

BROXTON & DISTRICT CHARACTER ASSESSMENT



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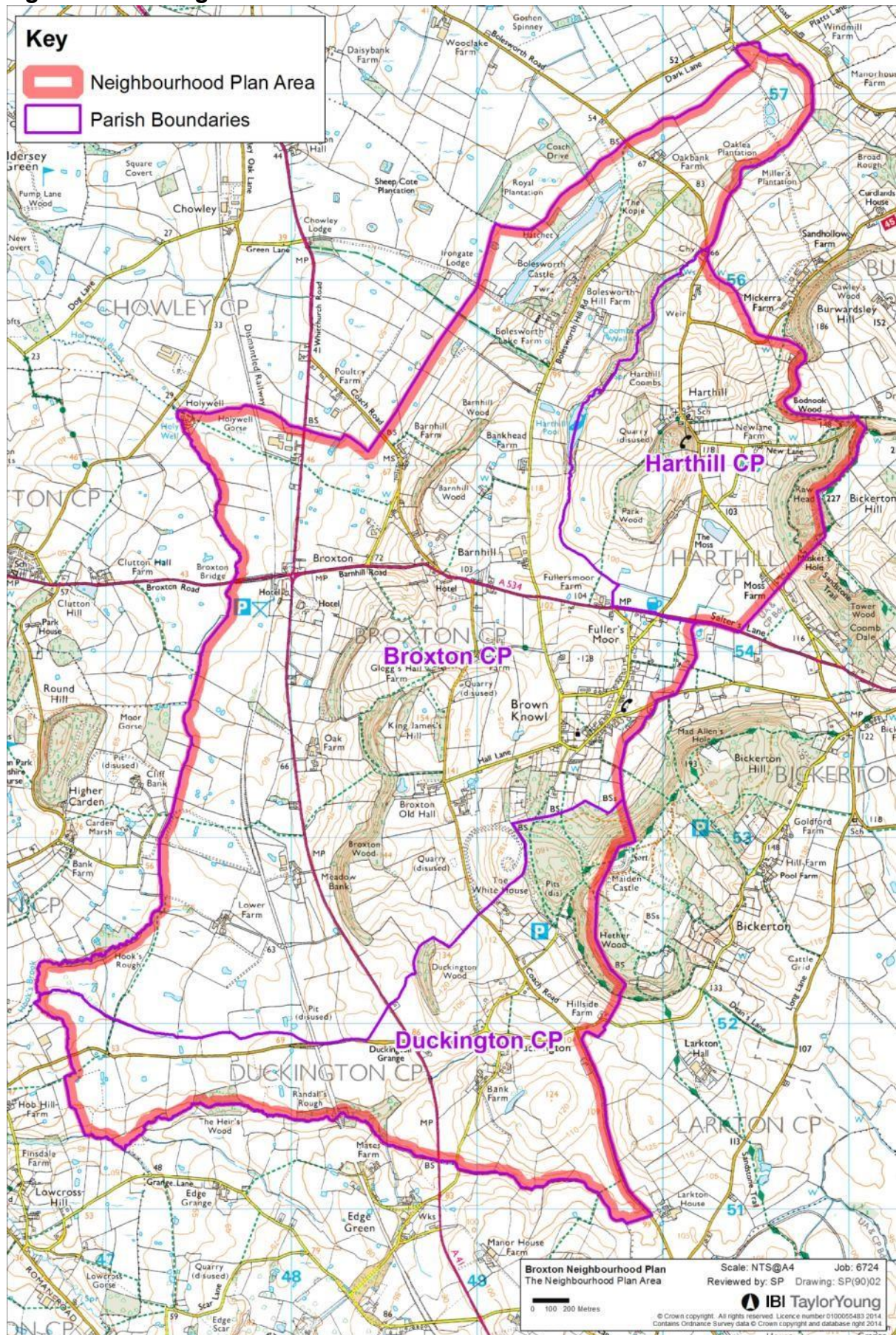
Figure 6. Significant Buildings

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides a 'Character Assessment' for the Broxton Neighbourhood Plan area, which includes the Parishes of Broxton, Harthill and Duckington, in west Cheshire. It has been written to support the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan, which is being led by Broxton Parish Council. The Character Assessment will form a key part of the evidence base for the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.2 This is a very scenic area of Cheshire. It has a strong landscape character with many fine, long range views, which attracts walkers and cyclists from far and wide. It is also an area with strong continuing links to its heritage, and with many locally distinctive buildings. It also includes a SSSI at Raw Head and part of the Nature Improvement Area Mosses and Meres programme
- 1.3 The local community has highlighted the need to preserve this special character. "Maintaining the rural character" was identified as the highest priority in the first stage consultation of the Neighbourhood Plan process. This included protecting the landscape, views, nature and the built heritage.
- 1.4 The importance of the local character is recognised through several local and national designations (e.g. listed buildings, Harthill Conservation Area, Areas of Special County Value and Sites of National Importance). However, much of the area and many of the distinctive features are not currently identified or specifically protected. The Neighbourhood Plan will add value to existing designations by providing a more detailed layer of analysis that reflects undesignated features of local importance.
- 1.5 In many ways it is these small and local features that play a key role in its character. The area is sparsely developed, with many open views, and even small scale development can consequently have a significant impact on character if it is insensitively designed.
- 1.6 This is not to say that new development will necessarily harm local character. It can have a positive and complementary role. The area is likely to adapt and change, as it has over previous centuries. However, it is crucial that new development displays high quality and sensitive design, which is based on a thorough understanding of local character. This document aims to assist this process by describing what the "local character" is, which is not uniform across the area, and by articulating what is distinctive and special.
- 1.7 This Character Assessment should therefore form both key early research for designers of new development in the area, and a tool that will inform local policy-making for the Neighbourhood Plan.

Broxton and District Neighbourhood Plan - Character Assessment

Figure 1. The Neighbourhood Plan Area



2 Local Context

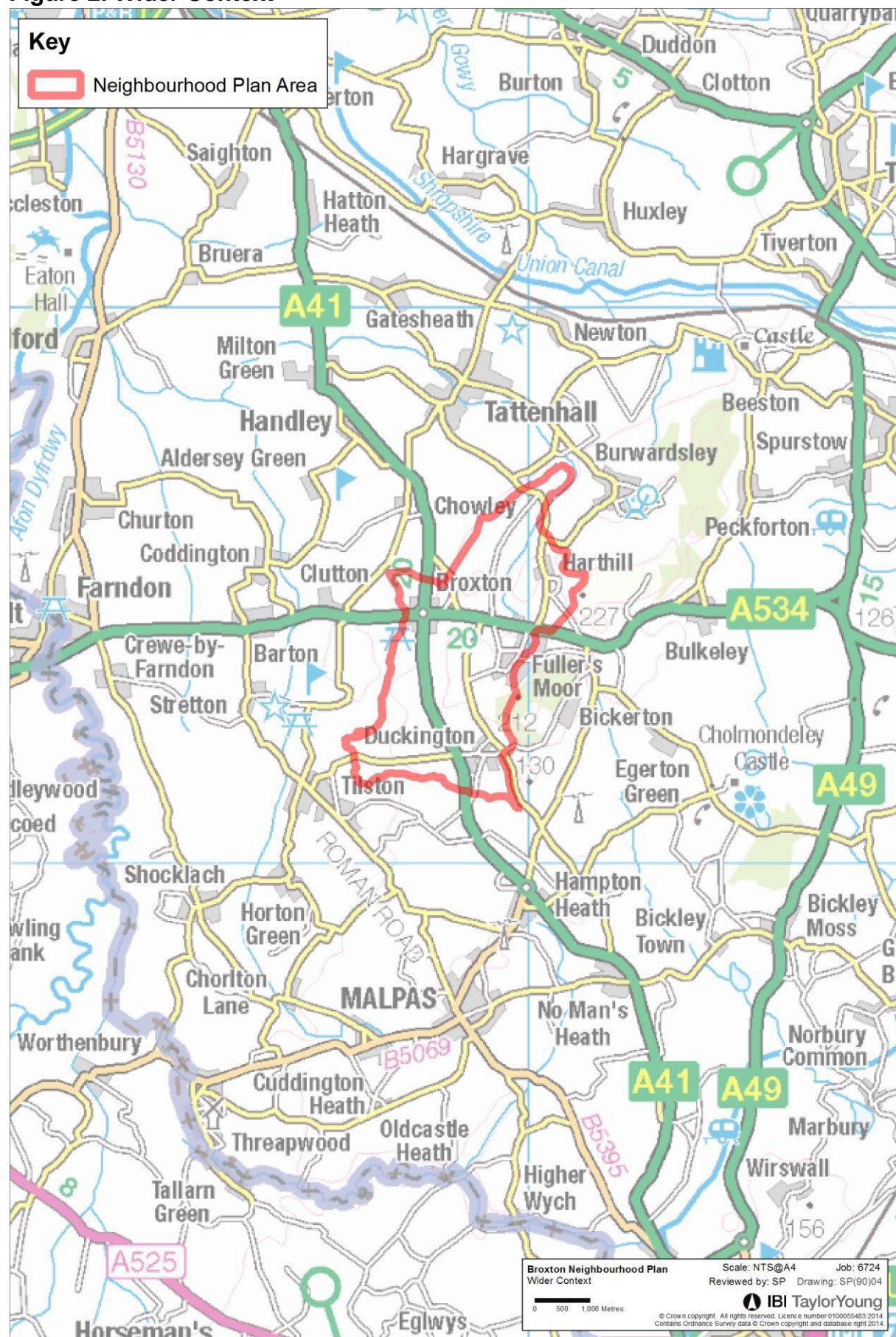
- 2.1 **Figure 1** outlines the boundary of the study area. This has been approved by Cheshire West and Chester Council (CW&C) and includes the parishes of Broxton, Duckington and Harthill. Within the Neighbourhood Plan boundary, the character assessment considers landscape and townscape character by focusing on significant buildings, existing character areas and local green spaces and key views. The Harthill Conservation Area is within the study area, this includes historic parts of the hamlet: The Church, the Church Farm and the former School. It also includes a SSSI at Raw Head and part of the Nature Improvement Area Mosses and Meres programme
- 2.2 **Figure 2** sets the Neighbourhood Plan area in its wider context. It shows that the Neighbourhood Plan area is located within rural Cheshire, close to Shropshire and the Welsh border, and between Chester, Wrexham, Malpas and Nantwich. The rural parish of Broxton is about 11 miles south of Chester and 10 miles east of Wrexham and covers 1333 hectares. It includes the settlements of Broxton, Barnhill, Brown Knowl, Fullersmoor. Duckington and Harthill are the settlements within the adjacent civil parishes within the study area.
- 2.3 Figure 2 also shows that the Neighbourhood Plan area is a very rural community of less than 500 people, with no railway line and very limited public transport. It has only one small garage shop and relies on the adjacent service centres of Malpas, Tattenhall, Farndon and Holt for shops and services.
- 2.4 The area is crossed by the A41 Chester to Whitchurch road from north to south and the A534 Nantwich to Wrexham road from east to west. Their intersection ("Broxton crossroads" which is now a roundabout") is the site of its few limited local services, and is not the basis of any residential settlement, but remains an important perceptual landmark in the area.
- 2.5 The area is also served by a network of narrow local roads (many of which are single track), by ways, footpaths, bridleways, and by National Cycle Route 45. There is no significant public transport within the parish.
- 2.6 The surrounding rural area plays a large part in the character of each settlement within Neighbourhood Plan area. The small size of each settlement means that the open agricultural fields are always close at hand. Moreover, the local topography means that there are frequent views outward to the countryside from high ground.
- 2.7 The Neighbourhood Plan area sits on the edge of two Landscape Character Areas (as defined by Natural England). To the south lies the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain Character Area (Character Area 61). To the north and east lies the Cheshire Sandstone

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Ridge Character Area (Character Area 62). A little further west is the Cheshire Plain and Dee Valley.

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Figure 2. Wider Context



3 Planning Policy Review

- 3.1 This section sets out the current planning policy context for Broxton, highlighting relevant policies that inform development and policy-making in the area.
- 3.2 Cheshire West and Chester Council (CW&C) are currently in the process of producing a new borough wide **Local Plan** which, once adopted, will set out the strategic planning policies for the Borough. As such, it is important that the Neighbourhood Plan is in general conformity with this document. The Publication Draft Local Plan – Part one (published December 2013) is currently the subject of an Examination (17 June to 4 July 2014) and has been adopted. Its policies have been considered here. Part two of the Local Plan is currently under consideration and is likely to be adopted in 2015/2016.
- 3.3 At present, the 'saved policies' of the adopted Chester District Local Plan (2006) form the development plan. In due course, many of these policies will be replaced by a new borough wide 'Part Two' Local Plan which will contain detailed land allocations and policies. Although work is now starting on the Part 2 plan, it will be some time before it is adopted. This Part 2 plan will need to integrate with neighbourhood plans.

National Planning Policy

- 3.4 The **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** paragraph 16 sets out neighbourhood planning requirements for communities. It states that *neighbourhood plans should develop plans that support the strategic development needs set out in local plan*. The following paragraphs are of most relevance to the Broxton Character Assessment:

Local character and history

- 3.5 The NPPF refers to Local character and history in Paragraph 58, which requires planning policies and decisions to aim to ensure that *developments respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation*.

Local Green Space

- 3.6 The NPPF refers to Local Green Space in Paragraphs 76 and 77. Paragraph 76 states that local communities through local and neighbourhood plans are able to identify for special protection green areas of particular importance to them. Paragraph 76 requires consistency with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. It indicates that Local Green Spaces should only be designated when a plan is prepared or reviewed, and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period.

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3.7 Paragraph 77 refers to Local Green Space designation, stating that designation will not be appropriate for most green areas or open space. The most relevant to Broxton are points 1 and 2, stating as follows:

- *where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;*
- *where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife.*

3.8 This Character Assessment will assist the Parish Council in identifying Local Green Spaces , if any ,through the Neighbourhood Plan.

Conservation and the historic environment

3.9 The NPPF Chapter 12, paragraph 126 requires Local Authorities to set out in their Local Plan a positive strategy for conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment.

3.10 Paragraph 128 refers to determining planning applications by Local Planning Authority. It requires an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting.

3.11 Paragraph 129 requires Local Planning Authorities to identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal, taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise.

3.12 This Character Assessment provides reach evidence base and will assist the Parish Council in identifying and assessing heritage assets through the Neighbourhood Plans.

Local Planning Policy

3.13 Particular strategic objectives and policies in the **Cheshire West and Chester Publication Local Plan (December 2013)** are relevant to the Broxton Character Study:

- Strategic objective SO3 states that in rural areas, CW&C support agriculture and diversification of the rural economy, whilst ensuring development is of an appropriate scale and character.
- Strategic objective SO12 aims to ensure new development is of sustainable and high quality design that respects heritage assets, local distinctiveness and the character and appearance of the landscape and townscape.

3.14 **Policy STRAT 9 Green Belt and countryside** is relevant to Broxton Character Study and it sets out the types of development which will be permitted in the countryside: CWaC have stated that it is now very likely that Broxton and District will be designated Open Countryside and therefore subject to Strat 9

- Agricultural or forestry operations
- Replacement buildings

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- Small scale and low impact rural/farm diversification schemes appropriate to the site, locations and setting
- Reuse of existing rural buildings, particularly for economic purposes, where buildings are of permanent construction
- Expansion of existing buildings to facilitate the growth of established business proportionate to the nature of the site and its setting.

3.15 **Policy ENV 2 Landscape** is relevant to Broxton Character Study. It states that the Local Plan will protect and, whenever possible, enhance landscape character and local distinctiveness. This will be achieved by:

- The identification of key gaps in the Local Plan (Part Two) Land Allocations and Detailed Policies Plan between settlements outside the Green Belt that serve to protect and maintain their character.
- Supporting the designation of Local Green Space.
- Protecting the character of the borough's estuaries and undeveloped coast.

3.16 The policy requires development to:

- Take full account of the characteristics of the development site, its relationship with its surroundings and where appropriate views into, over and out of the site.
- Recognise, retain and incorporate features of landscape quality into the design.

3.17 The Character Assessment will assist the Parish Council in identifying key landscape features which can be protected through the Neighbourhood Plan process.

3.18 **Policy ENV 3 Green Infrastructure** policy states that it will support the creation, enhancement, protection and management of a network of high quality multi-functional Green-Infrastructure.

3.19 **Policy ENV 5 Historic Environment** states that the Local Plan will protect the borough's unique and significant heritage assets through the protection and identification of designated and non-designated heritage assets. The policy defines heritage assets as "*a building, monuments, site, place, structure, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest*". This policy is relevant to Broxton Character Assessment which identifies undesignated heritage assets which contribute to local character.

3.20 **Policy ENV 6 High Quality Design and Sustainable Construction** states that the Local Plan will promote sustainable, high quality design and construction.

3.21 The **Chester District Local Plan (2006)** refers to **Local Distinctiveness** in Policy **GE 7**, which requires development proposals to make a contribution to local distinctiveness and encourages the production of parish plans and village design statements. This pre-dates the

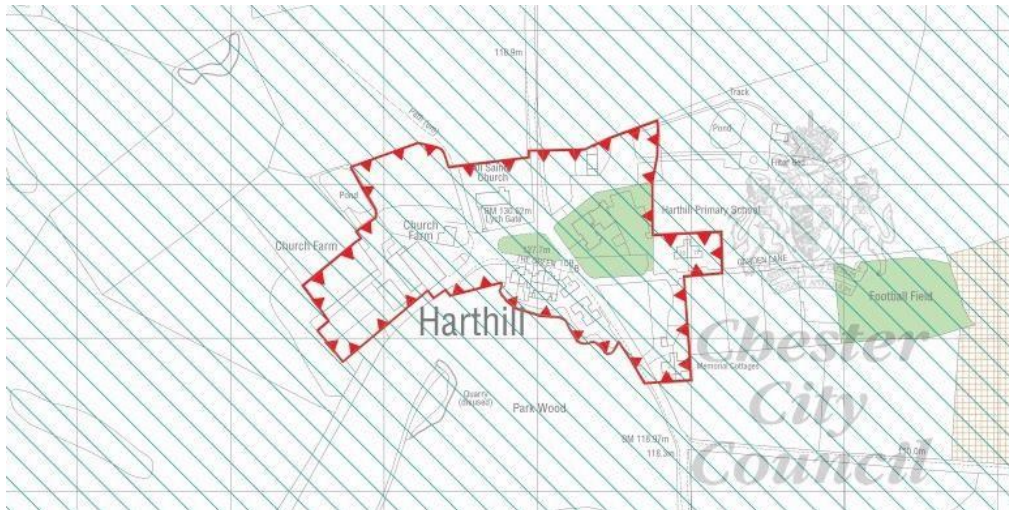
introduction of Neighbourhood Plans, which can also encourage and maintain local distinctiveness.

- 3.22 Policies in the Chester District Local Plan concerning environment, transport, economy, housing, community facilities, recreation and leisure also affect development in the Neighbourhood Plan area.
- 3.23 The former Chester City Council has also produced **Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)** and more recently Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD), which are still extant. They provide more detailed advice on particular topics. Key SPG/SPD relevant to the Broxton Neighbourhood Plan area include:
- SPD - Reuse of Rural Buildings
 - SPD - Design for Residential Development

Spatial Designations

- 3.24 There are a number of spatial designations affecting the Neighbourhood Plan area. These are shown on **Figure 3**. The Local Plan Proposals Map has designated 5 areas of green space within the Broxton Neighbourhood Plan area boundary. Policy **ENV17** states that these can only be developed if:
- *The development of the particular green space is required to meet the essential recreational or community needs of local needs;*
 - *The development is for small-scale structure and the recreation, landscape, wildlife; and/or the cultural value of the space will not be significantly adversely affected.*
- 3.25 Broxton Neighbourhood Plan area is also affected by Policy **SR14/ENV 26 Forming the Green Network strategic Recreation Corridor**. The disused railway line is designated as a “green network”.
- 3.26 Broxton Neighbourhood Plan area includes a **Conservation Area** in Harthill. The Chester District Local Plan sets out a number of policies for Conservation Areas:

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Harthill Conservation Area

ENV 35	Planning applications involving substantial or total demolition of building (s) or structure in a conservation area will not be permitted unless the demolition and any proposed replacement building would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area.
ENV 36	Applications for planning permission proposing the complete demolition behind the facade of a building within the conservation area will be permitted only where all of the following criteria are met: the proposed redevelopment would not have a detrimental effect on the character or appearance of the conservation area; the design of the development acceptably integrates the retained facade; and the floor levels and internal subdivision of the building reflect the scale, design and proportions of the facade viewed from the street during the day and night.
ENV 37	Development in conservation areas or affecting the setting of such an area will only be permitted where it will preserve or enhance its character or appearance.
ENV 38	Planning permission will not be granted for new development that will obstruct important views within, or views in or out of conservation areas.

3.27 Within the Broxton Neighbourhood Plan area many listed buildings are designated. The Chester District Local Plan sets out a number of policies for Listed Buildings:

ENV 45	Planning permission will be refused for proposals that fail to have regard to the desirability of preserving the building if its setting or any features of special architectural interest which it possesses.
ENV 46	Proposals for the change of use or alternative uses of listed buildings will be permitted where: the proposed use would not detrimentally affect or be likely to affect the architectural or historic character of the building; the proposed use would not be likely to require associated development which would damage the environmental setting and character of the building; the likely impact on the amenities of the surrounding area would be acceptable.
ENV 47	Proposals for development which fail; to have regard to the special qualities of locally important buildings of architectural or historic interest, their features of interest or their settings will be refused.

3.28 Most of the Broxton Neighbourhood Plan area is affected by Policy **ENV 25 Areas of Special County Value (ASCV)**. ASCV identifies the combined significance of features of historic, landscape, archaeological and nature conservation value present in Broxton Neighbourhood Plan Area. These designated areas are considered in ASCV to be the best examples of their type across the County and offer opportunities for quiet recreation.

3.29 The Broxton Neighbourhood Plan area is also affected by Policy **ENV 28 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSI)** (see Figure 3). SSI in Broxton Neighbourhood Plan areas are

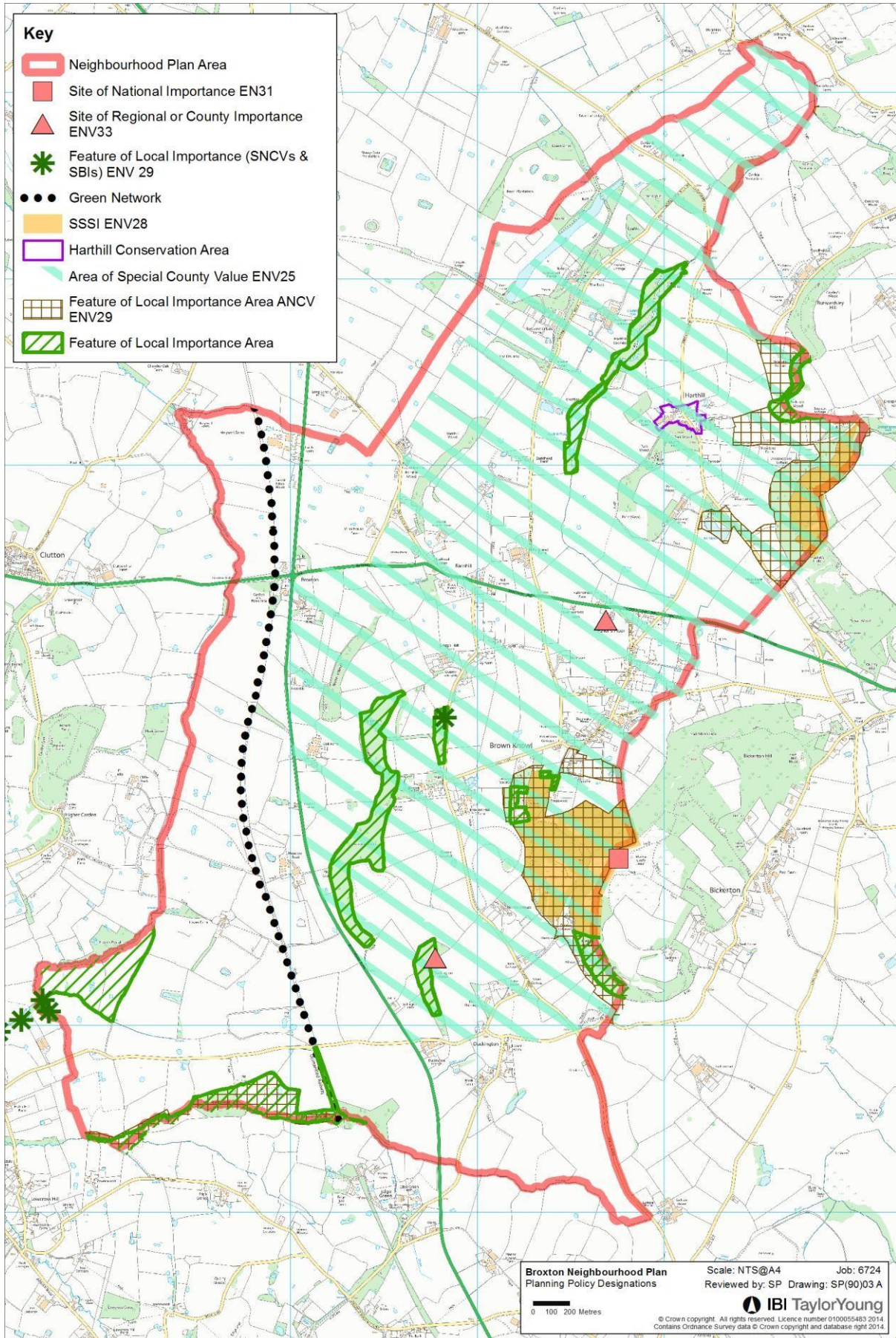
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recognised as containing the best examples of the natural features for which they have been notified by Natural England i.e. Raw Head, Harthill and Bickerton Hill.

- 3.30 Broxton Neighbourhood Plan area includes **Features of Local Importance** (FLI) and is affected by Policy **ENV 29** (see Figure 3). The policy states that residents should have the opportunity to enjoy natural features close to where they live and work. In Broxton Neighbourhood Local Plan area local sites and areas of importance can contribute to this and the conservation of a rich and diverse countryside.
- 3.31 Broxton Neighbourhood Plan area is also affected by Policy **ENV 31 Sites of National Importance** (SNI)(see Figure 3). The policy recognises archaeological sites as an important part of the cultural heritage of the nation and the local area. Within Broxton Neighbourhood Plan area there a number of SNI,
- 3.32 Fullersmoor includes a **Site of Regional or Country Importance (Grade A Sites)** (SRCI) covered in Policy **ENV 33** (see Figure 3). SRCI recognises the importance of historic landscapes and buildings as these will contain irreplaceable information about the past as well as making a major contribution to the distinctive character of the District.

Figure 3. Planning Policy Designations - Neighbourhood Plan Area

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61. Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain

4.4 General characteristics:

- Lowland character
- Widespread fertile and productive clay soils
- Generally low woodland cover - small broadleaved or mixed woodland on slopes of Sandstone Ridges or along watercourses.
- Strong field patterns defined by hedgerows, often with dense mature hedgerow trees. These are often in neglected condition.
- A series of wetland habitats across the landscape.
- Settlement pattern of small villages and few, dispersed hamlets spread along hedged lanes.
- Buildings are predominantly red brick with sandstone churches and occasionally very distinctive black and white half-timbered buildings.

62. Cheshire Sandstone Ridge

4.5 General characteristics:

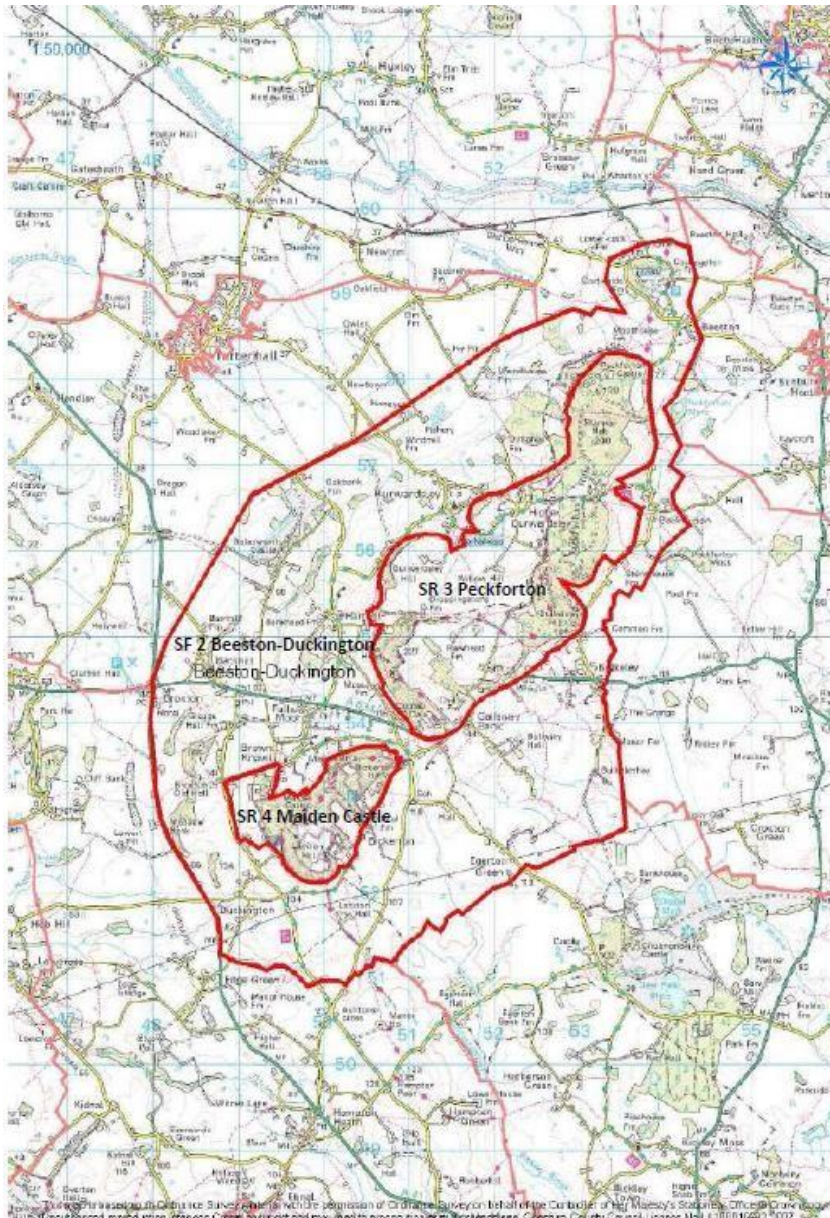
- Steep-sided Sandstone Ridge, to the east the lower slopes are cloaked in deposits of glacial sand and gravel.
- Soils are free draining, thin, sandy and generally infertile.
- Woodland cover is relatively high compared with adjacent areas. This includes both broadleaved and coniferous trees in woods and along hedgerows.
- A pattern of hedged fields with scattered mature hedgerow trees. Field sizes are irregular in pattern. Hedgerows are well maintained.
- Diverse range of wetland habitats.
- Dispersed pattern of scattered farms and small villages.
- Red brick is the dominant building material, together with local sandstone.
- A few older half-timbered black and white buildings occur.

Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment (2008)

- 4.6 CW&C's Landscape Character Assessment provides a more detailed, finer grain, look at local character, which is consistent with Natural England's broader description. In this assessment, the Neighbourhood Plan area includes three landscape character areas:

□ **SF 2: Beeston-Duckington Character Area** □ **SR 3: Peckforton Character Area** □ **SR 4: Maiden Castle Character Area**

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Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment (2008)

SF 2 Beeston-Duckington Character Area

4.7 General characteristics:

- Transitional zone between the high ground of the Sandstone Ridge and the surrounding low-lying landscape
- Strong visual elements including the sandstone outcrops of Helsby Hill
- Extensive views across Cheshire and beyond to Merseyside, North Wales and Shropshire
- Deciduous and mixed woodland on the steepest slopes
- Remnants of acid grassland
- Pasture and some arable on the flatter land
- Fields enclosed by hedgerows and some sandstone walls
- Combination of nucleated villages and dispersed farms and halls

SR 3 Peckforton Character Area and SR 4 Maiden Castle Character Areas

4.8 General characteristics:

- Sandstone Ridge - a distinctive landmark, with outcrops and upstanding bluffs above 100m AOD.
- Spectacular long distance views across Cheshire and beyond into North Wales, the Peak District and Shropshire.
- High density of woodland compared with the rest of Cheshire comprising post medieval conifer plantations as well as areas of ancient woodland. □ The largest surviving area of lowland heath in Cheshire □ Low-density dispersed farms.
- Sandstone buildings, boundary walls and sunken lanes.
- Cluster of Iron Age hill forts.
- Historic halls e.g. Utkinton Hall and Peckforton Castle.
- Industrial archaeology (sandstone quarries, copper mines).

5 Character Assessment

- 5.1 This section provides the key content of this report: the assessment of local character. This encompasses both the natural landscape character and built form. It is first important to understand the relevant local historical context.

Local Historical Context

- 5.2 The earliest known settlement in the area is the Iron Age hill fort at Maiden Castle. This was excavated in 1945 and is thought to date from around 200 BC. It consists of earth ramparts reinforced with dry stone, now overgrown with vegetation.
- 5.3 There are many disused sandstone quarries in the area. Copper mining was first recorded in Bickerton in 1696.
- 5.4 The urban form of the area has not significantly changed over recent centuries, remaining largely unaffected by urbanisation and industrialisation and the dispersed settlement form remains. The 1841 census recorded a population of 458 for Broxton. The 1901 census shows only a slight increase and in the 2011 census the population was only 461 [ONS, 2011]. The historical hamlets and villages of Broxton, Barnhill, Harthill, Duckington, Fullersmoor and Brown Knowl remain the focus for development, with more remote farmsteads and cottages in the surrounding rural area. These villages once formed the basis for local shops and services, most of which have now been closed. The Police Station and Magistrates Court was located at Broxton crossroads. The historic role of these settlements in providing community services and business, remains important to local character, and can be seen in the surviving buildings, for example All Saints Church, Brown Knowl Methodist Church and Harthill School together with the clustered settlement form that still exists around these historic centres. Many of these buildings remain vitally important to the character of each place, even if they do not accommodate their original function.



All Saints Church, Harthill 1909



Harthill houses, built in 1844

- 5.5 Transport through the area has been a defining feature in its history. A causeway through the area was recorded in 1791 (Adam Watkins, Observations), as the only route through Lancashire and Cheshire up to the mid-18th century. This north-south route can be seen on the 1735 Estate Map of Bickerton (Coston's History of Lancashire). An ancient causeway, Saltersway, also ran east-west and its alignment is now part of the A534. From 1750 the A41 turnpike road was gradually created, leading to present alignment passing through the Broxton area in 1821. A railway line was built through the area, opening in 1872, with a station at Broxton. This closed in the Beeching reforms of the 1960s.
- 5.6 There have also long been public houses in the area, acting as coaching inns for travellers. References to inns date from 1650. Several of these have since been converted to residential use. When the A41 was built in 1821 'The Feathers' on Old Coach Road became redundant

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and the inn closed. It is now the farmhouse for Barnhill Farm. The survival of the coaching inns in the area are the public houses now known as the Egerton Arms and The Sandstone on Nantwich Road (the A534).

- 5.7 The local economy is today characterised by agriculture, and equine businesses. Agriculture has historically been the dominant source of employment. Cheese production has been an important local industry. In the Inter-war period there was a cheese factory located close to Broxton station. Farmhouse Cheshire is still produced in the area.
- 5.8 Agricultural buildings are arranged in a familiar pattern in the area, with farm buildings located around a rectangular yard which contains the midden. In the 20th century Dutch barns and silos have been added, alongside modern dairies and tractor sheds.
- 5.9 There have historically been a number of small businesses in the area, dispersed across the villages in the area. In the 19th century this included shoemakers, tailors, coal merchants, butchers and blacksmiths. None of these businesses survive today, although several of the building still stand, for example the Old Bakery in Brown Knowl.
- 5.10 There are several old houses in the area, dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries, for example Broxton Old Hall. These display construction methods of the time, such as timber framing and wattle and daub panels. Use of local sandstone is prevalent in many buildings, especially in smaller, domestic buildings, for example Bay Bush, which dates from the 17th century. The sandstone is often painted or rendered now but many exposed sandstone buildings remain. Roofs would have originally been thatched. Most have been replaced by slate but a number of thatched cottages remain. In the 18th and 19th centuries a number of grander stone and brick houses were built for wealthier families, for example Glegg Hall (now demolished), Bankhead and Duckington Grange.
- 5.11 Broxton Old Hall, was owned by the Egerton family, and was a major landholding in the area, with its own tenant farms. Bolesworth Estate has been held by the Barbour family since 1856 and is the major landowner in the area. Bolesworth Castle was built in 1826, on the site of a former gothic house dating from the 1750s. The current lake, with its bridge and boathouse, are surviving features from the 18th century. The Bolesworth International show jumping event is held annually on the Estate.

Character Areas

- 5.12 The Neighbourhood Plan area contains a number of discernible 'character areas' of distinct identity and characteristics. This derives from the local history and topography, and the

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changing patterns of land-uses, route hierarchies and land ownership that have shaped their settlement form. These are shown on **Figure 4** and each character area is described below.

Broxton

- 5.13 Broxton is the largest character area within the Neighbourhood Plan area. It differs from many of the other areas by having no particular hamlet with which to define its character. Instead of nucleated settlements around winding roads the prevailing character here is of regular, medium-sized farms sitting in an open landscape, bypassed by modern, straighter and wider roads including A-roads (the A41 and A534) and Hob Hill Road. These often have lower and better maintained hedgerows than other character areas and offer open views from the roads, across surrounding low-lying grassland, which is a different experience of the landscape than the other character areas. A key landscape feature is the disused railway line that passes north-south through the area and is bisected by Hob Hill. This offers potential for a recreational walking/cycling route but at present remains an under-utilised feature.
- 5.14 Farm buildings are clustered together in typical farmstead arrangements and fields are divided by the hedgerows and mature trees which are typical of the area. This is the flattest character area but has some gently rising hills. Local character is provided by views to the Sandstone Ridge to the east and to lower hills to the west and within the area. Many of these hills are wooded. This includes the western slopes of hills within the area which are occupied by the ancient woodlands of Broxton Wood and Barnhill Wood.
- 5.15 The natural focal point for the character area is the crossroads of the A41 and A534. However, instead of forming the basis for a significant settlement, this is marked by only a handful of buildings. These nevertheless include a public house (the Egerton Arms) and a petrol filling station that also includes a small shop.

Bolesworth

- 5.16 This area is dominated by the Bolesworth Estate, which owns most of the land. This includes both formal grounds and working agricultural land. Bolesworth Castle, a 19th century manor and Grade II* listed building, is now home to the Barbour family, the holders of the Estate. Originally built in 1829 in a Gothic style, this was considerably altered in 1921 by William Clough-Ellis (the designer of Port Meirion), when the current formal lawns were also laid out. There are also a number of other listed features on the Estate. The attractive formal lawns include an ornamental lake.
- 5.17 The Castle sits on high ground and the land falls westward here, offering fine views over the lake and towards the Welsh Hills. The Bolesworth Estate now hosts the annual Bolesworth International, one of the leading show jumping events in the UK. The quality of this formal landscape and the profile of the Estate (notably through the show jumping event) mean that

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the Bolesworth Estate plays a significant role in the character and perception of the Neighbourhood Plan area, although it remains somewhat separate from the surrounding character areas.

- 5.18 Land also falls gently to the east, offering attractive views of the wooded slopes of the Sandstone Ridge. Bolesworth Hill Road, the main route through the area, is a narrow road that is tightly enclosed by hedgerows and mature trees, providing views over the top of the hedgerows to the surrounding landscape.
- 5.19 Buildings, other than around Bolesworth Castle, are isolated cottages and farm buildings, generally 19th century and of more substantial form than the smaller vernacular buildings of other character areas. Low stone walls (using natural sandstone) are found alongside several roads within the Estate. Alongside Bolesworth Castle a high and steep cliff face has been excavated to form the site of the Castle, and this provides a striking landscape feature.

Harthill

- 5.20 Harthill has a long history as a settlement. The first chapel was recorded here in 1280. The present All Saints Church was built in 1607, and restored in 1862. The Schoolhouse (now a cookery school) was built by Robert Barbour of Bolesworth Castle in 1868, and rebuilt in 1923 following a fire.
- 5.21 Harthill retains a distinctive character of its own, which differs from other settlements in the area. Many of the properties were built by George Walmesley when he rebuilt Bolesworth Castle in 1821. The buildings here are stone and have a more substantial scale and feel to the other buildings in the area. The elevated position on the hilltop also creates a distinctive feel. This is reflected in the designation of Harthill as a Conservation Area, the only conservation area within the Neighbourhood Plan area.



Listed Swiss style houses in Harthill

- 5.22 Harthill has a distinctive style of architecture. The buildings here were planned and developed by the Bolesworth Estate. They form a considered set piece around The Green, including All Saints Church, the Schoolhouse and the Swiss / Gothic style houses. These houses are defined by a complete use of dressed stone, gables, integrated stone porches, substantial chimneystacks and rectangular windows in deep surrounds. The gables are either projecting, Dutch style, or sit behind projecting eaves with bargeboards. One of the properties has been painted but the overall feel is one of variations around a consistent theme.

Barnhill

- 5.23 Barnhill is a dispersed area of settlement, with small houses located on the narrow winding lanes of Withy Lane, Old Coach Road and Barnhill Road. The area is today bisected by the A534 and the downgrading of the Old Coach Road, following the turnpiking of the A41 has removed the historic focus for development, leaving this area rather more isolated. The historic focus of Barnhill Road (now part of the A534) can be seen by the presence of the Durham Heifer, which was once a coaching inn. There was also once a blacksmith's smithy on this road (see the Character Building 22). Now the area is characterised by individual houses and farm buildings on narrow lanes with tall hedgerows and mature trees, giving it a close, intimate feel. Although the overall identity of Barnhill as a settlement is weak, the character here is distinct from the more open character of Bolesworth and Broxton.

Brown Knowl

- 5.24 Brown Knowl is characterised by a nucleated group of buildings clustered around narrow lanes. The tall hedgerows and abundance of trees give this area an intimate character. The settlement has grown from small timber and sandstone farm dwellings that have been

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accompanied by infill houses along the intervening lanes. The small Methodist Chapel was built in 1835, and replaced by the current building in 1913. The village once included two bakeries, a butcher's shop, a slaughter house and Stant's Store but there are now no shops or local services here. The settlement retains a close relationship with farming and equine businesses.



Brown Knowl

Fullersmoor

- 5.25 Fullersmoor adjoins with the neighbouring Brown Knowl and is also characterised by a series of domestic buildings along narrow lanes, edged with mature hedges and trees. Brown Knowl and Fullersmoor now flow into one settlement with no obvious separation point. The Sandstone public house (previously known as the Royal Oak and the Copper Mine) has long been a focal building in the area.



Fullersmoor

Duckington

- 5.26 Duckington is a much more dispersed area of development than either Brown Knowl or Fullersmoor. There are few buildings, which are either individual or grouped into a few units, with no larger hamlet formed. In 1840 Duckington was part of the Drake Estate, with most land owned by the Marquis of Cholmondeley. Most houses here are now privately owned. It remains predominantly an area of farms and farm land. Duckington Grange Farm was built in

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the typical layout of 19th century farms, with buildings arranged around a rectangular yard.

The area effectively became more remote after 1821 when the new turnpike A41 replaced the Old Coach Road as the principal north-south route through the area.

Tower Wood

5.27 This small character area has a distinct landscape character that differs from its surroundings. It forms part of the Sandstone Ridge and is the only part of part of the Neighbourhood Plan area to sit within the Peckforton character area, as defined in CW&C's Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment. It is also defined as an Area of Nature Conservation Value.

5.28 The area comprises a densely wooded, rolling hillside. The topography gives this area a prominent position, widely visible over the surrounding area and contributing to the wider local character. The woodland here has been replanted and is not ancient. Low lying land is grassland with hedgerows forming field boundaries and lining New Lane. There are no buildings in this area.



Tower Wood

Maiden Castle

5.29 This character area sits at the southern end of the Sandstone Ridge and is a separate character area within CW&C's Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment. It is also defined as an Area of Nature Conservation Value. Maiden Castle takes its name from an Iron Age hill fort that sat on this hilltop. Its remains now lie under bracken and is designated as a Scheduled Monument. The topography makes this area a prominent feature in the landscape. It is both forms a distinctive skyline in views from elsewhere in the Neighbourhood Plan area, and itself offers impressive long range panoramic views. There are also naturally occurring caves in this area, including the locally known 'Mad Allen's Hole' – the home of an 18th century recluse.

5.30 The landscape character of the area is characterised by steep-sided slopes with dense woodland planting. There are also small fields amongst the woodland, with various states of

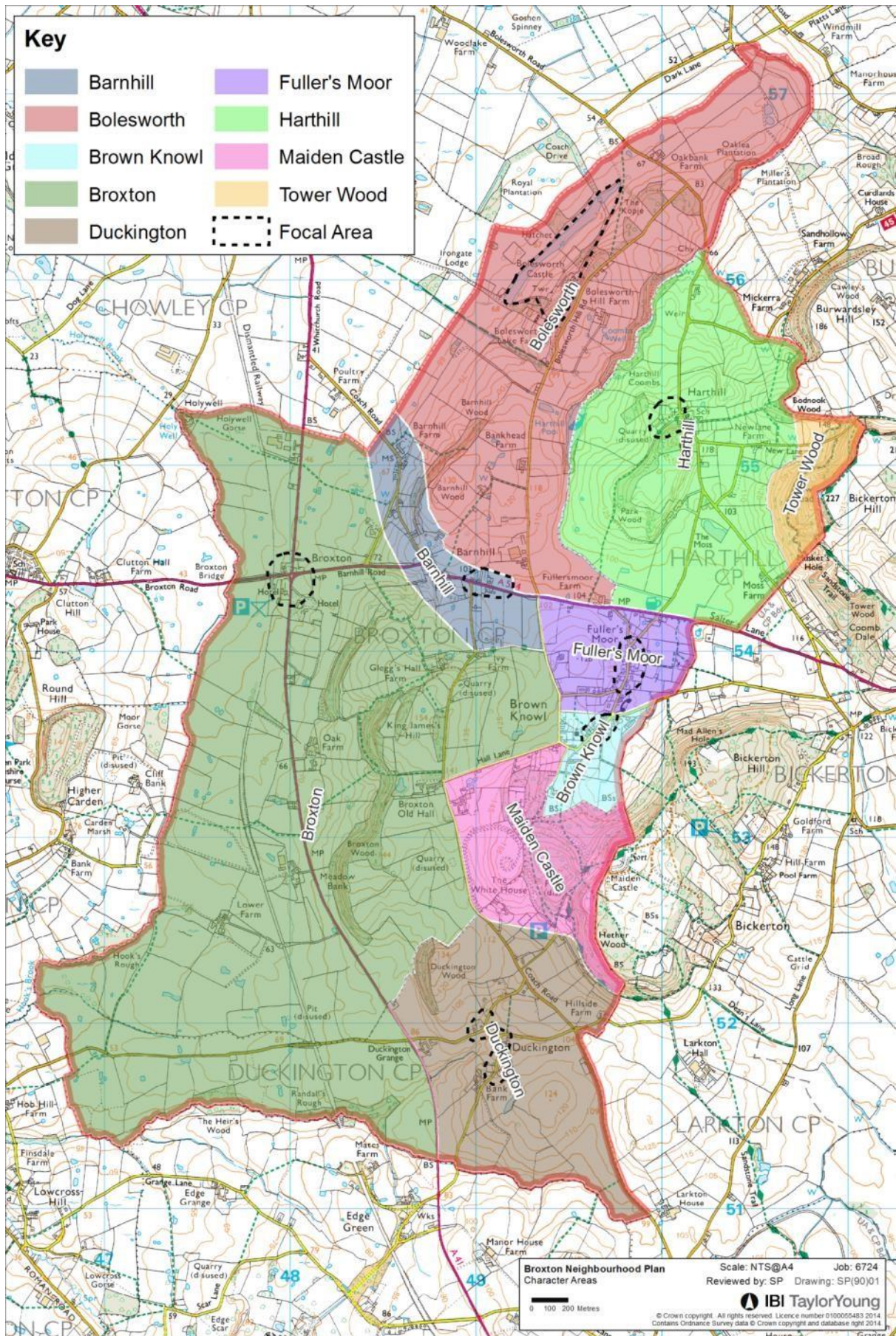
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enclosure and more expansive areas of open heathland and peripheral birch woodland. This heath in particular, is a distinctive feature of this area. The woodland is secondary rather than ancient, and comprises oak, aspen, rowan and holly. The medieval field pattern was replaced by enclosures in the 18th and 19th centuries. There are a number of disused quarries in the area, which have now been colonised by woodland. The area is now actively managed by the National Trust, who are seeking to restore the natural gorse and heath character.

- 5.31 There are very few buildings in this area: a few farms on the lower lands accessed from Old Coach Road and a few cottages nestled in amongst the woodland. The use of naturally extracted stone is a prevalent feature, not just for buildings but also for walls to line field boundaries and sunken lanes.

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Figure 4. Character Areas



Landscape Character

- 5.32 The topography of the Sandstone Ridge, smaller rolling hills and open valley floors forms the landscape context. Within this, the local landscape character is defined by medium-scale farmland, hedgerows in various condition and many mature trees along field boundaries. The field pattern dates from the enclosures of the 18th and 19th centuries and more modern interventions.
- 5.33 There are several areas of dense woodland, particularly on the western slopes of hillsides. These are very noticeable and play a large role in the landscape character. Some of these are ancient woodlands: Walker's Wood, Broxton Wood and Barnhill Wood; others are much younger and have developed from neglected heath or grassland. The woods include oak, beech, silver birch and sycamore.
- 5.34 There are several disused quarries in the area, and many small ponds, most are post glacial features and others formed from flooded former quarries.
- 5.35 Views are a key part of the landscape character. These include views of the Sandstone Ridge, and its skyline, to the east and panoramic views from elevated points in the area (including from the Sandstone Ridge). These long ridge views extend in all directions, but noticeably reach westward to include the Welsh hills and the skyline of Liverpool.
- 5.36 The settlement pattern in the area is very dispersed and includes isolated farms of medium sized, individual cottages (or small groups of cottages) and small hamlets clustered around narrow roads. Roads in the area vary from modern, straight trunk roads to narrow, winding roads and very narrow tracks to access properties. Most of the minor roads in the area are flanked by very high hedgerows, creating a close, enclosed character.

Key Views

- 5.37 The area is fortunate to have many fine views. The significant views that contribute most strongly to landscape character are described on **Figure 5. These views should be protected and development assessed with regards to its impact upon them. There are several types of view:**
- **Major panoramic views** from high vantage points (i.e. parts of the Sandstone Ridge). These overlook much of the Neighbourhood Plan area and often range much further afield to Liverpool and the Welsh hills.

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- **Medium range views across the open fields** of the lowland parts of the area, taking in mature trees, hedgerows, green fields, farms and development nestled within this landscape.
- **Views from the lowland to the Sandstone Ridge and other hillsides.** These are characterised by the dramatic skyline of the ridge and by the wooded hillsides (often ancient woodland).
- **Vistas** – there are very few enclosed vistas given the open nature of the landscape but occasionally there is a framed view of a building, for example the view south to buildings around the Green at Harthill from Harthill Lane.

Identification of Key Views

- 5.38 A selection of some of the most significant views are illustrated below. Please cross-refer to Figure 5 to which locates where these are from, using the numbers below.

1. View west from Harthill



2. Views west from Burwardsley Hill



3. View west from the Sandstone Trail over Tower Wood



4. View north-west from Bickerton Hill



5. View west from Maiden Castle towards Wales



6. View north over lowland plain from Hall Lane



7. View south-west to wooded hillside from Old Coach Road

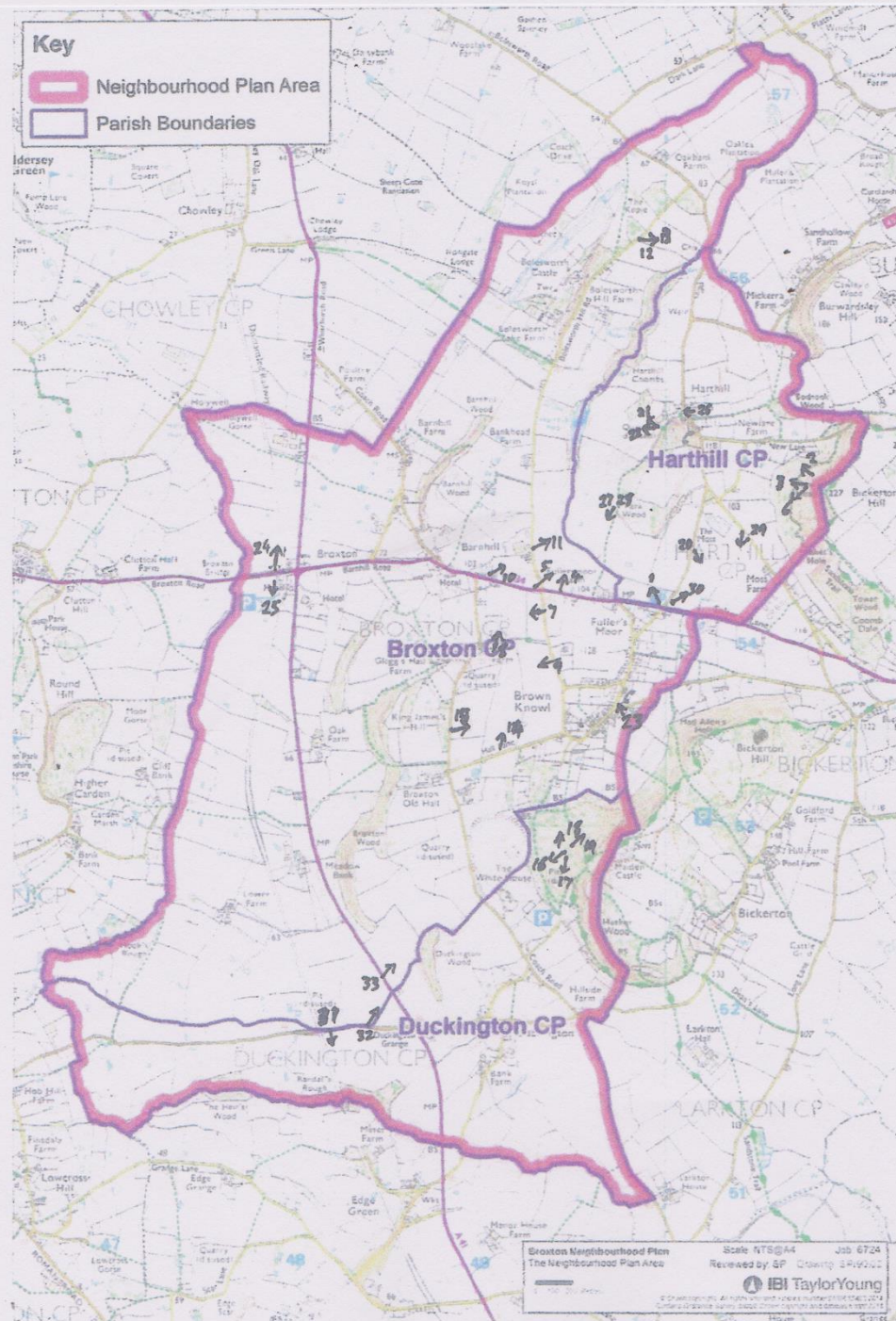


8. View north-east to wooded hillside from the A534



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Figure 5. Key Views



Community Green Spaces

5.39 Most of the area is open space, which contributes significantly to its character. There are also many national and local designations in the area which relate to nature conservation (see Section 3). There is, however value in identifying a series of 'Community Green Spaces'. These are undesignated green spaces that play a role in the local landscape character or have value, or potential value of community, recreational or amenity resources.

1. **Disused Railway Line** – this alignment can clearly be seen in the landscape either side of the bridge on Hobb Hill. The line offers potential for a pedestrian/cycle recreational route.
2. **The Green, Harthill.** This community green space plays a major role in defining the character of the conservation area. It is located in the heart of the village and forms the centrepiece setting for the surrounding listed buildings.



3. **Brown Knowl Green** – this small, informal amenity space serves as an informal village green – providing a setting for the surrounding built form and a perceptual focal point for Brown Knowl, and is where the telephone box and bus shelter is located.



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4. **Duckington Green** – in a similar manner to no. 7, this small green space in Duckington provides amenity for local residents and a focal point for this dispersed parish, reflect by the fact that this is where the parish notice board is situated.



5. **“Football Field” (at the end of Sandy Lane)** – although this small, uneven clearing is a far from ideal space for playing football on, it provides an informal sports and recreation space that is well known and valued by the local community.

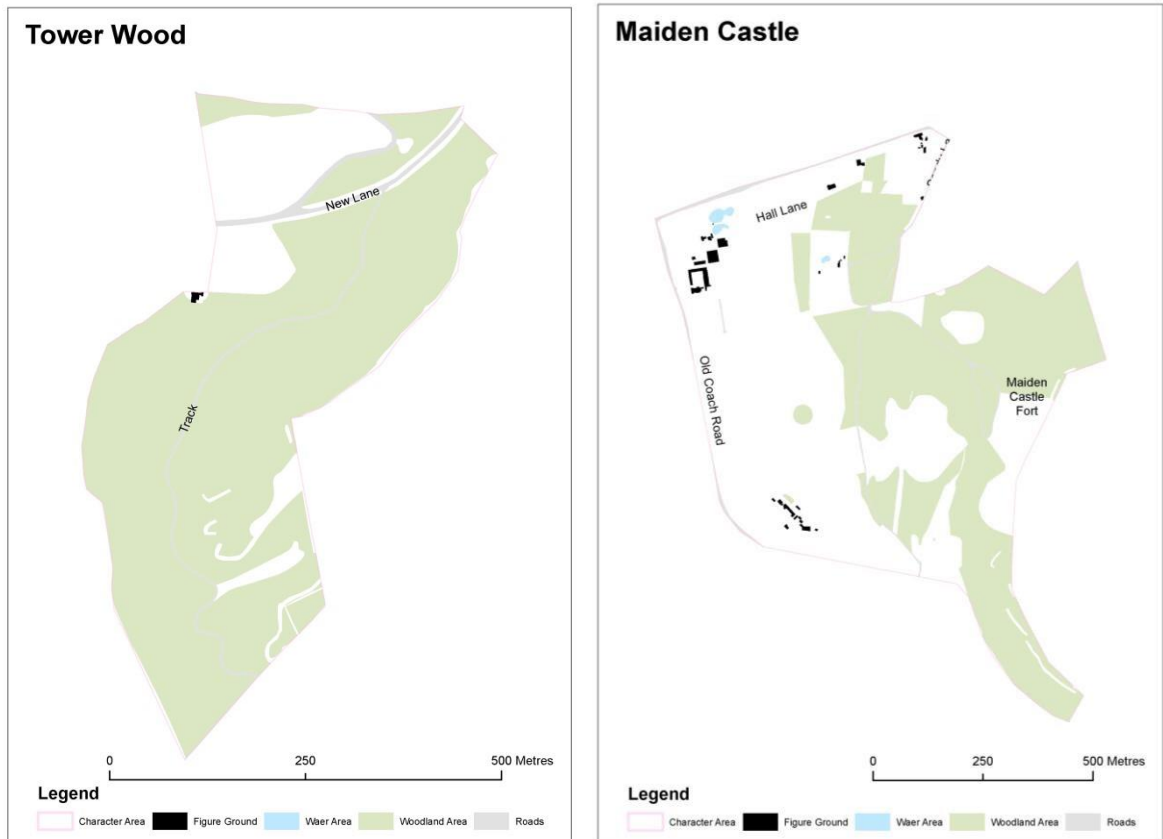


Built Form

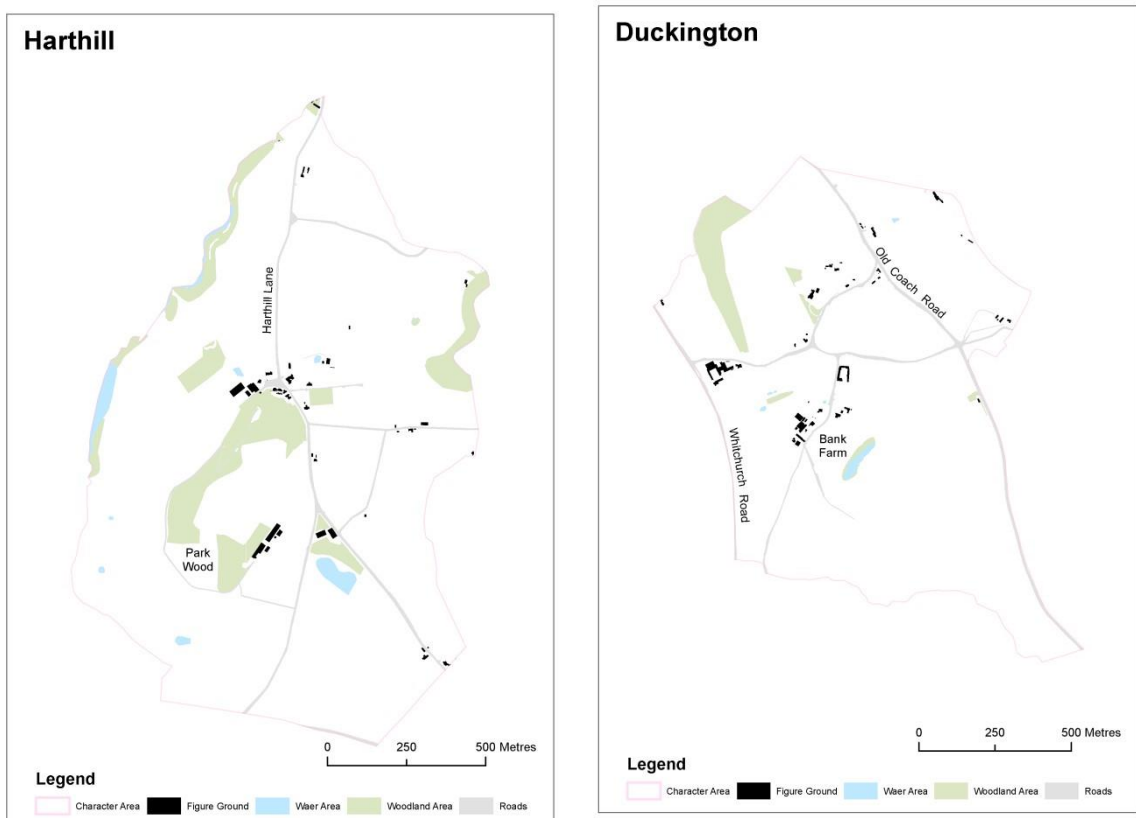
Layout and Form

- 5.40 The built form of the area is low density throughout the Neighbourhood Plan area, it responds to the local topography and historic hierarchy of routes and local history. As such, it varies by Character Area. This can be summarised by viewing the ‘figure grounds’ below, which describe the built form within each character area.

Broxton and District Neighbourhood Plan - Character Assessment

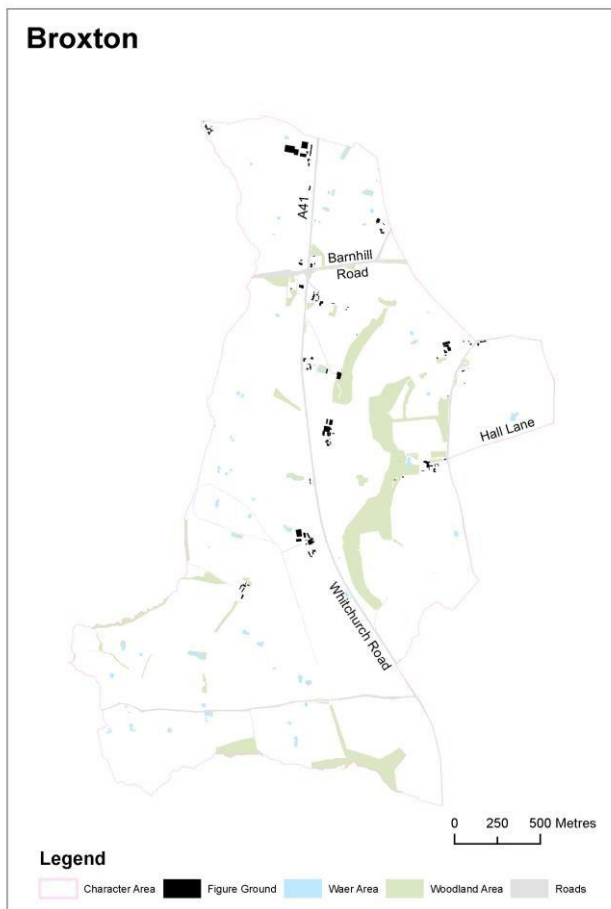


In Tower Wood and Maiden Castle the topography has precluded development on the higher ground. Much of the hillsides are wooded.



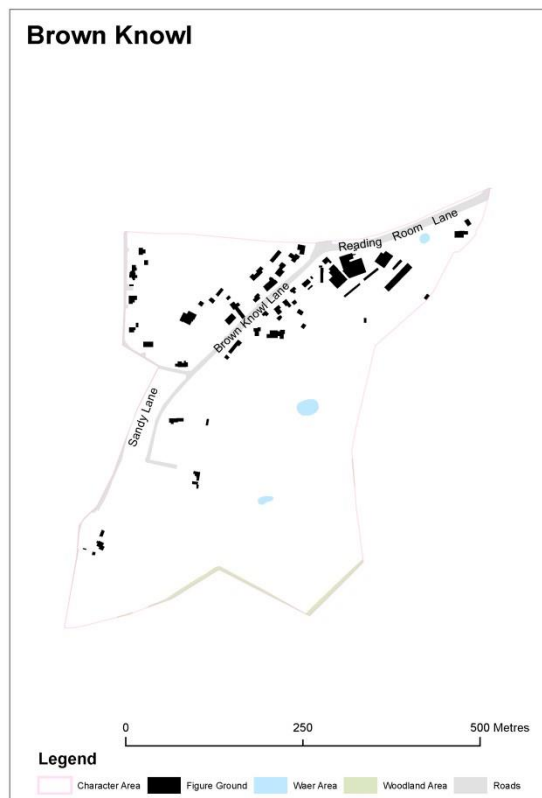
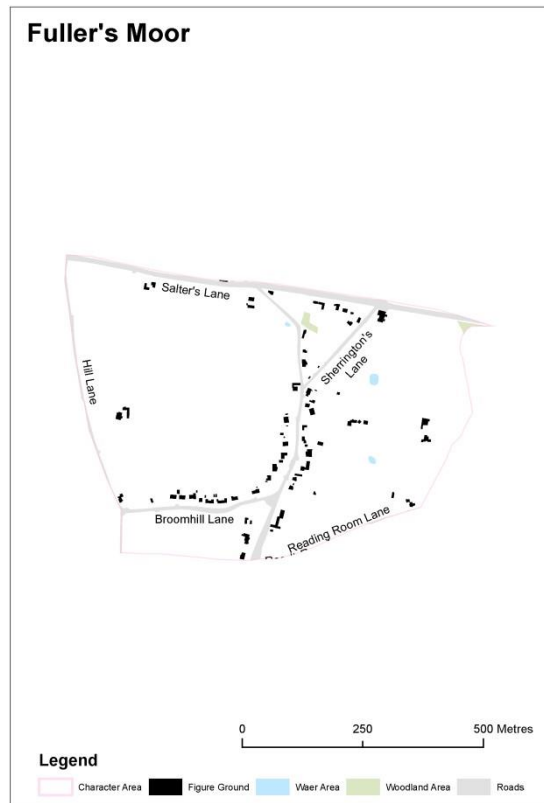
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Harthill and Duckington have a road pattern that responds to the contours of the land. Development is clustered around these roads but also set back and dispersed to relate to the agricultural land with which they are associated.



In Broxton and Bolesworth the roads largely follow the valley floor and are consequently straighter - not having to follow contours. Buildings are clustered in farmsteads or groups of estate properties and are dispersed across the agricultural land, with which they are closely associated. The position shows a relatively loose relationship with the roads, from which they gain access.

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The three villages/hamlets in the lowland areas show a much closer relationship with the lanes, around which they have developed. Buildings follow the road alignment, and are set back slightly from the road behind front gardens. The roads and lanes are gently winding, between the natural contours. More isolated farm buildings sit in the surrounding area.

Barnhill has fewer buildings but follows a similar pattern, with development clustered around the alignment of Old Coach Road, which was once the main route through the area.

Listed Buildings and Features

- 5.41 There are 38 listed buildings and structures in the area. These are all Grade II listed with the exception of Bolesworth Castle and the Church of All Saints, which are both Grade II* listed. In addition, the remains of the Iron Age hill fort at Maiden Castle is a Scheduled Monument.

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A selection of the listed buildings are illustrated below.



Bolesworth Castle



School at Harthill



*Brown Knowl Methodist Church
(also containing the listed Wedgwood tomb)*



Lodge to Broxton Old Hall



Bankhead Lodge



Old Coach House, Old Coach Road



The Green, Harthill



Bay Bush, Brown Knowl

Undesignated 'Character Buildings and Features'

- 5.42 A series of undesignated (i.e. not listed) Character Buildings and Features have been identified in this Assessment. Identification has followed the guidance published by English Heritage: 'Good Practice Guide for Local Heritage Listing' [2012]. These are all assets that have aesthetic, historical or community value. They all contribute significantly to the distinctive character of the Neighbourhood Plan area and loss or harm to these buildings and features should be avoided. Please refer to Figure 6, which locates all of these buildings.



1. **Telephone Box** – the famous “K6” type telephone box (designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott in 1935) is becoming rarer and surviving examples are often listed. The green space setting here combines well with the telephone box.

2. **Sherrington's Lane cottages** – good example of vernacular architecture with natural materials.
3. **The Old Bakery** – a group of buildings that tell a story of the area's history.
4. **Smithy Lane cottages** - good example of vernacular architecture.
5. **The Sandstone PH** – a good quality building that provides a link to the coaching inn heritage of the area.
6. **Cuckoo Hill** – a much altered cottage that remains historically important for its likely association with the poet Wilfred Owen, who may have stayed with an aunt here and was inspired by the local landscape setting.

7. **Stone House** – good example of vernacular architecture with natural materials.
8. **The Mount** – a large white-rendered Victorian farmhouse, set back from the road.
9. **Highways (thatched cottage)** - good example of vernacular architecture.
10. **Broxton Hall Farm** – a good example of a late Victorian farm, a type that was historically prevalent in the area, with an Arts & Crafts style farmhouse.
11. **Thatched cottage** - good example of vernacular architecture with natural materials.
12. **Duckington Grange** – another good example of a traditional Victorian farmhouse and associated buildings.
13. **Meadow Bank** – another good, traditional farm building, prominent in surrounding views,
14. **Oak Farm** – another good, traditional farm building.
15. **Woodacre** – a building of architectural quality with distinctive Arts & Crafts features
16. **The Egerton Arms** – a much altered cottage that remains historically important for its role as a coaching inn.
17. **White House** – a Georgian-style property in good condition.
18. **Cobblestones** – simple stone building is a good example of local vernacular.
19. **Brown Kowl Cottages** – good example of vernacular architecture with natural materials. Forms a strong group with no.18.
20. **The Cottage** – fine example of a Victorian cottage, in very good condition.
21. **Clere Lea** – historical, but much altered, large stone cottage reflects vernacular style and local materials.
22. **Smithy and cottage** - good example of vernacular building, with important local historical use as a smithy, with accompanying cottage.

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23. Arts and Crafts cottages – two pairs of cottages (with open space between) which have good value with distinctive Arts & Crafts features.

24. The Durham Heifer PH (also previously known as the Brown Cow) – previously a coaching inn which is also significant for its links with the First World War poet RG Lee, who was the son of the licensee and lived here.

25. Bolesworth Lodge – the Bolesworth Estate includes several listed buildings but excludes this gatehouse lodge. Its prominent position at the entrance, its historic relationship with the Estate and the quality of its architecture all merit value as a character building.

26. Memorial Cottage – a distinctive Edwardian building that adds character to the Harthill area.

27. Parkside House and Barn – good example of an Edwardian farmhouse and associated stone barn.

28. Fire Engine House – this small structure has a historical community value as it was built to accommodate a horse-drawn fire engine in 1895 (as commemorated on a plaque above the door, alongside “BFB” for Broxton Fire Brigade).



29. Stone cottage, Sherrington’s Lane - good example of vernacular architecture with natural materials.

30. Bank Farm – this farm has several listed features but the listing excludes the farmhouse itself, which is a fine quality Georgian building that contributes significantly to the character of Duckington.

31. Old Police Station – The former police station at Broxton is important for its past community use, and as a good quality architectural building, positioned at the key crossroads (now roundabout) of the A41 and A534. It is built in a distinctive Edwardian style that mimics

the Elizabethan “E-shape” plan and style of other buildings in the area (e.g. Broxton Old Hall).

Local Architectural Styles

The next paragraphs outline the various styles of housing that prevail in the Area , generally buildings tend to have “one off” and unique style

Vernacular Style

5.43 A number of architectural styles are present in the area. The most locally distinctive style is the vernacular architecture that is rooted in the informal, traditional historical style of the local area, and makes good use of local materials. This can be seen in smaller, domestic properties throughout the area. Agricultural buildings, stables and workshops are also important examples of vernacular architecture, many of which have now been converted to residential or other uses

Key vernacular architectural features:

- Low window-to-wall ratio with relatively large expanses of blank walls
- Local red sandstone – rough cut stones, large stones
- White or cream render
- Linear proportioned windows with glazing bars on earlier properties
- Vertical proportioned windows with glazing bars on later 19th century buildings
- Large stone lintels over doors and windows
- Simple timber porch canopies with pitched roofs
- Bay windows with hipped, slate roofs
- A few surviving thatched roofs, with cut-outs for windows
- Most roofs are slate and have a traditional pitch with no dormers or gables
- Properties often have wide frontages and shallow depth, rather than narrow frontages and deep plot depth
- Properties are generally detached or in short terraces and are set back from the road behind hedges and low sandstone walls



Vernacular features

Georgian Style

- 5.44 Mixed with this vernacular style, often in the same properties, one can see the prevalent architectural styles of the era in which properties were built. The earliest examples of these wider trends are traditional **Georgian** properties, with their simple, classically-proportioned front elevations (see below). There are relatively few of these and the best examples have been identified as Character Buildings.



Georgian style properties

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Victorian Style

5.45 A more common style is the Victorian architecture of the area. This is often found in large farmhouses and the planned houses of the Bolesworth Estate and other large landholdings. There were many different architectural styles during this era but there are some common characteristics visible on Victorian properties in the area.

5.46 Key Victorian architectural features are:

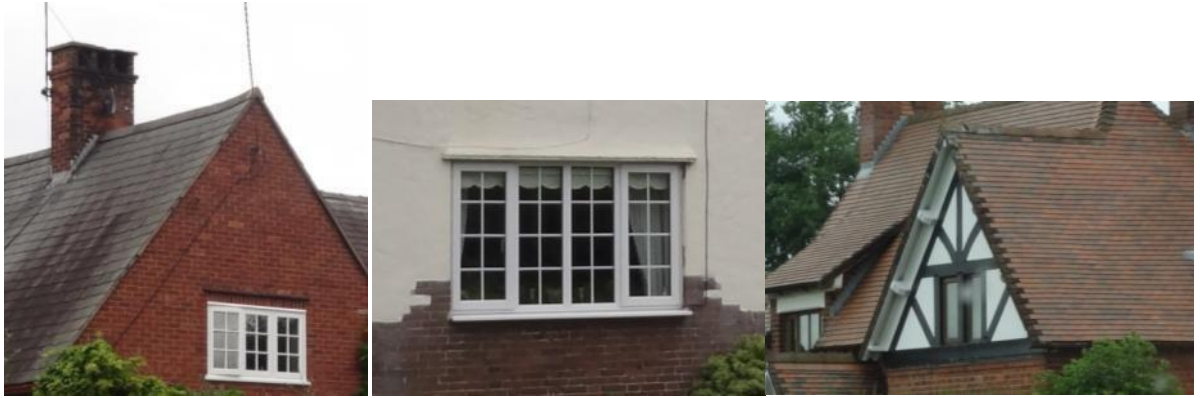
- Use of red brick, sometimes painted white
- Decorative brickworks and stringcourses
- Steep roof pitches and a complex roof form, including gables and dormers
- Vertical proportioned windows in wimple wooden frames
- Tall brick chimneystacks
- Slate roofs
- Buildings are generally much taller than in other styles
- Properties are detached or semi detached and set within their own grounds
- Farmhouses are rather, grand and individual and distinct from the functional farm buildings around them



Victorian style properties

Arts & Crafts Style

5.47 In the Edwardian and Inter-War eras (i.e. 1901-1939) many properties were designed with Arts & Crafts features and there are a few examples of this style in the area.



Arts & Crafts features

5.48 Typical Arts & Crafts features seen in the area include:

- Very steep, low hanging roof pitches with a front gable
- Horizontally-proportioned windows in simple surrounds
- Use of decorative white render on parts of elevations
- Mock timber beam detailing on gables
- Square, squat brick chimneystacks

5.49 Post War . Buildings characterised by a mixture of styles but using traditional materials There are relatively few newer buildings in the area but there are some good examples of high quality, sensitive design that responds positively to the distinctive styles of the area (see below). In following this approach it is important to pay attention to detail and follow a complete approach to a particular historical or vernacular style, otherwise a crude 'pastiche' form can result.

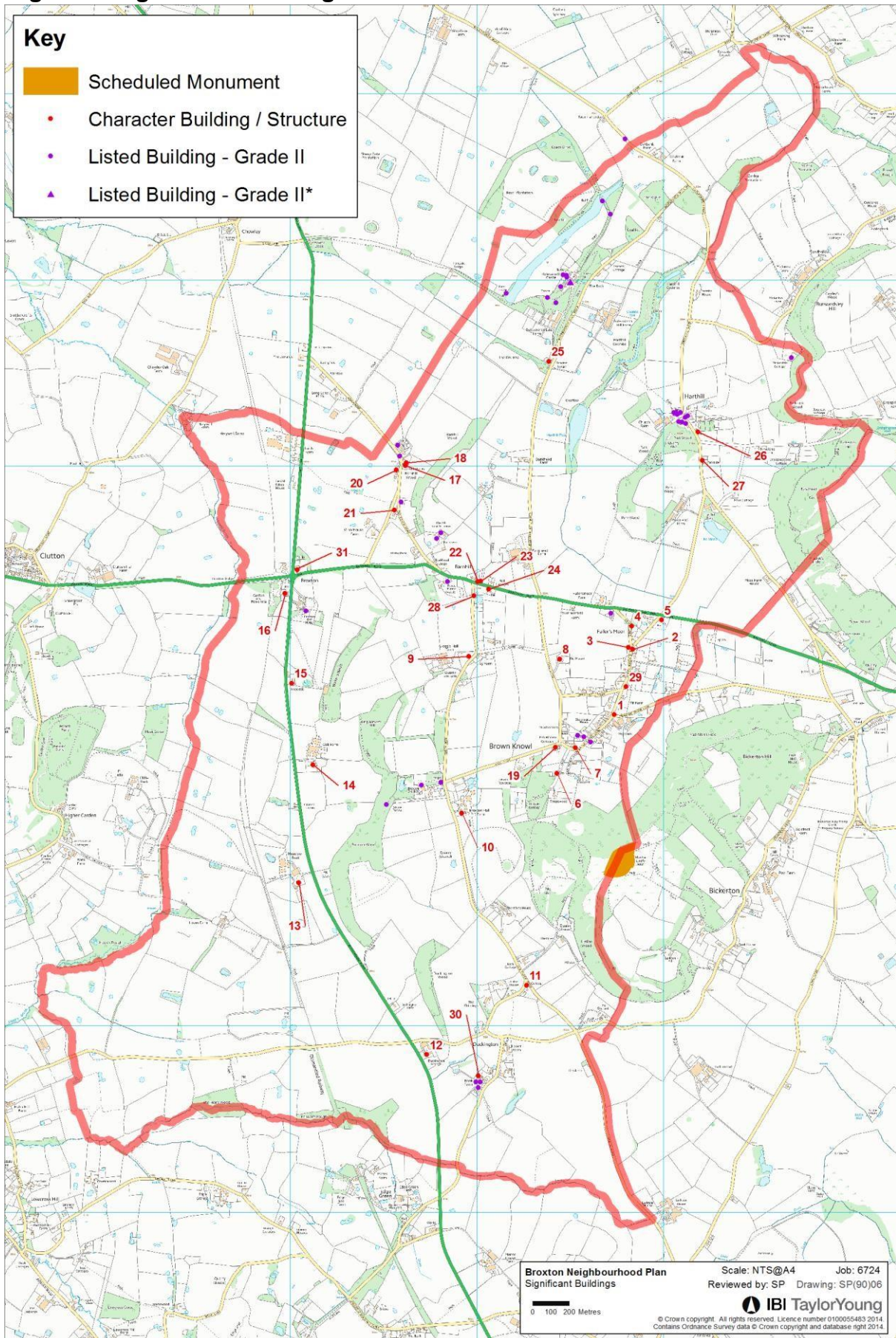


Good examples of new architecture in the area

5.50 These are all of the prevalent styles of residential architecture found in the area. There is also a distinctive style that is common only to Harthill (see the Harthill Character Area description). Beyond this there are individual buildings that represent distinctive styles (for example the Gothic Revival Bolesworth Hall, Elizabethan Old Broxton Hall and Edwardian Baroque Old Police Station). The public houses in the area reflect the coaching inn tradition but also have been much altered and reflect the prevalent styles of each era.

- 5.51 Whilst the above examples are good they are also rather traditional in approach. An alternative, equally valid approach is to respond to provide contemporary architecture, with an appearance that reveals an understanding of the traditional form of the area and does not detract from the existing character, for example by use of traditional materials and colours; form and scale; and elevational proportions and fenestration, but to apply these principles to a contemporary design approach. There are no strong examples of this in the area. The windows in the middle picture above suggest something of this approach but this does not extend to the whole dwelling (which replicates the Arts & Crafts style).

Figure 6. Significant Buildings



6 Conclusions and Next Steps

- 6.1 In summary, this Assessment describes the features that demonstrate the special character of the area. These include both man-made and natural features. It explains how the character derives from both the topography and wider landscape context; and from the local history of the area. It also shows that the local character varies through the Neighbourhood Plan, and defines a series of 'character areas' that enable this to be more accurately understood.
- 6.2 The Character Assessment provides a further stage of analysis by defining significant views, local community spaces and character buildings and structures. These are all undesignated features that contribute significantly to local character. Defining these features (and locating them on plan) is a key practical output of this Assessment.
- 6.3 This Character Assessment therefore forms an important step in the policy making process and a key part of the evidence base for the Neighbourhood Plan. It can also be used by designers of development in the area, helping them to understand the context to which they must respond.

7 References

- 7.1 The full list of references includes the documents that have been referred to and that have informed the preparation of the Character Assessment.

Planning and Policy Context:

- National Planning Policy Framework (2012)
- Cheshire West and Chester Publication Local Plan (December 2013) □ Chester & District Local Plan (2006) Saved Policies

Chester District SPDs:

- SPD - Reuse of Rural Buildings
- SPD - Design for Residential Development

Landscape Character

- National Character Areas, Natural England (2011)
- Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment Type 2 and Type 3 (November 2008)
- North West Landscape Character Framework (2009)
- Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation (2007)

Local Historical Context

- Bawn, W., Dakin, R. and Shadbolt, C. A Local History of Broxton, Duckington & Harthill (2004)
- The National Heritage List for England (including listings), English Heritage

Design Guidance

- Good Practice Guide for Local Listing, English Heritage, 2012
- Building in Context, English Heritage/CABE, 2001
- Building for Life 12, Design Council, 2012