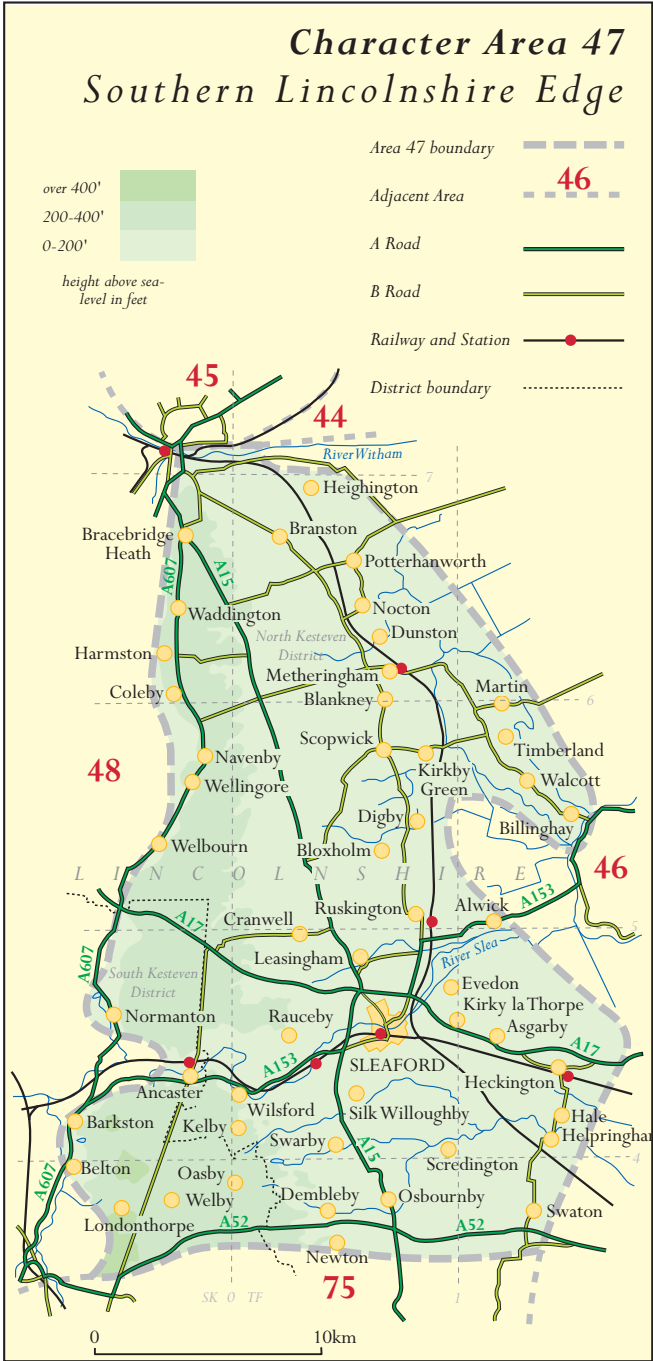
The dip slope which surrounds the 'Cliff' falls gently to the east. This is predominantly a large-scale 'upland' arable landscape with occasional dry valleys. Fields are typically rectilinear with gappy clipped hedgerows and occasional rubble limestone walls. A number of straight roads and ancient trackways, often with wide verges, cross the area further accentuating its linearity. The Roman Ermine Street is the most pronounced of these features. This landscape feels elevated and empty with settlement restricted to isolated farmsteads. Towards the eastern edge of the dip slope, the landscape pattern gradually becomes more enclosed. Here a more irregular settled landscape is influenced by the heavier clay soils as the area runs eastward to the valleys of the Witham and Ancholme.



The Scunthorpe area, with its double scarp feature, is also complicated by the presence of Coversands which creates an acidic sandy landscape of open heath, wind-blown sand, conifers, oak and birch wood. Coversands wraps over the 'Cliff', and extends into adjoining low-lying areas including an extension to the south-west around Messingham and Laughton Woods. At Scunthorpe, the local Frodingham Ironstone determined the establishment of the iron and steel industry and the consequential growth of the town.

Physical Influences

The Lincolnshire Edge is formed by the Middle Jurassic Lincolnshire Limestone which runs along the high ground from Grantham north to the Humber. The associated soils of the higher ground are shallow, well-drained and brashy loams, devoid of surface streams. To the east and north,



the soils include some clay with associated poorer drainage. The Coversands around Scunthorpe are composed of wind-blown deposits supporting a contrasting vegetation with a higher proportion of woodland. The Frodingham Ironstone, which forms the secondary scarp around Scunthorpe, has been quarried extensively for use in the iron and steel industry. Much of this smaller yet significant sub-area is now despoiled and derelict. Ironstones of the Marlstone have been worked on a smaller-scale between Leadenham and Grantham.

The river Witham is the major watercourse which cuts through the 'Cliff' at the Lincoln Gap. Along the western foot of the 'Cliff' a spring line is present where the limestone meets the clay. Streams also flow eastward off the dip slope towards the Wash and Ancholme, the most significant being the river Slea which follows the marked valley of the Ancaster Gap.

The Coversands which lie over much of the northern part of the Edge are predominantly wind-blown deposits. They produce light soils supporting a contrasting flora with some rare species and comprise some unusual features including inland dune systems.

Historic and Cultural Influences

A clear line of visible archaeological evidence is present along the Edge. Some of the most interesting and earliest archaeological features on the Edge date from the Bronze

Age. These include a triple ditch system at Honington and other linear routes.



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The industrial complexes and sprawling development of Scunthorpe adds a stark urban character to the northern end of the Lincolnshire Edge.

The Romans made a very visible impact on the landscape. Lincoln was the key settlement, at the junction of Ermine Street and the Fosse Way, where the prominent setting on the 'Cliff' overlooked the river crossing. Additional Roman settlements like Owmbly and Ancaster are located adjacent to Ermine Street as it continues up to the Humber at Winteringham. Here the 'Ferriby Craft' were discovered, illustrating the historical importance of the crossing since pre-Roman



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The scale of the western scarp of the Lincolnshire Edge can be seen very clearly in this view looking north from Welbourn.

times. During the medieval period, farming developed to the perimeter of the Edge along the western spring line, and to the clay vale to the east. However, a number of deserted medieval villages like Gainsthorpe are testimony to subsequent change. The upper reaches of the Edge remained a mainly uncultivated mix of gorse and calcareous grassland until the Napoleonic Wars, with many to the south still bearing the name 'Heath'. As a consequence, the upland part of the area has few villages. On the lighter sandy soils of the Coversands, rabbit warrening developed at Broughton and Risby Warren. In the 18th century, enclosure of the large fields created the elevated open farmlands seen today.

The landscape around Scunthorpe was dramatically altered by the mining of ironstone from the 1870s and other deposits, including sands and gravels. The growth of the iron and steel industry caused significant destruction of the natural landscape. Many of the heathlands were cleared, opencast mining was extensive and, between the first and the second world wars, the Forestry Commission began a planting programme which afforested a large proportion of the remaining heath areas. In contrast however, some geologically important sites in the quarries have now been designated. A major 20th century development has been the growth of airfields along the top of the Edge including Waddington, Cranwell with its RAF College and Scampton, home of the 617 'Dambuster' Squadron. Most of the other airfields are now redundant.



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Ermine Street at Cocked Hat Plantation. This Roman road and other ancient trackways run north-south along the Edge, emphasising the area's historical importance for communications. Now such routes provide valued recreational opportunities, as well as linear habitats for wildlife in an otherwise intensively farmed area.

Buildings and Settlement

The pattern of settlement is dispersed to the perimeter but almost non-existent on the central elevated higher ground. To the foot of the western scarp a line of small villages built in traditional honey coloured limestone, warm brick and

pantiles, cluster by the springs. Manor houses with parkland, for example at Fillingham, Burton and Leadenham, occupy sheltered locations looking up to the 'Cliff'. To the east of the dip slope larger settlements have been established and sprawled, for example Metheringham, Ruskington and Sleaford. Parklands associated with the larger estates such as Rauceby are also found at the heavier clay edge. The major park and house of the area is at Belton (National Trust), north of Grantham where the deer park is located in the enclosed upper reaches of the river Witham. The house is considered the crowning achievement of Restoration country house architecture (1685-88).

The great building of the area is Lincoln Cathedral, whose setting on the 'Cliff' Pevsner ranked second only to Durham Cathedral. The Cathedral with its distinctive triple towers (once capped with three spires) is over 80 m high and provides a major landmark throughout much of the county. The old town of Lincoln includes castle, city walls, churches and fine town houses dating back to the Norman period, eg the 'Jews House'. These buildings cluster around the Cathedral on the steep slopes of the 'Cliff', in marked contrast to the Victorian town below south of the railway station. There the settlement is dominated by red-brick terraces dating from the city's growth as an engineering centre and the arrival of the railway in the 19th century.

Scunthorpe, the other large settlement of the area, grew rapidly in the 19th century following the establishment of John Iysaght & Company's iron and steel works. The expanding town absorbed five villages and is now characterized by post second world war housing and industrial estates.

Land Cover

The land cover patterns strongly reflect the geology and soils. The drier central upland areas are productive arable lands with large fields growing malting barley, wheat, sugar beet and potatoes while requiring irrigation of the free-draining soils. Where present, hedges are clipped and gappy. Shelter belts, typically of beech and sycamore, often line roads, tracks and broad verges. There is limited semi-natural woodland in these areas with ash being the major non-woodland tree. The underlying light, calcareous, heathy nature of the land sometimes displays itself in gorse, bracken and other indicator species in road verges. During this century tracts of these upland areas have been developed as airfields.

To the east a more irregular pattern of field size and shape exists with a greater number of hedgerows and small semi-natural woodlands. A small group of significant woods lies at the foot of the limestone dip slope at its junction with the Fen edge at Potterhanworth and Nocton. There is grazing on the heavier clay, including sheep, such as at Nocton.

To the north, the Coversands were extensively planted with conifers between the first and second world wars. Birch and oak are regenerating naturally to add to the mix. These Coversands now comprise a rich mosaic of habitats. At Risby Warren an inland dune system exists with acidic and calcareous grasslands while elsewhere on deeper soils, bracken is a key indicator. Where the limestone is exposed in quarries, a further rich flora is present. On this less fertile land, pig rearing has developed, together with smallholdings and other miscellaneous uses, such as pet kennels. The 'Cliff' is not generally strongly wooded yet good examples exist at Burton Woods and Syston Park. Where the 'Cliff' is slight and agricultural changes have ironed out the landscape distinctions, the arable crops from the Trent Vale seem to roll up and almost envelop the scarp slope. Elsewhere, pasture and scrub remain with isolated ash trees providing important features on the skyline.

The Changing Countryside

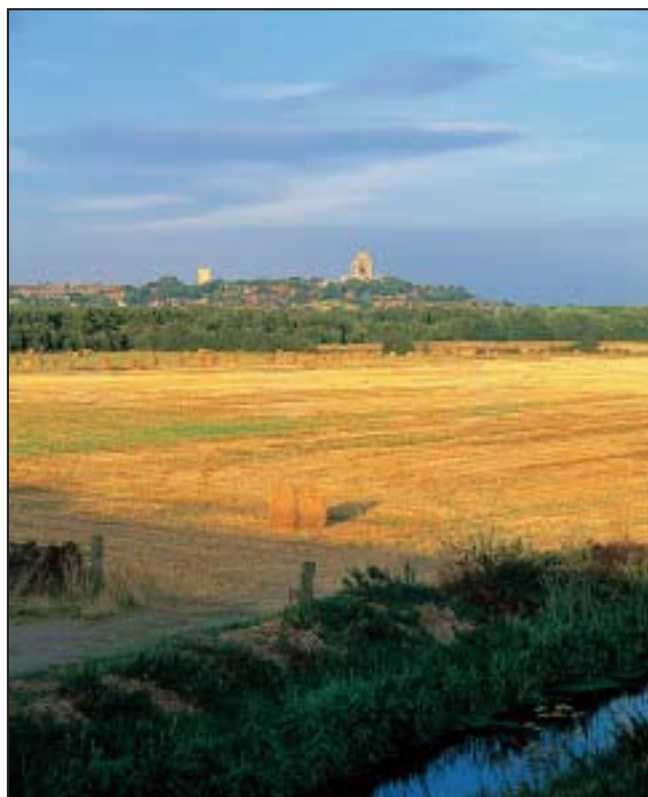
- Agricultural intensification. Second world war farm amalgamation - now halted.
- Coniferisation of Coversands areas between the wars - now halted.
- Loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees - notable 'ash' dieback.
- Pressure on water resources has led to lowering water tables and desiccation of wet heaths. Development of irrigation methods to free-draining limestone areas including starkly embanked reservoirs to extend range of crops, particularly potatoes.
- Pig rearing on Coversands.
- Iron ore extraction and despoliation north-east of Scunthorpe. Sand and gravel extraction at Messingham and Ancaster.
- Loss of mixed farming and affect on landscape pattern and agricultural buildings.
- Development of M180, Scunthorpe New Town and expansion of steel works (up to 1970s). Expansion of urban Lincoln up to bypass in north.
- Airfields becoming redundant creating uncertainty over inappropriate after-uses.

Shaping the Future

- There are opportunities to address a number of conservation issues: the enhancement of the linear 'Cliff' feature by extension of grassland, tree planting to the crest, the retention of ridge and furrow areas,

the enhancement of spring-line settlements by tree planting and the retention of grassland around and within them.

- Hedge restoration would benefit the whole area, with hedgerow tree planting important in the eastern clay landscapes. This might include wider field margins, selective new hedgerows and the maintenance of linear shelter belts and avenues with locally distinctive species.
- An increase in grassland, heathland and pasture would help to restore a more mixed pattern of land use to eastern clays and safeguard other grassland sites and broad road verges of wildlife importance.
- The reinstatement of stone walls to limestone areas, particularly along recreational routes such as High Dyke and Viking Way, is important.
- The balance of open heath and conifer plantations on the Coversands should be addressed.
- The integration of redundant airfields into the open landscape needs to be considered.
- There is scope to restore iron ore and limestone quarries. This should respect areas of geological value by maintaining open faces.
- The visual integration of new reservoirs should be addressed through their design and associated planting.



Lincoln Cathedral stands majestically above the city on top of the Lincolnshire Edge and provides a major landmark throughout much of the county. This view is from the edge of Skellingthorpe to the west

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