

# A LANDSCAPE STRATEGY FOR CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER BOROUGH



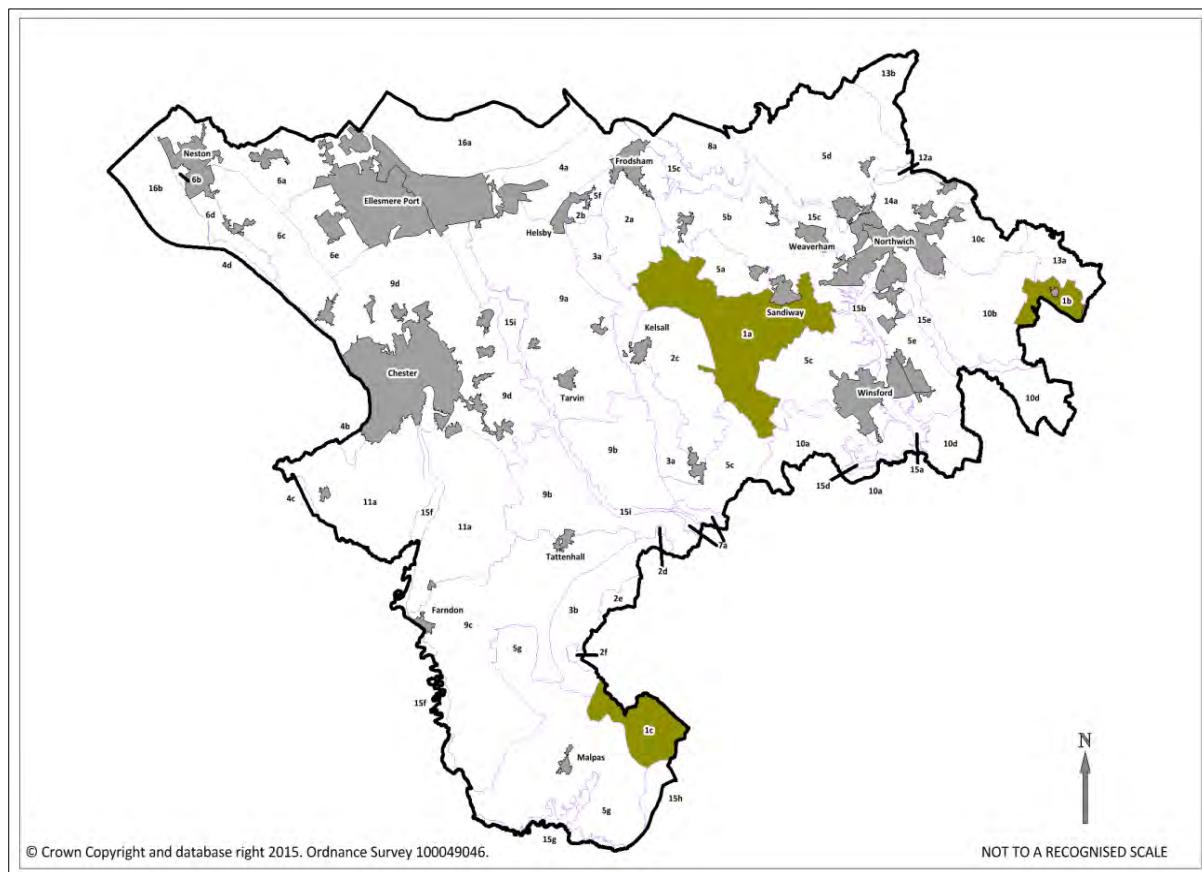
**PART 2  
2016**

## Acknowledgements

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# LCT 1: WOODLANDS, HEATHS, MERES & MOSES



## General Description

This character type is defined by extensive blocks of woodland (mainly planted coniferous but with some broadleaves), interspersed with relict heath, and meres and mosses formed in glacial hollows. More recent water bodies have been created through the extraction of sand and gravel or the quarrying of sandstone. This is also a partly enclosed character type with large fields (over 8ha) defined by regular, straight hedgerow boundaries which in many places are growing out and in poor condition.

The complex of meres, mosses and relict heathland is of internationally importance for nature conservation supporting species such as nightjar, common lizard, cross leaved heath and round-leaved sundew.

There is considerable evidence of human activity in the area since prehistoric times. In particular the palaeo-environmental record preserved in the areas mere's and mosses is regionally significant with the potential to make a significant contribution to our understanding of the prehistoric landscape and its exploitation. Furthermore, concentrations of prehistoric lithics in the vicinity of the areas mere's and mosses highlights the potential for archaeological sites, dating from the prehistoric period, at their margins. This is in addition to the more substantial settlement and funerary sites in the wider landscape.

This character type has a high level of recreational use and a large number of leisure facilities including golf courses and picnic sites as well as a major Forest Park that offers a visitor centre and open access areas.

### ***Visual Character***

This is a landscape of strong contrasts. The flat or gently rolling topography and large straight-sided fields combine with extensive woodland blocks and large water bodies to create a large scale landscape. In marked contrast, within the woodlands and mosses, there is a strong sense of enclosure. The large open water bodies are locally prominent and most views are restricted by trees and woodland blocks.

Colours are largely consistent year round with the dominance of conifers, seasonal variation provided by the pockets of broadleaved woodland, the yellows and reds of the mosslands, and purple flowering heathers on the remnant heathlands.

### ***Physical Influences***

This character type occurs at an intermediate elevation (c 40 – 120m AOD) with an underlying solid geology of mudstone and sandstone overlain by drift deposits of sand and gravel. The landform, soils and vegetation have been heavily influenced by glacial activity, with numerous meltwater channels and hollows occurring within the spread of deposited material, in which the meres and mosses subsequently developed.

The glacial meres and mosses of the character area comprise a series of wetlands that illustrate all stages of the process of natural succession developed over thousands of years from open water through swamp, fen and moss habitats to wet woodland – the vegetation types at each site varying according to the prevailing nutrient status and water level. This diversity is reflected in an extensive range of plants and animals, including many species specially adapted to the unusual wet and sometimes acid conditions. A number of the meres and the associated mosses are protected by national and European designations including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), for example at Black Lake, Oak Mere (also a Special Area of Conservation - SAC), Petty Pool, Hatch Mere and Bar Mere near Bickley. Oak Mere, Black Lake, Hatch Mere, Flax Mere and Abbots Moss (also a SAC) are also designated as Ramsar sites and include schwing moor characteristics.

The extraction of sandstone and gravel has led to the creation of distinctive water-bodies some of which have subsequently become valuable ecological habitats in their own right, for example, Shakerley Mere.

### ***Cultural Influences***

As mainly heath areas that were formerly open and only enclosed in recent centuries, historic settlement is not a key feature of this type. Where settlement does occur it tends to be much more recent such as at the village of Allostock, which has developed since the mid-19th century.

The natural drift geology of this landscape type which influenced the occurrence of heath and meres has also allowed exploitation of sand and gravels which in turn has had a major impact upon the landscape including the creation of new meres. Active quarries in the Delamere and Rudheath areas continue to work the local mineral deposits. However, these tend to be well screened from general view by tree belts.

Delamere was one of four large forests in Cheshire in the medieval period. The medieval Delamere Forest, formerly part of the Forest of Mara, covered a vast portion of CWaC, considerably larger than the coniferous plantations that the place name refers to today. Associated with the medieval Forest landscape and integral to it was woodland-pasture and wooded heath. This too covered large expanses of CWaC and survives today in small isolated pockets such as at Rudheath which was once a large grazed heathland providing valuable resources for the local population. Over time areas of sandy and wooded heath have been massively reduced through agricultural improvements after enclosure or through large scale commercial conifer plantations. The introduction from the

seventeenth century of new grasses which were better suited to sandy and acidic soils enabled the improvement of areas of sandy heath and its enclosure, resulting in the typical landscape of regular large scale enclosure. This pattern of change is seen at a national level and heathlands are now one of the rarest and most threatened habitats in Europe. Today, large-scale commercial conifer plantations mark the most recent stage in the development of these former forest and heathland landscapes. This is a particularly prominent influence as part of the managed and designed landscape features of the Cholmondeley Estate to the eastern flank of the area on the eastern fringe of the Bickley LCA.

The meres and mosses provide a considerable paleo-environmental resource. Meres are likely to have provided an early source of food going back into prehistory. The discovery of worked flint tools in this area indicates very early human activity – potentially temporary settlement. In later times meres continued to be important resources, for example, Vale Royal Abbey was granted permission to create a fishery at Oak Mere in the medieval period.

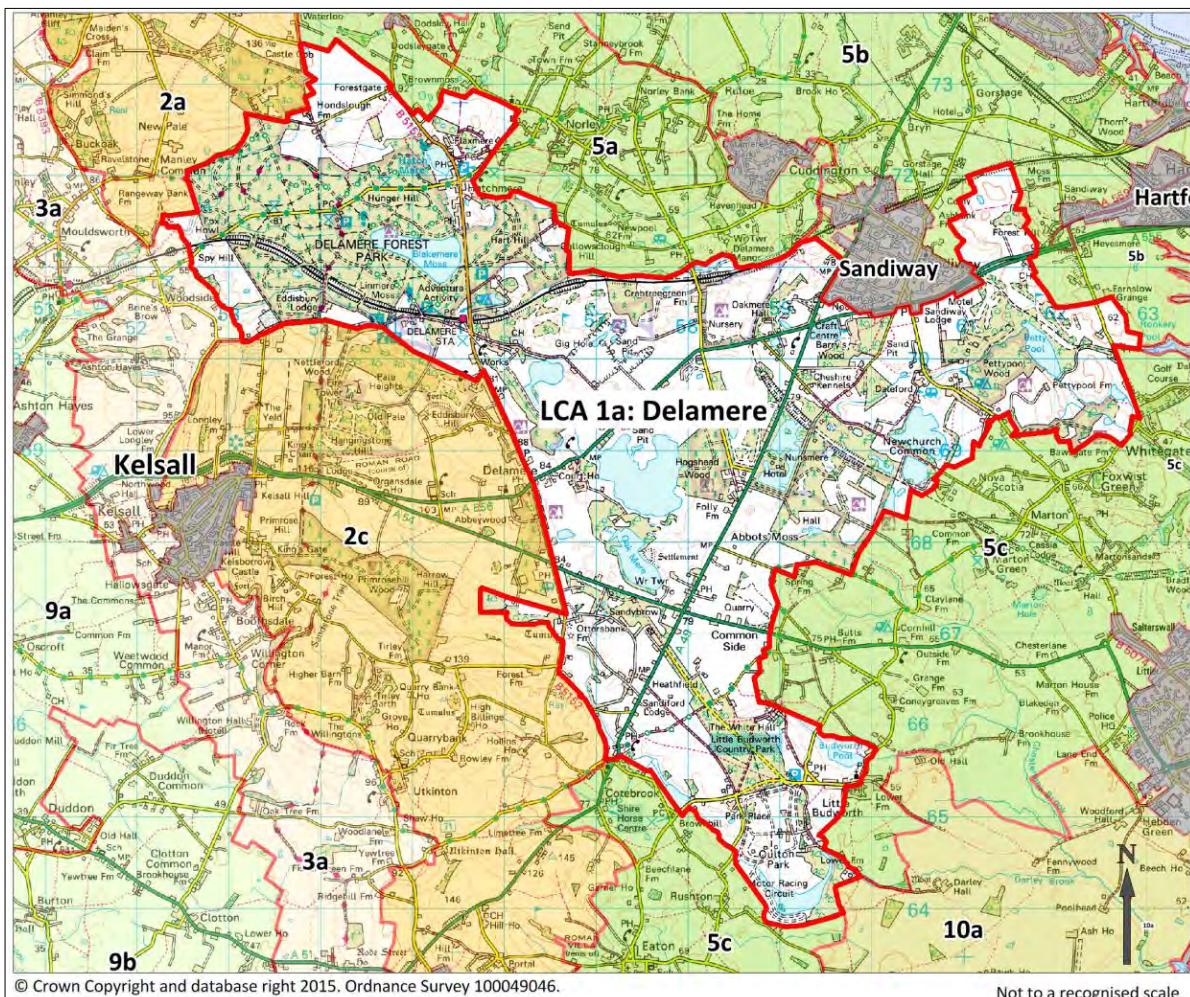
There are **three Landscape Character Areas** within LCT 1:

**1a: *Delamere***

**1b: *Allostock***

**1c: *Bickley***

## LCA 1a: Delamere



### Location and Boundaries

The **Delamere** landscape character area occupies a hollow created during the last glaciation when meltwaters forced their way through the sandstone ridge at the 'Mouldsworth Gap' and deposited extensive glacial sand and gravel deposits in the area that is now Delamere Forest. This is an extensive area bounded to the north by the undulating clay farmland landscape surrounding Norley, to the south by the undulating clay farmland landscape surrounding Oulton, and to the west the prominent sandstone ridge. The extent of the *Delamere* LCA is marked by the extent of glacio-fluvial deposits and accompanying sandy soils which give rise to its distinctive character.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 1a: Delamere***

- A gently undulating large scale landscape of woodland, farmland and heathland overlying sand and gravel glacio-fluvial drift material, deposited during the last glaciation, lying between 65m and 85m AOD
- An organic mosaic of meres, mosses, swamp, fen, woodland and heathland forming part of the ancient Forest of Mara and Mondrem, interspersed with conifer plantations, quarries and large, straight sided field
- A dynamic landscape with many areas showing different stages of peatland/ mossland development and vegetation succession
- Large open water bodies occupying kettle holes formed during the last glaciation, known as meres, are associated with fen, mire, acidic grassland and bog habitats and form part of the Meres and Mosses Ramsar site
- Peatland features include quaking bogs or 'schwing moor', where Sphagnum moss has formed over the water surface e.g. at Abbots Moss
- Large areas of plantation woodland on former heath and peatland, dominated by conifers, at Delamere Forest
- Sandy soils also support species rich acid grassland, oak-birch woodland and lowland heath – Little Budworth Common, one of best surviving examples of lowland heath in Cheshire
- Active and inactive sand and gravel and sandstone extraction sites
- Extensive glacio-fluvial drift deposits have created a resource of sand which is actively quarried to create large water bodies and lakes
- Around and between the woodland and water is pattern of planned 19th century enclosure representing relatively late enclosure of this landscape from waste heath
- Large areas managed for recreation including Delamere Forest, Little Budworth Country Park, parking and picnic sites, two golf courses and part of the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational path
- Low settlement density. Settlement form is relatively late in origin and comprises farmsteads of 18th-19th century origin, linked by turnpike roads, and set within areas of relatively recent enclosure together with scattered linear development
- Buildings are characteristically red brick or sandstone with clay or slate tiles. White washed buildings are also characteristic and prominent features within the landscape
- A great contrast between the openness of the heaths, clearings and meres, and the enclosed nature of the woodland
- The skyline is dominated by trees, most often the dark line of conifer plantations
- There is a great diversity of visual experiences - of particular significance are the open views across the Meres

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### ***Natural / Physical***

- The consistent topography of Delamere, albeit locally undulating, lying at an intermediate elevation of between 65m and 85m AOD;
- The complex soil structure, recognised by the Regionally Important Geological Site designation at Delamere Soil Trail;
- The organic mosaic of open water, mires, mosses, woodland and heathland;
- The visible stages of plant and habitat succession associated with fen, raised bog and mires dominated by Sphagnum moss, acidic grassland, and lowland heath habitats;
- A dynamic nature of the landscape – showing different stages of peatland / mossland development and vegetation succession;

- The meres and associated fen, mire, acidic grassland and bog habitats that are of great nature conservation importance and recognised by national, European and international designations (i.e. SSSI, SAC & Ramsar);
- The peatland features include mosses and quaking bogs or ‘schwing moor’, where Sphagnum moss has formed over the water surface;
- The species rich acid grassland, oak-birch woodland and remnant lowland heath that provide biological and visual diversity;
- The plantations of Scots pine that are distinctive features of the sandy landscape.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The areas of remnant ancient woodland, e.g. at Petty Pool Wood that provide a sense of time depth;
- The historic parklands at Petty Pool and Oulton Park are of local significance;
- The planned 19th century enclosure patterns and 18th-19th century farmsteads and hamlets that provide evidence of the relatively late enclosure of this landscape from waste heath;
- Historic features such as the ancient highway of ‘Peytefinsty’ that links Weaverham and Tarporley, ancient milestones (listed structures), the Iron Age settlement site on the shores of Oak Mere, and the remnant glassworks at Glazier’s Hollow;
- The ‘Seven Lows’ round barrows, early stone crosses and standing stones also indicate that this was valued as a ritual landscape – these features are now protected as Scheduled Monuments;
- The remnant Roman Road at Thieves Moss;
- The Conservation Area at Little Budworth;
- The recreational opportunities provided by Delamere Forest, Little Budworth Country Park, and the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational path.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- The local vernacular comprising red Cheshire brick buildings with slate or clay tile roofs and white-washed properties (some listed buildings) that stand out against the wooded backdrop;
- The area has historically been largely devoid of settlement, except for the occasional forest dwelling;
- The typical settlement form late in origin and comprises farmsteads of 18th-19th century origin set within areas of relatively recent enclosure together with scattered ribbon development alongside roads;
- Estate cottages line the A556 through Delamere;
- The straight ancient highway of ‘Peytefinsty’ passes through the area linking Weaverham and Tarporley, indicating that historically this was a landscape to pass through rather than settle;
- Principle strategic roads pass through the area forming a network of almost straight routes;
- A railway line passes east-west through the character area.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The relatively consistent topography and presence of woodland gives rise to restricted visual prominence and tree-dominated skyline;
- In contrast the open views across the meres;
- The low settlement density and sense of tranquillity of this well-visited landscape;
- The general impression is one of a large-scale landscape due to the fairly consistent topography, large blocks of woodland, large bodies of water and large field sizes;
- The pockets of small scale fields that contribute to a sense of enclosure within this large-scale mosaic;
- Areas of farmland ‘tamed’ in contrast to the unenclosed areas of woodland, heath and meres.
- There is a great contrast between the openness of the heaths, clearings and meres, and the enclosed nature of the woodland;

- The repeated pattern of woodland, meres, mosses, heaths and recently enclosed farmland gives a sense of unity to this area;
- White washed buildings are also characteristic and can be prominent features within the landscape;
- Views to the hillfort at Eddisbury (also known as Castle Ditch) on the adjacent *Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge* landscape character area;
- The western extent of the *Delamere* character area is overlooked by the elevated landform of the *Frodsham and Eddisbury Sandstone Ridges*. However, as this section of the landscape is densely wooded, views into the character area are limited;
- The presence of woodland indicates that this landscape provides opportunities for some screening of low level elements without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on views;
- Although settlement density is low and dispersed, the landscape is used extensively for recreational purposes and a number of main transport routes run through the character area, meaning that visual sensitivity is high to a number of potential visual receptors.

#### **Landscape Condition**

This is generally a well-managed landscape. Delamere Forest is actively managed by the Forestry Commission, permission for minerals working are subject to conditions to restore the land for future use, and the large numbers of designated sites are managed for their nature conservation value. However, there are some issues concerning the current state of the landscape including the past replacement of heathland and peatland sites with conifer plantations, past loss of historic sites (such as some of the round barrows forming the 'Seven Lows'), and a declining hedgerow network around fields in areas of enclosure.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 1a: *Delamere*:**

- Green Belt (north of the A556);
- Countryside (south of the A556);
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV) across the north of the LCA;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management (Sandyford Brook).

## Forces for Landscape Change

### Past Change

- Protection and active regeneration of peatland;
- Felling and clearance of many sites and replanting with non-native conifer species with implications for both biodiversity and the visual character of the woodland and setting;
- Heathland restoration as well as heathland construction as part of quarry restoration plans;
- Reduction in the number of farm units and the diversification of farming activity, including paddocks for horse grazing and ancillary buildings associated with equine development;
- Pressure for built development;
- Management and restoration of mosses to encourage the re-establishment of their wetland ecology e.g. at Blakemere Moss (Forestry Commission project);
- Mineral extraction (of construction sand) resulting in visual and noise impacts;
- Historic planting of conifers on ancient woodland sites ;
- Erosion of habitats and tranquillity resulting from heavy recreational use of the landscape;
- Lowering water tables are threatening habitats at Abbots Moss and Oakmere.

### Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 1a: *Delamere*

- Planting of new woodland on agricultural land within and around Delamere Forest (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan);
- Further forest recreational use and promotion rather than commercial forestry – may see improvements in species mix and biodiversity through the Forest Management Plan;
- Deterioration of habitats at some locations, including ancient woodland, meres, mossland and heathland;
- Impact of non-native species such as *Crassula*, Himalayan balsam, and Rhododendron;
- Biodiversity and landscape enhancement through plantation thinning and recreation of a mosaic of broadleaved woodland, open heathland and scrub landscape interspersed with restored peatlands including basin mires, mosses, wetlands and meres;
- Lowering of the water table may be exacerbated by planting of conifers;
- Continued pressure for mineral extraction threatening habitat and the historic environment but could also provide opportunities for habitat creation;
- Recreational pressures leading to loss of tranquillity, loss or fragmentation of habitats, erosion of road verges, visual intrusion of car-parks or stationary vehicles and demand for additional facilities - recreation activities could be directed towards appropriate man-made sites i.e. former quarry sites, to alleviate continued pressure on existing designated and natural sites;
- Increased demand for water-based recreation in meres and flooded sandpits, leading to potential conflict with nature conservation objectives.
- Increased demand for visitor accommodation such as holiday cottages, caravan parks and holiday cabin developments.
- Loss of historic field pattern due to decline in hedgerow management and disrepair of sandstone walls, with resulting increase in use of fencing;
- Erosion of built environment character through incremental development and the suburbanisation of rural properties and their curtilage;
- Pressure for expansion of existing settlement, ribbon development and in-fill;
- Upgrading of lanes and minor roads leading to increasingly suburban character of the countryside.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA1a: Delamere***

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** the mosaic of habitats and sense of tranquillity, and **restore** mineral sites, ensuring sensitive restoration.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Maintain the organic mosaic of open water, mires, mosses, woodland and heathland.
2. Support management of peatland habitats to maintain different stages of peatland/mossland development and vegetation succession, including the quaking bogs or 'schwingmoor'.
3. Conserve areas of species rich acid grassland and seek opportunities to extend this habitat.
4. Support restoration and re-creation of lowland heath, including removal of conifers on heathland sites. Manage through grazing and aim to include heathland creation in mineral restoration plans.
5. Conserve the remaining areas of ancient woodland and encourage enhanced management of woodlands, including the replacement of non-native species by native broadleaved species and active management of existing woodlands to ensure a diverse age structure and ground flora.
6. Support plans to increase woodland cover in areas of farmland of low ecological value using native broadleaved species, including oak-birch woodland, ensuring no detriment to historic assets.
7. Ensure mineral extraction does not detract from the naturalistic and tranquil qualities of the area – use naturalistic planting to screen extraction activities.
8. Monitor existing sand and gravel extraction programmes, and undertake risk assessments of proposed wet working of sand, to ensure extraction does not result in lowering of the water levels or adversely affect wetland habitats. Avoid planting conifers in these areas which may exacerbate the lowering of the water table.
9. Seek positive restoration schemes for mineral extraction sites to heathland, and also restoration of wetland habitats, species rich grassland/acidic grassland, scrub and woodland. Aim to increase the diversity of habitats by creating different stages of peatland/mossland development and vegetation succession.
10. Seek opportunities for recreational use of restored sites where this is compatible with nature conservation objectives.

11. Manage recreation to ensure heavy recreational use does not threaten naturalistic and tranquil qualities of the area.
12. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
13. Protect above ground archaeological features such as the ancient settlement site on the shores of Oak Mere, ancient glassworks at Glazier's Hollow, and round barrows at 'Seven Lows' and promote sustainable management practices in their vicinity to avoid damage by root growth or ploughing.
14. Conserve the historic character of, and settings to, the historic parks at Petty Pool and Oulton.
15. Maintain the great contrast provided by the openness of the heaths, clearings and meres, and the enclosed nature of the woodland.
16. Maintain the simple tree-dominated skyline and the open views across the Meres.
17. Maintain plantations of Scots pine as distinctive features of the sandy landscape where this does not conflict with nature conservation objectives.
18. Consider opportunities for replanting of hedgerows with trees in areas of enclosed farmland to maintain a continuous hedgerow network.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Conserve the 18th-19th century farmsteads and hamlets that provide evidence of the relatively late enclosure of this landscape from waste heath.
2. Conserve the low settlement density and sense of tranquillity of this well-visited landscape.
3. Monitor the cumulative effect of piecemeal change in this area – ensure new buildings and their gardens, drives, gates, etc. do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area through provision of appropriate guidance.
4. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
5. Conserve open areas along roads, particularly views across meres – seek to limit incremental linear development which could create a continuous built edge.

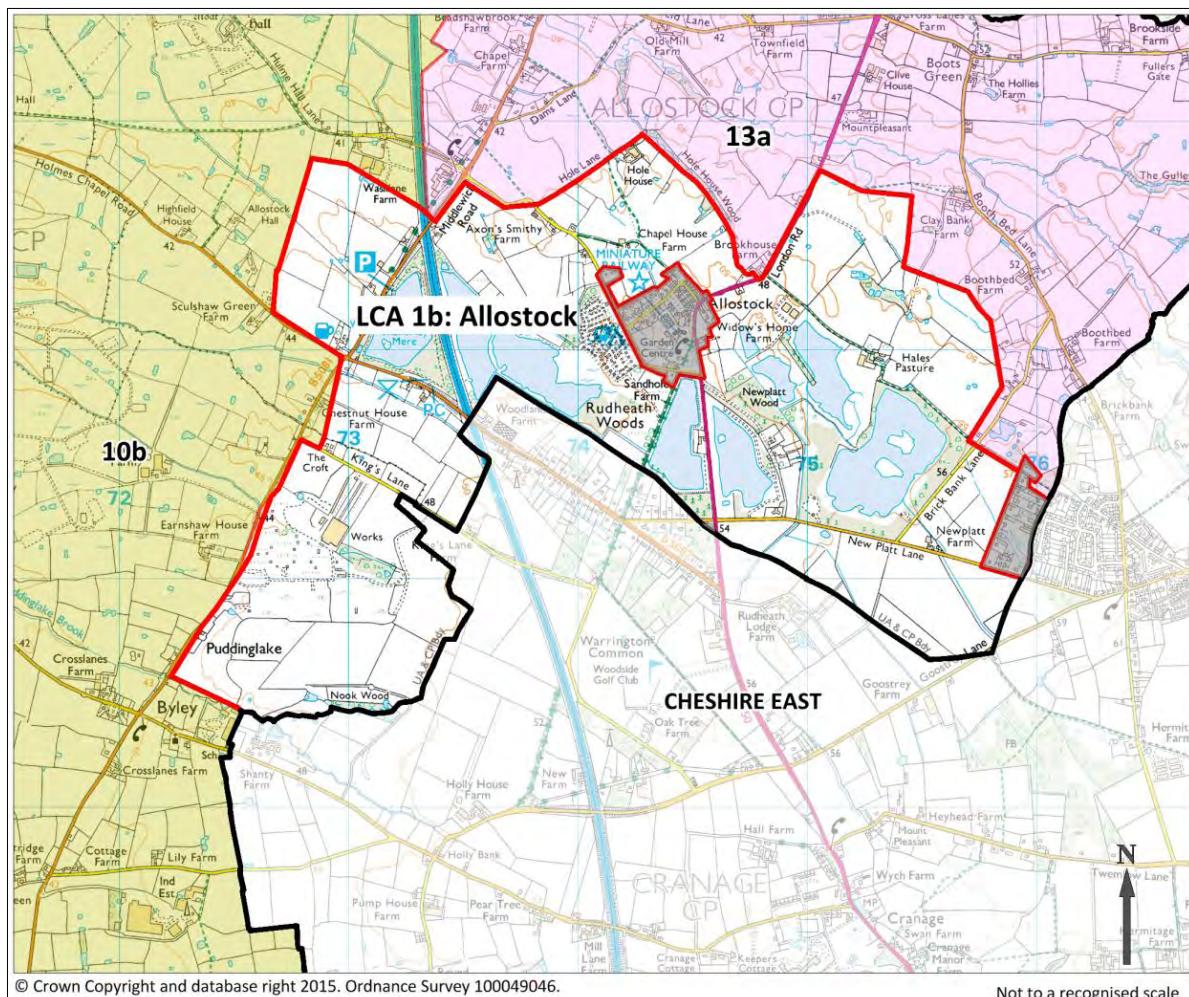
6. Using local materials such as red Cheshire brick and sandstone with slate or clay tile roofs, and white-washed finishes, will maintain the local vernacular and enhance sense of place.



LCT 1: Woodlands, Heaths,  
Meres & Mosses

LCA 1a: *Delamere*

## LCA 1b: Allostock



### Location and Boundaries

The **Allostock** LCA occupies an area of glacio-fluvial deposits on the eastern boundary of the borough. To the north lies the lowland landscape of the *Peover Lowland Farmland and Mosses* and to the west lies the flat clay *Stublach Plain*. This heathy landscape extends beyond the administrative boundary of the borough into Cheshire East to the east and south.

### **Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 1b: Allostock**

- A flat landscape of woodland, farmland and heathland overlying sand and gravel glacio- fluvial drift material, deposited during the last glaciation, lying between 45m and 50m AOD
- Extensive glacio-fluvial drift deposits have created a resource of sand and gravel which is still actively quarried to create large water filled quarries
- Areas of plantation woodland on former heath and peatland, including conifers which form a dark skyline
- Sandy soils support species rich acid grassland, oak-birch woodland and lowland heath
- Open water, woodland and heathland resulting from sand and gravel extraction on former heathland
- Shakerley Mere Country Park provides recreational opportunities
- Around and between the woodland and water is a pattern of planned 19th century enclosure - relatively late enclosure of this landscape from waste heath
- Settlement form comprises farmsteads of 18th-19th century origin set within areas of relatively recent enclosure together with scattered ribbon development alongside roads and a village at Allostock
- Straight roads bordered by verges and punctuated by gorse reflecting the sandy character of the area
- Buildings are characteristically red brick with clay tiles or slate. White washed buildings are also characteristic and prominent features within the landscape
- Individual houses in large plots are characteristic
- Nurseries and polytunnels are familiar features
- There is a great diversity of visual experiences - of particular significance are the open views across the meres although from the roads the water bodies are hidden
- The skyline is dominated by trees.

### **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The almost flat topography, lying at an intermediate elevation of between 45m and 50m AOD;
- Organic mosaic of open water, woodland and heathland – occupying the areas around former sand and gravel quarries;
- The soils that have developed on the glacio-fluvial drift are mostly deep permeable sandy and coarse loamy soils, with an isolated area of peat at Newplatt Wood;
- The remnant species rich acid grassland, oak-birch woodland and lowland heath habitats that provide biological and visual diversity;
- The deciduous woodland that forms a backdrop to views across the meres;
- The plantations of Scots pine and straight roads bordered by verges and punctuated by gorse that are distinctive features of the sandy landscape;
- The sandy soils support remnant acid grassland, semi-natural woodland, coniferous woodland, remnant heath and farmland;
- The broadleaved oak-birch woodland, although there are also coniferous plantations e.g. to the south of Newplatt Mere where a mature coniferous plantation is bounded by the original oak-birch woodland;
- The distinctive *heathy* character with gorse lining the roads, stands of Scots pine, and remnant areas of heath adjacent to Shakerley Mere and Newplatt Mere;

- The extensive resource of sand and gravel which has been quarried in the past to form a large number of water bodies which are now a key feature of the area, reminiscent of the natural meres around Delamere;
- The wet woodland and wet dwarf shrub heath of Shakerley Mere, designated as a local wildlife site.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The planned 19th century enclosure patterns and 18th-19th century farmsteads and hamlets that provide evidence of the relatively late enclosure of this landscape from waste heath;
- The recreational opportunities provided by Shakerley Mere;
- The character area corresponds with a once extensive area of medieval heathland and forest. Today, only small fragments of heath survive. Significant change occurred in the 19th century with the planned enclosure of the landscape and creation of farmland, followed by sand and gravel extraction;
- Fields are relatively large compared to the ancient fields in adjacent landscapes;
- Shakerley Mere Nature Reserve provides opportunities for walking and fishing, and is the home to Lymm Angling Club;
- The typical settlement form is relatively late in origin and comprises farmsteads of 18th-19th century origin set within areas of relatively recent enclosure together with scattered ribbon development alongside roads;
- A paucity of designated historic structures or buildings;
- Remnant airfield hard surfaces from former RAF Cranage within the south-west corner of the area and designated as Scheduled Monuments.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- The area has *historically* been largely devoid of settlement;
- Allostock forms a small, fragmented settlement with no real centre, located close to Rudheath Woods, and is entirely surrounded by, but excluded from, the LCA;
- Local vernacular comprising red Cheshire brick with slate or clay tile roofs and white-washed properties that stand out against the wooded backdrop;
- The road pattern comprises a network of almost straight roads – these are often bordered by wide verges containing gorse;
- The M6 cuts through the area, forming a physical barrier to movement east-west;
- Prominent large works in the flat open landscape south of Shakerley Mere;
- Quarrying is currently no longer active (but permission sought for land south of New Platt Mere).

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The general impression is one of a large-scale landscape due to the flat landform, large scale fields and large water bodies. The simple tree-dominated skyline and the open views across the meres from close to them are of particular significance;
- There is a diversity of visual experiences, from open views across large fields and open meres, to enclosed views within woodland;
- The low settlement density and sense of tranquillity;
- The only vantage points are provided by the bridges constructed over the busy M6 motorway as it runs north-south through the area and these have a significant impact upon the surrounding landscape;
- Allostock is the only settlement of note and is surrounded by the LCA;
- Localised but significant perceptual and physical barrier of the M6, introducing noise and movement into the landscape;
- The area appears ‘tamed’ as a result of the straight-sided fields that dominate the area;

- Gorse adds texture and colour to the landscape;
- The man-made lakes appear natural and contribute to the sense of tranquillity associated with this landscape;
- Although this landscape is perceived to be a highly natural landscape due to the presence of woodland, open water and grassland, the presence of the M6 detracts from the overall sense of tranquillity;
- The relative inaccessibility of most the area;
- Since this is a flat landscape it is not visually prominent;
- The skyline is dominated by trees;
- Views out of the character area are generally limited by woodland planting, although there are views from the western edge of the character area across the *Stublach Plain*;
- The presence of woodland indicates that this landscape provides an opportunity for some screening of low level elements without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on views.

#### **Landscape Condition**

This is generally a well-managed landscape. Mineral extraction has now ceased, although not all sites have been restored and some areas are still used for industrial uses. There are some issues concerning the current state of the landscape including the historic loss of heathland sites, a gappy hedgerow network around fields in areas of enclosure, and lack of management of some woodland.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 1b: *Allostock*:**

- Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of local importance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets (RAF Cranage - parts of).

## **Forces for Landscape Change**

### **Past change**

- Reduction in the number of farm units and the diversification of farming activity, including paddocks for horse grazing and an increase in fencing;
- Sand and gravel extraction leading to erosion of habitats and tranquillity;
- Increased industrial use of land leading to erosion of habitats and tranquillity;
- Lack of woodland management, and consequent invasive species e.g. Rhododendron within woodlands;
- Planting of coniferous species, particularly around industrial land uses;
- The M6 runs through this area.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 1b: *Allostock***

- Pressure for ‘backland’ housing development;
- Pressure for future mineral extraction - Allostock contains areas of search for sand and gravel extraction and the area is a preferred area for future controlled brine extraction which would result in impacts on the landscape. Mineral extraction may result in visual and noise impacts, and the wet working of sand that may result in the lowering of the water table affecting nearby habitats;
- Continued pressure for industrial use of land leading to further erosion of habitats and tranquillity;
- Lowering of the water table may be exacerbated by planting of conifers;
- Recreational pressure - use of water bodies for fishing, water skiing and other recreational activities including caravan parks, which may conflict with peaceful enjoyment and nature conservation objectives – recreation could be directed to certain areas such as the sandy Rudheath Woods (planting policy within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan);
- Potential infrastructure improvements to the M6 corridor.

***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for  
LCA 1b: Allostock***

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** the diverse mosaic of heathy habitats and **restore** areas of heathland and woodland

***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Conserve and manage areas of species rich acid grassland and seek opportunities to extend this habitat.
2. Support restoration and re-creation of lowland heath, including removal of conifers on heathland sites. Manage remnant heathland habitats e.g. around Rudheath Woods through grazing.
3. Encourage enhanced management of woodlands, including the replacement of non-native species by native broadleaved species, control of invasive species such as Rhododendron, and active management of existing woodlands to ensure a diverse age structure and ground flora.
4. Seek opportunities to increase woodland cover using native broadleaved species, including oak-birch woodland, where this does not compromise heathland or wetland habitats, and ensuring no detriment to historic assets.
5. Ensure mineral extraction does not detract from the naturalistic and tranquil qualities of the area – use naturalistic planting to screen extraction activities.
6. Seek positive restoration schemes for mineral extraction sites, including restoration of wetland habitats, grassland, heathland, scrub and woodland. Aim to increase the diversity of habitats by creating different stages of peatland /mossland development and vegetation succession.
7. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
8. Maintain the simple tree-dominated skyline and the open views across the Meres. Consider opportunities to create new views.
9. Maintain plantations of Scots pine and gorse scrub as distinctive features of the sandy landscape where this does not conflict with nature conservation objectives.
10. Consider opportunities for replanting hedgerows and hedgerow trees in areas of enclosed farmland to maintain a continuous hedgerow network.

11. Ensure uses associated with the large non-designated water bodies (e.g. fishing, water skiing and other recreational activities) do not conflict with nature conservation objectives and the peaceful enjoyment of the meres.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

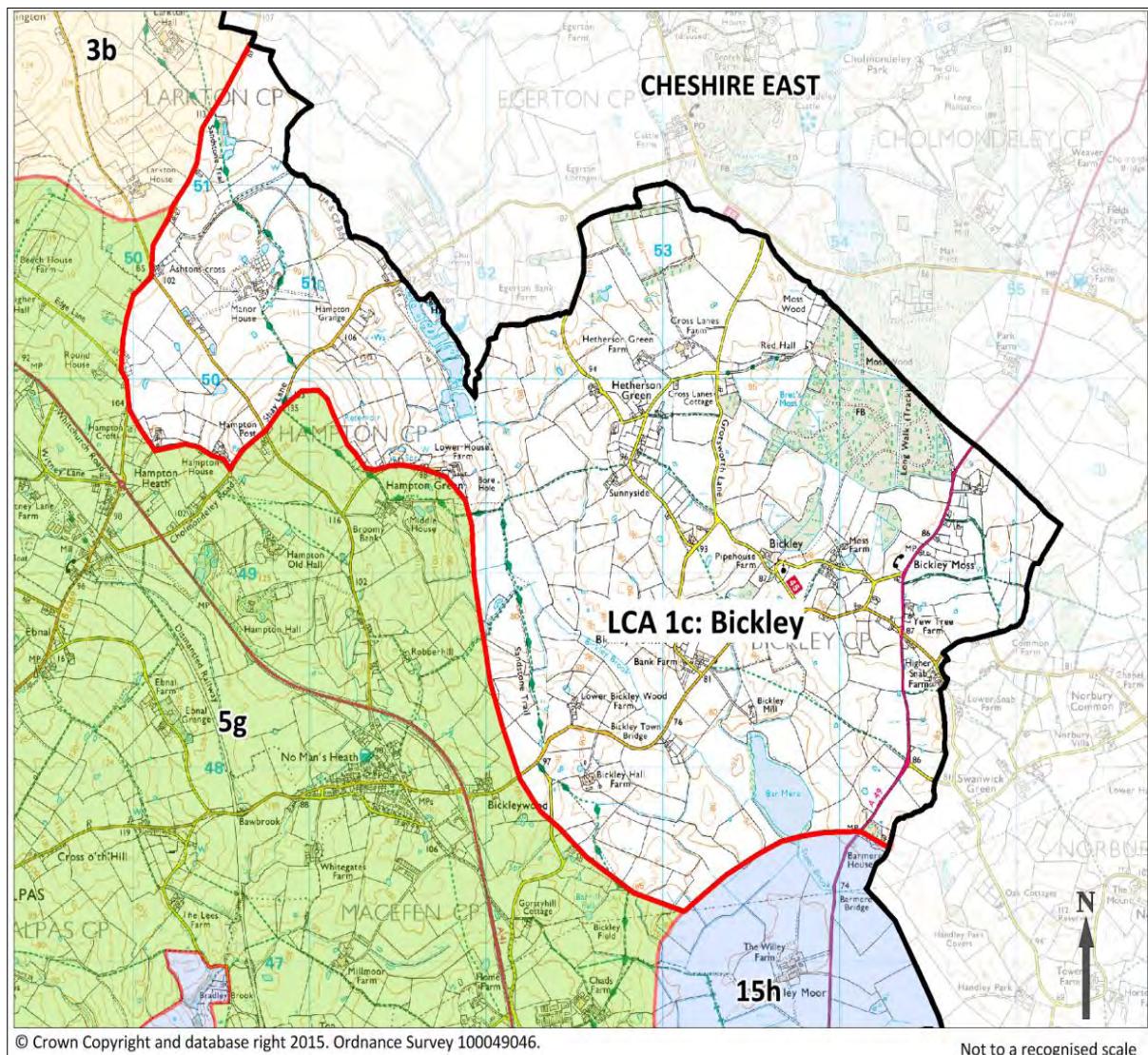
1. Conserve the 18th-19th century farmsteads and hamlets that provide evidence of the relatively late enclosure of this landscape from waste heath.
2. Conserve open areas along local roads, particularly views across meres – seek to limit incremental linear development which could create a continuous built edge.
3. Screen views of the M6 using native vegetation, where possible.
4. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
5. Using local materials such as red Cheshire brick and sandstone with slate or clay tile roofs, and limited white-washed finishes, will maintain the local vernacular and enhance sense of place.
6. Respect exiting settlement pattern of individual properties built in their own grounds.
7. Use native and locally characteristic vegetation (oak-birch woodland, gorse, Scots pine) to integrate any built development into the landscape and to screen industrial land.



LCT 1: Woodland, Heaths,  
Meres & Mosses

LCA 1b: *Allostock*

## LCA 1c: Bickley



### Location and Boundaries

The **Bickley** landscape character area falls across the south-eastern flank of CWaC and extends eastwards across the boundary into Cheshire East. The area is bounded to the west across most of its length by the *Maplas* LCA within the *Undulating Enclosed Farmland* LCT, with *Grindley Valley* to the south and for a short distance to the north *Beeston to Duckington Sandstone Fringe* LCA.

### **Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 1c: Bickley**

- The topography is flat to the north-east but more undulating in the west
- Occasional steeper slopes found to the west of the Bickley Brook
- Elevation is c. 80-120m AOD
- Irregular and semi-irregular medium and large fields, primarily under pasture use
- An intermediate scale LCA
- Bar Mere provides a significant surface water feature to the southern edge of the area but is often inconspicuous because of waterside vegetation and limited elevated views
- A tight concentration of fishing lakes to the north of the area at Egerton Hall Farm
- In the east of the character area the large blocks of woodland associated with the Cholmondeley estate conspicuous in views from the west and from the busy A49
- Points of higher ground provide views out, often framed by hedgerow trees, over the undulating fields of the Malpas LCA, with the occasional glimpse of one of the meres in the area
- Elsewhere, very narrow sunken lanes with high hedges, winding through a gently undulating landscape, contribute to the perception of a remote, small-scale landscape
- Settlement is mainly dispersed with a limited number of small, nucleated hamlets such as Bickley Town and Hetherson Green which are desirable residential locations
- A network of minor lanes, with only the A49 as a major road to the eastern fringe
- Concentration of black and white timber framed cottages in this area, some of which are 20<sup>th</sup> century pastiche of the vernacular
- Limited views to the south are dominated by the high ground in the vicinity of Wirswall near the CWaC boundary
- Bar Mere recognised as important wetland habitat and designated as a SSSI
- Willows and mature birch have colonised part of the mire at Bickley Moss where the wet woodland is well used by warblers, green and great spotted woodpeckers and buzzards and is locally designated as a Local Wildlife Site
- The skyline is dominated by hedgerow trees, or the dark line of conifer plantations
- There is a great diversity of visual experiences - of particular significance are the open views across Bar Mere.

### **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The gently undulating topography with more pronounced slopes to the western fringe of the area above the Bickley Brook;
- The predominantly pastoral land use outside the managed conifer plantations of the Cholmondeley Estate to the east;
- Arable farming presents significant minority land use within a predominantly pastoral context;
- Sandy gley soils, argillic stagnogleys, stagnogleyic argillic brown earths and typical brown sands. The latter is commonly associated with glacio-fluvial sand and gravel deposits. Peaty soils – earthy oligo-fibrous soils are occasionally found in enclosed hollows;
- Bar Mere and smaller mosses formed within natural depressions in the glacial drift following the retreat of the ice sheets some 15, 000 years ago;
- Bar Mere is the main water feature whilst there are many small field ponds with dense bankside vegetation;
- Bar Mere provides habitats for aquatic invertebrates as well as the wintering of wildfowl. It is designated as a SSSI and is an example of a nutrient rich mere having a very well developed

fringe of emergent vegetation. A narrow strip of woodland around part of the mere is included in the site;

- Treescapes to the western fringe of the area limited to hedgerow oaks;
- Designed pocket woodlands and shelter belts are scattered to the north and east of the area.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- Significant influence of the managed and designed landscape features of the Cholmondeley Estate to the eastern flank of the area;
- Paucity of historic built heritage assets;
- Limited recreational opportunity across Public Rights of Way network, including parts of the Sandstone Trail and access within the Cholmondeley plantations;
- Small medieval field patterns survive in small areas around Bickley Moss and Hetherson Green;
- Paleo-environmental potential of Barr Mere and the area's wetlands.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Dispersed settlement of small, loose-knit agricultural hamlets and scattered farmsteads;
- Significant equestrian complex and gallops dominate the open undulating landscape at Manor House Stables;
- Scattered farmsteads with large utilitarian agricultural sheds;
- Characteristic white wash and oak timber framed cottages found across the area.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Visibility is often confined by high hedges and hedgerow trees, or the coniferous plantations of the eastern fringe, foreshortening views across the gently undulating topography;
- Low settlement density results in a quiet, tranquil landscape;
- In places an 'intimate' hidden character with a sense of enclosure due to the narrow lanes, hedges and sunken lanes;
- However, variations in field size and concentration of hedgerow trees affords a more open feeling to the north west around Manor House Stables;
- Despite its medium scale, Bar Mere is usually inconspicuous in the landscape;
- The block conifer plantations and shelter belts of the Cholmondeley Estate provide a strong structure and skyline to the east and year round consistency in colour to the pastoral landscape where oak trees alter with the season;
- The A49 presents an uncharacteristic element of movement and noise to the landscape;
- The presence of woodland indicates that this landscape provides opportunities for some screening of low level elements without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on views.

#### **Landscape Condition**

Generally good, with key characteristic elements that make up the area mainly intact across some parts but eroding elsewhere. Field size has increased to the eastern and northern parts where former hedgerow trees are now freestanding, particularly where arable land use has been established and where equestrian uses are prominent around Manor House Stables.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 1c: *Bickley*:**

- Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of national and local importance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

## **Forces for Landscape Change**

### **Past change**

- Changes in farming from pastoral to arable and silage cropping with consequent seasonal changes to the landscape and loss of field hedges;
- Consequent erosion of historic field patterns;
- Separation from agriculture of farmhouses, leading to pressure for hobby farming and changes of use of the land;
- Under-management and/or inappropriate management of some of farm woodland;
- Over-mature hedgerow trees in decline;
- Loss of field ponds, exacerbating fragmentation of habitat networks;
- Erosion in built environment character through pastiche and suburban residential development and alteration;
- Prominence of modern agricultural buildings in the landscape;
- Large scale equine enterprise and infrastructure;
- Sub-urbanisation of the highway network.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 1c: *Bickley***

- On-going increase in arable land use;
- Decline of important woodland and wetland habitats through reduction, fragmentation and deterioration of farm woodlands;
- Reduction, fragmentation and deterioration of wetland habitats, through drainage and in-fill plus nutrient run-off from surrounding farmland;
- Climate change affecting the ecology and hydrology of the meres and mosses and flood risk on the Bickley Brook;
- Further sub division of remaining farm complexes.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA1c: Bickley***

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** the quiet, remote rural character and enclosed field pattern, **restore** areas of hedgerow loss, former peat sites back to wetland, and broadleaved woodland.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Conserve and manage areas of species-rich meres and mosses and seek opportunities to extend this habitat.
2. Encourage restoration of former peat sites back to wetlands.
3. Encourage enhanced management of farm and estate woodlands, including the replacement of non-native species by native broadleaved species, control of invasive species such as Rhododendron, and active management of existing woodlands to ensure a diverse age structure and ground flora.
4. Seek opportunities to increase woodland cover using native broadleaved species, including oak-birch woodland, where this does not compromise ecologically valuable grassland, heathland or wetland habitats, and ensuring no detriment to historic assets.
5. Ensure farm intensification and diversification does not detract from the naturalistic and tranquil qualities of the area – use naturalistic planting to screen extraction activities.
6. Encourage sympathetic integration of equine development through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
7. Maintain the simple tree-dominated skyline and the open views across the meres. Consider opportunities to create new views.
8. Maintain estate plantations of conifers and gorse scrub as distinctive features of the sandy landscape where this does not conflict with nature conservation objectives.
9. Consider opportunities for replanting hedgerows and hedgerow trees in areas of enclosed farmland to maintain a continuous hedgerow network.
10. Consider opportunities for new footpaths.

## ***Built Development Guidelines***

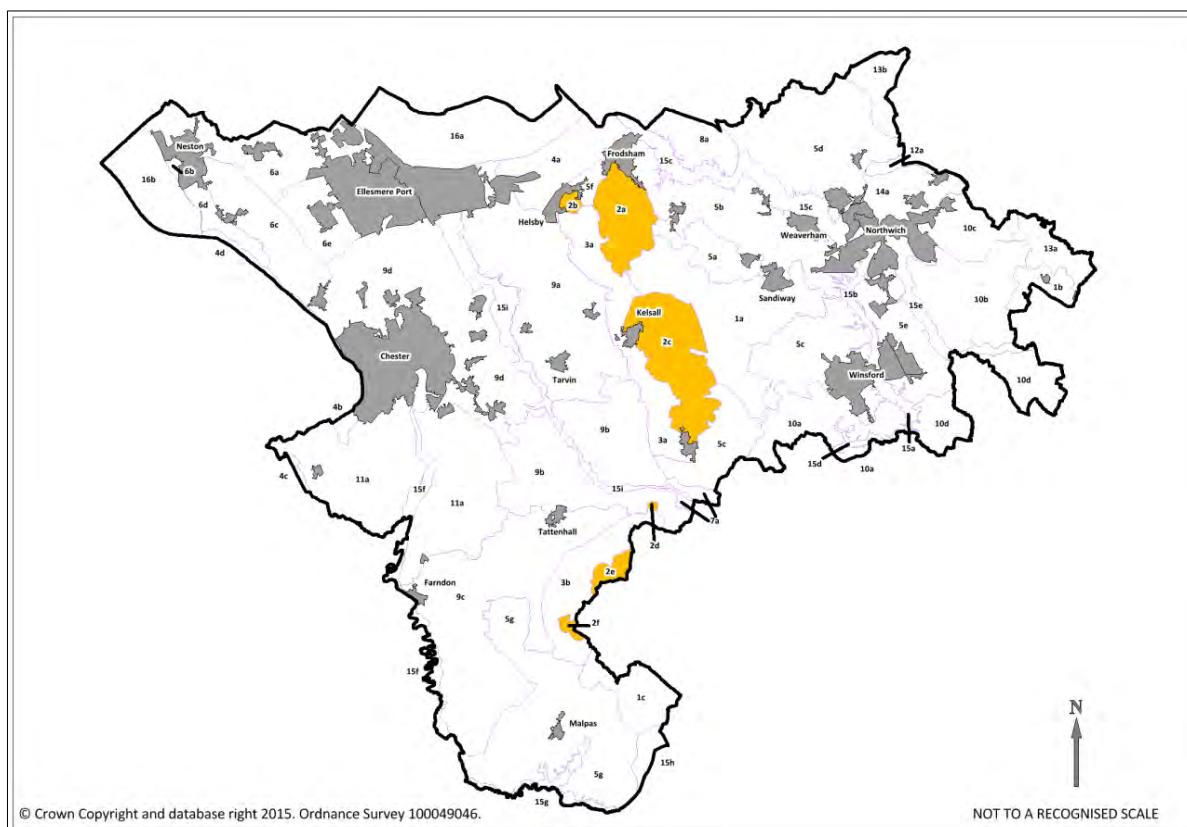
- 1.** Conserve the 18th-19th century farmsteads and hamlets that provide evidence of the relatively late enclosure of this landscape from waste heath.
- 2.** Conserve open areas along local roads, particularly views across Bar Mere – seek to limit incremental linear development which could create a continuous built edge.
- 3.** Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development does not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
- 4.** Using local materials such as red Cheshire brick and sandstone with slate or clay tile roofs, and white-washed finishes, will maintain the local vernacular and enhance sense of place.
- 5.** Use native and locally characteristic vegetation (oak-birch woodland, gorse, Scots pine) to integrate any built development into the landscape and to screen industrial land.
- 6.** Prevent suburban gentrification through construction of individual pastiche dwellings.



LCT 1: Woodland, Heaths,  
Meres and Mosses

LCA 1c: *Bickley*

## LCT 2: SANDSTONE RIDGE



### General Description

The *Sandstone Ridge* stands prominently above the surrounding Plain and is visually one of the most distinctive landmarks in the Cheshire West and Chester landscape. It comprises a spine running roughly north-south from Helsby through Tarporley and on to Duckington for some 30 km, emerging and dropping back down into the plain as a series of scarps and sandstone outcrops. Helsby Hill and Beeston Crag are prominent isolated outliers. There are overlapping characteristics with the *Sandstone Fringe* character type, but the visual and topographic differences set it apart from this more intermediate landscape.

The ridge has a very strong cultural and natural character for example there is a concentration of prehistoric sites, woodland and heathland, sandstone quarries and exposures and sandstone buildings, walls and sunken lanes.

### Visual Character

This landscape exhibits varying degrees of enclosure and contrasting scales, due to the localised ridge and valley features of the undulating topography and a wide variation in woodland cover. At many locations solid blocks of woodland (including conifers) and high hedgerows combine to provide strong enclosure, creating an impression of a small-scale verdant landscape. The sense of enclosure by lush, dense vegetation is further reinforced when travelling along sunken roads between high hedges or valley bottoms below wooded ridge lines. Elsewhere, reduced tree cover leads to a more open landscape with a dominant hedgerow pattern, particularly evident from many elevated positions available along the network of narrow lanes.

Expansive, long distance views provide an important element of this landscape type as they are widely available from the higher ground and contribute significantly to the distinctive character of the landscape. These vary between narrow views framed or filtered by high vegetation to spectacular panoramic views from open vantage points. Views extend over the surrounding plain as far as the Clwydian hills in the west and the Peak District in the east. Locations at the northern and southern ends of the ridge enjoy views of the Mersey Valley and the Shropshire Hills respectively.

### ***Physical Influences***

This elevated character type has a topography of between 100 and 212m AOD. The underlying bedrock comprises Helsby Sandstone and Tarporley Siltstone with a small amount of glacial till in occasional places. Outcrops of Triassic sandstone show cross bedding indicative of their formation from windblown sand dunes.

The *Sandstone Ridge* is generally overlain by free-draining brown earths and brown sands. The steep slopes and thin acid soils support concentrations of woodland, some ancient Oakwood, but much of more recent secondary origin or planted with conifers. Bird species are well represented, with several uncommon breeding species attracted to the elevated position, extensive woodlands and deadwood habitat, for example sparrow-hawk, raven and pied flycatcher.

Lowland heath, a habitat of international importance, was once a common sight in Cheshire but like other areas in the UK it has become increasingly reduced and fragmented; however, restoration work on Bickerton Hill SSSI has resulted in the local expansion of this important habitat. A number of woodlands are listed as Local Wildlife Sites and/or SSSIs, such as Dunsdale Hollow SSSI. A number of other geological and geomorphological features in the type are listed as of regional importance (RIGGS).

Pasture dominates the land use and is enclosed by hawthorn hedgerows and sandstone walls in the south. Arable cultivation of fodder crops and potatoes plus orchards and fruit farming are located on the better draining, gentler slopes of the ridge.

### ***Cultural Influences***

Settlement is mainly small scale and dispersed and comprises individual farms and houses. There are areas of modern development which has changed this settlement pattern such as at Utkinton and Quarry Bank, with the two largest urban settlements being Kelsall to the west, which grew from a dispersed pattern into a nucleated centre in the 20th century, and Tarporley to the south. Settlement is of a greater density in the adjoining *Sandstone Fringe* landscape type.

Prehistoric flint scatters and barrows indicate prehistoric activity (Bronze Age and earlier). This character type has been inhabited since at least the Iron Age period (c 700 BC) - six late Bronze Age/Iron Age hillforts provide evidence of this at Helsby, Woodhouse, Eddisbury, Kelsborrow, Beeston and Maiden Castle. These promontory forts (with the exception of Eddisbury and Beeston which were defended settlements) utilised the imposing natural topography and incorporated banks, ditches and palisades. They were imposing structures that were intended to be seen, making a statement about status as much as defence.

The northern areas of this landscape character type lay within the extensive former Royal Forest of Mara (Delamere) that covered a vast portion of Cheshire, considerably larger than the coniferous plantations that today are referred to as 'Delamere Forest'. The popular perception of a forest is that of an area densely covered with trees. In the medieval period, a forest was an area for hunting, especially deer; broad-leaved woodland was interspersed with farmland and even settlement in some areas. Forests were mainly owned by the Crown and they were subject to Forest Law which

imposed restrictions upon land use and severely punished poaching. The southern areas of this character type were largely woodland and heath, fringed by medieval fields, yet still important resources to the adjoining communities.

During the medieval period it became increasingly common for hunting to take place in deer parks and there are two former sites on the ridge which are identified by the place names Old Pale and New Pale. The enclosure of the forest was finally completed in 1819. Agricultural land was enclosed, creating the pattern of small to medium (up to 8ha) regular fields with straight hawthorn hedgerows. In the southern areas enclosure and forestry were also occurring, but on a significantly smaller scale. These areas were also subject to significant change by the activities of the local estates to improve their agricultural land.

Evidence of former industries is visible in the landscape, with numerous small sandstone quarries. Quarried sandstone from the ridge has been used extensively in the construction of local buildings and boundary walls, adding a distinctive architecture and colour to the area.

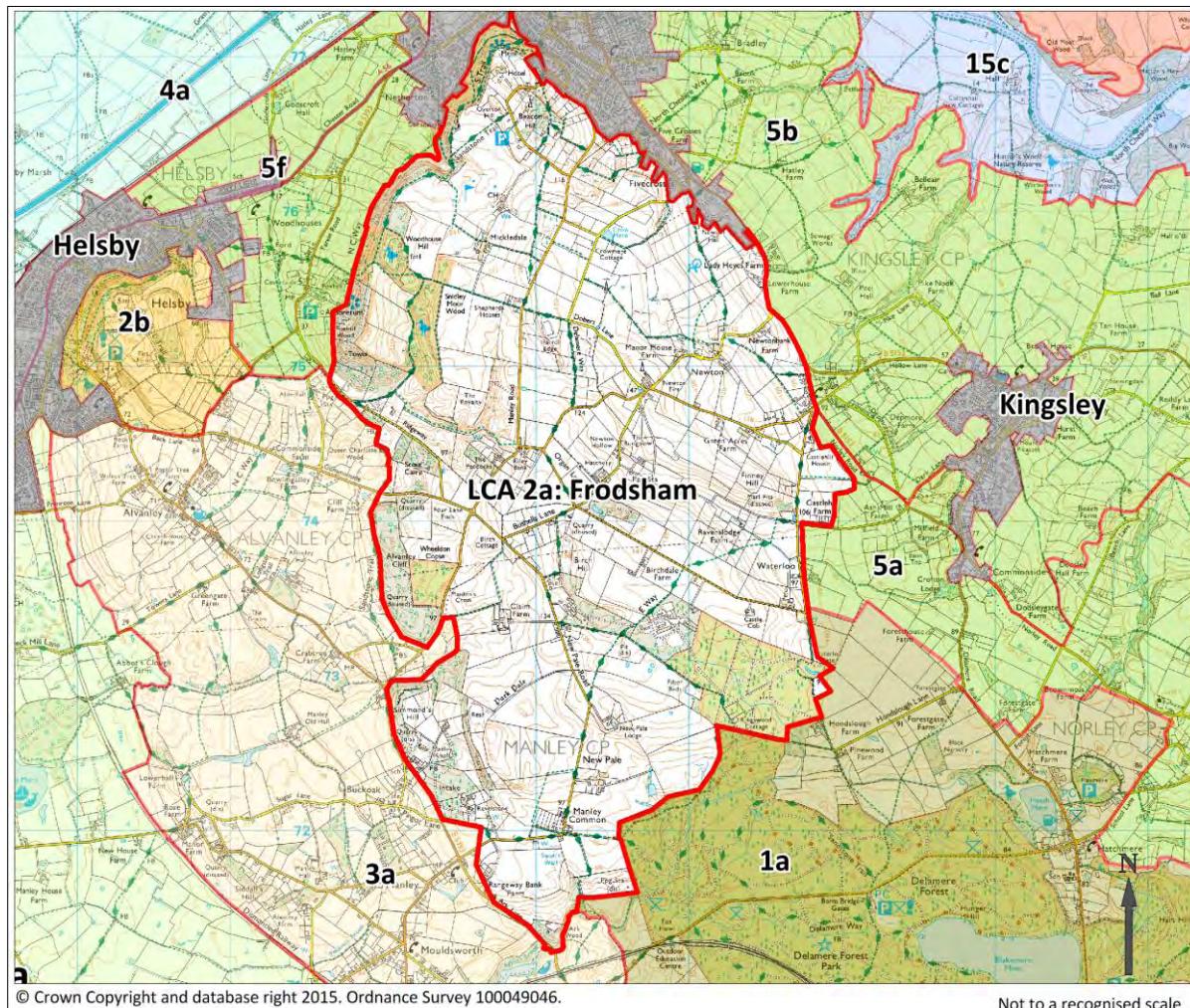
There are a number of high status residences on the ridge including the brick c 1700 Utkinton Hall and the pebble-dashed 20th century Tirley Garth.

Today the Sandstone Trail runs along the ridge, providing access to the length of this character type and a popular recreational facility for walkers. There are also open access areas such as the National Trust-owned Maiden Castle. Other leisure facilities include golf courses.

There are **six Landscape Character Areas** within LCT 2:

- 2a: Frodsham**
- 2b: Helsby Hill**
- 2c: Eddisbury**
- 2d: Beeston Crag**
- 2e: Higher Burwardsley**
- 2f: Larkton Hill/Hether Wood**

## LCA 2a: Frodsham Sandstone Ridge



### Location and Boundaries

The **Frodsham Sandstone Ridge** is a prominent ridge that extends from Frodsham in the north to Delamere Forest in the south. The boundaries are defined primarily by geology and topography.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 2a: Frodsham Sandstone Ridge***

- Outcrops of Triassic sandstone form a prominent ridge reaching over 150m with hills forming features at Beacon Hill, Harrol Edge and Birch Hill
- Steep sandstone cliffs to the north and west of the ridge support dense woodland, including ancient oak woodland, for example at Alvanley Cliff Wood
- Dry gorges, created by glacial meltwater, are features of the northern and western edges of the ridge
- Brown sandy soils support permanent grassland, dwarf shrub heath, bracken and gorse scrub and woodland on steeper slopes, for example at Frodsham and Overton Woods
- Groups of Scots pines form distinctive skyline elements
- Quarries are features, particularly along the west-facing cliff
- Less steep slopes support arable farmland
- Regular geometric fields, resulting from late eighteenth and early nineteenth century enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act, dominate the ridge
- New Pale is a 17th century deer park with a distinctive boundary which is a feature in the landscape
- Low density of dispersed farms and hamlets – many farm buildings are constructed from sandstone (quarried from the ridge) with Welsh slate roofs
- Sunken lanes provide access over the ridge, responding to landform – there are no main roads
- Late Bronze Age/Iron Age promontory hillfort at Woodhouse Hill on the western edge of the ridge, and a former Roman camp at Birch Hill, occupy prominent positions on the ridge (both Scheduled Monuments)
- The War Memorial on Frodsham Hill is a landscape feature, from where there are panoramic views over the Mersey Estuary
- Long distance footpaths run along the length of the ridge from where there are some spectacular panoramic views from the ridge as far as Wales to the west and the Peak District to the east
- Locally designated as an Area of Special County Value (ASCV) recognising its landscape and scenic quality and its historic, archaeological and ecological importance

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### ***Natural / Physical***

- The northern and western parts of the sandstone ridge are the highest and steepest;
- The steep scarp is mostly clothed in ancient oak/birch woodland including Frodsham and Overton Woods, Dunsdale Hollow, Queen Charlotte's Wood and Alvanley Cliff recognised for its nature conservation value, with an acid heathy ground flora;
- The less steep eastern siltstone formations support more arable farmland on coarse loamy soils;
- An intact hedgerow network (including ancient species rich hedgerows) with mature oak trees;
- Dry gorges created by glacial meltwater are features of geological interest on the northern and western edges of the ridge, for example to the west of Snidley Moor;
- Former sandstone quarries and outcrops that produce texture and interest and support some rare vegetation communities;
- The simple combination of farmland and woodland with variety provided by the presence of gorse thickets, bracken scrub and a number of water bodies (including a naturally occurring mere at Crow Mere, man-made field ponds and manmade reservoirs, some providing important wetland BAP priority habitats).

### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- Late Bronze Age/Iron Age promontory hillfort at Woodhouse Hill and former Roman Camp at Birch Hill, both Scheduled Monuments, as well as other historic features e.g. Castle Cob and Maiden's Cross;
- The smaller and more irregular post medieval fieldscapes around Newton contrast with larger, more geometric enclosure field patterns which are distinctive;
- The distinctive historic boundaries of the former 17<sup>th</sup> century deer park at New Pale;
- Glacial meltwater channels that are of historical interest;
- Ancient sunken lanes bordered by hedges often planted on top of low sandstone walls;
- Recreational opportunities provided to a large number of visitors by open access land (at Woodhouse Hill, Wheeldon Copse, Delamere Forest Park, and on the sandstone cliff above Frodsham to the north of Beacon Hill) and three long distance recreational footpaths (Sandstone Trail, Delamere Way and Eddisbury Way), as well as other inter-connecting footpaths and a golf course;
- Mersey View (a former Victorian Pleasure Ground) and Manley Knoll (a formal Edwardian quarry garden) are historic parks and gardens of local significance;
- Frodsham Anti-Aircraft Operations Room (known as the 'Beacons' – a Grade II listed building).

### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Low density scattered farmsteads and hamlets, including Manley Common and Newton, with an absence of villages on the ridge;
- Local sandstone/red brick farmhouses and barns with Welsh slate roofs, some of which are listed;
- Crossley East Hospital is a distinctive cluster of buildings that was developed in 1905 as a tuberculosis sanatorium – many of its buildings are now listed;
- More recent development includes some scattered residential houses, Forest Hills Hotel overlooking Frodsham, and Frodsham golf club house, as well as a number of man-made reservoirs, communication masts and a wind turbine.

### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Large scale, open landscape;
- The strong, prominent and simple skyline;
- Long distance panoramic views across the Mersey Estuary to Runcorn, Liverpool and north Wales (in particular from the War Memorial on Frodsham Hill), and across Delamere and to the east to the distant Peak District;
- The character area is visible from extensive areas of the borough and beyond making the ridge visually sensitive;
- Clusters and belts of Scots pine and communication masts form distinctive skyline features are highly visible from many parts of the borough on a clear day;
- Woodland helps to mitigate visual impacts, for example due to the large numbers of visitors to this landscape;
- The sense of peace and quiet away from the popular areas;
- Although population density is low, there are a large number of visitors to this landscape as a result of the recreational opportunities provided by the open access land and three long distance recreational footpaths. However, the presence of woodland as a key characteristic provides some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

### Landscape Condition

The **Frodsham Sandstone Ridge** is in agricultural and woodland use and is actively managed for these land uses. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network and some over-mature hedgerow trees. Some of the sandstone boundary walls are derelict, particularly alongside roads.

### CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 2a: **Frodsham Sandstone Ridge**:

- Green Belt;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV);
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets.

### *Forces for Landscape Change*

#### Past change

- Limited hedgerow management causing decline in traditional field boundaries – some hedgerows are discontinuous;
- The Woodland Trust manages a number of woodlands including Frodsham Wood, Woodhouse Hill, Snidley Moor and Wheeldon Copse, which is a positive change;
- Restoration of traditional sandstone walls and hedgerows has also been a positive change;
- A shift from grassland to crops, fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Relaxation of traditional grazing practices and resultant spread of scrub and trees and reduction and deterioration of heathland;
- The Crossley hospital site has been converted into 77 dwelling units;
- Gardens associated with built development have introduced some exotic and garden species into the landscape;
- Some footpaths are poorly drained.

#### Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 2a: **Frodsham**

- Pressure for small scale residential development and recreational provision including holiday homes/cabins and caravan parks;
- Pressure for farm extension and conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential and commercial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Erosion of built environment character and increased suburbanisation through incremental development and standardisation/upgrading of lanes and minor roads;
- Pressure for further communication masts and other tall structures such as wind turbines given the elevated topography and wind speeds;
- This is an area of search for sand and gravel extraction;
- Policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan include establishing a woodland framework around Frodsham and Helsby linking the Sandstone Ridge (whilst avoiding the escarpment) with the Weaver Valley;
- Increased visitor pressure at some locations leading to fragmentation of habitats and loss of tranquillity as a result of increased recreational use of the landscape.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 2a: Frodsham Sandstone Ridge***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the strong, prominent and simple skyline and panoramic views from the ridge, and to **restore** and link former heathland sites.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

- 1.** Encourage enhanced management of woodlands, including the replacement of non-native species by native broadleaved species and active management of existing woodlands to ensure a diverse age structure and ground flora.
- 2.** Support the vision to create a well-wooded landscape with links to Delamere whilst preserving ecologically important habitats, ensuring no detriment to historic assets and maintaining panoramic views from the ridgeline.
- 3.** Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
- 4.** Conserve the post medieval fieldscapes around Newton and the historic boundaries of New Pale as features of the landscape.
- 5.** Protect archaeological sites, such as the late Bronze Age/Iron Age promontory hillfort at Woodhouse Hill, and consider opportunities for encouraging the establishment of pasture on and around such sites.
- 6.** Maintain sandstone outcrops as features of the landscape – consider opportunities to enhance views of and, where appropriate, access to, these features whilst maintaining their geological and ecological interest.
- 7.** Conserve the glacial meltwater channels that are of geological and historical interest.
- 8.** Encourage drainage of footpaths to prevent erosion.
- 9.** Ensure any quarries are sensitively sited and ensure plans for their restoration have ecological interest, incorporating recreational uses and access where possible.
- 10.** Use ASCV designation to protect the character area from inappropriate development.
- 11.** Maintain the ancient sunken lanes, minimising small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or straightening of the road network which could change the character of these lanes. Encourage restoration of sandstone boundary walls alongside these lanes.

12. Maintain field ponds and meres as features of the landscape as well as the gorse thickets and bracken scrub that provide variety and texture.
13. Consider opportunities for re-creation of heathland in areas where this would have no detriment to anything else (e.g. archaeological sites) and seek opportunities to re-create species rich grassland.
14. Maintain groups and belts of Scots pine as distinctive skyline features of the ridge where this does not interfere with biodiversity objectives.
15. Support the diversification of farm activities that maintain the rural and peaceful character of the landscape.
16. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and maintain the sparse settlement and road network and limited visible development.
17. Conserve the strong, prominent and simple skyline – consider opportunities to mitigate the visual effect of existing communication masts on the skyline in the future.
18. Maintain panoramic views from the ridge – consider opportunities to create additional viewpoints and increased opportunities for public views. Consider views when planning locations for new woodland associated with The Mersey Forest.
19. Protect views to and from the War Memorial on Frodsham Hill, and hillforts.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

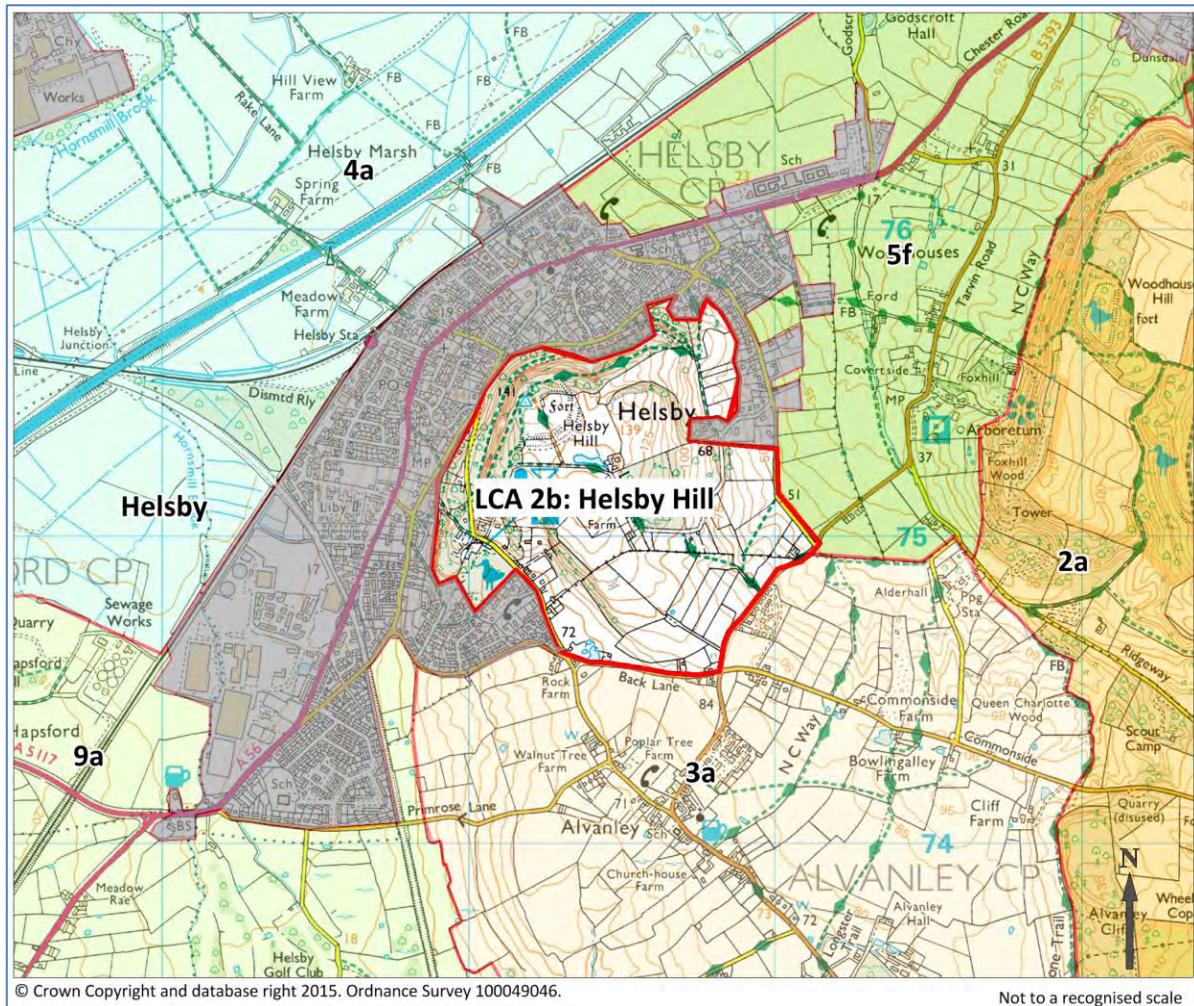
1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern. Conserve the local vernacular - local sandstone and red brick farmsteads and barns with Welsh slate roofs. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
2. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
3. Retain or enhance existing boundary features as part of new built development.
4. The ridgeline is particularly sensitive to large scale, or tall, built development.



LCT 2: Sandstone Ridge

LCA 2a: Frodsham

## LCA 2b: *Helsby Hill*



## ***Location and Boundaries***

**Helsby Hill** is a prominent isolated outcrop of sandstone located above Helsby, forming an outlier to the west of the *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge*. The boundaries are defined primarily by geology and topography.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 2b: Helsby Hill***

- Outcrop of Triassic sandstone forms a prominent hill (Helsby Hill reaching 141m) with distinctive cliff profile
- Steep sandstone cliffs to the north and west of the hill support dense woodland and are used for rock climbing
- A rich variety of habitats; brown sandy soils support sheep grazed pasture, semi-natural grassland, dwarf shrub heath, bracken and gorse scrub, with woodland on steeper slopes
- Sandstone outcrops, sandstone quarries (Helsby Quarry) and cliffs are features, including the 'Old Man of Helsby'
- Regular rectangular fields resulting from late eighteenth and early nineteenth century enclosure of the Forest of Mara by Parliamentary Act
- Low density of dispersed farms; farm buildings are typically constructed from sandstone (quarried from the ridge) with Welsh slate roofs
- Narrow sunken lanes provide access up to the hill – there are no main roads
- A promontory hillfort at Helsby Hill (a Scheduled Monument) occupies a prominent position on the north-western edge of the outcrop overlooking the Mersey Estuary
- The Longster Trail long distance footpath crosses the outcrop, from where there are some spectacular panoramic views over the Mersey Estuary to the north and towards the *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge* to the east
- Locally designated as an Area of Special County Value (ASCV) recognising its landscape and scenic quality and its historic, archaeological and ecological importance

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The northern and western edges of the outcrop are the highest and steepest, mostly clothed in old birch woodland with a species-poor understorey of bracken;
- These Helsby Sandstone cliffs form a distinctive stepped profile when the outcrop is viewed from adjacent areas – the 'Old Man of Helsby' refers to the appearance of the cliff side above Helsby;
- The Helsby Sandstone gives rise to well drained sandy and coarse loamy soils (known as brown sands) that support a mixture of arable and pastoral farmland, bracken scrub, gorse thickets, heathland and woodland;
- Rising to 141m, much of the hill includes Local Wildlife Sites with woodland, semi-improved grassland and dwarf shrub heath habitats of nature conservation interest;
- A pocket of heathland to the north west of the hill is managed by the National Trust;
- The Tarporley Siltstones on the south side of the hill to the south of Fir's Farm are prominent but less steep, with coarse loamy soils that support a mixture of arable and pastoral fields;
- An intact hedgerow network (including ancient species rich hedgerows) with mature oak trees;
- Former sandstone quarries and outcrops that produce texture and interest and support some rare vegetation communities and many are enclosed by regenerating woodland, for example at Helsby Quarry Local Nature Reserve and Woodland Park, and Harmers Wood;
- A pond located to the south of the hill fort provides important wetland habitats, and many habitats in the LCA are habitats of principal importance.

### Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- Late Bronze Age/Iron Age promontory hillfort and Scheduled Monument at Helsby Hill on the north-western edge overlooking the Mersey Estuary;
- The smaller and more irregular post medieval fieldscapes south of Fir's Farm contrast with the mostly straight-sided, rectangular enclosed fields elsewhere, the contrast being distinctive;
- Ancient sunken lanes bordered by hedges often planted on top of low sandstone walls;
- Recreational opportunities attract a relatively large number of visitors to the hill fort and recreational opportunities provided by footpaths including part of the Longster Trail long distance recreational footpath, National Trust owned land, and parking, picnic and walking facilities at Helsby Quarry Woodland Park;
- Royal Observer Corps Monitoring Post – underground rectangular compound with surface features including a metal dome remaining intact.

### Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- Low density scattered farmsteads and hamlets with an absence of villages;
- Local sandstone/red brick farmhouses and barns with Welsh slate roofs, some of which are listed;
- More recent residential development along the foot of the ridge as well as properties scattered along the minor lanes that access the hill.

### Perceptual / Visual

- Prominent, open landscape with a distinctive, simple skyline;
- Distinctive landform unifies the character area;
- Expansive 360 degree panoramic views from the top of the hill across the Mersey Estuary to Runcorn, Liverpool and north Wales and across Delamere and to the east to the distant Peak District, and southwards across the lower slopes of Helsby Hill;
- The character area is visible from extensive areas of the borough and beyond making the outcrop visually sensitive;
- The absence of communication masts and other prominent structures;
- Woodland helps to mitigate visual impacts, for example due to the large numbers of visitors to this landscape;
- The sense of peace and quiet away from the popular areas;
- Although population density is low, there are a relatively large number of visitors to this landscape as a result of the hill fort and the recreational opportunities provided by the public footpaths and woodland park. However, the presence of woodland as a key characteristic provides some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

### Landscape Condition

**Helsby Hill** sandstone outcrop is partially in active agricultural use and partly managed by the National Trust. There are also some areas being managed for nature conservation, including management of acidic grassland/remnant heath. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the hedgerow network and some over-mature hedgerow trees. Some of the sandstone boundary walls are broken or in a declining condition.

### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 2b: *Helsby Hill*:**

- Green Belt;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV);
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets.

### ***Forces for Landscape Change***

#### **Past change**

- Limited woodland and hedgerow management causing decline in traditional field boundaries – some hedgerows are discontinuous, but there is also evidence of hedgerow gapping up with new planting;
- Restoration of traditional sandstone walls and hedgerows has been a positive change;
- Management by the National Trust including protection and restoration of acidic grassland/remnant heath on Helsby Hill is another example of positive change;
- Some evidence of 'horsiculture' resulting in a change in the landscape;
- Some evidence of erosion of the soft sandstone as a result of recreational use of the landscape;
- Gardens associated with built development have introduced some exotic and garden species into the landscape.

#### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 2b: *Helsby Hill***

- Pressure for small scale residential development along the lanes, as well as additional residential development in the gardens of the larger properties along the hill;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings to other uses including residential and commercial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Erosion of built environment character and increased suburbanisation through incremental development and standardisation/upgrading of lanes and minor roads;
- Pressure for communication masts and other tall structures such as wind turbines, currently absent from the hill, given the elevated topography and wind speeds;
- The location within The Mersey Forest is likely to result in further tree planting and support for the management and extension of existing woodlands on steep hillsides – aiming for over 30% woodland cover over the majority of the hill;
- The likelihood of continued erosion of the soft sandstone, fragmentation of habitats and loss of tranquillity as a result of increased recreational use of the landscape.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 2b: Helsby Hill***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the strong, prominent and simple skyline and panoramic views from the hill, and to **restore** and link former heathland sites.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Encourage enhanced management of woodlands, including the replacement of non-native species by native broadleaved species and active management of existing woodlands to ensure a diverse age structure and ground flora.
2. Support plans to extend existing woodlands on steep hillsides where this does not conflict with heathland restoration proposals or compromise other ecologically important habitats or historic assets.
3. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and continuing to gap up existing hedges.
4. Seek to restore sandstone walls that are a feature of this landscape.
5. Protect archaeological sites, particularly those comprising earthworks such as the late Bronze Age/Iron Age promontory hillfort, and consider opportunities for encouraging the establishment of pasture on and around such sites.
6. Maintain former quarries and sandstone outcrops as features of the landscape – consider opportunities to enhance views of and, where appropriate, access to, these features whilst maintaining their geological and ecological interest.
7. Manage visitor access to minimise erosion of the soft sandstone.
8. Use ASCV designation to protect the character area from inappropriate development.
9. Maintain the ancient sunken lanes, minimising small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or straightening of the road network which could change the character of these lanes. Encourage restoration of sandstone boundary walls alongside these lanes.
10. Maintain the gorse thickets and bracken scrub that provide variety and texture, except in the vicinity of the hill fort where gorse and bracken are removed to prevent damage to the monument.

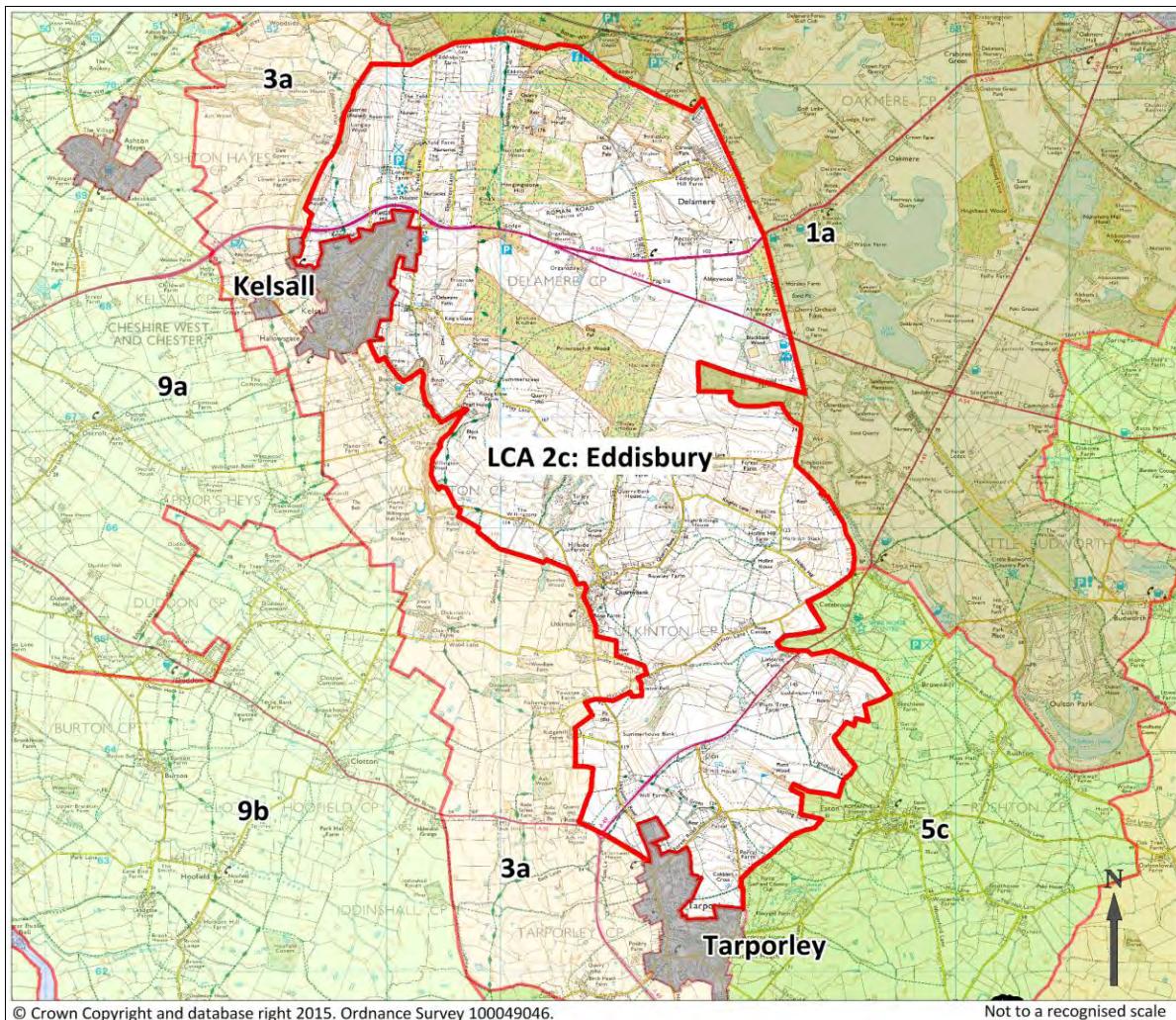
11. Conserve remnant areas of heathland and consider opportunities for re-creation of heathland in areas where this would have no detriment to anything else (e.g. archaeological sites).
12. Seek opportunities to re-create species rich grassland.
13. Support the diversification of farm activities that maintain the rural and peaceful character of the landscape.
14. Consider further opportunities for passive recreational use of the landscape avoiding activities that may have a detrimental impact on the landscape.
15. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and maintain the sparse settlement and road network and limited visible development.
16. Conserve the strong, prominent and simple skyline and the distinctive, natural slope profile of this outcrop.
17. Maintain panoramic views – consider opportunities to create additional viewpoints and increased opportunities for public views. Consider views from the outcrop when planning locations for new woodland associated with The Mersey Forest.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern. Conserve the local vernacular - local sandstone and red brick farmsteads and barns with Welsh slate roofs. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
2. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
3. The ridgeline is sensitive to built development and in particular communication masts, wind turbines and other tall structures on the skyline which should be avoided.



## LCA 2c: Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge



### Location and Boundaries

The **Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge** is a prominent ridge that extends from Eddisbury Lodge in the north to Tarporley in the south, as a continuation southwards of the *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge*. The boundaries are defined primarily by geology and topography.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 2c: Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge***

- Outcrops of Triassic sandstone form a prominent, undulating ridge reaching 176m at Pale Heights, at its northern end
- Steep sandstone cliffs and dry gorges support dense woodland, including ancient oak woodland
- Brown sandy soils support permanent grassland and woodland on steeper slopes, including the plantation woodland at Primrosehill Wood
- Heavily influenced by the presence of, and enclosure of, the former Royal Forest of Mara into a regular geometric fieldscape bordered by straight sided thick hedgerows, some on top of low sandstone walls, and large plantations initially established at the beginning of the nineteenth century
- Old Pale is an enclosed medieval deer park which retains a distinctive boundary that is a feature in the landscape
- Belts of Scots pines form distinctive skyline elements
- Quarries are features, including King's Chair quarry
- Less steep slopes support cereals, potatoes and fruit farming. Orchards are features around Kelsall/Willington
- Low density of dispersed farms; farm buildings are typically local red brick or constructed from sandstone (quarried from the ridge) with Welsh slate roofs
- Sunken lanes provide access over the ridge, responding to landform while the A54 and A49 cross the ridge in cutting
- A49 is recognised as the ancient public highway of Peytelynsty (Roman road marking the boundary between the former Forest of Mara and Forest of Mondrem)
- Late Bronze Age/Iron Age defensive hillfort at Eddisbury Hill and 'Chamber in the Forest' hunting lodge, Scheduled Monuments within the former Royal Forest of Mara (Delamere)
- Promontory fort at Kelsborrow (Scheduled Monument) occupies a prominent positions along the ridge
- Tirley Garth Listed Building and Registered Park and Garden
- The 'Sandstone Trail' runs along part of the ridge from Eddisbury Lodge before descending the ridge at The Willingtons
- Spectacular panoramic views from the ridge across Delamere and beyond to the northeast, over the open plains to the south-east, to the Peckforton Hills to the south, and to north Wales to the west
- Locally designated as an Area of Special County Value (ASCV) recognising its landscape and scenic quality and its historic, archaeological and ecological importance

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### ***Natural / Physical***

- The northern and western sides of the ridge are the highest and steepest, with a steep scarp wrapping around the west side of the ridge, partially clothed in woodland;
- The ridge rises to 176m at Pale Heights, the highest point in the borough;
- Old Pale is a former deer park associated with the former Royal Forest of Mara which has retained a distinctive boundary and now supports a mosaic of woodland and grassland;
- The Helsby Sandstones underlying the northern part of the ridge produce well drained sandy and coarse loamy soils (known as brown sands) that support a mixture of arable and pastoral farmland, with woodland including ancient oaks on steep slopes;
- The Tarporley Siltstones on the southern half of the ridge give rise to coarse loamy soils that support a greater proportion of arable farmland;

- Orchards around Kelsall/Willington are a feature of the southern Tarporley Siltstones;
- Nurseries along Yeld Lane provide a variety of exotic plants which contrast with their naturalistic landscape setting;
- Dry gorges, created by glacial meltwater, are features of Primrose Hill, designated as Urchin's Kitchen Regionally Important Geological Site;
- A number of field ponds on the ridge provide important wetland habitats and are UK priority habitats;
- An intact hedgerow network (including ancient species rich hedgerows) with mature oak trees;
- Former sandstone quarries and outcrops that produce texture and nature conservation interest, for example the former quarry at the Yeld.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The LCA is heavily influenced by the presence of the former Royal Forest of Mara – initially wooded, then an area of heath dotted with small mosses, and enclosed between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to provide allotments to compensate claims for common rights and Crown land for lease and forestry (to provide timber for the navy);
- The largest area enclosed by Parliamentary Act in Cheshire, it continues to be dominated by surveyed geometric field system of regular rectangular fields with straight quickset hedgerows and large plantations initially established at the beginning of the nineteenth century;
- Variety of small irregular medieval townfields on the edge of Tarporley and ancient field system around Utkinton, to straight-sided enclosure fields on the elevated land to the west of King's Chair and Primrosehill Wood (formerly part of the Royal Forest of Mara);
- Ancient sunken lanes bordered by hedges often planted on top of low sandstone walls;
- Late Bronze Age/Iron Age hillforts and Scheduled Monuments at Eddisbury and Kelsborrow Castle, as well as other historic features including bowl barrows and tumuli, 'Chamber in the Forest' hunting lodge;
- A49 is recognised as the ancient public highway of Peytelynsty (Roman road marking the boundary between the former Forest of Mara and Forest of Mondrem);
- Tirley Garth is an early twentieth century Arts and Crafts garden (the only complete one remaining in Cheshire), a Grade II\* Registered park and garden and Grade II listed building;
- Portal House Garden is a twentieth century garden of local significance in the Elizabethan style by Walter Tower; the area around the house (a listed building) is also a Conservation Area and contains listed structures, including the lodge, gateposts and gates;
- Sandstone outcrops and quarries provide good building stone; stone for the Vale Royal Abbey was quarried from King's Chair quarry, on the edge of Hangingstone Hill;
- There are a relatively large number of visitors due to the recreational opportunities provided by footpaths including the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational footpath, and open access Forestry Commission land at Primrosehill Wood and Pale Heights.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Low density scattered farmsteads and hamlets with a general absence of villages;
- Local sandstone/red brick farmhouses and barns with Welsh slate roofs, some of which are listed;
- Utkington Hall on the western edge of the ridge is a listed historic manor house and the ancient seat of the Done family who were Master Foresters for protecting the game in the royal forest of Delamere;
- Some built development on the edge of villages located at the foot of the ridge has extended onto the ridge in places e.g. on the edges of Kelsall, Quarrybank and Tarporley.

### Perceptual / Visual

- Prominent, distinctive, simple skyline;
- Clusters and belts of Scots pine that form distinctive skyline features;
- Distinctive landform unifies the character area;
- Panoramic views including views of the medieval castle at Beeston and commanding views from Old Pale;
- The character area is visible from extensive areas of the borough and beyond making the ridge visually sensitive;
- Woodland helps to mitigate visual impacts, for example due to the large numbers of visitors to this landscape;
- The sense of peace and quiet away from main roads and the popular areas;
- Although population density is low, there are a large number of visitors to this landscape as a result of the recreational opportunities provided by the Forestry Commission land and the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational route. However, the presence of woodland as a key characteristic provides some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

### Landscape Condition

**Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge** is in active agricultural and forestry use and is managed for these land uses. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network and some over-mature hedgerow trees. Some of the sandstone boundary walls are derelict, particularly alongside roads, and some woodlands are in poor condition or are not being actively managed.

### CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 2c: *Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge*:

- Green Belt (north of the A54/A556);
- Countryside (south of the A54/A556);
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV);
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets.

## **Forces for Landscape Change**

### **Past change**

- Limited woodland and hedgerow management causing decline in traditional field boundaries – some hedgerows are discontinuous;
- Restoration of traditional sandstone walls and hedgerows has been a positive change;
- A shift from grassland to crops, fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Farm diversification and increase in equestrian facilities including stables, pastures and fencing;
- Expansion of aggregate extraction;
- Settlement expansion, with relatively recent built development on the edges of the ridge at Yeld Lane, Eddisbury Hill, Quarrybank and on the edges of Kelsall and Tarporley;
- Some of the footpaths are poorly drained;
- Nurseries and gardens associated with built development have introduced some exotic and garden species into the landscape;
- Tall hedgerows around the orchards have resulted in a reduction in the open character of the ridge.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 2c: *Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge***

- Continuing pressure for housing, particularly along main roads;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings to other uses including residential and commercial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Erosion of built environment character and increased suburbanisation through development and standardisation/upgrading of main roads, including signage and Leylandii screen planting;
- Pressure for communication masts and other tall structures such as wind turbines, given the elevated topography and wind speeds;
- Pressure for small scale recreation-related development along the Sandstone Trail and other walks, with the possible erosion of the soft sandstone, fragmentation of habitats and loss of tranquillity;
- The location within The Mersey Forest is likely to result in further tree planting including planting new woodlands, restoring hedgerows and hedgerow trees, and support for the management and extension of existing woodlands to link to Delamere – new planting on ridge (e.g. around Pale Heights) is already contributing to an increase in woodland cover.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 2c: Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the strong, prominent and simple skyline and panoramic views from the ridge, and to **restore** and link former heathland sites.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Encourage enhanced management of woodlands, including the replacement of non-native species by native broadleaved species and active management of existing woodlands to ensure a diverse age structure and ground flora.
2. Support the vision to create a well-wooded landscape with links to Delamere, whilst preserving ecologically important habitats, ensuring no detriment to historic assets and maintaining panoramic views from the ridgeline.
3. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
4. Protect archaeological sites, particularly those comprising earthworks such as the late Bronze Age/Iron Age hillforts at Eddisbury and Kelsborrow, and consider opportunities for encouraging the establishment of pasture on and around such sites.
5. Maintain sandstone outcrops as features of the landscape – consider opportunities to enhance views of and, where appropriate, access to, these features whilst maintaining their geological and ecological interest.
6. Use ASCV designation to protect the character area from inappropriate development.
7. Maintain the ancient sunken lanes, minimising small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or improvements to the road network which could change the character of these lanes. Encourage restoration of sandstone boundary walls alongside these lanes.
8. Maintain field ponds and glacial meltwater channels as features of the landscape.
9. Consider opportunities for re-creation of heathland in areas where this would have no detriment to anything else (e.g. archaeological sites) and seek opportunities to re-create unimproved or semi-improved species rich grassland.
10. Maintain groups and belts of Scots pine as distinctive skyline features of the ridge where this does not interfere with biodiversity objectives.

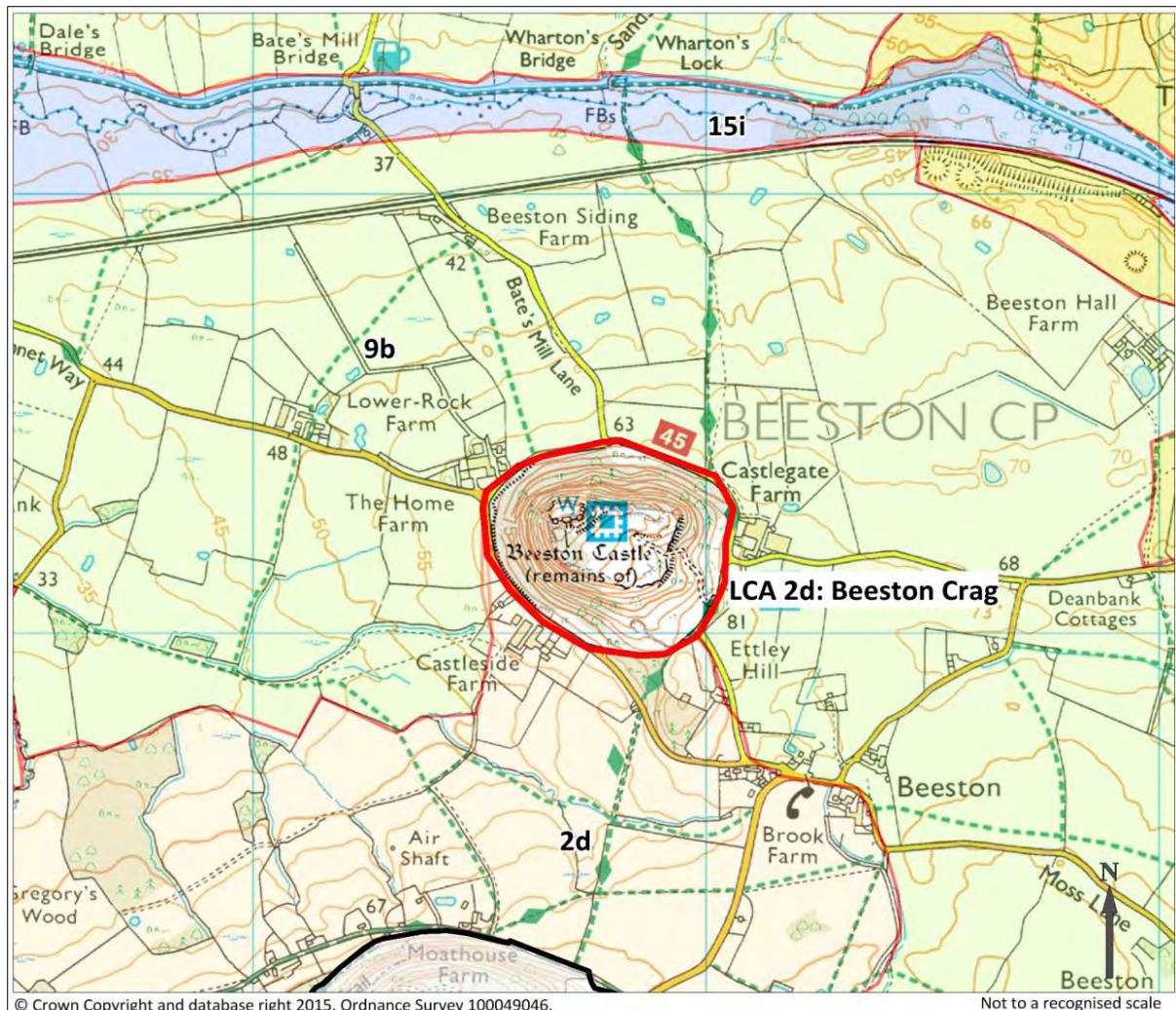
11. Ensure farm diversification activities maintain the rural and peaceful character of the landscape.
12. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and maintain the sparse settlement and road network and limited visible development.
13. Conserve the strong, prominent and simple skyline – consider opportunities to mitigate the visual effect of existing communication masts on the skyline in the future.
14. Maintain panoramic views from the ridge across adjacent landscapes – consider opportunities to create additional viewpoints and increased opportunities for public views. Consider views when planning locations for new woodland associated with The Mersey Forest.
15. Conserve existing panoramic views, for example views of the medieval castle at Beeston from the edge of Tarporley, and views across Delamere from Old Pale.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern. Conserve the local vernacular - local sandstone and red brick farmsteads and barns with Welsh slate roofs. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
2. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
3. Minimise the impact of road cuttings, signage and associated development using native planting.
4. Maintain panoramic views out of Tarporley – ensure new build does not block these views that connect the village with its landscape setting. Of particular importance are the views to Beeston Castle.
5. Refer to local Village Design Statements and Neighbourhood Plans when considering change.
6. The ridgeline is particularly sensitive to large scale, or tall, built development.



## LCA 2d: Beeston Crag



### Location and Boundaries

**Beeston Crag** is a prominent isolated outcrop of sandstone forming an outlier within the 'Beeston Gap' between the *Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge* to the north and the *Peckforton Sandstone Ridge* to the south. Although covering a small area, it is physically and visually distinct from the surrounding *Sandstone Fringe* and *Cheshire Plain* to justify its inclusion as a separate landscape character area. The boundaries are defined by geology and topography.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 2d: Beeston Crag***

- Outcrop of Triassic sandstone forms a prominent hill reaching approximately 110m with distinctive cliff profile rising above the Cheshire Plain
- Steep sandstone cliffs on all sides produce a distinctive circular profile densely clothed by woodland
- Late Bronze Age promontory hillfort which was occupied into the Romano-British period is a Scheduled Monument
- The remains of the thirteenth century Beeston Castle, also a Scheduled Monument and Grade I listed building, occupies a prominent position on the rocky summit - its outer bailey utilises the fort's rampart for defensive purposes
- The castle and associated woodland park is a popular English Heritage visitor attraction
- Spectacular extensive views in all directions
- Farms encircle the base of the crag, linked by a minor road with impressive sandstone retaining walls – there are no roads on the crag which is now uninhabited
- A footpath winds around the crag and provides access up to the castle remains at the top of the hill
- there are no main roads
- The Sandstone Trail long distance footpath follows a route around the eastern side of the crag
- Locally designated as an Area of Special County Value (ASCV) recognising its landscape and scenic quality and its historic, archaeological and ecological importance

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### ***Natural / Physical***

- The steep sandstone cliffs support mostly dense deciduous woodland on all sides, although the woodland is more open on the eastern side;
- Rising to around 110m, much of the hill includes local wildlife sites with woodland, semi-improved and species-rich grassland habitats of nature conservation interest;
- Beeston Crag is of geological and ornithological interest with features of Wilmslow, Bulkeley and Helsby Sandstone Formations, and rare breeding birds;
- Stone was quarried from a ditch between the castle outer and inner walls and used to construct the castle, the rocky outcrops produce texture and interest and support some rare vegetation communities;

#### ***Cultural / Heritage / Historic***

- Beeston promontory hillfort, a Scheduled Monument, dates from the late Bronze Age and was occupied into the Romano-British period;
- The defences of the outer bailey of the C13th Beeston Castle, built in the 1220's by Ranulf de Blondeville, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Chester on his return from the Crusades, utilises the fort's rampart for defensive purposes. It is a Scheduled Monument and Grade I listed building, and last saw hostilities in the English Civil War when it changed hands a number of times;
- The entire hill including the castle and woodland grounds is a Scheduled Monument and part of the Beeston Conservation Area, with several listed structures;
- Prehistoric finds suggest Bronze Age activity including the earliest remains of habitation in the area now occupied by the castle;
- The castle remains and woodland owned and maintained by English Heritage attract a large number of visitors, and other recreational opportunities provided by the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational footpath.

### Perceptual / Visual

- Prominent, enclosed landscape with a distinctive profile isolated from the surrounding farmland;
- Distinctive landform unifies the character area;
- Extensive elevated views from in-between the trees across the Mersey Estuary to Runcorn, Liverpool and north Wales and across Delamere and to the east to the distant Peak District, and southwards across the Peckforton Hills;
- The character area is visible from extensive areas of the borough and beyond making the outcrop visually sensitive;
- The absence of any prominent structures apart from the remains of the castle's outer bailey on the rocky outcrop (down the hill from the summit);
- Woodland helps to mitigate visual impacts, for example due to the large numbers of visitors to this landscape;
- The sense of peace and quiet away from the popular areas.

### Landscape Condition

**Beeston Crag** sandstone outcrop and Woodland Park is managed by English Heritage as an important visitor attraction. Consequently it is kept in good condition appropriate to maximising the experience gained from visiting an historic site such as this.

### CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 2d: *Beeston Crag*:

- Countryside;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV);
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets.

### *Forces for Landscape Change*

#### Past change

- English Heritage provides appropriate management of Beeston Castle and Woodland Park, including its trees, paths, sandstone walls etc., to ensure it remains an important visitor attraction and in accordance with its designation as a Scheduled Monument and Conservation Area with many listed buildings and other structures.

#### Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 2d: *Beeston Crag*

- Landscape change is unlikely whilst the landscape continues to be managed by English Heritage. A large increase in visitor numbers could, for example, result in the erosion of footpaths;
- Tall built structures within the adjoining landscape character areas would affect the setting of Beeston Crag rising above the flat Cheshire Plain.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 2d: Beeston Crag***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the strong, prominent, distinctive profile and extensive views from the hill, and to **conserve** and protect the setting of the Scheduled Monument.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Encourage continued management by English Heritage, including appropriate woodland management and maintenance of paths, sandstone walls and other features of interest in the landscape. This should include management of visitor numbers to avoid erosion of sandstone footpaths.
2. Ensure the setting of the hillfort and castle is protected by encouraging appropriate management of the surrounding *Sandstone Fringe* and *Cheshire Plain*.
3. ASCV designation should further protect the character area from inappropriate development.
4. Maintain the adjacent lanes, minimising small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or straightening of the road network which could change the character of these lanes.
5. Maintain the contrast between enclosure amongst the trees and extensive views from the crag in-between trees and structures.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

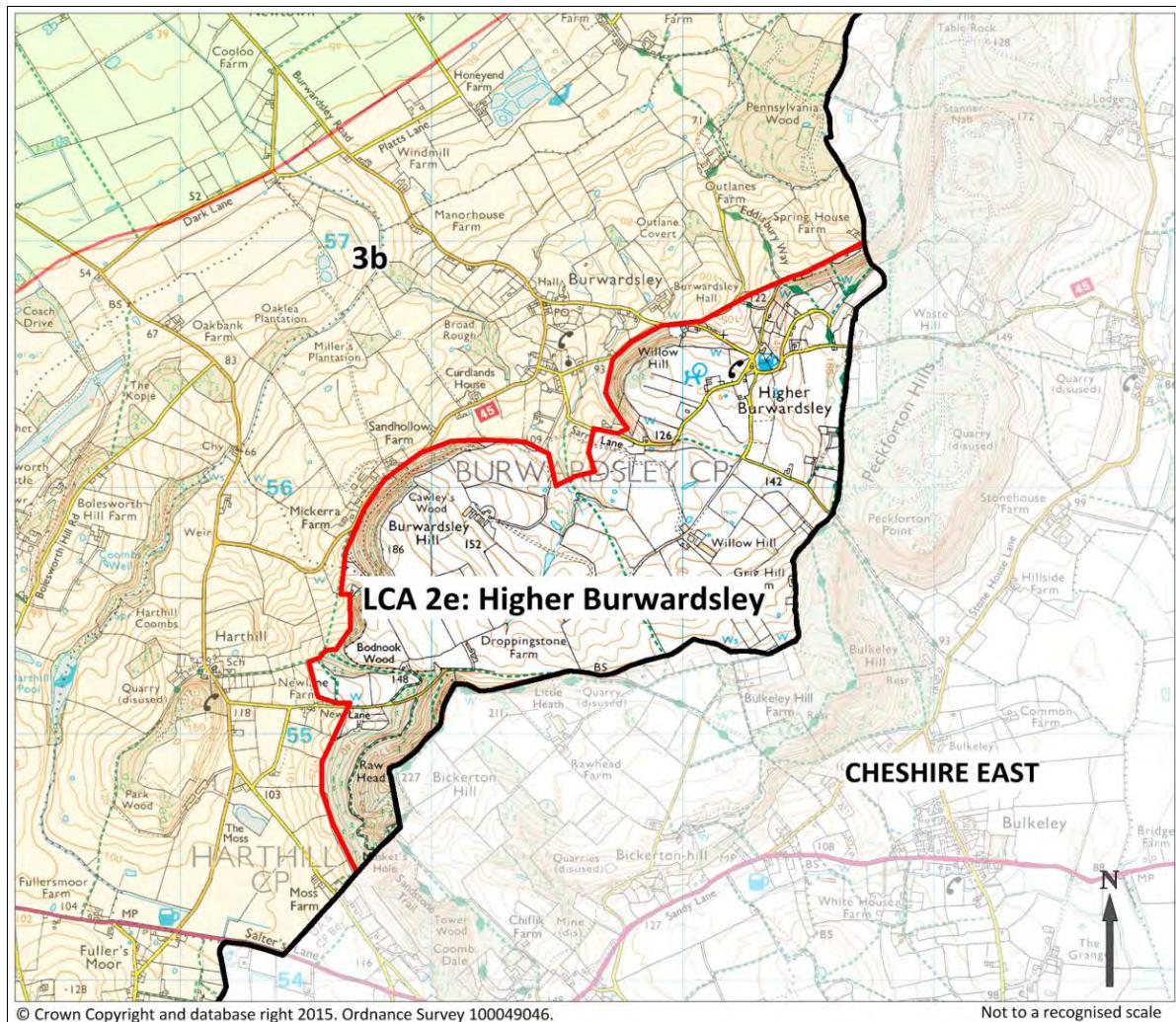
1. *Beeston Crag* is sensitive to any built development - encourage continued management by English Heritage to ensure no built development is allowed on *Beeston Crag*.
2. Avoid built development within the adjacent landscape that would affect the setting of *Beeston Crag* and the Scheduled Monument.
3. Avoid inappropriate built development that would be seen in key views out from the crag, in particular where views are filtered between trees and/or structures such that development would draw the eye and become the main focus in the view.



LCT 2: Sandstone Ridge

LCA 2d: *Beeston Crag*

## LCA 2e: Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge



### Location and Boundaries

The **Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge** is a prominent ridge that straddles the borough boundary between Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East. It extends from Moathouse Farm at the northern foot of the ridge below Peckforton Castle (in Cheshire East) to the A534 in the south, as a continuation southwards of the *Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge*. The boundaries are defined primarily by geology and topography.

The following description applies to that part of the **Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge** lying within Cheshire West and Chester district.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 2e: Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge***

- Outcrops of Triassic sandstone form a prominent, undulating ridge reaching 227m at Bickerton Hill at the top of the Raw Head escarpment, at the southern end of the ridge
- Steeper slopes and poorer brown sandy soils on the ridge support dense woodland, including ancient oak woodland and permanent grassland
- Scattered gorse scrub and remnant heath
- Regular blocks of coniferous and mixed woodland on some steeper slopes
- Raw Head escarpment is of national importance for its sandstone exposures and is a geological / geomorphological SSSI
- Small sandstone quarries, field ponds, wells and springs are features in the landscape
- Late (early nineteenth century) enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act gives a distinctive regular, geometric, small to medium scale fieldscape;
- Contrasting post medieval agricultural improvement with larger fields and loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees;
- Low density of settlement including Higher Burwardsley and dispersed farms; farm buildings are typically constructed from sandstone (quarried from the ridge) with Welsh slate roofs, with a number of timber framed buildings
- Sunken lanes provide access over the ridge, responding to landform
- The 'Sandstone Trail' runs along part of the ridge from north to south from Moathouse Farm at the northern foot of the ridge and along the Raw Head escarpment at its southern end, and a number of other rights of way and NCN Route 45 cross the ridge from east to west
- The Grade I listed Peckforton Castle is located at the northern end of the ridge within Cheshire East and is prominent in views from the west
- Spectacular panoramic views from the ridge to very distant horizons
- Locally designated as an Area of Special County Value (ASCV) recognising its landscape and scenic quality and its historic, archaeological and ecological importance

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### ***Natural / Physical***

- The southern end of the ridge at the Raw Head escarpment is the highest and steepest, rising to 227m at Bickerton Hill, partially clothed in woodland;
- The Helsby Sandstones produce well drained sandy and coarse loamy soils (known as brown sands) that support a mixture of arable and pastoral farmland, with woodland including ancient oaks on steep slopes;
- The Tarporley Siltstones give rise to coarse loamy soils that support a greater proportion of arable farmland;
- A number of field ponds on the ridge provide important wetland habitats and are UK priority habitats;
- Distinctive field pattern with intact hedgerow network (including ancient species rich hedgerows) with mature oak trees around Higher Burwardsley towards the western edge of the ridge, enclosed during the nineteenth century; some hedges have been removed but trees remain giving a parkland-like appearance;
- Medieval and later field systems survived eighteenth and nineteenth century improvements in the southern part of the area, but modern field enlargement has significantly changed their character with the complete loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees replaced with roadside post and wire fencing providing a distinctive, exposed, elevated landscape;

- Former sandstone quarries and outcrops that produce texture and nature conservation interest, for example at Raw Head;
- Scarp slopes around Higher Burwardsley and Raw Head are designated as Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS).

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- Late (early nineteenth century) enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act gives a distinctive regular, geometric, small to medium scale fieldscape;
- Post medieval agricultural improvement replaced areas of irregular enclosure or enclosed open field arable land, with larger fields and thus fewer hedgerows and hedgerow trees, probably related to the consolidation and improvement of landholdings belonging to the nearby Bolesworth and Peckforton Estates;
- Ancient sunken lanes bordered by hedges;
- There are a relatively large number of visitors due to the recreational opportunities provided by footpaths including the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational footpath;
- The Pheasant Inn at Higher Burwardsley and the nearby Candle Factory are popular visitor destinations.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Low density scattered farmsteads and hamlets with a general absence of villages;
- Local sandstone/red brick farmhouses and barns with Welsh slate roofs, some of which are listed;
- A number of timber framed buildings such as the Grade II listed farm buildings at Grigg Hill Farm;

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Prominent, distinctive, simple skyline;
- Distinctive landform unifies the character area;
- Panoramic views from the ridge to very distant horizons, in particular across the Cheshire Plain to the hills of north Wales to the west;
- The character area is visible from extensive areas of the borough and beyond making the ridge visually sensitive;
- Woodland helps to mitigate visual impacts, for example due to walkers using the Sandstone Trail;
- The sense of peace and quiet away from main roads and the popular areas;
- Although population density is low, there are a large number of visitors to this landscape as a result of the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational route. However, the presence of woodland as a key characteristic provides some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

#### **Landscape Condition**

**Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge** is in active agricultural and woodland use and is managed for these land uses. Most woodlands are actively managed by the Bolesworth Estate using Forestry Commission grant schemes. Although the hedgerow network is intact in some areas, there are gaps in the network and some over-mature hedgerow trees. In other areas hedgerows have been removed and replaced with post and wire fences.

**CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 2d: *Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge*:**

- Green Belt (north of the A54/A556);
- Countryside (south of the A54/A556);
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV);
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets.

### ***Forces for Landscape Change***

#### **Past change**

- Evidence of decline in traditional field boundaries in some locations – some hedgerows are discontinuous and some have been removed, and others replaced by post and wire fences;
- Restoration of traditional sandstone walls and hedgerows in other locations has been a positive change;
- Active woodland management by the Bolesworth Estate using Forestry Commission grant schemes is also a positive change;
- A shift from grassland to crops (particularly maize), fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Farm diversification ;
- Some of the footpaths are affected by compaction and/or are poorly drained.

#### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 2d: *Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge***

- Pressure for small scale residential development along the lanes, for example in the Burwardsley area;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings to other uses including residential and commercial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Erosion of built environment character and increased suburbanisation through incremental development and standardisation/upgrading of lanes and minor roads;
- Pressure for communication masts and other tall structures such as wind turbines, given the elevated topography and wind speeds;
- Pressure for small scale recreation-related development along the Sandstone Trail and other walks, with the possible erosion of the soft sandstone, fragmentation of habitats and loss of tranquillity.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 2e: Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the prominent, distinctive and simple skyline and panoramic views from the ridge, and to **restore** the traditional field pattern with hedgerow boundaries and hedgerow trees where these have been lost.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Encourage enhanced management of woodlands, including the replacement of non-native species by native broadleaved species and active management of existing woodlands to ensure a diverse age structure and ground flora.
2. Encourage restoration of an intact hedgerow network through management of existing hedges and replacement of hedges and hedgerow trees where these have been lost.
3. Maintain former quarries, sandstone outcrops and ponds as features of the landscape – consider opportunities to enhance views of and, where appropriate, access to, these features whilst maintaining their geological and ecological interest.
4. Manage visitor access to minimise erosion of the soft sandstone.
5. Use ASCV designation to protect the character area from inappropriate development.
6. Maintain the ancient sunken lanes, minimising small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or straightening of the road network which could change the character of these lanes. Encourage restoration of traditional hedgerow boundaries alongside these lanes.
7. Conserve remnant areas of heathland and consider opportunities for re-creation of heathland in areas where this would have no detriment to anything else (e.g. archaeological sites) and where topography is not a limiting factor.
8. Seek opportunities to re-create species rich grassland.
9. Support the diversification of farm activities that maintain the rural and peaceful character of the landscape.
10. Consider further opportunities for passive recreational use of the landscape avoiding activities that may have a detrimental impact on the landscape.
11. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the most popular areas, and maintain the sparse settlement and road network and limited visible development.

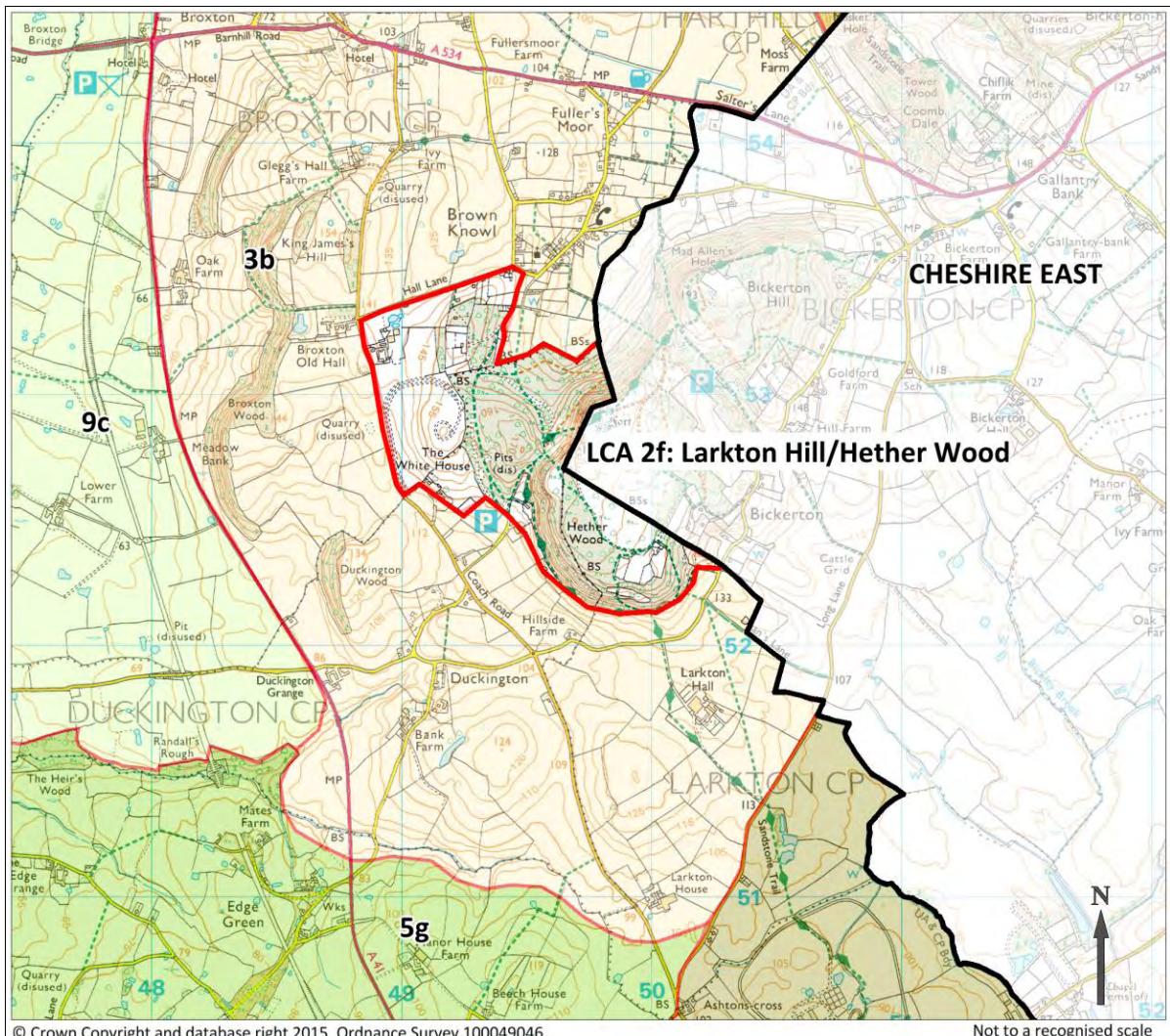
12. Conserve the strong, prominent and simple skyline and the distinctive, natural slope profile of this outcrop.
13. Maintain panoramic views – consider opportunities to create additional viewpoints and increased opportunities for public views. Consider views from the outcrop when planning locations for new woodland associated with The Mersey Forest.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern. Conserve the local vernacular - local sandstone and red brick farmsteads and barns with Welsh slate roofs, and timber framed buildings. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
2. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
3. Maintain panoramic views out from the ridge – ensure new build does not block these views.
4. The ridgeline is sensitive to built development and in particular communication masts, wind turbines and other tall structures on the skyline which should be avoided.



## LCA 2f: Larkton Hill/Hether Wood Sandstone Ridge



### Location and Boundaries

The **Larkton Hill/Hether Wood Sandstone Ridge** is the most southerly of the prominent sandstone ridge character areas, separated from the *Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge* by a narrow strip of lower sandstone fringe through which the A534 passes. The **Larkton Hill/Hether Wood Sandstone Ridge** straddles the borough boundary between Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East. It extends from Bickerton Hill in the north (in Cheshire East) to Hether Wood, north of Duckington, in the south. The boundaries are defined primarily by geology and topography.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics*** of LCA 2f: *Larkton Hill/Hether Wood Sandstone Ridge*

- Outcrop of Triassic sandstone forming a prominent ridge reaching approximately 200m at Maiden Castle
- Steep west and south facing slopes support dense woodland, in particular birch woodland and heathland on the poorer brown sandy soils, such as Hether Wood
- Other woodland belts are much younger, having regenerated naturally on former heath or grassland
- Late (early nineteenth century) enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act gives a distinctive regular, geometric, small to medium scale fieldscape
- Contrasting post medieval agricultural improvement with larger fields and fewer hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Contrast in scale and enclosure from the totally enclosed woodland to the open heathland on the higher ground and ridges
- SSSI covers most of the character area for its heathland communities and assemblage of reptiles
- Small sandstone quarries are features, the stone being used in local buildings, field boundaries and alongside sunken lanes
- Low density of settlement limited to a small number of dispersed farms with large detached farmhouses and ranges of outbuildings on the lower slopes; farm buildings are typically constructed from red brick with Welsh slate roofs
- Sunken lanes provide access around the ridge, responding to landform
- The 'Sandstone Trail' runs along the top of the ridge from north to south, and a number of other public rights of way cross the ridge
- Late Bronze Age/Iron Age promontory hillfort and Scheduled Monument at Maiden Castle at the southern end of the ridge, owned by the National Trust
- Spectacular panoramic views from the ridge to very distant horizons, in particular to the hills of north Wales to the west and the Shropshire Hills to the south
- Locally designated as an Area of Special County Value (ASCV) recognising its landscape and scenic quality and its historic, archaeological and ecological importance

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The western and south facing wooded slopes of the ridge are the steepest and most distinctive, rising to 193m at Bickerton Hill, partially clothed in woodland;
- The Helsby Sandstones produce well drained sandy soils (known as brown sands) that support a mixture of arable and pastoral farmland, with birch woodland and heathland;
- The Tarporley Siltstones give rise to coarse loamy soils that support a greater proportion of arable farmland on the lower slopes;
- Heathland on Bickerton Hill remains mostly intact from agricultural improvement largely due to army training and more recently National Trust management;
- Contrast in scale and enclosure from the totally enclosed woodland to the open heathland with ling, wavy hair-grass and gorse on the higher ground and ridges;
- Much of the open heathland habitat supports assemblages of reptiles and is designated SSSI;
- Former sandstone quarries and outcrops that produce texture and nature conservation interest;
- Southern scarp slope around Hether Wood is designated as a Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGGS).

### Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- Late(early nineteenth century) enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act gives a distinctive regular, geometric, small to medium scale fieldscape;
- Post medieval agricultural improvement replaced areas of irregular enclosure or enclosed open field arable land, with larger fields and thus fewer hedgerows and hedgerow trees, probably related to the consolidation and improvement of landholdings belonging to the nearby Cholmondeley and Bolesworth Estates;
- Late Bronze Age/Iron Age promontory hillfort at Maiden Castle, owned by the National Trust, is a Scheduled Monument situated within bracken and heathland on the edge of a cliff with its outer edge protected by a double line of ramparts (bivallate);
- Ancient sunken lanes bordered by hedges;
- There are a relatively large number of visitors due to the recreational opportunities provided by footpaths including the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational footpath. There are two car parking areas within the character area.

### Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- Low density of settlement limited to a small number of dispersed farms with large detached farmhouses and ranges of outbuildings on the lower slopes;
- Farm buildings are typically constructed from red brick with Welsh slate roofs.

### Perceptual / Visual

- Prominent, distinctive, simple skyline;
- Distinctive ridgeline landform unifies the character area;
- Panoramic views from the ridge to very distant horizons, in particular across the Cheshire Plain to the hills of north Wales to the west and the Shropshire Hills to the south;
- The character area is visible from extensive areas of the borough and beyond making the ridge visually sensitive;
- Woodland helps to mitigate visual impacts, for example due to walkers using the Sandstone Trail;
- The sense of peace and quiet away from main roads and the popular areas;
- Although population density is low, there are a large number of visitors to this landscape as a result of the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational route. However, the presence of woodland as a key characteristic provides some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

### Landscape Condition

**Larkton Hill/Hether Wood Sandstone Ridge** is in active agricultural and conservation use with heathland vegetation actively managed by the National Trust. Farmland including field boundaries and roadside hedges on the lower slopes appear to be well maintained and are in good condition.

**CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 2f: *Larkton Hill/Hether Wood Sandstone Ridge*:**

- Countryside;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV);
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets.

***Forces for Landscape Change***

**Past change**

- Loss of heathland and open grasslands where woodland has been allowed to naturally regenerate;
- Active management of heathland by the National Trust is an example of positive change;
- Some of the footpaths are poorly drained;
- Gardens associated with built development have introduced some exotic and garden species into the landscape.

**Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 2f: *Larkton Hill/Hether Wood Sandstone Ridge***

- Some pressure for incremental housing on the lower slopes;
- Erosion of built environment character and increased suburbanisation through development and standardisation/upgrading of lanes, including signage;
- Pressure for communication masts and other tall structures such as wind turbines, given the elevated topography and wind speeds;
- Pressure for small scale recreation-related development along the Sandstone Trail and other walks, with the possible erosion of the soft sandstone, fragmentation of habitats and loss of tranquillity.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 2f: Larkton Hill/Hether Wood Sandstone Ridge***

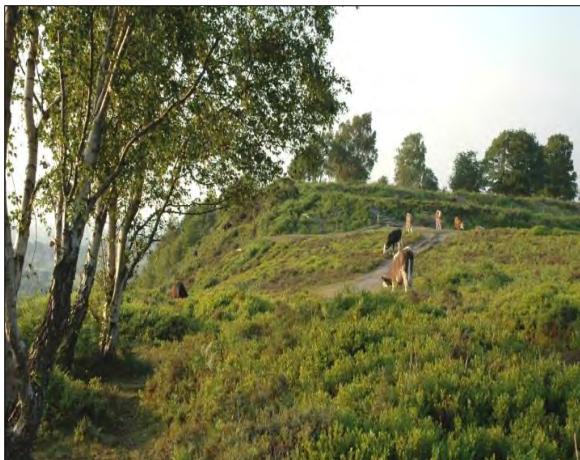
The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the prominent, distinctive and simple skyline and panoramic views from the ridge, and to continue to **enhance** heathland through continued active management and protection from agricultural practices.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

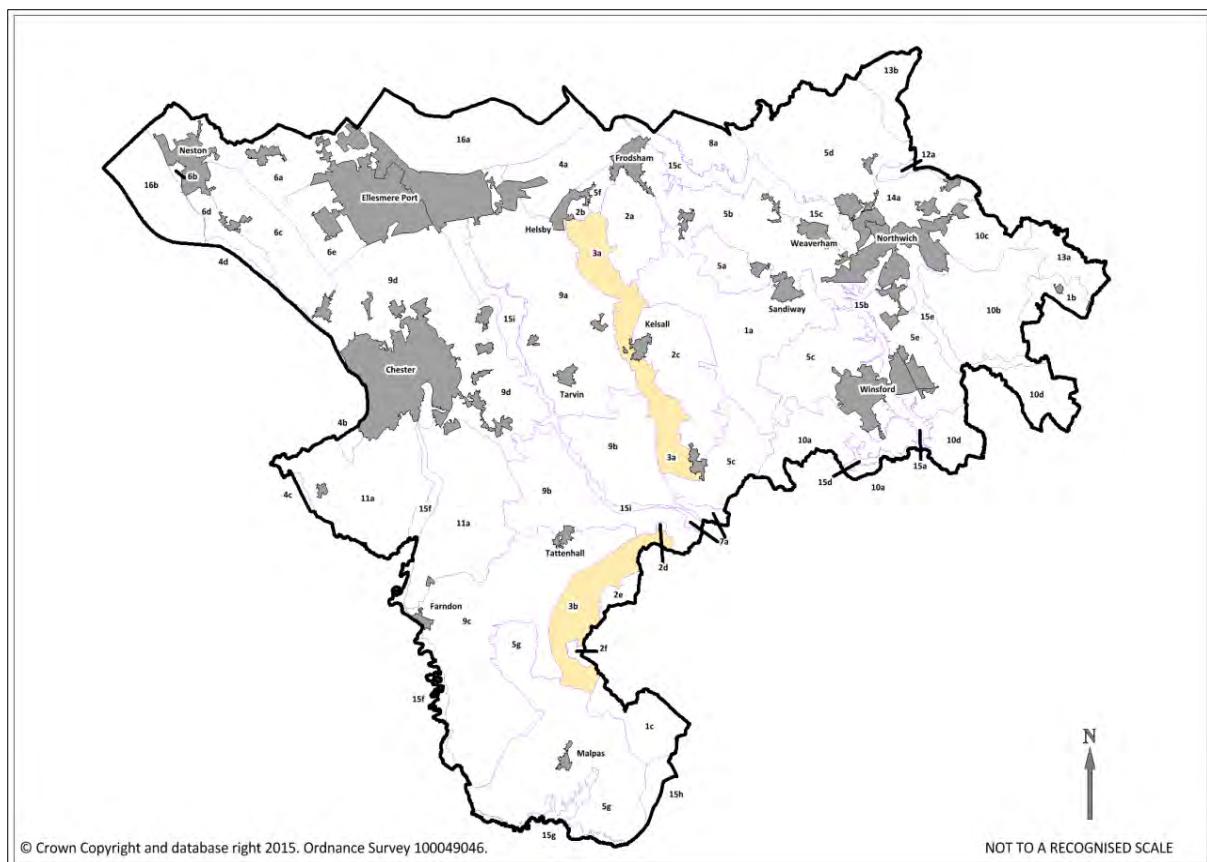
1. Encourage active management of existing woodlands to ensure a diverse age structure and ground flora.
2. Encourage the continued enhancement of heathland on open areas through continued active management.
3. Maintain sandstone outcrops and caves as features of the landscape – consider opportunities to enhance views of and, where appropriate, access to, these features whilst maintaining their geological and ecological interest.
4. Manage visitor access to minimise erosion of the soft sandstone.
5. Use ASCV designation to protect the character area from inappropriate development.
6. Maintain the ancient sunken lanes, minimising small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or straightening of the road network which could change the character of these lanes. Encourage restoration of traditional hedgerow boundaries alongside these lanes.
7. Seek opportunities to re-create species rich grassland.
8. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the most popular areas, and maintain the sparse settlement and road network and limited visible development.
9. Conserve the strong, prominent and simple skyline and the distinctive, natural, wooded slope profile of this outcrop.
10. Maintain panoramic views – consider opportunities to create additional viewpoints and increased opportunities for public views.

## ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern. Conserve the local vernacular - local sandstone and red brick farmsteads and barns with Welsh slate roofs. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
2. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
3. Maintain panoramic views out from the ridge – ensure new build within and out with the character area does not block these important views.
4. The ridgeline is sensitive to built development and in particular communication masts, wind turbines and other tall structures on the skyline which should be avoided.



# LCT 3: SANDSTONE FRINGE



## General Description

This is an intermediate landscape type that delineates the eastern margin of the *Cheshire Plain West*, while above it rises the *Sandstone Ridge* to the east. To the north and south are patches of the *Undulating Enclosed Farmland* landscape type.

## Visual Character

This is a landscape of strong contrasts. At many locations landform, high hedges and blocks of woodland provide effective enclosure and ensure only immediate, short distance views. Where the high vegetation combines with narrow, sunken, winding lanes the landscape has a small scale, verdant character. This is in contrast to those elevated and open viewpoints enjoying extensive and panoramic views across the adjacent low lying Cheshire Plain and the Mersey valley. Views to the west extend to the Clwydian hills in north Wales and to the Shropshire hills to the south on clear days.

At many open viewpoints on the lower slopes the eye is drawn to a number of distinctive landmarks along the high ground of the *Sandstone Ridge*. This includes strong visual elements such as the sandstone outcrop of *Beeston Crag* and *Beeston Castle*, and *Peckforton Castle* in Cheshire East.

## Physical Influences

The *Sandstone Fringe* rises from the *Cheshire Plain West* at 50m AOD, with a maximum elevation of 155m. To the east and south of the *Sandstone Ridge* the landscape is more undulating and the break between character types is not so distinct.

The topography varies from gentle slopes and undulations to steep scarps. The underlying geology comprises Wilmslow Sandstone and Tarporley Siltstone, which is mostly overlain by glacial till and glacio-fluvial deposits, distinguishing the character are from the adjacent *Sandstone Ridge*. Soils are brown sands and earths, which support arable and grassland. The principal arable crop is potatoes. Fragments of acid grassland, which support flora such as fescue and sheep sorrel, are also found in this character type.

Overall woodland cover is lower than on the *Sandstone Ridge*. Small copses are dotted across this type, a number of which are Local Wildlife Sites. Areas of ancient woodland occur at sites such as Cats Rough in the valley of Ashton Brook and in part of the large Pennsylvania Wood to the west of Peckforton Castle. Fields are mainly enclosed with hawthorn hedgerows but there are also some dry sandstone walls.

### ***Cultural Influences***

Prehistoric finds of flint tools, metal work and burials suggest Bronze Age and earlier activity within the *Sandstone Fringe* area. Paleo-environmental work has also shown that significant soil erosion was occurring in the southern part of the *Sandstone Fringe* where it meets the *Sandstone Ridge* in the Bronze Age, which is also indicative of the clearance of woodland.

The northern areas of this landscape type lay within the boundary of the extensive former Royal Forest of Mara (Delamere), which covered a vast portion of Cheshire, considerably larger than the coniferous plantations that today are referred to as 'Delamere Forest'. The popular perception of a forest is that of an area densely covered with trees. In the medieval period, a forest was an area for hunting, especially deer. This part of the forest would have been interspersed with farmland and settlements.

There is a greater density of settlement than on the *Sandstone Ridge* and the *Cheshire Plain West*. The topography provides good aspect and a pleasing outlook above the poor draining land of the plain. There are a number of small nucleated villages and hamlets such as Burwardsley, Alvanley and Harthill, whilst some larger villages such as Tarporley and Kelsall straddle the boundary where the *Sandstone Fringe* meets the *Sandstone Ridge*. Buildings are constructed predominantly from red and brown brick, but there are also examples of thatch and 17<sup>th</sup> century timber framed buildings with white washed brick and brick infill. Fruit farms are found in this type, taking advantage of the free draining, light soils and the shelter afforded by the ridge.

Some settlements such as Alvanley are still surrounded by their enclosed medieval townfields. Areas of medieval and early post medieval enclosure are distributed throughout the character type and these areas often contain the remains of marl pits. The township commons, some of which survived into the nineteenth century were enclosed in the post medieval period creating more regular field patterns. In these areas of later enclosure settlement is largely dispersed and often associated with a complex pattern of roads.

This character type is defined by small to medium fields (up to 8ha) in an irregular and semi-regular pattern. Generally enclosure is likely to date back to the medieval period if not earlier following the assarting of heath and woodland.

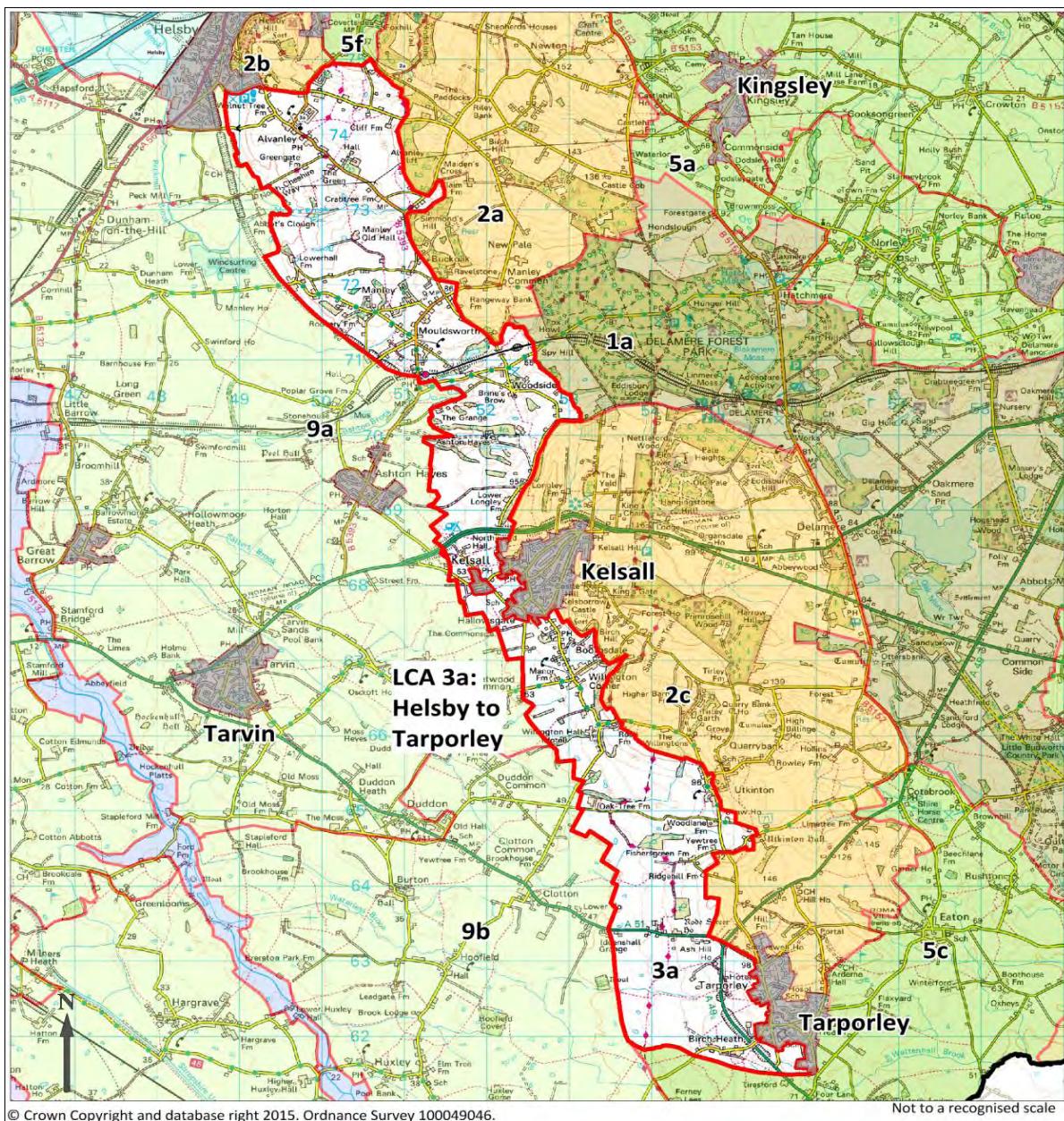
This landscape type has been favoured for the location of high status monuments and buildings, a characteristic it shares with the adjoining *Sandstone Ridge*. Late Bronze Age/Iron Age promontory hillforts are prominent in views of the adjacent *Sandstone Ridge*, whilst and isolated halls with associated parkland are prominent features in the *Sandstone Fringe* e.g. Bolesworth Castle and Burwardsley Hall. Sections of the Sandstone Trail long distance footpath pass through the *Sandstone Fringe* as it descends off the ridge.

There are **two Landscape Character Areas** within LCT 3:

**3a: Helsby to Tarporley**

**3b: Beeston to Duckington**

## LCA 3a: Helsby to Tarporley Sandstone Fringe



### Location and Boundaries

The **Helsby to Tarporley Sandstone Fringe** wraps around the western edge of the *Sandstone Ridge* from Helsby in the north to Tarporley in the south, forming a transitional landscape between the *Sandstone Ridge* and the *Cheshire Plain West*. This *Sandstone Fringe* landscape is defined by its sandstone geology and intermediate topography and continues to the south.

### **Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 3a: Helsby to Tarporley Sandstone Fringe**

- Transitional zone between the prominent *Sandstone Ridge* and the low lying *Cheshire Plain West* forming a gently undulating landscape of intermediate elevation (mostly between 35m and 90m AOD)
- Underlying bedrock geology of Helsby and Wilmslow Sandstone Formations and Tarporley Siltstone that has been weathered and overlain by glacio-fluvial sands and gravels and till (boulder clay) deposits except along the western edge;
- Steep, gorse-clad sandstone outcrops, for example overlooking the *Dunham to Tarvin Plain*, marked by disused quarries e.g. Manor Farm
- Other disused quarries mark places where the underlying geology is not obscured by glacial deposits, for example at Birch Heath Farm
- Geology gives rise to brown sands and earths which support a mixed agricultural landscape of arable and grassland, with pasture dominating in the south, and some small woodland and fragments of acid grassland
- Fruit farming towards the centre of the character area around Kelsall and Willington
- Predominantly late eighteenth and early nineteenth century planned enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act
- Fields are typically irregular, small to medium in size and enclosed by hawthorn hedges or low sandstone walls
- The clayey soils have a low permeability and give rise to a number of water bodies, including ponds, brooks and streams. Water filled marl pits are a reminder of the past use of the boulder clay to fertilise fields
- A generally low level of woodland cover but containing a number of small scattered woodland blocks, for example at Bentley Wood, Oxpasture Wood and Ash Wood, small copses and riparian woodland along the course of narrow streams e.g. Abbot's Clough Woodland along Moor's Brook is a Local Wildlife Site
- Mature hedgerow trees are important landscape elements, contributing to the overall tree cover
- Some areas are designated as an Area of Special County Value (ASCV) recognising their landscape and scenic quality and their historic, archaeological and ecological importance
- The settlement pattern is characterised by nucleated villages and scattered hamlets and farms, constructed from combinations of sandstone and red brick, or white washed sandstone walls and thatch are also a feature, linked by a network of historic lanes, some sunken
- Nucleated village at Alvanley surrounded by distinctive small medieval townfields
- Larger villages such as Tarporley and Kelsall straddle the boundary where the *Sandstone Fringe* meets the *Sandstone Ridge*
- Grand mansion houses, for example Manley Old Hall
- Although this area does not provide as many recreational opportunities as the adjacent *Sandstone Ridge* it contains a number of public footpaths, including the Longster Trail long distance recreational footpath and part of the Sandstone Trail as it descends off the ridge
- The adjacent *Sandstone Ridge* forms a backdrop to views across the *Sandstone Fringe*.

### **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

#### **Natural / Physical**

- Gently undulating landscape, the majority of which has an extensive covering of more recent drift deposits of glacial till (boulder clay) and glacio-fluvial sands and gravels (unlike the neighbouring *Sandstone Ridge*);

- Western edges are free of drift deposits where quarries indicate the presence of sandstone bedrock;
- Some exposed Helsby Sandstone formations are designated RIGS for their geological interest;
- The network of hawthorn hedges and low sandstone walls that create a strong field pattern;
- The small to medium sized fields, particularly those dating to the medieval period or earlier which provide historic continuity in the landscape;
- Remnant fragments of acid grassland on the sandy soils that are of nature conservation value;
- The field ponds (previous marl pits), brooks and streams that are of importance for biodiversity as well as being landscape features in their own right and contributing to the diversity of the landscape;
- The mature hedgerow trees, small scattered woodland blocks, copses and riparian woodland that are valuable landscape features in a landscape with generally low woodland cover;
- Ancient woodland of nature conservation importance which is limited in number and extent, increasing its importance on the *Sandstone Fringe*.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- Distinctive landscape setting around the historic nucleated village of Alvanley formed by enclosed medieval townfields visible as small scale field divisions. Alvanley is a Conservation Area recognised for its historic and architectural value, with a number of listed buildings including Alvanley Hall;
- Predominantly late eighteenth and early nineteenth century planned enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act attest to the final enclosure of the small remaining fragments of township commons, which had survived enclosure in the preceding centuries;
- The mix of medieval and post medieval field patterns including ancient field systems which are defined by relatively small scale, irregular field units as seen around Crabtree Farm and alongside Chester Road, and larger fields such as those around Alvanley Hall and Manley Old Hall;
- Fruit farms growing apples and summer fruits located around Kelsall and Willington;
- The presence of the Longster Trail and the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational footpaths which bring recreational users to the area.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- The settlement pattern of nucleated villages and scattered hamlets and farmsteads, and a number of halls including Alvanley Hall and Manley Hall, linked by a network of rural lanes and minor roads which maintain the rural character of the landscape;
- Buildings are typically constructed from red brick, sandstone or a combination of the two, or are white washed. Sandstone/red brick barns and low sandstone walls are a particular feature;
- The rural settings of villages that straddle the boundary where the *Sandstone Fringe* meets the *Sandstone Ridge*, such as Tarporley, Utkinton and Kelsall;
- Kelsall has seen recent residential development;
- Some more modern residential dwellings are also scattered along the minor roads at low density;
- Absence of large scale visually intrusive built elements except for the row of pylons that descend Alvanley Cliff and cross the landscape.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Generally quiet and rural character;
- Semi-enclosed landscape comprising a simple combination of farmland and woodland set against the backdrop of the *Sandstone Ridge*;
- The low sandstone walls associated with hedgerows or alongside roads contribute colour and texture to the landscape;

- The gently undulating topography within the transitional area between the *Sandstone Ridge* and the low lying *Cheshire Plain West* unifies the character area;
- A landscape of strong contrasts – some areas enclosed with a small scale, verdant character, and other open elevated areas with extensive panoramic views with rural views to the east across the fringe to the adjacent *Sandstone Ridge* and westwards across the Cheshire plain in particular from the *Sandstone Trail*, and views from the *Sandstone Ridge* over the fringe;
- The position of this landscape character area in the shadow of part of the *Sandstone Ridge* means it is not as visually prominent as the ridge itself. However, the undulating topography allows opportunities for views across the landscape of the *Helsby to Tarporley Sandstone Fringe*. There is some settlement in this landscape (indicating the presence of sensitive residential receptors) and, although recreational use of the landscape is relatively low, there are views from the *Sandstone Ridge* across this landscape character area. The LCA is also visible from the Cheshire Plain West, to the west;
- Although there is a relative absence of woodland cover, the presence of undulating topography and hedgerow trees means there is some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

#### **Landscape Condition**

The *Helsby to Tarporley Sandstone Fringe* is in active agricultural use and is managed accordingly. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network and some over-mature hedgerow trees. Some of the sandstone boundary walls are derelict, particularly alongside roads, and some woodlands are not being actively managed. Horse grazed pasture is also common in some areas.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 3a: *Helsby to Tarporley Sandstone Fringe***

- Green Belt (north of Kelsall off the A54);
- Countryside (south of Kelsall);
- Some areas are designated Area of Special County Value (ASCV) e.g. east of Helsby Hill and west of Utkinton;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Candidate Key Settlement Gap between Kelsall and Willington Corner

## **Forces for Landscape Change**

### **Past change**

- Limited boundary management and some evidence of decline and degradation in hedgerow boundaries as well as over-mature hedgerow trees;
- Sandstone walls, often forming part of hedgerow boundaries or alongside roads, are also in a declining state of repair;
- A shift from grassland to crops, fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in the number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Growth of potatoes and maize in traditionally pastoral areas resulting in soil erosion as a result of exposure of bare soil;
- Farm diversification and an increase in paddocks/horse grazing with accompanying ranch style fencing, decline in sward structure and introduction of ancillary buildings, clutter and hardstanding;
- Loss of orchards – in the past nearly all farms would have had an orchard;
- Decline in thatched buildings.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 3a: *Helsby to Tarporley***

- Pressure for residential development, particularly on the edges of the larger villages such as Kelsall and Tarporley, but also Utkinton and Mouldsworth;
- Pressure for holiday chalets;
- Likelihood of conversion of farm buildings for residential, business or industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Erosion of built environment character and increased suburbanisation through development and standardisation/upgrading of main roads, including signage and screen planting;
- Pressure for communication masts and other tall structures such as wind turbines, given the elevated topography and wind speeds;
- Visitor pressure with small scale recreation-related development along the Sandstone Trail and other walks, with the possible erosion of the soft sandstone, fragmentation of habitats and loss of tranquillity;
- The area's location in The Mersey Forest indicates that there is likely to be additional tree planting in this area. The Forest Plan is aiming for a woodland cover of 20-30% in this area.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 3a: Helsby to Tarporley Sandstone Fringe***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the pastoral character, strong field pattern and views to and from the *Sandstone Ridge* and the *Cheshire Plain West*.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Conserve ancient field patterns, particularly those dating to the medieval period or earlier which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
3. Seek to repair sandstone walls where they bound fields or align roads, to conserve these as a feature of the landscape.
4. Maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil (for example as a result of increased crop growing).
5. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
6. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
7. Conserve the remnant fragments of unimproved or semi-improved acid grassland on the sandy soils that are of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.
8. Conserve field ponds, brooks and streams that are of importance for biodiversity as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
9. Consider further opportunities for recreational use of the landscape as long as this does not result in 'suburbanisation' of the countryside.
10. Seek opportunities to extend woodland cover where it doesn't impact upon other ecologically valuable habitats – small scattered broadleaved woodland blocks, copses and riparian woodland are the most appropriate forms of woodland in this area.
11. Seek opportunities to restore and create orchards at the farm scale – in the past nearly all farms would have had an orchard.

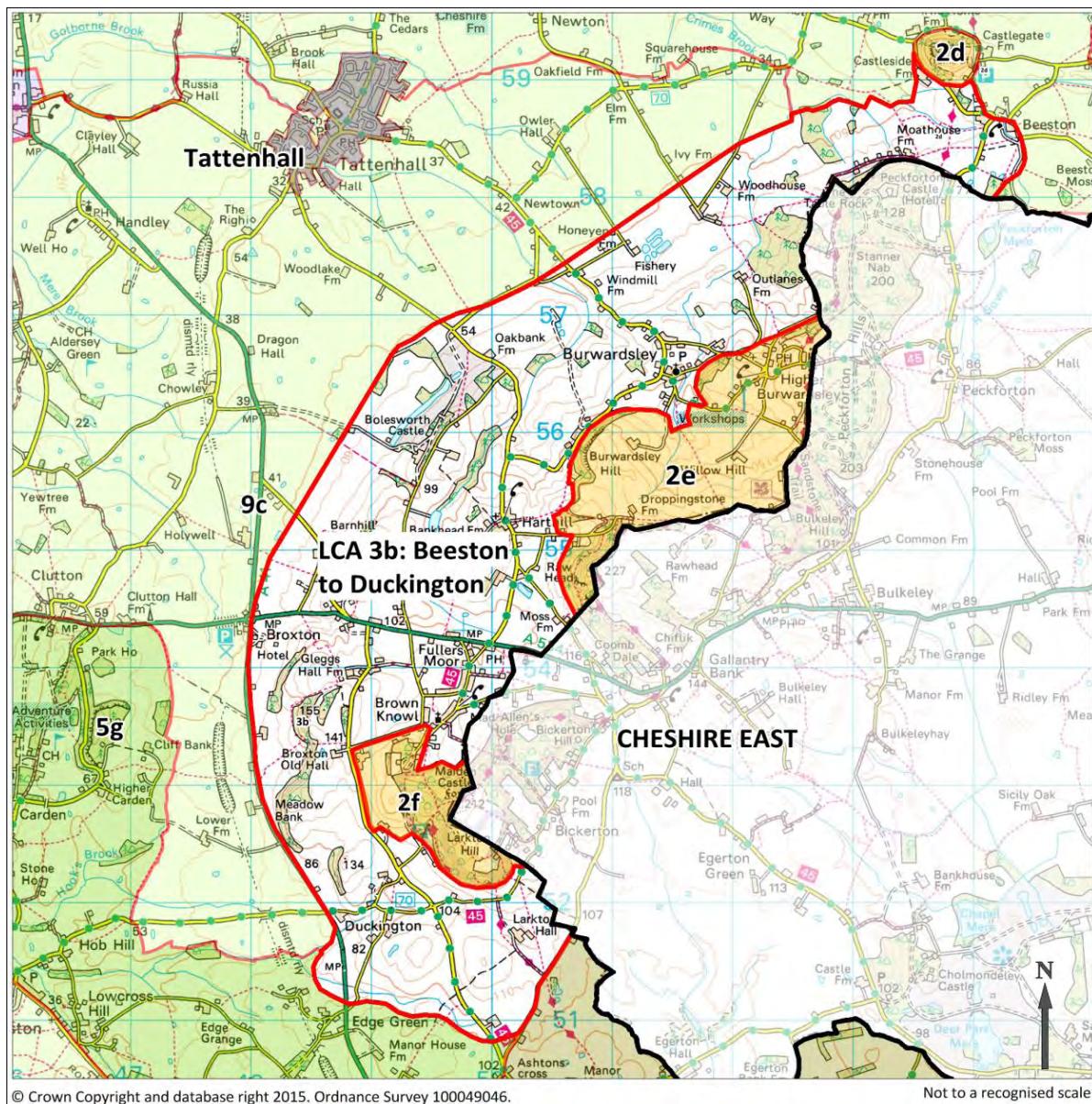
12. Manage existing woodlands to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
13. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and conserve the rural character of the lanes.
14. Conserve views to the east to the adjacent *Sandstone Ridge* and westwards across the *Cheshire Plain West* and consider opportunities to create additional viewpoints and increased opportunities for public views, for example across the Mersey Estuary. Consider key views when planning locations for new woodland associated with The Mersey Forest.

### *Built Development Guidelines*

1. Respect dominant historic settlement patterns where they remain.
2. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of hamlets and farmsteads away from the main urban areas.
3. Avoid locating buildings in prominent locations.
4. Conserve the local vernacular built style - red brick/sandstone or white washed farmsteads and buildings, thatch, and sandstone walls. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
5. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
6. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
7. Conserve the historic nucleated village at Alvanley and its landscape setting formed by distinctive small medieval townfields.
8. Maintain the rural setting to villages.
9. Minimise impacts of the leisure industry.
10. Refer to local Village Design Statement (VDS) and Neighbourhood Plans when considering change.
11. Conserve the open undeveloped area between Kelsall and Willington Corner that has been identified as a Candidate Key Settlement Gap where development would lead to coalescence and the loss of identity of the two communities.



## LCA 3b: Beeston to Duckington Sandstone Fringe



### Location and Boundaries

The **Beeston to Duckington Sandstone Fringe** wraps around the western edge of the *Sandstone Ridge* from Beeston in the north to Duckington in the south, forming a transitional landscape between the *Sandstone Ridge* and the *Cheshire Plain West*. This *Sandstone Fringe* landscape is defined by its sandstone geology and intermediate topography.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 3b: Beeston to Duckington Sandstone Fringe***

- Transitional zone between the prominent *Sandstone Ridge* and the low lying *Cheshire Plain West* forming an undulating, in parts complex landscape of intermediate elevation between 40m AOD in the north and rising to 155m in the south
- Underlying bedrock geology of Wilmslow Sandstone Formations and Tarporley Siltstone that has been weathered and overlain by glacio-fluvial sands and gravels and till (boulder clay) deposits except along the western edge
- Steep sandstone outcrops, for example overlooking the *Tattenhall to Shocklach Plain*, marked by disused quarries e.g. west of Harthill
- Other disused quarries mark places where the underlying geology is not obscured by glacial deposits, for example south of Broxton
- Geology gives rise to brown sands and earths which support a mixed agricultural landscape of arable and pasture
- Predominantly late eighteenth and early nineteenth century planned enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act
- Fields are typically irregular, small to medium in size and enclosed by hawthorn hedges or low sandstone walls
- Larger fields with trimmed hedges on shallower land support an increasing amount of arable crops, with an increase in landscape scale
- A greater covering of woodland than in the *Helsby to Tarporley Sandstone Fringe*, on the west facing slopes with small and medium sized copses and plantations and larger woodland including ancient woodland such as Pennsylvania Wood
- Woodland blocks provide a very strong visual image
- Complex landform around the A534 which passes east-west through the area, with prominent ridges, hidden valleys and high hedges flanking a network of narrow sunken lanes
- Township commons and areas of open heath divided and interspersed with small holdings and a complex pattern of roads, for example at Brown Knowl and Fullers Moor
- The clayey soils have a low permeability and give rise to a number of water bodies, including ponds (some used for fishing), brooks and streams. Water filled marl pits are a reminder of the past use of the boulder clay to fertilise fields
- Designated as an Area of Special County Value (ASCV) recognising the landscape and scenic quality and the historic, archaeological and ecological importance
- The settlement pattern is characterised by nucleated villages and scattered hamlets, farms and cottages, constructed from combinations of sandstone and red brick, or white washed sandstone walls and some thatch and timber framed cottages are also a feature, linked by a network of historic lanes, some sunken
- Nucleated villages and hamlets at Burwardsley, Brown Knowl and Harthill, with smaller hamlets such as Harthill grand mansion houses, for example Bolesworth Hall, Grade II\* listed
- Numerous archaeological and historic sites, including prehistoric barrows, Bolesworth Castle, Harthill Conservation Area and the remains of WWII searchlight batteries
- Although this area does not provide as many recreational opportunities as the adjacent *Sandstone Ridge* it contains a number of public footpaths, including the Eddisbury Way long distance recreational footpath which links to the Sandstone Trail as it ascends the ridge at Higher Burwardsley; and fishing ponds
- The adjacent *Sandstone Ridge*, including Beeston Castle and hillfort on the distinctive *Beeston Crag*, Peckforton Castle (in Cheshire East) and Maiden Castle, forms a backdrop to views across the *Sandstone Fringe*
- Extensive views from open elevated viewpoints to the hills of north Wales in the west and the Shropshire hills to the south.

## **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

### **Natural / Physical**

- Undulating, in part complex landscape, the majority of which has an extensive covering of more recent drift deposits of glacial till (boulder clay) and glacio-fluvial sands and gravels (unlike the neighbouring *Sandstone Ridge*);
- Western edges are free of drift deposits where quarries indicate the presence of sandstone bedrock;
- More gently undulating in the north around Beeston, rising to around 60m AOD, with steep, exposed Wilmslow Sandstone outcrops with hidden valleys and prominent ridges to the west and south rising to 155m;
- The typically irregular, medium sized fields, particularly those dating to the medieval period or earlier, with weak hawthorn hedges and mature hedgerow oaks provide historic continuity in the landscape;
- Mixed arable and pasture agricultural land use, where larger fields with trimmed hedges on shallower land support an increasing amount of arable crops, with an increase in landscape scale, for example in the north around Beeston and to the south around Duckington where Medieval and later field enclosures have undergone enlargement within the estates of Tollemache and Bolesworth;
- The greater covering of woodland than in the *Helsby to Tarporley Sandstone Fringe*, on the west facing slopes with small and medium sized copses and plantations and larger woodland including ancient woodland such as Pennsylvania Wood;
- The field ponds (some are previous marl pits), streams and brooks including Crimes Brook that are of importance for biodiversity as well as being landscape features in their own right and contributing to the diversity of the landscape.

### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The historic nucleated villages at Burwardsley and Brown Knowl;
- The township commons and areas of open heath, some of which survived into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were often encroached by landless labourers creating a pattern of small fields interspersed with small holdings and a complex pattern of roads, for example at Brown Knowl and Fullers Moor;
- The mix of medieval and post medieval field patterns including ancient field systems which are defined by relatively small scale, irregular field units towards the centre of the character area, and larger fields such as those around Cattleside Farm to the north and Bank Farm to the south of Duckington;
- Examples of ancient woodland, including Pennsylvania Wood, Broxton Wood, Barnhill Wood and Burwardsley Wood. Some woodland has been replanted and now comprises even-aged oak, beech, sycamore and larch over an understorey of bramble, bracken and bluebells;
- The numerous archaeological and historic sites, including prehistoric barrows, Bolesworth Castle, Harthill Conservation Area recognised for its historic and architectural value, with a number of listed buildings, and the remains of WWII searchlight batteries;
- The presence of the Eddisbury Way long distance recreational footpath which links to the Sandstone Trail as it ascends the ridge at Higher Burwardsley and which bring recreational users to the area;
- Enlarged ponds/lakes for fishing, such as at Honeyend Farm and Harthill Pool.

### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- The settlement pattern of nucleated villages and scattered hamlets including Harthill and Duckington, farmsteads, and a number of grand mansion houses/halls such as Bolesworth Hall (Grade II\* listed) and Burwardsley Hall, linked by a network of rural lanes and minor roads which maintain the rural character of the landscape;

- Buildings are typically constructed from combinations of sandstone and red brick, or white washed sandstone walls and some thatch and timber framed cottages are also a feature, linked by a network of minor roads and historic lanes, some sunken;
- Some more modern residential dwellings are also scattered along the minor roads at low density;
- Absence of large scale visually intrusive built elements.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Generally quiet and rural character;
- Semi-enclosed landscape comprising a simple combination of farmland and woodland set against the backdrop of the *Sandstone Ridge*;
- The low sandstone walls associated with hedgerows or alongside roads contribute colour and texture to the landscape;
- A landscape of strong contrasts - the open, gently undulating topography and larger arable fields in the north and south, and the more complex, enclosed, small scale verdant landscape of hidden valleys and prominent ridges to the west;
- Woodland blocks provide a strong visual image;
- The adjacent *Sandstone Ridge*, including Beeston Castle and hillfort on the distinctive *Beeston Crag* outcrop, Peckforton Castle (in Cheshire East) and Maiden Castle, forms a backdrop to views across the *Sandstone Fringe*;
- Extensive views from open elevated viewpoints to the hills of north Wales in the west and the Shropshire hills to the south;
- The position of this landscape character area in the shadow of part of the *Sandstone Ridge* means it is not as visually prominent as the ridge itself. However, the undulating topography allows opportunities for views across the landscape of the *Beeston to Duckington Sandstone Fringe*. There is some settlement in this landscape (indicating the presence of sensitive residential receptors) and, although recreational use of the landscape is relatively low, there are views from the *Sandstone Ridge* across this landscape character area. The LCA is also visible from the Cheshire Plain West, to the west;
- The presence of woodland cover, hedgerow trees and undulating topography means there is some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

#### **Landscape Condition**

The *Beeston to Duckington Fringe* is in active agricultural use and is managed for these land uses. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network and some over-mature hedgerow trees. Some of the sandstone boundary walls are broken, particularly alongside roads, and some woodlands are not being actively managed. However, some woodland has been replanted and now comprises even-aged oak, beech, sycamore and larch.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 3b: *Beeston to Duckington Sandstone Fringe***

- Countryside;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV);
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets.

## ***Forces for Landscape Change***

### **Past change**

- Limited boundary management and some evidence of decline and degradation in hedgerow boundaries as well as over-mature hedgerow trees;
- Sandstone walls, often forming part of hedgerow boundaries or alongside roads, are also in a declining state of repair;
- A shift from grassland to arable crops and a general reduction in the number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in field size and in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Decline in thatched buildings.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA3b: *Beeston to Duckington***

- Pressure for residential development, particularly on the edges of the larger villages such as Burwardsley and Brown Knowl;
- Pressure for holiday chalets;
- Likelihood of conversion of farm buildings for residential, business or industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Erosion of built environment character and increased suburbanisation through development and standardisation/upgrading of roads, including signage and screen planting;
- Pressure for communication masts and other tall structures such as wind turbines, given the elevated topography and wind speeds;
- Visitor pressure with small scale recreation-related development along the Eddisbury Way leading to/from the Sandstone Trail long distance footpath and other walks, with the possible erosion of the soft sandstone, fragmentation of habitats and loss of tranquillity;
- Increase in fishing bringing more visitors and associated signage, car parking etc.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 3b: Beeston to Duckington Sandstone Fringe***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and continue to manage the strong, distinctive wooded character and **restore** the small – medium scale field pattern by strengthening hedgerows and planting new hedges and hedgerow trees where fields have been enlarged by agricultural practices.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Encourage the continued management of existing woodlands and replanting of woods to ensure a diverse age structure and ground flora.
2. Encourage restoration of ancient field patterns by strengthening hedgerows and planting new hedges and hedgerow trees where fields have been enlarged by agricultural practices.
3. Conserve ancient field patterns, particularly those dating to the medieval period or earlier which provide historic continuity in the landscape, by encouraging the management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
4. Maintain sandstone outcrops as features of the landscape – consider opportunities to enhance views of and, where appropriate, access to, these features whilst maintaining their geological and ecological interest.
5. Seek to repair sandstone walls where they bound fields or align roads, to conserve these as a feature of the landscape.
6. Maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil (for example as a result of increased crop growing).
7. Conserve the surviving township commons and areas of open heath at Brown Knowl and Fullers Moor.
8. Maintain the ancient sunken lanes, minimising small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or straightening of the road network which could change the character of these lanes. Encourage restoration of traditional hedgerow boundaries alongside these lanes.
9. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.

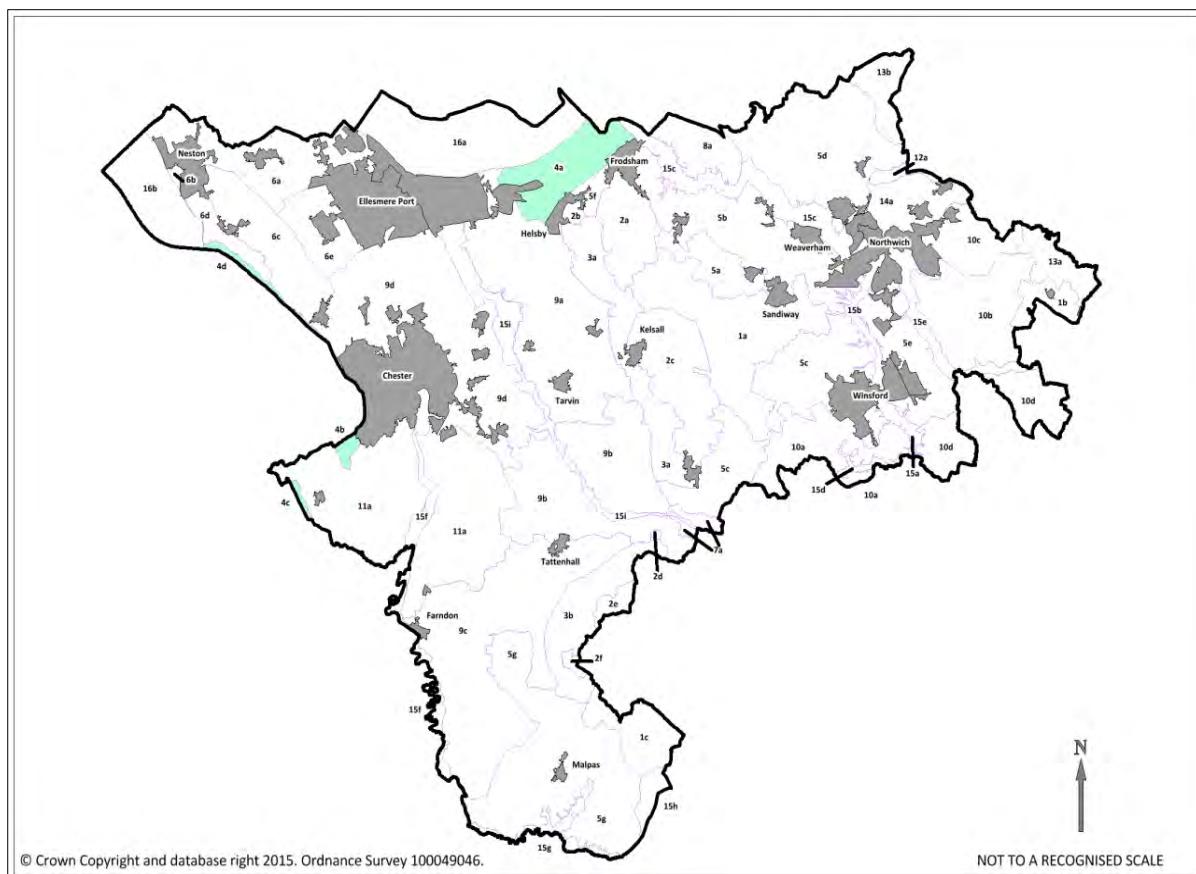
10. Conserve field ponds, brooks and streams that are of importance for biodiversity as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
11. Consider further opportunities for recreational use of the landscape as long as this does not result in 'suburbanisation' of the countryside.
12. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and maintain the sparse settlement and road network and limited visible development.
13. Maintain panoramic views – consider opportunities to create additional viewpoints and increased opportunities for public views.
14. Use ASCV designation to protect the landscape and scenic quality and the historic, archaeological and ecological importance of the character area from inappropriate development.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of nucleated villages, hamlets, farmsteads and cottages away from the main urban areas.
2. Conserve the local vernacular built style - red brick/sandstone or white washed farmsteads and buildings, thatch, and sandstone walls. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
3. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
4. Conserve the historic nucleated villages/hamlets at Burwardsley, Brown Knowl and Harthill.
5. Maintain the rural setting to villages and avoid locating buildings in prominent locations.
6. Ensure views of and the settings of archaeological and historic sites and buildings are not affected by new development.
7. Maintain panoramic views out from the ridge – ensure new build within and out with the character area does not block these important views.
12. Minimise impacts of the leisure industry.
13. Refer to local Village Design Statement (VDS) and Neighbourhood Plans when considering change.



## LCT 4: DRAINED MARSH



### General Description

This landscape character type is located on former saltmarsh or mudflats adjacent to the Dee and Mersey estuaries. It is drained by inter-connecting networks of drainage channels arranged in a regular, often linear pattern, and this gives the impression of an open unenclosed landscape. This character type is significantly reduced in size; it formerly covered a much greater area. Today the reclaimed land is mainly used as grazing land, with some arable crops.

The flat, open nature of this landscape often provides expansive views of the surrounding area including the Dee and Mersey estuaries, which are intrinsic to its existence and character. The close proximity to industrial sites and the open views of these areas also has a significant impact.

### Visual Character

This landscape type appears as a very flat, open and large scale landscape. The combination of flat topography and low field boundaries such as drainage ditches or post and wire fences allows extensive panoramic views out to the surrounding character areas. Within this landscape the general absence of development or higher ground means that visually dominant elements, such as upland areas or large structures, are located in the surrounding character areas and this exerts a strong influence upon landscape character.

Major transport corridors can be visually prominent. For example, the M56 and main railway transport corridors traverse the *Frodsham, Helsby and Lordship Marshes* character area on embankments. This slight elevation combined with the scarcity of high hedges or hedgerow trees

can lead to a high level of visual disruption from moving traffic. Artificial embankments along the northern boundary of the *Frodsham, Helsby and Lordship Marshes* character area, separating it from the Manchester Ship Canal and the open Mersey Estuary, and around the canal deposit dumps, are prominent, highly visible features in the landscape. Similarly, a number of large scale overhead power lines running parallel with the M56 and railway are dominant features.

### ***Physical Influences***

This character type occurs on very low-lying flat topography with an elevation of between 0-13m AOD. The former marsh resulted from the marine and alluvial deposits of clay, salt and silt deposited under tidal and estuarine influence. This overlies Kinnerton Sandstone, Chester Pebble Beds and Wilmslow Sandstone. Soils comprise humic and alluvial gleys on the improved reclaimed coastal floodplain.

Small patches of scrub are common, with few trees. Where there are hedgerows they are mostly grown out and in poor condition. Reeds and other aquatic or emergent plants are mainly restricted to ditches. The drained marsh has ornithological interest as a wintering ground for wading birds and wildfowl as well as birds of prey.

### ***Cultural Influences***

This is marginal land that has been created through reclaiming former estuarine marshland and manually digging drainage ditches and installing pumps in more recent periods. This was undertaken to increase the available land for agriculture and to improve food production. For example, the *Frodsham, Helsby and Lordship Marshes* area was reclaimed in 1894 as part of the opening of the Manchester Ship Canal, with further extensive drainage undertaken in the Second World War. The reclaimed sediments are amongst the best in the county and potentially very fertile, able to sustain crops of barley, winter wheat and potatoes.

Marshland is an unappealing location for settlement and as such these areas have remained largely unsettled, restricted to a few isolated farms. However, industry has utilised similar reclaimed marshland, for example the landscape character type wraps around the GrowHow Fertiliser Plant to the west of the Frodsham and Ince Marshes, and further west is the extensive Stanlow oil refinery.

Development of the Ince Resource Recovery Park has been approved on Ince Marshes. The Frodsham Wind Farm comprising 19 wind turbines is under construction and will occupy much of the land within the northern half of the *Frodsham, Helsby and Lordship Marshes* between Lordship Lane and the Mersey Canal.

There are **four Landscape Character Areas** within LCT 4:

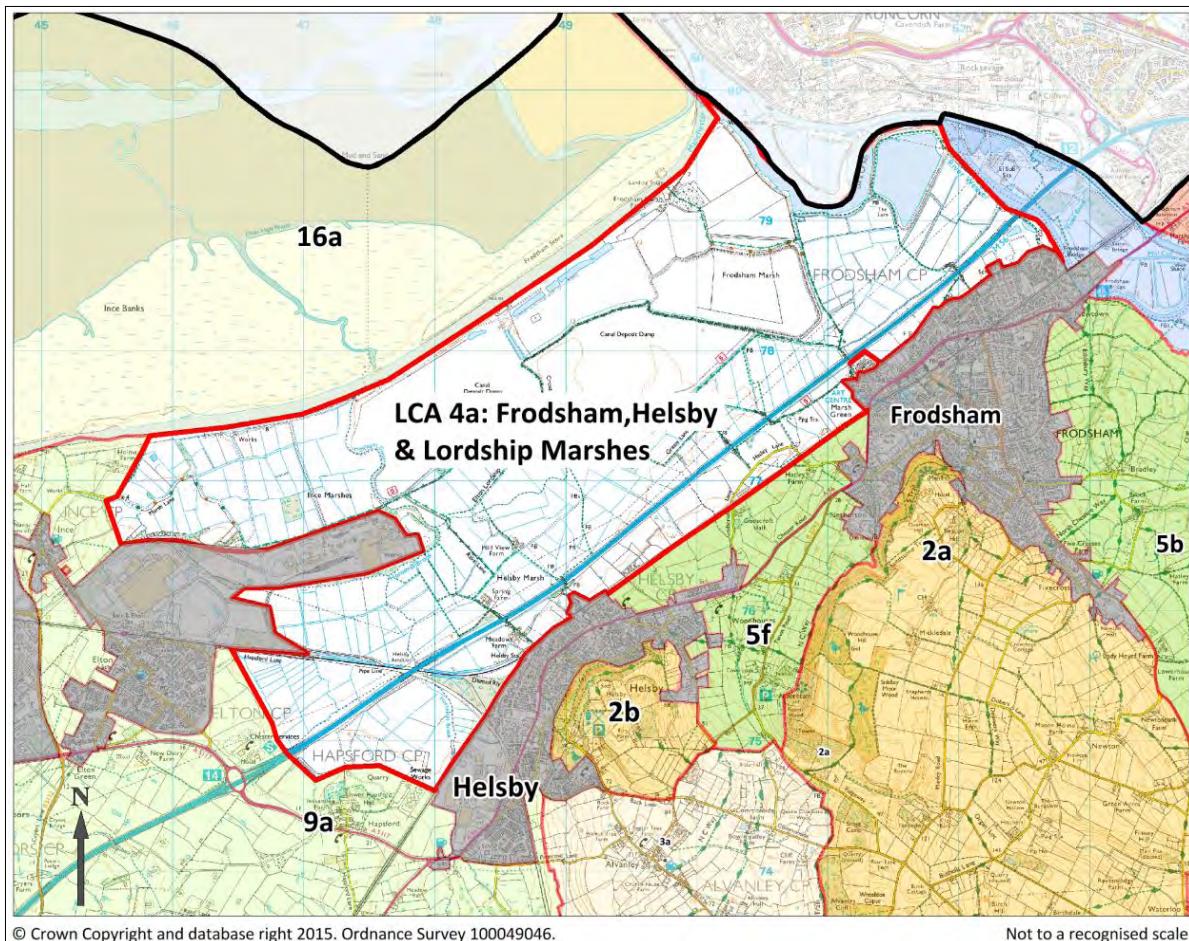
**4a: *Frodsham, Helsby and Lordship Marshes***

**4b: *The Lache Eyes***

**4c: *Dodleston Drained Marsh***

**4d: *Burton & Shotwick Drained Marsh***

## LCA 4a: Frodsham, Helsby and Lordship Marshes



### Location and Boundaries

The northern boundary of this landscape character area is formed by an artificial bank which separates it from the Manchester Ship Canal and open *Estuary* of the Mersey Estuary beyond. The southern boundary is marked by the railway and urban edges of Frodsham and Helsby. The River Weaver lies to the east and industrial development to the west.

### **Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 4a: *Frodsham, Helsby and Lordship Marshes***

- A flat, low lying landscape (up to 13m AOD) of former mudflats and saltmarsh alongside the Mersey Estuary, contrasting with surrounding built development (previously designated as an Area of Significant Local Environmental Value – ASLEV)
- Strong interconnection and intervisibility with LCT 16 *Mudflats and Saltmarsh* to the north
- Reclaimed as part of the opening of the Manchester Ship Canal in 1894, with further drainage following the Second World War to produce productive farmland
- The flat landscape is etched with a distinctive pattern of straight drainage ditches which delineates the field pattern of planned 19th century enclosure
- There is an extensive ditch system, a stronghold for water voles in the borough
- Incomplete hedgerow boundaries provide partial enclosure along some field boundaries
- Land to the north of Lordship Lane is used as a deposit ground for dredgings from the Manchester Ship Canal and supports a range of wetland habitats
- Land to the south of Lordship Lane is in agricultural use – a mixture of pasture and arable with incomplete thorn hedgerows
- Canal dredging grounds defined by high earth embankments
- The area is of local, national and international importance for its breeding, wintering and passage birds which add movement to the landscape
- An isolated, bleak and open landscape - settlement is limited to isolated farms linked by rough tracks between ditches
- A system of surfaced tracks and bridleways serve the area, including National Cycle Route (NCR) 5
- The M56 and railway utilise the flat landscape, crossing the marsh at the base of the *Helsby to Frodsham Undulating Enclosed Farmland* that gently rises to the south
- Running parallel to the M56 area a number of large scale overhead power lines which are dominant features in this flat landscape
- The flat, open landscape provides clear views to and from the adjacent *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge and Helsby Hill*
- Industrial works at Ince Marshes, and at Halton and Rocksavage in Runcorn, form a backdrop in views to the west and east respectively
- Permitted windfarm will become dominant creating a ‘windfarm landscape’ when constructed

### **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

#### **Natural / Physical**

- Extensive alluvial deposits of sand, silt and clay left by the Mersey River overlying a solid bedrock of Chester Pebble Beds, the erosional base of the Sherwood Sandstones;
- Once contiguous with the saltmarsh and mudflats of the Mersey Estuary, the area was embanked, ditched and drained in 1894 following the opening of the Manchester Ship Canal which lies to the north;
- Pumps and new ditches added following the Second World War to produce productive farmland that are some of the most fertile soils in the county;
- Influenced by alluvial drift deposits, clayey humic and alluvial gley soils are deep and well drained, and well suited to both pasture and arable crops;
- Field pattern delineated by the pattern of drainage ditches, with some fields also bounded by gappy hawthorn hedges;
- The extensive ditch system is a stronghold for water voles in the borough;

- Important roosting sites for wildfowl and waders at high tide from the Mersey Estuary SSSI - the whole area provides a wintering ground for waders and raptors and extensive habitat for breeding birds and is designated as a Local Wildlife Site;
- Large areas of land to the north of Lordship Lane are dredging deposit lagoons associated with the Manchester Ship Canal, exhibiting a sequence of ecologically rich habitats from bare mud to agricultural land.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The field pattern characterised by straight-sided fields bounded by ditches, dating from the 19th century planned enclosure of marshland;
- Land north of Lordship Lane modified by 20th century field improvements (around Frodsham Marsh Farm) and creation of deposit dumps associated with the Manchester Ship Canal;
- Traces of human activity are indicated by the discovery of Bronze Age (c 2000 BC) spearheads on Frodsham and Ince Marshes. More recently, this marginal area was used as a WWII bomb decoy;
- The extensive network of public rights of way across the marshes, including NCR 5, which follow tracks and field boundaries and are used for passive forms of recreation such as jogging and dog walking. The Thornton-le-Moors to Frodsham Greenway crosses the area;
- Small consented developments including model aircraft strip and Hoverforce (leisure hovercraft and segways) provide recreational facilities.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- The absence of settlement except for scattered farms including Meadow Farm, Spring Farm, Hill View Farm, and Frodsham Marsh Farm, linked by a network of rough tracks that follow field boundaries and drainage ditches;
- The M56 and railway transport corridor that utilise the flat land;
- A number of large scale overhead power lines run parallel with the M56;
- Industrial works at Ince Marshes, and at Halton and Rocksavage in Runcorn, form a backdrop in views to the west and east respectively;
- Development of the Ince Resource Recovery Park has been approved on Ince Marshes;
- The consented Frodsham Wind Farm comprising 19 wind turbines will occupy much of the land within the northern half of the *Frodsham, Helsby and Lordship Marshes* between Lordship Lane and the Mersey Canal.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The flat landform and long views contribute to the perception of a large scale, exposed landscape;
- Presence of man-made embankments foreshorten views to the north across the Mersey Estuary;
- Important views to and from the *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge* and *Helsby Hill*;
- The consistent field pattern through planned enclosure gives the perception of a reclaimed, tamed landscape;
- Vegetation-fringed ditches and rough ground and lagoons provide texture in the landscape;
- Parts of the marsh are remote, but the presence of traffic on the M56 motorway brings noise and movement to the area; the presence of birds and proximity to John Lennon Airport also contribute to noise and movement;
- Sense of naturalness of the marsh is diluted by man-made features and development;
- No prominent skyline, but embankments, pylons and industrial development are visually prominent;
- The open character means there is little opportunity for screening any large scale elements or for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves being highly visible -

making it a visually sensitive landscape. There are relatively few sensitive visual receptors in the area, limited to a few residential properties and users of the PROW network, but in adjacent areas overlooking the marsh there are views from Frodsham and Helsby as well as visitors to the viewpoints at the top of Helsby Hill and the War Memorial above Frodsham.

### **Landscape Condition**

Although much of the area is actively farmed, the degraded hedgerows and broken fencing shows this to be a landscape in need of improved management. Some land to north of Lordship Lane remains in use for canal dredgings and has undergone change as a result of the preliminary works for the permitted windfarm. Wet grassland species have been lost and ditches are eutrophic as a result of the intensive agricultural use of the land.

### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 4a: *Frodsham, Helsby and Lordship Marshes***

- Green Belt;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Flood risk and water management.

### ***Forces for Landscape Change***

#### **Past change**

- Reduction of cultivated areas and increase in set-aside;
- Loss of wet grassland communities;
- Reduction in dredging lagoons with loss of wildlife interest;
- Increase in horse grazing around peripheral areas with associated changes to field boundaries and use of informal animal shelters, sheds etc.;
- Loss and fragmentation of hedgerows, and decline in fencing condition;
- Ditches are eutrophic as a result of nutrient run-off due to the intensive agricultural use of the land;
- Approved development of the Ince Resource Recovery Park on Ince Marshes;
- Small consented developments including model aircraft strip and Hoverforce (leisure hovercraft and segways);

#### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 4a: *Frodsham, Helsby and Lordship Marshes***

- Continued dredging and dumping is likely to continue to affect the landscape of the marshes;
- Pressure for increase in transport infrastructure / improvements;
- Encroachment by industrial development and infrastructure: pressure for expansion of industry on the marshes, including renewable energy development;
- Visual impact of prominent development and traffic could be reduced by tree planting but this would change the open character of the area;
- Cost of artificial drainage could lead to withdrawal of pumping and loss/under-management of historic drainage systems and change in water levels on farmland;
- Climate change could lead to increased flooding affecting the use and management of the land;
- Improved drainage measures could lead to local modification to hydrological characteristics of field system and may threaten paleo-environmental remains;
- When constructed the Frodsham Wind Farm will dominate the landscape, reduce the openness of the marshes and create a 'windfarm landscape'.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 4a: Frodsham, Helsby and Lordship Marshes***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to ***enhance and restore*** the condition of habitats and features of the marshes whilst safeguarding its open character.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

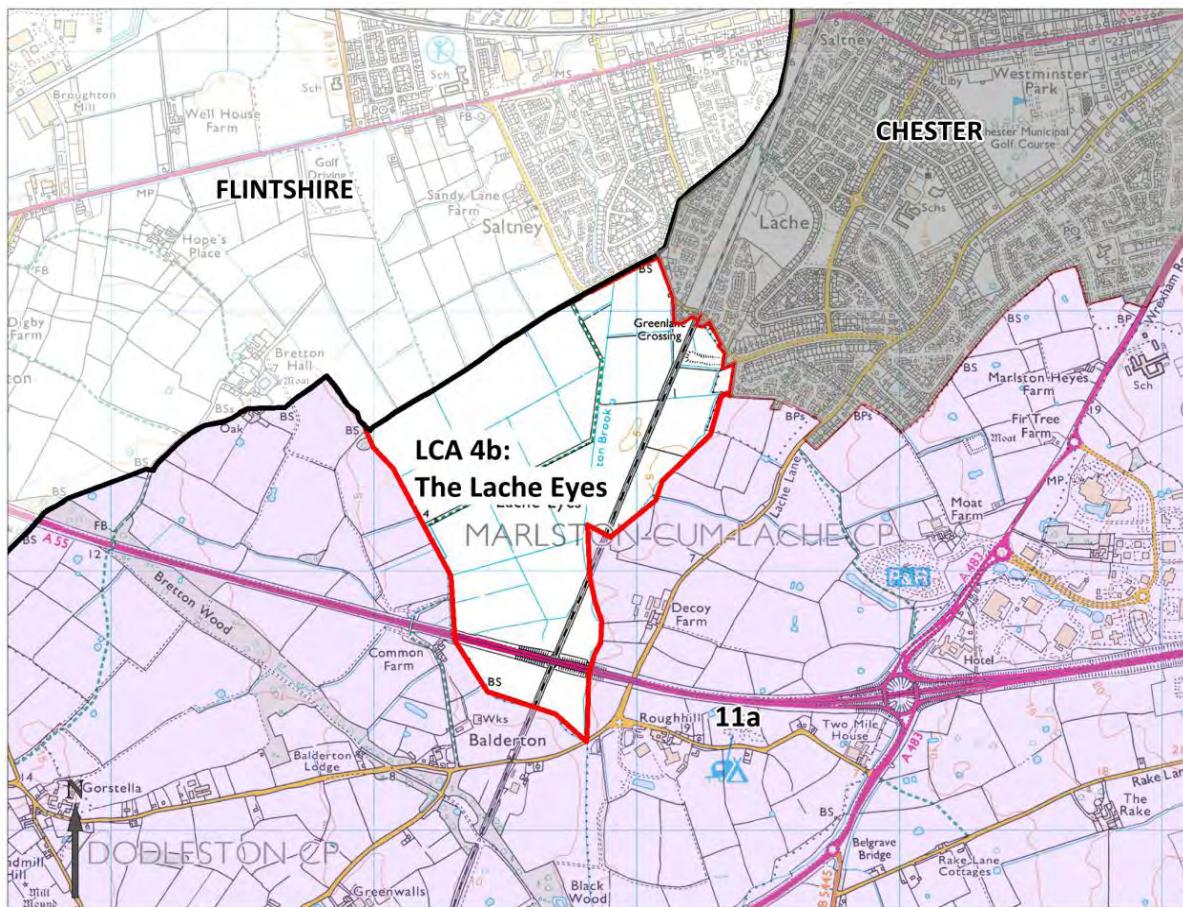
- 1.** Encourage recreational development as a means of managing some of the more derelict and degraded areas of the landscape. Encourage use of the area by walkers, cyclists, rowers and horse riders (including provision of picnic facilities and viewing opportunities) whilst safeguarding the nature conservation interest of the area, particularly its importance for birds.
- 2.** Maintain the distinctive field pattern that reveals the planned 19<sup>th</sup> century enclosure of the marsh.
- 3.** Seek to restore thorn hedgerows that are falling into decline.
- 4.** Maintain and ecologically enhance the ditch system and riparian habitats and land supporting breeding, over wintering and passage birds. Seek opportunities to re-create habitats such as species rich grassland and reed beds.
- 5.** Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows and ditches to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
- 6.** Improve water quality by encouraging less-intensive agricultural practices to reduce fertiliser run-off and nutrient levels in the ditches.
- 7.** Encourage restoration of derelict industrial land including re-creation of salt-marsh and reintroduction of grazing to maintain the open character of the marsh.
- 8.** Consider opportunities to create views across the Mersey Estuary.
- 9.** Conserve the ‘remote’ character of the marshes away from the main transport corridor of the M56.
- 10.** Retain the open character of the marsh by restricting planting to low growing scrubby species typically found in the local landscape, taking into account the importance of the area for ground nesting birds and wintering/passage birds. Woodland planting /screening using tall or ornamental species is not appropriate in the open marsh.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Conserve the remaining open, undeveloped areas of the marsh.
2. Consider using native scrubby vegetation to screen views of traffic on the north side of the M56 motorway (taller species may be appropriate on the southern side of the motorway adjacent to the *Helsby to Frodsham Undulating Enclosed Farmland*).
3. Consider views to and from the *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge and Helsby Hill* when planning any change.



## LCA 4b: *The Lache Eyes*



### *Location and Boundaries*

The Lache Eyes is a very small landscape character area immediately to the southwest of Chester. Formerly part of the larger Saltney Marsh in the Dee Estuary, it continues to the north beyond the Cheshire West and Chester borough boundary, west of Saltney.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics* of LCA 4b: *The Lache Eyes***

- A very flat, low lying landscape (up to 5m AOD) of former tidal marsh alongside the Dee Estuary, contrasting with surrounding built development
- Regular flooding occurs in the winter
- An area originally part of the tidal estuary of the River Dee before silting up after the Roman period, embanked and reclaimed during the 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to produce productive farmland
- Land predominantly used for grazing and horticulture north of the main footpath crossing the LCA (land to the south has recently been sprayed off and reseeded)
- Areas of species rich grassland of nature conservation interest
- The flat landscape is etched with a distinctive pattern of straight drainage ditches and channels which delineate the regular field pattern
- Ditches and drainage channels criss-cross the area and are of important nature conservation value
- The area supports red and amber listed bird species of conservation concern including snipe and starling
- Incomplete, low cut hedgerow boundaries and post and wire and wooden fencing provide variety in field boundaries
- Lack of trees provides a very open, exposed, windswept landscape
- Absence of settlement, and lack of roads and rights of way across the area; one main footpath crosses the LCA
- The A55 cuts across the southern end of the character area, and the railway transects the eastern edge, on embankment and utilising the flat landscape
- The transport corridors add movement and noise to an otherwise remote, empty landscape
- The flat, open landscape provides clear views to the hills of north Wales to the west
- The presence of two duck decoys, used to trap wildfowl

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The flat nature of the land was formed when Lache Eyes was originally part of the tidal estuary of the River Dee before silting up after the Roman period;
- Formerly part of the larger Saltney Marsh in the Dee Estuary, the Lache Eyes was embanked and reclaimed during the 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to produce productive farmland;
- Subsequent drainage and industrial development of the wider Saltney Marsh beyond the borough boundary has reduced its extent;
- Influenced by alluvial drift deposits, clayey and alluvial gley soils are deep and well drained, and well suited to both pasture and arable crops;
- Areas of species rich grassland of nature conservation interest;
- Field pattern delineated by the pattern of drainage ditches, with some fields also bounded by low cut hawthorn hedges, in some places gappy, or post and wire fences and wooden fences;
- Drainage works included straightening the Balderton Brook.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The field pattern characterised by straight-sided fields bounded by ditches and drainage channels, dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19th century planned enclosure;
- The presence of two duck decoys, used to trap wildfowl, close to Decoy Farm although both are now only faint depressions in the ground. The one to the immediate north of the pond (known

as the 'Mermaid's Purse Decoy') is of unknown age but the main decoy to the west was known to have been constructed in 1634 and a map dated 1733 shows it located on the coastline;

- The second decoy is called Brereton's Duck Decoy and was constructed between 1631 and 1634 by Sir William Brereton and his relatives as a commercial venture. Its construction caused controversy and protests from more traditional landowners which resulted in a number of lawsuits. These indicate that Brereton was supplying the market towns of Cheshire and South Lancashire with cheaper and better quality fowl than his rivals. Although it is uncertain exactly when the decoy fell into disuse, it was definitely out of use by 1846, when the Chester-Wrexham Railway drove their line through the centre of the pond. Both are Mermaid's Purse Decoys in terms of morphology, the more northerly example is un-named;
- A public footpath follows the drainage ditches/channels and field boundaries through the character area.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- The absence of settlement, although a number of farmsteads are located along the character area boundary, including Decoy Farm and Common Farm which are visually prominent due to the lack of screening in the flat landscape;
- Lack of roads, although the A55 and Chester to Wrexham railway transport corridors utilise the flat land.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The flat landform and long panoramic views contribute to the perception of a large scale, exposed landscape;
- Woodland within the *Eaton Estate Farmland* provides a backdrop in views to the south;
- Important views westwards to the Clwydian Hills of north Wales and south-eastwards to the *Sandstone Ridge*;
- The consistent field pattern through planned enclosure gives the perception of a reclaimed, tamed landscape;
- Vegetation-fringed ditches and rough ground provide texture in the landscape;
- Parts of the area are remote, but the presence of traffic on the A55 dual carriageway brings noise and movement to the southern part of this character area; the presence of birds and aircraft using the Hawarden (Chester) Airport also contribute to noise and movement;
- No prominent skyline, but traffic on the embanked A55 is visually prominent;
- Huge sheds and hangers of the Broughton Aircraft Factory are visually dominant in views to the northwest;
- The open character means there is little opportunity for screening any large scale elements or for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves being highly visible - making it a visually sensitive landscape. There are relatively few sensitive visual receptors in the area.

#### **Landscape Condition**

The degraded hedgerows and broken fencing shows this to be a landscape in need of improved management. Wet grassland species have been lost and ditches are eutrophic as a result of the intensive agricultural use of the land.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 4b: *The Lache Eyes***

- Green Belt;
- Flood risk and water management.

## ***Forces for Landscape Change***

### **Past change**

- Reduction of cultivated areas and increase in set-aside;
- Loss of wet species-rich grassland communities;
- Loss and fragmentation of hedgerows, and decline in fencing condition;
- Ditches are eutrophic as a result of nutrient run-off due to the intensive agricultural use of the land.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA4b: *The Lache Eyes***

- Pressure for increase in transport infrastructure / improvements;
- Pressure for renewable energy; wind turbines in the open, exposed, windswept landscape, and Solar PV farms;
- Visual impact of prominent development and traffic could be reduced by tree planting but this would change the open character of the area;
- Cost of artificial drainage could lead to withdrawal of pumping and loss/under-management of historic drainage systems;
- Climate change could lead to increased flooding affecting the use and management of the land.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 4b: The Lache Eyes***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the open, undeveloped character and the distinctive network of drainage ditches and channels, and to **enhance** the condition of habitats and features of the drained marsh.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

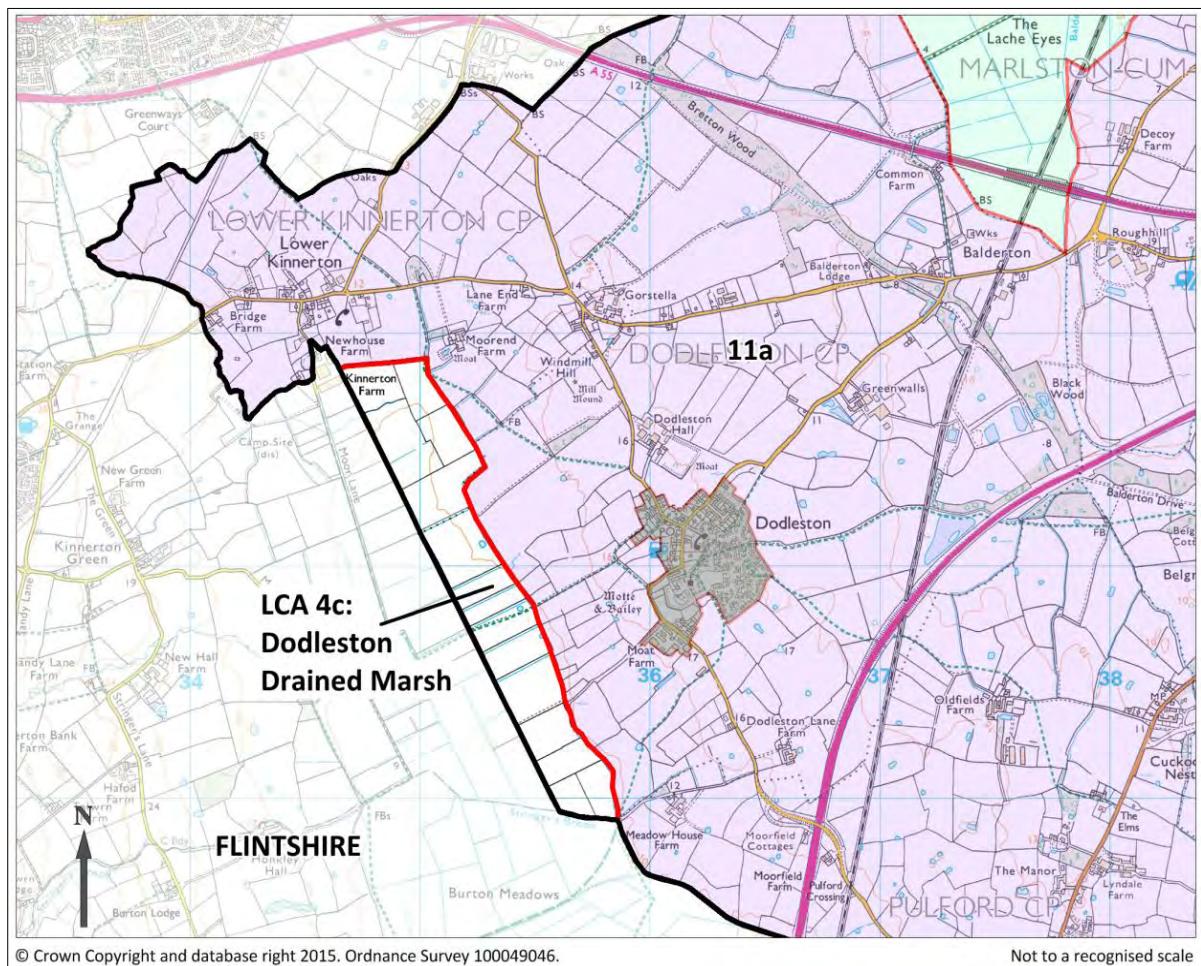
1. Encourage management of derelict and degraded areas of the landscape.
2. Maintain the distinctive field pattern that reveals the planned 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century enclose of the former Saltney Marsh in the Dee Estuary.
3. Seek to restore and manage thorn hedgerows that are falling into decline, to maintain the age and species diversity.
4. Encourage management and maintenance of the network of drainage ditches and channels in a way that retains these as important characteristic features of the landscape and protects their ecological value.
5. Maintain and manage semi-improved species rich grassland.
6. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows and ditches to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
7. Improve water quality by encouraging less-intensive agricultural practices to reduce fertiliser run-off and nutrient levels in the ditches.
8. Conserve the ‘remote’ character of *The Lache Eyes* away from the main transport corridors of the A55 and railway.
9. Retain the open character of the drained marsh by restricting planting to low growing scrubby species typically found in the local landscape, taking into account the importance of the area for ground nesting birds and wintering/passage birds. Woodland planting /screening using tall or ornamental species is not appropriate in the open marsh.
10. Encourage controlled public access through the area via clear way marking to prevent people straying from the public footpath network.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Conserve the open, undeveloped character of the drained marsh. Even small scale built development is likely to be conspicuous and any attempt at screening with trees would itself be prominent and uncharacteristic.
2. Renewable energy development is likely to be prominent in the open landscape, with potential for cumulative effects which should be avoided.
3. Consider using native scrubby vegetation to screen views of traffic alongside the A55 dual carriageway.
4. Consider views to the Welsh hills and the *Sandstone Ridge* when planning any change.



## LCA 4c: Dodleston Drained Marsh



### Location and Boundaries

The *Dodleston Drained Marsh* is a narrow elongated landscape character area straddling the border with Wales to the southwest of Chester. It forms part of the wider Burton Meadows, reclaimed and artificially drained from the former Dee Estuary. It lies between Lower Kinnerton and Dodleston and continues to the west beyond the Cheshire West and Chester borough boundary.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 4c: Dodleston Drained Marsh***

- A very flat, low lying landscape (10m AOD) of former tidal saltmarsh alongside the Dee Estuary, reclaimed during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to produce productive farmland
- An underlying geology of Kinnerton Sandstone and Chester Pebble Beds overlain by alluvial deposits;
- Cattle grazing is the dominant land use, although there are also fields in arable cultivation
- Areas of species rich grassland of nature conservation interest
- The flat landscape is etched with a distinctive pattern of straight drainage ditches and channels which delineate the regular, rectangular field pattern
- Ditches run perpendicular to the main drainage channel
- Ditches and drainage channels are of important nature conservation value
- Low cut hedgerow boundaries, some incomplete, and occasional post and wire fencing provide uniformity in field boundaries
- Lack of trees provides a very open, exposed, windswept landscape
- Occasional field ponds
- Absence of settlement and roads through the area provides an empty, remote landscape
- A footpath from Dodleston crosses the landscape
- The flat, open landscape provides views to the hills of north Wales to the west and to the *Sandstone Ridge* to the southeast

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### **Natural / Physical**

- Alluvial deposits of sand, silt and clay left by the River Dee overlying a solid bedrock of Chester Pebble Beds Formation, the erosional base of the Kinnerton Sandstones;
- Once contiguous with the saltmarsh and mudflats of the tidal Dee Estuary, the area was ditched and drained during the 19<sup>th</sup> century to produce productive farmland;
- Areas of species rich grassland of nature conservation interest;
- Regular, rectangular field pattern delineated by the pattern of drainage ditches running perpendicular to the main drainage channel which runs in a northwest to southeast direction from Lower Kinnerton, along the borough boundary;
- Fields bounded by low cut hawthorn hedges, in some places gappy, with occasional post and wire fences providing uniformity in field boundaries.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The regular, rectangular field pattern characterised by straight-sided fields bounded by ditches and drainage channels, dating from the 19th century;
- Field ponds along the eastern boundary of the character area are more typical of the adjacent *Estate Farmland* and *Cheshire Plain West*;
- A public footpath follows the drainage ditches/channels and field boundaries through the character area.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Settlement and any other built development is absent from this landscape, although a number of farmsteads are located along the character area boundary, including Newhouse Farm, Kinnerton Farm, Moat Farm and Meadow House Farm which are visually prominent due to the lack of screening in the flat landscape;
- Absence of roads.

### Perceptual / Visual

- The flat landform and long panoramic views contribute to the perception of a large scale, exposed landscape;
- Woodland at Hawarden, including Bilberry Wood, provides a backdrop in some views to the west, although there are more distant views westwards to the Clwydian Hills of north Wales and south-eastwards to the *Sandstone Ridge*;
- The consistent field pattern through planned enclosure gives the perception of a reclaimed, tamed landscape;
- Vegetation-fringed ditches and rough ground provide texture in the landscape;
- Field ponds and irregular field boundaries along the eastern edge of the character area are more typical of the adjacent *Estate Farmland* and *Cheshire Plain West* giving this part of the character area a more transitional feel;
- The absence of any development and roads provides a remote landscape, but the presence of birds and aircraft using the Hawarden (Chester) Airport contribute to noise and movement;
- No prominent skyline, but farm silos and the huge sheds and hangers of the Broughton Aircraft Factory are visually dominant;
- The open character means there is little opportunity for screening any large scale elements or for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves being highly visible - making it a visually sensitive landscape. There are relatively few sensitive visual receptors in this landscape, limited to farm workers and people using the footpath network.

### Landscape Condition

The land is actively farmed and managed, although there are some degraded hedgerows and broken fencing.

### CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 4c: *Dodleston Drained Marsh*

- Countryside;
- Flood risk and water management.

### Forces for Landscape Change

#### Past change

- Loss and fragmentation of hedgerows, and decline in fencing condition;
- Loss of wet species-rich grassland communities.

#### Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 4c: *Dodleston Drained Marsh*

- Loss and under management of the drainage system would affect the key characteristic feature of this landscape character area;
- There could be pressure for wind energy development in the open, exposed, windswept landscape, and Solar PV farms;
- Tree planting could reduce the visual impact of prominent structures on neighbouring farms but this would change the open character of the area;
- Climate change could lead to increased flooding affecting the use and management of the land.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 4c: Dodleston Drained Marsh***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the open, undeveloped character and the distinctive network of drainage ditches and channels, and to **enhance** the condition of boundary hedgerows on the drained marsh.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Maintain the distinctive regular, rectangular field pattern that reveals the planned 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century enclosure of the former tidal Dee Estuary.
2. Seek to restore and manage thorn hedgerows that are falling into decline, to maintain the age and species diversity.
3. Encourage continued management and maintenance of the network of drainage ditches and channels in a way that retains these as important characteristic features of the landscape and protects their ecological value.
4. Maintain and manage species rich grassland and field ponds for their nature conservation value.
5. Increase the biodiversity value of the land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows and ditches to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
6. Conserve the remote character of the *Dodleston Drained Marsh*.
7. Retain the open character of the drained marsh by restricting planting to low growing scrubby species typically found in the local landscape, taking into account the possible presence of ground nesting birds and wintering/passage birds. Woodland planting / screening using tall or ornamental species is not appropriate in the open marsh.
8. Encourage controlled public access through the area via clear way-marking to prevent people straying from the public footpath network.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

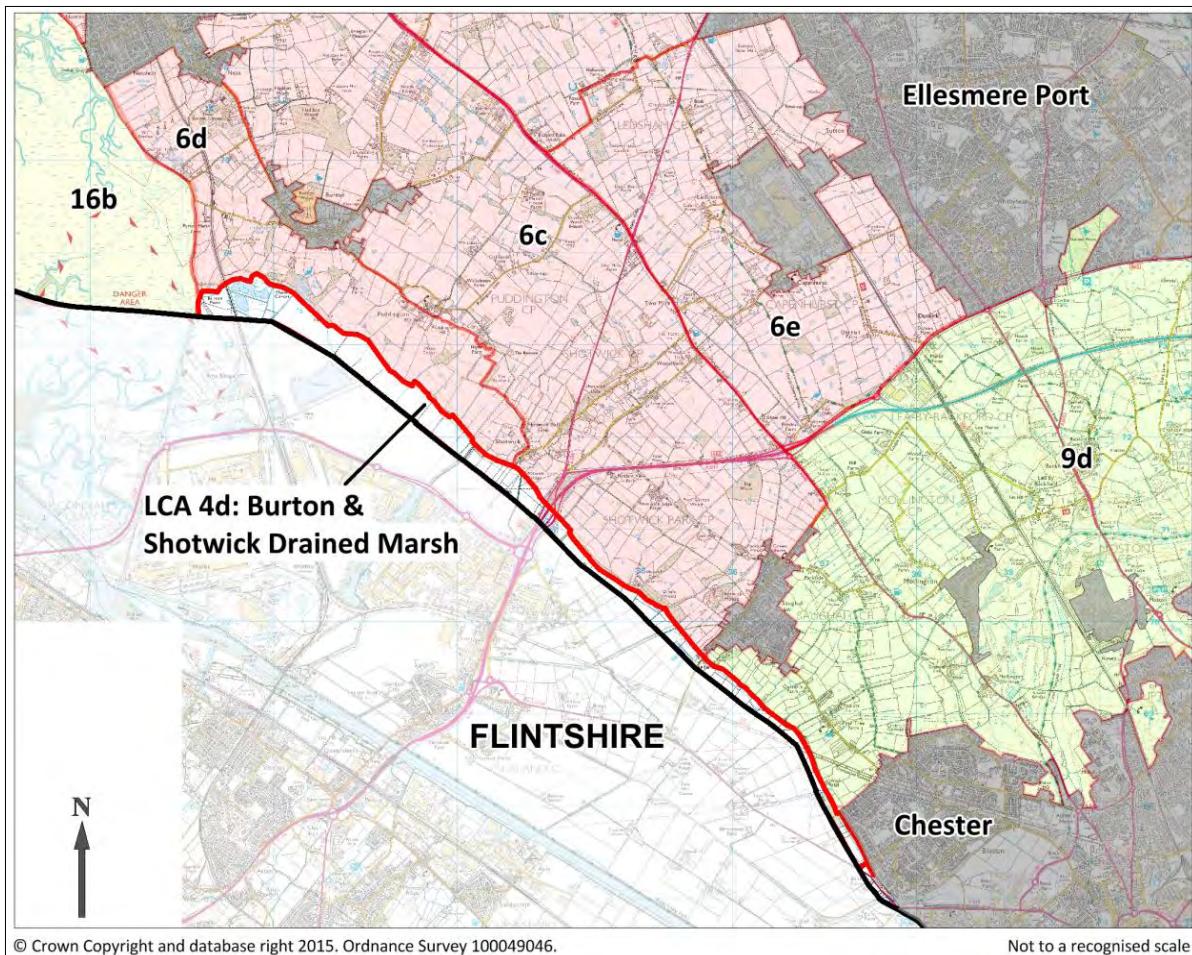
1. Conserve the open, undeveloped character of the drained marsh. Even small scale built development is likely to be conspicuous and any attempt at screening with trees would itself be prominent and uncharacteristic.
2. Renewable energy development is likely to be prominent in the open landscape, with potential for cumulative effects which should be avoided.
3. Consider views to the Welsh hills and the *Sandstone Ridge* when planning any change.



LCT 4: Drained Marsh

LCA 4c: *Dodleston  
Drained Marsh*

## LCA 4d: Burton & Shotwick Drained Marsh



### Location and Boundaries

The Burton & Shotwick Drained Marsh is a very narrow, elongated landscape character area marking the transition between the *Undulating Enclosed Farmland* and the low lying Dee levels. It straddles the national border, the western edge of the character area marking the English/Welsh boundary. The Burton & Shotwick Drained Marsh extends from Burton to Blacon on the outskirts of Chester.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 4d: Burton & Shotwick Drained Marsh***

- A very flat, low lying landscape (up to 5m AOD) of former tidal marsh alongside the Dee Estuary, contrasting with farmland sloping down from the east
- An area originally part of the tidal estuary of the River Dee before silting up after the Roman period, reclaimed during the 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to produce productive farmland, with further improvement at the northern end as part of the development of the Wrexham to Bidston railway
- Mixed agricultural pasture and arable land use
- Ditches and areas of species rich grassland are of nature conservation interest
- The flat landscape is etched with a distinctive pattern of straight drainage ditches and channels which delineate the regular, rectangular field pattern
- Incomplete hedgerow boundaries provide partial enclosure along some field boundaries
- Lack of trees provides an open, exposed, windswept landscape
- Absence of settlement and roads
- A number of rights of way cross the area and National Cycle Route (NCR)5 follows a disused railway (now the Chester Millennium Greenway) near the southern end
- The A550 cuts through the centre of the character area, and the Wrexham to Bidston railway passes along the eastern edge
- The transport corridors add movement and noise to an otherwise remote, empty landscape
- The flat, open landscape provides clear views across the Dee Estuary to the hills of north Wales to the west and to the Shotton industrial area where Connah's Quay power station and the Dee Bridge are visually prominent
- Recreational fishing ponds and RSPB Burton Mere Wetlands reserve with a mosaic of wetland habitats important for birds including internationally designated Ramsar site
- Iron Age promontory fort at Burton Point

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### ***Natural / Physical***

- Alluvial deposits of sand, silt and clay left by the River Dee overlying a solid bedrock of Chester Pebble Beds Formation, well suited to both pasture and arable crops;
- Once contiguous with the saltmarsh and mudflats of the tidal Dee Estuary, the area was ditched and drained during the 19<sup>th</sup> century to produce productive farmland, with further improvements at the northern end as part of the development of the Wrexham to Bidston railway ('The Borderlands Line');
- Ditches and areas of species rich grassland of nature conservation interest;
- Regular, rectangular field pattern delineated by the pattern of drainage ditches running perpendicular to the main drainage channel which runs in a northwest to southeast direction along the borough boundary from Burton Point to Blacon on the outskirts of Chester;
- Field pattern delineated by the pattern of drainage ditches, with some fields also bounded by gappy hawthorn hedges;
- Includes the 'Shotwick Fields', prone to flooding in the winter;
- RSPB Burton Mere Wetlands Reserve is internationally designated as a Ramsar site as an extension of the Dee Estuary.

### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The regular, rectangular field pattern characterised by straight-sided fields bounded by ditches and drainage channels, dating from the 19th century;
- Iron Age promontory fort at Burton Point;
- The northern end of the LCA was the site of a bombing decoy during the Second World War;
- A number of footpaths cross the character area, linking to the network of rights of way through farmland around Burton, Puddington, Shotwick and Saughall to the east;
- The Chester Millennium Greenway provides an important recreational route along the disused railway linking Chester and Connah's Quay as part of NCR5;
- Fishing ponds provide recreational activity;
- RSPB Burton Mere Wetlands Reserve provides a mosaic of habitats including wetlands with reed beds, fenland, woodland with wildflowers and farmland, important for wildfowl and wading birds – the reserve has recently expanded and includes a visitor centre;
- Good palaeo-environmental potential.

### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Settlement and any other built development is absent from this landscape, although a number of villages lie within the *Undulating Enclosed Farmland* to the east, namely Burton, Puddington, Shotwick and Saughall;
- Absence of roads.

### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The flat landform and long panoramic views contribute to the perception of a large scale, exposed landscape;
- The consistent field pattern through planned enclosure gives the perception of a reclaimed, tamed landscape;
- Vegetation-fringed ditches and rough ground provide texture in the landscape;
- The absence of any development and roads provides a remote landscape, but the presence of the A550 and railway bring noise and movement to the area; birds and aircraft using the Hawarden (Chester) Airport also contribute to noise and movement;
- No prominent skyline, but the Deeside / Shotton industrial area including Connah's Quay power station, pylons and the Dee Bridge are visually dominant;
- The flat, open landscape provides clear views across the Dee Estuary to the hills of north Wales to the west;
- Topography and woodland in the *Undulating Enclosed Farmland* limit views to the east;
- The open character means there is little opportunity for screening any large scale elements or for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves being highly visible - making it a visually sensitive landscape. There are relatively few sensitive visual receptors in this landscape, limited to farm workers and people using the footpath network.

### **Landscape Condition**

Although much of the area is actively farmed, the degraded hedgerows and broken fencing shows this to be a landscape in need of improved management. Some land appears to be set-a-side or is not being actively managed and the long grasses and scrub vegetation create an impression of neglect. Recreational fish ponds and the RSPB reserve are well managed.

**CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 4d: *Burton & Shotwick Drained Marsh***

- Green Belt;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

***Forces for Landscape Change***

**Past change**

- Reduction of cultivated areas and increase in set-aside;
- Loss of wet grassland communities;
- Loss and fragmentation of hedgerows, and decline in fencing condition;
- Recently extended RSPB Burton Mere Wetlands reserve has increased visitor numbers to the area;
- Expansion of fisheries has resulted in 'suburbanisation' by signage, car parking, fencing etc.

**Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 4c: *Dodleston Drained Marsh***

- Pressure for increase in transport infrastructure / improvements across the area;
- There could be pressure for wind energy development in the open, exposed, windswept landscape, and Solar PV farms;
- Visual impact of prominent development and traffic could be reduced by tree planting but this would change the open character of the area;
- Further 'suburbanisation' of the landscape, for example signage, fencing and car parking associated with new or improved fishing ponds;
- Climate change could lead to increased flooding affecting the use and management of the land.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 4d: Burton & Shotwick Drained Marsh***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **enhance** the condition of habitats and features of the drained marsh whilst safeguarding its open character.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

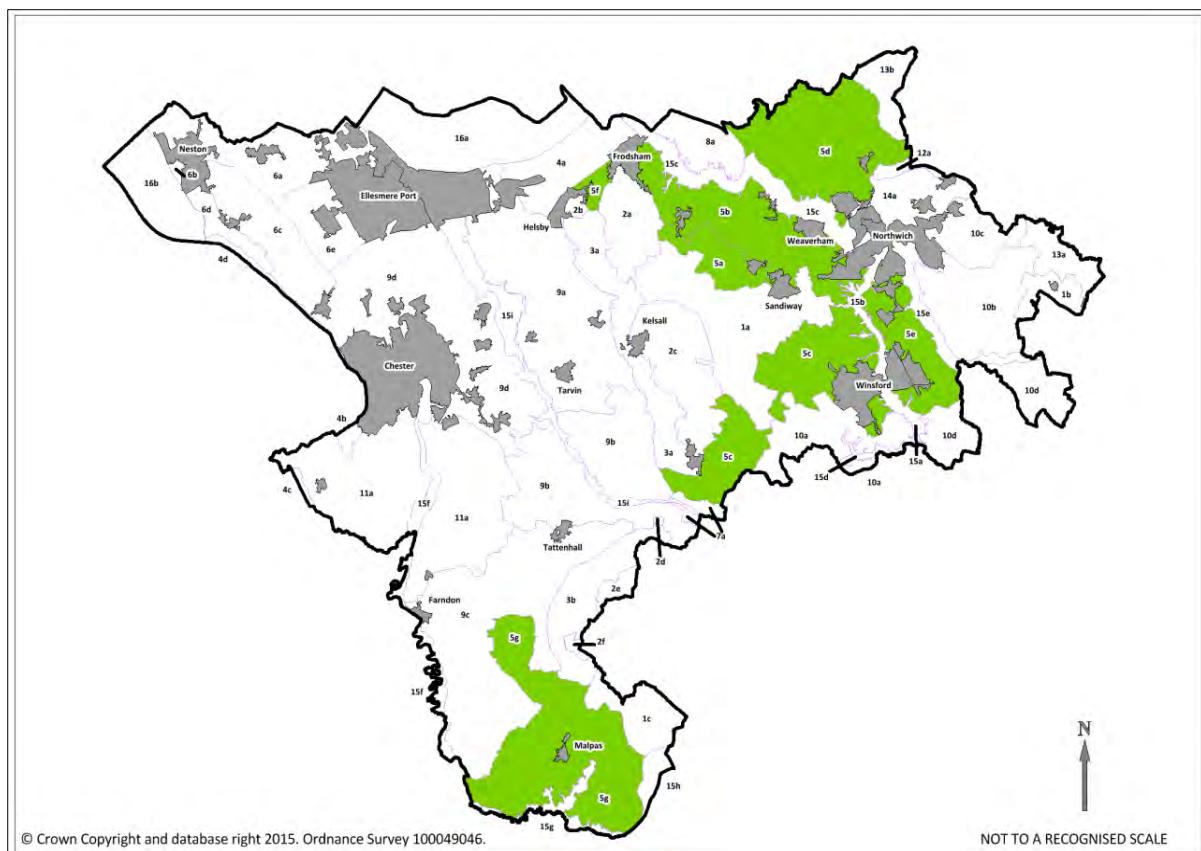
1. Encourage appropriate management of the more derelict and degraded areas of the landscape to enhance the nature conservation interest of the area.
2. Maintain the distinctive field pattern that reveals the planned 19<sup>th</sup> century enclosure of the marsh.
3. Encourage management and maintenance of the network of drainage ditches and channels in a way that retains these as important characteristic features of the landscape and protects their ecological value.
4. Seek to restore thorn hedgerows that are falling into decline, to maintain the age and species diversity.
5. Maintain a range of habitats, from open water to agricultural land. Seek opportunities to re-create habitats such as species rich grassland and reed beds.
6. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows and ditches to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
7. Conserve the ‘remote’ character of the *Burton & Shotwick Drained Marsh* away from the main transport corridors of the A550 and railway.
8. Retain the open character of the marsh by restricting planting to low growing scrubby species typically found in the local landscape, taking into account the importance of the area for ground nesting birds and wintering/passage birds. Woodland planting / screening using tall or ornamental species is not appropriate in the open marsh.

## ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Conserve the remaining open, undeveloped areas of the marsh.
2. Consider using native scrubby vegetation to screen views of traffic on the A550.
3. Ensure features associated with new development do not lead to 'suburbanisation' of the landscape, for example signage, fencing and car parking at fishing ponds.
4. Consider views to the north Wales hills when planning any change.



## LCT 5: UNDULATING ENCLOSED FARMLAND



### General Description

This character type is defined by undulating topography and the associated small to medium scale enclosure into which it is divided. Key characteristics are the generally cohesive and un-fragmented historic landscape in the south of the borough, small woodlands, ponds and streams, nucleated rural villages and scattered farmsteads. Land use is mainly pasture.

Away from main roads, railways and settlement the landscape is generally quiet and rural. Views within this type very much depend upon location and the nature of the immediate topography. There is a range of monuments from Bronze Age barrows to post medieval canal locks.

The character type is found across a large part of the Cheshire West and Chester borough; to the east between Northwich and the *Sandstone Ridge* and in the south of the borough.

### Visual Character

The location of this landscape type is reflected in the prevailing views which extend to adjacent character areas, either out over the low-lying plain or up towards the often dominant *Sandstone Ridge*. Roads typically follow the rolling topography, offering extensive views from high vantage points out over the immediate field pattern and extending to the high ground in the far distance such as the Pennines in the east. Long distance views are sometimes affected by large scale industrial works in adjacent areas.

From low ground the landscape appears smaller in scale due to the increase in enclosure and the contained views where skylines are typically formed by hedgerow trees, woodland and farmsteads, with occasional electricity pylons and church spires. At many locations tree cover appears to be high, an obvious departure from the adjacent Cheshire plain. This can be attributed to the intact hedgerow system, complemented by numerous small farm woodlands or coverts upon locally prominent areas of high ground.

In certain areas arable farming predominates, especially upon better-drained ground. Where this is associated with loss of hedgerows, post and wire fences and fewer hedgerow trees, the scale of the landscape increases considerably and views become more extensive.

### ***Physical Influences***

The topography of this type varies from around 10m-135m AOD. Solid geology is a bedrock of Mercia Mudstones, overlain by till and glacio-fluvial deposits. Soils comprise slowly permeable clay stagnogleys ideally suited to grass and were a major factor in the development of the Cheshire dairy farming industry. In the south of the borough around Carden and Overton sandstone outcrops in a series of escarpments and dip slopes, creating a distinctive local landscape.

Secondary calcium carbonate deposits are common at a depth of 1-2m in the till, and prior to the 19th century was dug and spread for agricultural improvement. These marl pits led to the creation of field ponds which were colonised by a rich variety of plants and animals from other wetland habitats of greater antiquity, for example meres and mosses. Vegetation succession has reduced many ponds to small, shallow features, over shaded with trees and with little open water.

Small, irregular ancient field enclosures and larger late post medieval enclosures are bounded by hedgerows with an abundance of hedgerow trees. The area around Malpas contains a regionally significant late medieval landscape which preserves elements of the earlier medieval open fields. The historic landscape of this area is generally cohesive and un-fragmented and is considered to contain some of the best preserved late medieval field systems and ridge and furrow in Cheshire (together with LCA 9b: *Hargrave, Hoofield & Beeston Plain* and LCA 9c: *Tattenhall to Shocklach Plain*).

The majority of fields are grass leys for pasture, although increasing areas are cultivated for silage or feed crops including cereals and maize.

Woodland levels are higher than those of the neighbouring plain but still relatively low, concentrated mainly upon former estates such as Carden and along smaller stream sides like the Wych Valley in the south of the county where there are fragments of ancient woodland. Frequently they are associated with unimproved or semi-improved grassland habitats which have escaped modern farming practices such as the species-rich Carden meadows. Small farm copses and coverts are mainly broadleaved and there are mixed woodlands on sandier soils.

The undulating landform supports a complex natural drainage system and in some areas every stream or open ditch supports a line of mature trees.

### ***Cultural Influences***

Settlement density is relatively high. Some nucleated villages, such as Acton Bridge, have seen 20th century expansion reflecting their location close to larger places of work and the communications network. Elsewhere settlement comprises a mix of small picturesque villages such as Eaton, Little Budworth and Malpas, surrounded by a dispersed pattern of hamlets, farms and halls linked by a network of rural lanes, overlaid by main roads.

The character of the built environment includes timber framed buildings, some of which date back to the 17th century, and red and brown brick buildings. Large red brick dairy barns a particular feature of this type.

The area was divided amongst a number of estates and the holdings of major land owners are intermingled throughout the character type. Designed parkland landscapes and woodland associated with 19th century halls indicate the previous wealth of parts of the character type. Some former large parkland areas are now degraded or converted to recreational use such as golf courses, for example at Carden.

The small to medium scale field pattern reflects irregular medieval fields created by the assarting of moss, heath and woodland and the regular fields reflecting post medieval improvement. Parts of the type are also enclosed from former Royal Forest. Associated with the early fields is a network of footpaths, some of which may be of some antiquity.

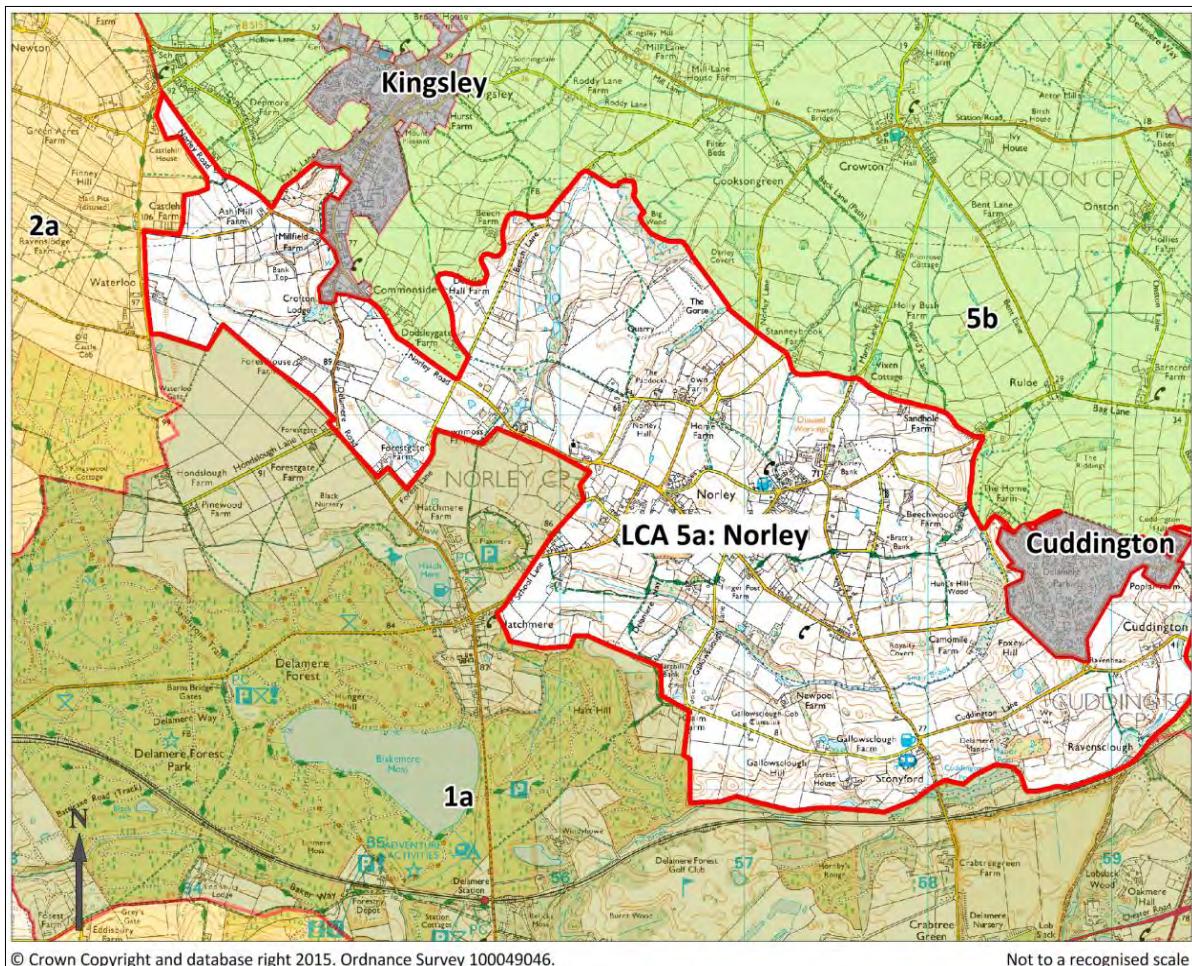
Evidence of past activity include Bronze Age (c2000 -700 BC) barrows, such as the round barrow at Gallowsclough Cob, an Iron Age (c700 BC – AD 50) promontory fort at Bradley above Beech Brook, numerous medieval moated sites such as Crowton and Peel, and a rare example of a Roman Villa at Eaton (the only one known in Cheshire).

The discovery of items such as flints, burnt stones, the tip of a Neolithic axe and Bronze Age pottery indicate that rock shelters and caves located in Carden Park were likely to have been occupied in the prehistoric period. One cave was also deepened in the 18th century to house John Harris, an eccentric who lived on the estate for 20 years.

There are **seven Landscape Character Areas** within LCT 5:

- 5a: Norley**
- 5b: Frodsham to Northwich**
- 5c: Eaton, Marton & Over**
- 5d: Whitley and Comberbach**
- 5e: East Winsford**
- 5f: Helsby to Frodsham**
- 5g: Malpas**

## LCA 5a: Norley



### Location and Boundaries

The **Norley Undulating Enclosed Farmland** represents a particularly undulating area of farmland, influenced by glacial drift deposits, located to the north of Delamere. The boundary between Delamere and **Norley Undulating Enclosed Farmland** is defined by a change in topography and the extent of glacio-fluvial sand and gravel deposits. To the north is the *Frodsham to Northwich Undulating Enclosed Farmland* which is lower lying and less steeply undulating.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 5a: Norley***

- A bedrock geology of Bollin Mudstones (part of the Mercia Mudstone Group) covered by a mantle of glacial drift deposits that gives rise to an undulating topography between 35m and 90m AOD
- Steep, wooded valleys incise the hills, containing small brooks that drain towards the River Weaver. Gorse occupies steep slopes
- Glacio-fluvial deposits mask the underlying mudstones giving rise to well drained sandy and coarse loamy soils. These soils support a mixture of dairying on short term grassland and arable crops
- Small scale fields resulting from late eighteenth and early nineteenth century enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act are bounded by hedgerows with hedgerow trees
- The sheltered valleys and steeper slopes support woodland – for example along Small Brook and the upper reaches of Crowton Brook
- Remnant historic orchards e.g. to the south-west of Kingsley (previously designated as Areas of Significant Local Environmental Value (ASLEV)
- Glacio-fluvial deposits have been quarried in the past
- Areas of former parkland at Norley Hall, Norley Bank, around Royalty Covert and at Delamere Park
- Passive recreation in the form of public footpaths, including part of the Delamere Way which provides access to the adjacent Delamere Forest. Breech Moss is a small area of Registered Common Land with open access
- A network of small sunken lanes link scattered farms and hamlets while the post-medieval settlement of Norley forms a focus for the area
- Characteristic vernacular architecture including sandstone farmsteads and a sandstone church at Norley
- Steep undulations and woodland contribute to an enclosed, intimate landscape
- Views across Delamere to the south-west and across *Frodsham to Northwich Undulating Enclosed Farmland* to the north-east

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The distinctive, highly undulating topography with narrow valleys carved by small brooks that drain the area;
- The incised valleys containing small brooks that support important woodland and wetland habitats and provide landscape diversity;
- The prominent ridge at Gallowsclough Hill and steep valleys;
- The underlying Bollin Mudstones covered by a mantle of glacial drift deposits (a mixture of boulder clay and glacio-fluvial sand and gravels) which give rise to a mixture of clay soils and deep, well drained sandy and coarse, that support a predominantly pastoral landscape;
- Disused sand and gravel pits and quarries, for example at Gallowsclough Lane, Norley Bank and The Gorse;
- The woodland in sheltered valleys and steeper slopes, e.g. along Small Brook and the upper reaches of Crowton Brook;
- The isolated pocket of peat on the southern edge of Norley that supports scrub woodland on an old mossland site (Breech Moss).

### Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- The small scale field pattern that divides the landscape - a mixture of ancient irregular enclosures along the north-east facing slopes and regular Parliamentary and planned enclosures along the ridge top at Gallowsclough Hill;
- The strong intact hedgerow network along field boundaries, with hedgerow trees;
- Areas of former parkland at Norley Hall, Norley Bank, and around Royalty Covert – now all farmland - and at Delamere Park, now an area of 20th century housing (forming an extension to Cuddington Hall Conservation Area);
- Remnant historic orchards to the south-west of Kingsley, typically small domestic orchards attached to farms. Previously designated as Areas of Significant Local Environmental Value (ASLEV)(i) to protect the further decline and loss of numbers and variety of orchards that make a significant contribution to the character of settlements, and (ii) to protect the decline and loss of traditional crafts, wildlife heavens and attractive landscapes;
- The network of public footpaths, including the Delamere Way long distance recreational route which provides access to the adjacent Delamere Forest;
- Breech Moss peat mossland is a small area of Registered Common Land with open access;
- The remnants of the Motte and Bailey at Harthill Bank and the tumulus at Gallowsclough Hill are an indication that the area had been settled long before the Medieval period;
- The heavy WWII anti-aircraft battery close to Finger Post Farm which is recognised as a Scheduled Monument.

### Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- A low density of settlement, with a network of small lanes that link scattered farms and hamlets while the post-medieval settlement of Norley forms a focus for the area. There are also a number of scattered residential properties along the roads surrounding Norley; Delamere Park is a new settlement on former estate grounds abutting the LCA;
- Building materials include red brick and sandstone with slate roofs;
- Sandstone buildings are a particular feature of the area, reflecting its location close to the *Sandstone Ridge*.

### Perceptual / Visual

- The steeply undulating topography and presence of woodland and incised valleys gives a sense of enclosure;
- Exposed ridges, e.g. at Gallowsclough Hill, that are visually prominent and sensitive;
- Red sandstone and brick contrast with the green pasture, providing warm colours in the landscape;
- The area is unified by its undulating landform that is more pronounced than other character areas within this landscape type;
- The farmed landscape gives an impression of being manicured and 'tamed';
- Generally a quiet, rural landscape but with features that detract from the overall sense of tranquillity whilst providing sensitive visual receptors, including the relatively dense network of rural lanes, an area of 'suburban' style development at Delamere Park, a relatively high density of scattered settlement, and a caravan park;
- A water tower at Ravenhead forms a feature on the skyline;
- The *Norley Undulating Enclosed Farmland* forms a backdrop to views from the *Frodsham to Northwich Undulating Enclosed Farmland* to the north-east. The skyline is therefore prominent;
- Elevated and distant views from this area across *Delamere* to the south-west and across *Frodsham to Northwich Undulating Enclosed Farmland* to the north and east;
- The presence of undulating topography, woodland and hedgerow trees means there is some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

### **Landscape Condition**

The *Norley Undulating Enclosed Farmland* is in active agricultural use and is managed for these land uses. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network and some over-mature hedgerow trees. Some woodlands are not being actively managed. Breech Moss has been succeeded to scrub/woodland.

### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 5a: *Norley*:**

- Green Belt;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

## **Forces for Landscape Change**

### **Past change**

- Limited boundary management, with evidence of decline in hedgerow boundaries and decline/loss of hedgerow trees due to flail mowing;
- Under management and deterioration of some farm woodlands;
- Increase in fencing to replace hedgerow boundaries – including close board fencing associated with new garden boundaries – leading to loss of historic field pattern;
- Village expansion by way of ribbon development;
- The ‘suburbanisation’ of parts of the landscape by new built features such as kerbs, lighting, driveways and gateposts;
- A shift from grassland to crops, fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Growth of potatoes and maize in traditionally pastoral areas resulting in soil erosion as a result of exposure of bare soil;
- Improved drainage and in-filling leading to loss of field ponds, bogs and mosses over the years. Breech moss has been succeeded to scrub/woodland;
- Steady intensification of grassland management has resulted in the loss of herb rich hay pastures;
- Loss of orchards;
- Loss of historic parkland to agricultural or recreational uses, or development;
- Under management of Breech Moss and invasion by scrub;
- Some of the broadleaved woodland resource has been replaced with non-native coniferous species in the past.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 5a: *Norley***

- Farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;
- On-going decline in traditional woodland management practices leading to general deterioration and increase in the proportion of over-mature trees;
- Location within The Mersey Forest indicates that there is likely to be additional tree planting in the area, principally on the steeper valley slopes, which would be a positive change;
- Erosion of built environment character through incremental development: pressure for small scale incremental residential development, principally around Norley and Kinngsley but also in the wider countryside;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Located within an area of search for sand and gravel extraction.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 5a: Norley***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the rural pastoral character of the landscape and **enhance** the hedgerow and woodland network.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerow.
3. Consider opportunities to replace hedgerows where they have been lost.
4. Conserve the small scale pattern of fields, particularly earlier field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
5. Maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil (for example as a result of increased crop growing).
6. Seek opportunities to re-create herb rich hay pastures.
7. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
8. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
9. Conserve the remnant fragments of unimproved or semi-improved acid grassland on the sandy soils that are of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.
10. Conserve and manage remaining field ponds, bogs and mosses that are of importance for biodiversity as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
11. Seek to conserve and restore historic designed landscapes and their settings, encouraging the management/restoration of permanent pasture, parkland trees, clumps and avenues.

12. Conserve and manage earthworks, such as the remnants of the Motte and Bailey at Harthill Bank and the tumulus at Gallowsclough Hill, promoting sensitive agricultural practices in their vicinity (i.e. grazing not ploughing).
13. Support continued management of Breech Moss by Norley Wildlife Group / Cheshire Wildlife Trust.
14. Seek to replace coniferous woodlands with broadleaved woodlands.
15. Support plans to extend woodland cover, including planting on the steeper valley slopes where existing habitats are of low ecological value. Respect the small scale of the landscape when designing new woodland.
16. Seek opportunities to restore and create orchards at the farm scale – in the past nearly all farms would have had an orchard.
17. Manage existing woodlands to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
18. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that ‘suburbanise’ the landscape such as kerbs and large scale signage.
19. Conserve views across *Delamere* to the south-west and across *Frodsham to Northwich Undulating Enclosed Farmland* to the north and east. Consider key views when planning locations for new woodland associated with The Mersey Forest.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of villages/hamlets and farmsteads, retaining Norley as the main focus for development.
2. Monitor the cumulative effect of piecemeal change in this area – ensure new built single dwellings and their gardens, drives, gates etc. do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area through provision of appropriate guidance.
3. Conserve the local vernacular built form - red brick/sandstone buildings with slate roofs. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting.
4. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not ‘suburbanise’ the landscape.

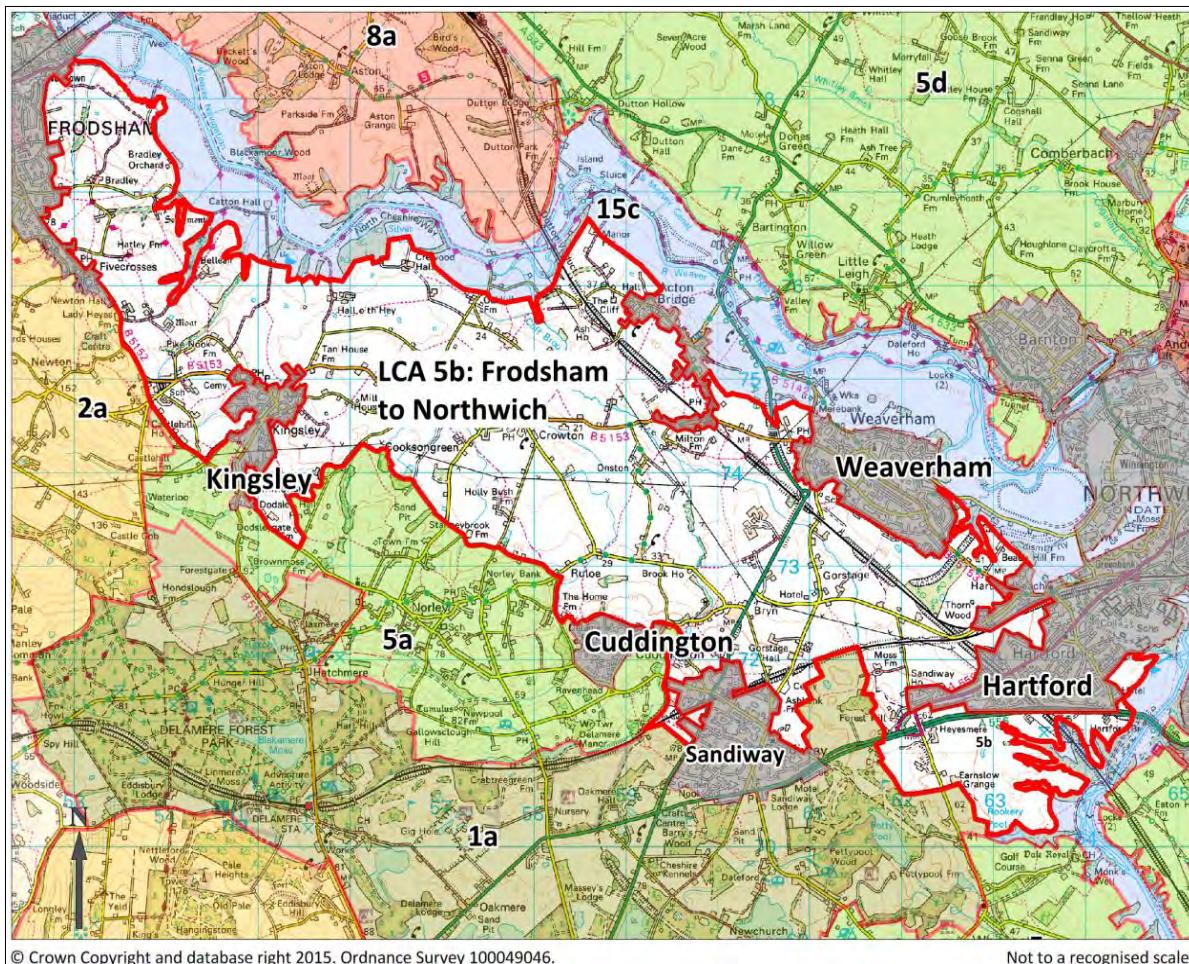
5. Soften built edges by introducing small scale planting schemes using native broadleaved species. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows rather than close-board fencing.
6. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
7. Conserve rural views from Delamere Way long distance footpath.
8. Maintain the rural setting to villages and sandstone farmsteads which are features of the landscape.
9. Consider views to the skyline ridges e.g. Gallowsclough Hill, and the function of these skyline ridges as a backdrop to the *Frodsham to Northwich Undulating Enclosed Farmland*, in relation to any change.
10. Restrict incremental linear development, which may see distinct rows of housing being connected causing suburbanisation.



LCT 5: Undulating  
Enclosed Farmland

LCA 5a: *Norley*

## LCA 5b: Frodsham to Northwich



### Location and Boundaries

The **Frodsham to Northwich Undulating Enclosed Farmland** represents an area of large scale, gently undulating farmland located to the south of the Weaver Valley between Frodsham and Northwich. To the south-west is the more steeply undulating *Norley Undulating Enclosed Farmland* character area. The boundary between these two character areas is defined by a marked change in topography as the ground begins to rise towards the *Sandstone Ridge*.

### **Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 5b: *Frodsham to Northwich***

- A bedrock geology of Bollin Mudstones (part of the Mercia Mudstone Group) covered by a mantle of glacial drift deposits that gives rise to a gently undulating topography between 25m and 50m AOD (rising to 90m where it joins the *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge*)
- Steep, wooded cloughs and valleys incise the hills, containing small brooks that drain towards the River Weaver, for example along Cliff Brook, and are of local wildlife importance
- Grassland meadows that are of local wildlife importance
- Boulder clay deposits mask the underlying mudstones giving rise to a predominance of poorly draining clay soils that support dairying and some arable crops
- Small scale fields resulting from late eighteenth and early nineteenth century enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act are bounded by hedgerows with hedgerow trees and drainage ditches. Small scale Medieval townfields surround Kingsley
- Small farm woodlands and coverts are important features of a landscape with generally relatively low woodland cover
- Historic orchards throughout the area (previously designated as Areas of Significant Local Environmental Value (ASLEV))
- Field ponds are a feature of the lower lying areas, indicating the extraction of marl (calcareous deposits) from the boulder clay for past agricultural improvement
- Designed landscapes at Pike Nook Farm, Hefferston Grange, Weaver Holt, and Hollies Farm are associated with large country houses or farmsteads
- Passive recreation in the form of public footpaths, including parts of the Delamere Way, Eddisbury Way and North Cheshire Way
- Community woodland sites at Thorn Wood and Hazel Pear Wood are managed by the Woodland Trust and provide open access
- A network of small sunken lanes link scattered farms, hamlets and halls. Kingsley, Acton Bridge and Weaverham form nucleated settlements on the edge of the area
- Building materials are typically red brick with large red brick dairy barns a particular feature. Peel Hall is a medieval moated farmstead and a Scheduled Monument
- Promontory hillfort at Bradley, a Scheduled Monument
- Mainline railway lines, the disused ICI mineral railway, electricity pylons, the A49 and A556 pass through the area, contributing to the sense of movement and noise locally
- The *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge* and the *Norley Undulating Enclosed Farmland* form a backdrop to views, and Weaverham Church tower is a landmark on the skyline, but generally there is no strong skyline to this relatively low lying landscape
- There are panoramic views from the B5152 across the Weaver Valley

### **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The narrow wooded valleys carved by small brooks that drain towards the River Weaver e.g. along Cliff Brook, and support grassland meadows of local wildlife importance e.g. at Hefferston Grange Farm;
- The wooded cloughs to the east of Brook Farm that form part of the Beechmill Wood & Pasture SSSI – these fall partly within the *Lower Weaver Valley* and partly in the *Frodsham to Northwich Undulating Enclosed Farmland* character area;
- Other important semi-natural broadleaved clough woodlands are found at Hob Hey Wood and Belleair Wood East, and are also of local wildlife importance;

- The underlying Bollin Mudstones covered by a mantle of glacial drift deposits (boulder clay) which give rise to a predominance of poorly draining clay soils that support dairying and some arable crops;
- Fields bounded by thorn hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees a feature of the landscape;
- The large number of field ponds from past marl digging;
- The small farm woodlands, coverts and remnant historic orchards are important landscape features;
- Copses, clumps, avenues and mature trees associated with designed landscapes are also a feature, for example at Pike Nook Farm, Hefferston Grange, Weaverham Wood Farm, Weaver Holt, and Hollies Farm.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The small scale field pattern that divides the landscape - a mixture of ancient irregular enclosures and later planned and informal enclosures, including 20th century field reorganisation of units into larger fields. Of particular note are the small scale Medieval townfields that form a setting to Kingsley;
- The ancient irregular enclosures provide a sense of time depth in the landscape;
- The strong intact hedgerow network along field boundaries, with an abundance of hedgerow trees;
- Areas of parkland/formal designed planting associated with large houses and farmsteads, dating from the wealthy 19th century, for example Pike Nook Farm, Hefferston Grange, Weaverham Wood Farm, Weaver Holt, and Hollies Farm;
- Historic orchards scattered throughout the area, for example at Peel Hall, Hollow Lane, Mill Lane, and on the edge of Kingsley. Previously designated as Areas of Significant Local Environmental Value (ASLEV)(i) to protect the further decline and loss of numbers and variety of orchards that make a significant contribution to the character of settlements, and (ii) to protect the decline and loss of traditional crafts, wildlife heavens and attractive landscapes;
- The network of public footpaths, including parts of the Delamere Way, Eddisbury Way and North Cheshire Way long distance recreational routes;
- Community woodland sites at Thorn Wood and Hazel Pear Wood are managed by the Woodland Trust and provide open access with a network of informal paths and rides;
- The promontory fort at Bradley, a Scheduled Monument, indicates the strategic importance of the River Weaver;
- Peel Hall, a medieval moated farmstead and a Scheduled Monument.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- A low density of settlement, with a network of narrow lanes (often unmarked) that link scattered farms and hamlets such as Onston (a Conservation Area) and scattered properties including thatched cottages;
- Kingsley, Weaverham and Hartford (also Conservation Areas) and Acton Bridge form nucleated settlements on the edge of the *Frodsham to Northwich Undulating Enclosed Farmland* character area that have seen considerable 20<sup>th</sup> century growth, but retain historic cores;
- Building materials are typically red brick but with some sandstone and white-wash/rendered finishes, with large red brick dairy barns a particular feature – some of the farmsteads and barns are listed.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The large scale, undulating landscape overlaid by a small scale field pattern allows varying views, from enclosed low lying views to open long distance views from higher ground which is visually more sensitive;

- The simplicity of the mostly pastoral land use and the pattern of elements such as hedgerows and trees provides landscape unity, texture and seasonal colour;
- Red sandstone and brick contrast with the green pasture, providing warm colours in the landscape;
- The farmed landscape gives an impression of being manicured and ‘tamed’;
- Generally a quiet, rural landscape but with features that detract from the overall sense of tranquillity whilst providing sensitive visual receptors, including the main roads and railway, the relatively dense network of rural lanes, small scale industry (including sewage works) and the presence of sizeable settlements including ‘suburban’ development and industry on the edge of the character area;
- The *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge* and the *Norley Undulating Enclosed Farmland* form a backdrop to views, but generally there is no strong skyline to this relatively low lying landscape other than hedgerow trees and electricity pylons;
- Weaverham Church tower is a landmark on the skyline;
- The presence of undulating topography, woodland and hedgerow trees means there is some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape;
- The character area is visible from the *Whitley & Comberbach Undulating Enclosed Farmland* to the northeast.

#### **Landscape Condition**

The *Frodsham to Northwich Undulating Enclosed Farmland* is in active agricultural use and is managed for these land uses. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network and some over-mature hedgerow trees. Some woodlands are not being actively managed.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 5b: *Frodsham to Northwich*:**

- Green Belt;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England’s National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

## **Forces for Landscape Change**

### **Past change**

- Limited boundary management, with evidence of decline in hedgerow boundaries and decline/loss of hedgerow trees due to flail mowing;
- Increase in fencing to replace hedgerow boundaries leading to loss of historic field pattern;
- A shift from grassland to crops, fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Growth of potatoes and maize in traditionally pastoral areas, resulting in soil erosion as a result of exposure of bare soil;
- Improved drainage and in-filling leading to loss of field ponds, bogs and mosses;
- Steady intensification of grassland management has resulted in the loss of herb rich hay pastures;
- Loss of orchards.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 5b: *Frodsham to Northwich***

- Farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;
- Location within The Mersey Forest indicates that there is likely to be additional tree planting in the area, principally restoring and creating Cheshire orchards, copses and small woodlands within the existing field pattern which would be a positive change;
- Pressure for settlement expansion, and small scale residential development , principally around the main settlements abutting the character area but also in the wider countryside;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Pressure for built development associated with the main roads that pass through the landscape (A49 and A556);
- Erosion of recreational sites by car parking;
- Located within an area of search for sand and gravel extraction.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 5b: Frodsham to Northwich***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the pastoral character of the landscape and to **enhance** the hedgerow and woodland network.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerow.
3. Consider opportunities to replace hedgerows where they have been lost.
4. Conserve the small scale pattern of fields, particularly earlier field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
5. Support retention of pasture and grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil.
6. Seek opportunities to re-create herb rich hay pastures.
7. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
8. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
9. Conserve the remnant fragments of unimproved or semi-improved grassland that are of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.
10. Conserve and manage remaining field ponds that are of importance for biodiversity as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
11. Seek to conserve and restore historic designed landscapes and their settings, encouraging the management/restoration of permanent pasture, parkland trees, clumps and avenues.
12. Conserve and manage earthworks, such as the moated sites, promoting sensitive agricultural practices in their vicinity (i.e. grazing not ploughing).

13. Support plans to enhance woodland cover in areas of low ecological value, including restoring and creating orchards, copses and small woodlands within the existing field pattern. Respect the small scale of the landscape when designing new woodland.
14. Manage existing woodlands to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
15. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as kerbs and large scale signage.
16. Conserve panoramic views from the B5152 across the Weaver Valley and views to the church tower at Weaverham, particularly from the Trent and Mersey Canal. Consider these key views when planning locations for new woodland, for example associated with The Mersey Forest.
17. Provide informal car parking areas adjacent to recreational sites to avoid erosion of the landscape in these areas.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of villages/hamlets and farmsteads.
2. Monitor the cumulative effect of piecemeal change in this area – ensure new built single dwellings and their gardens, drives, gates etc. do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area through provision of appropriate guidance.
3. Conserve the local vernacular built form - red brick/sandstone or white washed farmsteads and buildings. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting.
4. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows.
5. Retain the red brick dairy barns and their rural settings as features of the landscape.
6. Local distinctiveness: maintain the rural setting to villages and sandstone farmsteads which are features of the landscape.
7. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.

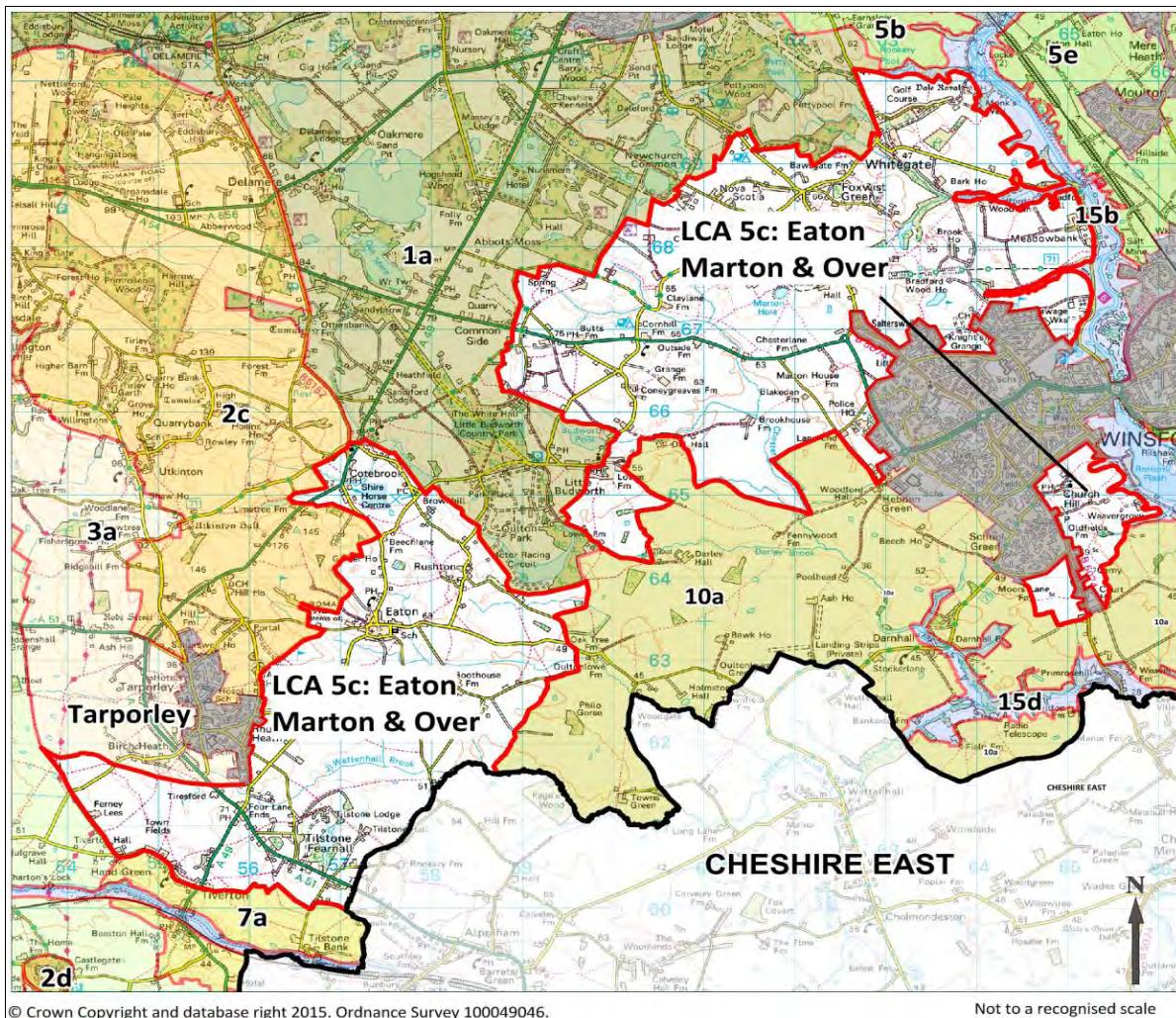
8. Soften built edges by introducing small scale planting schemes using native broadleaved species.
9. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
10. Consider views from Delamere Way, Eddisbury Way and North Cheshire Way long distance footpaths in any new development proposals.
11. Ensure signage is appropriate to its setting.
12. Conserve the open setting of Weaverham Church on the skyline.
13. Refer to local Village Design Statement (VDS) and Neighbourhood Plans when considering change.



LCT 5: Undulating  
Enclosed Farmland

LCA 5b: *Frodsham to Northwich*

## LCA 5c: Eaton, Marton & Over



### Location and Boundaries

The **Eaton, Marton & Over Undulating Enclosed Farmland** is a transitional area of gently undulating farmland lying between the elevated areas of *Delamere* and the *Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge* to the west, and the flat lowland of the Cheshire plain to the south and west. It extends from *Tiverton* and *Tarporley* in the west to wrap around the north western and southern edges of *Winsford* to the east, where it abuts the *Weaver Valley*.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 5c: Eaton, Marton & Over***

- A bedrock geology of Bollin Mudstones (part of the Mercia Mudstone Group) covered by a mantle of glacial drift deposits that gives rise to a gently undulating topography between 50m and 70m AOD
- Steep wooded cloughs incise the hills, containing small brooks that drain eastwards towards the River Weaver, for example Bogart Brook, Pettypool Brook, Cat's Clough (ancient woodland) and Firwood Brook, and are of local wildlife importance
- Glacio-fluvial outwash deposits of sands and gravels support some fragments of acid grassland/heathland
- Unimproved meadows and species rich grassland along brooks and on lower lying areas e.g. Beauty Bank and Brookhouse Farm Meadows
- Boulder clay deposits mask the underlying mudstones giving rise to a predominance of poorly draining clay soils that support dairying and some arable crops
- Small scale fields resulting from late eighteenth and early nineteenth century enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act are bounded by hedgerows with hedgerow trees and drainage ditches. Small scale medieval townfields surround Eaton, Little Budworth, Tiverton, Marton House Farm and Church Hill
- Small farm woodlands, coverts and willow withy beds are important features of a landscape with generally relatively low woodland cover
- Field ponds are a feature of the lower lying areas, indicating the extraction of marl (calcareous deposits) from the boulder clay for past agricultural improvement
- Larger pools are also a feature of the area, e.g. Marton Hole, Bradford Wood Pool, Sixes Pool
- Designed landscape at Tilstone Hall with woodland and ornamental landscaped gardens associated with the hall, Tilstone Lodge and Tilstone Hall Farm
- Recreational opportunities provided by public rights of way including the Whitegate Way (disused mineral railway mainly for transporting salt), picnic sites, fishing lakes and golf courses
- A network of small rural lanes link scattered farms, cottages, hamlets and halls. Eaton, Little Budworth and Whitegate form nucleated settlements; Tiverton is a linear village; with Winsford / Over a large conurbation on the eastern edge of the area
- Eaton, Little Budworth and Tiverton (and Tarporley abutting the LCA) are Conservation Areas, with a number of listed buildings, with others across the area e.g. Tilstone Hall Folly
- Building materials are typically red brick and sandstone, with large red brick dairy barns and thatched cottages particular features
- The 'Cheshire railings' – the black and white painted estate railings
- The site of Vale Royal Abbey, once the largest Cistercian abbey church in Britain, is a Scheduled Monument located in Vale Royal Park; the house is a Grade II\* listed building
- Moated sites were once a feature – surviving medieval sites on the outskirts of Eaton and Marton Hall are Scheduled Monuments
- Roman Villa site at Eaton, the only such site in Cheshire
- The A49, A51 and A54 pass through the area, contributing to the sense of movement and noise locally (as does Oulton park race track which lies just outside the area)
- The skyline is punctuated by hedgerow trees, copses and farm buildings. The church spire at Over forms a prominent landmark feature
- Long distance views from high vantage ground including important views to Beeston Castle and Peckforton Castle on the wooded *Sandstone Ridge* to the south and Vale Royal Park on the edge of the Weaver Valley.

## **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

### **Natural / Physical**

- The undulating topography, being more elevated in the north west adjoining the *Sandstone Ridge* and generally flattening out to the south where it merges with the plain;
- The narrow valleys and wooded cloughs carved by small brooks that drain eastwards towards the River Weaver e.g., Shay's Lane Brook, Cat's Clough (ancient woodland), Pettypool Brook and Shaw's Wood that include areas of species rich unimproved grassland and important wetland habitats— these fall partly within the *Mid Weaver Valley/Lower Weaver Valley* and partly in the *Eaton, Marton and Over Undulating Enclosed Farmland* character areas;
- Meadows at Coach Road Farm, species rich grassland at Beauty Bank, wet woodland and ponds at Outside Farm, and wetland habitats at Sixes Pool (all recognised as local wildlife sites); also, depressions in the undulating landscape support wetland habitats such as reed swamp and willow scrub habitats at Bradford Wood Pond;
- The underlying Bollin Mudstones (Northwich Halite Formation) covered by a mantle of glacial drift deposits (mostly boulder clay) which give rise to a predominance of poorly draining clay soils that support dairying and some arable crops;
- The isolated pockets of glacio-fluvial sand and gravels particularly adjacent to Delamere Forest which support some small areas of acid grassland or heathland (e.g. along Whitegate Way and off Bradford Way on the edge of the Weaver Valley). Some of the deposits have been quarried in the past – for example Marton Hole, Bradford Wood Pool and Sixes Pool are the result of land subsidence/quarrying;
- Fields bounded by thorn hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees a feature of the landscape;
- The large number of field ponds from past marl digging contribute to the wetland habitats;
- The small farm woodlands, coverts and withy beds are important landscape features;
- Copses, clumps, avenues and mature trees associated with the designed landscapes at Tilstone Hall and Vale Royal Park are also a feature.

### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The small scale field pattern that divides the landscape - a mixture of ancient irregular enclosures and larger, late post medieval enclosures. Of particular note are the small scale Medieval townfields that Eaton, Little Budworth, Tiverton, Marton House Farm and Church Hill;
- The ancient irregular enclosures provide a sense of time depth in the landscape;
- The strong intact hedgerow network along field boundaries, with an abundance of hedgerow trees;
- Areas of parkland associated with large houses and farmsteads, for example Tilstone Hall / Tilstone Hall Farm;
- The significant parkland site of Vale Royal Abbey (once the largest Cistercian abbey church in Britain, founded by Edward I and endowed in 1277) a Scheduled Monument, replaced by a mansion house now apartments and the club house for Vale Royal Golf Club;
- The network of public footpaths, including the Whitegate Way disused mineral railway which once transported salt;
- Other recreational opportunities include picnic facilities at the former Whitegate Station and north of Brownhill (close to Oulton Park), fishing at Sixes Pool and two golf courses;
- The two surviving moated sites, both Scheduled Monuments - an area of earthworks on the south-eastern outskirts of Eaton and a moated farmstead at Marton Hall;
- Roman Villa site at Eaton, the only such site in Cheshire;
- A number of roadside cross bases are also Scheduled Monuments;
- Eaton, Little Budworth and Tiverton (and Tarporley abutting the LCA) are Conservation Areas, with a number of listed buildings.

### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- A low density of settlement, with a network of narrow lanes that link scattered farms, cottages and hamlets while Eaton, Little Budworth and Whitegate form nucleated settlements; Tiverton is a linear village;
- Winsford / Over is a large conurbation on the eastern edge of the area that has seen considerable 20th century growth, expanding into the landscape;
- Other 20th century linear residential development along roads e.g. north of Whitegate, Salterswell, Marton Green, and Meadowbank;
- Building materials are typically red brick, sandstone and white-wash finishes, with large red brick dairy barns and thatched cottages particular features – some of the farmsteads and barns are listed;
- The red brick walls surrounding the Rushton Estate also have a visual influence on the landscape;
- The ‘Cheshire railings’ – the black and white painted estate railings, some of which are in a declining condition.

### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The large scale, undulating landscape overlaid by a small scale field pattern allows varying views, from enclosed low lying views to open long distance views from higher ground which is visually more sensitive e.g. views from Vale Royal Park north to the church spire at Northwich and south to the church spire at Over; important views from high ground above Tiverton to Beeston Castle and Peckforton Castle on the wooded *Sandstone Ridge* to the south;
- The simplicity of the mostly pastoral land use and the pattern of elements such as hedgerows and trees provides landscape unity, texture and seasonal colour;
- Red sandstone and brick contrast with the green pasture, providing warm colours in the landscape;
- The farmed landscape gives an impression of being manicured and ‘tamed’;
- The parkland at Vale Royal Abbey has a significant landscape and visual impact;
- Generally a quiet, rural landscape but with features that detract from the overall sense of tranquillity whilst providing sensitive visual receptors, including the main roads, the relatively dense network of rural lanes, the scattered settlement, the nearby presence of Oulton Park racing circuit, and the sizeable settlement of Winsford/Over including ‘suburban’ development, a sewage works and industry on the edge of the character area;
- No strong skyline to this relatively low lying landscape other than hedgerow trees, copses and farm buildings;
- The spire of John the Evangelist’s Church at Over is a prominent landmark;
- The presence of undulating topography, woodland and hedgerow trees means there is some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape;
- The western part of the area is visible from the *Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge* above Eaton. There are also some views into the area from *Delamere*, although these tend to be glimpsed.

### **Landscape Condition**

The *Eaton, Marton & Over Undulating Enclosed Farmland* is in active agricultural use and is managed for these land uses. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network and some over-mature hedgerow trees. Some woodlands are not being actively managed. There is relatively little unimproved species rich grassland remaining. There are areas of 20th century linear residential development along roads e.g. north of Whitegate, Salterswell, and Marton Green which give the landscape a ‘suburban’ appearance in places.

**CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 5c: *Eaton, Marton & Over*:**

- Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management;
- Candidate Key Settlement Gap between Tarporley and Tilstone Fearnall / Four Lanes End.

### ***Forces for Landscape Change***

#### **Past change**

- Limited boundary management, with evidence of decline in hedgerow boundaries (trees left 'in-field') and decline/loss of hedgerow trees due to flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries;
- Increase in fencing to replace hedgerow boundaries leading to loss of historic field pattern;
- A shift from grassland to crops, fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Growth of potatoes and maize in traditionally pastoral areas, resulting in soil erosion as a result of exposure of bare soil;
- Improved drainage and in-filling leading to loss of field ponds but this appears to have halted;
- Steady intensification of grassland management has resulted in pasture 'improvement' and the gradual loss of unimproved species rich grassland, but this appears to have halted;
- Decline in interest in willow products has resulted in the lack of coppicing of withy beds and their loss over the 20th century;
- Industrial / employment development at Woodford Park on the western edge of Winsford, which is well integrated into the landscape.

#### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 5c: *Eaton, Marton & Over***

- Farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;
- Location within The Mersey Forest indicates that there is likely to be additional tree planting in the area, principally the establishment of a well-wooded landscape around the periphery of Winsford and in particular around industrial estates, which would be a positive change;
- Regeneration of derelict and underused land on the edge of Winsford;
- Pressure for residential and industrial / employment development, principally on the outskirts of Winsford/Over abutting the character area but also in the wider countryside, that could affect the close relationship between town and country;
- There could be lack of management of farmland on the edge of urban areas in the hope that it becomes favoured for development;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Decline in condition and extent of 'Cheshire railings' – the black and white painted estate railings;
- Pressure for built development associated with the main roads that pass through the landscape (A49, A51 and A54);
- Erosion of recreational sites by car parking;
- The area around Marton Green is an area of search for sand and gravel extraction.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 5c: Eaton, Marton & Over***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the rural, pastoral character of the landscape and to **enhance** the grassland, hedgerow and woodland network.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerow.
3. Consider opportunities to replace hedgerows where they have been lost.
4. Conserve the small scale pattern of fields, particularly earlier field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
5. Support retention of pasture and grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil.
6. Seek opportunities to re-create / extend species rich grassland.
7. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
8. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
9. Conserve the remnant fragments of unimproved and semi-improved grassland that are of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend this habitat.
10. Conserve and manage remaining field ponds, pools and ditches that are of importance for biodiversity as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
11. Seek opportunities to extent/re-create areas of reed swamp and willow scrub and other wetland habitats.
12. Seek to conserve and restore historic designed landscapes and their settings, encouraging the management/restoration of permanent pasture, parkland trees, clumps and avenues.

13. Conserve and manage earthworks, such as the moated sites, promoting sensitive agricultural practices in their vicinity (i.e. grazing not ploughing).
14. Support plans to enhance woodland cover in areas of low ecological value, particularly extending broadleaved woodlands along cloughs, and willow scrub in wet areas. Respect the small scale of the landscape when designing new woodland.
15. Support plans to establish a well-wooded landscape around the periphery of Winsford, avoiding areas of ecological value. Consider views when designing new woodland - conserve panoramic views from Vale Royal Park to views to the landmark of the church spire at Over.
16. Manage existing woodlands to ensure a diverse native canopy structure and rich ground flora.
17. Consider bringing withy beds back into coppice management, exploring opportunities for use of the willow as wood-fuel and/or creating markets for traditional craft skills, for example withies for basket making.
18. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as kerbs and large scale signage.
19. Conserve panoramic views when planning locations for new woodland, for example associated with The Mersey Forest - including views from Vale Royal Park to the landmark of the church spire at Over and to the church spire at Northwich, and important views from high ground above Tiverton to Beeston Castle and Peckforton Castle on the wooded *Sandstone Ridge* to the south.
20. Screen quarrying activity using broadleaved species. Consider the long term restoration of sand and gravel quarries for the benefit of wildlife, creating new wetland habitats and recreational access where possible.
21. Protect above ground archaeological features, such as the moated sites, promoting sensitive agricultural practices in their vicinity (i.e. grazing not ploughing).

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of villages/hamlets and farmsteads.
2. Monitor the cumulative effect of piecemeal change in this area – ensure new built single dwellings and their gardens, drives, gates etc. do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area through provision of appropriate guidance. Maintain a distinction between urban and rural areas.

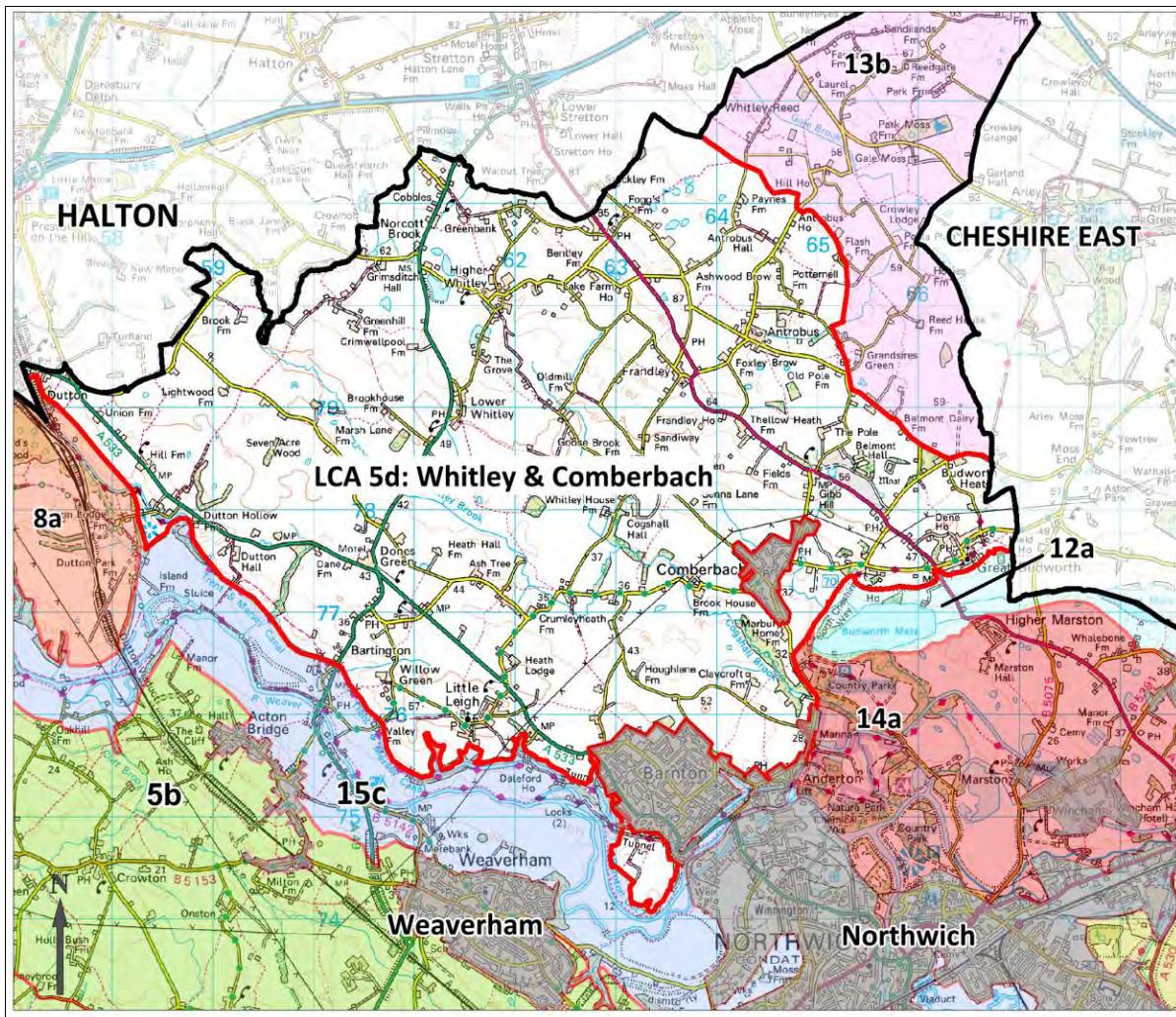
3. Conserve the local vernacular built form - red brick/sandstone or white washed farmsteads and buildings, and thatched cottages. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting.
4. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows.
5. Retain the red brick dairy barns, including their round windows which are a characteristic feature, and their rural settings as features of the landscape.
6. Conserve the black and white estate railings known as 'Cheshire Railings'.
7. Maintain the rural setting to villages and sandstone farmsteads which are features of the landscape.
8. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
9. Soften built edges and views of infrastructure by introducing small scale planting schemes using native broadleaved species.
10. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
11. Conserve rural views from the Whitegate Way and from the main picnic site areas when considering the location for new built development.
12. Ensure signage is appropriate to its setting.
13. Refer to local Village Design Statement (VDS) when considering change.
14. Maintain the close relationship between Winsford and its rural landscape, ensuring land on the edge of the urban area remains well managed.
15. Conserve the settings of Tarporley, Eaton, Little Budworth, Whitegate and St Chad's that are designated as Conservation Areas – refer to the Conservation Area Appraisals when considering change in these areas.
16. Conserve the open undeveloped area between Tarporley and Tilstone Fearnall / Four Lanes End that has been identified as a Candidate Key Settlement Gap where development would lead to coalescence and the loss of identity of the two communities.



LCT 5: Undulating  
Enclosed Farmland

LCA 5c: *Eaton, Marton and Over*

## LCA 5d: Whitley and Comberbach



### Location and Boundaries

The **Whitley & Comberbach Undulating Enclosed Farmland** represents an area of large scale gently undulating farmland located to the north of Northwich/Barnton/Anderton and the Weaver Valley. To the west, separated by the Trent & Mersey Canal, lies the *Aston Heathy Farmland and Woodland*, to the north east the landscape gradually forms a transition to the peaty and alluvial lowlands of the *Arley West Lowland Farmland and Mosses* and to the south-east the landscape meets *Budworth Mere LCA*.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics* of LCA 5d: *Whitley and Comberbach***

- A bedrock geology of Bollin Mudstones (part of the Mercia Mudstone Group) covered by a mantle of glacial drift deposits that gives rise to a gently undulating topography generally between 30m and 60m AOD, but rising to almost 90m north of Higher Whitley
- Steep wooded cloughs incise the hills, containing small brooks that drain westwards towards the River Weaver, for example Whitley Brook and Cogshall Brook. Semi-improved species rich grassland is found alongside some brooks
- The pastoral character of the landscape - boulder clay deposits mask the underlying mudstones giving rise to a predominance of poorly draining clay soils that support dairying and some arable crops
- Late eighteenth and early nineteenth century enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act which produces a strong field pattern of hedgerows with hedgerow trees (mainly oak)
- Small farm woodlands, coverts and designed copses/clumps in parkland are important features of a landscape with generally relatively low woodland cover
- Field ponds are a feature of the lower lying areas, indicating the extraction of marl (calcareous deposits) from the boulder clay for past agricultural improvement
- Water bodies to the west of Higher Whitley result from sand/gravel extraction in an area of glacio-fluvial deposits
- Recreational opportunities provided by public rights of way including part of the Delamere Way long distance route, picnic sites, fishing lakes and golf courses
- A network of small rural lanes link scattered farms, cottages, hamlets and villages, with Comberbach the main settlement in the character area
- Great Budworth, Higher Whitley and Lower Whitley are Conservation Areas, with a number of listed buildings, with others across the area
- Building materials are typically red brick and sandstone, with large red brick dairy barns and thatched cottages particular features
- The 'Cheshire railings' – the black and white painted estate railings
- Moated sites were once a feature – a former moated farmstead beside Belmont Hall is a Scheduled Monument
- Generally a quiet, rural landscape although the A49, A533 and A559 pass through the area, contributing to the sense of movement and noise locally
- A comparatively low lying landscape without a strong skyline – formed by hedgerow trees, woodland and electricity pylons (south). The church at Great Budworth forms a prominent landmark feature
- Long distance views from the southern edge of the area across the Weaver Valley and from the A559 which runs along the ridge top to the east
- Views of large scale industrial works at Northwich (south) and Preston Brook (north west) that lie outside the character area's boundary

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The undulating topography, being more elevated in the north and east and generally falling to the south and west down to the River Weaver;

- The steep narrow valleys and wooded cloughs carved by small brooks that drain either to the south or west towards the River Weaver, e.g. ancient woodland at Dutton Dingles, Dutton Dean (along Dean Brook), and Kennel Wood and Hopyards Wood (both along Cogshall Brook);
- The underlying Bollin Mudstones (Northwich Halite Formation) covered by a mantle of glacial till deposits (mostly boulder clay with pockets of glacio-fluvial sand and gravel) which give rise to a predominance of poorly draining clay soils that support dairying and some arable crops;
- The isolated pockets of glacio-fluvial sand and gravel deposits to the west of Higher Whitley which have been quarried to leave water bodies in the landscape;
- Fields bounded by thorn hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees a feature of the landscape;
- The large number of field ponds from past marl digging contribute to the wetland habitats;
- The small farm woodlands, coverts and woodlands associated with designed landscapes are important landscape features;
- Copses, clumps, avenues and mature trees associated with the designed landscapes at Belmont Hall and Cogshall Hall (both on the local register of Historic Parks and Gardens) are also features in the landscape.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The variety of field sizes, with survival of a large number of small, irregular enclosures (ancient fields contributing a sense of time depth to the landscape) interspersed by larger, straight-sided fields relating to later enclosures, including 20th century field reorganisation of units into larger fields;
- Of particular note are the small scale Medieval townfields associated with Comberbach;
- The strong intact hedgerow network along field boundaries, with an abundance of hedgerow trees;
- Areas of parkland associated with large houses and farmsteads at Belmont Hall and Cogshall Hall;
- The network of public footpaths, including part of the Delamere Way long distance route;
- The Bowl Barrow at Whitley is an indication that the area had been settled long before the Medieval period;
- A surviving moated site, a Scheduled Monument, at Belmont Hall;
- Great Budworth, Higher Whitley and Lower Whitley are picturesque villages and Conservation Areas, with a number of listed buildings, with others across the area; Great Budworth is an estate village linked to Arley Hall with very distinct built form; the settlements at Whitley are very individual, still very rural with limited development.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- A network of rural lanes link scattered farms, cottages, hamlets and villages, with Comberbach the main settlement in the character area;
- Northwich/Barnton is a large conurbation on the southern edge of the area that has seen considerable 20th century growth, expanding into the landscape;
- Other modern development (including a motel and petrol station) where the routes of the A49 and A533 cross at Dones Green;
- Building materials are typically red brick, sandstone and white-wash finishes, with large red brick dairy barns and thatched cottages particular features – some of the farmsteads and barns are listed;
- The ‘Cheshire railings’ – the black and white painted estate railings are characteristic features.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The large scale, undulating landscape overlaid by a small to medium scale field pattern allows varying views, from enclosed low lying views to open long distance views from higher ground

- which is visually more sensitive e.g. views from the southern edge of the area across the Weaver Valley and from ridge top along the A559 Northwich Road near Higher Whitley;
- The simplicity of the mostly pastoral land use and the pattern of elements such as hedgerows and trees provides landscape unity, texture and seasonal colour;
- Red sandstone and brick contrast with the green pasture, providing warm colours in the landscape;
- The farmed landscape gives an impression of being manicured and ‘tamed’;
- Generally a quiet, rural landscape but with features that detract from the overall sense of tranquillity whilst providing sensitive visual receptors, including the main roads, the relatively dense network of rural lanes and the scattered settlement including Comberbach;
- The area is affected by views of large scale industrial works at Northwich/Barnton and Preston Brook that lie outside the character area’s boundary – these also detract from the sense of tranquillity;
- No strong skyline to this relatively low lying landscape other than hedgerow trees, woodland and electricity pylons – it is not greatly inter-visible with other landscapes, except the *Frodsham to Northwich Undulating Enclosed Farmland* on the opposite side of the *Lower Weaver Valley*;
- Traffic on the high ground along the A559 forms a subtle skyline in views from within the character area;
- The distinctive tower of Great Budworth’s church forms a significant landmark, with the church spire at Little Leigh also a prominent landmark;
- The presence of undulating topography, woodland and hedgerow trees means there is some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape;
- The views across the *Lower Weaver Valley* to the *Sandstone Ridge* beyond.

#### **Landscape Condition**

The **Whitley & Comberbach Undulating Enclosed Farmland** is in active agricultural use and is managed for these land uses. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network and some over mature hedgerow trees. Some woodlands are not being actively managed. Clough woodland at Dutton Dean and Dutton Hollow incorporates a canopy dominated by Sycamore which developed following Dutch elm disease. Ornamental garden species and suburban style boundaries are having an impact on the rural character of the landscape in places.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 5d: *Whitley and Comberbach*:**

- Green Belt;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England’s National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

## **Forces for Landscape Change**

### **Past change**

- Limited boundary management, with evidence of decline in hedgerow boundaries and decline/loss of hedgerow trees due to flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries;
- Increase in fencing to replace hedgerow boundaries leading to loss of historic field pattern;
- A shift from grassland to crops, fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Growth of potatoes and maize in traditionally pastoral areas, resulting in soil erosion as a result of exposure of bare soil;
- Improved drainage and in-filling leading to loss of field ponds but this appears to have halted;
- Loss of historic parkland and houses;
- Decline in condition and extent of 'Cheshire Railings' – the black and white painted estate railings;
- Steady intensification of grassland management has resulted in pasture 'improvement' and the gradual loss of unimproved species rich grassland, but this appears to have halted;
- Visitor pressure is felt within smaller settlements, e.g. Great Budworth.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 5d: *Whitley and Comberbach***

- Farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;
- Location within The Mersey Forest indicates that there is likely to be additional tree planting in the area which would be a positive change;
- Pressure for residential and industrial / employment development, principally on the outskirts of Northwich/Barnton abutting the character area but also around Comberbach and in the wider countryside, that could affect the close relationship between town and country;
- There could be lack of management of farmland on the edge of urban areas in the hope that it becomes favoured for development;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Pressure for built development associated with the main roads that pass through the landscape (A49, A533 and A559).

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 5d: Whitley and Comberbach***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the rural pastoral character of the landscape and the settings to the picturesque villages, and to **enhance** the hedgerow and woodland network.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerow.
3. Conserve the strong field pattern, particularly earlier field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
4. Support retention of pasture and grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil.
5. Seek opportunities to re-create species rich grasslands, particularly alongside the brooks.
6. Seek opportunities to restore and create orchards at the farm scale.
7. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
8. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
9. Conserve and manage remaining field ponds, pools and ditches that are of importance for biodiversity as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
10. Seek to conserve and restore historic locally significant designed landscapes at Belmont Hall and Cogshall Hall and their settings, encouraging the management/restoration of permanent pasture, parkland trees, clumps and avenues.
11. Conserve and manage earthworks, such as the moated sites, promoting sensitive agricultural practices in their vicinity (i.e. grazing not ploughing).

12. Support plans to enhance woodland cover in areas of low ecological value, including restoring and creating valley woodlands and copses/small woodlands within the existing field pattern. Respect the small scale of the landscape when designing new woodland.
13. Consider views when designing new woodland - conserve long distance views from the southern edge of the area across the Weaver Valley and from the A559 that runs along the higher ground.
14. Manage existing woodlands to ensure a diverse native canopy structure and rich ground flora.
15. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as kerbs and large scale signage.
16. Ensure appropriate after use, restoration and management of former gravel workings to meet biodiversity, landscape and recreation/access objectives.
17. Protect above ground archaeological features, such as the moated site near Belmont Hall, promoting sensitive agricultural practices in its vicinity (i.e. grazing not ploughing).
18. Monitor effects of visitor recreational pressure on the character of the villages.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of picturesque villages/hamlets, farmsteads and cottages.
2. Monitor the cumulative effect of piecemeal change in this area – ensure new built single dwellings and their gardens, drives, gates etc. do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area through provision of appropriate guidance. Maintain a distinction between urban and rural areas.
3. Conserve the local vernacular built form - red brick/sandstone or white washed farmsteads and buildings, and thatched cottages. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting outside the main settlements.
4. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows.
5. Retain the red brick dairy barns, including their round windows which are a characteristic feature, and their rural settings as features of the landscape.
6. Conserve the black and white estate railings known as 'Cheshire Railings'.

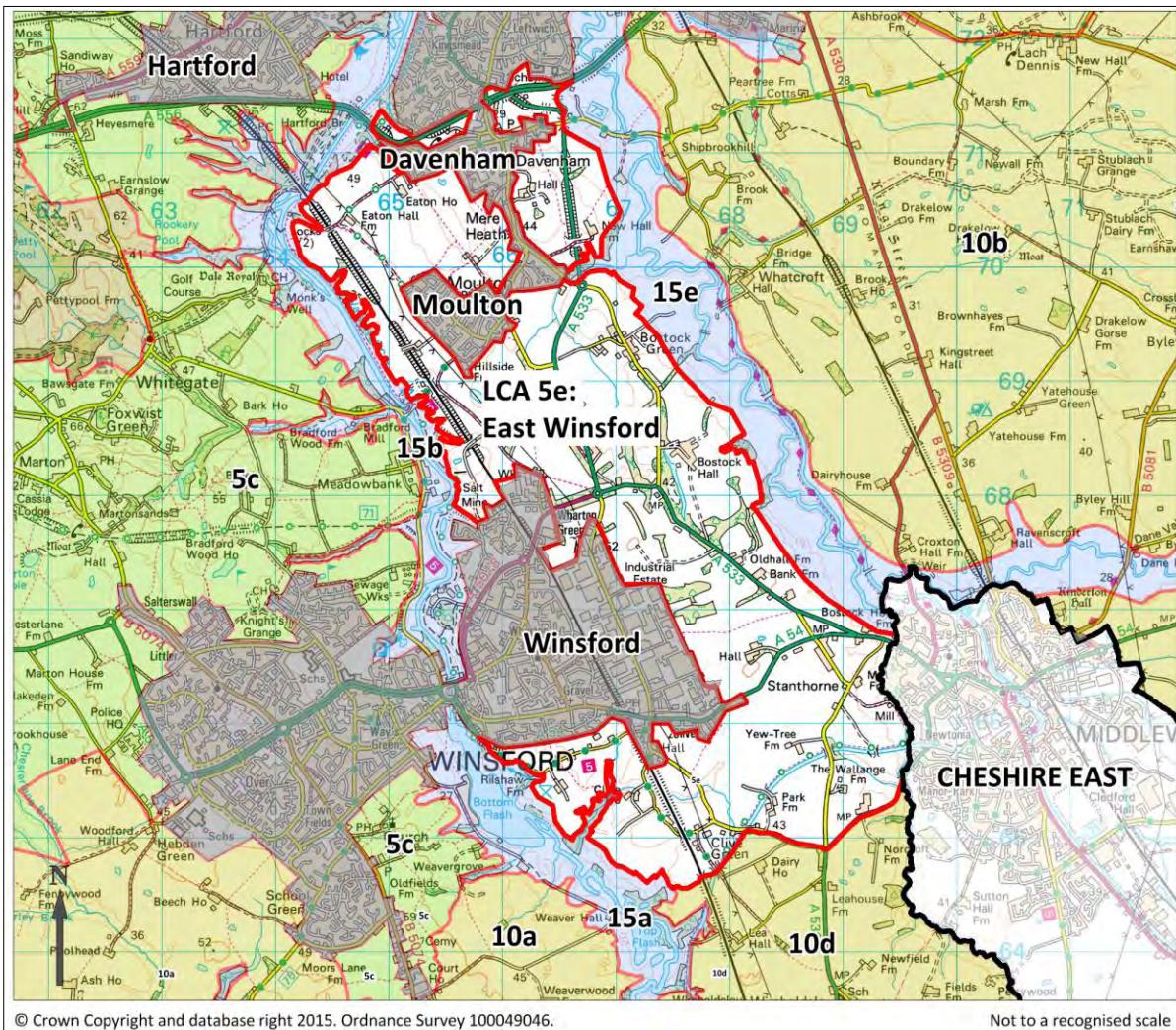
7. Maintain the rural setting to villages and sandstone farmsteads which are features of the landscape.
8. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
9. Soften built edges and views of infrastructure by introducing small scale planting schemes using native broadleaved species. Use similar planting schemes to integrate new development into the landscape.
10. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
11. Conserve the rural settings of villages and views to landmark features.
12. Preserve the distinctive characteristic of Great Budworth.
13. Resist expansion of Lower Whitley to preserve its distinctive rural character.
14. Conserve the open settings of the medieval church tower at Great Budworth and church spire at Little Leigh that form landmarks on the skyline when considering the location for new built development.
15. Consider views from Delamere Way when considering locations for new built development.
16. Ensure signage is appropriate to its setting.
17. Refer to the Whitley Village Plan when considering change in and around Whitley.



LCT 5: Undulating  
Enclosed Farmland

LCA 5d: *Whitley and Comberbach*

## LCA 5e: East Winsford



### Location and Boundaries

The *East Winsford Undulating Enclosed Farmland* represents a finger of gently undulating farmland sandwiched between the valleys of the River Weaver and the River Dane which lie to the west and east respectively. The Kingsmead and Leftwich estates in south Northwich lie immediately to the north, with the industrial estates of Winsford to the west. To the south the landscape gradually forms a transition to the flat lowland of the *Wimboldesley & Sproston Plain*.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 5e: East Winsford***

- A bedrock geology of Mercia Mudstone covered by a mantle of glacial drift deposits that gives rise to a gently undulating, lush landscape generally between 30m and 50m AOD, gradually flattening out to the south
- Small, mostly wooded brooks in narrow valleys that drain westwards towards the River Weaver and eastwards to the River Dane.
- The lush pastoral character of the landscape - boulder clay deposits mask the underlying mudstones giving rise to a predominance of poorly draining clay soils that support dairy farming, with some arable crops
- Late eighteenth and early nineteenth century enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act which produces a strong field pattern of hedgerows with hedgerow trees, and drainage ditches
- Isolated pockets of glacio-fluvial sands and gravels with potential to support acid grassland or heathland
- Low lying areas support wetland habitats such as willow beds that are important features of a landscape with generally relatively low woodland cover
- Designed parkland landscapes and woodland at Bostock Hall, Davenham Hall (historic park and garden of local significance) and Stanthorne Hall indicate the wealth of the 19th century and provide a well-manicured character
- Occasional field ponds
- Recreational opportunities provided by Sustrans' National Cycle Route 5 between Northwich and Winsford, and the towpath alongside the Shropshire Union Canal (Middlewich Branch) running through the southern tip of the area, both providing public access to the countryside
- A network of rural lanes link scattered farmsteads, hamlets and halls, while the character area wraps around the settlements of Davenham, Mere Heath and Moulton
- Significant 20<sup>th</sup> century development on the southern edge of Northwich, the eastern edge of Winsford (and the western edge of Middlewich beyond the borough boundary to the east) have a significant urbanising influence on the character of the area
- Open land between Davenham and Moulton, between Davenham and Leftwich, between Davenham and Kingsmead (Leftwich Grange), and between Moulton and Winsford previously designated as ASLEV and are now recognised as candidate Key Settlement Gaps
- Davenham Hall, Bostock Hall and Bostock Green (late 18<sup>th</sup> century planned estate village associated with Bostock Hall) are Conservation Areas, with a number of listed buildings
- Building materials are typically red brick and sandstone, with timber framed buildings, large red brick dairy barns and thatched cottages particular features
- The Shropshire Union Canal (Middlewich Branch including Stanthorne Lock) is an important part of the industrial archaeology of the area – it is also a local wildlife site noted for its emergent vegetation and grassland
- Scheduled Monuments at Moultonbank Farm (Bowl Barrow) and Old Bostock Hall (moated site)
- Generally a quiet, rural landscape although the A533, A556 Davenham Bypass, A5018, A54 and mainline railway pass through the area, contributing to the sense of movement and noise locally
- Power lines running parallel with the railway, and cutting through the Winsford and Wharton Industrial estates also erode rural character and tranquillity
- A comparatively low lying landscape without a strong skyline – formed by hedgerow trees, woodland, farm buildings, industry (at Wharton/Winsford) and electricity pylons. The church spire at Davenham forms a prominent landmark feature

## ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

### **Natural / Physical**

- Gently undulating topography with a central 'spine' gradually falling to the river corridors to the east and west, and gradually flattening out to the south;
- The underlying Mercia Mudstones (Northwich Halite Formation) covered by a mantle of glacial till deposits (mostly boulder clay) which give rise to a predominance of poorly draining clay soils that support mostly dairying with some arable crops;
- Salt mine at Wharton indicates the exploitation of the underlying salt-bearing rock formation, known commonly as 'rock salt';
- Isolated pockets of glacio-fluvial sands and gravels e.g. at Bostock Green that have the potential to support acid grassland. The settlement at Mere Heath is an indication that heathland was once a feature of the area;
- Small, mostly wooded brooks have carved narrow valleys that drain westwards towards the River Weaver and eastwards to the River Dane;
- Fields bounded by thorn hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees and drainage ditches forming a strong field pattern and contributing to the sense of enclosure associated with this landscape;
- Wetland habitat of marsh and woods including willow beds between the Winsford Industrial Estate and the A533 is of local wildlife value and adds to the woodland cover;
- Occasional field ponds from past marl digging contribute to the wetland habitats;
- Woodlands associated with designed landscapes are important landscape feature, particularly around Bostock Hall.

### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The variety of field sizes, with survival of a large number of small, irregular ancient enclosures (particularly around the canal in the south contributing a sense of time depth to the landscape) and larger scale, late post-medieval straight-sided field improvements (on the outcrop of glacio-fluvial sand and gravel deposits around Eaton Hall Farm);
- The strong intact hedgerow network along field boundaries, with an abundance of hedgerow trees;
- Areas of designed parkland landscapes and woodland at Bostock Hall, Davenham Hall and Stanthorne Hall indicate the wealth of the 18th and 19th century and provide a well-manicured character. Bostock and Davenham Parks are on the local register of Historic Parks and Gardens;
- Davenham Hall, Bostock Hall and Bostock Green (late 18<sup>th</sup> century planned estate village associated with Bostock Hall) are Conservation Areas, with a number of listed buildings;
- The Bowl Barrow at Moultonbank Farm is a Scheduled Monument and an indication that the area was settled well before the medieval period;
- The site of Old Bostock Hall (the Old Hall was demolished in 1803) is the only surviving moated site in this landscape and a Scheduled Monument;
- Part of the Shropshire Union Canal (Middlewich Branch, including Stanthorne Lock) passes through this area linking the Trent and Mersey Canal to the Shropshire Union Main Line and provides an important part of the industrial archaeology of the area – it is also a local wildlife site for its rich marginal and emergent vegetation along its banks and also for the small areas of unimproved diverse grassland along the towpath;
- Much of the area is in private ownership and there is a relatively sparse network of public rights of way that include Sustrans' NCR 5 between Winsford and Northwich and the towpath alongside the Shropshire Union Canal which both provide an important contribution to public access to the countryside and opportunities for recreation. There is also good access to the Weaver Valley which provides many recreational opportunities.

### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- A network of rural lanes link scattered farmsteads, hamlets and halls, while the character area wraps around the settlements of Davenham, Mere Heath and Moulton;
- Northwich immediately to the north and Winsford to the west (and Middlewich beyond the CWaC boundary to the east) have seen considerable 20th century growth, expanding into the landscape;
- Despite this expansion there are important areas of open land between Davenham and Moulton, between Davenham and Leftwich, between Davenham and Kingsmead (Leftwich Grange), and between Moulton and Winsford which were previously designated as Areas of Significant Local Environmental Value (ASLEV) and are now recognised as candidate Key Settlement Gaps where development could lead to coalescence and the loss of identity of the separate settlements;
- Building materials are typically red brick and sandstone; timber framed buildings and large red brick dairy barns are particular features;
- Superimposed on this rural settlement pattern is a network of major roads (A533, A556 Davenham Bypass, A5018, and A54) and the mainline railway runs along the western edge.

### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The small scale field pattern and sense of enclosure provided by woodland and hedgerows results in a perception of an intimate character with intermittent views. However, the area around Eaton Hall Farm is larger in scale due to the larger field patterns, more open character and ridge like landform;
- The simplicity of the lush pastoral fields and the pattern of elements such as hedgerows and trees provides landscape unity, texture and seasonal colour;
- Parkland landscapes contribute to a well-manicured character, particularly around Bostock Hall, and contribute colour to the landscape;
- The farmed landscape gives an impression of being manicured and ‘tamed’, and the presence of woodland, pasture and water contribute to a sense of ‘naturalness’, the presence of industry, extensive 20th century residential areas, electricity pylons, railway and main roads that cut across the landscape bearing no relation to landform or field pattern detract from the tranquillity of the area;
- Despite these detracting elements, the landscape is generally quiet and rural in areas some distance from, or visually screened from them. The most tranquil parts of the landscape include the area around Bostock Hall/Bostock Green where woodland screens views of these elements, and the area around the canal which is located away from the main built development and infrastructural elements of the landscape;
- A comparatively low lying landscape without a strong skyline – formed by hedgerow trees, woodland, farm buildings, industry (at Wharton/Winsford) and electricity pylons;
- Views are varied due to the undulating topography, where low lying areas are hidden while ridge tops are open and visually more sensitive;
- Scattered residential development indicates the presence of sensitive residential receptors. The Sustrans’ NCR 5 between Winsford and Northwich and the canal towpath bring recreational users to the area who are likely to have a visual interest in their surrounding landscape;
- The church spire at Davenham forms a prominent landmark;
- The presence of undulating topography, woodland and hedgerow trees means there is some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape;
- The western edge of the area is visible from the opposite side of the Weaver Valley (from the *Eaton, Marton & Over Undulating Enclosed Farmland* landscape character area) and the eastern edge of the area is visible from the opposite side of the Dane Valley (the *Stublach Plain*).

### **Landscape Condition**

The area is in active agricultural use and is managed for these land uses. The presence of designed parkland also gives the area an appearance of being 'well cared for'. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network and some over-mature hedgerow trees. Some woodlands are not being actively managed. There is very little unimproved species rich grassland remaining. There are considerable areas of 20<sup>th</sup> century residential development that give the landscape a 'suburban' appearance in places and main roads have cut across the landscape bearing no relation to landform or landscape patterns (particularly the A533).

### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 5e: *East Winsford*:**

- Countryside;
- Candidate Key Settlement Gaps on open land between Davenham and Moulton, between Davenham and Leftwich, between Davenham and Kingsmead (Leftwich Grange), and between Moulton and Winsford previously designated as ASLEV;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets.

## **Forces for Landscape Change**

### **Past change**

- Limited boundary management, with evidence of decline in hedgerow boundaries and decline/loss of hedgerow trees due to flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries;
- Increase in fencing to replace hedgerow boundaries leading to loss of historic field pattern;
- A shift from grassland to crops, fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Increase in silage production;
- Growth of potatoes and maize in traditionally pastoral areas, resulting in soil erosion as a result of exposure of bare soil;
- Improved drainage and in-filling leading to loss of field ponds but this appears to have halted;
- Provision of buffer zones around fields, as part of Countryside Stewardship agreements, has had an effect on the landscape;
- Steady intensification of grassland management has resulted in pasture 'improvement' and the gradual loss of unimproved species rich grassland, but this appears to have halted;
- Visitor pressure is felt within smaller settlements, e.g. Great Budworth.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 5e: *East Winsford***

- Farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;
- Location within The Mersey Forest indicates that there is likely to be additional hedgerow and tree planting in the area which would be a positive change;
- Pressure for residential and industrial / employment development, principally on the outskirts of Northwich, Davenham, Mere Heath, Moulton and Winsford, that could lead to coalescence and the loss of identity of the separate settlements;
- There could be lack of management of farmland on the edge of urban areas in the hope that it becomes favoured for development;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Expansion of settlement into parkland;
- Pressure for built development associated with the main roads that pass through the landscape (A533, A556 Davenham Bypass, A5018 & A54).

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 5e: East Winsford***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the lush, pastoral character of the landscape and to **enhance** the urban edges as well as the hedgerows and unimproved grassland resource.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerow.
3. Conserve the strong field pattern, particularly earlier field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape, for example around the canal. Consider opportunities to replace hedgerows where they have been lost.
4. Support retention of pasture and grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil.
5. Seek opportunities to re-create acid grassland in areas of glacio-fluvial outwash deposits of sands and gravels, e.g. around Bostock green and Eaton Hall Farm.
6. Seek opportunities to restore and create orchards at the farm scale.
7. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
8. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
9. Conserve and manage remaining field ponds, pools and ditches that are of importance for biodiversity as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
10. Seek opportunities to extend/re-create areas of marsh, reed swamp, willow beds and other wetland habitats.
11. Seek to conserve and restore historic designed landscapes at Bostock Hall and Davenham Hall and their settings, encouraging the management/restoration of permanent pasture, parkland trees, clumps and avenues.

12. Conserve and manage earthworks, such as the moated site of Old Bostock Hall, promoting sensitive agricultural practices in their vicinity (i.e. grazing not ploughing).
13. Support plans to enhance woodland cover of native broadleaf species in areas of low ecological value - respect the small scale of the landscape when designing new woodland.
14. Support the establishment of a well-wooded landscape around the periphery of Northwich and Winsford in areas of low ecological value. Consider views when designing new woodland - conserve views to the church spire at Davenham.
15. Manage existing woodlands to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
16. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as close board fencing, kerbs and large scale signage.
17. Consider opportunities to improve public access in this area close to large centres of population.

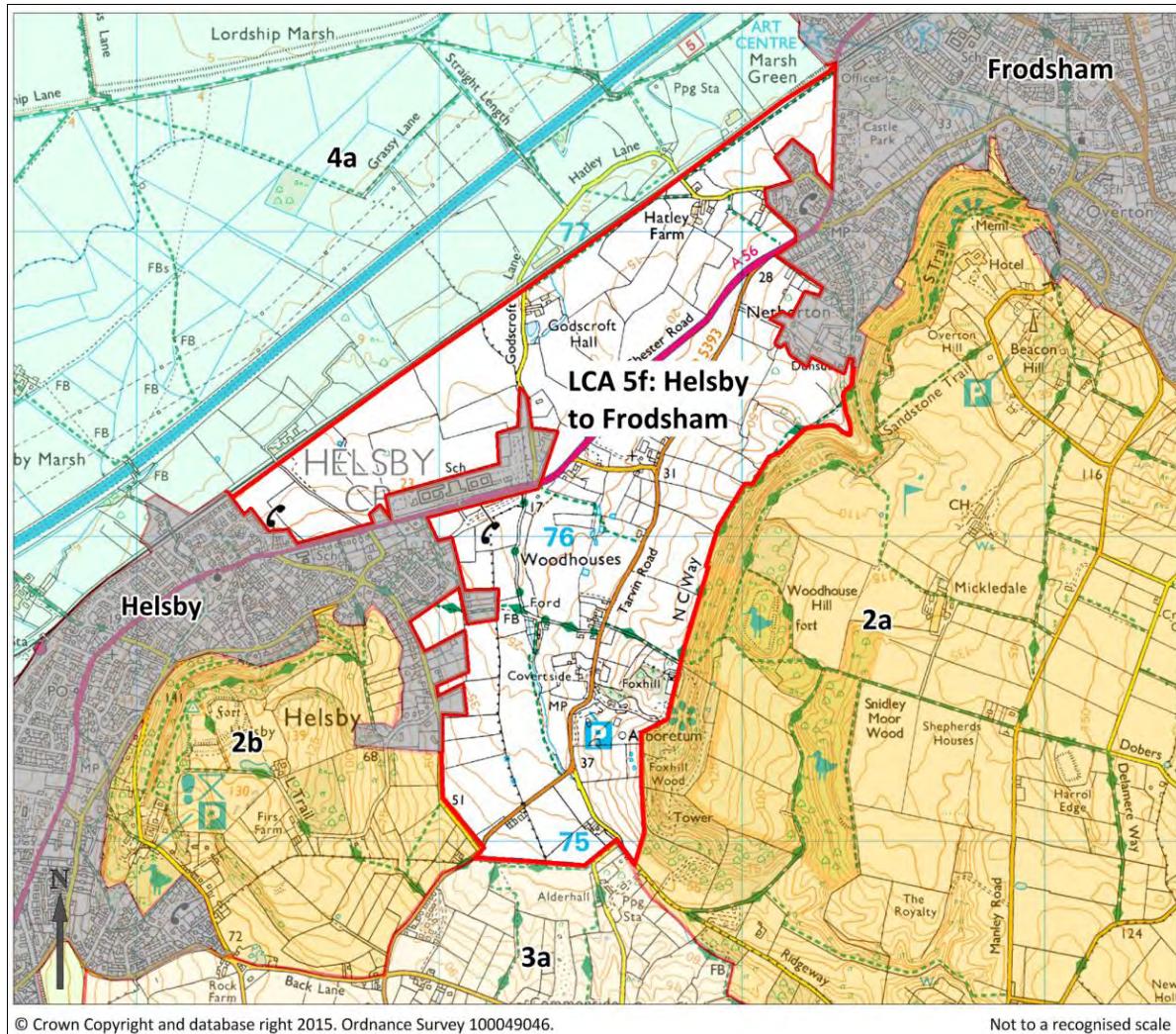
### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Conserve the rural settlement pattern comprising scattered farms, halls and hamlets linked by a network of rural lanes – ensure new built development does not obliterate this characteristic.
2. Conserve the open undeveloped areas between settlements that have been identified as a Candidate Key Settlement Gaps where development could lead to coalescence and the loss of identity of the separate communities of Davenham, Moulton and Northwich (Kingsmead and Leftwich).
3. Monitor the cumulative effect of piecemeal change in this area – ensure new built single dwellings and their gardens, drives, gates etc. do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area through provision of appropriate guidance.
4. Conserve the local vernacular built form - red brick and sandstone, with timber framed buildings, large red brick dairy barns (with characteristic round windows) and thatched cottages. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting outside the main settlements.
5. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows.

6. Conserve the settings of Davenham Hall (Grade II\*) and Bostock Hall (Grade II\*) (including Bostock Green estate village) that are designated Conservation Areas.
7. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
8. Soften built edges and views of infrastructure by introducing planting schemes using native broadleaved species. Use similar planting schemes to integrate new development into the landscape.
9. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
10. Conserve the open setting of the church spire at Davenham that forms a landmark on the skyline when considering the location for new built development.
11. Consider views from Sustrans NCR 5 and the canal towpath when considering the location of new built development.
12. Refer local documents such as Village Design Statement (VDS), Conservation Area Appraisals and Neighbourhood Plans when considering change.



## LCA 5f: Helsby to Frodsham



### Location and Boundaries

The *Helsby to Frodsham Undulating Enclosed Farmland* is a small transitional character area lying between the steeply rising *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge* to the south and the steeply rising *Helsby Hill* to the west, and the flat, low lying *Frodsham, Helsby and Lordship Marches* and *Mersey Estuary* to the north. A railway line forms the northern boundary of the character area. Helsby lies immediately to the west and Frodsham to the east.

### **Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 5f: *Helsby to Frodsham***

- Transitional zone between the prominent and distinctive *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge* and *Helsby Hill*, and the flat, low lying *Frodsham, Helsby and Lordship Marches* forming an undulating landscape that gently rises from 10m to 60m AOD
- Underlying bedrock geology of Helsby Sandstone Formations that has been weathered and overlain by glacio-fluvial drift and till deposits
- Geology gives rise to brown sands and earths which support a mixed agricultural landscape of arable and grassland, with fragments of acid grassland
- Fields are typically small to medium in size, with a combination of irregular medieval enclosure and modern reorganisation and enclosure, enclosed by trimmed thorn hedgerows and trees
- Enclosed medieval townfields around Woodhouses, visible as small scale field divisions
- Low sandstone walls and black and white estate style 'Cheshire Fencing' also form boundaries
- The area is drained by a small stream running south to north, crossed by a footbridge and ford at Chestnut Lane, Woodhouses, and wooded at its southern end
- Otherwise woodland cover is low, with a small broadleaf copse around Foxhill
- Cluster of field ponds west of Tarvin Road and around Godscroft Hall
- A low density settlement pattern of scattered farms, individual dispersed detached properties and halls e.g. Godscroft Hall (a listed building) linked by a small network of minor roads either side of the A56
- Building materials include a mix of red brick and sandstone, with white wash and timber framed buildings, and large red brick barns
- A mix of other road side land uses including small workshops, two static caravan sites, tyre fitters, a nursery and Frodsham Cemetery, representing modern ribbon development on the outskirts of Helsby and Frodsham and blurring the distinction between urban and rural
- Recreational opportunities are provided by public rights of way including the North Cheshire Way long distance route passing through the area from *Helsby Hill* to join the Sandstone Trail along the *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge*. A parking area and footpath lead from the B5393 to the Arboretum on the *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge*
- The wooded high ground of Frodsham Hill and Helsby Hill dominates the southern and western parts of the area, where the very strong skyline terminates all views in these directions
- By contrast the northern boundary is visually indistinct and distant views extend over *Frodsham, Helsby and Lordship Marches* to the Mersey
- Generally a quiet, rural landscape although the A56 Chester Road passes through the area between Helsby and Frodsham, contributing to the sense of movement and noise locally
- The railway and traffic on the M56 just beyond the character area to the north also adds to the sense of movement and noise
- The area south of the A56 is designated as part of the Helsby & Frodsham Hills Area of Special County Value (ASCV)
- The area south of the A56 was also designated as an Area of Significant Local Environmental Value (ASLEV) by the former Vale Royal Borough Council
- The character area is overlooked from many high vantage points on the *Helsby Hill Sandstone Ridge* and *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge* and is visually sensitive
- The huge industrial complex at Runcorn is visible, as are electricity pylons that run parallel to the motorway beyond the character area to the north
- The church spire of Trinity Church at Frodsham is a landmark

## **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

### **Natural / Physical**

- Underlying bedrock geology of Helsby Sandstone Formations that has been weathered and overlain by glacio-fluvial drift (sands and gravels) and till (boulder clay) deposits that give rise to a gently undulating landscape, gradually rising from 10m to 60m AOD at the edge of the *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge* and *Helsby Hill Sandstone Ridge*;
- Geology gives rise to a deep, well drained sandy and coarse loamy soil known as brown sands that support a mixed agricultural landscape of arable and grassland, with fragments of acid grassland;
- Mature hedgerow trees, a broadleaf copse at Foxhill and trees and scrub along the southern end of a small stream that are valuable landscape features in a landscape with generally low woodland cover;
- Small to medium size fields bounded by thorn hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees forming a strong field pattern and contributing to the sense of enclosure associated with this landscape;
- The area south of the A56 is designated as part of the Helsby & Frodsham Hills Area of Special County Value (ASCV) recognised for its high scenic quality and value, and its location between *Helsby Hill Sandstone Ridge* and *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge* important to their setting;
- The area south of the A56 was also designated as an Area of Significant Local Environmental Value (ASLEV), essentially identifying the open gap between Helsby and Frodsham as important to maintain the identity and integrity of the two villages – Green Belt protection should prevent coalescence in the future.

### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The small to medium size fields, with a combination of irregular medieval enclosure and modern reorganisation and enclosure, enclosed by trimmed thorn hedgerows and trees, which provide historic continuity in the landscape. Fields are smaller and more regular on the steeper slopes, and larger and more irregularly shaped on the flatter ground to the north;
- The strong intact hedgerow network along field boundaries, with an abundance of hedgerow trees;
- Enclosed medieval townfields around Woodhouses, visible as small scale field divisions;
- Recreational opportunities are provided by public rights of way including the North Cheshire Way long distance route passing through the area from *Helsby Hill* to join the Sandstone Trail along the *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge*. A parking area and footpath lead from the B5393 to the Arboretum on the *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge*.

### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- The low density settlement pattern of scattered farms, individual dispersed detached properties and halls e.g. Godscroft Hall (a listed building) linked by a small network of minor roads either side of the A56;
- Building materials include a mix of red brick and sandstone, with white wash and timber framed buildings, and large red brick barns;
- A mix of other road side land uses including small workshops, two static caravan sites, tyre fitters, a nursery and Frodsham Cemetery representing modern ribbon development on the outskirts of Helsby and Frodsham and blurring the distinction between urban and rural;
- Low sandstone walls and black and white estate style 'Cheshire Fencing' also form boundaries.

### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The small scale field pattern, hedgerows and hedgerow trees, and distinctive backdrop of the wooded hills on the edge of the sandstone ridge gives a sense of enclosure to the south of the

character area where the strong skyline terminates views, and a perception of an intimate character;

- However, the area to the north is larger in scale due to the larger field patterns, more open character and more extensive views across the *Frodsham, Helsby and Lordship Marches* to the Mersey;
- Overall a semi-enclosed landscape generally composed of a simple combination of farmland, hedgerows and hedgerow trees with variety provided by the undulating topography, low sandstone walls, 'Cheshire Fencing' and buildings. The red sandstone and brick contrast with the green pasture and wooded backdrop, providing warm colours in the landscape. The area is unified by its location between the prominent sandstone ridge to the south and west and the flat marshland to the north;
- Generally a quiet, rural landscape although the A56 and railway pass through the area, contributing to the sense of movement and noise locally. The A56 is lit along its entire length through this character area between Helsby and Frodsham, providing a suburbanising influence both during the day and at night-time;
- The M56 just beyond the character area to the north also adds to the sense of movement and noise;
- Settlement edges of Helsby and Frodsham and other scattered residential development indicates the presence of sensitive residential receptors. The North Cheshire Way long distance footpath links to *Helsby Hill* to join the Sandstone Trail along the *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge* and brings recreational users to the area who are likely to have a visual interest in the surrounding landscape;
- The character area is overlooked from many high vantage points on the *Helsby Hill Sandstone Ridge* and *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge* and is visually sensitive, although not as visually prominent as the ridge itself;
- The huge industrial complex at Runcorn is visible, as are electricity pylons that run parallel to the motorway beyond the character area to the north, detracting from the rural character of the area;
- The church spire of Trinity Church at Frodsham is a landmark;
- Although there is a relative absence of woodland cover, the presence of undulating topography and hedgerow trees means there is some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

#### **Landscape Condition**

The *Helsby to Frodsham Undulating Enclosed Farmland* is in active agricultural use and is managed for these land uses. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network and some over-mature hedgerow trees. Some of the sandstone boundary walls and 'Cheshire Fencing' is in need of repair, particularly alongside roads. The areas of 20<sup>th</sup> century ribbon development give the landscape a 'suburban' appearance, particularly alongside the A56 which is lit along its entire length through this character area between Helsby and Frodsham.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 5f: *Helsby to Frodsham*:**

- Green Belt;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV) south of the A56;
- (Area south of A56 also previously designated as an Area of Significant Local Environmental Value (ASLEV) by the former Vale Royal Borough Council – Green Belt protection should prevent coalescence in the future);

- Natural heritage sites of regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

### ***Forces for Landscape Change***

#### **Past change**

- Some evidence of decline in hedgerow boundaries;
- Some boundary sandstone walls and estate type 'Cheshire Fencing' is also in need of repair, particularly alongside roads;
- A shift from grassland to crops (in particular potatoes) and a general reduction in number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Steady intensification of grassland management has resulted in pasture 'improvement' and the gradual loss of unimproved species rich grassland;
- 20<sup>th</sup> century ribbon development particularly alongside the A56 has resulted in the gradual suburbanisation and narrowing of the open gap between Helsby and Frodsham;
- Conversion of traditional dairy barns into residential development, e.g. at Godscroft Hall

#### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 5f: *Helsby to Frodsham***

- Location within The Mersey Forest indicates that there is likely to be additional tree planting in the area to establish a woodland framework around Helsby and Frodsham and seek to create a woodland buffer on suitable land between the settlements and the motorway, which would be a positive change;
- Pressure for residential and employment development alongside roads and on the edge of Helsby and Frodsham that could lead to coalescence and the loss of identity of the two settlements;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Farm diversification, especially to holiday chalets and caravan sites;
- Pressure for built development associated with the main A56 that passes through the landscape.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 5f: Helsby to Frodsham***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve and enhance** the rural character, strong field pattern and views to and from the *Sandstone Ridge*.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

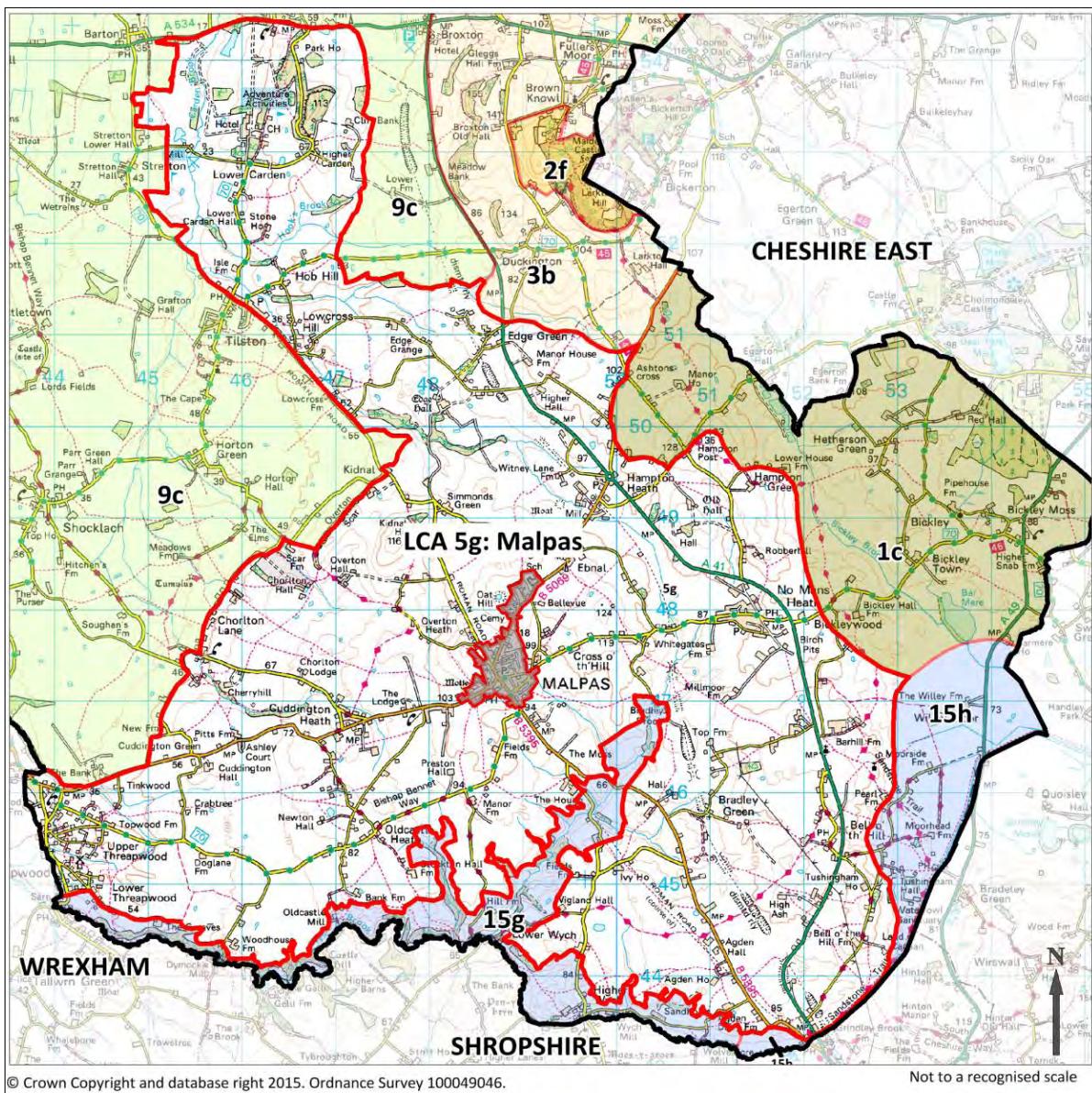
1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Conserve ancient field patterns, particularly those dating to the medieval period or earlier which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
3. Seek to repair sandstone walls and 'Cheshire Fencing' where they bound fields or align roads, to conserve these as a feature of the landscape.
4. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
5. Conserve the remnant fragments of unimproved or semi-improved acid grassland on the sandy soils that are of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.
6. Consider further opportunities for recreational use of the landscape as long as this does not result in 'suburbanisation' of the countryside.
7. Encourage increased woodland cover, including the establishment of a woodland framework around Helsby and Frodsham and creation of a woodland buffer on suitable land of low ecological value between the settlements and the motorway. Small scattered broadleaved woodland blocks, copses and riparian woodland are the most appropriate forms of woodland in this area.
8. Manage existing woodlands to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
9. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as close board fencing, kerbs and large scale signage.
10. Conserve views to and from the adjacent *Sandstone Ridge* and the church spire at Frodsham. Consider key views when planning locations for new woodland associated with The Mersey Forest.

## ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the low density settlement pattern of scattered farms, individual dispersed detached properties and halls away from the main urban areas.
2. Monitor the cumulative effect of piecemeal change in this area – ensure new built single dwellings and their gardens, drives, gates etc. do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area through provision of appropriate guidance.
3. Conserve the local vernacular built style - red brick/sandstone or white washed farmsteads and timber framed buildings. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
4. Ensure built form including conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
5. Don't locate farm buildings in prominent locations.
6. Maintain the rural gap between Frodsham and Helsby and maintain a rural setting to these settlements.
7. Seek to integrate the A56 into the landscape using roadside planting.
8. Conserve the open setting of the church spire at Frodsham that forms a landmark on the skyline when considering the location for new built development.
9. Consider views from the North Cheshire Way when considering the location of new built development.
10. Refer to local documents, Village Design Statement (VDS) and Neighbourhood Plans when considering change.



## LCA 5g: Malpas



### Location and Boundaries

The *Malpas Undulating Enclosed Farmland* lies in the south of CWA C borough, between Clutton to the north and the *Wych Valley* to the south. *Tattenhall to Shocklach Plain* wraps round the character area to the north and west; the *Beeston to Duckington Sandstone Fringe* and *Bickley Woodland, Heaths, Meres and Mosses* lie to the north-east, with the *Gringley Valley* to the south-east. The character area boundaries are generally defined by geology and topography, with the A534 forming the northern boundary.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 5g: Malpas***

- Bedrock geology of Mudstones covered by a mantle of glacial drift deposits (boulder clays) that gives rise to an undulating landform of interlocking hills
- In the north and west a series of escarpments and dip slopes create a locally distinctive landscape of sandstone outcrops identified as Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) and where disused quarries are found
- The topography 'crowns' at Malpas towards the centre of the character area rising to a maximum height of 134m AOD, falling to join the plain northwards to around 20m AOD at Barton and westwards to 45m AOD at Threapwood
- The north-south divide between drainage catchment areas: north of Malpas small brooks drain northwards and westwards towards the River Dee; south of Malpas small brooks drain southwards into the Wych Brook which then flows westwards into the Dee
- Steep wooded valleys of high conservation value, with a rich mosaic of broadleaved semi-natural woodland including coppice with a diverse ground flora, unimproved grassland, that incise the hills and contain small brooks
- Mixed broadleaf and coniferous woodland and copses are a feature on high ground in the north where they 'skyline' and give the impression of a well wooded landscape
- Unimproved grassland and woodland on stream sides, steep banks, sandstone outcrops and other places where agricultural improvement has been limited
- Varying sandy and clay soils, with agricultural land use predominantly arable cropping especially fodder crops such as maize, interspersed with some pasture, in contrast to dairying on the adjoining plain
- Cohesive and un-fragmented regionally significant historic landscape with extremely well preserved late medieval field systems and extensive ridge and furrow; abundant hedgerows and hedgerow trees creating a characteristic patchwork with preserved elements of the earlier medieval open fields and common land (which is sometimes associated with dispersed settlement)
- Dispersed settlement pattern with narrow sunken lanes weaving between high hedges and linear belts linking villages, hamlets, farmsteads and isolated cottages; roads radiate out from the main settlement of Malpas
- Sandstone walls sometimes atop the hedges, with timber fences and 'Cheshire Railings' also found along fields and roadside boundaries
- Field ponds (marl pits) are a feature of the lower lying areas; other water bodies include reservoirs on high ground and ornamental parkland lakes
- Elongated, dispersed Parish of Threapwood with distinctive settlement pattern of minor lanes linking small cottages set amongst hedgerow-bound meadows
- Built form is typically simple red/orange brick cottages with steeply pitching roofs and slate or clay pantiles, terminating in distinctive gable parapets; also timber-framed buildings; also decorative brick detailing at Carden Park
- The Carden Park Estate in the north, with its remaining lodges and ice house, extensive woodland belts and boundary walls, now a hotel, spa, golf resort and outdoor adventure centre
- The number of halls and small historic estates such as Chorlton, Overton and Cuddington; Chorlton Old Hall and Edge Hall have medieval moats
- Wide range of archaeological sites, e.g. Castel Hill Motte at Malpas and Round Barrow at Carden
- A rural, tranquil landscape away from the main A41 and A534
- Bishop Bennet Way long distance route and numerous other public rights of way
- Extensive views from high ground across the plain to the Clwydian hills to the west
- The sandstone fringe and sandstone ridge form a very dominant skyline to the north. St. Oswald's Church in Malpas provides a significant landmark

## ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

### **Natural / Physical**

- Steeply undulating topography of interlocking hills with locally distinctive wooded sandstone outcrops at Carden Park (Parkers Hill), Overton Scar and Edge Scar; the escarpment and caves at Carden Park are identified as a Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS);
- An east-west drainage catchment that 'crowsns' at Malpas, with small brooks draining northwards and southwards through the character area and westwards into the River Dee;
- Solid bedrock geology of mudstones, overlain by glacio-fluvial drift deposits of boulder clay and stagnogley sandy and clay/loam soils that give rise to a predominantly arable land use, with some pasture;
- The steep wooded valleys with a rich mosaic of broadleaved semi-natural woodland including coppice with a diverse ground flora, unimproved grassland, that drain northwards towards the River Dee, e.g. Upper Wood and Lower Wood at Edge, Randall's Rough and The Heir's Wood west of Duckington;
- The incised hills that contain small brooks such as Bradley Brook, Carden Brook, Hooks Brook and their numerous tributaries that contain important concentrations of these habitats, some of which are local wildlife sites;
- Ancient woodland on stream sides, steep banks, sandstone outcrops and other places where agricultural improvement has been limited, e.g. Overton Scar outcrop is a local wildlife site;
- Unimproved grassland also on stream sides, steep banks, sandstone outcrops and other places where agricultural improvement has been limited, with notable areas around Carden, Duckington and Bradley;
- Mixed broadleaf and coniferous woodland and copses are a feature on high ground in the north around Carden Park, e.g. at Parker's Hill and the conifer plantation at Round Hill.

### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The area contains a regionally significant late medieval landscape which preserves elements of the earlier medieval open fields. The historic landscape of this area is generally cohesive and unfragmented and is considered to contain some of the best preserved late medieval field systems and ridge and furrow in Cheshire, providing historic continuity in the landscape;
- The townfields that are located in the vicinity of historic settlements;
- The landscape to the southwest, in Wales and known as the Maelor Saesneg, is included on the Countryside Council for Wales/CADW/International Council on Monuments and Sites (UK): Historic Landscapes Register; Part 2.2 Register of Landscapes of Special Historic Interest in Wales. England has no equivalent register, however this landscape is clearly of regional, if not national, importance;
- Sandstone walls sometimes atop the hedges, with other boundaries of timber fencing and 'Cheshire Railings';
- Examples of surviving common land as indicated by the place names Bradley Green, Edge Green, Overton Heath, Hampton Heath and Cuddington Heath;
- Field ponds are a feature of the lower lying areas, indicating the extraction of marl (calcareous deposits) from the boulder clay for past agricultural improvement;
- Other water bodies include reservoirs on high ground, ornamental parkland lakes and a mill pond at Stretton Water Mill;
- Disused quarries indicate the previous winning of sandstone in the area, for example at Edge Green and Overton;
- The historic Carden Park Estate in the north, previously the site of a 16th century timber framed hall (Carden Hall burnt down in 1912) and Deer Park. Today two lodges and an ice house remain, with other listed buildings/structures;

- Halls and small historic estates are located in the west of the character area, at Chorlton (including Chorlton Hall, Chorlton Old Hall, Chorlton House and Chorlton Lodge), at Overton (Overton Hall and Overton Manor), at Cuddington (Cuddington Hall), Newton Hall, Preston Hall, and Edge Hall towards the north;
- Chorlton Old Hall and Edge Hall are moated medieval sites;
- Watling Street Roman Road runs north-south through Malpas between Chester and Whitchurch;
- The A41 was originally an 18<sup>th</sup> century turnpike road;
- Former Chester/Whitchurch railway line;
- The nucleated historic settlement of Malpas is mentioned in the Domesday Book suggesting it was one of the more important settlements in Cheshire, with a castle and a market ;
- Wide range of archaeological sites, including Scheduled Monuments, e.g. Castle Hill Motte at Malpas; Bronze Age (c2200-1250BC) Round Barrow in Carden Park;
- The discovery of items such as flints, burnt stones, the tip of a Neolithic axe and Bronze Age pottery indicate that rock shelters and caves located in Carden Park were likely to have been occupied in the prehistoric period. One cave was also deepened in the 18th century to house John Harris, an eccentric who lived on the estate for 20 years;
- Conservation Areas at Edge, Higher Carden, Chorlton Lane and Malpas;
- There has been much modern conversion of parkland to recreational use or farmland;
- Recreational opportunities are provided at Carden Park where there is a hotel, spa, golf resort and outdoor activity centre;
- Passive recreation provided by the Bishop Bennet Way long distance footpath and numerous other public rights of way.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- The dispersed and relatively dense settlement pattern with narrow sunken green lanes weaving between high hedges and linear belts linking villages, hamlets, halls, farmsteads and isolated cottages. Roads radiate out from the main nucleated settlement of Malpas;
- Linear development has occurred alongside roads, including the modern dormitory village of No Mans Heath and an industrial estate at Hampton Heath, both near junctions on the A41;
- Built form is typically simple red/orange brick cottages with steeply pitching roofs and slate or clay pantiles, terminating in distinctive gable parapets; also timber-framed buildings;
- The Carden Estate is notable for the use of decorative polychromatic brick detail in cottages and model farms;
- The dispersed Parish of Threapwood has a particularly distinctive settlement pattern that comes from squatter settlement in the C18th, early C19th; small cottages alongside minor roads linking Upper Threapwood and Lower Threapwood and set amongst hedgerow-bound meadows.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Generally a deeply rural, tranquil landscape away from the main A41 that passes north-south through the eastern side of the character area, and the A534 defining the northern boundary;
- The northern area around Carden Park appears to be heavily wooded due to the dominance of trees on the skyline;
- The adjacent wooded *Beeston to Duckington Sandstone Fringe* and the *Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge* form a very dominant skyline to the north of the character area;
- Extensive views from high ground to the Clwydian hills;
- The Wrexham Industrial Estate is also visible to the west and appears as a massive incongruous element within the agricultural plain;
- St. Oswald's Church, Malpas provides a significant landmark, especially when approaching the settlement from the south;

- The presence of undulating topography, woodland and hedgerow trees means there is some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

### **Landscape Condition**

The *Malpas Undulating Enclosed Farmland* is in active agricultural use and is managed for these land uses. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network and some over-mature hedgerow trees. Some of the sandstone boundary walls and 'Cheshire Fencing' is in need of repair, particularly alongside roads. The areas of 20<sup>th</sup> century ribbon development at No Mans Heath off the A41 give the landscape a 'suburban' appearance.

### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 5g: *Malpas*:**

- Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management;
- Candidate Key Settlement Gap between Malpas and Ebnal.

### **Forces for Landscape Change**

#### **Past change**

- Limited boundary management, with evidence of gappy hedges and walls and fencing ('Cheshire Railings') being neglected and in need of repair;
- Agricultural intensification with enlargement of fields and loss of hedgerow boundaries (oak trees left 'in-field') with loss of historic field pattern;
- Under management and deterioration of some farm woodlands;
- A shift from pasture grazing with increasing areas being cultivated for arable cropping, silage or fodder crops including cereals and maize;
- Significant change has occurred on the former Carden Park estate (but topography, dense woodland and boundary walls have limited its impact on the landscape);
- Loss of historic parkland to recreational use (such as golf courses) or farmland;
- Loss of heathland to recreational use or farmland or invasion by scrub and bracken;
- Loss of unimproved grassland to farmland;
- Loss of ridge and furrow resulting from increase in arable land use replacing pasture;
- Limited management of field ponds has resulted in some silting up and drying out due to natural processes of vegetation succession and overshadowing from trees.

#### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 5g: *Malpas***

- Farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;
- Pressure for (large scale) residential/employment development, in particular at Malpas and No Mans Heath;
- Further loss of ridge and furrow which is a key historic landscape characteristic of the area;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Pressure for Solar PV farms;
- Pressure for built development associated with the main A41 that passes through the landscape, for example at road junctions at No Mans Heath and Hampton Heath;
- Pressure for more golf courses.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 5g: Malpas***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the regionally significant historic landscape comprising late medieval field systems and ridge and furrow, **restore** the historic field pattern of hawthorn hedgerows and hedgerow oak trees, and **enhance** the grassland and woodland network.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

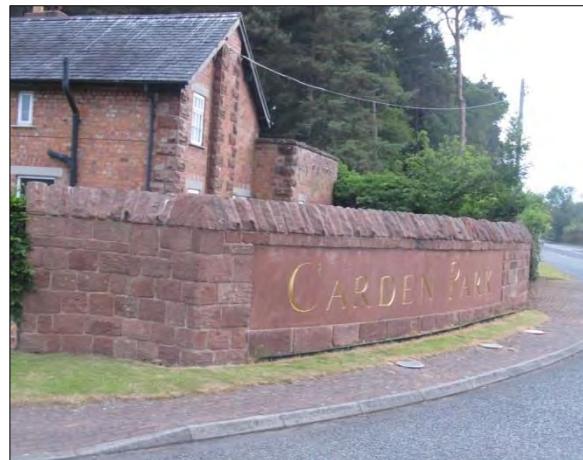
1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerow.
3. Consider opportunities to replace hedgerows where they have been lost.
4. Manage existing woodlands to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
5. Consider opportunities to plant simple pockets of trees and small blocks of woodland in field corners, on land of low ecological value and ensuring no detriment to historic assets, to ensure the continuation of these characteristic features.
6. Conserve the small to medium scale pattern of fields, particularly earlier field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
7. Maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil (for example as a result of increased crop growing).
8. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
9. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
10. Encourage sympathetic integration of golf courses through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries and existing woodland rather than planting of alien ornamental species - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
11. Conserve the areas of unimproved grassland that is of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.

12. Encourage the retention and management of field ponds and brooks that are of wildlife importance as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
13. Conserve and manage large scale earthworks, such as ridge and furrow, promoting sensitive agricultural practices in their vicinity (i.e. grazing not ploughing).
14. Planting within Carden should retain the diversity and distinctive mix of tree species: Scots pine, birch and oak on the higher sandstone cliff; hawthorn, oak and lime in the lower parkland; and appropriate wetland species around Carden brook and the field ponds. Avoid planting in areas of ecological value.
15. Conserve and manage earthworks, such as the remnants of Castle Hill Motte at Malpas, and the Round Barrow at Carden, promoting sensitive agricultural practices in their vicinity (i.e. grazing not ploughing).
16. Seek to replace coniferous woodlands with broadleaved woodlands.
17. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as kerbs and large scale signage.
18. Conserve views from high vantage points, including prominent views from within Carden, across the plain to the Clwydian hills to the west, and to St. Oswald's Church in Malpas. Consider opening up more views from new vantage points. Consider key views when planning locations for new woodland.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of villages, hamlets, halls and farmsteads and isolated cottages, retaining Malpas and No Mans Heath (in that order) as the main focus for development.
2. Conserve the local vernacular built form – timber-framed or simple red/orange brick buildings with steeply pitching slate/pantile roofs with distinctive gable parapets. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting.
3. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.

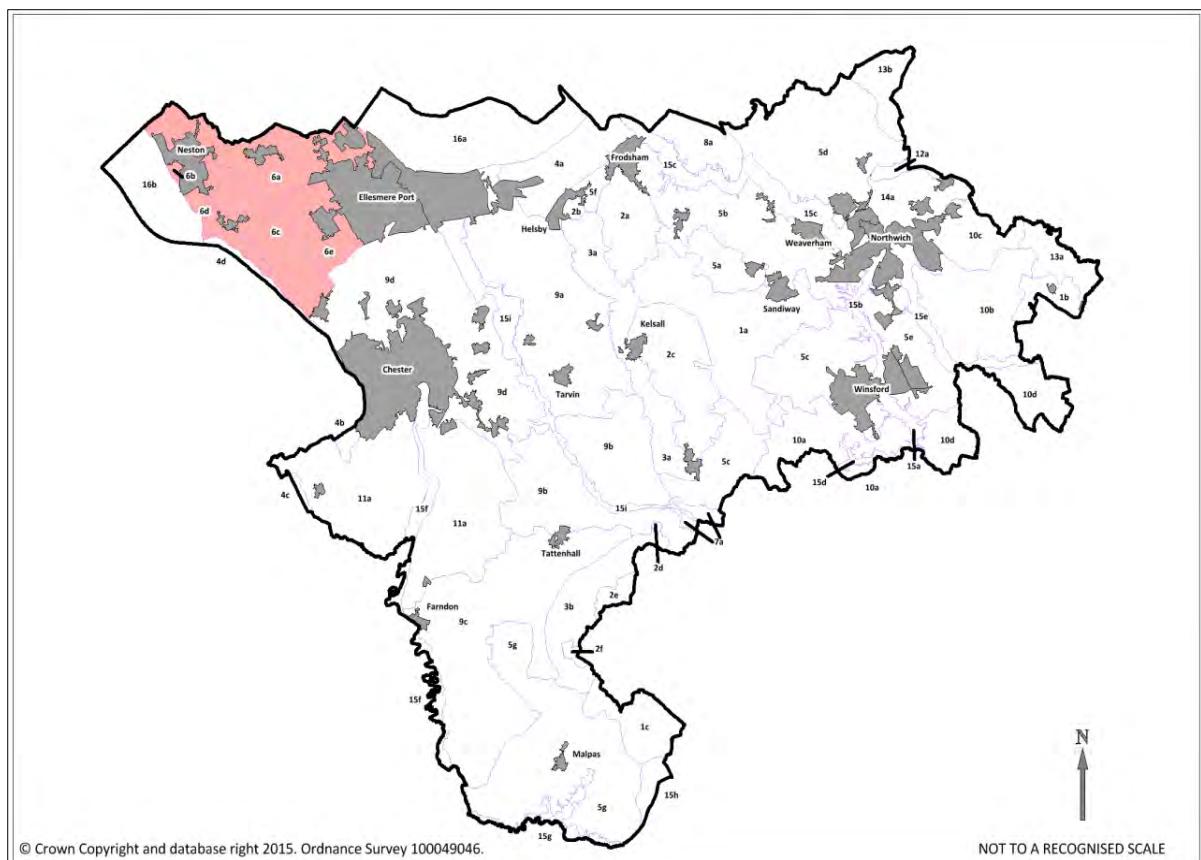
4. Soften built edges by introducing small scale planting schemes using native broadleaved species. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows rather than close-board fencing.
5. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
6. Conserve rural views from Bishop Bennet Way long distance footpath and consider views to the Clwydian Hills and Malpas Church, which provides a significant landmark especially when approaching the settlement from the south, in relation to any change.
7. Maintain the rural setting to villages and farmsteads which are features of the landscape, with specific reference to Malpas.
8. Consider views northwards and eastwards to the skyline backdrop of the wooded sandstone fringe and sandstone ridge in relation to any change.
9. Protect views to and from St. Oswald's Church, Malpas.
10. Refer to local documents, Village Design Statement (VDS) and Neighbourhood Plans when considering change.
11. Conserve the openness of the landscape between Malpas and Ebnal where the Candidate Key Settlement Gap is identified through which settlement identity and separation can be secured.



LCT 5: Undulating  
Enclosed Farmland

LCA 5g: *Malpas*

## LCT 6: ENCLOSED FARMLAND



### ***General Description***

This landscape character type is located on a peninsula formed by the Mersey and Dee estuaries. The landscape comprises low lying, very gently undulating or gently sloping topography and a distinctly rural, small to medium scale field pattern into which it is divided. Key characteristics are the strong field patterns, small woodlands, ponds and streams, nucleated rural villages and scattered farmsteads. Land use is a mix of arable and pasture.

The area was originally part of the Royal Forest of Wirral, cleared by the end of the Roman period for fuel and building materials, and subsequently colonised by heathland as shown by the names Heath Farm and Heath Hey – now almost completely lost as farming practices have expanded.

Woodlands form an important feature within this landscape and dominate many localities. Where these combine with an intact and prominent hedgerow system the scale of the landscape is effectively reduced by the increased enclosure.

Natural coastal scenery with long distance views westwards across the Dee contrasts with the built-up, predominantly industrial character of the eastern side of the area heavily influenced by the outskirts of Ellesmere Port, the M56 motorway corridor, other main roads and railway.

### ***Visual Character***

Many of the more elevated and open locations enjoy expansive views westward across the Dee estuary towards North Wales and the Clwydian Hills. There are views to the south towards the Shotton industrial area where both the Connah's Quay power station and the dramatic Dee Bridge

are visible. Where low tree cover and poor hedges allow more extensive views over very gently undulating farmland, large scale industrial works on the edge of Ellesmere Port can dominate the landscape and detract from the original agricultural character, exerting a strong visual influence over a wide area.

From low ground the landscape appears smaller in scale due to the increase in enclosure and the contained views where skylines are typically formed by hedgerow trees, woodland and farmsteads, with occasional church spires and electricity pylons emanating from Connah's Quay. At many locations tree cover appears to be high, an obvious departure from the adjacent Cheshire plain. This can be attributed to the intact hedgerow system, complemented by numerous small farm woodlands or coverts upon locally prominent areas of high ground.

In certain areas arable farming predominates, especially upon better-drained ground. Where this is associated with loss of hedgerows, post and wire fences and fewer hedgerow trees, the scale of the landscape increases considerably and views become more extensive.

### ***Physical Influences***

The topography of this type varies from sea level to a maximum height of around 70m AOD. The main A540 follows a straight, slightly elevated ridge through the centre of the area, gently sloping down towards the Dee estuary. There are localised areas of flatter ground.

Lowland heathlands show a strong association with the underlying geology and are found on Podsolic soils where glacial till overlies Triassic red mudstones and sandstones. Secondary calcium carbonate deposits are common at a depth of 1-2m in the till, and prior to the 19th century was dug and spread for agricultural improvement. These marl pits led to the creation of field ponds which were colonised by a rich variety of plants and animals from other wetland habitats of greater antiquity, for example meres and mosses. Vegetation succession has reduced many ponds to small, shallow features, over shaded with trees and with little open water.

Small, irregular ancient field enclosures and larger late post medieval enclosures are bounded by intermittent clipped hedgerows with an abundance of hedgerow trees. There are grass leys for pasture, although increasing areas are cultivated for silage or feed crops including cereals and maize.

Woodland is predominantly broadleaved, although there are areas of mixed and conifer plantations; levels are higher than those of the neighbouring plain and concentrated mainly upon former estates such as at Burton. Shotwick Wood is ancient broadleaved woodland. Small farm copses and coverts are associated with unimproved or semi-improved grassland habitats which have escaped modern farming practices. Large woodlands are increasingly being split into multiple parcels with different owners and management regimes.

Drainage is into the Dee estuary in the west and Mersey estuary in the east, with a network of small streams and drainage ditches.

The extensive estuarine habitats of the Dee estuary are of considerable wildlife and ornithological significance. Much of the farmland provides wildlife habitat, including for feeding and roosting birds.

### ***Cultural Influences***

Documentary (mainly Domesday Book) and place-name evidence (mainly Scandinavian and Anglo Saxon) suggests there wasn't much woodland on the Wirral by the time of the establishment of the Royal Forest.

The small to medium scale field pattern reflects irregular medieval fields created by the assarting of moss, heath and woodland and the regular fields reflecting post medieval improvement. Parts of the type are also enclosed from former Royal Forest. Associated with the earlier field systems is a network of footpaths, some of which may be of some antiquity.

Open land, where not farmed, often has uses such as grazing for horses, such as at Neston, or recreational uses offering opportunities for the enjoyment of the natural environment, including coastal footpath and cycleway and RSPB Burton Mere Wetlands reserve. The Wirral Country Park lies to the southwest of Willaston. Some small meadows of unimproved neutral grassland are local wildlife sites.

Settlement density is relatively high. The close proximity of a number of large urban areas, including Neston to the north, Burton in the central area, Saughall to the south and Capenhurst and Ellesmere Port to the east, has a significant influence upon landscape character. Some nucleated villages, such as Willaston and Hooton, have seen 20th century expansion reflecting their location close to larger places of work and the communications network. The urban influence is further reinforced where a number of busy highways such as the A540 to Liverpool and the A550 and A5117, and the Birkenhead-Chester railway dissect the area.

Elsewhere settlement comprises a mix of small picturesque villages such as Puddington and Shotwick, Conservation Areas, surrounded by a dispersed pattern of hamlets, farms and halls linked by a network of rural lanes, bridleways and footpaths.

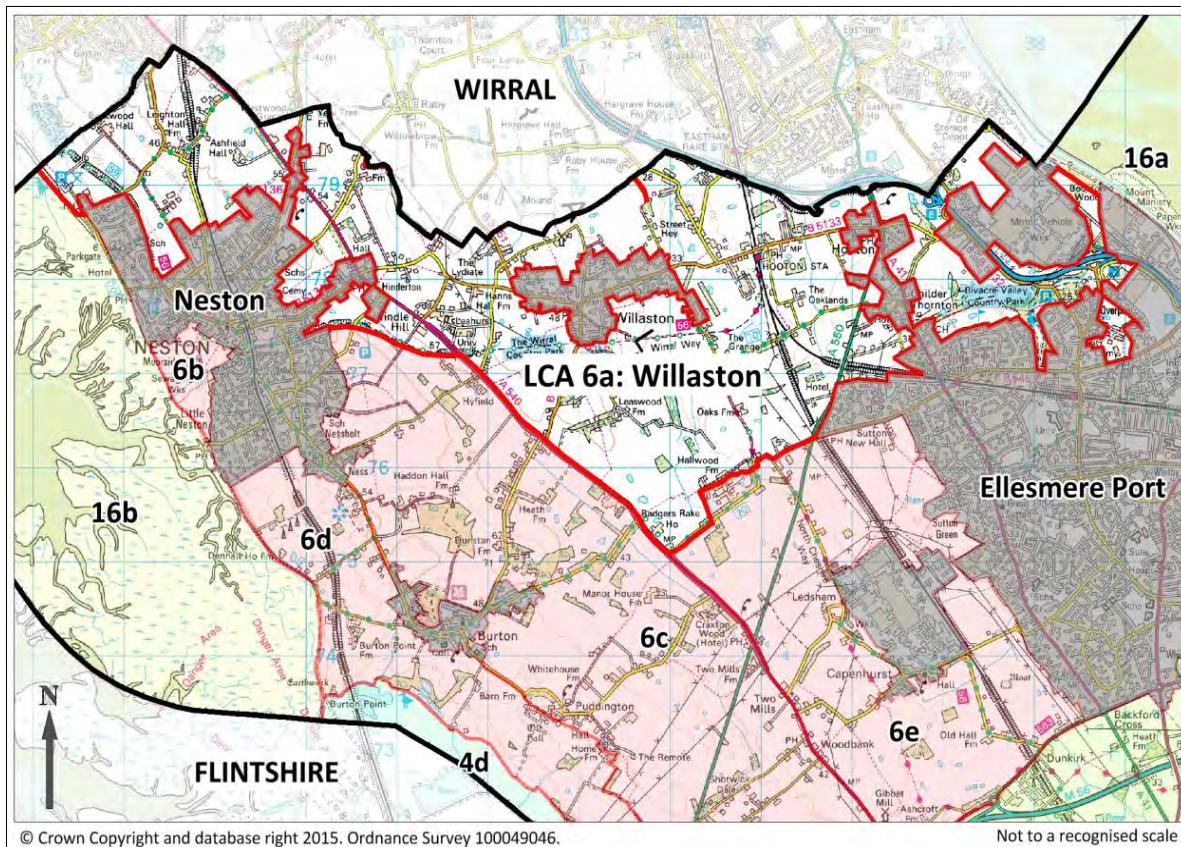
Building materials are commonly brick, in the areas of modern housing expansion where this takes the form of a range of colours and textures, rough hurl render with occasional red sandstone vernacular domestic buildings and boundaries. There are a small number of old houses including Shotwick Hall (Grade II\*) and Puddington Old Hall (Grade II). Impressive examples of 19th century black and white timber framed buildings survive.

Sites of archaeological interest span a vast period of time and include an Iron Age promontory fort at Burton Point and a heavy WWII anti-aircraft gun-site at Puddington. There are two Grade II Registered Parks and Gardens from Heritage England's National Heritage List for England – Ness Botanic Gardens and Burton Manor. There is a medieval Deer Park at Shotwick. The Neston Cutting, which is now a disused railway has been designated as a RIGG.

There are **five Landscape Character Areas** within LCT 6:

- 6a: Willaston**
- 6b: Neston**
- 6c: Neston to Saughall**
- 6d: Ness, Burton, Puddington & Shotwick Slopes**
- 6e: Capenhurst Plateau**

## LCA 6a: Willaston



### Location and Boundaries

The *Willaston Enclosed Farmland* landscape character type is located towards the north-western edge of CWaC, between the *Mudflats and Saltmarsh* of the Dee and Mersey Estuaries. It extends from the northern boundary with Wirral borough southwards to the *Capenhurst Plateau*, also within the *Enclosed Farmland* character type, and Ellesmere Port.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 6a: Willaston***

- A bedrock geology of Mercia Mudstones covered by a mantle of glacial drift deposits that gives rise to a gently undulating topography between 5m and 70m AOD
- Glacio-fluvial deposits mask the underlying mudstones giving rise to well drained sandy and coarse loamy soils. These soils support a mixture of dairy farming on short term grassland, and arable crops
- Close proximity to a number of settlements and other urban influences including main roads and industrial areas, has a significant effect on the character of some areas
- Small to medium scale fields formerly part of the Royal Forest of Wirral – patches of small, semi-regular ancient medieval enclosure, such as north of Willaston, regular post-medieval enclosures, and larger, mostly regular fields resulting from reorganisation of earlier field systems, such as south of Willaston
- Fields are mostly bounded by a strong, intact, hedgerow system, with hedgerow trees prominent in some areas but less so in others. Where these are accompanied by blocks of woodland, copses and wooded linear screening belts there is a strongly verdant character, such as on the edge of settlement and around manor houses and industrial areas
- Sandstone walls and metal 'Cheshire Railings' are also boundary features in some areas
- Field ponds are a feature of the landscape around Willaston, with a large lake and mixed ornamental plantation at The Duckery to the east of Leaswood Farm
- Hallwood Farm Marl Pit is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Streams are minor and inconspicuous, but Rivacre Brook provides a valuable, wooded green valley corridor and local wildlife interest through Ellesmere Port and out to the River Mersey
- A small area to the north of Neston is designated at the county level as part of the Dee Coastal Area of Special County Value (ASCV) by the former Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council for its high landscape quality
- Large manor houses and halls, most are listed buildings, some associated with former farm estates, including Backwood Hall, Leighton Hall Farm, Ashfield Hall Farm, Hinderton Hall, The Lydiate, Hanns Hall Farm and Inglewood Manor, often with impressive entrances and drives, lodge houses and set in extensive parkland
- A number of plant nurseries, including Greenwood Nursery (part of the Greenwood Group) to the west of Willaston. Other large land holdings, including the University of Liverpool's Leahurst Campus and industrial units at Hooton Station
- Opportunities for recreation are provided by the Wirral Country Park and Sustrans NCR 56 Wirral Way Recreational Route (dismantled railway) which also links to the North Cheshire Way long distance footpath, Ellesmere Port Golf Club and Rivacre Valley Country Park north of Ellesmere Port
- Settlement is centred along roads; the main settlement of Willaston has expanded along the B5151 and B5133, with smaller nucleated villages at Hooton and Childer Thornton along the main A550 and A41, whilst linear development has occurred along the 'B' roads radiating out from Neston and along the main A540; farmsteads, cottages and large detached properties are scattered throughout the area
- A range of building materials throughout the area, but typically brick (in a range of colours and textures) with occasional red sandstone vernacular domestic buildings and boundaries; impressive examples of traditional black and white timber framed buildings
- Landscape scale, enclosure and views are dependent on location; from small scale enclosure where views are limited by hedgerows, trees and woodland, to larger scale open views from elevated vantage points such as north of Neston with expansive views westward across the Dee estuary towards North Wales and the Clwydian Hills
- Electricity pylons, the Birkenhead-Chester railway and M53 to the north are visually intrusive

## ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

### **Natural / Physical**

- The gently undulating topography, between 5m and 70m AOD, generally falling from a high point along the A540 Chester High Road near Windle Hill eastwards to the River Mersey and westwards to the River Dee, flattening out to the south;
- Glacio-fluvial deposits mask the underlying mudstones giving rise to well drained sandy and coarse loamy soils. These soils support a mixture of dairying on short term grassland, and arable crops;
- Small to medium scale fields mostly bounded by a strong, intact, hedgerow system, with hedgerow trees prominent in some areas but less so in others;
- The blocks of woodland, copses and wooded linear screening belts that give a strongly verdant character to some areas, particularly around Hinderton and Willaston, south of Willaston, within parkland around manor houses and halls, the industrial areas at Hooton Station and between Ellesmere Port and the M53;
- Field ponds are a feature of the landscape around Willaston and to the south, where there is a large lake and mixed ornamental plantation at The Duckery to the east of Leaswood Farm;
- Hallwood Farm Marl Pit is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI);
- Streams are minor and inconspicuous, but Rivacre Brook follows a steep, wooded green valley corridor through Ellesmere Port and out to the River Mersey, with a diverse ground flora typical of ancient woodland and small patches of species-rich neutral grassland of local wildlife interest;
- A small area to the north of Neston/Parkgate is designated at the county level as part of the Dee Coastal Area of Special County Value (ASCV) by the former Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council for its high landscape quality – this area to the north of Boathouse Lane comprises mixed arable and pasture fields, including equestrian facilities associated with Barkwood Hall and Farm, gently falling from 60m to 5m AOD with extensive, panoramic views across the Dee Estuary to the Welsh hills.

### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The small to medium scale fields that were formerly part of the Royal Forest of Wirral – patches of small, semi-regular ancient medieval enclosure, such as north of Willaston, regular post-medieval enclosures, and larger, mostly regular fields resulting from reorganisation of earlier field systems, such as south of Willaston;
- Areas of parkland around manor houses, halls and large estate farms, such as Backwood Hall, Leighton Hall Farm, Ashfield Hall Farm, Hinderton Hall, The Lydiate, Hanns Hall Farm and Inglewood Manor, often with impressive entrances and drives, lodge houses and set in extensive parkland;
- A number of listed buildings are scattered throughout the area, including most of the manor houses and halls, and The Old Mill on Mill Lane to the north of Willaston; the historic core of Willaston at the junction of the B5151 and B5133 is a Conservation Area, as is the site of Parkgate Old Baths;
- The number of plant nurseries, including Greenwood Nursery (part of the Greenwood Group) to the west of Willaston, is an indication of the quality of the soils;
- Opportunities for recreation are provided by the Wirral Country Park south of Willaston, Rivacre Valley Country Park and the Ellesmere Port Golf Club north of Ellesmere Port;
- Passive recreation is catered for by the Sustrans National Cycle Route 56 Wirral Way Recreational Route (utilising the dismantled railway south of Willaston) which also links to the North Cheshire Way long distance footpath.

### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Close proximity to a number of settlements (Neston, Ellesmere Port and Eastham) and other urban influences (A41, A540, A550, M53, the Birkenhead-Chester railway, industrial areas at Hooton Station, North Road Industrial Estate including the Vauxhall car plant north of the M53 and the massive Capenhurst industrial complex to the south which acts as a focus for numerous overhead power lines) has a significant effect on the character of some areas;
- Settlement is centred along roads; the main settlement of Willaston has expanded along the B5151 and B5133, with smaller nucleated villages at Hooton and Childer Thornton along the main A550 and A41, whilst linear development has occurred along the 'B' roads radiating out from Neston and along the main A540;
- Manor houses, halls, farmsteads, cottages and large detached properties are scattered throughout the area; some of the manor houses and halls have been divided into luxury apartments and mews houses e.g. The Lydiate and Leighton Hall;
- A range of building materials is evident throughout the area, but typically brick (in a range of colours and textures) with occasional red sandstone vernacular domestic buildings and boundaries; impressive examples of traditional black and white timber framed buildings at Inglewood Manor Hotel and The Brook Meadow Hotel;
- Other large land holdings, including the University of Liverpool's Leahurst Campus and industrial units at Hooton Station;
- Sandstone walls and metal 'Cheshire Railings' are boundary features in some areas.

### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Generally perceived as a pleasant agricultural landscape along winding country lanes, but with significant intrusion from 20<sup>th</sup> century residential and industrial development, busy transport infrastructure and other man-made structures significantly affect views and tranquillity;
- Close proximity to a number of settlements and other urban influences including main roads and industrial areas, has a significant effect on the character of some areas;
- Away from the intrusive features, the simplicity of the agricultural land use and the pattern of elements such as hedgerows and trees provides landscape unity, texture and seasonal colour;
- Landscape scale, enclosure and views are dependent on location; from small scale enclosure where views are limited by hedgerows, trees and woodland, to larger scale open views from elevated vantage points such as north of Neston with expansive views westward across the Dee estuary towards North Wales and the Clwydian Hills;
- Electricity pylons are visually intrusive features on the skyline in many views from within and beyond the character area with the exception of the high quality landscape to the north of Neston/Parkgate;
- The presence of woodland and hedgerow trees means there is some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

### **Landscape Condition**

The *Willaston Enclosed Farmland* is in active agricultural use and is managed for these land uses. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network and some over-mature hedgerow trees. Some woodlands are not being actively managed. There is relatively little unimproved species rich grassland remaining. There are significant areas of 20th century residential and industrial development, especially alongside roads, that give the landscape a 'suburban' appearance in many places.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 6a: *Willaston*:**

- Green Belt;
- Area designated at the county level as part of the Dee Coastal Area of Special County Value (ASCV) to the north of Neston/Parkgate;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

#### ***Forces for Landscape Change***

##### **Past change**

- 20<sup>th</sup> century development, in particular ribbon development alongside roads has resulted in the gradual suburbanisation of significant parts of the area;
- Conversion of manor houses and halls into luxury apartments and mews houses has included the incorporation of inappropriate materials such as fencing, car parking, kerbing and signage, with a suburbanising effect;
- Conversion of barns and outbuildings into residential development, e.g. Leighton Hall;
- Agricultural intensification has resulted in loss of unimproved and species-rich neutral grassland;
- Limited management of field ponds has resulted in some silting up and drying out due to natural processes of vegetation succession and overshadowing from trees;
- Erection of large structures out of scale with the landscape e.g. Aldi distribution depot on the northern edge of Neston;
- Farm diversification including equestrian facilities such as stables and paddocks.

##### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 6a: *Willaston***

- Pressure for residential development, particularly on the edge of Neston, Willaston and Hooton;
- Pressure for employment/industrial development especially where there are good communication links to main roads including the M53;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use;
- Expansion of plant nurseries with erection of modern portal sheds and glasshouses;
- Pressure for built development associated with the M53 and other main roads that pass through the landscape;
- Planting of small woodlands and hedgerow trees (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan) could help to screen developments and transport infrastructure.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 6a: Willaston***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the traditional historic field pattern of small to medium scale semi-regular fields bounded by hedgerows and trees, and **enhance** woodland cover to reduce the influence of urban intrusions on the landscape.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of existing hedges and new planting ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Manage existing woodlands to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
3. Consider opportunities to plant trees and small woodlands as a screen to reduce the influence of urban intrusions on the landscape and to ensure the continuation of these characteristic landscape features. Avoid planting in areas of ecological value and ensure no detriment to historic assets.
4. Conserve the small to medium scale pattern of fields, particularly earlier field systems around Willaston, which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
5. Use ASCV designation to protect the area north of Neston/Parkgate from inappropriate development.
6. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors, and create ponds.
7. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
8. Encourage sympathetic integration of conversions of manor houses and halls through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries and existing woodland rather than planting of alien ornamental species - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
9. Conserve the remnant fragments of unimproved grassland that is of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.
10. Encourage the retention and management of field ponds and brooks that are of wildlife importance as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.

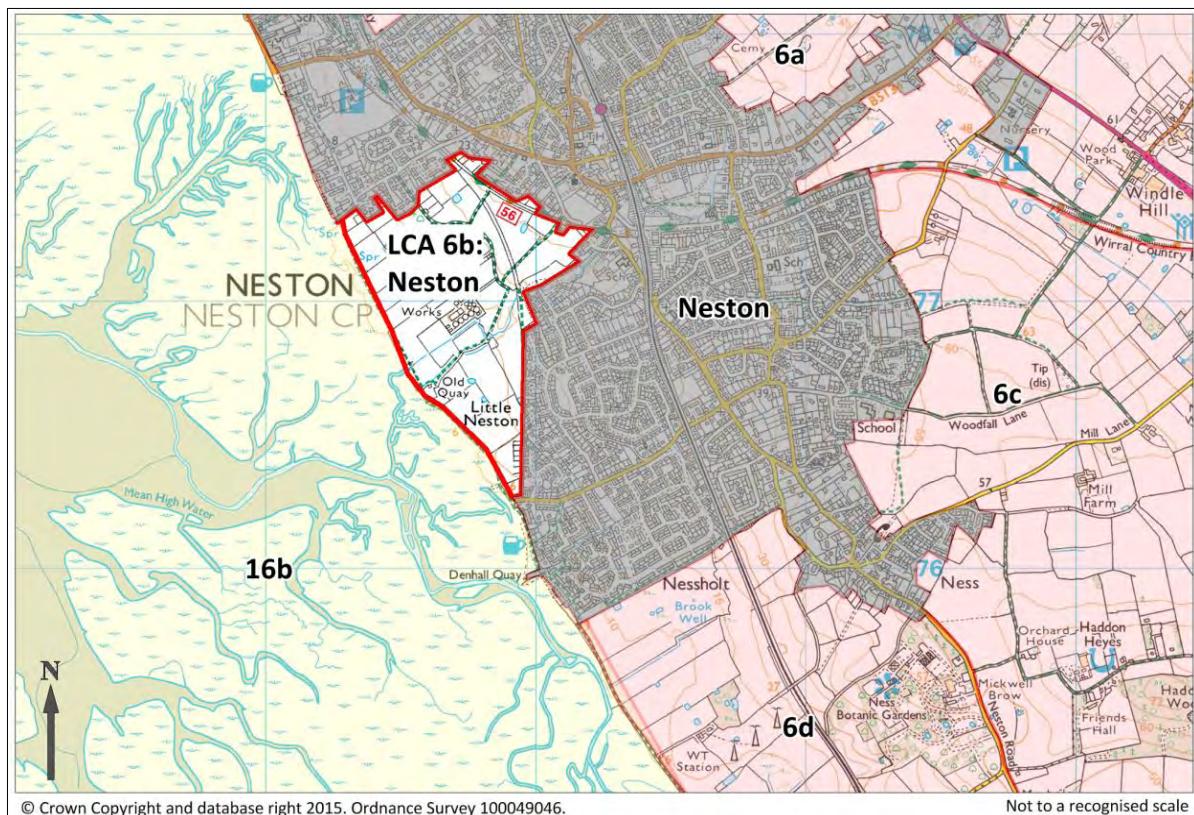
11. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads and other intrusive features, and conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as kerbs and large scale signage.
12. Conserve views from high vantage points, including views across the Dee Estuary to the Clwydian hills to the west, and consider opening up more views from new vantage points. Consider key views when planning locations for new woodland.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of villages, hamlets, halls, farmsteads and isolated cottages, retaining Willaston as the main focus for development.
2. Ensure the separate identities of settlements are retained by avoiding development that would lead to coalescence, e.g. retain the narrow open gap between Hooton and Childer Thornton.
3. Conserve the local vernacular built form where this is still in evidence – timber-framed or simple red-orange brick buildings. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Encourage retention / introduction of boundary sandstone walls and 'Cheshire Railings' and resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting.
4. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
5. Soften built edges and aim to integrate large intrusive structures into the landscape using native planting, and ensure proposals are accompanied by enhancement of existing hedgerows, trees and woodland in the vicinity of the site to ensure the landscape structure around any new facility is maintained / improved.
6. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
7. Conserve rural views from long distance footpaths and consider views to the Clwydian Hills in relation to any change.
8. Maintain the rural setting to villages and farmsteads which are features of the landscape.



## LCA 6b: Neston



### Location and Boundaries

The **Neston Enclosed Farmland** landscape character type is a very small character area enclosed to the north, east and south by the built up suburbs of Neston. To the west lies the *Dee Estuary*, a contrasting area of open Mudflats and Saltmarsh.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 6b: Neston***

- A low lying area (0-20m AOD) which slopes gently westwards down towards the coast
- The strong field pattern of post medieval regular, rectangular small to medium sized fields bounded by hedgerows and trees
- Fields are used as horse paddocks, with shelters evident in a number of fields
- Small woodland blocks in field corners
- Linear wooded green corridors along two dismantled railways provide enclosure to the eastern part of the character area, whilst tall relatively dense vegetation along the northern and southern boundaries allows only glimpsed views of Neston
- An area of small ponds and unimproved neutral grassland in the north-eastern corner, known as 'The Intake', is recognised as a local wildlife site
- A series of springs and ponds located across the character area
- A predominantly open, unsettled area with only one small farmstead and a couple of cottages towards the centre of the area - a sewage works occupies a similar location
- Designated at the county level as part of the Dee Coastal Area of Special County Value (ASCV) by the former Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council for its high landscape quality
- Dismantled railways and other evidence of past coal mining activity close to the shoreline in the southern corner at Little Neston – now reclaimed with trees and shrubs
- 'Old Quay' was located on a tidal creek at the junction of Great and Little Neston providing evidence of the past importance of the areas location on the coast. Sandstone walls and steps are retained along the old shoreline
- Panoramic views westwards across the Dee Estuary towards north Wales and the Clwydian Hills from most parts of the character area, including from a popular footpath that follows the shore line
- Other rights of way along field boundaries and Old Quay Lane provide access between the estuary inland to Neston, including links to the Sustrans NCR 56 Wirral Way Recreational Route / Wirral Country Park (disused railway)
- Extensive views to the south towards the Shotton industrial area where both the Connah's Quay power station and the dramatic new Dee Bridge are conspicuous
- Tall structures at the sewage works and Neston Church provide visual landmarks inland

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### ***Natural / Physical***

- The underlying Mercia Mudstones covered by a mantle of glacial till deposits (boulder clay) which give rise to a predominance of poorly draining clay soils;
- A low lying area between 0-20m AOD sloping gently westwards down from Neston towards the coast;
- A series of springs and ponds are located across the character area, indicating the impervious nature of the underlying clays;
- The fields bounded by hedgerows, tall scrub and hedgerow trees; hedges are generally tall and un-trimmed but kept short alongside Old Quay Lane;
- Small woodland blocks in field corners, linear wooded green corridors along disused railways, and tall, relatively dense vegetation along the northern and southern boundaries are features of the landscape;
- The Intake, a local wildlife site, is an area of unimproved neutral grassland with yellow rattle and sea clubrush and small ponds with lesser reedmace and cyperus sedge.

### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The strong field pattern of post medieval regular, rectangular small to medium sized fields (4ha-8ha) that divides the landscape;
- Fields are mostly used as horse paddocks, with shelters evident in a number of fields – a silage crop is taken from some fields;
- Small woodland blocks in field corners, linear wooded green corridors along disused railways, and tall, relatively dense vegetation along the northern and southern boundaries contribute to the perception of a small scale, enclosed landscape when looking inland;
- This enclosure contrasts with the open western boundary of the character area adjacent to the Dee Estuary which provides an opportunity to observe the wildlife of the marshland in the near distance, a quality recognised in its designation at the county level as part of the Dee Coastal Area of Special County Value (ASCV);
- The dismantled railways and other evidence of past coal mining activity close to the shoreline in the southern corner at Little Neston;
- The Old Quay or “New Haven” was first mentioned in 1541, located on a tidal creek at the junction of Great and Little Neston. It was used throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century but by 1732 it had become known as the Old Quay and had been superseded by the quay at Parkgate;
- Good public access through the area via public rights of way, including a popular footpath that follows the shore line, with links between the estuary inland to Neston and the Sustrans NCR 56 Wirral Way Recreational Route / Wirral Country Park (disused railway);
- Good public access provides an opportunity to observe the internationally important populations of waders and wildfowl, and other wildlife on the Dee marshland in the near distance.

### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Enclosed to the north, east and south by the built up suburbs of Neston, the character area is predominantly open and unsettled with one small farmstead and a couple of cottages towards the centre of the area - a sewage works occupies the same location;
- The cottages are built from sandstone and red brick with white wash;
- Sandstone walling and steps around the Old Quay.

### **Perceptual / Visual**

- A quiet, peaceful landscape despite being close to Neston;
- The strong field pattern of tall hedgerows and trees, small woodland blocks in field corners, linear wooded green corridors along disused railways, and tall, relatively dense vegetation along the northern and southern boundaries contribute to the perception of a small scale, enclosed landscape when looking inland;
- However, the character area is distinctly west facing with open, panoramic views across the Dee Estuary into north Wales and the Clwydian Hills;
- Extensive views to the south towards the Shotton industrial area where both the Connah’s Quay power station and the dramatic new Dee Bridge are conspicuous;
- Tall structures at the sewage works and Neston Church provide visual landmarks inland.

### **Landscape Condition**

The grass paddocks, horse shelters, tall un-trimmed hedges and post and wire fencing, and stored materials around the farmstead provide an air of neglect. However, there is evidence of hedgerow gapping up with new hedge planting, and hedges and fencing around the farmstead and cottages in the central area and along Old Quay Lane are well maintained.

**CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 6b: *Neston*:**

- Green Belt;
- Part of the Dee Coastal Area of Special County Value (ASCV);
- Natural heritage sites of local importance.

***Forces for Landscape Change***

**Past change**

- Limited boundary management in some areas, with evidence of decline in hedgerow boundaries; however there is evidence of new hedgerow planting in other areas;
- Increase in fencing to replace hedgerow boundaries leading to loss of historic field pattern;
- Steady intensification of horse grazing has resulted in pasture 'improvement' and the gradual loss of unimproved grassland.

**Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 6b: *Neston***

- Pressure for residential development with the growth of the surrounding Neston housing estates;
- Possible loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees and replacement with fencing leading to loss of historic field pattern ;
- Decline in woodland management could reduce the effectiveness of surrounding woodland belts and open the area up to views from Neston;
- Reduction, fragmentation and deterioration of ponds and unimproved grassland habitats;
- Increase in provision of equestrian facilities including fencing, buildings.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 6b: Neston***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the traditional historic field pattern of small scale regular fields bounded by hedgerows and trees, and to **conserve** its enclosed inland character and open estuary coastline with extensive views.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerow.
3. Consider opportunities to replace hedgerows where they have been lost.
4. Conserve the small scale pattern of fields, particularly earlier field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
5. Use ASCV designation to protect the character area from inappropriate development.
6. Support retention of pasture and grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the landscape.
7. Seek opportunities to re-create herb rich hay pastures.
8. Increase the biodiversity of the grassland paddocks – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
9. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
10. Conserve the area of unimproved neutral grassland at 'The Intake' that is of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.
11. Conserve and manage remaining field ponds and springs that are of importance for biodiversity as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
12. Manage existing woodlands to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
13. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as kerbs and signage.

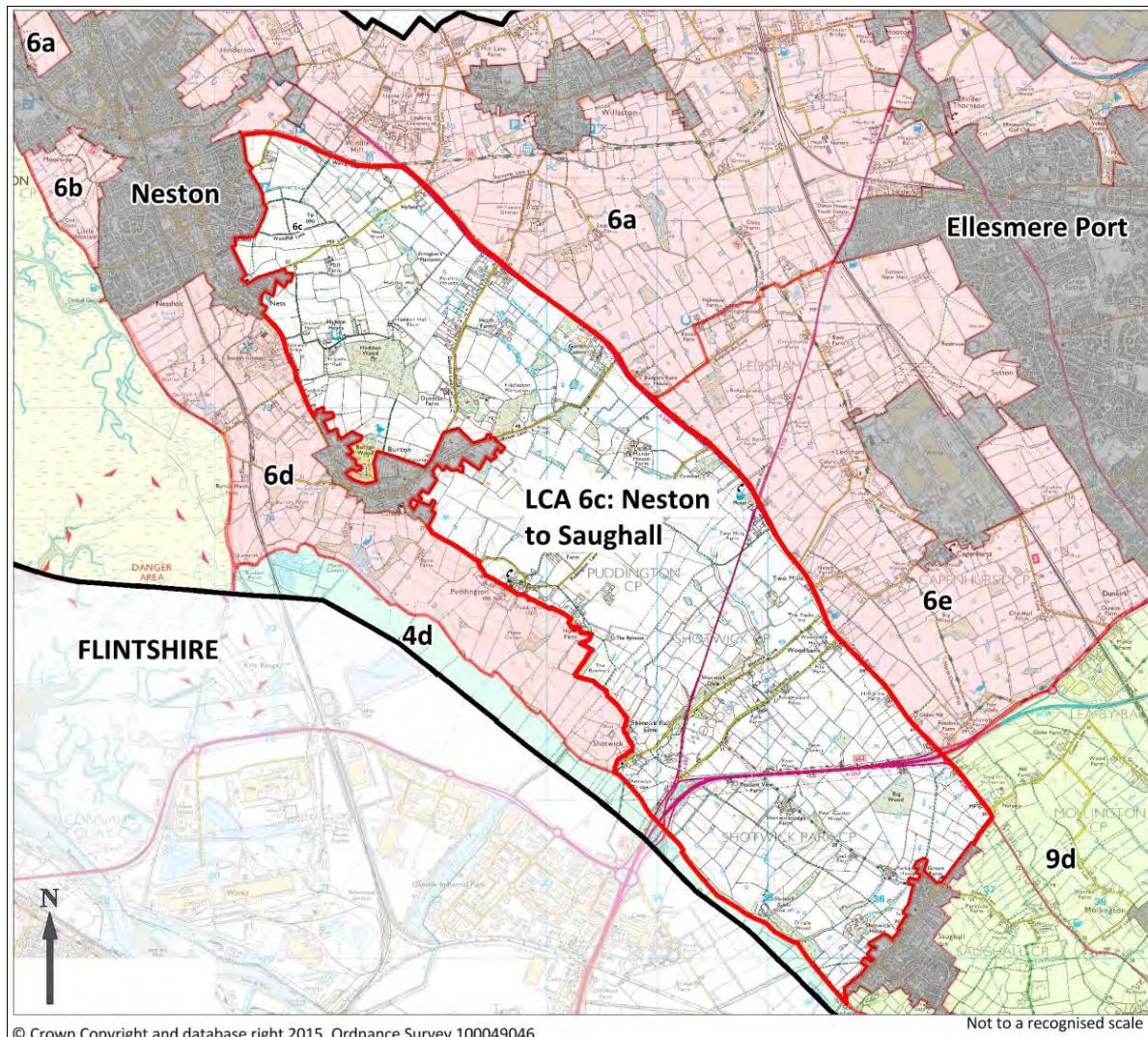
14. Conserve panoramic views over the Dee Estuary and views inland to Neston Church. Consider these key views when planning locations for new planting.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the essentially unsettled nature of the landscape, concentrating built development to the centre of the character area around the existing farmstead and cottages.
2. Conserve the local vernacular built form - red brick/sandstone or white washed buildings. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting.
3. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows.
4. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
5. Soften built edges by introducing small scale planting schemes using native broadleaved species.
6. Ensure equestrian development does not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
7. Consider retention of the sandstone walls and steps at the Old Quay along the old shoreline as a legacy to the past importance of the area as a transhipment point.
8. Consider views from the popular footpath that follows the shore line and from the other public rights of way across the area in any new development proposals.
9. Conserve panoramic views over the Dee Estuary and views inland to Neston Church, and consider these key views when planning locations for new development.



## LCA 6c: Neston to Saughall



### Location and Boundaries

The *Neston to Saughall Enclosed Farmland* character area extends from Neston in the west to Saughall in the east. The A540 defines its northern boundary. To the south the ground falls more steeply on the *Ness, Burton, Puddington & Shotwick Slopes Enclosed Farmland* before flattening out on the *Burton and Shotwick Drained Marsh*.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 6c: Neston to Saughall***

- A bedrock geology of Mercia Mudstones covered by a mantle of glacial drift deposits that gives rise to a gently undulating topography between 5m and 72m AOD
- Glacio-fluvial deposits mask the underlying mudstones giving rise to coarse loamy soils and lighter soils on higher ground less influenced by glacial deposits. These soils generally support arable crops within the larger exposed fields, with grazing on the smaller pastures
- Small to medium scale fields in a rectilinear pattern of small, semi-regular ancient medieval enclosure such as around Puddington, regular post-medieval enclosures, and larger, mostly regular fields resulting from reorganisation of earlier field systems e.g. fields between Puddington and Shotwick
- Fields are mostly bounded by a strong, intact, hedgerow system, with hedgerow trees - where these are accompanied by blocks of woodland, copses and plantations there is a strongly verdant character
- Broadleaf, conifer and mixed woodlands form an important feature in some areas e.g. north of Burton, between Shotwick and Saughall and on the escarpment of the Old River Dee, which has species rich ground flora
- Area to the north of Burton is designated at the county level as part of the Dee Coastal Area of Special County Value (ASCV) by the former Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council for its high landscape quality
- Sandstone walls and metal 'Cheshire Railings' are also boundary features in some areas
- Minor roads and sunken green lanes respond to the topography, winding their way from the A540 to Burton and the small picturesque historic villages of Puddington and Shotwick dotted along the area's southern boundary; ribbon development lies along the roads either as continuous cottages such as that along Dunstan Lane north of Burton, or dispersed cottages and farmsteads
- Shotwick Brook follows a narrow, wooded, steeply incised valley through Shotwick Dale and Shotwick Wood, ancient broadleaf woodland
- Other minor streams and brooks; mill ponds and field ponds are a feature of the landscape
- Conservation Areas at Burton, Puddington and Shotwick, with numerous listed buildings including Puddington Old Hall and Shotwick Hall; the site of Shotwick Castle and a heavy anti-aircraft gun-site at Puddington are Scheduled Monuments
- Building materials are commonly red-orange brick with slate roofs in a simple design
- Urbanising influence of Neston and Saughall on the boundaries of the area, together main road corridors (A540, A550 and A5117); road junctions are particularly intrusive with commercial development such as petrol stations, car showrooms at Two Mills, garden centre etc.
- Recreational opportunities provided by access through Burton Wood nature reserve managed by the National Trust, the Wirral Country Park and Sustrans NCR 56 Wirral Way Recreational Route (dismantled railway), NCR 563 alongside the A5117, and equestrian facilities at Haddon House (The Wirral Riding Centre)
- Electricity power lines cross the southern half of the area from the Deeside power stations and are visually prominent
- From the southern boundary there are expansive views westward across the Dee estuary towards north Wales and the Clwydian Hills; also views to the south towards the Shotton industrial area where both the Connah's Quay power station and the dramatic new Dee Bridge are visible

## ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

### **Natural / Physical**

- The gently undulating topography, between 5m and 72m AOD. North of Burton the topography rises from the A540 to a wooded ridge, before gently falling southwards to the Dee Estuary; elsewhere the A540 follows the ridge of high ground, topography gently sloping southwards to the Dee;
- Glacio-fluvial deposits mask the underlying mudstones giving rise to coarse loamy soils and lighter soils on higher ground less influenced by glacial deposits. These soils generally support arable crops within the larger exposed fields, with grazing on the smaller pastures
- Small to medium scale fields (4ha-8ha) mostly bounded by a strong, intact, hedgerow system, with hedgerow trees prominent in some areas but less so in others. Where these are accompanied by blocks of woodland, copses and plantations there is a strongly verdant character;
- Broadleaved, conifer and mixed woodlands form an important feature within this landscape and dominate many localities, in particular north of Burton (e.g. Haddon Wood, Burton Wood and ancient woodland alongside Mudhouse Lane), between Shotwick and Saughall (e.g. Big Wood and Dingle Wood) and a strip of ancient woodland on the escarpment of the Old River Dee, which has species rich ground flora;
- Shotwick Brook follows an inconspicuous course parallel with the A540 before falling through a narrow, wooded, steeply incised valley through Shotwick Dale and to the east of the village; Shotwick Wood is ancient broadleaf woodland;
- Other minor streams and brooks, mill ponds and field ponds are a feature of the landscape and provide a valuable habitat for a diverse number of wetland species;
- An area to the north of Burton is designated at the county level as part of the Dee Coastal Area of Special County Value (ASCV) by the former Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council for its high landscape quality.

### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The area was originally part of the Royal Forest of Wirral, cleared by the end of the Roman period for fuel and building materials, and subsequently colonised by heathland as shown by the names Heath Farm and Heath Hey – now almost completely lost as farming practices have expanded;
- The small to medium scale field pattern of small, semi-regular ancient medieval enclosure, such as around Puddington and Shotwick / Woodbank, regular post-medieval enclosures, and larger, mostly regular fields resulting from reorganisation of earlier field systems e.g. fields between Puddington and Shotwick;
- Conservation Areas at Burton, Puddington and Shotwick, with numerous listed buildings including Puddington Old Hall and Shotwick Hall; the site of Shotwick Castle and a heavy anti-aircraft gun-site at Puddington are Scheduled Monuments;
- Opportunities for recreation are provided by access through Burton Wood nature reserve managed by the National Trust, the Wirral Country Park and Sustrans NCR 56 Wirral Way Recreational Route (dismantled railway), NCR 563 alongside the A5117, and equestrian facilities at Haddon House (The Wirral Riding Centre).

### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Minor roads and sunken green lanes respond to the topography, winding their way from the A540 to Burton and the small picturesque historic villages of Puddington and Shotwick dotted along the area's southern boundary;
- In contrast the A540, A550 and A5117 are straight, major roads that cut across the area with no integration with the landscape;

- Ribbon development lies along the roads either as a continuous line of dwellings such as that along Dunstan Lane north of Burton, or dispersed cottages and farmsteads;
- A range of building materials is evident throughout the area, but typically brick (in a range of colours and textures) with slate roofs in a simple design;
- Sandstone walls and metal 'Cheshire Railings' are boundary features in some areas;
- Urbanising influence of Neston and Saughall on the boundaries of the area, together main road corridors (A540, A550 and A5117); road junctions are particularly intrusive with commercial development such as petrol stations, car showrooms at Two Mills, garden centre etc.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Generally a quiet, rural landscape but with features that detract from the overall sense of tranquillity whilst providing sensitive visual receptors, in particular the main 'A' roads and the presence of settlements on the edge of the character area;
- Away from the intrusive features, the simplicity of the agricultural land use and the pattern of elements such as hedgerows and trees provides landscape unity, texture and seasonal colour;
- Red sandstone and brick contrast with the green pasture, providing warm colours in the landscape;
- The farmed landscape gives an impression of being manicured and 'tamed';
- Landscape scale, enclosure and views are dependent on location; from small scale enclosure where views are limited by hedgerows, trees and woodland, to larger scale open views from the southern boundary westward across the Dee estuary towards north Wales and the Clwydian Hills;
- Also views to the south towards the Shotton industrial area where both the Connah's Quay power station and the dramatic new Dee Bridge are visible;
- Electricity power lines cross the southern half of the area from the Deeside power stations and are visually prominent;
- The presence of woodland and hedgerow trees means there is some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

#### **Landscape Condition**

The *Neston to Saughall Enclosed Farmland* is in active agricultural use and is managed for these land uses. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps and some over-mature hedgerow trees. There is very little unimproved grassland or heathland remaining. Although the landscape generally has an appearance of being 'well cared for', development along the A540 and in particular at road junctions where commercial development such as petrol stations, car showrooms at Two Mills, garden centre etc. give the landscape a 'suburban' appearance.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 6c: *Neston to Saughall*:**

- Green Belt;
- Area designated at the county level as part of the Dee Coastal Area of Special County Value (ASCV) to the north, south and west of Burton;
- Natural heritage sites of local importance;
- Regionally / locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

## **Forces for Landscape Change**

### **Past change**

- Loss of heathland and unimproved grassland due to agricultural intensification;
- Loss of the traditional nucleated settlement pattern with piecemeal dispersal of farmsteads and cottages along minor roads;
- Loss of water mills and windmills that were typical throughout the landscape (hence the name Two Mills);
- Construction of straight, major roads that cut across the area with no integration with the landscape;
- 20<sup>th</sup> century development along the A540 has resulted in the suburbanisation of significant parts of the road corridor;
- Limited management of field ponds has resulted in some silting up and drying out due to natural processes of vegetation succession and overshadowing from trees;
- A shift from grassland to crops, fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Erection of large barns and other farm buildings out of scale with the landscape;
- Farm diversification including equestrian facilities such as stables and paddocks.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 6c: *Neston to Saughall***

- Further farm diversification, for example equestrian facilities;
- Possible move towards biomass crops such as Miscanthus;
- On-going decline in traditional woodland management practices leading to general deterioration and increase in number of over-mature trees;
- Pressure for small scale residential development , principally around Neston, Burton and Saughall on the edge of the character area, but also in the wider countryside;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Pressure for built development associated with the A540 road corridor and other main roads that pass through the landscape;
- Planting of small woodlands and hedgerow trees (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan) could help to screen developments and transport infrastructure.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 6c: Neston to Saughall***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the traditional historic field pattern of small to medium scale semi-regular fields bounded by hedgerows and trees, and **enhance** broadleaved woodland cover by planting new woodland to replace that lost.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Consider opportunities to replace hedgerows where they have been lost.
3. Continue to manage woodlands to ensure a diverse canopy structure, age and species diversity and rich ground flora.
4. Consider opportunities to plant trees and simple blocks of broadleaf woodland to ensure the continuation of these characteristic features in the landscape. Avoid planting in areas of ecological value and ensure no detriment to historic assets.
5. Conserve the small to medium scale pattern of fields, particularly earlier field systems around Puddington and Shotwick, which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
6. Use ASCV designation to protect the area to the north of Burton from inappropriate development.
7. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
8. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
9. Encourage sympathetic integration of conversions of farm buildings through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries and existing woodland rather than planting of alien ornamental species - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
10. Conserve the remnant fragments of unimproved grassland that is of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.

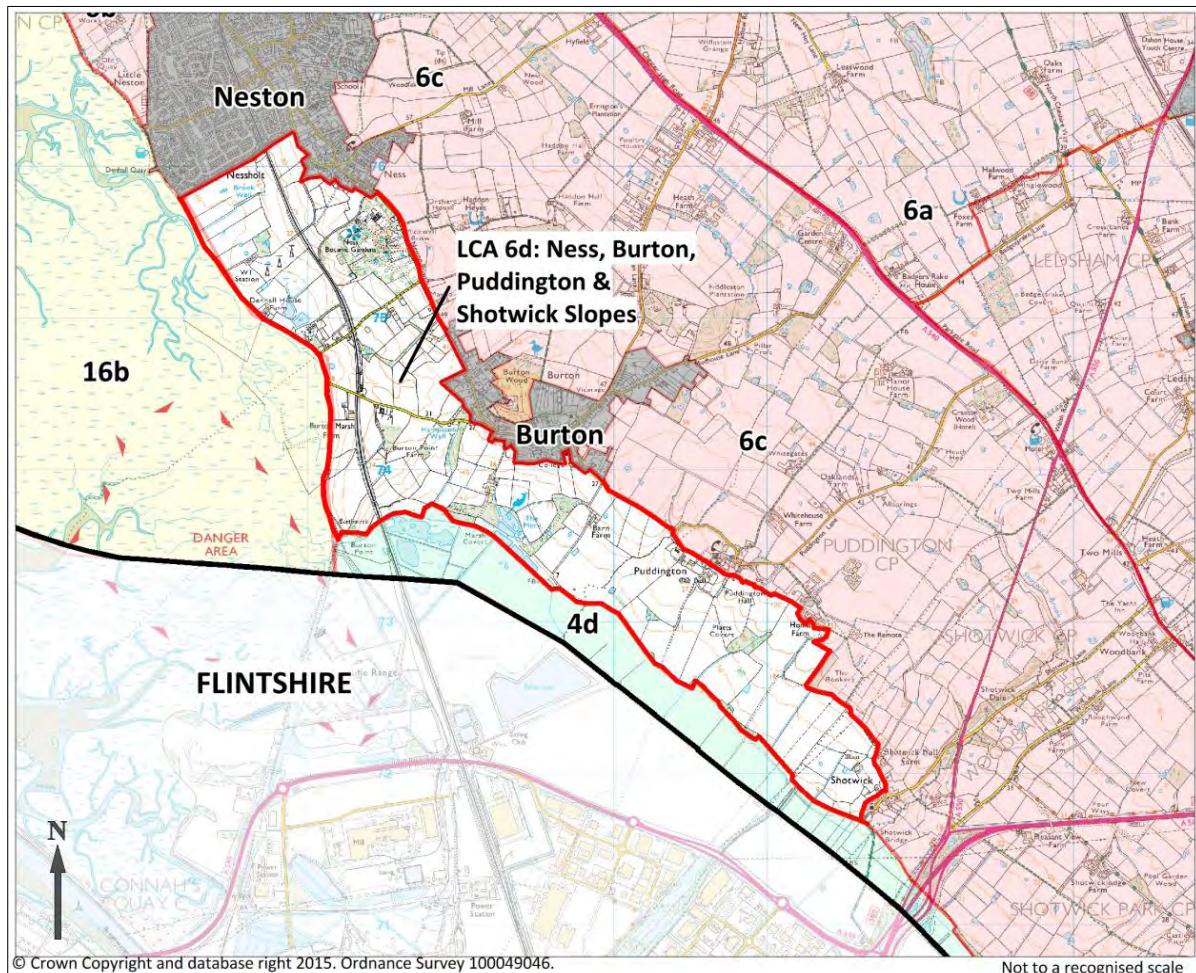
11. Conserve the remnant fragments of heathland and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.
12. Encourage the retention and management of field ponds and brooks that are of wildlife importance as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape. Create new ponds.
13. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads and other intrusive features, and conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as kerbs and large scale signage.
14. Conserve views across the Dee Estuary to the Clwydian hills to the west, and consider opening up more views from new vantage points. Consider key views when planning locations for new woodland.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of villages, farmsteads and isolated cottages, retaining the main focus for development on the edges of neighbouring settlements of Neston, Burton and Saughall.
2. Conserve the local vernacular built form of simple red-orange brick buildings and slate roofs. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and simple styles. Encourage retention / introduction of boundary sandstone walls and 'Cheshire Railings' and resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting.
3. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
4. Soften built edges and aim to integrate large structures into the landscape using native planting, and ensure proposals are accompanied by enhancement of existing hedgerows, trees and woodland in the vicinity of the site to ensure the landscape structure around any new facility is maintained / improved.
5. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
6. Maintain the rural setting to villages and farmsteads which are features of the landscape.



## LCA 6d: Ness, Burton, Puddington & Shotwick Slopes



### Location and Boundaries

The *Ness, Burton, Puddington & Shotwick Slopes Enclosed Farmland* landscape character type extends from Neston in the west to Shotwick in the east. The southern edge of the *Burton to Shotwick Enclosed Farmland* defines its northern boundary. To the south the ground flattens out to the *Burton and Shotwick Drained Marsh* and the mudflats of the *Dee Estuary*.

### **Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 6d: Ness, Burton, Puddington & Shotwick Slopes**

- A bedrock geology of Mercia Mudstones covered by a mantle of glacial drift deposits, giving rise to a gently undulating topography that slopes down towards the Dee Estuary from around 50m to 5m AOD
- Elongated transitional area between the elevated farmland inland and the low lying Dee levels
- Predominantly used for arable crops within the larger exposed fields, with grazing on the smaller pastures around Puddington and Shotwick
- Rectilinear pattern of large fields facing north-east to south-west resulting from reorganisation of earlier field systems, with some semi-regular ancient medieval enclosure around Puddington, and Shotwick
- Fields are mostly bounded by gappy hawthorn hedges with few hedgerow trees and occasional copses and coverts, giving an open windswept appearance
- Ancient broadleaved woodland to the south of Burton is of local wildlife value
- Area to the south and west of Burton is designated at the county level as part of the Dee Coastal Area of Special County Value (ASCV) by the former Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council for its high landscape quality
- Settlement pattern restricted to a small number of dispersed farmsteads along minor rural green lanes and a nucleated group of large properties along Denhall Lane; the southern built edges of Neston, Burton, Puddington and Shotwick border the character area
- Building materials are commonly red-orange brick with slate roofs in a simple design. Sandstone walls are boundary features in some areas
- A few field ponds are inconspicuous features in the landscape, providing wildlife value; there are larger waterbodies at Denhall House Farm and Burton Mere RSPB Reserve
- Conservation Area at Ness, and at Burton, Puddington and Shotwick on the edge of the character area, with numerous listed buildings including Puddington Old Hall and Shotwick Hall; the moated site of Shotwick Castle and Ice House at Burton are Scheduled Monuments
- Ness Botanic Gardens and parkland at Burton Manor are on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens
- Recreational opportunities provided at The Mere fishing ponds and RSPB Burton Mere Wetlands reserve with a mosaic of wetland habitats important for birds including internationally designated Ramsar site
- A popular coastal footpath provides an opportunity to experience the Dee Estuary close-to
- Electricity power lines cross the southern end of the area from the Deeside power stations and are visually prominent; the Bidston to Wrexham railway passes through the western end of the area but is inconspicuous in the landscape
- Views to the north are limited by the wooded ridge north of Burton; views east are limited by the elevated southern edge of the *Burton to Shotwick Undulating Enclosed Farmland*
- Expansive views westward across the Dee Estuary towards north Wales and the Clwydian Hills; also views to the south towards the Shotton industrial area where both the Connah's Quay power station and the dramatic new Dee Bridge are visible

## ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

### **Natural / Physical**

- The north side of the River Dee Estuary originally passed across the area during Roman times, when Chester City was an important port before silting up. The site of Shotwick Castle originally acted as a landing stage for sea-going boats;
- The gently undulating topography, between 5m and 50m AOD that slopes down to the west to the Dee Estuary;
- Glacio-fluvial deposits mask the underlying mudstones giving rise to coarse loamy soils and lighter sandy soils on higher ground less influenced by glacial deposits. These soils generally support arable crops within the larger exposed fields, with some grazing on the smaller pastures around Puddington and Shotwick;
- Fields are mostly bounded by gappy hawthorn hedges with few hedgerow trees and occasional copses and coverts e.g. Platts Covert;
- Ancient broadleaved woodland to the south of Burton which is of local wildlife value;
- A few field ponds are inconspicuous features in the landscape, providing wildlife value; there are larger waterbodies at Denhall House Farm and Burton Mere RSPB Reserve;
- An area to the south and west of Burton is designated at the county level as part of the Dee Coastal Area of Special County Value (ASCV) by the former Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council for its high landscape quality.

### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- Rectilinear pattern of large fields facing north-east to south-west resulting from reorganisation of earlier field systems, with some semi-regular ancient medieval enclosure around Puddington, and Shotwick;
- Conservation Area at Ness, and at Burton, Puddington and Shotwick on the edge of the character area, with numerous listed buildings including Puddington Old Hall and Shotwick Hall; the moated site of Shotwick Castle and Ice House at Burton are Scheduled Monuments;
- Ness Botanic Gardens and parkland at Burton Manor are on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens;
- Opportunities for recreation are provided at The Mere fishing ponds and RSPB Burton Mere Wetlands reserve with a mosaic of wetland habitats important for birds including internationally designated Ramsar site;
- A popular coastal footpath provides an opportunity to experience the Dee Estuary close-to.

### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Settlement pattern restricted to a small number of dispersed farmsteads, including Denhall House Farm, Burton Marsh Farm, Burton Point Farm and Barn Farm along minor rural sunken green lanes, and a nucleated group of large properties along Denhall Lane;
- The southern built edges of Neston, Burton, Puddington and Shotwick border the character area;
- Building materials are commonly red-orange brick with slate roofs in a simple design;
- Sandstone walls are boundary features in some areas, for example along Denhall Lane.

### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Generally a quiet, rural landscape;
- The simplicity of the agricultural land use and the pattern of elements such as hedgerows and trees provides landscape unity, texture and seasonal colour;
- Red sandstone and brick contrast with the green pasture, providing warm colours in the landscape;

- The farmed landscape gives an impression of being manicured and ‘tamed’;
- A medium to large scale landscape with an open windswept appearance;
- Electricity power lines cross the southern end of the area from the Deeside power stations and are visually prominent; the Bidston to Wrexham railway passes through the western end of the area but is inconspicuous in the landscape;
- Views to the north are limited by the wooded ridge north of Burton; views east are limited by the elevated southern edge of the *Burton to Shotwick Undulating Enclosed Farmland*;
- Expansive views westward across the Dee Estuary towards north Wales and the Clwydian Hills; also views to the south towards the Shotton industrial area where both the Connah’s Quay power station and the dramatic new Dee Bridge are visible.

#### **Landscape Condition**

The *Ness, Burton, Puddington & Shotwick Slopes Enclosed Farmland* is in active agricultural use and is managed for these land uses. The landscape generally has an appearance of being ‘well cared for’ although the hedgerow network gappy and open.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 6d: *Ness, Burton, Puddington & Shotwick Slopes*:**

- Green Belt;
- Area designated at the county level as part of the Dee Coastal Area of Special County Value (ASCV) to the south and west of Burton;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England’s National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets.

#### **Forces for Landscape Change**

##### **Past change**

- Loss of hedgerow field boundaries and hedgerow trees;
- Increase in areas under arable crops with loss of grazing pasture;
- Under management of farm woodlands, coverts and copses leading to general deterioration.

##### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 6d: *Ness, Burton, Puddington & Shotwick Slopes***

- Possible move towards biomass crops such as Miscanthus;
- On-going decline in traditional woodland management practices could lead to general deterioration in the ecological structure and function of the woodland;
- Pressure for small scale residential development, principally around Neston and Burton;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 6d: Ness, Burton, Puddington & Shotwick Slopes***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the rural character of the landscape and **enhance** the hedgerow and woodland network.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

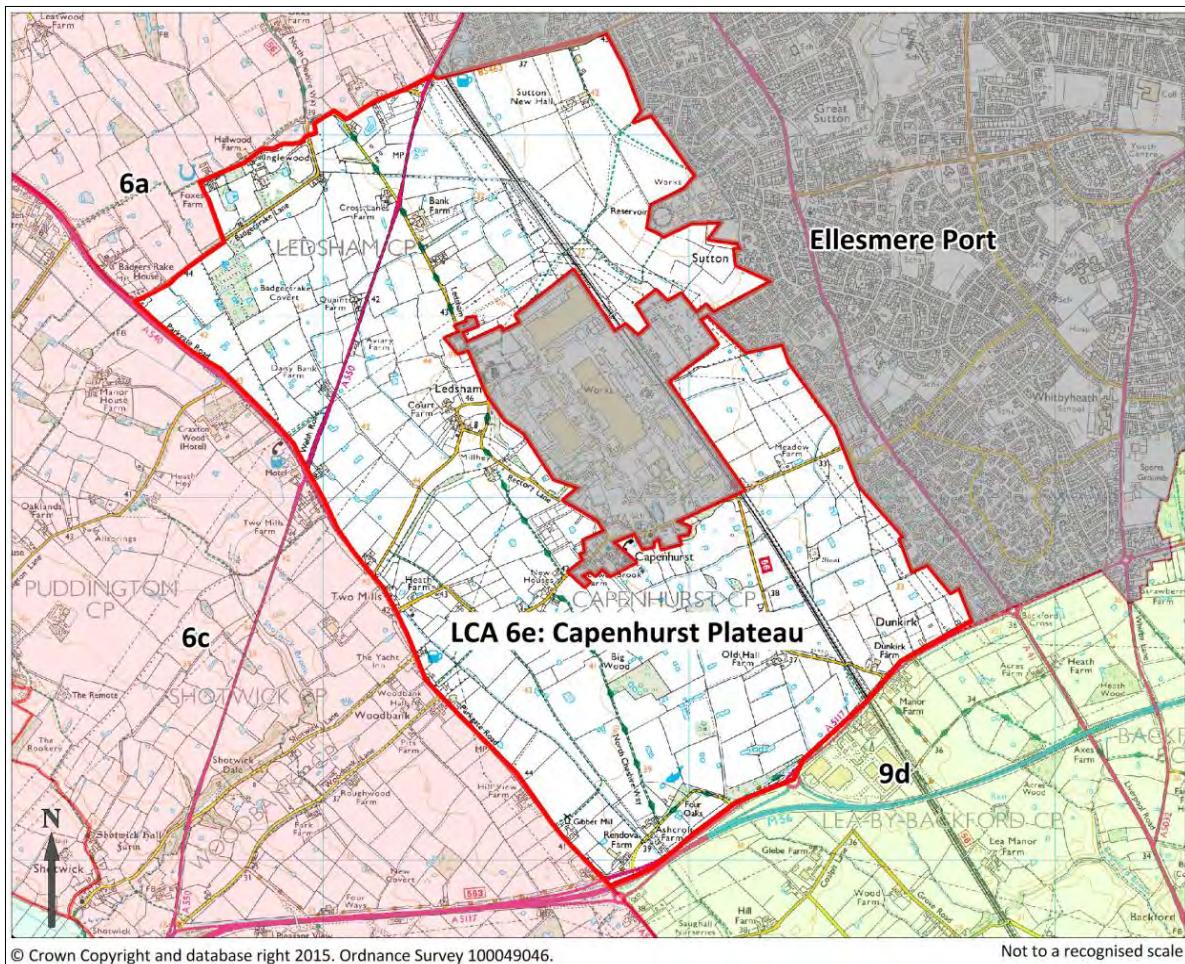
1. Manage the hedgerow network and replace hedgerows and hedgerow trees where they have been lost.
2. Manage woodlands to ensure a diverse canopy structure, age and species diversity and rich ground flora.
3. Consider opportunities to plant trees and simple blocks of broadleaved woodland to ensure the continuation of these characteristic features in the landscape. Avoid planting in areas of ecological value and ensure no detriment to historic assets.
4. Conserve the smaller scale pattern of pasture fields around Puddington and Shotwick, which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
5. Use ASCV designation to protect the area to the south and west of Burton from inappropriate development.
6. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
7. Encourage the retention and management of field ponds and streams that are of wildlife importance as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape. Create new ponds.
8. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet and conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that ‘suburbanise’ the landscape such as kerbs and large scale signage.
9. Conserve views across the Dee Estuary to the Clwydian hills to the west, and consider opening up more views from new vantage points. Consider key views when planning locations for new woodland.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the low density, dispersed settlement pattern of farmsteads, retaining the main focus for development on the edge of the neighbouring settlement of Neston.
2. Conserve the local vernacular built form of simple red-orange brick buildings and slate roofs. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and simple styles. Encourage retention / introduction of boundary sandstone walls and resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting.



## LCA 6e: Capenhurst Plateau



### Location and Boundaries

The **Capenhurst Plateau Enclosed Farmland** character type is an almost flat area of land surrounding the Capenhurst industrial complex to the west of Ellesmere Port. The A540 forms the western boundary to the character area, a transitional area with a poorly defined boundary with the *Burton to Shotwick Enclosed Farmland* further west. The *Willaston Enclosed Farmland* lies to the north and the lower lying *Saughall to Waverton Plain* to the south beyond the A5117.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 6e: Capenhurst Plateau***

- A bedrock geology of Mercia Mudstones covered by a mantle of glacial drift deposits that gives rise to a very gently undulating, plateau-like topography between 33m and 44m AOD
- Glacio-fluvial deposits mask the underlying mudstones giving rise to well drained sandy and coarse loamy soils. These soils support predominantly arable crops with some cattle grazing
- Close proximity to Ellesmere Port and other urban influences, including major transport corridors and industrial areas, has a significant effect on the character of the landscape
- Small to medium scale fields with a mixture of small, mostly regular, ancient medieval enclosure, regular post-medieval enclosures and larger, mostly regular fields resulting from reorganisation of earlier field systems
- Fields are mostly bounded by a predominantly intact hedgerow system, with hedgerow trees dominant and providing verdant enclosure
- Occasional copses to the north and south of the area add to the verdant character, some of which are local wildlife sites
- Sandstone walls, timber post and rail fencing and metal 'Cheshire Railings' are boundary features in some areas
- Field ponds are a feature of the landscape, some quite large and surrounded by vegetation; streams are minor and inconspicuous
- Opportunities for recreation are provided by Sustrans NCR 56 and the North Cheshire Way long distance footpath. There is a fishing pond at Four Oaks
- Settlement comprises the nucleated villages of Ledsham and Capenhurst, both Conservation Areas, with a number of dispersed farmsteads and cottages linked by secondary roads (not minor lanes).
- Sporadic ribbon development stretches out along the roads adding to the urban fringe character, including kennels, a large plant nursery at Ledsham, caravan storage at a number of farms, fields used for quod biking/motor cross
- A range of building materials throughout the area, but typically brick (in a range of colours and textures including re-claimed brick) with modern style rendering and white-washing
- Generally a small scale landscape and enclosure where views are limited by hedgerows, trees and copses despite the plateau-like topography
- The A540, A550, A5117 and the Birkenhead-Chester railway are major, visually intrusive transportation corridors affecting the character of the area
- The huge Capenhurst industrial complex lies at the heart of the area and is the focus for numerous electricity pylons and overhead power lines which are more visually intrusive than the industrial buildings themselves

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The very gently undulating, plateau-like topography between 33m and 44m AOD;
- Glacio-fluvial deposits mask the underlying mudstones giving rise to well drained sandy and coarse loamy soils. These soils support predominantly arable crops with some cattle grazing;
- Small to medium scale fields formerly part of the Royal Forest of Wirral – cleared by the end of the Roman period for fuel and building materials, and subsequently colonised by heathland as shown by the name Heath Farm – now almost completely lost as farming practices have expanded;
- The occasional copses to the north and south of the area add to the verdant character, some of which are local wildlife sites e.g. Badgersake Covert to the north and Big Wood to the south;

- Field ponds from past marl digging are a feature of the landscape and contribute to the wetland habitats, including some quite large ponds surrounded by vegetation. Streams are minor and inconspicuous.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- Field pattern of small, mostly regular, ancient medieval enclosure around Ledsham, regular post-medieval enclosures, and larger, mostly regular fields resulting from reorganisation of earlier field systems, such as between Sutton Green and Little Sutton;
- Ledsham and Capenhurst are both Conservation Areas, with a small number of listed buildings;
- Sites of archaeological /cultural heritage interest are not a feature of this landscape (they are more characteristic of other areas within the *Undulating Enclosed Farmland* landscape type); Gibbet Mill is a remaining windmill near Two Mills and is a listed building (water mills and windmills were typical throughout the landscape hence the name Two Mills);
- Opportunities for recreation are limited – there is a fishing pond at Four Oaks and a large plant nursery at Ledsham;
- Passive recreation is catered for by the Sustrans National Cycle Route 56 and the North Cheshire Way long distance footpath that pass north-south through the area.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Close proximity to Ellesmere Port and other urban influences, in particular the A540, A550, A5117 and the Birkenhead-Chester railway transportation corridors, the Capenhurst industrial complex, electricity sub-station, pylons and overhead power lines provide a strong urban fringe character to the area;
- Medium settlement density comprises the nucleated villages of Ledsham and Capenhurst and a number of dispersed farmsteads and cottages linked by secondary roads (larger than minor lanes that are more characteristic of other areas within the *Undulating Enclosed Farmland* landscape type);
- Sporadic ribbon development stretches out along the roads adding to the urban fringe character, including kennels, a large plant nursery at Ledsham, caravan storage at a number of farms, fields used for quad biking/motor cross, etc.;
- A range of building materials is evident throughout the area, but typically brick (in a range of colours and textures) with slate roofs, and modern style rendering and white-washing;
- Sandstone walls, timber post and rail fencing and metal 'Cheshire Railings' are boundary features in some areas.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Generally perceived as a pleasant agricultural landscape, but heavily influenced by 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial development, busy transport infrastructure, modern residential suburbs on the edge of Ellesmere Port, and other man-made influences that significantly affect views and tranquillity (although the Capenhurst industrial complex is relatively well screened);
- Away from the roads and intrusive features, the simplicity of the agricultural land use and the pattern of elements such as hedgerows and trees provides landscape unity, texture and seasonal colour;
- Generally a small scale landscape and enclosure where views are limited by hedgerows, trees and copses despite the plateau-like topography;
- Electricity pylons are visually intrusive features on the skyline in many views from within and beyond the character area;
- Distant views are not a feature of this landscape, unlike other character areas within the same character type;

- The presence of woodland and hedgerow trees means there is some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

#### **Landscape Condition**

The *Capenhurst Plateau Enclosed Farmland* is in active agricultural use and is managed for these land uses. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network, some oak trees remain 'in-field' where hedges have been removed, and some hedgerow trees are becoming over-mature. Some woodlands/copse are not being actively managed. There is relatively little unimproved grassland or heathland remaining. There are significant areas of 20th century residential and industrial development, especially alongside roads, and some urban edge dereliction that give the landscape an unmanaged or 'suburban' appearance in many places.

#### **CWaC Local Plan environmental policies applicable to LCA 6e: *Capenhurst Plateau***

- Mostly Green Belt, with the exception of the Ellesmere Port urban fringe between Sutton Green and Little Sutton allocated for residential development;
- Natural heritage sites of local importance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets.

#### **Forces for Landscape Change**

##### **Past change**

- Loss of heathland and unimproved grassland due to agricultural intensification;
- Loss of the traditional nucleated settlement pattern with piecemeal dispersal of farmsteads and cottages along minor roads;
- Loss of water mills and windmills that were typical throughout the landscape (hence the name Two Mills);
- 20<sup>th</sup> century residential and industrial development has resulted in the suburbanisation of significant parts of the character area;
- Limited management of field ponds has resulted in some silting up and drying out due to natural processes of vegetation succession, overshadowing from trees and muddy edges of pond edges by cattle;
- A shift from pasture to cultivation for silage and crops, fallow and set-aside;
- Farm diversification, including equestrian facilities such as stables and paddocks, kennels and caravan storage.

##### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 6e: *Capenhurst Plateau***

- Further farm diversification, for example equestrian facilities;
- Possible move towards biomass crops such as Miscanthus;
- On-going decline in traditional woodland management practices leading to general deterioration and increase in number of over-mature trees;
- Pressure for residential development, principally within the Ellesmere Port urban fringe between Sutton Green and Little Sutton with permission for 2000 houses;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use;
- Pressure for built development associated with the main road corridors and other secondary roads that pass through the landscape;
- Planting of small woodlands, hedgerows and hedgerow trees (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan) could help to screen developments and transport infrastructure.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 6e: Capenhurst Plateau***

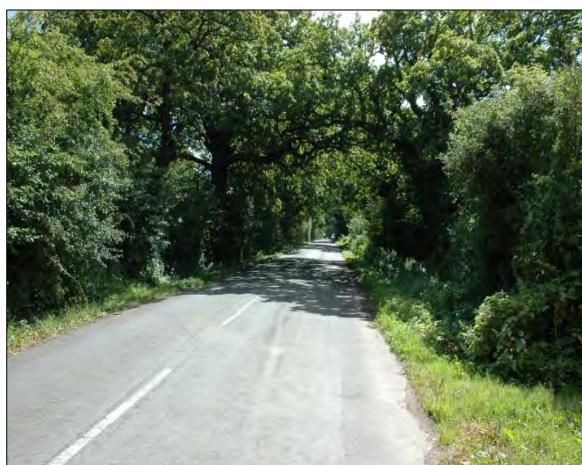
The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the traditional historic field pattern of small to medium scale regular fields bounded by hedgerows and trees, and **enhance** woodland cover to reduce the influence of urban intrusions on the landscape.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

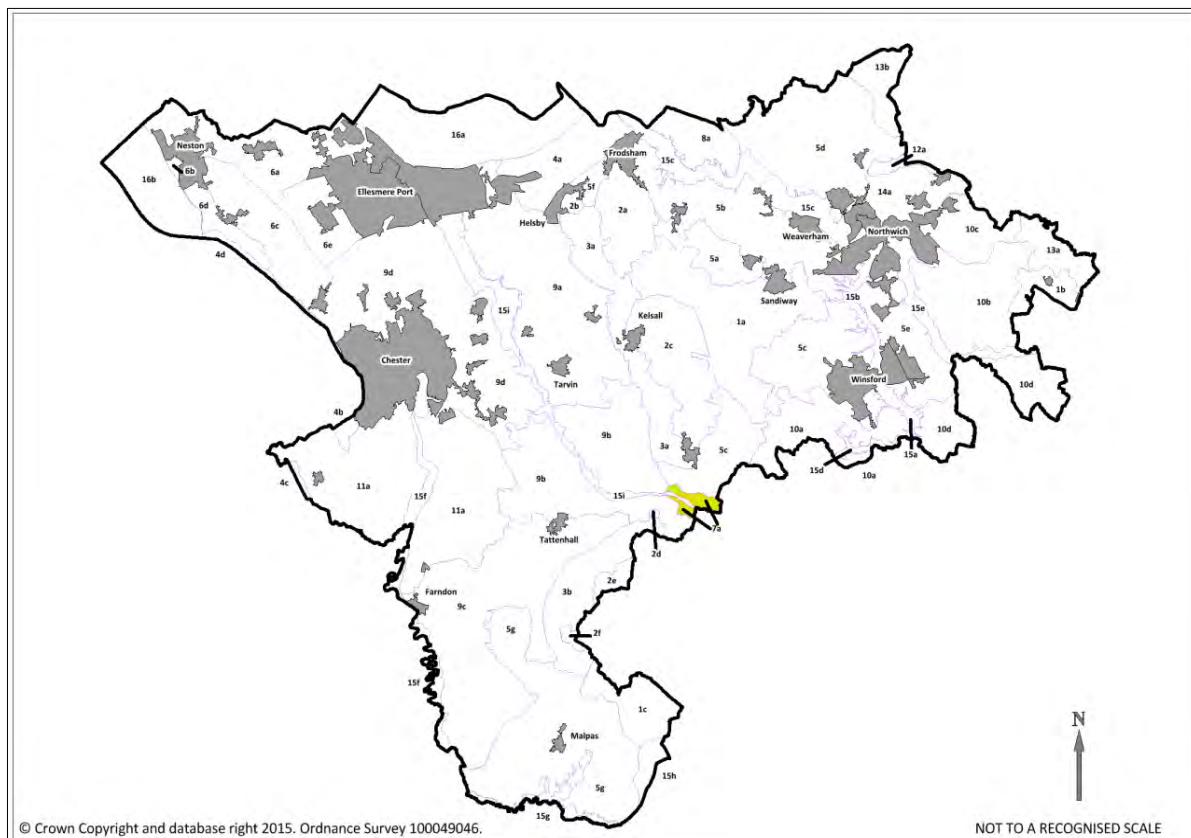
1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Consider opportunities to replace hedgerows where they have been lost.
3. Manage existing woodlands to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
4. Consider opportunities to plant trees and small woodlands as a screen to reduce the influence of urban intrusions on the landscape and to ensure the continuation of these characteristic features in the landscape. Avoid planting in areas of ecological value and ensure no detriment to historic assets.
5. Conserve the small to medium scale pattern of fields, particularly earlier field systems around Ledsham, which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
6. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
7. Encourage the retention and management of field ponds and brooks that are of wildlife importance as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
8. Conserve the remaining example of a mill at Gibbet Mill (windmills and watermills were once typical features in the landscape).
9. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads and other intrusive features. Avoid features that ‘suburbanise’ the landscape such as kerbs and large scale signage.

## ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the low density, nucleated settlement pattern of villages, farmsteads and cottages, retaining the urban fringe of Ellesmere Port as the main focus for development.
2. Conserve the local vernacular built form where this is still in evidence – simple red-orange brick buildings with slate roofs. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Encourage retention / introduction of boundary sandstone walls and ‘Cheshire Railings’ and resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting.
3. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not ‘suburbanise’ the landscape.
4. Soften built edges and aim to integrate large intrusive structures into the landscape using native planting, and ensure proposals are accompanied by enhancement of existing hedgerows, trees and woodland in the vicinity of the site to ensure the landscape structure around any new facility is maintained / improved.
5. Consider views from Sustrans NCR 56 and the North Cheshire Way long distance footpath when considering the location of new built development.



# LCT 7: ROLLING FARMLAND



### **Visual Character**

The steeply rolling landform provides an enclosed landscape where views are funnelled along the river and canal or terminate at the high ground at the edge of the character type, with no inter visibility with adjacent character areas. However, the steep ground to the north provides vantage points with views to the *Sandstone Ridge* to the south, where Beeston Castle and Peckforton Castle (within Cheshire East) are particularly prominent on the wooded hills.

Tall hedges with trees line the roads, adding to enclosure and reducing visibility. Hedgerows with trees are more intact in the west, whilst the landscape is noticeably more open with far fewer hedges and trees to the east. Wooden fencing around horse fields and gallops are noticeable boundary features in the landscape.

### **Physical Influences**

The topography varies from 40m-70m AOD. Bedrock solid geology is Mercia Mudstones (Northwich Halite Formation) overlain by till and glacial drift deposits (mostly boulder clay with glacio-fluvial sands and gravels). Rocky Sandstone outcrops lie amongst the rolling topography; some areas have been quarried for the stone.

A number of field ponds remain from previous marl pits dug for spreading on the agricultural fields to improve its moisture holding capacity and fertility. These now provide a variety of plant and animal habitats of nature conservation importance.

Woodland is confined to a small copse of riparian ancient woodland on the banks of the River Gowy near Tiverton, a local wildlife site. Parts of the canal side are well vegetated. Tree cover is greater in the west, in contrast with the open plain, and noticeably sparser to the east in contrasting with the surrounding enclosed farmland. The area between the canal and railway, including the banks of the Gowy, are of ecological interest for the species-rich grasslands that have escaped agricultural improvement and remain undisturbed.

### **Cultural Influences**

Small picturesque linear village and nucleated hamlet reflect the communications network that winds through the rolling landscape, and the amenity of the recreational facilities and features alongside the canal including a series of locks.

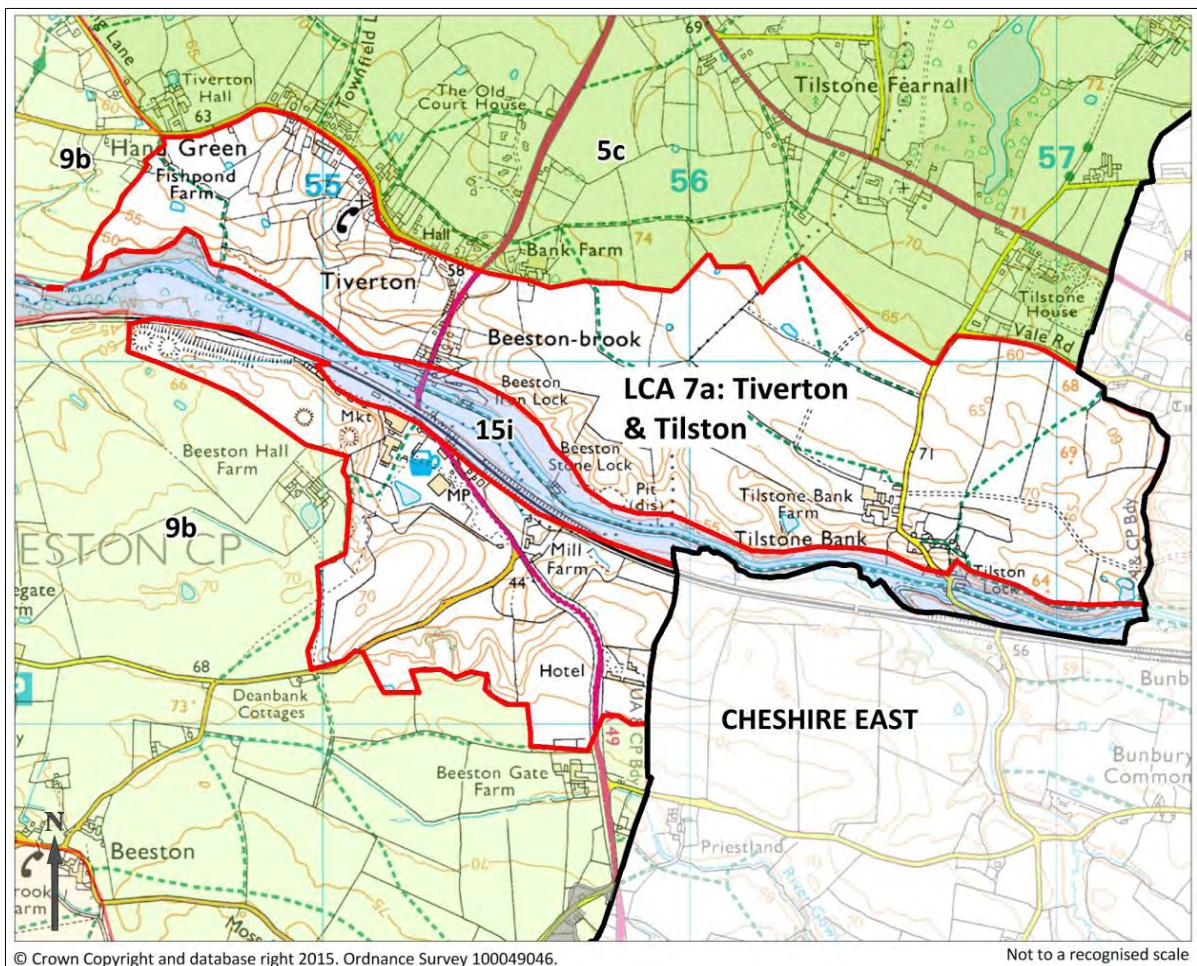
The villages are protected by Conservation Area status and include a number of listed buildings. There are scattered farmsteads and red brick dairy barns (with round windows) that represent examples of the red brick and timber framed 'black and white' local vernacular building style more usually associated with the Cheshire plain. The Wild Boar Hotel is another good example.

Construction of the Shropshire Union Canal (formerly The Chester Canal) in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century provided an important stopping off point to serve the local community. Some of the canal side structures such as Beeston Iron Lock and Beeston Stone Lock are also listed and are Scheduled Monuments. Two round Lengthman's Huts are also of heritage interest. Mill Farm lies close to the River Gowy (now largely silted up and inconspicuous through this character type) is one of four mills converted to private residences.

There is **one Landscape Character Area** within LCT 7:

**7a: Tiverton & Tilston**

## LCA 7a: Tiverton & Tilston



### Location and Boundaries

The **Tiverton and Tilston Rolling Farmland** character area is located between Tiverton to the north and west, and Beeston to the south. The character area extends eastwards and southwards beyond the Cheshire West and Chester borough boundary. The boundaries are defined primarily by geology and topography.

### **Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 7a: Tiverton & Tilston**

- Complex rolling landform falling steeply down from 70m to 40m AOD
- Bedrock geology of Mercia Mudstones overlain by till and glacial drift deposits providing topographic variations
- Rocky sandstone outcrops create a distinctive locally hilly landscape
- Steeply rolling landform provides an intimate landscape of small to medium scale enclosure, fields to the west reflecting medieval enclosure around Tiverton, with larger more open fields around Tilstone Bank to the east
- A more intact hedgerow pattern and tree cover in the west, with noticeably fewer hedges and trees to the east where field boundaries have been lost; other boundaries include wooden fencing around horse fields and gallops
- Predominantly grazed pastureland but with some arable cropping on flatter larger fields
- Ancient riparian woodland
- Field ponds remain from previous marl pits dug for agricultural improvement, now providing wildlife interest
- Undisturbed area between the canal and railway is of ecological interest for the species rich grasslands
- Tiverton is a small picturesque linear village that has expanded along the A49 and Tilston Bank is a tiny nucleated hamlet; both are Conservation Areas with a number of listed buildings
- The village/hamlet and scattered farms include examples of red brick dairy barns (with round windows), thatched cottages and the red brick with timber framed 'black and white' local vernacular building style.
- The railway, River Gowy and Shropshire Union Canal run east-west within the same transport corridor on low ground at the base of the hills; the A49 passes north-south through the area
- Minor sunken lanes follow the rolling topography offering a variety of views
- Variable views depending on location; views are enclosed where they are funnelled along the river and canal and terminate at high ground at the edge of the character area, whereas the high ground provides vantage points with important views to Beeston Castle and Peckforton Castle on the wooded *Sandstone Ridge* to the south
- A series of locks on the canal, including Beeston Iron Lock, Beeston Stone Lock and Tilstone Lock, some of which are listed and Scheduled Monuments. Two round Lengthman's Huts are of heritage interest, as are the remaining mills (although these are now converted to private residences e.g. Mill Farm)
- The canal provides an important recreational facility and a stopping of point, with its locks, tow path, café, pub and a boat yard providing canal holidays
- Way marked footpaths through the fields provide links to the wider footpath network

### **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

#### **Natural / Physical**

- Complex rolling landform falling steeply down from 70m to 40m AOD to the River Gowy and the Shropshire Union Canal;
- Bedrock solid geology of Mercia Mudstones of the Northwich Halite Formation overlain by till and glacial drift deposits of boulder clay and glacio-fluvial sands and gravels providing topographic variations;
- Rocky sandstone outcrops in a series of escarpments and dip slopes create a distinctive locally hilly landscape occupying the gap between the *Sandstone Ridge* to the north and south;

- The topographic variations identify this as a separate character type from the surrounding more gently undulating farmland to the north and east, and the much flatter fields of the Cheshire plain to the south and west;
- Steeply rolling landform provides an intimate landscape of small to medium scale enclosure, fields to the west reflecting medieval enclosure around Tiverton, with larger more open fields around Tilstone Bank to the east;
- A more intact hedgerow pattern and tree cover in the west, with noticeably fewer hedges and trees to the east where field boundaries have been lost; other boundaries include wooden fencing around horse fields and gallops;
- Woodland confined to a small copse of riparian ancient woodland on the banks of the River Gowy near Tiverton, also a local wildlife site; parts of the canal side are also well vegetated;
- Land use is predominantly dairy pasture, with some sheep grazing on steeper slopes and horses around Tilstone Bank Farm. Some arable cropping on larger flatter fields in the east, also around Tilstone Bank Farm north of the river/canal;
- Undisturbed area between the canal and railway, including the banks of the Gowy, are of ecological interest for the species rich grasslands.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- Nearby Tiverton Lodge was the seat of the Tollemache estate prior to the construction of Peckforton Castle (located in Cheshire East);
- Small regular field pattern to the west around Tiverton reflect the post medieval enclosures with strong hedgerow boundaries and trees; larger more open pattern to the east reflects later agricultural improvement;
- Field ponds remain from previous marl pits dug for spreading on the agricultural fields to improve its moisture holding capacity and fertility. These now provide a variety of plant and animal habitats of nature conservation importance;
- Construction of the Shropshire Union Canal (formerly The Chester Canal) in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century provided an important stopping off point to serve the local community;
- Some of the canal side structures such as Beeston Iron Lock and Beeston Stone Lock are also listed and are Scheduled Monuments. Two round Lengthman's Huts are also of heritage interest. Mill Farm lies close to the River Gowy (now largely silted up and inconspicuous through this character type) is one of four mills converted to private residences;
- A popular tourist / visitor area due to the attractions associated with the canal and the nearby attractions at Beeston Castle and Peckforton Castle (the A49 is on the brown signposted 'Leisure Drive' route);
- Good public access via the canal tow path and way marked footpaths through the fields provide links to the wider footpath network, including the nearby Sandstone Trail;
- Disused World War II fuel storage bunkers on railway sidings provide heritage interest and topographic variation (part of PLUTO; the system designed to supply petrol to the allied armies in France following D Day).

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Tiverton is a small picturesque linear village that has expanded along the A49 and Tilston Bank is a tiny nucleated hamlet close to the river/canal crossing; both are Conservation Areas with a number of listed buildings;
- Thatched cottages and scattered farms include examples of red brick dairy barns (with round windows), and the red brick with timber framed 'black and white' local vernacular building style. A good example is the Wild Boar Hotel on the A49;
- The railway, River Gowy and Shropshire Union Canal run east-west within the same transport corridor on low ground at the base of the hills; the A49 passes north-south through the area;
- Sunken lanes follow the rolling topography, offering a variety of views;

- A number of land uses are located along the A49 or on the railway sidings, including the site of Beeston Cattle Market/Auction (due to be developed for housing), a reclamation site, timber yard, animal health product supplier, motor repairs/sales. Residential development on the site of Beeston Castle pub (recently demolished).

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Generally a picturesque, tranquil, rural landscape;
- Views from low ground are enclosed where they are funnelled along the river and canal and terminate at high ground at the edge of the character area;
- High ground provides vantage points with important views to Beeston Castle and Peckforton Castle (in Cheshire East) on the wooded *Sandstone Ridge* to the south;
- Tourist facilities associated with the canal provide movement and noise;
- Traffic on the main A49, road side businesses and land uses on the railway sidings give the perception of a busy, noisy road corridor;
- Occasional woodland and canal side vegetation provide texture and interest;
- The presence of hilly and undulating topography, some woodland and hedgerow trees means that the ridges are visually prominent while the valleys are hidden. There is some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

#### **Landscape Condition**

The *Tiverton & Tilston Rolling Farmland* is actively managed agricultural land, although some of the hedgerows have been lost or are in a declining condition. The undisturbed are between the canal and railway has the appearance of being overgrown and under managed. Some land uses associated with the busy A49 road corridor and railway sidings are not well integrated into the landscape.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 7a: *Tiverton & Tilston***

- Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets.

## ***Forces for Landscape Change***

### **Past change**

- Decline in hedgerow field boundaries and hedgerow trees, due to agricultural improvement;
- Loss of permanent grassland and an increase in growth of arable crops on larger fields;
- Farm diversification including introduction of horse gallops with associated increase in use of timber fencing;
- Growth in visitor numbers and tourism facilities associated with the canal;
- Conversion of farm buildings;
- Conversion of mills to private residences;
- Demolition of Beeston Castle pub and residential new build;
- Increased traffic, signage etc. on the A49 has 'suburbanised' the road corridor.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 7a: *Tiverton & Tilston***

- Closure and redevelopment of the cattle market (planning permission for 103 dwellings);
- Pressure from increased tourism associated with the canal, for example new moorings;
- Small infill or back land housing development could affect the setting of Tiverton and Tilston in the landscape, especially if this meant cutting into the hillside;
- Inappropriate management of undisturbed species-rich grassland between the canal and railway could reduce its attraction as a locally valued site of ecological interest;
- Road improvements to the A49 could lead to the further suburbanisation of the character area through kerbing, lighting, signage etc.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 7a: Tiverton & Tilston***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the pastoral character and local built vernacular of the landscape, and **enhance** the condition of the hedgerow and tree network.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

- 1.** Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges, gapping up incomplete hedges, and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
- 2.** Conserve ancient field patterns, particularly those dating to the medieval period or earlier which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
- 3.** Maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil (for example as a result of increased crop growing).
- 4.** Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
- 5.** Encourage sympathetic integration of horse gallops through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility timber fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
- 6.** Conserve unimproved or semi-improved species-rich grassland that is of nature conservation value, in particular in the area between the canal and railway which should be managed, and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.
- 7.** Conserve field ponds, brooks and streams that are of importance for biodiversity as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
- 8.** Consider further opportunities for recreational use of the landscape as long as this does not result in 'suburbanisation' of the countryside.
- 9.** Seek opportunities to extend woodland cover in areas currently of low ecological value and ensuring no detriment to historic assets – small scattered broadleaved woodland blocks, copses and riparian woodland are the most appropriate forms of woodland in this area.
- 10.** Conserve and manage the existing area of ancient woodland along the banks of the River Gowy to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.

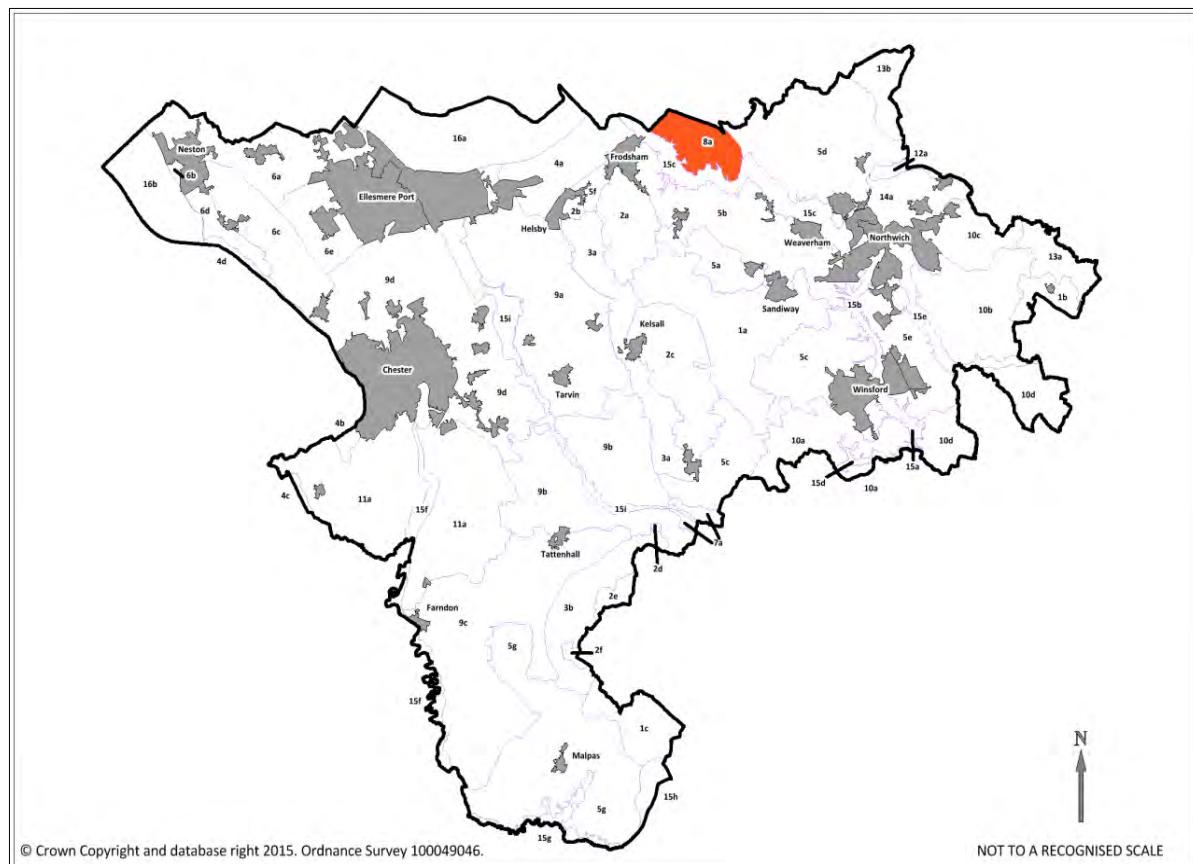
11. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main road, and conserve the rural character of the lanes by avoiding features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as close board fencing, kerbs, signage and lighting.
12. Conserve views to the south to the adjacent *Sandstone Ridge* and in particular the important views to Beeston Castle and Peckforton Castle.
13. Seek opportunities to screen unsightly land uses within the A49 road corridor, for example by woodland planting.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the low density settlement pattern of village, hamlet and scattered farmsteads.
2. Conserve the local vernacular built style - red brick with timber framed 'black and white' buildings, thatched cottages, red brick dairy barns with round windows. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
3. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
4. Ensure horse gallops (and any future riding schools, stables and equestrian development) do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
5. Conserve the historic nucleated hamlet at Tilston Bank and its landscape setting, ensuring that any new development does not involve cutting into the hillside, and that Tilston Bank Farm does not become over dominant.
6. Conserve the historic linear village of Tiverton and its landscape setting, ensuring that any new development occurs within the village boundary and does not involve cutting into the hillside, and will not close the gap on the A49 between the two separate parts of the village which would lead to coalescence.
7. Ensure new tourism development associated with the canal is of high quality design and responds to the built heritage features alongside the canal.
8. Soften built edges and views of land uses along the A49 road corridor and railway sidings by introducing planting schemes using native broadleaved species.



## LCT 8: HEATHY FARMLAND & WOODLAND



### General Description

A large scale, mostly open arable farmland landscape to the immediate north of the River Weaver, influenced by the presence of glacio-fluvial deposits of sands and gravels which historically supported heathland. This landscape is distinguished from the *Undulating Enclosed Farmland* landscape type by its field pattern which is much larger in scale and arable use, resulting from late post-Medieval agricultural improvement and 20th century field re-organisation.

### Visual Character

The location of this type is reflected in the prevailing views which extend to adjacent character areas, either out over the low-lying plain or up towards the dominant Sandstone Ridge. Roads typically follow the rolling topography, offering extensive views from the high points out over the immediate field pattern and extending to the high ground of the Pennines in the east. At the low points the landscape appears smaller scale due to the increase in enclosure and the contained views. At some locations the tree cover appears to be high, an obvious departure from the adjacent Cheshire Plain East. This can be attributed to small and medium scale farm woodlands or covers upon locally prominent areas of high ground.

In certain areas arable farming predominates, especially upon better-drained ground. Where this is associated with loss of hedgerows, post and wire fences and fewer hedgerow trees, the scale of the landscape increases considerably and views become more extensive.

### ***Physical Influences***

This character type occurs at an intermediate elevation, lying between 15m AOD at the river bank and rising evenly to a gentle brow across the central to northern parts of the LCT at around 65 m. The solid geology is a combination of one or more of Bollin Mudstone, Eldersfield Mudstone and Northwich Halite. This is overlain by till and glacio-fluvial deposits.

Secondary calcium carbonate deposits are common at a depth of 1-2m in the till, and before cheap lime was made available in the 19th century this was dug and spread on the surrounding fields to reduce acidity. On sandy soils this practice of marligning also increases fertility and moisture holding capacity. The digging of these marl pits led to the creation of ponds as the pits filled with water and were colonised by a rich variety of plants and animals from other wetland habitats of greater antiquity such as mosses. Marl was also used in daub in the construction of vernacular structures and later to make bricks.

The natural processes of vegetation succession have reduced many ponds to small, shallow features, over shaded with trees and with little open water. Characteristic plant species include bur marigold, water plantain, tubular water-dropwort, reedmace, branched bur-reed, water horsetail, common spike-rush, purple loosestrife, water milfoil, various water lilies and pondweeds. Associated invertebrates include all five species of amphibian found in Cheshire, including the European protected great crested newt.

Field boundaries are delineated predominantly by hawthorn hedgerows with hazel, blackthorn and dog rose also present. Oak, ash and sycamore are the main tree species, but are far less numerous as hedgerow trees than neighbouring LCTs. The majority of fields are cultivated for silage or feed crops including cereals and maize.

Woodland levels are higher than those of the *Cheshire Plain West* and *Cheshire Plain East*. Copses and coverts are mainly broadleaved and there are mixed woodlands on sandier soils.

The gently sloping landform and sandy soils supports a limited surface natural drainage network.

### ***Cultural Influences***

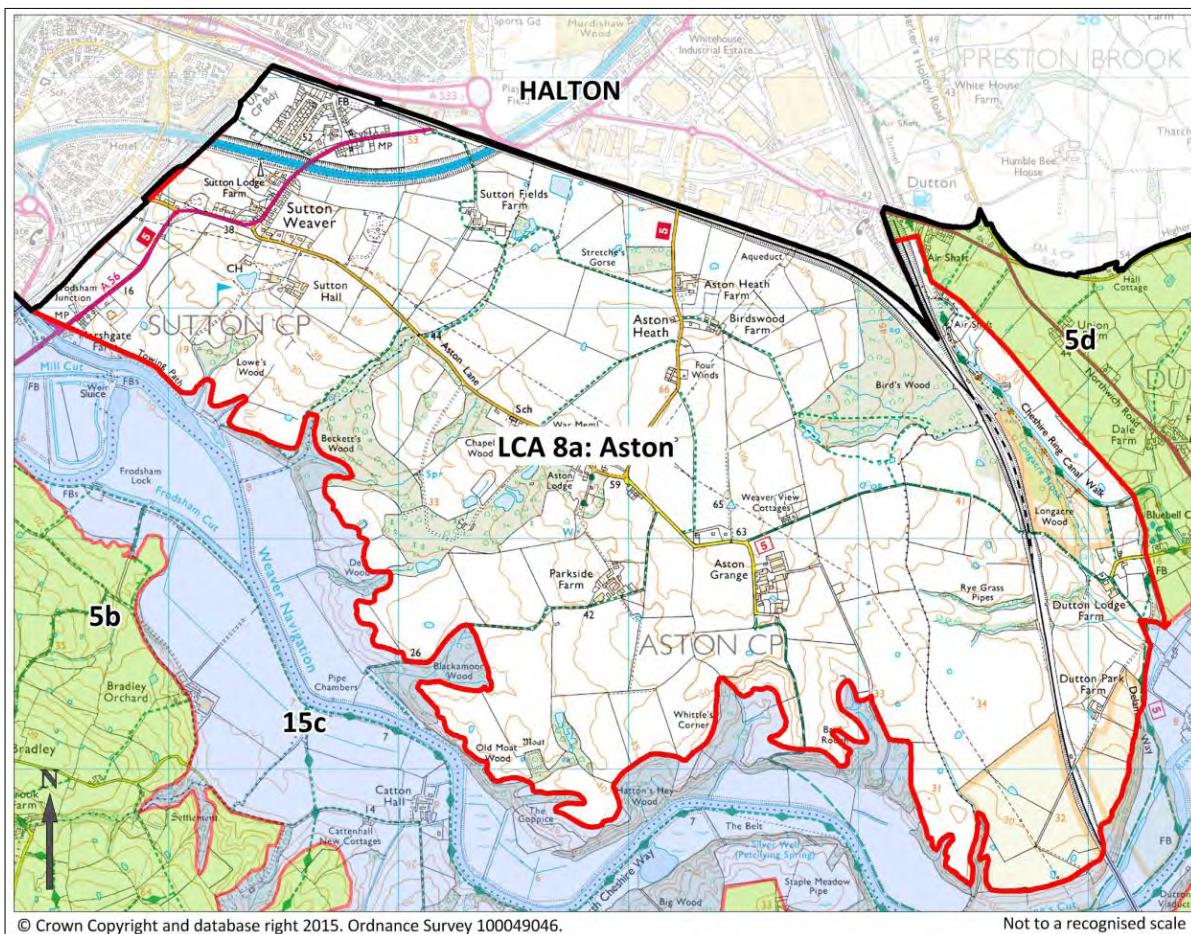
This is an area of late post-medieval enclosure; regular shaped fields between 4- 8ha in size, which are typical of reorganised earlier fields, from agricultural improvements / estate management associated with Aston Hall. In the south is an enclosed medieval deer park, as indicated by the place name Park Brow etc. Settlement comprises small villages such as Sutton Weaver and dispersed farms and halls e.g. Sutton Hall, a listed medieval timber-framed building, behind which is a golf course. However, buildings are predominantly built from red brick.

The Trent and Mersey Canal passes through the east of the character area, emerging from a tunnel that runs past Whitehouses to the north.

There is only **one Landscape Character Area** within LCT 8:

**8a: Aston**

## LCA 8a: Aston



### Location and Boundaries

This character area is located on the east bank of the Weaver Navigation and to the south of Runcorn. It shares its northern limits with the Cheshire West and Chester boundary. This is an area of post medieval enclosure – regular shaped fields between 4- 8ha in size, which are typical of reorganised earlier fields. In the south is an enclosed medieval deer park, as indicated by the place names such as Park Brow.

### **Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 8a: Aston**

- An 'island' of farmland cut off from its context by a combination of railway lines, the M56 motorway, the Trent & Mersey Canal and River Weaver
- Bedrock geology of Bollin Mudstones (forming part of the Mercia Mudstone Group) forms a prominent flat-topped ridge reaching 65m AOD
- Sand, gravel and boulder clay deposits produce a mixture of slowly permeable clay soils and lighter sandy soils that support pasture, arable and former heath
- Numerous brooks drain towards the Weaver into often in steep wooded valleys immediately to the south and east of the LCA; some have extensive displays of bluebells
- Large areas of ancient deciduous woodland on the ridge slopes and along Longacre Brook provide some enclosure and changing colour with the seasons
- Dutton Park, 281ha woodland managed by the Woodland Trust with a rich mixture of habitats from open grassland, ponds, ancient woodland and grazed riverside meadows
- Large poplar plantation at Dutton Lodge Farm
- The designed parkland surrounding the former Aston Hall (now demolished) contributes to the wooded character of the ridge and is a locally important historic site
- Field ponds are a feature of the landscape - formed by the digging of marl pits before the 19th century, they now form important landscape and ecological features
- Relatively large scale fields resulting from late post-medieval agricultural improvement and 20th century field re-organisation / estate management associated with Aston Hall
- Recreational opportunities are provided by public rights of way, and area of open access land at Longacre Wood and a golf course and driving range at Sutton Weaver
- The scale of the landscape is large as a result of the large scale field units and sense of openness, emphasised by the low hedgerows, the lack of hedgerow trees and long distance views from the ridge in all directions
- Part of the Trent and Mersey Canal passes along the eastern edge of the area adjacent to the railway, providing a link to the River Mersey
- Settlement is sparse – scattered farms and the rural hamlets of Aston, Aston Heath and Sutton Weaver are linked by narrow lanes and tracks
- Buildings are typically constructed from red brick and sandstone, with slate roofs
- A peaceful 'island' in a busy context – surrounded by the M56 motorway, roads, railways, built development and industry
- The 'ridge' forms a strong skyline in views from outside the character area, including from the *Frodsham to Northwich Undulating Enclosed Farmland* and the *Whitley & Comberbach Undulating Enclosed Farmland*
- From the ridge views are influenced by industry, located to the north and west.

### **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The Mercia Mudstone bedrock geology gives rise to a large scale flat topped 'ridge' reaching 66m AOD;
- The landscape is partially overlain with drift glacio-fluvial and till (boulder clay) deposits, with glacio-fluvial sand and gravels notable along the ridge top where they produce well drained and coarse loamy soils;
- These soils support intensively farmed arable fields that are bounded by low, gappy hedgerows. There are few hedgerow trees and the name Aston Heath indicates that this area is likely to have formerly been heathland;

- The more clayey soils that occupy the slopes of the ridge support some large blocks of ancient deciduous woodland e.g. Birds Wood and Beckett's Wood that are of recognised as local wildlife sites- some of these may be remnants of the original post-glacial forest;
- Beckett's Wood is dominated by sycamore while Birds Wood is distinguished by its open canopy of small-leaved lime and hornbeam;
- These woodlands are interspersed by large scale fields that are typically a mixture of arable and pasture and are divided by low-cut hedgerows, some gappy and discontinuous, with occasional hedgerow trees;
- Dutton Park is a 281ha woodland managed by the Woodland Trust with a rich mixture of habitats from open grassland, ponds, ancient woodland and grazed riverside meadows – managed by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust for conservation with a herd of Longhorn cattle;
- Large poplar plantation at Dutton Lodge Farm;
- The past digging of marl pits (to extract marl to improve the fields) has resulted in the presence of a number of field ponds, particularly between Sutton Fields Farm and Aston Heath Farm;
- Numerous streams flow through areas of woodland into the Weaver, the most notable being Longacre Brook that flows in a steep-sided, wooded valley containing neutral unimproved grassland.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- Distinctive large-scale straight sided fields, resulting from late post-medieval agricultural improvement and 20th century field reorganisation / estate management associated with Aston Hall ;
- An area of parkland south of the hamlet of Aston is a remnant 18th century Repton parkland and woodland;
- The original house and gardens have been demolished but its parkland contributes to the wooded character of the ridge and contains a 17th century Dovecote whose historic importance is recognised through designation as a Scheduled Monument. The walls are listed structures;
- Field ponds are a feature of the landscape, formed by the digging of marl pits before the 19th century – they now form important landscape and ecological features and are UK priority habitats;
- Part of the Trent and Mersey Canal passes along the eastern edge of the area, within the valley formed by Longacre Brook. This Canal, constructed in 1777 by James Brindley, links the navigable River Trent to the River Mersey;
- This area provides passive recreation in the form of public footpaths that form links with the Weaver Valley; Dutton Park provides open access through land managed by the Woodland Trust;
- Part of the Cheshire Ring Canal Walk follows the towpath of the Trent & Mersey Canal along the eastern edge of the area;
- This also links with the Delamere Way long distance recreational route;
- There is also a small area of open access adjacent to Longacre Brook which lies adjacent to the Cheshire Ring Canal Walk;
- Moated sites were once a feature of the landscape and the site of a Moated Monastic Grange at Middleton is now a Scheduled Monument;
- An anti-aircraft gun site lies on the ridge top at Sutton Fields Farm – this is recognised for its historic interest as a Scheduled Monument.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- A sparsely settled landscape with are three small hamlets – at Aston, Aston Heath and Sutton Weaver;
- Buildings are typically constructed from red brick and sandstone, with slate roofs;
- Sutton Hall and its barn are listed structures;

- There is also a cluster of listed buildings at Aston, including the remnant of Aston Old Hall;
- There are also a number of large farms, dispersed across the ridge and reached via narrow lanes or tracks.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- This is a simple landscape, with a consistent and unified character as a result of the consistent land use and field size/pattern;
- The scale of the landscape is large as a result of the large scale undulating topography and relatively large field units;
- There is a sense of openness as a result of the low hedgerows, lack of hedgerow trees and long distance views from the ridge in all directions;
- The presence of arable crops and deciduous woodland provides changing colour with the seasons;
- The perceived naturalness of this landscape is diminished by the presence of intensive farming, electricity pylons, the M56 motorway, roads, railways, and proximity to built development and industry;
- This area is perceived as a peaceful 'island' in a busy context. However, the tranquillity is fragile on the edges of the character area (particularly to the north-west, north and north-east) due to proximity to infrastructure and industry;
- This upstanding 'ridge' forms a strong skyline in views from outside the character area, including from the edge of Runcorn;
- The ridge (and its pylons) are inter-visible with adjacent landscapes, particularly from the *Frodsham to Northwich Undulating Enclosed Farmland* and the *Whitley & Comberbach Undulating Enclosed Farmland*;
- There is little inter-visibility with the adjacent Weaver Valley due to the steep topography of the valley sides and its hidden nature;
- From the top of the 'plateau' there are views to large scale industry at Rockavage and Preston Brook;
- The elevated, open character of this landscape and its inter-visibility with adjacent landscapes makes it visually sensitive to change. However, the area has a relatively low settlement density and therefore relatively few potential residential receptors that may experience visual impacts;
- Although public rights of way cross the ridge, the main recreational opportunities (Cheshire Ring Canal Walk and open access land at Longacre Wood) are located in the Longacre Valley where views are constrained by landform. The presence of woodland provides some potential for mitigating visual impact of low level elements without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

#### **Landscape Condition**

The *Aston Heathy Farmland and Woodland* LCA is in active agricultural use and is managed for this land use. However, there are some gaps in the hedgerow network and hedgerow tree loss, particularly in areas of more intensive arable agriculture.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 8a: Aston:**

- Green Belt;
- Countryside;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV) across the southern half of the LCA;
- Natural heritage sites of regional and/or local significance;

- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk / water management.

### ***Forces for Landscape Change***

#### **Past Change**

- Limited evidence of boundary management and evidence of decline in hedgerow boundaries. In addition hedgerow trees may be damaged/lost due to intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to the hedgerow boundary;
- Increase in the number of fences to replace hedgerow boundaries;
- A shift from grassland to crops, fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Growth of potatoes and maize in traditionally pastoral areas resulting in soil erosion as a result of exposure of bare soil;
- Past loss of orchards – in the past nearly all farms would have had an orchard;
- Farm diversification including introduction of polytunnels, stables, riding centres and paddocks and change of use of farm buildings, including residential use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Improved drainage and in-filling has led to the loss of field ponds and wetlands over the years;
- Some of the broadleaved woodland on the slopes is currently under-managed, but the Mersey Forest strategy aims to bring existing woodlands into better management;
- Significant changes to the landscape have arisen from the recently planted extension to Longacre Wood and acquisition of Dutton Park Farm by The Woodland Trust in partnership with The Cheshire Wildlife Trust and The Mersey Forest with resulting new woodland planting;
- The M56, A56, West Coast main line across Dutton Viaduct and industrial development immediately to the north have had a significant impact on the character of this landscape, eroding tranquillity along its northern, eastern and western sides;
- Steady intensification of grassland management in the 20th century has resulted in the loss of species rich grassland;
- A56 at Sutton Weaver used by motorway traffic as a 'short-cut';
- Pressure for wind turbine development owing to favourable location and elevation.

#### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 8a: Aston**

- Woodland and hedgerow tree planting around Aston and as a buffer between settlements and the motorway and to connect ancient semi-natural woods (planting policy within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan);
- Pressure for small scale residential development, particularly around Sutton Weaver.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA8a: Aston***

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **enhance** the condition of the hedgerow, tree and woodland network, and **restore** and link former habitats such as woodland and heathland.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

- 1.** Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges, planting lost hedge lines, and re-planting a young stock of hedgerow trees. Consider a programme of replacement hedgerow tree planting to re-instate those that have been lost over the years.
- 2.** Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerow.
- 3.** Reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil associated with crop growth.
- 4.** Promote appropriate management of arable farmland to create a wildlife-rich habitat supporting farmland birds, including retaining areas of fallow land, over-wintering stubbles, maintaining an unploughed margin around arable land, and management of existing hedgerows.
- 5.** Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
- 6.** Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
- 7.** Conserve and manage the remaining field ponds and wetlands along the valleys – seek opportunities to extend areas of wet woodland and species rich unimproved grassland.
- 8.** Consider opportunities to re-create areas of heathland habitat in areas where this would have no detriment to anything else (e.g. archaeological sites).
- 9.** Promote traditional woodland management techniques of the deciduous woodland to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
- 10.** Seek opportunities to expand and link existing woodlands in areas currently of low ecological value – support plans to create additional large woods in balance with the open agricultural landscape, ensuring no detriment to historic assets.

11. Seek opportunities to restore and create orchards at the farm scale – in the past nearly all farms would have had an orchard.
12. Minimise the impact of existing major roads and industry on the area by using native planting to screen, but maintain panoramic views, for example those from the ridge top across the Mersey Estuary.
13. Seek to conserve and restore historic designed landscapes and their settings, such as the historic parkland at the former Aston Hall and consider opportunities to enhance access to, and appreciation of, this landscape.
14. Avoid road ‘improvements’ (such as addition of kerbs and lighting) that would alter the rural character of the lanes.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

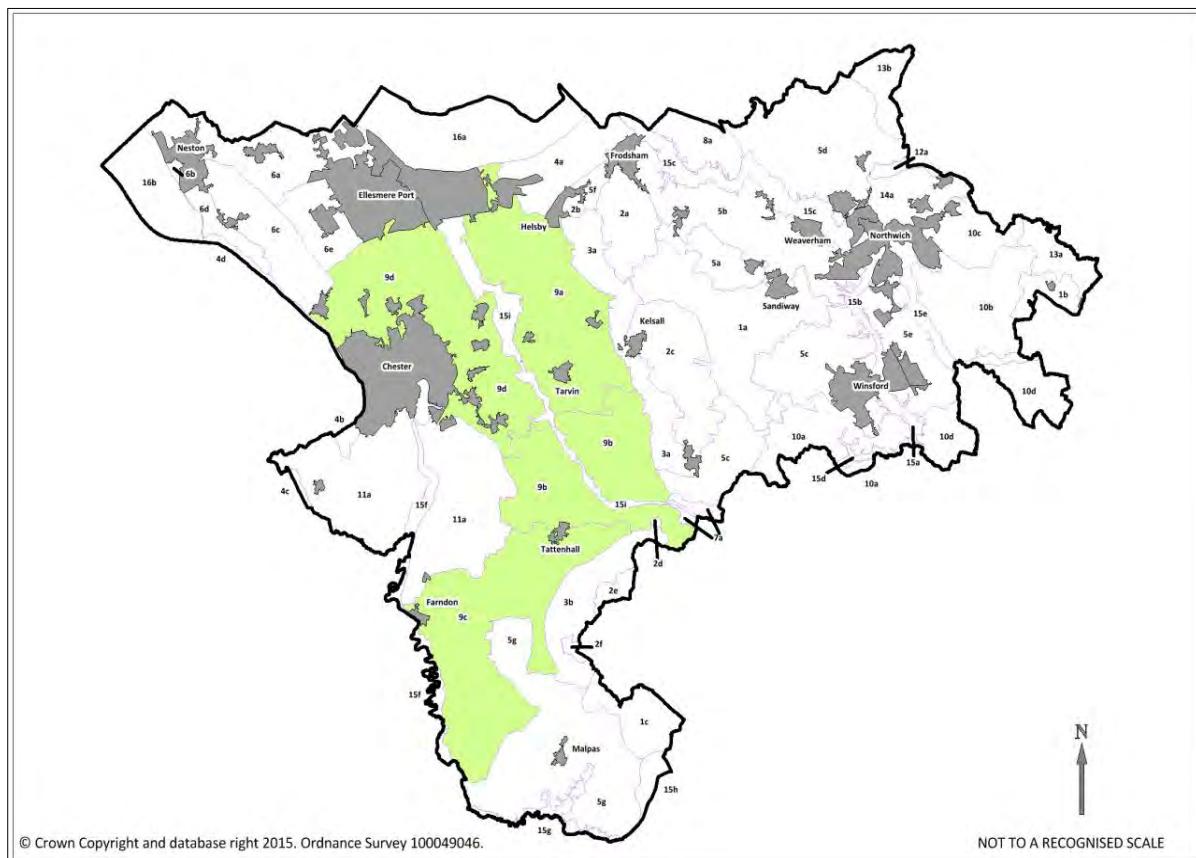
1. Conserve the low settlement density and rural character of the hamlets. Avoid ‘suburbanising’ features such as gate posts, kerbs and close board fences around gardens. Ensure new built development fits with the local built vernacular, including use of materials (sandstone and red brick). Use indigenous planting to integrate any new built development into the landscape.
2. Maintain the external fabric, appearance and setting of farm buildings and promote the use of local materials.
3. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the rural landscape and vernacular building style. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not ‘suburbanise’ the landscape.
4. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
5. Consider the effects of any development on adjacent landscapes, particularly the *Frodsham to Northwich Undulating Enclosed Farmland* and the *Whitley & Comberbach Undulating Enclosed Farmland*.
6. Consider views from public rights of way, but particularly the Cheshire Ring Canal Walk long distance recreational route, when considering any new built development.
7. Preserve the industrial aesthetic of the Trent and Mersey Canal and its setting, including associated structures and artefacts of industrial archaeology. Consider views from the canal in planning new built development.



LCT 8: Heathy Farmland  
and Woodland

LCA 8a: Aston

# LCT 9: Cheshire Plain West



## General Description

This character type dominates a large proportion of CWaC, and as such it has been broken down into four character areas which reflect the subtle variations that exist in the landscape. It extends from Stanlow and Helsby in the north, as far south as Threapwood at the south-westerly tip of the borough. It bounds the northern and eastern fringes of the City of Chester and is framed by the *Sandstone Fringe* to the east. Its northern portion, from around Beeston, is bisected along a south-east to north-west line by the linear *Gowy Valley* LCA.

This landscape type is defined by its flat or very gentle topography enclosed by hedgerows and standard trees in small-medium enclosures that follow an irregular and semi-regular field pattern. It is differentiated from the *Cheshire Plain East* by the physical barrier of the *Sandstone Ridge*. However, in many respects there are shared characteristics and features between the *Cheshire Plain East* and *Cheshire Plain West* landscape character types.

Woodland cover is very low, with small blocks scattered intermittently across the area. The field patterns comprise a mix of ancient enclosure and post medieval improvement. Settlement is predominantly dispersed and has a low density.

## Visual Character

This landscape type is represented by a generally flat agricultural plain where the prevailing field pattern and condition of the hedgerows can account for subtle differences in landscape character. Where fields are smaller, hedges higher and hedgerow trees more abundant, the sense of enclosure is much stronger. Long distance views are blocked or filtered, creating a perception of a smaller scale and much more verdant landscape. Where the fields are larger, with low trimmed hedgerows and

fewer trees, the lack of enclosure means that the landscape character appears to be more open and larger scale. At such locations the views are much more extensive and panoramic and often extend as far as the high ground of the surrounding areas. To the west this extends to the Clwydian Hills and to the east the *Sandstone Ridge*.

The high number of hedgerow trees scattered across the plain can lead to a false perception of the landscape. Viewpoints are low due to the absence of high vantage points and the nearest tall hedgerow tends to form the visual horizon. Views from more open ground can feature a succession of hedgerows receding into the distance, and these coalesce visually into a single mass of tree crowns creating a false impression of woodland cover. In reality the woodland cover is low across the *Cheshire Plain West*, being restricted to small copses, game coverts and groups of trees associated with ponds and lines of drainage.

### **Physical Influences**

The topography of the landscape is predominantly flat with a range of between 10-40m AOD. This is lower than the *Cheshire Plain East* (40-80m AOD). The solid geology comprises Chester Pebble Beds, banded with Kinnerton Sandstone and Salop Formation (mudstone, sandstone and conglomerate) in the central area of the plain. To the east is an area of Wilmslow Sandstone. Overlying this is a large expanse of glacial till (Devensian) interspersed with occasional pockets of sand and gravel. This supports argillic stagnogley soils which are the most widespread type in Cheshire. These fine textured soils are ideally suited to grass and are a major factor in the development of the dairy farming industry on the plain. Much of the type is given over to permanent pasture but more favourable sites are also used to grow fodder crops.

Secondary calcium carbonate deposits are common at a depth of 1-2m in the till, and before cheap lime was made available in the 19th century this was dug and spread on the surrounding fields to reduce acidity. On sandy soils this practice of marling also increases fertility and moisture holding capacity. The digging of marl pits led to the creation of ponds as the pits filled with water and were colonised by a rich variety of plants and animals from other wetland habitats of greater age, for example, meres and mosses.

The natural processes of vegetation succession have reduced many ponds to small, shallow features, over shaded with trees and with little open water. Nevertheless, the remaining ponds still provide a significant wildlife resource. Characteristic plant species include bur marigold, water plantain, tubular water-dropwort, reedmace, branched bur-reed, water horsetail, common spike-rush, purple loosestrife, water milfoil, various water lilies and pondweeds. A wide range of invertebrates is associated with marl pits as well as all 5 species of amphibian found in Cheshire, including the European protected great crested newt.

The *Cheshire Plain West* is naturally badly drained, despite a large number of water courses. There is a network of rivers and brooks that drain into the River Dee. Woodland is mainly restricted to small copses, shelter belts and along river sides. The landscape type is notable for its lack of ancient woodland; just one area is mapped at Long Wood to the north of Ashton Hayes, while the greatest concentration of broad leaved woodland occurs around Churton Heath. Scattered examples of species-rich grassland survive throughout the area, with particularly important examples in the south between Shocklach, Tilston and Threapwood.

Hawthorn hedgerows and standard trees (oaks, ash and sycamore) are distinctive features of this type. In some areas hedgerows have been lost or have grown out, leaving mature trees which give a false impression of parkland and an unrealistic proportion of woodland. The sense of a well-wooded landscape is enhanced by the tree growth that now surrounds many of the ponds and small water bodies which occur throughout the area.

### ***Cultural Influences***

A handful of Bronze Age round barrows such as the bowl barrow near Coddington provide some of the earliest indicators of human activity, while the first example of settlement is indicated by the discovery of the remains of a series of Iron Age round houses to the south of Tarvin. It is likely that much of the Plain was dotted with similar settlement on the higher, better drained areas with associated fields and animal husbandry enclosures. Two Roman Roads cross the Plain – leading to Wilderspool and Manchester. Medieval features such as moated sites are common features with fine examples of these ornamental water features at Bruera and Lower Huxley Hall on the fringe of the *Gowy Valley*. There are also fishponds and field systems as well as expanses of ridge and furrow.

The predominant settlement character consists of low density dispersed hamlets and farmsteads. There are also a small number of nucleated villages including Ashton, Great Barrow, Tarvin and Tattenhall.

The *Cheshire Plain West* landscape is dominated by enclosure and field sizes are mainly a mix of small (under 4 hectares) and medium scale enclosure (4 to 8 hectares) with an irregular and semi-regular pattern. Around half of fields in this type, particularly within the central *Hargrave, Hoofield & Beeston Plain* LCA and within the western *Tattenhall to Shocklach Plain* LCA contain a regionally significant late medieval landscape which preserves elements of the earlier medieval open fields. The historic landscape of these areas is generally cohesive and un-fragmented and is considered to contain some of the best preserved late medieval field systems and ridge and furrow in Cheshire (together with LCA 5g: *Malpas*). Amongst these are townfields associated with ancient settlement. Some of these have escaped agricultural improvement and still support species-rich grassland.

Dispersed settlement is typical as is a sinuous network of footpaths and country lanes that link hamlets and farmsteads together across the landscape. Much of this landscape type therefore has medieval origins and there has been very little change in recent centuries.

There are a small number of large fields that have been created in recent decades as boundaries have been lost or deliberately removed, while the remaining proportion of field types are post medieval in date, which indicate either later phases of enclosure (there is a small percentage of enclosure by Act of Parliament) or the reorganisation and rationalisation of field size and shape in order to improve productivity, mainly associated with the surrounding Eaton, Bolesworth and Tollemache estates.

Industrial heritage is evident as the Shropshire Union Canal and the former London and North Western Railways both utilised the flat landscape, running northwest-southeast across the Plain. The canal stretches from Ellesmere Port through Chester and Barbridge and eventually to Wolverhampton. It was constructed as a number of waterways that were brought together as the Shropshire Union in the mid 19th century. The M56, a major communication route runs east-west across the north of the Plain.

Buildings include timber-framed and brick-built structures as well as a small number constructed from sandstone (mainly high status – churches for example) and some stone walls are evident.

There are **four Landscape Character Areas** within LCT 9:

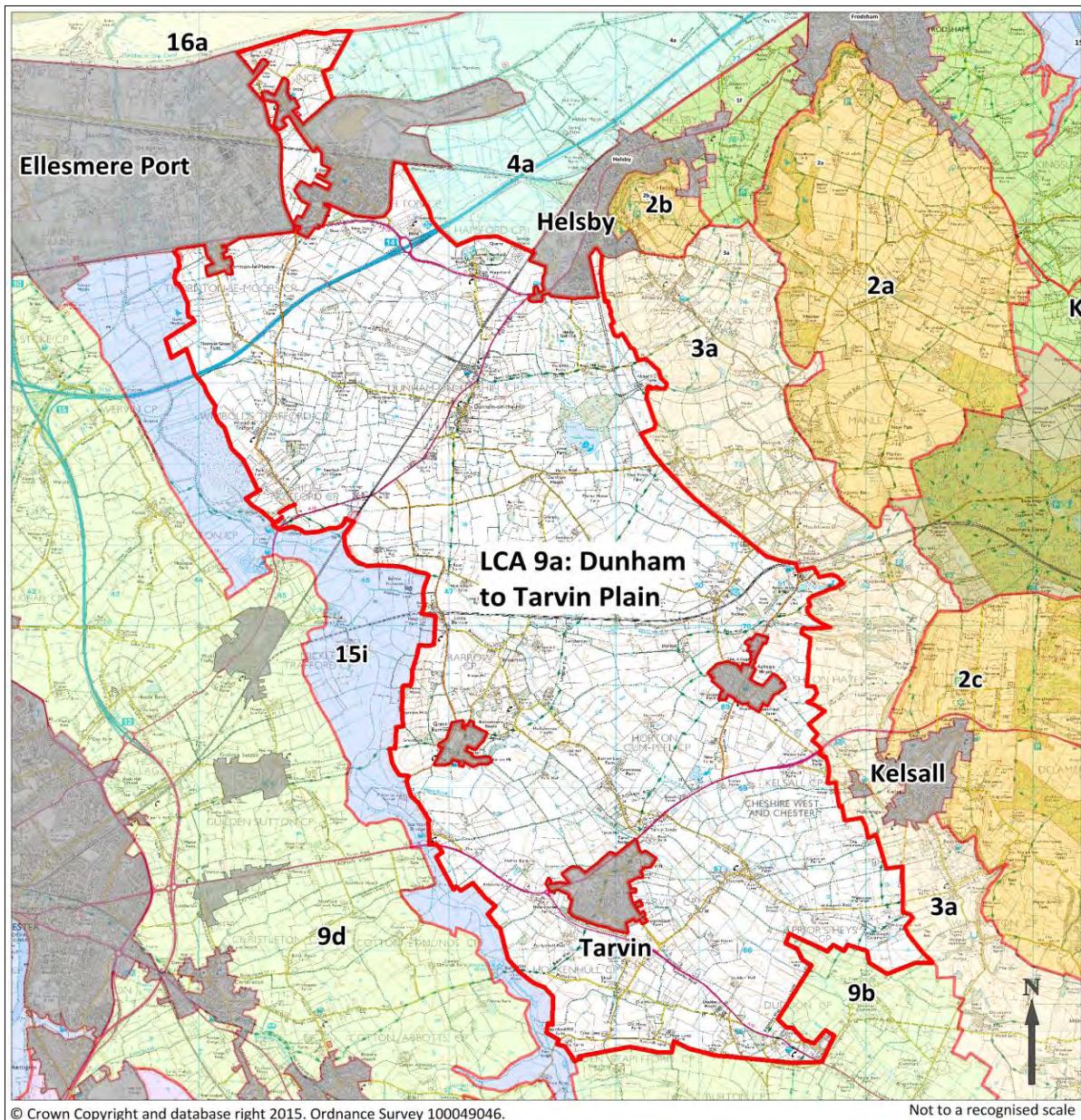
**9a: Dunham to Tarvin Plain**

**9b: Hargrave, Hoofield & Beeston Plain**

**9c: Tattenhall to Shocklach Plain**

**9d: Saughall to Waverton Plain**

## LCA 9a: Dunham to Tarvin Plain



### Location and Boundaries

The **Dunham to Tarvin Plain LCA** falls between the *Gowy Valley* and *Sandstone Fringe* LCAs across the north-eastern parts of the *Cheshire Plain West LCT*. It includes urban fringe area around the south of Stanmore and Elton to the north and includes the free-standing rural settlements of Tarvin, Ashton Hayes and Great Barrow across its south. Duddon lies to its southern-most point.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 9a: Dunham to Tarvin Plain***

- A broad, gently shelving and mostly flat plain landscape characterised by hedges and hedgerow trees providing limited vistas
- Wide areas of improved grassland for dairy farming and fodder crops
- Limited woodland, confined to isolated coverts and copses, although hedgerow oaks are important elements of the landscape
- Historic medieval field patterns and increases in tree cover are still found around smaller settlements
- Extensive network of small field ponds which are generally inconspicuous in the landscape
- Larger settlements punctuate the plain where historic form has often been lost within areas of 20<sup>th</sup> century and later housing development, e.g. at Tarvin
- Elsewhere, settlement is scattered across the plain in small linear hamlets and freestanding farmsteads
- Petro-chemical and Industrial development outside the character area is prominent across the north of the LCA
- The Sandstone Ridge presents a more elevated skyline to the east of the LCA
- Where hedgerows and tree networks remain, the area can present some degree of limited enclosure due to an absence of elevation and viewpoints
- Some loss of field boundaries diminishes this enclosure where some arable farming has been established
- Significant transport infrastructure dissects the area and diminishes tranquillity and rurality, particularly across the north of the LCA

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### **Natural / Physical**

- A generally flat landscape with some gentle undulation, for example at Dunham-on-the-Hill, at Great Barrow which stands raised above the Gowy Valley, and along parts of the transition with the Sandstone Fringe LCA around Ashton Hayes;
- Fields are a mix of mainly small-medium (up to 8ha) semi-regular, regular and some irregular enclosures, with hedgerow boundaries and numerous marl pits;
- A considerable treescape created by abundance of hedgerow trees, predominantly oak, but which is perceived as being denser than it is as a consequence of level terrain;
- Woodland is otherwise limited to isolated coverts and copses, often under-managed;
- Evidence of the enclosure of surviving heath in the character area, sometimes associated with dispersed settlement;
- In certain areas hedgerow loss has resulted in a more open landscape with larger fields, isolated oak trees and post and wire fences;
- Land use is predominantly dairy agriculture with some limited pockets of arable farming and for fodder production;
- Surface water drainage limited to small inconspicuous streams such as Peckmill Brook and Salters Brook;
- Manley Mere presents a significant open water feature with uncharacteristic, more wooded vegetation context of planted immature woodlands than elsewhere in the LCA;
- The plain is dotted with hundreds of small field ponds providing an important habitat network and reflecting historic marl pit excavations for soil improvement;

- However, designated ecological sites are limited as consequence of the historically farmed landscape and improved grassland;
- Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Site at Dunham-on-the-Hill cutting.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The combination of medieval fields alongside those that have undergone post medieval improvement and 20th century adaptation;
- The Roman Roads to Wilderspool and Manchester both cross this area;
- Medieval moated sites are located at Foulk Stapleford and Elton and designated as Scheduled Monuments;
- A number of ancient settlements were mentioned at Doomsday and notably ancient field systems developed in the surrounding area, which includes some surviving areas of ridge and furrow;
- Fields were reorganised into a more regular pattern in the 18th and 19th centuries especially around Ashton Hayes, which alongside the parkland may form a wider estate landscape;
- Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments are generally sparse across the open plain, although a number of medieval and later country halls and houses can be found including Peel, Hockenhull, Mouldsworth and Lower Hapsford Halls are exceptions to this;
- Elsewhere, Listed Buildings, primarily churches and historic houses are restricted to the historic cores of the villages, such as Tarvin and Dunham-on-the-Hill;
- Conservation Areas reflect the historic significance of many of the LCAs villages, such as Tarvin, Great Barrow, Little Barrow and Dunham-on-the-Hill;
- Recreational opportunities across an extensive Public Rights of Way network, including parts of the Longster Trail and North Cheshire Way;
- Golf courses provide recreational opportunities near Dunham-on-the-Hill, Oscroft and at Sandfield;
- Multiple outdoor adventure, water sports and training activities at the Manley Mere education centre.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- The most built-up of the *Cheshire Plain West*'s character areas;
- A greater proportion of villages, which have undergone modern expansion (Tarvin, Great Barrow and Dunham-on-the-Hill) than elsewhere on the plain which is typified by dispersed settlement of small hamlets and farmsteads;
- These villages, outside their significant historic cores, reflect suburban type development and present very limited local distinctiveness;
- Traditional farm buildings and distinctive brick barns have often been converted to residential or rural business uses;
- Farmsteads are scattered across the plain but generally well-spaced, suggesting quite large farm size;
- Large modern dairy unit buildings and agricultural infrastructure can be locally prominent;
- Building types are typically red and brown brick;
- Some sporadic ribbon development can be found outside settlements such as at Long Green and Old Moss;
- Much of the character area the landscape has a very rural feel with small, winding roads and lanes connecting isolated farms and hamlets;
- This contrasts with the significant local impact of a number of busy highways, noticeably the M56 and A56 in the north and the A41 and A54 in the south;
- Brick-built buildings of the Royal Ordnance Factory at Dunham-on-the-Hill ammunition store are a feature in the landscape;
- Overhead electricity lines and pylons are sometimes prominent;

- The settlement of Dunham-on-the-Hill identifies an isolated point of high ground within the prevailing flat agricultural plain;
- A number of golf courses are located in the north of the area near Helsby and this has significantly changed the character of the landscape.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Away from transport and energy infrastructure, the plain presents a pastoral and peaceful character with some degree of tranquillity possible, particularly across the footpath network;
- The relative elevation of Dunham-on-the-Hill provides views to the north over the flat, sparsely developed landscape surrounding the M56, to the industrial areas of Stanlow and Ellesmere Port;
- The massive petrochemical industrial complex dominates many outward views in the north of the character area;
- An intrusive overhead power line also traverses this part of the character area introducing industrial scale infrastructure to a large swathe rural parts of the LCA;
- Views to the east are dominated by the *Sandstone Ridge*, which appears to be very well-wooded in contrast to this area, where woodland is scarce;
- There are distant views to the hills of North Wales to the west;
- Hedgerows and hedgerow trees, as well as limited coverts and woodlands associated with settlement and the halls, present a changing seasonal colour in contrast to the rich but improved pastoral fields;
- Field ponds are often inconspicuous in the landscape despite their number due to thick hedge enclosure of the fields they lie within and general absence of elevated viewpoints into them;
- In other cases pond-side vegetation and trees within a field belie their existence rather than any glimpse of surface water;
- In some areas where hedgerows have been lost but mature trees remain, a 'false parkland' character can pervade;
- The flatness of the landscape provides opportunities for long views to the *Sandstone Ridge* which forms a dominant backdrop and prominent skyline to the east. Relatively open character of the plain means there is little opportunity for screening large scale elements, however the visual impact of low level elements could be mitigated using native planting that would not in itself be highly visible.

#### **Landscape Condition**

Generally good, with key characteristic elements that make up the plain generally intact. However, some field boundaries are undermanaged or being removed. Suburban and settlement fringe land use, such as equine related sites serve to erode pastoral character in places.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 9a: Dunham to Tarvin Plain:**

- Green Belt and Countryside;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV) to the far south-east of the area at Prior Heys;
- Natural heritage sites of local importance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management;
- Candidate Key Settlement Gap between Tarvin and Oscroft.

### ***Forces for Landscape Change***

#### **Past change**

- Agricultural intensification with enlargement of fields and loss of hedgerow boundaries (oak trees left 'in-field') with loss of historic field pattern;
- Under management and deterioration of some small farm woodlands;
- A shift from pasture grazing with increasing areas being cultivated for arable cropping, silage or feed crops including cereals and maize;
- Loss of historic parkland to recreational use (such as golf courses) or farmland;
- Loss of unimproved grassland;
- Loss of ridge and furrow;
- Limited management of field ponds has resulted in some silting up and drying out due to natural processes of vegetation succession and overshadowing from trees;
- Prominent transport and energy transfer infrastructure;
- Erosion of local distinctiveness in larger settlements;
- Increased visual intrusion and loss of tranquillity from industrial and transport infrastructure to the north, including the M56.

#### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 9a: *Dunham to Tarvin Plain***

- Farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;
- Pressure for Solar PV farms;
- Pressure for residential/employment development, for example at Tarvin and Ashton Hayes;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Degradation of vernacular building style through alteration;
- Pressure for built development around settlements and associated with the main M56 corridor at Junction 14 that passes through the landscape.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 9a: Dunham to Tarvin Plain***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **restore** the historic field pattern of hawthorn hedgerows and hedgerow oak trees and **enhance** the grassland and small woodland network, and to limit the influence of urban and industrial development to the north on the rural character of the plain.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerows.
3. Consider opportunities to replace hedgerows where they have been lost utilising appropriate species of hawthorn and oak standards.
4. Conserve the remaining hedgerow trees and seek opportunities to encourage a new generation of hedgerow trees to increase their presence in the landscape.
5. Manage existing small woodlands and coverts to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
6. Consider opportunities to plant simple, small pockets of trees and small blocks of woodland in field corners to ensure the continuation of these declining characteristic features.
7. Conserve the small to medium scale pattern of fields, particularly early field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape, particularly around settlements.
8. Maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil (for example as a result of increased crop growing).
9. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
10. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.

11. Encourage sympathetic integration of golf courses through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries and existing woodland rather than planting of alien ornamental species  
- ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
12. Conserve the remnant fragments of unimproved grassland that is of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.
13. Encourage the retention and management of field ponds and brooks that are of wildlife importance as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
14. Conserve the remaining areas of ridge and furrow by restricting use of fields to pasture.
15. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as kerbs and large-scale signage.
16. Conserve distant views to the Welsh hills and take account of views from the *Sandstone Fringe* and *Sandstone Ridge* when planning for change.

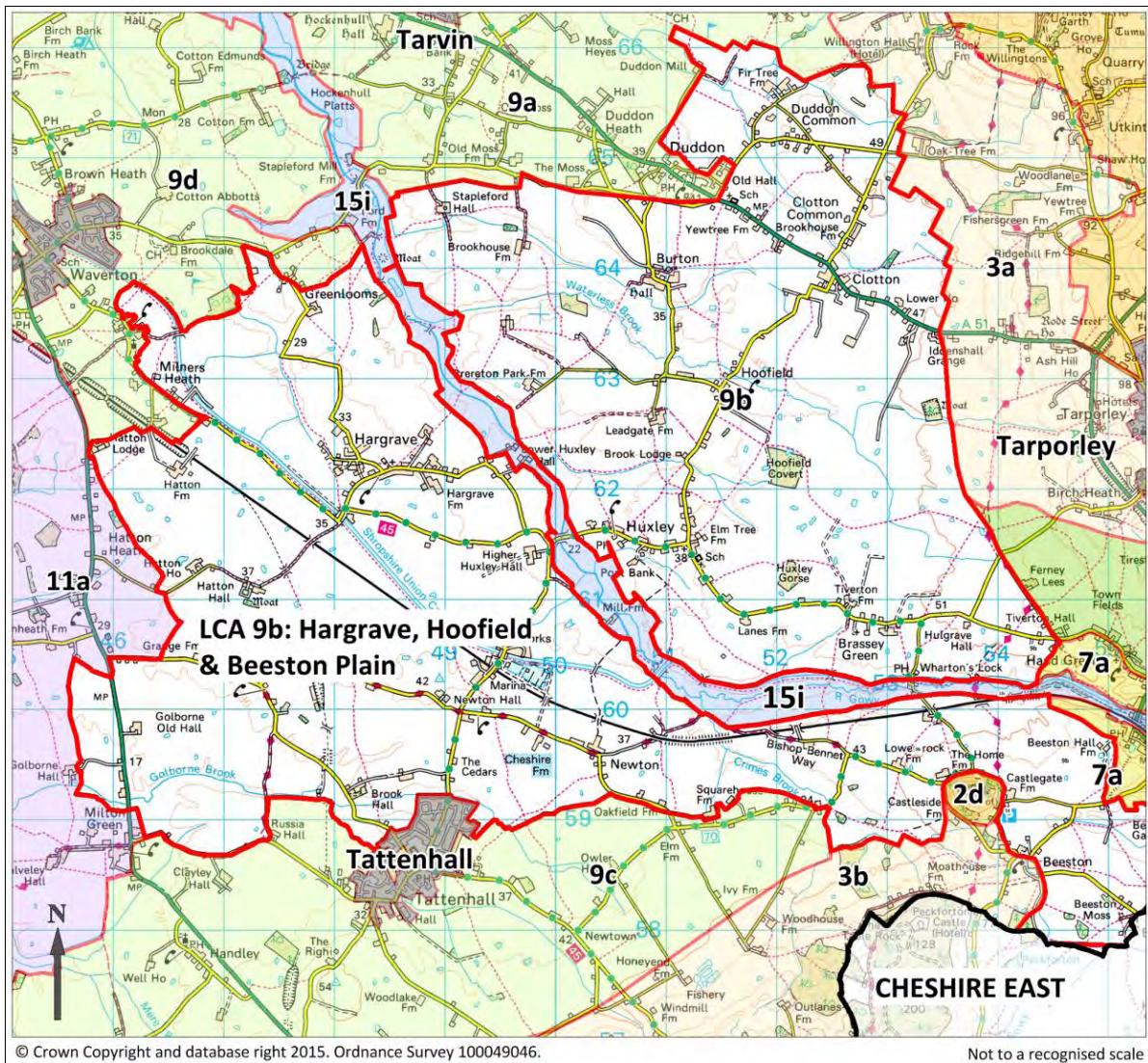
### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of villages, hamlets, halls and farmsteads and isolated cottages, retaining the main villages as the main focus for development.
2. Conserve the local vernacular built form –simple red-brown brick buildings with steeply pitching welsh slate roofs.
3. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting.
4. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
5. Soften built edges by introducing small scale planting schemes using native broadleaved species. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows rather than close-board fencing.
6. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
7. Conserve rural views towards the *Sandstone Ridge* in the east.

8. Maintain the rural setting to villages and farmsteads which are features of the landscape.
9. Conserve the open undeveloped area between Tarvin and Oscroft that has been identified as a Candidate Key Settlement Gap where development would lead to coalescence and the loss of identity of the two communities.
10. Ensure any industrial character or large scale commercial development in M56 corridor and beyond is appropriately sited, designed and orientated so as to limit its influence on the rural and tranquil plain to the south, with extensive mitigating planting as necessary.
11. Ensure the design of elements associated with new development such as boundary treatments and surfacing recognise, respond to and reflect the traditional vernacular of existing landscape elements that help to define the landscape character, in order to prevent encroaching sub-urbanisation.
12. Ensure that the siting of Solar PV farms is not visually prominent from higher ground.



## LCA 9b: Hargrave, Hoofield & Beeston Plain



### Location and Boundaries

The **Hargrave, Hoofield and Beeston Plain LCA** character area lies to the south of Duddon and extends as far south as Tattenhall. It is bisected by the *Gowy Valley LCA* in a south-east to north-west line. It has dispersed settlement pattern with villages limited to the free-standing small rural settlements of Hargrave, Hoofield, Clotton and Burton. The LCA abuts the large village of Tattenhall to the south.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 9b: Hargrave, Hoofield and Beeston Plain***

- A broad and gently undulating plain landscape characterised by hedges and hedgerow tress providing limited vistas
- The area is bisected by the narrow line of the Gowy River LCA
- Wide areas of improved grassland for dairy farming and fodder crops
- Limited woodland, confined to isolated coverts and copses, although hedgerow oaks are important elements of the landscape
- Cohesive and un-fragmented regionally significant historic landscape with extremely well preserved late medieval field systems and extensive ridge and furrow; abundant hedgerows and hedgerow trees creating a characteristic patchwork with preserved elements of the earlier medieval open fields and common land (which is sometimes associated with dispersed settlement)
- Extensive network of small field ponds which are generally inconspicuous in the landscape
- Low settlement density of small agricultural hamlets with loose-knit settlement form and freestanding farmsteads
- Absence of significant urban or industrial influence
- The Sandstone Ridge presents a more elevated skyline to the east of the LCA
- Beeston Castle provides a strong landscape focus and reference point to the south
- Where hedgerows and tree networks remain, the area can present some degree of limited enclosure due to an absence of elevation and viewpoints
- Some loss of field boundaries diminishes this enclosure where some arable farming has been established
- Historic transport infrastructure of the Shropshire Union Canal and railway dissects the area

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### ***Natural / Physical***

- A gently undulating topography with some limited increase in elevation to the east as the area transitions with the Sandstone Fringe LCT;
- Some slight fall in elevation and local topography is associated with the margins of the Gowy Valley LCA which effectively runs through this character area;
- The character of the landscape is strongly influenced by the ubiquitous coverage of hedgerows and pasture, their pattern and abundance of individual hedgerow trees;
- A considerable treescape is created by repeated lines of hedgerow trees, predominantly oak, but which is perceived as being denser than it is as a consequence of limited elevation change;
- Many hedgerows are tightly trimmed, but where allowed to grow taller restrict ground level views;
- Woodland cover is low and usually associated with watercourses and small copses;
- Barn owls populations are significant in the area;
- The plain is dotted with hundreds of small field ponds providing an important habitat network and reflecting historic marl pit excavations for soil improvement;
- Designated ecological sites are limited within the LCA as a consequence of the historically farmed landscape and improved grassland but a small number of sites of ecological importance are associated with species rich grassland, small woodlands and coverts for example at Clotton Common, Hoofield Covert, Huxley Gorse and the disused railway at Gatesheath;

- Surface water drainage is limited to small inconspicuous streams such as Guylance, Waterless and Southey Brooks, which are occasionally prominent only as a consequence of increased riparian tree cover rather than the water feature itself;
- In certain areas hedgerow loss has resulted in a more open landscape with larger fields, isolated oak trees and post and wire fences.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The area contains a regionally significant late medieval landscape which preserves elements of the earlier medieval open fields. The historic landscape of this area is generally cohesive and unfragmented and is considered to contain some of the best preserved late medieval field systems and ridge and furrow in Cheshire, providing historic continuity in the landscape;
- The landscape to the southwest, in Wales and known as the Maelor Saesneg, is included on the Countryside Council for Wales/CADW/International Council on Monuments and Sites (UK): Historic Landscapes Register; Part 2.2 Register of Landscapes of Special Historic Interest in Wales. England has no equivalent register, however this landscape is clearly of regional, if not national, importance;
- Large blocks of small to medium (up to 8ha) irregular and semi-regular field enclosure (mainly a medieval field system);
- A dispersed ancient settlement pattern and dense network of footpaths;
- Little Post-Medieval and Modern re-organisation of the field systems although increases in arable farming to the south east have resulted in some hedgerow loss, such as south of Huxley and north of Gatesheath, reflecting better drained soils;
- A fragment of heath survives into the post medieval period, which was enclosed by Parliamentary Act at Duddon;
- There are a number of halls and moated sites such as the late 15th century manor house of Lower Huxley Hall, which is a Scheduled Monument;
- The outline of the medieval Stapleford Park survives in the landscape at Brereton Park Farm;
- An important resource of archaeological sites associated including Saxon coins horde and medieval kiln sites.;
- Civil war skirmish site at Tiverton Heath;
- Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments are generally sparse across the open plain, although a number of medieval and later country halls and houses can be found including those at Hatton, Hoofield and Burton are exceptions to this;
- Elsewhere, Listed Buildings, primarily churches and historic houses are restricted to the historic cores of the villages and hamlets such as Burton and Clotton where Conservation Areas are also designated;
- The Shropshire Union Canal reflects more recent industrial heritage of the area including listed bridges;
- Recreational opportunities across an extensive Public Rights of Way network, including the Eddisbury Way, Bishop Bennet Way and the canal towpath;
- Navigation on the canal and moorings at Tattenhall Marina;
- Brereton Park Farm visitor attraction.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- A very low settlement density with few small loose-knit villages, hamlets and dispersed isolated farmsteads and cottages;
- Settlements which have avoided significant enlargement and loss of character, although Hargrave, Clotton and Huxley display varying degrees of a mid 20<sup>th</sup> century ribbon and in-fill development;
- Traditional farm buildings and distinctive brick barns have often been converted to residential or rural business uses;

- Farmsteads are scattered across the plain but generally well-spaced, suggesting quite large farm size;
- Modern dairy unit buildings and agricultural infrastructure can be locally prominent, including within settlements such as Clotton;
- Building types are typically red and brown brick simple cottages with some whitewash and timber framed buildings;
- Much of the character area the landscape has a very rural feel with small, winding roads and lanes connecting isolated farms and hamlets;
- The Crewe-Chester railway traverses the area in close proximity to the Shropshire Union Canal, both in a generally east-west direction;
- In the north the busy A51 passes through Duddon and Clotton.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Where middle distance views are available the hedgerow trees in successive field boundaries can appear to coalesce to form a solid mass on the horizon, creating the effect of a well-wooded landscape;
- The striking landmark of Beeston Castle, perched high upon the precipitous sandstone crag on the area's southern boundary is a dominant visual feature and reference point;
- The castle, in combination with the much greater mass of the *Sandstone Ridge* in the vicinity of Peckforton and Buckley Hill, terminate all views to the south and contribute significantly to the landscape character;
- To the north-east the *Sandstone Ridge* is prominent around Utkinton;
- Away from transport infrastructure such as the railway and A51, the LCA presents a pastoral and peaceful character with some degree of tranquillity possible, particularly across the footpath network and along the canal towpath;
- Hedgerows and hedgerow trees, as well as small coverts and woodlands associated with settlement and the halls, present a changing seasonal colour in contrast to the rich but improved pastoral fields;
- The ubiquitous field ponds are often inconspicuous in the landscape despite their number due to hedge enclosure of the fields they lie within and general absence of elevated viewpoints;
- In other cases pond-side vegetation and trees within a field belie their existence rather than any glimpse of surface water;
- In some areas where hedgerows have been lost but mature trees remain, a 'false parkland' character can pervade;
- The relatively open character of the plain means there is little opportunity for screening any large scale elements, however the visual impact of low level elements could be mitigated using native planting that would not in itself be highly visible.

#### **Landscape Condition**

Generally good, with key characteristic elements that make up the plain generally intact. However, some field boundaries are undermanaged or being removed as arable land use has increased in places.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 9b: *Hargrave, Hoofield and Beeston Plain*:**

- Countryside;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV) to the far south-east of the area at Beeston and to the far north-east beyond Duddon Common;

- Natural heritage sites of local importance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

### ***Forces for Landscape Change***

#### **Past change**

- Some agricultural intensification with enlargement of fields and loss of hedgerow boundaries (oak trees left 'in-field') with loss of historic field pattern;
- Under management and deterioration of some small farm woodlands;
- A shift from pasture grazing with increasing areas being cultivated for arable cropping, silage or feed crops including cereals and maize;
- Loss of unimproved grassland;
- Loss of ridge and furrow;
- Limited management of field ponds has resulted in some silting up and drying out due to natural processes of vegetation succession and overshadowing from trees;
- Transport infrastructure improvements and increase in traffic;
- Expansion of Tattenhall Marina;
- Dilution of built vernacular character in settlements;
- Change of use of traditional farm buildings to residential use with loss of character and unsympathetic detailing.

#### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 9b: *Hargrave, Hoofield and Beeston Plain***

##### **Plain**

- Continued deterioration in field boundary maintenance and management;
- Farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks, and Ice Cream Farm;
- Erosion of built environment character through incremental development –pressure for expansion of existing settlement, ribbon development and in-fill (particularly Tattenhall area including Newton-By-Tattenhall)
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Decline in the vernacular building character;
- Climate change leading to changing agricultural practice and impacts upon field ponds and water ecology.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 9b: Hargrave, Hoofield & Beeston Plain***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the regionally significant historic landscape comprising late medieval field systems and ridge and furrow, **restore** the historic field pattern of hawthorn hedgerows and hedgerow oak trees, and **enhance** the grassland and woodland network.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerows.
3. Consider opportunities to replace hedgerows where they have been lost utilising appropriate species of hawthorn and oak standards.
4. Manage existing small woodlands and coverts to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
5. Consider opportunities to plant simple, small pockets of trees and small blocks of woodland in field corners to ensure the continuation of these declining characteristic features.
6. Conserve the small to medium scale pattern of fields, particularly early field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape, particularly around settlements.
7. Maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil (for example as a result of increased crop growing).
8. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
9. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
10. Conserve the remnant fragments of unimproved grassland that is of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.
11. Encourage the retention and management of field ponds and brooks that are of wildlife importance as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.

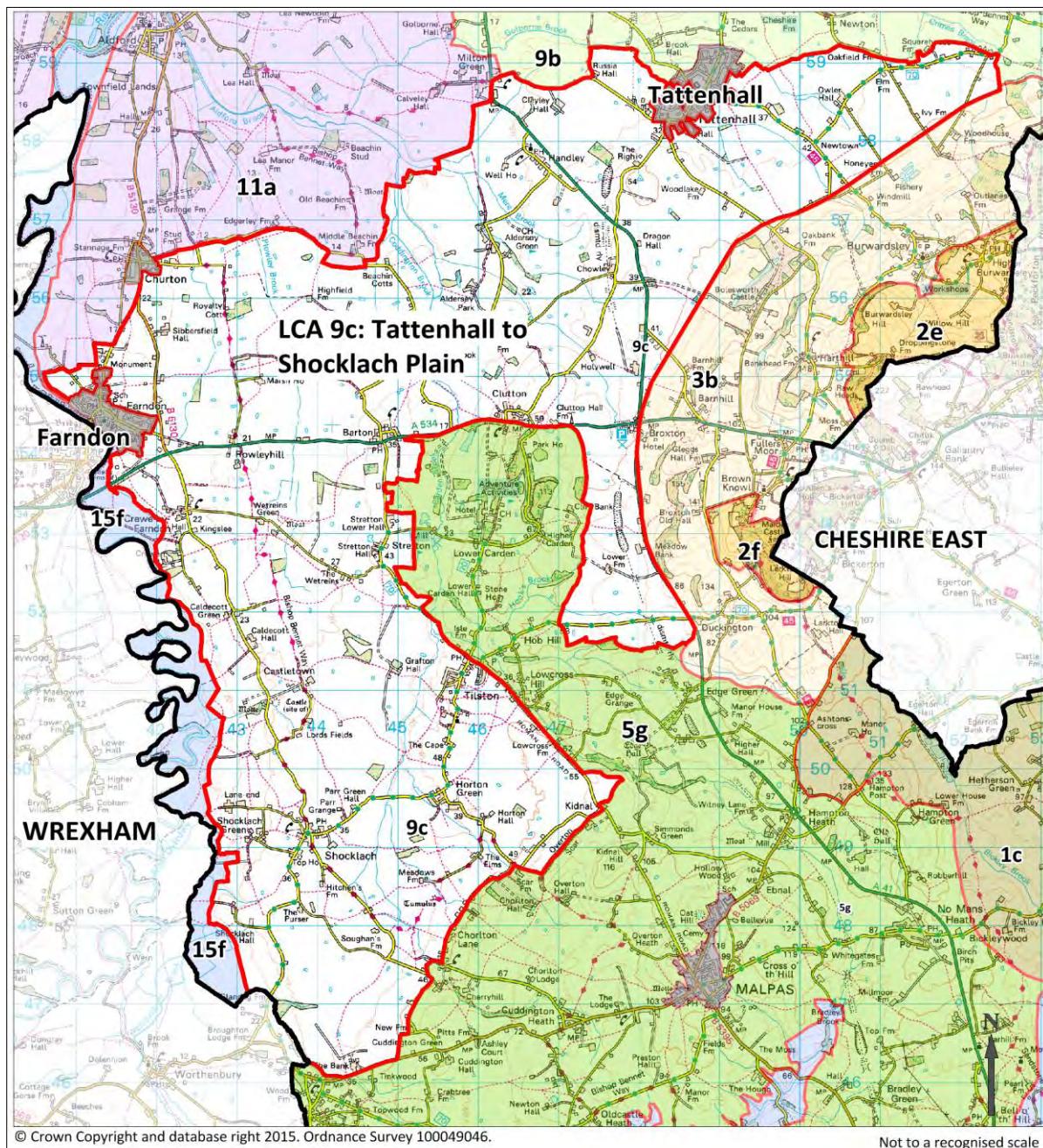
12. Conserve the remaining areas of ridge and furrow by restricting use of fields to pasture.
13. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as kerbs and large-scale signage.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the loose-knit, low-density, scattered settlement pattern of very small villages, hamlets, halls and farmsteads and isolated cottages. Tightly control settlement expansion.
2. Conserve the local vernacular built form –simple red-brown brick buildings with steeply pitching Welsh slate roofs and white washed brick and timber frames.
3. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting.
4. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
5. Soften built edges by introducing small scale planting schemes using native broadleaved species.
6. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows rather than close-board fencing.
7. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development does not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
8. Conserve rural views towards the *Sandstone Ridge* in the east, Beeston Castle and Peckforton Castle to the southeast, and the Welsh hills to the west.
9. Maintain the rural setting to villages and farmsteads which are features of the landscape.
10. Ensure the design of elements associated with new development such as boundary treatments and surfacing recognise, respond to and reflect the traditional vernacular of existing landscape elements that help to define the landscape character, in order to prevent encroaching sub-urbanisation.
11. Encourage new development to include new footpath connections.



## LCA 9c: Tattenhall to Shocklach Plain



### Location and Boundaries

The **Tattenhall to Shocklach Plain** character area lies to the south of the *Hargreave, Hoofield and Beeston Plain* from Tattenhall, in a large south-westerly swathe of thinly populated deeply rural countryside extending as far south as Threapwood, with a long western boundary with the *Dee Valley*. Its eastern boundary runs from Threapwood in a north-easterly to the foot of the *Sandstone Fringe* near Beeston. This boundary is indented by the Carden Park estate and hotel facility which is included within the *Malpas LCA* to the south and east.

### **Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 9c: Tattenhall to Shocklach Plain**

- A broad and mostly flat plain landscape characterised by hedges and hedgerow trees providing limited vistas
- Wide areas of improved grassland for dairy farming and fodder crops
- Limited woodland, confined to isolated coverts and copses, although hedgerow oaks are important elements of the landscape
- Cohesive and un-fragmented regionally significant historic landscape with extremely well preserved late medieval field systems and extensive ridge and furrow; abundant hedgerows and hedgerow trees creating a characteristic patchwork with preserved elements of the earlier medieval open fields and common land (which is sometimes associated with dispersed settlement)
- Extensive network of small field ponds which are generally inconspicuous in the landscape
- Small settlements punctuate the plain where historic form has often been retained although limited within areas of 20<sup>th</sup> century and later housing development has occurred
- Farndon and Tattenhall have seen recent residential development. Elsewhere, settlement is scattered across the plain in small, nucleated hamlets and freestanding farmsteads
- The *Sandstone Ridge* presents a more elevated skyline to the east of the LCA, with the Clwydian Hills to the west
- Distant views over the Dee valley into Wales are possible from the western fringe of the area
- Where hedgerows and tree networks remain, the area can present some degree of limited enclosure due to an absence of elevation and viewpoints
- Some loss of field boundaries diminishes this enclosure where some arable farming has been established
- An absence of significant transport infrastructure or industrial development helps retain a deeply rural and tranquil character

### **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

#### **Natural / Physical**

- A gently undulating topography with some increase in elevation to the east as the area transitions with the *Sandstone Fringe* LCT towards Malpas and Tilston;
- The central area is predominantly flat pastoral plain with elevations typically of 35m AOD;
- To the west the land surface falls gently and evenly to the *Dee Valley* at around 10m AOD offering some longer views out to the Welsh hills;
- It includes small, nucleated villages such as Clutton, Barton, Tilston and Shocklach, while the remaining settlement pattern is made up of isolated hamlets and farmsteads;
- Fields are small – medium (up to 8ha) and comprise medieval enclosures with post-medieval reorganisation;
- The land along the western boundary of the character area slopes gently down to the *Dee Valley* and elsewhere the ground rises;
- Although there are few woodland areas, small copses associated with field ponds or small streams combine with the abundant hedgerow trees to filter views within the landscape, creating the impression of well-wooded landscape;
- The character of the landscape is strongly influenced by the ubiquitous coverage of hedgerows and pasture, their pattern and abundance of individual hedgerow trees;
- Dairy farming is the predominant land use but pockets of arable farming are also scattered, such as north of Tilston and south of the hamlet of Crewe;

- Treescapes are created by repeated lines of hedgerow trees, predominantly oak, but which can be perceived as being denser than it is where there is limited elevation change;
- Many hedgerows are tightly trimmed and sometimes gappy, but where allowed to grow taller restrict ground level views;
- Woodland cover is low and usually associated with small coverts such as Fox Covert, Grafton Gorse, New Covert and the Royalty, some recognised as local wildlife sites;
- Sites of semi-natural vegetation are isolated, for example, at Pump Lane Wood, Tom Irons' Rough and Castletown Rough;
- The plain is dotted with hundreds of small field ponds providing an important habitat network and reflecting historic marl pit excavations for soil improvement;
- Designated ecological sites are found across the LCA associated with concentrations of unimproved grasslands near Shocklach, Tilston, Castletown and Aldersey;
- The River Dee SSSI with its important mixed ecological community lies along much of the LCA's western fringe;
- Surface water drainage is limited to small streams which mainly run northwards parallel to the Dee such as Plowley, Coddington and Alderley Brooks, which are often inconspicuous but occasionally prominent only as a consequence of increased riparian tree cover rather than the water feature itself;
- In certain areas hedgerow loss has resulted in a more open landscape with larger fields, isolated oak trees and post and wire fences, particularly to the north east of the LCA.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The area contains a regionally significant late medieval landscape which preserves elements of the earlier medieval open fields. The historic landscape of this area is generally cohesive and unfragmented and is considered to contain some of the best preserved late medieval field systems and ridge and furrow in Cheshire, providing historic continuity in the landscape;
- The landscape to the southwest, in Wales and known as the Maelor Saesneg, is included on the Countryside Council for Wales/CADW/International Council on Monuments and Sites (UK): Historic Landscapes Register; Part 2.2 Register of Landscapes of Special Historic Interest in Wales. England has no equivalent register, however this landscape is clearly of regional, if not national, importance;
- Large blocks of small to medium (up to 8ha) irregular and semi-regular field enclosure (mainly a medieval field system);
- A dispersed ancient settlement pattern and network of footpaths;
- There are a number of medieval monuments in this character area including Shocklach castle motte and moated enclosure, a deserted medieval settlement and ornamental moat at Grafton and medieval field system and settlement at Castletown Farm;
- The route of the Roman road partly defines the eastern boundary of the LCA at Tilston;
- Listed buildings are found in small concentrations within the small settlements of Coddington, Barton and Stretton;
- Conservation Areas have been designated in Tilston, Stretton, Handley, Tattenhall, Barton, Coddington, Aldersey Green and Farndon;
- A dense Public Rights of Way network falls across the central parts of the character area around Tilston and Horton Green, but is less extensive to the northern and southern parts of the LCA;
- The Bishop Bennet Way long distance path, for much of its route along green lanes, dissects the western half of the area in a north-south direction;
- A manicured and well-wooded golf course is found at Aldersey Green, adding an atypical landscape character to the area, including larger lake than the frequent field ponds;
- Ridge and furrow is a frequent landscape characteristic - the greatest concentration of ridge and furrow in CWaC is located in the Shocklach area;

- Listed Buildings are generally sparse across the open plain, reflecting low settlement density, although a number of medieval and later country halls and houses can be found including those at Shocklach and Parr Green Halls, as well as farmhouses and lodges such as at Yew Tree Farm, Well House and Bank House;
- The Bolesworth Estate lies to the east of Tattenhall.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- A very low settlement density with few small nucleated villages, hamlets and dispersed isolated farmsteads and cottages;
- The A534 between Farndon and Clutton is the only major highway traversing this area and this has relatively little impact upon the rural atmosphere of the surrounding landscape;
- The area's road network is characterised by an extensive system of narrow and winding country lanes running between solid, intact hedgerows connecting small settlements and farmsteads;
- Tattenhall and Farndon have seen recent residential development. Otherwise settlements are small and have generally avoided significant enlargement and loss of character, although Tilston, Barton and Shocklach display varying degrees of a mid 20<sup>th</sup> century ribbon and in-fill development;
- Traditional farm buildings and distinctive brick barns have often been converted to residential or rural business uses;
- Farmsteads are scattered across the plain but generally well-spaced, suggesting quite large farm size;
- Modern dairy unit and other agricultural buildings infrastructure can be locally prominent, including close to settlements such as Shocklach and Barton;
- Building types are typically red and brown brick simple cottages with some whitewash and timber framed buildings;
- The whole character area the landscape has a very rural feel with small, winding roads and lanes connecting isolated farms and hamlets.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Many areas have a strong feeling of tranquillity and isolation;
- Local variations in topography allow more extensive and distant views than elsewhere in the type, over the Dee valley to the west, with the Clwydian Hills in the far distance;
- To the east the *Sandstone Ridge* is visible;
- The Grade II\* Obelisk Monument at Farndon (to commemorate Roger Barnston) is a key feature in views to the west;
- Where middle distance views are available the hedgerow trees in successive field boundaries can appear to coalesce to form a solid mass on the horizon, creating the effect of a well-wooded landscape;
- The striking landmark of Beeston Castle, perched high upon the precipitous sandstone crag on the area's north-eastern boundary, and to a slightly lesser extent Peckforton Castle are dominant visual features and reference points from the north-east of the area;
- The castles, in combination with the much greater mass of the Sandstone Ridge in the vicinity of Peckforton terminate all views to the east and contribute significantly to the landscape character;
- Hedgerows and hedgerow tress, as well as small coverts and woodlands present changing seasonal colours and cover in contrast to the verdant improved pastoral grassland;
- The ubiquitous field ponds are often inconspicuous in the landscape despite their number due to hedge enclosure of the fields they lie within and general absence of elevated viewpoints;
- In other cases pond-side vegetation and trees within a field belie their existence rather than any glimpse of surface water;

- In some areas where hedgerows have been lost but mature trees remain, a ‘false parkland’ character can pervade;
- The relatively open character of the plain means there is little opportunity for screening any large scale elements, however the visual impact of low level elements could be mitigated using native planting that would not in itself be highly visible.

### **Landscape Condition**

Generally good, with key characteristic elements that make up the plain generally intact. However, some field boundaries are undermanaged or being removed as arable land use has increased in places.

### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 9c: *Tattenhall & Shocklach Plain:***

- Countryside;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV) to the far north-east of the area at Beeston;
- Natural heritage sites of national and local importance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England’s National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

### ***Forces for Landscape Change***

#### **Past change**

- Some agricultural intensification with enlargement of fields and loss of hedgerow boundaries (oak trees left 'in-field') with loss of historic field pattern;
- Under management and deterioration of some small farm woodlands;
- A shift from pasture grazing with increasing areas being cultivated for arable cropping, silage or feed crops including cereals and maize;
- Loss of unimproved grassland;
- Loss of ridge and furrow;
- Limited management of field ponds has resulted in some silting up and drying out due to natural processes of vegetation succession and overshadowing from trees;
- Transport infrastructure improvements and increase in traffic;
- Tattenhall and Farndon have seen recent residential development;
- Dilution of built character and form in settlements;
- Change of use of traditional farm buildings to residential use with loss of character and unsympathetic detailing.

#### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 9c: *Tattenhall & Shocklach Plain***

- Continued deterioration in field boundary maintenance and management;
- Farm diversification, potentially including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;
- Erosion of built environment character through incremental development –pressure for expansion of existing settlement, ribbon development and in-fill, particularly Tattenhall and Farndon;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Decline in the vernacular building character;
- Climate change leading to changing agricultural practice and impacts upon field ponds and water ecology.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 9c: Tattenhall & Shocklach Plain***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the regionally significant historic landscape comprising late medieval field systems and ridge and furrow, **restore** the historic field pattern of hawthorn hedgerows and hedgerow oak trees, and **enhance** the grassland and woodland network.

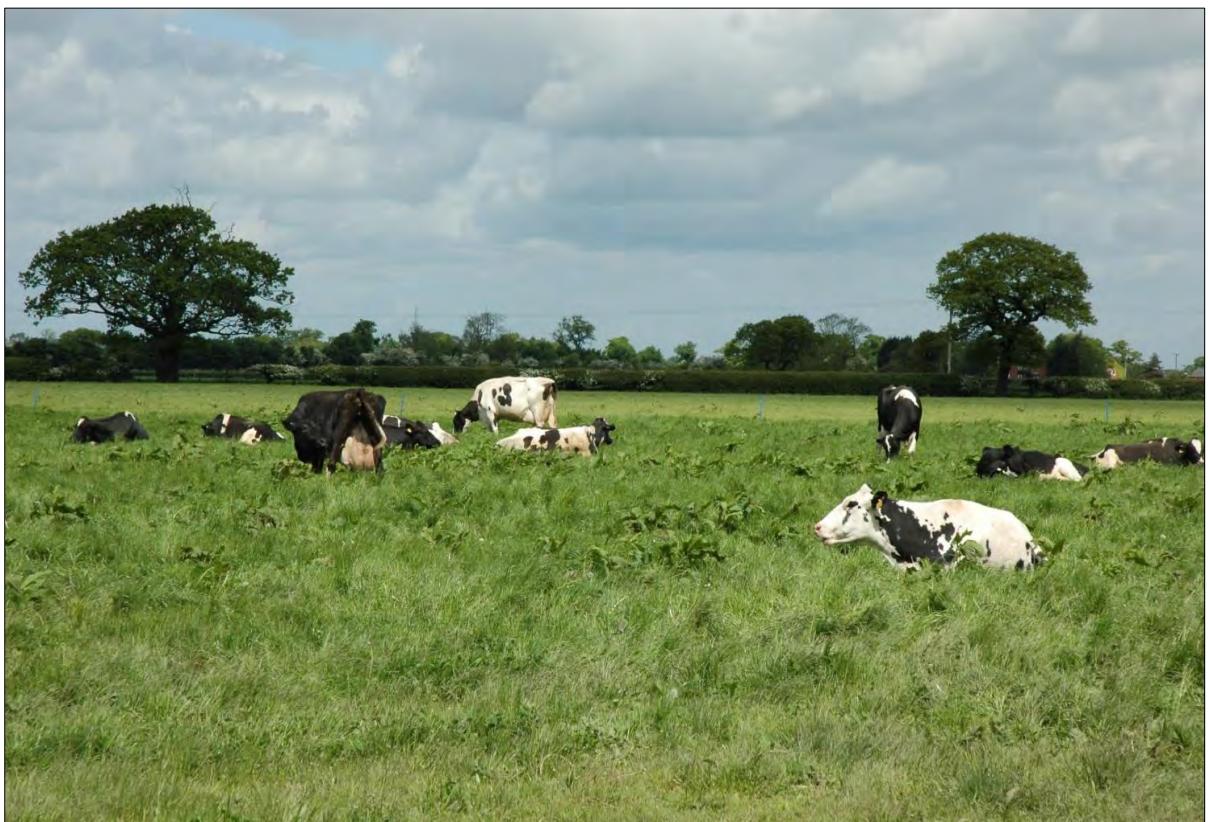
### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerows.
3. Consider opportunities to replace hedgerows where they have been lost utilising appropriate species of hawthorn and oak standards.
4. Manage existing small woodlands and coverts to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
5. Consider opportunities to plant simple, small pockets of trees and small blocks of woodland in field corners to ensure the continuation of these declining characteristic features.
6. Conserve the small to medium scale pattern of fields, particularly early field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape, particularly around settlements.
7. Maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil (for example as a result of increased crop growing).
8. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
9. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
10. Conserve the remnant unimproved grassland that is of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.

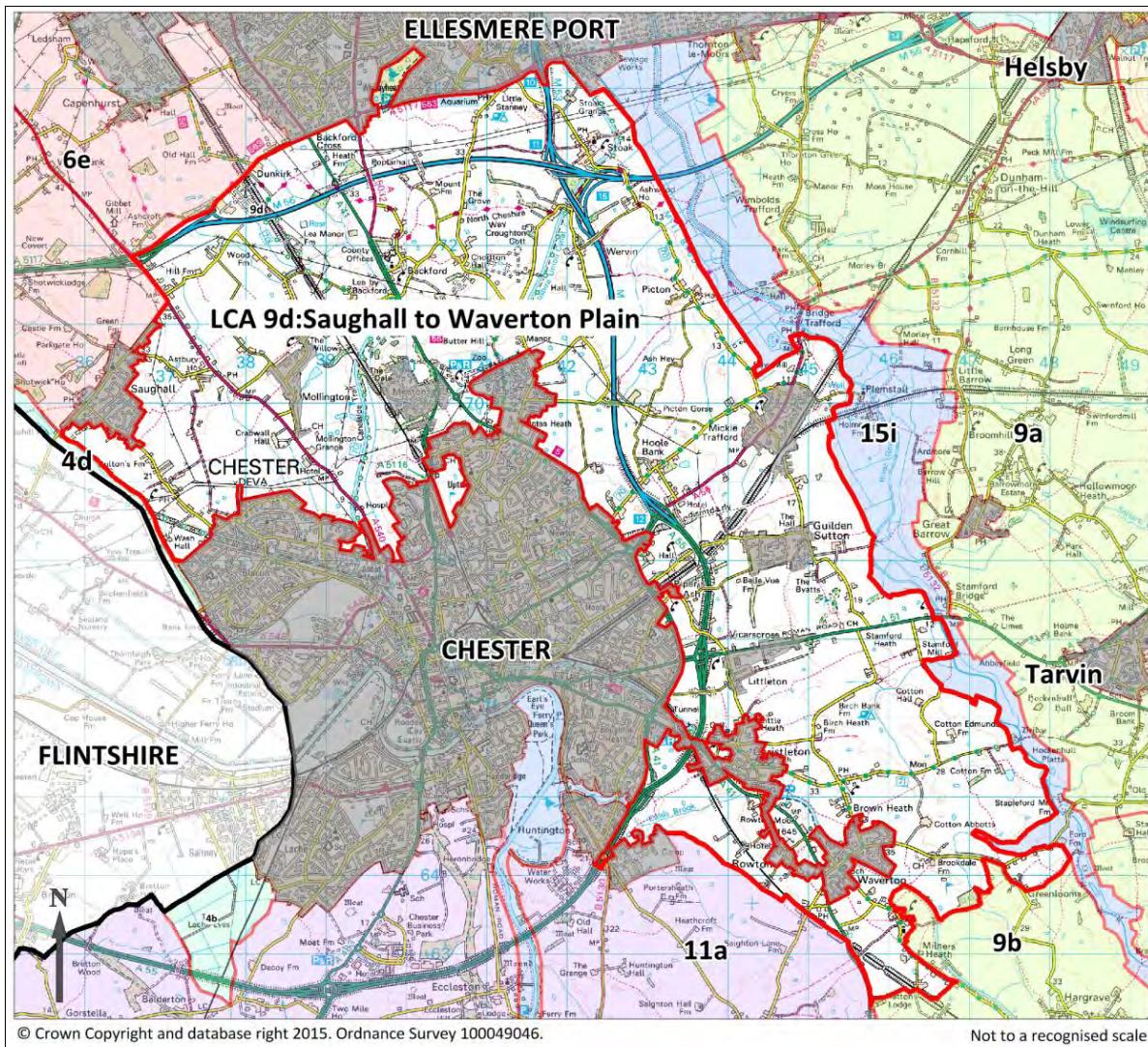
11. Encourage the retention and management of field ponds and brooks that are of wildlife importance as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
12. Conserve the remaining areas of ridge and furrow by restricting use of fields to pasture.
13. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as kerbs and large-scale signage.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Maintain the low-density, scattered settlement pattern of very small villages, hamlets, halls and farmsteads and isolated cottages. Tightly control settlement expansion.
2. Conserve the local built form –simple red-brown brick buildings with steeply pitching Welsh slate roofs, white washed brick and timber frames.
3. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting.
4. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
5. Soften built edges by introducing small scale planting schemes using native broadleaved species.
6. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows rather than close-board fencing.
7. Conserve rural views towards the *Sandstone Ridge*, Beeston Castle and Peckforton Castle to the northeast, and views to the Welsh hills to the west. Maintain local views such as to the Farndon Obelisk Monument to Roger Barnston.
8. Maintain the rural setting to villages and farmsteads which are features of the landscape.



## LCA 9d: Saughall to Waverton Plain



### Location and Boundaries

The **Saughall to Waverton Plain** character area lies to the immediate east and north of Chester City urban area, in a large arc of well-populated countryside characterised by larger villages and transport infrastructure. Its eastern boundary abuts the linear *Gowy Valley* LCA and its narrow southern edge abuts the *Hargrave, Hoofield and Beeston Plain*, within the same LCT - *Cheshire Plain West*. Its northern edge is defined by the urban edge of Ellesmere Port and the *Enclosed Farmland* LCT. To the north of Chester, its western edge is defined by its meeting with the very narrow, linear *Drained Marsh* LCT.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 9d: Saughall to Waverton Plain***

- Urban-fringe landscape with significant settlement density
- Prominent infrastructure characterises the urban fringe of Chester and routes radiating from it
- The urban and industrial character and infrastructure of Ellesmere Port to the north is a prominent landscape feature
- Rural pastoral landscape is diluted by many urban fringe uses which introduce complexity and intrusion to the landscape
- Elsewhere, a gently undulating landscape characterised by hedges and hedgerow trees providing limited vistas
- Areas of improved grassland for dairy farming and fodder crops, increasingly being challenged by other uses
- Limited woodland, confined to shelter belts and screening planting, some small copse, although hedgerow oaks are important elements of the landscape
- Historic medieval field patterns are still found across the area
- Extensive network of small field ponds which are generally inconspicuous in the landscape
- Significant villages of a suburban character punctuate the plain where historic form has often been diluted through of 20<sup>th</sup> century and later housing and employment development
- Elsewhere, settlement is scattered across the plain as freestanding farmsteads and some ribbon development
- The *Sandstone Ridge* presents a more elevated skyline to the east of the LCA
- Where hedgerows and tree networks remain, the area can present some degree of limited enclosure due to an absence of elevation and viewpoints
- Some loss of field boundaries diminishes this enclosure where some arable farming has been established
- The overall character of the area is of a transitional landscape from rural pasture to suburbanised, busy urban fringe with consequent dilution in tranquillity

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### **Natural / Physical**

- Undulating, medium-scale landscape of a series of gently rolling hillocks, gradually falling to the low-lying Gowy Valley to the east ranging from around 45m AOD to less than 10m AOD, but is typically around 20m AOD;
- This gently rolling topography is incised by the important Deva Spillway (former course of the river Mersey) and small channels emptying into the *Gowy Valley*;
- The western boundary of the area with the *Drained Marsh* LCT also slopes down gently to the west;
- A diverse landscape with significant urban influences on its rural character;
- Predomination of arable farming with some pastoral uses;
- Fields are a mix of medieval and post medieval, regular to irregular in pattern, of mainly small to medium scale (up to 8ha);
- Away from urban and suburban influences, hedges and hedgerow trees are the predominant landscape components;
- There are numerous mature and over mature hedgerow oaks creating a well wooded appearance without any great occurrence of woodland, apart from a few small copse typical of the type;
- Field boundaries defined by fragmented hawthorn hedges;

- Marl ponds are common (but less so than elsewhere within the LCT), and with drainage ditches provide wetland habitats of some local conservation value;
- Other surface water features include a series of larger ponds to the north of Chester at Mollington Grange;
- Blocks of trees, often oak, Scots pine and birch, screen development e.g. Dale MOD land, with other woodland at golf courses, Mickle Trafford Green Way and small copses such as Acres Wood;
- Ornamental or non-native species present in the landscape reflect urban and suburban influences;
- Important ecological corridor within the Deva Spillway which now contains the Shropshire Union Canal - the canal and adjoining wet meadows are designated as local wildlife sites;
- Surface water drainage is limited to very small streams and drainage ditches. Streams mainly run eastwards to the Gowy, with minor brooks emptying to the canal. These are often inconspicuous in the landscape but occasionally prominent as a consequence of increased riparian tree cover rather than the water feature itself;
- Some increased regularity of field size and shape with drainage ditches can be identified towards the western boundary with the Drained Marsh LCT;
- In certain areas hedgerow loss has resulted in a more open landscape with larger fields, isolated oak trees and post and wire fences, particularly to the north east of the LCA.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The area has a rich historic environment and the landscape is partially defined by its medieval and post medieval field structures;
- The prosperous, historic City of Chester has acted as an economic stimulus for the area since its foundation as a Roman Fort in AD 70;
- The site of Roman camps have been identified at Elm Bank near Rowton and at Upton Heath and are Scheduled Monuments;
- The moated site of Upton Grange is a Scheduled Monument;
- The site of the English Civil War *Battle of Rowton Heath* 1645, on the southern boundary of the LCA, is registered within the Register of Historic Battlefields by Heritage England for its special historic interest;
- Listed Buildings are not particularly common across the character area outside the settlements (particularly Waverton and Backford) where greater concentrations are found;
- The Shropshire Union Canal winds its way through the 'Deva Spillway' south of Backford where, at the end of the Devensian glaciation, meltwater from the Mersey drained into the Dee, leaving an obvious dry valley within the Cheshire Plain;
- The canal reflects the area important industrial heritage with numerous listed structures such as the railway viaduct at Moston and bridges along its stretch through the LCA;
- Conservation Areas have been designated at Christleton, Waverton and Picton;
- Recreation opportunities reflect proximity to major urban concentrations, including urban fringe uses such as ridding schools and sports fields such as at Chester Rugby Club, Cheshire County Sports Club at Hoole;
- Golf courses at Upton-by-Chester, Waverton, Vicars Cross and Mollington;
- Access to the rural hinterland of Chester is available across the Public Rights of Way network, including the Baker Way trail, the disused railway line east of Chester and the Shropshire Union Canal towpath.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- High settlement density, where suburban and light industrial expansion around nucleated village cores punctuate the landscape, for example at Saughall, Christleton, Guilden Sutton, Mickle Trafford and Waverton;

- Intrusive transport infrastructure, including the M53, M56, other radial main routes (A51, A55, A56 and A41) and railway infrastructure creating visual and noise intrusion to the landscape around Chester;
- Energy infrastructure, such as high voltage lines and pylons are conspicuous features in the landscape;
- The large former utilitarian Saughton (army) Camp was established in the 20th century south of the A55, now a significant sized recent housing development;
- There is significant visual influence of major industry at Ellesmere Port and the urban area of Chester;
- Ribbon development is evident on radial routes out of Chester, such as at Mannings Lane, Tarvin Road and Guilden Sutton Lane;
- Urban fringe uses with associated buildings are common, such as plant nurseries, golf clubs, business parks, oil depot at Chorlton by Backford, and the extensive Chester Zoo car park ;
- Small scale, red brick and welsh slate building vernacular, but with strong Victorian *villa* and farmhouse influences can still be found across the character area, but this is much diluted by much uniform suburban development and urbanisation;
- More recent development of contemporary designs and materials;
- The Shropshire Union Canal offers a more attractive transport corridor and reflects industrial heritage north east of Chester;
- Traditional farm buildings and distinctive brick barns have often been converted to residential or rural business uses;
- Farmsteads are scattered across the plain but generally well-spaced, suggesting quite large farm size;
- Modern agricultural buildings infrastructure can be locally prominent, including close to settlements such as Wervin and Mickle Trafford;
- Chester Zoo has recently expanded;
- The Countess of Chester Hospital site includes a new Country Park.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Contrasting and complex character of rural and urban landscapes together in fragmented patterns;
- Physical and perceptual separation and fragmentation of spaces by major transport infrastructure;
- Moving and stationary traffic can be conspicuous in the landscape;
- The combination of generally flat terrain and low, closely trimmed hedgerows means that heavy traffic on the motorways, and associated signage and lighting, can be visible over an extensive area, particularly when embanked or crossing numerous bridges;
- Highway planting schemes partially mitigate this intrusion;
- Overhead wires and pylons locally dominate the skyline;
- The northern extent of the Sandstone Ridge, forming an important visual feature to the east and appearing as a wooded mass of high ground beyond the low lying and visually insignificant Gowy Valley is visible over a very extensive area;
- To the north the massive Industrial complex around Stanlow and Elton dominates the skyline beyond character area;
- Any sense of tranquillity and isolation is highly diluted apart from secluded areas, such as parts of the canal corridor;
- The ubiquitous field ponds are often inconspicuous in the landscape despite their number due to hedge enclosure of the fields they lie within and general absence of elevated viewpoints;
- In other cases pond-side vegetation and trees within a field belie their existence rather than any glimpse of surface water;

- In some areas where hedgerows have been lost but mature trees remain, a ‘false parkland’ character can pervade;
- The relatively open character of the gently undulating plain means there is little opportunity for screening any large scale elements, however the visual impact of low level elements could be mitigated using native planting that would not in itself be highly visible.

#### **Landscape Condition**

Landscape condition is varied, with key characteristic elements that make up the plain generally being challenged by urban fringe uses and pressure for development despite Green Belt designation. Field boundaries are often undermanaged or being removed as arable land use has increased in places, particularly across the north of the LCA.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 9d: *Saughall to Waverton Plain*:**

- Green Belt and Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of local importance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England’s National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

### ***Forces for Landscape Change***

#### **Past change**

- Urban expansion and dilution of settlement identity;
- Intrusion, physically and perceptually of major transport infrastructure and the influence of traffic on the landscape;
- ‘Urban fringe’ uses challenging the predominance of agriculture as land use close to Chester;
- Some agricultural intensification with enlargement of fields and loss of hedgerow boundaries (oak trees left ‘in-field’) with loss of historic field pattern away from the urban fringe;
- Under-management and deterioration of some small farm woodlands;
- A shift from pasture grazing with increasing areas being cultivated for arable cropping, silage or feed crops including cereals and maize;
- Loss of unimproved grassland;
- Limited management of field ponds has resulted in some silting up and drying out due to natural processes of vegetation succession and overshadowing from trees;
- Significant dilution of built vernacular character and form of settlements;
- Change of use of traditional farm buildings to residential use with loss of character and unsympathetic detailing;
- A suburbanisation of the countryside.

#### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 9d: *Saughall to Waverton Plain***

- Pressure for major urban expansion and employment space provision;
- Further transport infrastructure improvements;
- Continued deterioration in field boundary maintenance and management;
- Farm diversification, potentially including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Decline in the vernacular building character;
- Climate change leading to changing agricultural practice and impacts upon field ponds and water ecology.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 9d: Saughall to Waverton Plain***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **enhance** the rural character and historic field pattern of hawthorn hedgerows and hedgerow oak trees and field ponds, and to manage development pressure so to strengthen the rural setting of Chester and deliver sensitive character restoration.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerows.
3. Consider opportunities to replace hedgerows where they have been lost utilising appropriate species of hawthorn and oak standards.
4. Manage existing small woodlands and coverts to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
5. Consider opportunities to plant simple, small pockets of trees and small blocks of woodland in field corners to ensure the continuation of these declining characteristic features.
6. Conserve the historic scale and pattern of fields, particularly early field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape, particularly around settlements.
7. Maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil (for example as a result of increased crop growing).
8. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors, with increased public access where practical.
9. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
10. Conserve the fragments of unimproved/wet grassland that is of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.

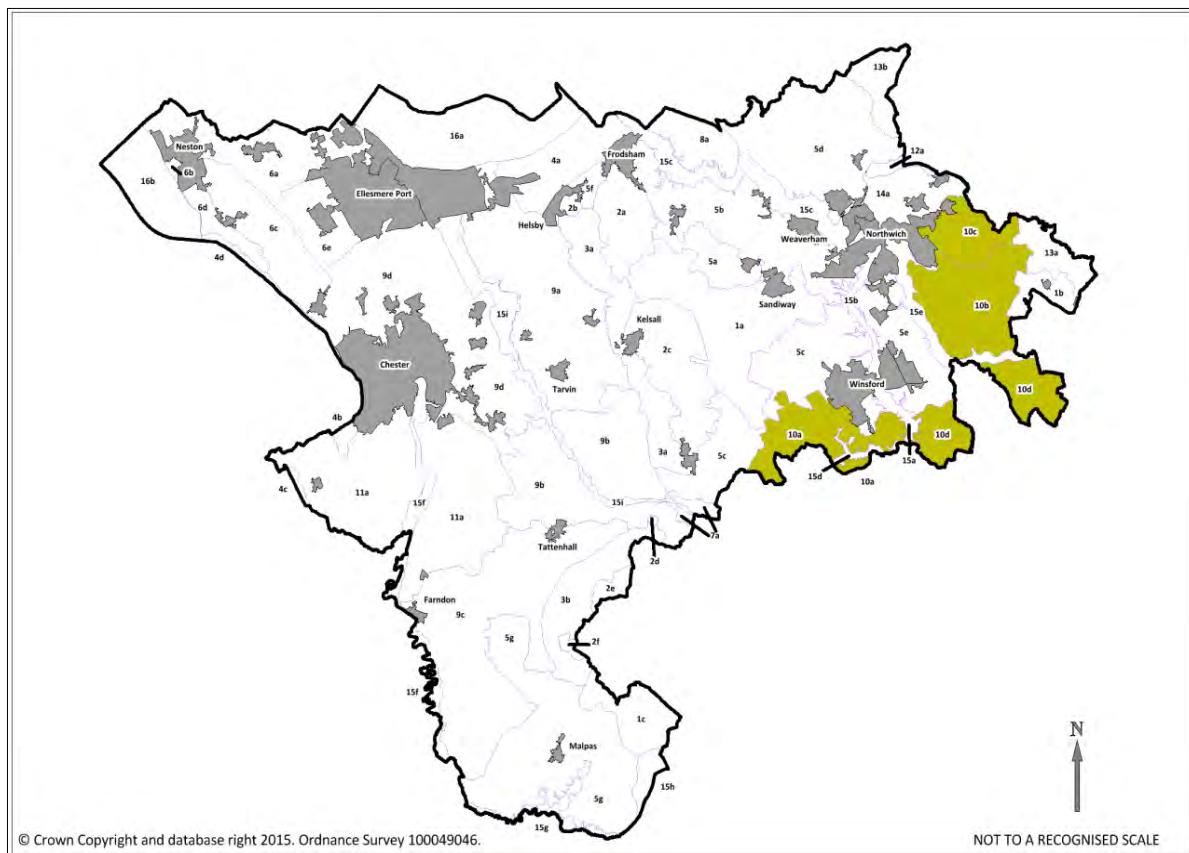
11. Encourage the retention and management of field ponds and brooks that are of wildlife importance as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
12. Conserve the remaining areas of ridge and furrow by restricting use of fields to pasture.
13. Conserve the remaining sense of peace and quiet away from the main transport infrastructure and urban fringe areas, and conserve the rural character of minor lanes.
14. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as kerbs and large-scale signage.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Recognising the significant on-going pressure for development of various types, seek to ensure this is delivered sensitively and in ways which off-sets visual harm and loss of character and delivers landscape and habitat enhancements appropriate to the character of the plain and furthering landscape objectives.
2. Conserve the local vernacular built form –simple red-brown brick buildings with steeply pitching welsh slate roofs and white washed brick and black oak frames.
3. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting where this is not already the de-facto vernacular.
4. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish.
5. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
6. Soften built edges by introducing small scale planting schemes using native broadleaved species.
7. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows rather than close-board fencing.
8. Conserve rural views towards the sandstone ridge in the east.
9. Encourage new development to include new footpath connections.



## LCT 10: CHESHIRE PLAIN EAST



a small number of natural brooks, some within minor valleys that provide local undulations in the landscape.

There is a low density dispersed settlement pattern across the plain. Typical construction materials are red brick, with whitewashed and timber framed buildings in a distinctive black and white style.

### ***Visual Character***

This landscape type is represented by a generally flat agricultural plain where the prevailing field pattern and condition of the hedgerows can account for subtle differences in landscape character. Where fields are smaller, hedges higher and hedgerow trees more abundant, the sense of enclosure is much stronger. Long distance views are blocked or filtered and the perception is of a small scale and much more verdant landscape. Where the fields are larger, with low trimmed hedgerows and fewer trees, the lack of enclosure means that the landscape character appears to be more open and larger scale. At such locations the views are much more extensive and panoramic and often extend as far as the high ground of the surrounding character areas. Mid to long distance views to the west extend to the Sandstone Ridge and eastwards from a limited number of areas to the Pennine Hills.

Hedgerows and the large number of hedgerow trees, mainly oak, across the plain can lead to a false perception of woodland density. Most viewpoints are low due to the absence of high vantage points and the nearest tall hedgerow tends to form the visual horizon. Views from more open ground tend to feature a succession of hedgerows receding into the distance, and these can coalesce visually into a single mass of tree crowns creating a false impression of woodland cover.

Farmsteads and the occasional church spire (located in adjacent character areas) form landmarks in the distance.

### ***Physical Influences***

The *Cheshire Plain East* is low-lying at generally between 30m-55m AOD (slightly higher than the *Cheshire Plain West* which only occasionally reaches 40m AOD).

The underlying bedrock is a mix of Eldersfield Mudstone and Northwich Halite Formation. This supports drift deposits of Devensian Till interspersed to the east with small pockets of glaciofluvial sand and gravel and peat. The overlying soils are pelo-stagnogleys and stagnogleys which are poorly drained and suited to dairying on permanent grassland, interspersed with some arable fields (potatoes and maize).

Clay was dug for use in daub in the construction of vernacular structures and later to make bricks. Secondary deposits of calcium carbonate are common at a depth of 1-2m in the till, and before cheap lime was made available in the 19th century this was dug and spread on the surrounding fields to reduce acidity. On sandy soils this practice of marling also increases fertility and moisture holding capacity. The digging of these marl pits led to the creation of ponds as the pits filled with water and were colonised by a rich variety of plants and animals from other wetland habitats of greater antiquity, for example, meres and mosses. Vegetation succession has reduced many ponds to small, shallow features, over shaded with trees and with little open water.

### ***Cultural Influences***

Settlement is limited to a small number of small, dispersed nucleated or linear villages/hamlets, such as Lostock Green, Lache Dennis, Sproston Green, Wimboldsley and Darnhall, situated along rural unmarked lanes. Dispersed farms and cottages are relatively inaccessible. Other than Whatcroft, large mansion houses and halls are uncommon. Estates are scattered, with limited holdings of private land owners. Hulme Hall is an example of a medieval moated site taking advantage of the

poor drainage on the plain. This and other similarly moated farmsteads and earthworks are all protected as Scheduled Monuments.

An irregular and semi-regular field pattern is typical of surviving medieval fields and associated improvement in the post-medieval period. In some areas there is a greater concentration of post medieval field patterns, which are associated with later phases of enclosure. There are also small areas of 20th century intensification of farming practices where field boundaries have been lost and field size extended, also leading to loss of species-rich grassland.

There are a number of significant communication routes cross the *Cheshire Plain East*, taking advantage of the flat topography. These include the A530 Roman Road (King Street) between Northwich and Middlewich, railway lines, the Shropshire Union Canal and the Trent and Mersey Canal. Two major rivers flow northwards through the area, the Weaver Navigation and the Dane, both of which are identified as *River Valley* landscape types. Other land uses have also taken advantage of the flat topography, such as airfields.

Recreational use of the landscape is generally limited to a few public rights of way that follow tracks and field boundaries across the farmland. Some follow canal towpaths.

There are **four Landscape Character Areas** within LCT 10:

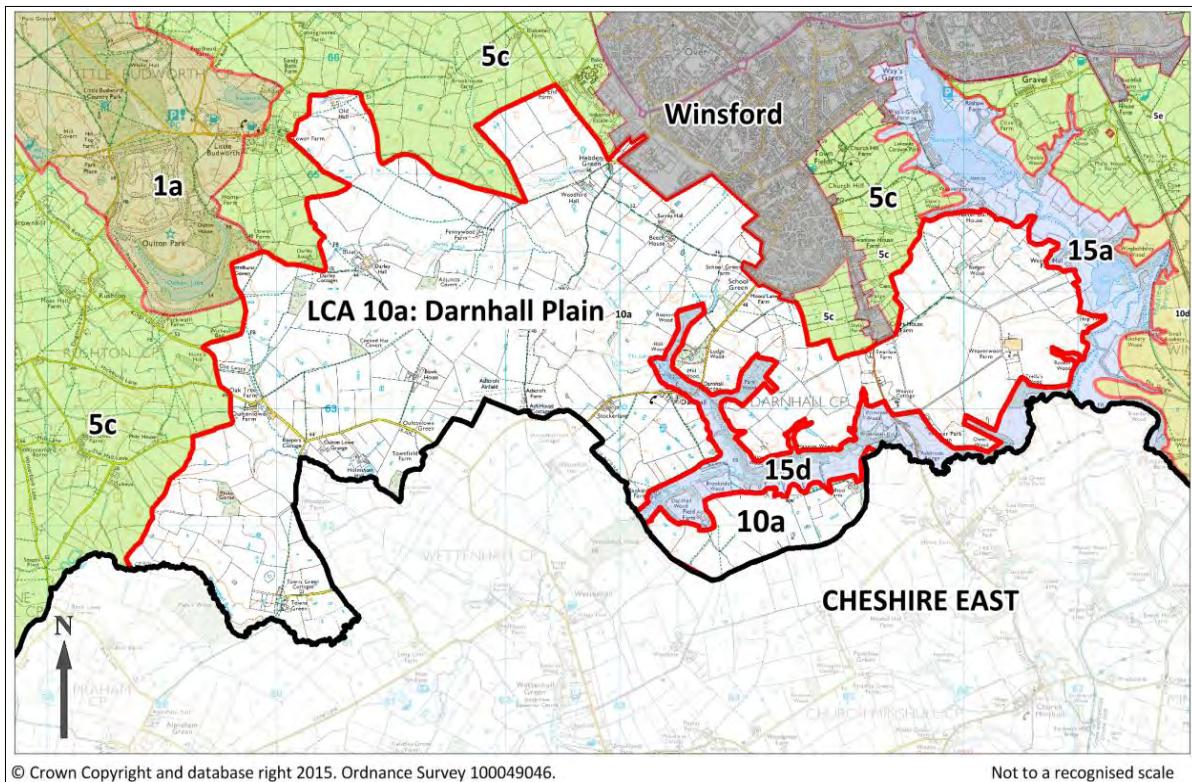
**10a: Darnhall Plain**

**10b: Stublach Plain**

**10c: Lostock Plain**

**10d: Wimboldsley and Sproston Plain**

## LCA 10a: Darnhall Plain



### Location and Boundaries

The **Darnhall Plain** is an open, flat plain lying on the southern borders of the borough. To the north the landscape makes a gradual transition to the more undulating landscape of the *Eaton, Marton & Over Undulating Enclosed Farmland*. The character area continues to the south beyond the *Ash Brook River Valley* (landscape character area 15d) and further south beyond the administrative boundary of Cheshire West and Chester Borough.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 10a: Darnhall Plain***

- Flat plain-like topography resulting from the uniform characteristics of the underlying Eldersfield Mudstone bedrock
- The surface mantle of glacial till (boulder clay) gives rise to seasonally waterlogged soils that are suited to dairying on short term and permanent grassland, interspersed with some arable fields
- Variety of field sizes – from small ancient irregular shaped fields near the Weaver Valley to fields enlarged in the 20th century around Weaverwood Farm
- Fields are bounded by an intact network of low thorn hedgerows with relatively few hedgerow trees. Ditches are also present along field boundaries
- Woodland cover is generally absent, although the occasional covert or copse punctuates the landscape
- The area is drained by a small number of brooks that drain into the Upper Weaver e.g. Ash Brook
- Field ponds, formed when pits were dug to extract marl for improving fields, are a common feature of the plain
- Recreational use of the landscape is limited to a few public rights of way that follow tracks and field boundaries across the farmland
- Low density of settlement – the settlement pattern is defined by scattered red brick farmsteads with large red brick dairy barns (with round windows) and some farmsteads in the distinctive timber framed ‘black and white’ style. Darley Hall is a moated site
- The road network is typically comprised of narrow, rural unmarked lanes linking farmsteads, is relatively inaccessible and predominantly used by farm traffic
- Long range views across the open, flat landscape with trees and farmsteads forming the skyline
- The church spire of St John the Evangelist’s Church at Over is a feature visible across the plain.

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### ***Natural / Physical***

- The flat plain-like topography of between 45m-50m AOD resulting from the uniform characteristics of the underlying bedrock;
- The uniform covering of glacial till (boulder clay) that gives rise to a seasonally waterlogged stagnogley soil that is well suited to dairying and stock rearing;
- The field ponds (old marl pits) that provide an indication of the former use of the natural resources of the landscape;
- The fields bounded by an intact, low cut thorn hedgerow network and occasional hedgerow trees;
- The lack of woodland cover, limited to a scattering of small deciduous copses and scrub within the existing field pattern e.g. Darley Gorse and Crooked Hat Covert;
- The small number of brooks draining the landscape into the Upper Weaver e.g. Ash Brook.

#### ***Cultural / Heritage / Historic***

- The pastoral character of the landscape;
- The strong field pattern and presence of ancient field systems in a variety of shapes and sizes which provide an historic continuity; from the small ancient irregular shaped fields south of the Weaver Valley to the medium sized straight-sided late post-Medieval enclosures around Cocked Hat Covert, and the fields enlarged in the 20th century around Weaverwood Farm;
- The ponds, ditches and brooks which provide wildlife habitats and landscape diversity;

- The historic moated Darley Hall, a Scheduled Monument, that provides a sense of time depth in the landscape (being the only surviving site of what were once common features of this landscape);
- The historic designed parkland at Darnhall Park, site of the Cistercian Abbey (founded 1274) and the precursor to Vale Royal Abbey (founded 1281) that is of local significance;
- Some of the halls and barns are listed buildings;
- Recreational use of the landscape is limited to a few public rights of way that follow tracks and field boundaries across the farmland.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- The low density of settlement, with scattered farmsteads and red brick dairy barns (with round windows) that represent examples of the red brick and timber framed 'black and white' local vernacular building style;
- The narrow, unmarked lanes that contribute to the rural character of the area;
- Farm intensification has resulted in some large industrial / warehouse type barns in the landscape, e.g. at Weaverwood Farm and Court House Farm.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The flat, expansive nature of the landform produces large scale landscape which is overlaid by an irregular pattern of hedged fields that provides a unity across the landscape;
- Hedgerow trees that are uncommon and important visual features of the landscape;
- The low density of settlement and absence of roads across much of the plain give it an 'empty' character. In places the landscape even feels 'remote', but the strong field pattern indicates that this landscape has been tamed by man;
- A tranquil, rural landscape;
- Occasional areas of woodland, marl pits and associated emergent vegetation, provide some texture and visual interest;
- The flat landform provides the opportunity for long ranging and expansive views; open skylines are a feature of the area;
- The views of trees and farmsteads as features on the skyline, and the church spire at Over;
- The open character means there is little opportunity for screening any large scale elements or for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves being highly visible - making it a visually sensitive landscape. However, there are relatively few sensitive visual receptors in the area.

#### **Landscape Condition**

Although the landscape is actively managed as farmland, many hedgerow trees have been lost and others are over-mature. Some of the hedgerows are in a declining condition. Some field ponds have been reduced to small, shallow features, over shaded with trees with little open water, while others have been incorporated into gardens as ornamental features.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 10a: *Darnhall Plain*:**

- Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

## ***Forces for Landscape Change***

### **Past change**

- Farm intensification has resulted in some large industrial / warehouse type barns in the landscape, e.g. at Weaverwood Farm and Court House Farm;
- Growth of arable and fodder crops, including maize/grass silage to support the dairy industry, within an otherwise predominantly pastoral landscape;
- Improved drainage and in-filling over the years has resulted in drying out of wetland habitats and ponds;
- Decline in hedgerow field boundaries and hedgerow trees, due to flail mowing which reduces diversity and kills emerging saplings, leading to loss of historic field pattern and increased use of fencing;
- Decline in traditional woodland management practices leading to under management of copses and coverts;
- Intensification of grassland management leading to loss of species-rich grassland.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 10a: *Darnhall Plain***

- Planting of new woodland and hedgerow trees (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan) as a buffer to ancient semi-natural woodland and to screen views of large scale industry (but without obstructing long distance views of the Sandstone Ridge and Peak District);
- There may be pressure for farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;
- Conversion of farm buildings to residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Potential on better drained land for growing bio-energy crops such as Miscanthus.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 10a: Darnhall Plain***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the pastoral character and local built vernacular of the landscape, and **enhance** the condition of the hedgerow and tree network.

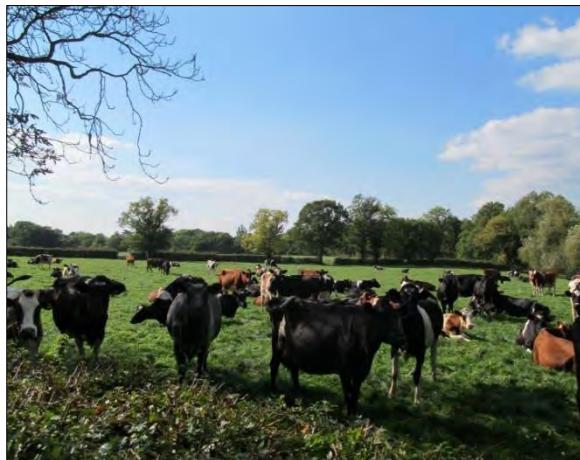
### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Conserve and manage grassland to conserve the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil.
2. Maintain the hedgerow network, gapping up incomplete hedgerows where appropriate and avoiding harsh flail mowing, to ensure the network continues to provide a unity across the landscape as well as providing wildlife habitats.
3. Protect and encourage hedgerow trees, encouraging them to grow up at intervals along the hedgerow.
4. Conserve the small scale pattern of fields, particularly early field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape e.g. south of the River Weaver.
5. Conserve the remaining hedgerow trees and seek opportunities to encourage a new generation of hedgerow trees to increase their presence in the landscape.
6. Aim to extend broadleaved woodlands along water courses where this does not impact other valuable riparian habitats, and plant small scale copses within existing field patterns.
7. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors. Seek opportunities to re-create unimproved or semi-improved species rich grassland.
8. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
9. Conserve and manage the remaining ditches, field ponds and brooks that are of importance for biodiversity as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape. Prevent further drying out of wetland habitats and seek opportunities to extent/recreate areas of wetland habitat including reedswamp and willow scrub.

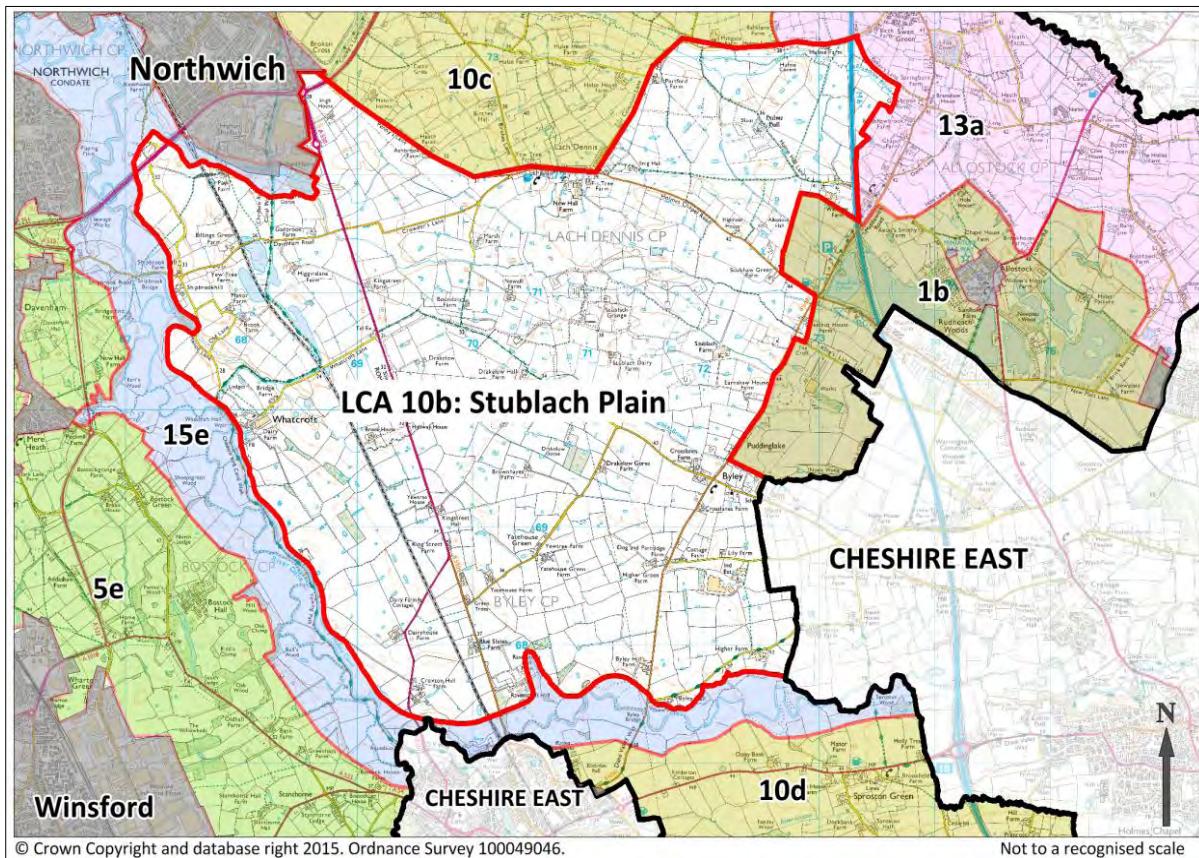
10. Monitor the impact of climate change and water levels on vegetation, particularly the hedgerow oaks.
11. Conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as close board fencing, kerbs, signage and lighting.
12. Protect above ground archaeological features, such as the moated site of Darley Hall, promoting sensitive agricultural practices in their vicinity (i.e. grazing not ploughing).
13. Conserve the designed parkland at Darnhall Park, and its setting.
14. Conserve views to the church spire at Over, Winsford.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Conserve the low density, scattered settlement pattern of farmsteads.
2. Conserve the local vernacular built style - including red brick farmsteads with large red brick dairy barns (containing round windows) and distinctive timber framed 'black and white' farmsteads resulting from the Victorian 'black and white revival' that is typical of Cheshire. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
3. Seek to ensure that new farm buildings do not threaten the settings of the older farmsteads, particularly the pre-Victorian and distinctive timber framed 'black and white' farmsteads.
4. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
5. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development does not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
6. Maintain the rural character of the narrow, unmarked lanes – resist improvements such as additions of kerbs and lighting that would erode the rural character of the landscape.



## LCA 10b: *Stublach Plain*



### Location and Boundaries

The ***Stublach Plain*** forms a flat pastoral plain influenced in part by features associated with the brine/salt extraction and gas storage industries. It is bounded to the west and south by the *River Dane* (landscape character area 15e), to the north by the more industrialised *Lostock Plain* (character area 10c) and to the east by the heathy landscape of the *Allostock Woodland, Heath, Meres and Mosses* character area (LCA 1b).

### **Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 10b: *Stublach Plain***

- Flat plain-like topography resulting from the uniform characteristics of the underlying Eldersfield Mudstone bedrock
- Salt bearing strata underlie the area – the landscape is influenced in part by features associated with the brine/salt extraction and gas storage industries with well-heads, fenced compounds and tracks visible
- The surface mantle of glacial till (boulder clay) gives rise to seasonally waterlogged soils that are suited to dairying on short term and permanent grassland, interspersed with some arable fields
- A pattern of small and medium sized fields is overlaid onto the flat plain providing unity across the landscape – some fields are Medieval in origin e.g. around Stublach Grange
- Fields are bounded by an intact network of low thorn hedgerows with some hedgerow trees that filter views across the area. Ditches are also present along field boundaries
- Woodland cover is generally absent, although the occasional covert or copse punctuates the landscape
- The area is drained by a small number of brooks and streams
- Field ponds, formed when pits were dug to extract marl for improving fields, are a common feature of the plain
- The Trent and Mersey Canal that includes associated structures and artefacts of industrial archaeology
- The Billinge flashes beside the canal, formed land subsidence due to brine pumping, now support important wetland habitats, including swamp
- Recreational use of the landscape is limited to a few public rights of way that follow tracks and field boundaries across the farmland and the canal towpath
- Low density of settlement – the settlement pattern is defined by scattered red brick or white washed farmsteads with distinctive red brick dairy barns (with round windows). Two moated medieval sites remain
- The road network is typically comprised of narrow, rural unmarked lanes linking farmsteads, although the M6 motorway, A530 and a small number of 'B' roads also pass through the character area
- A straight Roman Road that crosses the plain, connecting Middlewich to Northwich. A railway line follows a similar route across the plain
- Long range views across the open, flat landscape with electricity pylons prominent on the skyline. Industrial works at Northwich East have a visual influence on the *Stublach Plain*;
- Church spires at Moulton and Davenham are features in views across the plain.

### **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The flat plain-like topography of between 30m-45m AOD resulting from the uniform characteristics of the underlying bedrock;
- The uniform covering of glacial till (boulder clay) that gives rise to a seasonally waterlogged stagnogley soil that is well suited to dairying and stock rearing;
- Salt bearing strata underlie the mudstones - brine pumping, salt extraction and gas storage has been carried out in this and surrounding areas in the past;
- The field ponds (old marl pits) that provide an indication of the former use of the natural resources of the landscape;

- Billinge Green Farm Pond forms part of the Billinge Flashes, an area of wetlands formed by land subsidence following brine pumping – a Local Wildlife Site due to its wetland habitats including a large area of swamp at the southern end which is floristically diverse;
- The fields bounded by an intact hedgerow network and hedgerow trees, mostly oak, that provides a unity across the landscape and contribute to biodiversity;
- Remaining isolated trees, mostly oak, where hedgerows have been removed;
- The lack of woodland cover, limited to a scattering of small deciduous copses and scrub within the existing field pattern e.g. Drakelow Gorse, providing visual and biological diversity and provide valuable cover in a landscape largely devoid of woodland;
- The small number of brooks draining the landscape e.g. Puddinglake Brook.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The pastoral character of the landscape;
- The strong field pattern and presence of ancient field systems which provide an historic continuity and a mixture of small and medium sized irregular shaped fields and larger regular fields where agricultural improvement has taken place;
- The ponds, ditches and brooks which provide wildlife habitats and landscape diversity;
- The Billinge flashes beside the canal that now support important wetland habitats, including swamp;
- The historic moated Drakelow Hall (now just a moat and earthwork) and Hulme Hall, both Scheduled Monuments, and the Roman Road (A530 King Street) that provide a sense of time depth in the landscape;
- The Trent and Mersey Canal and its setting, including associated structures and artefacts of industrial archaeology, that provides an indication of the past use of the landscape as an important link between the navigable River Trent and the River Mersey, and provides wetland habitats and recreational opportunities;
- Some of the halls and farmsteads are listed buildings;
- Recreational use of the landscape is limited to a few public rights of way that follow tracks and field boundaries across the farmland and the canal towpath that forms part of the Cheshire Ring Canal Walk long distance recreational route which links to the Dane Valley Way. There is no open access land.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- The low density of settlement, with scattered farmsteads that represent examples of the red brick and slate, and white washed finishes of the local vernacular building style;
- The narrow, unmarked lanes that contribute to the rural character of the area;
- Above ground structures associated with the brine/salt extraction industry include tracks, pipelines and compounds bounded by chicken wire.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The flat, low lying, large scale, open landscape is itself not visually prominent;
- The presence of hedgerow oaks which are particularly distinctive and contribute to biodiversity, filter views and stand out against the open skyline;
- The low density of settlement and absence of roads across much of the plain give it an 'empty' character. In places the landscape even feels 'remote', but the strong field pattern indicates that this landscape has been tamed by man;
- A generally tranquil, still, rural landscape although the presence of the main road and railway contributes movement and noise locally;
- Occasional areas of woodland, marl pits and associated emergent vegetation, provide some texture and visual interest;

- The flat, low lying, open landscape (due to lack of vegetation) provides the opportunity for long ranging and expansive views across the landscape;
- Open skylines are a feature of the area – punctuated by the occasional hedgerow tree, farmstead, or pylon;
- The open character means there is little opportunity for screening any large scale elements or for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves being highly visible - making it a visually sensitive landscape. However, the low density of settlement and few recreational opportunities means there are relatively few sensitive visual receptors in the area;
- Large scale industrial buildings in adjacent areas (e.g. the distribution warehouses at Gadbrook Park, Rudheath and the Brunner Mond brine works at Northwich East) are visible on the skyline;
- There are views from the western edge of the plain over the Dane Valley with the spire of Moulton Church on the skyline.

#### **Landscape Condition**

Although the landscape is actively managed as farmland, many of the hedgerow trees are over-mature and some of the hedgerows are in a declining condition. Some field ponds have been reduced to small, shallow features, overshadowed with trees and with little open water, while others have been incorporated into gardens as ornamental features.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 10b: *Stublach Plain*:**

- Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

## ***Forces for Landscape Change***

### **Past change**

- Increasing size of farm units;
- Agricultural improvements have resulted in increased field sizes as hedgerows have been removed (leaving isolated trees in the centre of fields representing the line of former hedgerows);
- Farm diversification including introduction of stables and paddocks;
- Growth of arable and fodder crops, including maize/grass silage to support the dairy industry, within an otherwise predominantly pastoral landscape;
- Improved drainage and in-filling over the years has resulted in drying out of wetland habitats and ponds e.g. the swamp habitats at Billinge Flash;
- Decline in hedgerow field boundaries and hedgerow trees, due to flail mowing which reduces diversity and kills emerging saplings, leading to loss of historic field pattern and increased use of fencing.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 10b: *Stublach Plain***

- Planting of new woodland and hedgerow trees (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan) as a buffer to ancient semi-natural woodland and to screen views of large scale industry (but without obstructing long distance views of the Sandstone Ridge and Peak District);
- There may be increased pressure for farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks, and gas storage proposals;
- Conversion of farm buildings to residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Pressure for residential and commercial development, particularly on the edge of Northwich;
- Search area for sand and gravel extraction, and the preferred area for future controlled brine extraction;
- Possible improvements to the M6 corridor that runs through the north-eastern corner of this character area;
- High Speed Phase 2 (HS2) route will potentially pass north-south through the area, mostly on embankment.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 10b: Stublach Plain***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the pastoral character and local built vernacular of the landscape, and **enhance** the condition of the hedgerow and tree network.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Conserve and manage grassland to conserve the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil.
2. Maintain the hedgerow network, gapping up incomplete hedgerows where appropriate and avoiding harsh flail mowing, to ensure the network continues to provide a unity across the landscape as well as providing wildlife habitats.
3. Protect and encourage hedgerow trees, encouraging them to grow up at intervals along the hedgerow.
4. Conserve the small scale pattern of fields, particularly early field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape e.g. around Stublach Grange.
5. Conserve existing hedgerow trees and seek opportunities to encourage a new generation of hedgerow trees to increase their presence in the landscape.
6. Aim to extend broadleaved woodlands along water courses and plant small scale copses within existing field patterns.
7. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors. Seek opportunities to re-create unimproved or semi-improved species rich grassland.
8. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
9. Conserve and manage the remaining ditches, field ponds and brooks that are of importance for biodiversity as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape. Prevent further drying out of wetland habitats and seek opportunities to extent/recreate areas of wetland habitat including reed swamp and willow scrub.
10. Monitor the impact of climate change and water levels on vegetation, particularly the hedgerow oaks.
11. Conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as close board fencing, kerbs, signage and lighting.

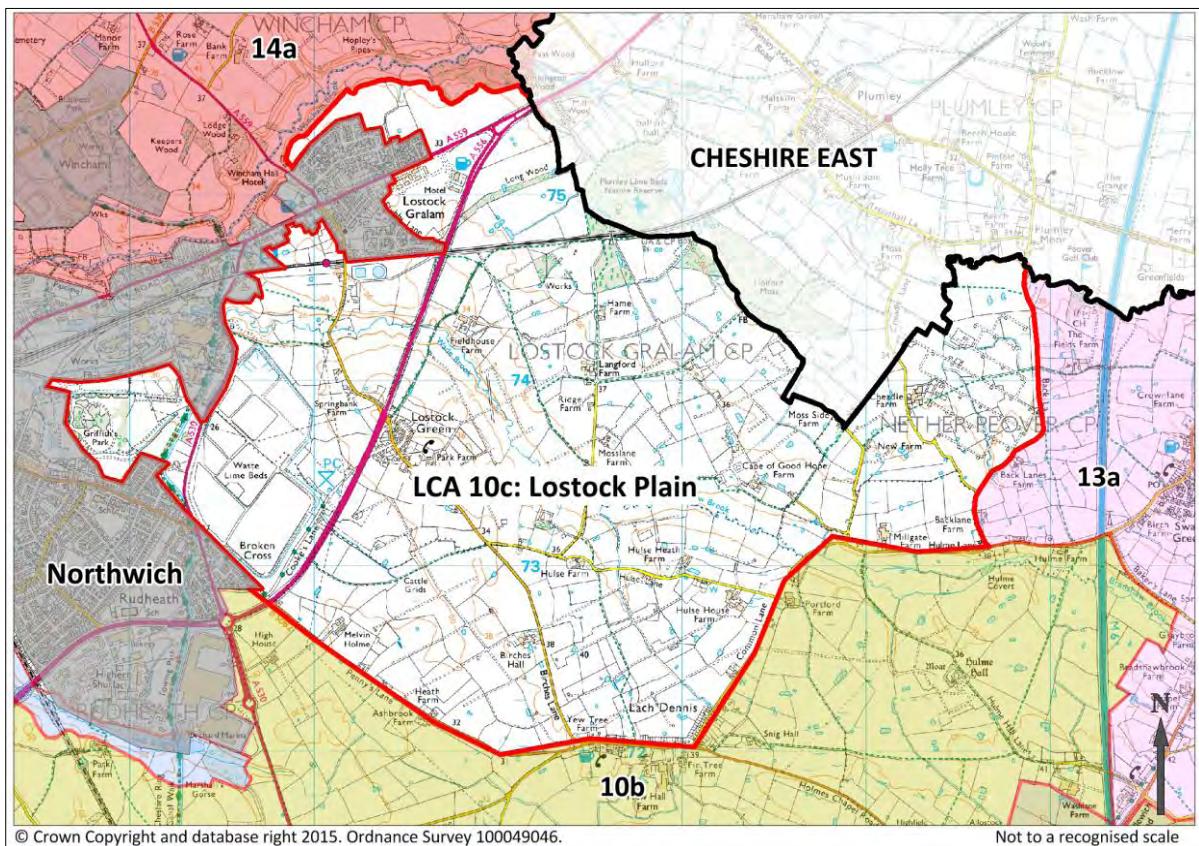
12. Protect above ground archaeological features, such as the moated sites of Hulme Hall and the former Drakelow Hall, promoting sensitive agricultural practices in their vicinity (i.e. grazing not ploughing).
13. Support plans to create a woodland setting for the industrial and business areas to the east of Northwich.
14. Conserve views to the church spires at Moulton and Davenham.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Conserve the low density, scattered settlement pattern of farmsteads.
2. Conserve the local vernacular built style - including red brick farmsteads and barns (containing round windows) with slate and white washed finishes. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
3. Seek to ensure that new farm buildings do not threaten the settings of the older farmsteads.
4. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
5. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development does not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
6. Maintain the rural character of the narrow, unmarked lanes – resist improvements such as additions of kerbs and lighting that would erode the rural character of the landscape.
7. Protect the character of Kings Street Roman Road, including the avenue of trees along its length.
8. Consider opportunities to screen development on the urban edge of Northwich using planting of broadleaved species.
9. Screen brine/salt extraction, gas storage and quarrying activities using planting of broadleaved species. Consider the long term restoration of these areas for the benefit of wildlife, creating new wetland habitats and recreational access where possible.
10. Preserve the industrial aesthetic of the Trent and Mersey Canal and its setting, including associated structures and artefacts of industrial archaeology. Consider views from the canal in planning new built development.
11. Ensure any structures associated with the brine/salt extraction, gas storage and quarrying industries are well integrated into the landscape using native planting, and proposals are accompanied by enhancement of existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees in the vicinity of the site to ensure the landscape structure around any new facility is maintained/improved.



## LCA 10c: Lostock Plain



### Location and Boundaries

The **Lostock Plain** is located to the east of Northwich between the built up area and the Cheshire West and Chester borough boundary. It is a distinct area defined by its function as a brine field and is influenced by above ground structures associated with brine/salt extraction and underground ethylene /gas storage.

### **Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 10c: *Lostock Plain***

- Flat plain-like topography resulting from the uniform characteristics of the underlying Eldersfield Mudstone bedrock, except for the banded waste lime beds
- Salt bearing strata underlie the area – this area is a large brine field used for extraction of salt and storage of gas in underground chambers with well-heads, fenced compound and tracks visible in the landscape
- The surface mantle of glacial till (boulder clay) gives rise to seasonally waterlogged soils that are suited to permanent grassland, interspersed with some arable fields
- A small scale pattern of irregular fields is overlaid onto the flat plain providing unity across the landscape – there are extensive areas of ancient and post medieval origin
- Fields are bounded by an intact network of low thorn hedgerows with some hedgerow trees that filter views across the area. Ditches are also present along field boundaries
- Woodland cover is generally absent, although the occasional copse or shelter belt punctuates the landscape. Part of Holford Moss Wood falls in this area
- Field ponds, formed when pits were dug to extract calcium carbonate for improving fields, are a common feature of the plain
- Crow Brook and Wade Brook are distinctive hydrological features, producing local variety in topography and creating important wetland habitats
- Part of the Trent and Mersey Canal passes through the area, including associated structures and artefacts of industrial archaeology
- Recreational use of the landscape is limited to a few public rights of way that follow tracks and field boundaries across the farmland
- Settlement pattern is defined by nucleated villages e.g. Lostock Gralam and Lostock Green, with dispersed farmsteads – those with distinctive red brick barns (with round windows) form points of focus in the landscape
- The road network is typically comprised of narrow, rural unmarked lanes linking farms and villages, although the A556 fragments and the area and creates movement and noise locally
- Long range views across the open, flat landscape with electricity pylons prominent on the skyline. Industrial works at Northwich East have a visual influence on and form a backdrop to the *Lostock Plain*;
- Church spires at Moulton and Davenham are features in views across the plain.

### **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The flat plain-like topography of between 30m-45m AOD resulting from the uniform characteristics of the underlying bedrock;
- The uniform covering of glacial till (boulder clay) that gives rise to a seasonally waterlogged stagnogley soil that is well suited to dairying and stock rearing;
- Salt bearing strata underlie the mudstones - brine pumping has been carried out, where salt is extracted in solution and the cavities left by this extraction is ideally suited for storage of products such as ethylene and gas;
- The field ponds (old calcium carbonate pits) that provide an indication of the former use of the natural resources of the landscape, some of which are local wildlife sites for their stands of emergent and floating vegetation e.g. Hame Farm Pond;
- The small area of woodland, grassland and rare inland salt marsh at Holford Moss is recognised as a local wildlife site;

- The fields bounded by an intact hedgerow network and occasional hedgerow trees, mostly oak, that provides a unity across the landscape and contribute to biodiversity;
- The lack of woodland cover, limited to the occasional copse or shelter belt providing visual and biological diversity and valuable cover in a landscape largely devoid of woodland, e.g. Long Wood is a narrow strip of broadleaved woodland with a diverse canopy located between the A556 and railway line that is recognised as a local wildlife site;
- The small number of brooks draining the landscape. Crow Brook and Wade Brook are distinctive hydrological features, producing variety in topography and creating important wetland habitats.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The pastoral character of the landscape;
- The small scale, strong field pattern and presence of ancient field systems which provide an historic continuity and a mixture of small and medium sized irregular shaped fields and larger regular fields where agricultural improvement has taken place;
- The ponds, ditches and brooks which provide wildlife habitats and landscape diversity;
- The Billing flashes beside the canal that now support important wetland habitats, including swamp;
- The historic moated Drakelow Hall (now just a moat and earthwork) and Hulme Hall, both Scheduled Monuments, and the Roman Road (A530 King Street) that provide a sense of time depth in the landscape;
- The Trent and Mersey Canal and its setting, including associated structures and artefacts of industrial archaeology, that provides an indication of the past use of the landscape as an important link between the navigable River Trent and the River Mersey, and provides wetland habitats and recreational opportunities;
- Some of the halls and farmsteads are listed buildings;
- Recreational use of the landscape is limited to a few public rights of way that follow tracks and field boundaries across the farmland and the canal towpath. There is no open access land.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- The low density of settlement, with few nucleated villages e.g. Lostock Gralam and Lostock Green, and dispersed farmsteads that represent examples of the red brick local vernacular building style – those with distinctive red brick dairy barns (with round windows) form points of focus in the landscape;
- The narrow, unmarked lanes that contribute to the rural character of the area; however, the A556 cuts through the area creating a barrier to movement east/west across the area;
- Above ground structures associated with the brine extraction industry include tracks leading to well-heads, pipelines, and the well-heads themselves which are often enclosed in a compound bounded by chicken wire;
- Electricity pylons and bunded waste lime beds are also prominent built features in this flat landscape.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The flat, low lying, large scale, open landscape that in itself is not visually prominent;
- Overlaid by a more intricate and irregular pattern of hedged fields and well-heads;
- The presence of hedgerow oaks which are particularly distinctive and contribute to biodiversity, filter views and stand out against the open skyline;
- The low density of settlement and quiet rural roads across much of the plain contribute to a generally tranquil landscape. However, the strong pattern of fields and presence of industrial structures and compounds contribute to an impression of this landscape tamed and exploited by man;

- A generally tranquil, still, rural landscape although the presence of the main road contributes movement and noise locally and industrial works on the edge of Rudheath and Northwich (just outside the area) also have a visual influence on the *Lostock Plain* – these aspects detract from the sense of tranquillity associated with this part of the *Cheshire Plain East*;
- Occasional areas of woodland, marl pits and associated emergent vegetation, provide some texture and visual interest;
- The flat, open landscape (due to lack of vegetation) provides the opportunity for long ranging and expansive views across the landscape;
- Open skylines are a feature of the area – punctuated by the occasional hedgerow tree, farmstead, or pylon;
- The open character means there is little opportunity for screening any large scale elements or for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves being highly visible - making it a visually sensitive landscape. The low density of settlement and few recreational opportunities means there are relatively few sensitive visual receptors in the area;
- Large scale industrial buildings in adjacent areas (e.g. the distribution warehouses at Gadbrook Park, Rudheath and the Brunner Mond brine works at Northwich East) are visible on the skyline;
- There are views from the western edge of the plain over the Dane Valley with the church spires at Moulton and Davenham on the skyline.

#### **Landscape Condition**

Although the landscape is actively managed as farmland (as well as being used for industrial extraction of brine and storage of ethylene/gas), many of the hedgerow trees are over mature and some of the hedgerows are in a declining condition. Although this is a major brine extraction area, the only above ground visible structures are modest well-heads, compounds and tracks that are generally well integrated into the landscape. Short term set –aside has resulted in isolated cases of fields containing invasive grasses and ruderal vegetation which contrasts with the otherwise well managed and maintained fields. Some field ponds have been reduced to small, shallow features, over shaded with trees and with little open water.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 10c: *Lostock Plain*:**

- Green Belt (north of the A559);
- Countryside (south of the A559);
- Candidate Key Settlement Gap between Lostock Gralam and Northwich;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

## **Forces for Landscape Change**

### **Past change**

- Farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;
- Loss of permanent grassland and an increase in growth of arable and fodder crops, including maize/grass silage to support the dairy industry, within an otherwise predominantly pastoral landscape; this may also result in soil erosion as a result of exposure of bare soil;
- Improved drainage over the years has resulted in the gradual loss of bogs, ponds and mosses;
- Loss of hedgerows/trees due to salt pipeline spillages;
- Decline in hedgerow field boundaries and hedgerow trees, due to flail mowing which reduces diversity and kills emerging saplings, leading to loss of historic field pattern and increased use of fencing;
- Planning permission for a large scale business park and hotel at Lostock Gralam.

### **Potential future change/ key issues affecting LCA 10c: Lostock Plain**

- Planting of new woodland and hedgerow trees (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan) as a buffer to ancient semi-natural woodland, to screen views of large scale industry and increase connectivity with Northwich (but without obstructing long distance views of the Sandstone Ridge and Peak District);
- There may be increased pressure for farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks, and gas storage proposals;
- Conversion of farm buildings to residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Pressure for residential and commercial (business and employment) development, particularly on the edge of Northwich; the open area between Northwich and Lostock Gralam has been identified as a potential Key Settlement Gap where development would lead to coalescence and the loss of identity of the two communities;
- Search area for sand and gravel extraction, and the preferred area for future controlled brine extraction;
- Increased development could lead to the suburbanisation of the character area through upgrading of roads, kerbing, lighting, signage etc.
- Pressure for increased gas storage;
- High Speed Phase 2 (HS2) route will potentially pass north-south through the area, mostly on embankment.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 10c: Lostock Plain***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the pastoral character and local built vernacular of the landscape, and **enhance** the condition of the hedgerow and tree network.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Conserve and manage grassland to conserve the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil.
2. Maintain the hedgerow network, gapping up incomplete hedgerows where appropriate and avoiding harsh flail mowing, to ensure the network continues to provide a unity across the landscape as well as providing wildlife habitats.
3. Protect hedgerows and hedgerow trees from salt spillages, encouraging them to grow up at intervals along the hedgerow.
4. Conserve the small scale pattern of fields, particularly early field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
5. Conserve existing hedgerow trees and seek opportunities to encourage a new generation of hedgerow trees to increase their presence in the landscape.
6. Conserve the area of woodland, grassland and rare inland salt marsh at Holford Moss.
7. Seek opportunities to create a woodland setting for the industrial and business areas to the east of Northwich.
8. Hedgerow, tree planting and small scale copses may be more appropriate on the plain itself. Aim to extend broadleaved woodlands along water courses where this does not impact other valuable riparian habitats. Respect the small scale of the landscape when designing new woodland.
9. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors. Seek opportunities to re-create unimproved or semi-improved species rich grassland.
10. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.

11. Conserve and manage the remaining ditches, field ponds and brooks that are of importance for biodiversity as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape. Prevent further drying out of wetland habitats and seek opportunities to extent/recreate areas of wetland habitat including reed swamp and willow scrub.
12. Monitor the impact of climate change and water levels on vegetation, particularly the hedgerow oaks.
13. Conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as close board fencing, kerbs, signage and lighting.

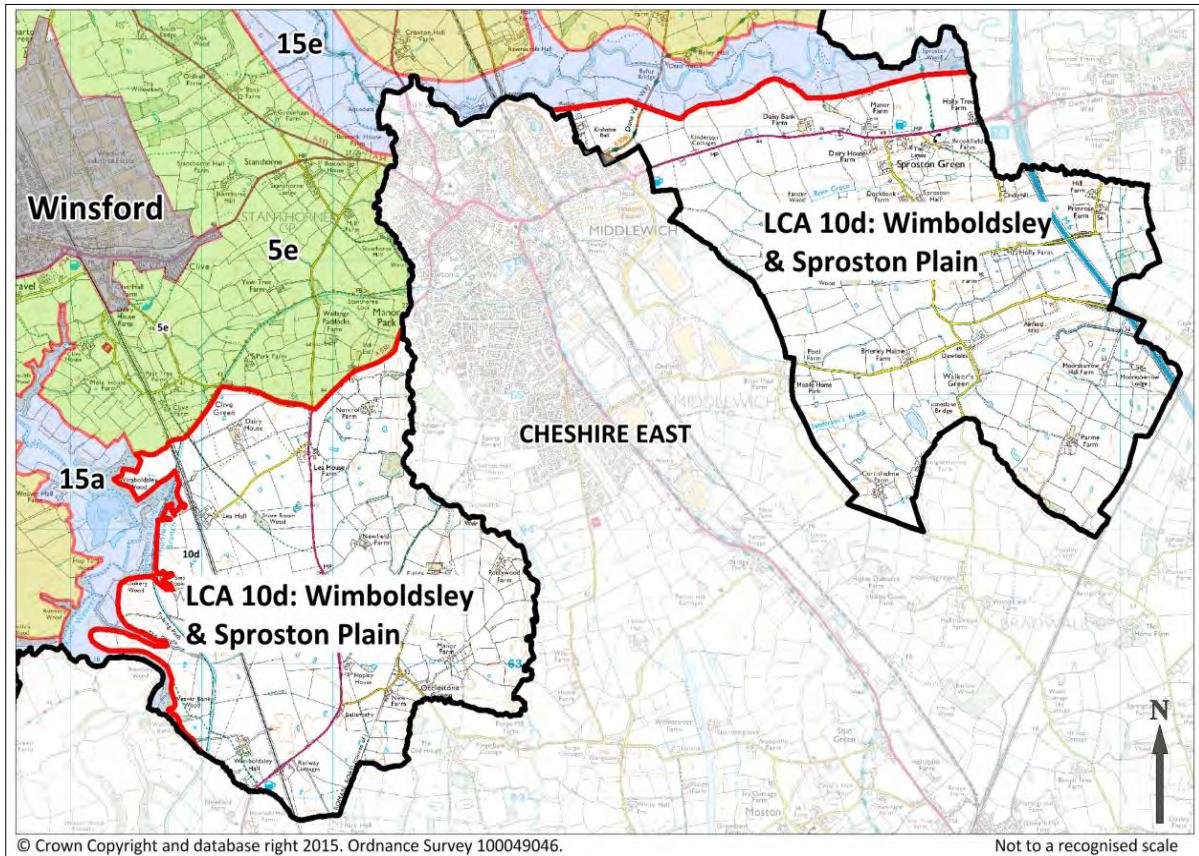
### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Conserve the low density, scattered settlement pattern of farmsteads, ensuring residential development takes place within existing villages.
2. Maintain the scattered farmsteads that represent examples of the red brick local vernacular building style – the red brick barns are particularly distinctive. Seek to ensure that new farm buildings do not threaten the settings of these farmsteads.
3. Conserve the open undeveloped area between Northwich and Lostock Gralam that has been identified as a Candidate Key Settlement Gap where development would lead to coalescence and the loss of identity of the two communities.
4. Conserve the local vernacular built style - including red brick or white washed farmsteads. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
5. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development does not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
6. Maintain the rural character of the narrow, unmarked lanes – resist improvements such as additions of kerbs and lighting that would erode the rural character of the landscape.
7. Screen brine/salt extraction, gas storage and quarrying activities using broadleaved species. Consider the long term restoration of sand and gravel quarries for the benefit of wildlife, creating new wetland habitats and recreational access where possible.
8. Industrial structures associated with the brine/salt extraction and gas storage industries are generally well integrated into the landscape – however, any development should be accompanied by enhancement of existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees in the vicinity of the site to ensure the landscape structure around any new facility is maintained.

9. Soften built edges and views of main roads, commercial sheds and industry on the eastern edge of Northwich and Lostock Gralam by introducing planting schemes using native broadleaved species.
10. Preserve the industrial aesthetic of the Trent and Mersey Canal and its setting, including associated structures and artefacts of industrial archaeology. Consider views from the canal in planning new built development.



## LCA 10d: Wimboldsley and Sproston Plain



### Location and Boundaries

The **Wimboldsley & Sproston Plain** is located on the southern borders of the borough surrounding Middlewich. It is divided into two separate areas by the administrative boundary of the borough – in reality the plain is one continuous area and extends well beyond the borough boundary. To the north the plain meets the *East Winsford Undulating Enclosed Farmland* and the *Dane Valley*.

### **Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 10d: *Wimboldsley and Sproston Plain***

- Flat plain-like topography resulting from the uniform characteristics of the underlying Eldersfield Mudstone bedrock, with minor undulations around water courses
- The surface mantle of glacial till (boulder clay) gives rise to seasonally waterlogged soils that are suited to dairying on short term and permanent grassland
- A pattern of small and medium sized fields is overlaid onto the flat plain providing unity across the landscape – some fields are Medieval in origin e.g. townfields around Holly Farm, and to the east of Wimboldsley
- Fields are bounded by an intact network of low thorn hedgerows with some hedgerow trees that filter views across the area. Ditches are also present along field boundaries
- Woodland cover is generally absent, although the occasional covert or copse punctuates the landscape e.g. Spring Covert and Rookery Wood
- The area is drained by a small number of brooks and streams including Sanderson's Brook and River Croco which produce local undulations in the landform
- Field ponds, formed when pits were dug to extract marl for improving fields, are a common feature of the plain
- The Shropshire Union Canal (Middlewich Branch including Stanthorne Lock) is an important part of the industrial archaeology of the area – it is also a local wildlife site recognised for its emergent vegetation and grassland
- Recreational use of the landscape is limited to a few public rights of way that follow tracks and field boundaries across the farmland and the canal towpath that forms part of the Cheshire Ring Canal Walk
- Low density of settlement – the settlement pattern is defined by small hamlets at the intersection of rural roads, and scattered red brick farmsteads with large red brick dairy barns (with round windows) and halls, some in the distinctive timber framed 'black and white' style e.g. Wimboldsley Hall
- The road network is typically comprised of narrow, rural unmarked lanes linking farmsteads, although the M6 motorway, A54, A530 and the Winsford to Crew railway line pass through the character area
- Long range views across the open, flat landscape with trees and farmsteads punctuating the skyline. The hills of the Pennines are visible in the distance
- Large scale industrial works on the southern outskirts of Middlewich have a visual influence on the *Wimboldsley & Sproston Plain*.

### **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The flat plain-like topography of between 40m-50m AOD resulting from the uniform characteristics of the underlying bedrock;
- Small brooks (the River Croco and Sanderson's Brook) create gentle undulations in the surface and are bordered by riparian vegetation, drain towards Middlewich and into the River Dane;
- The uniform covering of glacial till (boulder clay) that gives rise to a seasonally waterlogged stagnogley soil that is well suited to dairying and stock rearing. There is also some growth of arable crops including fodder crops;
- The field ponds (old marl pits) that provide an indication of the former use of the natural resources of the landscape and provide important wetland habitats;

- The fields bounded by an intact hedgerow network and remnant hedgerow trees, mostly oak, that provides a unity across the landscape and contribute to biodiversity;
- Remaining isolated trees, mostly oak, where hedgerows have been removed;
- The lack of woodland cover, limited to a scattering of small deciduous copses and scrub within the existing field pattern e.g. Spring Covert and Rookery Wood, providing visual and biological diversity and provide valuable cover in a landscape largely devoid of woodland.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The pastoral character of the landscape;
- The strong, small scale field pattern and presence of ancient field systems which provide historic continuity and a mixture of small and medium sized irregular shaped fields (e.g. east of Wimboldsley and the A530 and around Catishulme Farm and Mooresbarrow Lodge) and larger regular fields where agricultural improvement has taken place (e.g. west of Wimboldsley and the A530);
- Medieval townfields around Holly Farm;
- The ponds, ditches and brooks which provide wildlife habitats and landscape diversity;
- The Shropshire Union Canal (Middlewich Branch) that provides an indication of the past use of the landscape and supports two listed bridges. The canal also provides valuable emergent vegetation and grassland habitats;
- Some of the halls and farmsteads are listed buildings;
- Recreational use of the landscape is limited to a few public rights of way that follow tracks and field boundaries across the farmland and the canal towpath that forms part of the Cheshire Ring Canal Walk long distance recreational route which links to the Dane Valley Way (which passes Sproston Green). There is no open access land.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- The low density of settlement, with small hamlets at the intersection of roads, such as Sproston Green, Wimboldsley and Occlestone Green, and scattered farmsteads that represent examples of the red brick and striking timber framed black and white local vernacular building style;
- Halls, e.g. Wimboldsley Hall, Lea Hall;
- The narrow, unmarked lanes that contribute to the rural character of the area;
- Large modern steel barns.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The flat, low lying, large scale, open landscape is itself not visually prominent;
- The presence of hedgerow oaks which are particularly distinctive and contribute to biodiversity, filter views and stand out against the open skyline;
- A generally tranquil rural landscape although the main road and railway corridors contribute movement and noise locally;
- Occasional areas of woodland, marl pits and associated emergent vegetation, provide some texture and visual interest;
- The flat, open landscape (due to low vegetation cover) provides the opportunity for long ranging and expansive views across the landscape. Open skylines are a feature of the area, punctuated by the occasional hedgerow tree or farmstead;
- The open character means there is little opportunity for screening any large scale elements or for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves being highly visible - making it a visually sensitive landscape. However, the low density of settlement and few recreational opportunities means there are relatively few sensitive visual receptors in the area;
- The views to the distant Pennines.

### **Landscape Condition**

Although the landscape is actively managed as farmland, many hedgerow trees have been lost. Some of the hedgerows are in a declining condition and others have been lost as a result of past field expansion. Some field ponds have been reduced to small, shallow features, over shaded with trees and with little open water, while others have been incorporated into gardens as ornamental features.

### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 10d: *Wimboldsley and Sproston Plain*:**

- Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

### ***Forces for Landscape Change***

#### **Past change**

- Increasing size of farm units;
- Agricultural improvements have resulted in increased field sizes as hedgerows have been removed (leaving isolated trees in the centre of fields representing the line of former hedgerows);
- Farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;
- Loss of permanent grassland and an increase in growth of arable and fodder crops, including maize/grass silage to support the dairy industry, within an otherwise predominantly pastoral landscape; this may also result in soil erosion as a result of exposure of bare soil;
- Improved drainage and in-filling over the years has resulted in drying out of wetland habitats and ponds. Some field ponds have also been incorporated into gardens as ornamental features;
- Decline in hedgerow field boundaries and hedgerow trees, due to flail mowing which reduces diversity and kills emerging saplings, leading to loss of historic field pattern and increased use of fencing.

#### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 10d: *Wimboldsley and Sproston Plain***

- There may be increased pressure for farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;
- Conversion of farm buildings to residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Pressure for residential and commercial development, particularly expansion / overspill around Middlewich including the approved rural business hub development 'Cheshire FRESH';
- Planting of new woodland and hedgerow trees (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan) as a buffer to ancient semi-natural woodland and to screen views of large scale industry (but without obstructing long distance views of the Sandstone Ridge and Peak District);
- Search area for sand and gravel extraction;
- Clay extraction and landfill at Kinderton Lodge;
- Possible improvements to the main road corridors that run through this character area due to increase in HGVs, and M6 widening/capacity improvements;
- High Speed Phase 2 (HS2) route will potentially pass north-south through the area.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 10d: Wimboldsley and Sproston Plain***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the pastoral character and local built vernacular of the landscape, and **enhance** the condition of the hedgerow and tree network.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Conserve and manage grassland to conserve the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil.
2. Maintain the hedgerow network, gapping up incomplete hedgerows where appropriate and avoiding harsh flail mowing, to ensure the network continues to provide a unity across the landscape as well as providing wildlife habitats.
3. Conserve the small scale pattern of fields, particularly early field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape e.g. the small ancient irregular shaped fields to the east of the A530 and around Catishulme Farm and Mooresbarrow Lodge and the area of medieval townfields between Chapel House Farm and Holly Farm.
4. Conserve the remaining hedgerow trees and seek opportunities to encourage a new generation of hedgerow trees to increase their presence in the landscape.
5. Aim to extend broadleaved woodlands along water courses where this does not impact other valuable riparian habitats, and plant small scale copses within existing field patterns.
6. Protect and actively manage the remaining wetland habitats, including field ponds.
7. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors. Seek opportunities to re-create unimproved or semi-improved species rich grassland.
8. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
9. Conserve and manage the remaining ditches, field ponds and brooks that are of importance for biodiversity as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape. Prevent further drying out of wetland habitats and seek opportunities to extent/recreate areas of wetland habitat including reed swamp and willow scrub.

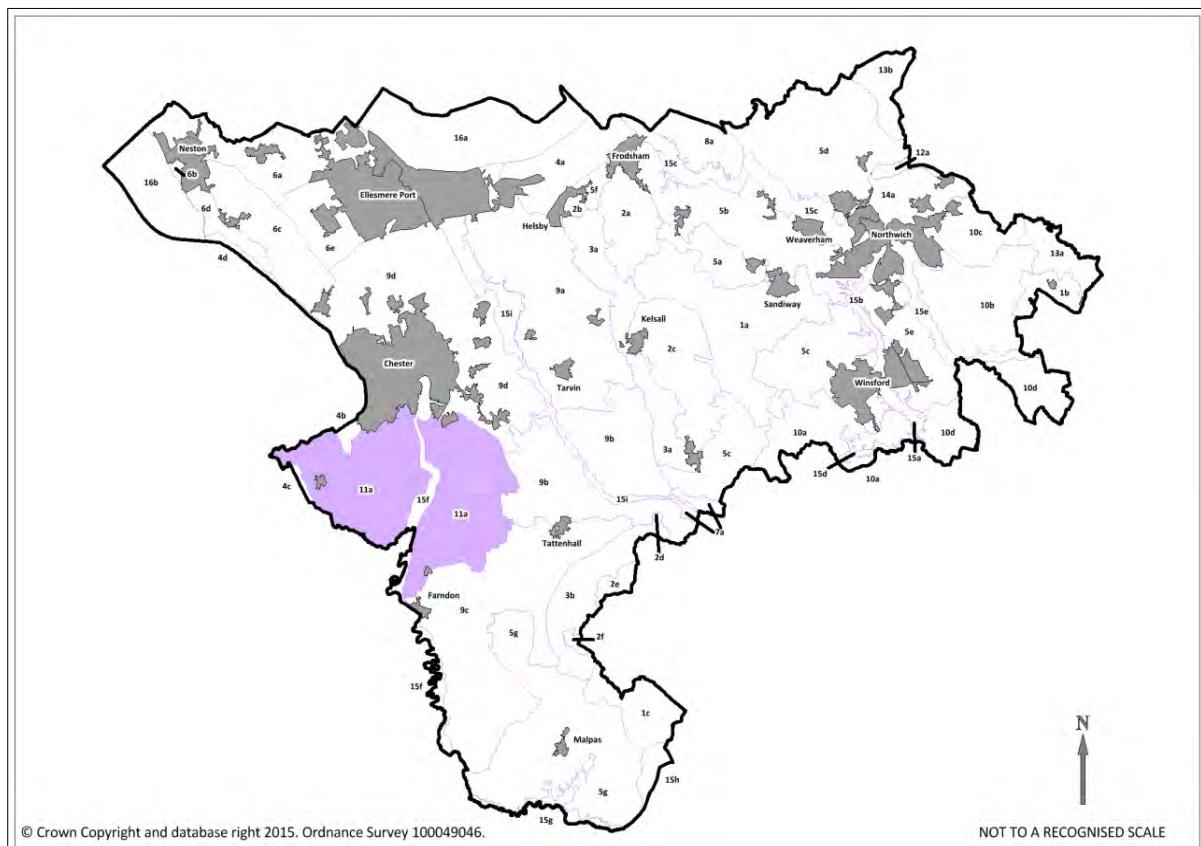
10. Monitor the impact of climate change and water levels on vegetation, particularly the hedgerow oaks.
11. Conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as close board fencing, kerbs, signage and lighting.
12. Conserve views to the distant Pennines.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Conserve the low density, scattered settlement pattern of small hamlets and farmsteads.
2. Conserve the local vernacular built style - including red brick farmsteads with large red brick dairy barns (containing round windows) and distinctive timber framed 'black and white' farmsteads. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
3. Seek to ensure that new farm buildings do not threaten the settings of older farmsteads.
4. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
5. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development does not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
6. Maintain the rural character of the narrow, unmarked lanes – resist improvements such as additions of kerbs and lighting that would erode the rural character of the landscape.
7. Screen extraction activity using broadleaved species. Consider the long term restoration of sand and gravel quarries for the benefit of wildlife, creating new wetland habitats and recreational access where possible.
8. Minimise the visual impact of intrusive features such as roads, railways and industrial buildings using native broadleaf planting.
9. Consider the effect of any changes on views to/from the Pennines.



# LCT 11: ESTATE FARMLAND



## General Description

A medium-scale, low-lying and well maintained landscape character area falling in extensive tracts of the Cheshire Plain either side of the *Dee Valley LCA* south of Chester. It is defined through a consistency in topography, land use, woodland blocks and formal parkland and tree-lined avenues associated with historical estate ownership, with particularly strong and distinguishing settlement and architectural elements. The landscape type shares many characteristics of the *Cheshire Plain West LCT*.

## Visual Character

Visual character is defined by flat or gently rolling expanses of hedgerow enclosed fields of medium size and regular pattern, set within a context of extensive designed parkland and mature woodland blocks, particularly the four linear 'approaches' /drives/avenues which radiate out from Eaton Hall and are a key characteristic of the Grade II\* Eaton Hall Registered Historic Park and Garden (Chester Approach, Burton Approach, Pulford Approach and Belgrave Avenue – the main formal approach from the west). These blocks and parkland, together with a significant density of hedgerow trees serve to present a semi-enclosed landscape. The landscape is punctuated by highly attractive estate villages with striking redbrick, slate and tile houses and estate buildings with ornate detailing and strong consistency of style designed by John Douglas. Eaton Hall and its associated buildings are set low within the wooded estate but whose estate chapel clock tower and spire rises to provide a dramatic and imposing landmark across much of the lowland pasture. Church spires also provide visual reference points, with some longer views possible to the Welsh hills and the sandstone ridge to the east.

The extensive network of fields is a mix of small, medium and large enclosures (up to 4ha, 4-8ha and over 8ha respectively) and is mainly of an irregular and semi-regular pattern. These are typical of medieval fields that have undergone improvement during the post-medieval period as part of estate management as well as more recent changes i.e. boundary loss and field size increases. Boundaries are typically hedgerows – some mixed species, others single species hawthorn. The area is also rich in farm ponds, flooded marl-pits that in many places reach a density of one in every field.

The northern edge of this character type is strongly influenced by the urban form of Chester, particularly the extensive buildings of the Chester Business Park within a prestigious landscape setting, and the visual intrusion of heavy traffic on two major roads. The A55 passes through the character area from east to west, hidden in deep cutting for some of its length, but raised conspicuously on embankment further west towards the county border with Wales. The A483 is particularly obvious where it rises to pass over the Chester-Wrexham railway.

### ***Physical Influences***

Topography is flat or gently rolling (c 10-30m AOD), gradually increasing with distance to the south. The underlying geology comprises Kinnerton Sandstone and Chester Pebble Beds Formation. This is overlain by Devensian till. Soils are typical argillic stagnogleys, which are suited to pasture as they are not particularly free draining.

Country lanes lined with well-managed, closely trimmed hedgerows. There are many conspicuous blocks of woodland, often linear and following the public road system or defining the private approaches to Eaton Hall. Many of the individual properties are surrounded by mature gardens and small stands of trees, often with a strong element of evergreen planting, and all reinforcing the perception of a higher density of tree cover. This increased tree cover ensures a greater degree of enclosure than elsewhere in the neighbouring *Cheshire Plain West*. The flat topography allows a number of tall cylindrical storage silos to be seen in middle distance views, identifying the location of individual farmsteads.

The four formal wooded approaches to the Hall in this character area are very conspicuous within the surrounding field system with its low hedgerows. A mix of broadleaves and coniferous with beech, holly, hornbeam, lime, Scots pine and yew, they make up much of the woodland content of this character area. In the northeast the linear woodland along the Chester Approach dominates the edge of the Dee Valley. This area, a local wildlife site with a range of species indicative of older woodland, is managed as a public access area, a reflection of its location on the southern edge of Chester. A small portion of the park to the east – the Burton Approach, which crosses the River Dee via the Iron Bridge - is located in the adjacent *Cheshire Plain West* landscape type. Bretton Wood in the northwest is also a local wildlife site and follows a former approach to the Hall (Balderton Drive) dissected by the construction of the A55 in the 1970's.

### ***Cultural Influences***

There is a rich historic heritage in this character area: Watling Street Roman Road runs south from the fort at Chester to Eccleston and on through the grounds of the Eaton Estate, and a Roman settlement site off this has been the subject of excavation at Heronbridge. There are three motte and bailey castles in the villages of Aldford, Pulford and Dodleston and a number of medieval moated sites e.g. Belgrave, which is a rare example of a moat flanked on three sides by a medieval garden. Dodleston Hall is also moated.

The most dominant characteristic of this landscape type is the influence of the Eaton Estate, the seat of which is Eaton Hall, home to the Grosvenor Family now the Dukes of Westminster. Eaton Hall was first built in the late 17th century for Thomas Grosvenor and rebuilt in the 19th. However, during its use by the army in WWII it was badly damaged and finally it was largely demolished in 1963. A new

house was built in a modern style in the 1970s, which was transformed in the 1990s when it was encased in pinkish ashlar. The Grade II\* Eaton Hall Registered Historic Park and Garden includes 17th to 20th century formal gardens and a landscape park associated with the country house, including elements by John Webb, William Andrews Nesfield and Edwin Lutyens.

The 'Eaton Estate style' predominates with high quality buildings, both red brick cottages and higher status properties, with characteristic architectural detailing. Several of the neighbouring villages have a strong and consistent identity afforded by the large number of late 19th and early 20th century estate buildings. There are also a number of small, nucleated villages in this character area such as at Eccleston, one of the most notable villages of the Eaton Estate. Most estate buildings and cottages from the 19th century survive such as Wrexham Road Farm which is a model farm. Lower Kinnerton also has Eaton Estate housing as does Pulford and Poulton and there are many cottages that are typical of those dating from the time of the first Duke of Westminster. The architect who designed many of the estate's notable buildings was John Douglas and his typical building fabrics are soft red-orange brick to hard Ruabon brick. Roof tiles are both slate and red clay.

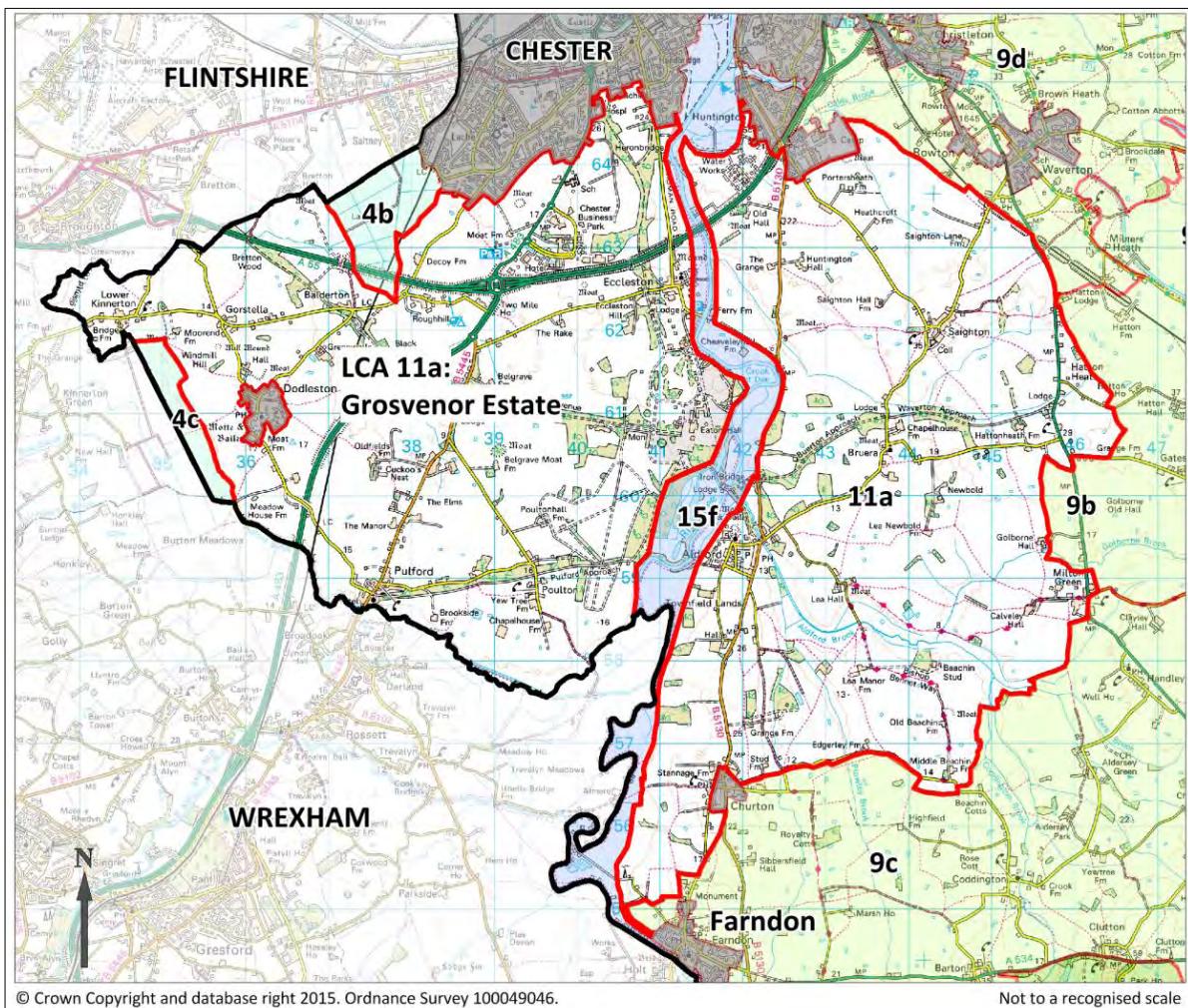
In the late 19th century the Estate constructed over 300 cottages, which meant that many buildings of an earlier date were demolished. They are of high quality and have intricate and elaborate architectural detailing such as highly decorative chimneys and complex roof forms, moulded brick detail and areas of contrasting rendering, built on planned street form.

To the west of Park Plantation is the greater part of a former deer park. This was requisitioned in 1940 for use as RAF Poulton which opened in 1943 and was manned by RAF 12 Group Operational Training Unit. Poulton acted as a satellite airfield for Hawarden airfield and was mainly used for fighter training. Parts of the runways and most of the perimeter track survive. Most of the dispersal bays have gone.

There is **one Landscape Character Area** within LCT 11:

**11a: Grosvenor Estate**

## LCA 11a: Grosvenor Estate



### Location and Boundaries

The **Grosvenor Estate** character area is located in two separate blocks displaying strong consistency in appearance, on the east and west flanks of the River Dee, beyond the narrow LCA which defines the river's immediate landscape character. To the north of the LCA is the urban influence of the City of Chester, although limited changes in relief do not afford views beyond its fringe, and to the east lies the *Cheshire Plain West* which shares many landscape characteristics with the *Grosvenor Estate*. For the most part the west of the character area is defined by the Welsh border apart from a linear strip of *Drained Marsh* west of Dodleston (LCA 4c).

### **Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 11a: Grosvenor Estate**

- A gently rolling or flat landscape with few views apart from longer vistas to higher ground east and west of the area
- Underlying geology comprises Kinnerton Sandstone and Chester Pebble Beds Formation overlain by Devensian till
- Large blocks of woodland, predominantly oak with a more ornamental mix of species around Eaton Hall
- Mix of pastoral and arable land use
- Strong network of well managed hawthorn hedges with a high proportion of oak trees
- Sense of enclosure arising from low elevation, dense hedgerows and significant woodland blocks creating middle distance and close skylines
- Extensive areas of flood plain as tributaries meet with the River Dee, such as Stoneyford Brook, Powsey Brook and Plowley Brook
- Dense concentration of listed historic estate buildings, set within Conservation Areas at Eaton Hall and within most of the designed villages across the LCA
- Three motte and bailey castles in the villages of Aldford, Pulford and Dodleston and a number of medieval moated sites
- Eaton Hall clock tower and spire provides an imposing landmark unchallenged by other constructions
- Views to some estate village church spires and towers, such as Eccleston, Pulford and Aldford
- Influence of important designers on the designed landscape and built environment of the LCA, such as John Douglas, John Webb, William Andrews Nesfield and Edwin Lutyens reflected by designations
- Big skies
- Some field ponds, often of habitat importance
- A sparse network of often straight, quite lanes and roads, including private estate roads
- Significant influence of road and rail infrastructure to the northern parts of the LCA
- Significant variation in public access to the countryside between the eastern part with good public rights of way network, and the western area where the network is less extensive
- Connectivity between the two parts of the LCA is significantly limited by very limited crossing points of the River Dee
- Large garden centre complex and car park at Belgrave reflects diversification of the estate and rural enterprise.

### **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The Topography is flat or gently rolling (c 10-30m AOD), gradually increasing with distance to the south;
- The landscape is partly enclosed by extensive, conspicuous linear woodland blocks known as *approaches* of oak and a more complex mix of holly, beech, hornbeam, lime, Scots pine and yew closer to Eaton Hall;
- The wooded parkland *approaches* which often define the horizon;
- Woodland to the eastern and western fringes of the LCA become less frequent and prominent;
- Mature parkland planting;
- Good quality ridge and furrow survives on the estate;

- Soils are typical argillic stagnogleys, which are suited to pasture as they are not particularly free draining;
- Arable agriculture is more predominant on better-drained soils such as north of Belgrave, south of Cuckoo's Nest and around Churton;
- Field pattern is primarily semi-regular in shape with well-managed, often low clipped hawthorn hedges;
- Many of the individual properties are surrounded by mature gardens and small stands of trees, often with a strong element of evergreen planting, and all reinforcing the perception of a higher density of tree cover;
- This increased tree cover ensures a greater degree of enclosure than elsewhere in the Cheshire Plain;
- Straight and gently meandering country lanes lined with well-managed, closely trimmed hedgerows;
- Hedgerow trees are less frequent to the north-western fringes of the LCA;
- Where arable land use has increased there is evidence of loss of hedgerows, such as at Churton, Milton Green and immediately north of the A55 Chester ring road;
- The LCA supports an extensive network of habitats due to the estate woodlands and wetlands;
- Local wildlife sites have been designated locally reflecting the habitat value of the woodlands across the LCA, including Bretton Wood, Duck Wood and Beachin Wood with a range of species indicative of older woodland;
- Aldford Brook Meadows is a large local wildlife site of diverse, mainly wetland habitats, including wet scrub/woodland, by the canalised Aldford Brook.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- Watling Street Roman Road runs south from the fort at Chester to Eccleston and on through the grounds of the Eaton Estate, and a Roman settlement site off this has been the subject of excavation at Heronbridge;
- The three motte and bailey castles in the villages of Aldford, Pulford and Dodeleston and a number of medieval moated sites e.g. Belgrave, which is a rare example of a moat flanked on three sides by a medieval garden;
- The moated Dodeleston Hall;
- The major landscape and historical influence of the Eaton Estate, the seat of which is Eaton Hall, home to the Grosvenor Family now the Dukes of Westminster;
- Eaton Hall, first built in the late 17th century for Thomas Grosvenor and rebuilt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but largely demolished in 1963 after army use. A new house was built in a modern style in the 1970s, which was transformed in the 1990s when it was encased in pinkish ashlar;
- The park and gardens of Eaton are Registered Grade II\* on Historic England's National Heritage List for England and includes 17th to 20th century formal gardens and a landscape park associated with a country house, including elements by John Webb, William Andrews Nesfield and Edwin Lutyens;
- The 'Eaton Estate style' predominates much of the LCA with attractive, high quality buildings, both red brick cottages and higher status properties, with characteristic architectural detailing in estate villages and on model farms;
- Recreation opportunity is presented by the cultural and landscape attractions of Eaton Hall;
- The extensive footpath network allows for recreational use to the west of the River Dee more so than to the east;
- Duke's Drive (Chester Approach) woodland is managed as a public access area, a reflection of its location on the southern edge of Chester;
- The garden centre at Belgrave presents a major retail-focused attraction in the countryside.

### Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- Settlement is characterised by a mix of well-defined, nucleated and architecturally integral estate villages, such as Aldford, Saighton and Eccleston and medieval villages which have grown through mid-20<sup>th</sup> century expansion such as Dodeleston and Pulford where some suburbanisation is evident;
- An extensive collection of large 'model' estate farmsteads and estate workers cottages dot the landscape outside the main settlements;
- Within and around the estate villages, the quality and commonality in styles of the built environment is highly evident, reflecting long-term single ownership of much of the LCA by the Grosvenor family, and design concept of John Douglas;
- Red and orange brick houses with clay tile and blue slate roofs that dominate these villages, often with intricate brickwork detailing, ornate chimney stacks and leaded casement windows;
- In common with other areas of the Plain, the flat topography allows a number of tall cylindrical storage silos to be seen in middle distance views, identifying the location of individual farmsteads;
- Atypical of the LCA, the expansive Chester Business Park stands as a significant concentration of employment modern buildings immediately north of the A55 set partly within a designed landscape setting which reduces its prominence;
- Major road transport corridors of the A55 and A483 contrast with the otherwise quite lane road network;
- Watling Street Roman Road crosses the river at Aldford and continues south-eastwards through the LCA;
- The former RAF Poulton stands centrally in the LCA, west of Eaton Hall with runway and taxiways still evident. However this is inconspicuous in the flat and well screened landscape context.

### Perceptual / Visual

- Where middle distance views are available the hedgerow trees in successive field boundaries appear to coalesce to form a solid mass on the horizon, creating the effect of a well-wooded landscape;
- This is a simple landscape, with a consistent and unified character as a result of the consistent land use and field size/pattern;
- The scale of the landscape is moderate as a result of the gentle undulating topography and scale of field units;
- There is a sense of some enclosure in places as a consequence of the effects the approaches to Eaton Hall and the extensive layers of hedgerows and hedgerow trees have in combination;
- The presence of arable crops and deciduous woodland provides changing colour with the seasons;
- Whilst deeply rural, any perceived of naturalness in this landscape is diminished by the presence of managed farmland, and increasingly across the northern parts by the relationship with Chester and transport infrastructure;
- This area is perceived as a peaceful rural landscape close to the City of Chester;
- The upstanding sandstone ridge of the *Higher Burwardsley* LCA forms a strong skyline in views to the east from parts of the character area, whilst the ridge of the Clwydian Hills in Wales present a more dramatic horizon profile to the west;
- The presence of woodland means there may be some potential for mitigating visual impact of low lying features without the mitigation measure in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

### **Landscape Condition**

The *Grosvenor Estate* LCA is in active agricultural use and is intensively managed by the estate for dairy and arable land use. Despite erosion of formal parkland, the condition of the landscape is generally good, although hedgerow loss and the influence of urban extension and transport infrastructure to the north is increasing.

### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 11a: *Grosvenor Estate*:**

- Green Belt and Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of regional and/or local importance;
- Significant concentration of nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

## **Forces for Landscape Change**

### **Past Change**

- Erosion of formal parkland;
- A predominantly well-managed and maintained landscape where change has been partly arrested over the past century through consistent estate management and agricultural practice;
- Increases in arable farming on better-drained soils has resulted in some field enclosure loss and weakening of character;
- Increase in modern agricultural buildings (particularly silos) diminishing the architectural integrity of historic model farmsteads;
- Estate diversification including introduction of visitor attractions around the Eaton Estate;
- Improved drainage and in-filling has led to the loss of field ponds and wetlands over the years;
- Main roads, railways and industry in the area perceptually influenced by Chester have had a significant impact on the character of limited parts of this landscape – eroding the tranquillity of the landscape at its edges;
- Steady intensification of grassland management in the 20th century has resulted in the loss of species rich grassland;
- Erosion of the historic form and character of non-estate villages through suburban-like housing growth;
- Some limited inter-war and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century sporadic and isolated housing such as at Sandy Lane;
- Diminution of the ecological value of the area through intensive agricultural use and landscape management;
- Loss of ridge and furrow areas.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 11a: *Grosvenor Estate***

- Further intensification of agricultural practice and infrastructure development;
- Purchase of agricultural holdings by non-farmers resulting in conversion of farm houses and farm buildings and changes in farm use;
- Further loss of field boundaries and changes to the enclosure scale and pattern;
- Restoration of parkland would be a positive change;
- Loss of veteran trees;
- Deterioration of wetland habitats through drainage and nutrient run-off, and ecological succession of remaining ponds;
- Further diversification of estate enterprise;
- Pressure for small-scale residential development to maintain rural communities;
- Improvement and increase in use of major transport infrastructure;
- Expansion of Chester into the north of the area.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA11a: Grosvenor Estate***

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the condition of the hedgerow, tree and woodland network, and **restore** and link former habitats such as woodland and maintain ponds and wetland. New development should have strong a reference to estate village scale, layout, architecture and planting.

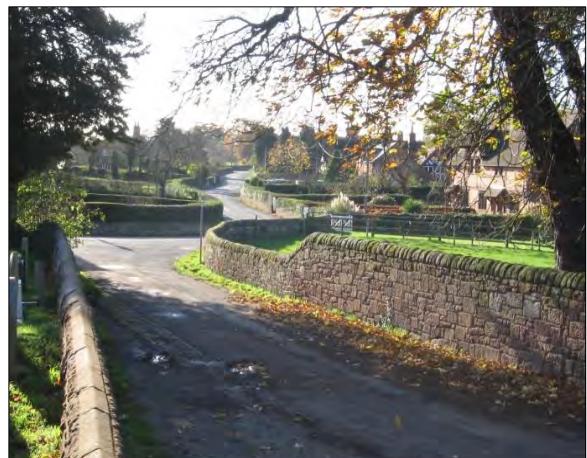
### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges, planting lost hedge lines, and re-planting a young stock of hedgerow trees. Consider a programme of replacement hedgerow tree planting to re-instate those that have been lost over the years.
2. Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerow.
3. Promote appropriate management of arable and pastoral farmland to create a wildlife-rich habitat supporting farmland birds, including retaining areas of fallow land, over-wintering stubbles, maintaining an unploughed margin around arable land, and management of existing hedgerows.
4. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
5. Conserve and manage the remaining field ponds and wetlands across the plain – seek opportunities to extend areas species rich unimproved grassland.
6. Avoid further loss of ridge and furrow through agricultural intensification or development.
7. Promote traditional woodland management techniques of the deciduous woodland to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
8. Seek opportunities to expand and link existing woodlands in areas currently of low ecological value – support plans to create additional large woods in balance with the open agricultural landscape.
9. Minimise the impact of existing major roads and industry on the area by using native planting to screen.

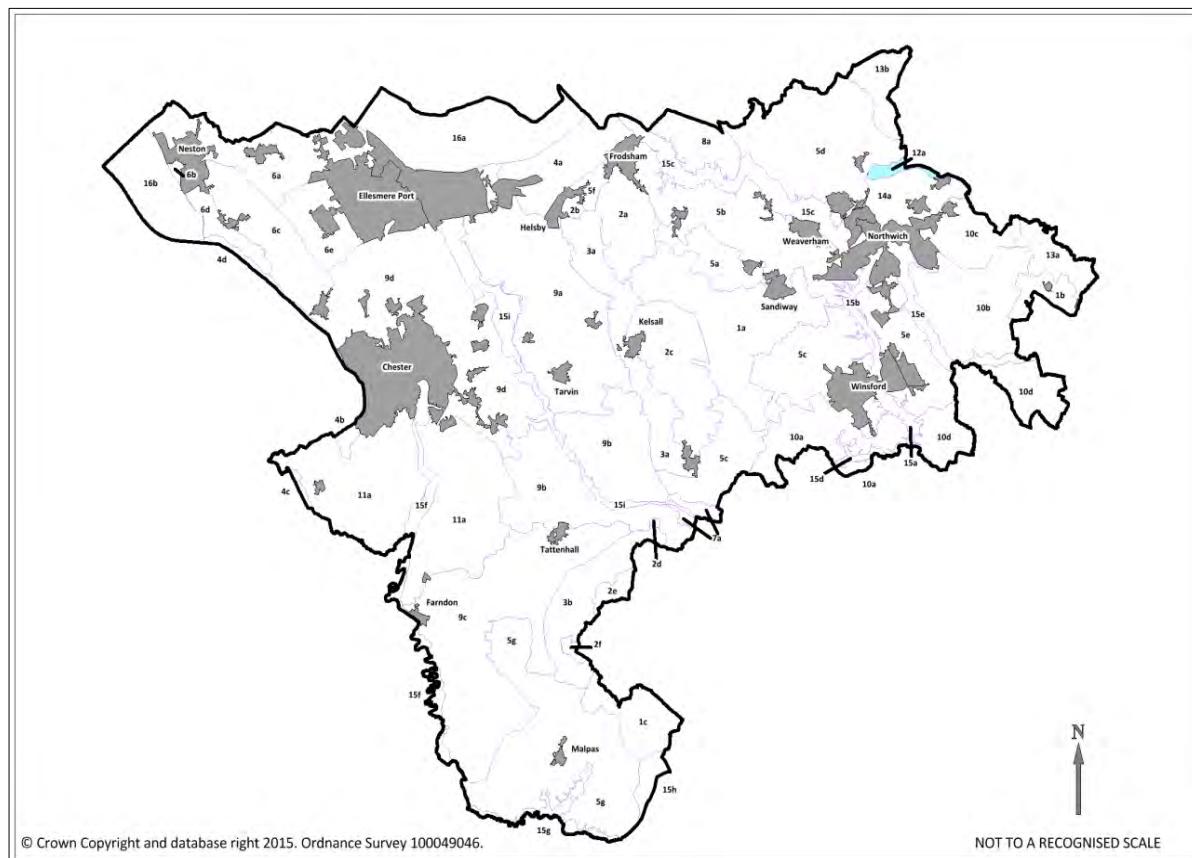
10. Seek to conserve and restore historic designed landscapes and their settings, such as the historic parkland at Eaton Hall and consider opportunities to enhance access to, and appreciation of, this landscape. Respect approaches to Eaton parkland.
11. Avoid road 'improvements' (such as addition of kerbs and lighting) that would alter the rural character of the lanes.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Conserve the low settlement density and rural character of the estate villages and hamlets. Avoid 'suburbanising' features such as gate posts, kerbs and close board fences around gardens.
2. Ensure new built development fits with the local built vernacular, including use of distinctive materials. Use indigenous planting to integrate any new built development into the landscape but also ornamental species mix where consistent with the local context.
3. Maintain the external fabric, appearance and setting of farm buildings and promote the use of local materials.
4. Ensure modern farm buildings and infrastructure is sensitively located and screened in relation to historic buildings as well as landscape prominence.
5. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the rural landscape and vernacular building style. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
6. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
7. Respect planned form of settlements.
8. Preserve views of the estate chapel clock tower and spire.



## LCT 12: MERE BASIN



### **General Description**

The LCT comprises part of a distinctive basin landform containing meres formed by natural salt subsidence, coinciding with a geological fault line on the eastern boundary of the borough. The character type extends into the neighbouring Cheshire East borough. Meres support a wide range of habitats including open water, reed beds and willow/alder woodland. Alluvial soils in the basin typically support pasture, woodland and some unimproved species rich grassland. Fields of arable and pasture typically occur on the basin slopes bounded by hedgerows.

The LCT is notable for the absence of settlement and a limited road network. Some buildings are associated with the meres e.g. boat houses, sailing club facilities, visitor facilities, but otherwise the LCT remains undeveloped.

The scale of the landscape is generally medium across its open pasture and pockets of arable farmland, but areas of intimate, self-contained landscape with relatively tranquil character can be found where the influence of trees and woodland predominate around the meres. Panoramic views from the basin edges over the meres can be experienced, although such vistas are usually from outside the LCT itself.

### **Visual Character**

The most obvious visual characteristic of this type is the influence of mature woodland blocks and individual parkland trees, resulting in some degree of enclosure in places. The influence of woodland blocks and tree lines, primarily around the meres provides a contrast with the surrounding, more open, gently undulating basin topography. The meres constitute an essential defining element of this type but are not always immediately apparent from within the LCT as they

are partially screened from the few primary transport routes within or around the LCT. Budworth Mere lies at the northern end of Northwich Woodlands, part of The Mersey Forest, and contributes to the localised but attractive parkland landscape of Marbury Country Park immediately to the south. Elsewhere meres can be found in simple settings within farmland.

### ***Physical Influences***

The basin-like topography is flat to undulating - mainly a broad and gently rolling landscape c. 20-100m AOD, with sometimes open views within it as a consequence of low clipped hedges and general absence of hedgerow trees. In some sections slopes become steeper, for example around Great Budworth and Pickmere to the east (partly within Cheshire East).

The solid geology of this character type is predominantly made up of banded siltstone, Bollin Mudstone and Northwich Halite. This is overlain by glacial till with river terrace deposits and alluvium. This deposition has led to the formation of a hummocky terrain. Meres sit within these deposits – a number of which are designated as local wildlife sites. Soil types are typical sandy gley soils, brown earths and typical brown sands. The latter is commonly associated with glacio-fluvial sand and gravel deposits. Peaty soils are occasionally found in enclosed hollows.

The meres within the LCA form part of a nationally important series of open water sites. Associated fringing habitats such as reedswamp, fen and damp pasture add to the value of meres. The development of these habitats often leads to in-filling, with the meres becoming nutrient poor leading to the formation of bog or mossland. Meres provide habitats for aquatic invertebrates as well as the wintering of wildfowl including the Great Crested Grebe (a species that has fought its way back from near extinction in the nineteenth century). Typical vegetation includes the common reed, yellow iris and the greater and lesser pond sedges.

Away from the ornamental estates, land use is typically arable or pastoral. There are isolated areas of neutral unimproved grassland which support a rich flora.

The remnant historic parkland at Marbury to the south has a higher than average woodland cover, enhanced by its location within Northwich Woodlands, part of The Mersey Forest, fringing the meres in designed blocks. Woodland in this type has many functions – it acts as a screen, enhancing privacy and in turn restricting views into and out of the former estate; it has ornamental value – e.g. following planting patterns and including varied species; biodiversity – providing valuable habitats. Where woodland doesn't have an ornamental association it is mainly located on the slopes of streams or rivers where it has survived through lack of competition for alternative land uses or has been planted as game cover.

### ***Cultural Influences***

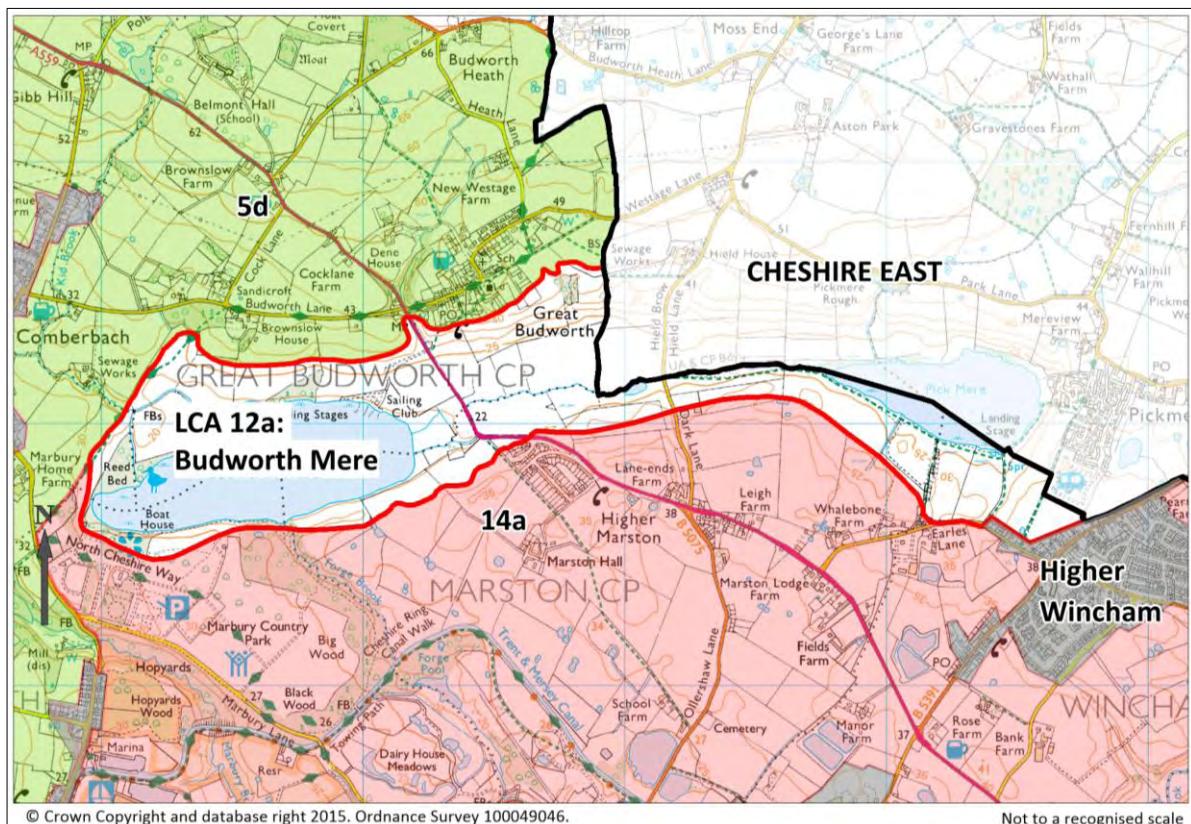
This character type is influenced, but not dominated by, the former historic Marbury estate, the formal grounds elements of which lie to the south within LCT14, but remain a visitor attraction and popular visitor location. The now demolished Marbury Hall utilised the assets of the natural landscape, in particular the mere. There has therefore been a great deal of continuity in land use with estate management heavily influencing the form of parts of the landscape.

Outside the designed landscapes, the remaining area is used mainly for pasture, and there are medium to large scale irregular and semi-regular fields, which are typical of a medieval field pattern and late post medieval reorganisation and improvement associated with the Marbury estate. Boundaries consist of low clipped hawthorn hedges with few hedgerow trees in the basin.

There is **one Landscape Character Area** within LCT 12:

**12a: Budworth Mere**

## LCA 12a: Budworth Mere



### Location and Boundaries

**Budworth Mere** is a linear, compact, basin-shaped landscape character area located along a geological fault line to the north of Northwich. The boundaries of the mere basin are defined predominantly by the basin-like landform with the top of the slopes meeting the adjacent post-industrial landscape of the *Northwich Salt Heritage Landscape* to the south (LCA14a) and *Whitley & Comberbach Undulating Enclosed Farmland* to the north-west (LCA5d).

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 12a: Budworth Mere***

- Located on a bedrock of Northwich Halite Formation, commonly known as rock salt, close to a geological fault which forms a steep slope along the northern boundary
- Budworth Mere and Pick Mere (that straddles the boundary with Cheshire East) are large water bodies formed by natural salt subsidence that support a wide range of habitats including reed beds and willow/alder woodland
- Alluvial soils in the basin support traditionally managed grassland e.g. Pickmere meadow
- Woodland and trees are generally absent, although small areas of peat deposits along the south side of Budworth Mere, in the adjoining character area (LCA 14a) support oak, birch, hawthorn and hazel
- Fields of arable and pasture on the basin slopes represent agricultural improvement of former medieval fields associated with Great Budworth
- Notable for the absence of settlement. Some buildings are associated with the mere e.g. boat house/sailing club
- Partly an intimate, hidden landscape with a tranquil character. Bird watching is a popular activity; however visitors to Marbury Country Park reduce tranquillity along the southern edge of Budworth Mere
- Sailing, boating, open water swimming and feeding the ducks provide recreational activity to this landscape
- Panoramic views from the northern edge of the basin across Budworth Mere with the industrial works of Northwich in the background
- Views to Budworth Church

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### ***Natural / Physical***

- The basin-like topography which creates an intimate, hidden landscape;
- Budworth Mere and Pick Mere which support a wide range of important habitats including open water, reedbeds and willow/alder woodland;
- The two meres are designated local wildlife sites important for migrating wildfowl and resident species;
- Traditionally managed grassland e.g. Pickmere meadow;
- Oak-birch woodland with hawthorn and hazel on peat deposits;
- Pastoral fields on the slopes of the basin that provide a pastoral and green setting to the meres.

#### ***Cultural / Heritage / Historic***

- The large scale fields on the slopes around Budworth Mere represent late post-medieval agricultural improvement and 20th Century improvement of medieval townfields around Great Budworth;
- Budworth Mere is used for fishing, open water swimming and sailing and is the home to Budworth Sailing Club;
- The entire Budworth Mere is navigable, although the south-western part has restricted access to protect the wildlife associated with the nature reserve;
- Bird watching, country walks and duck feeding are popular activities;
- The public footpaths and walks around the southern banks of Budworth Mere and further south within Marbury Country Park, part of the wider Northwich Woodlands, and Pick Mere to the east.

### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- The absence of settlement that creates a tranquil character away from the popular Marbury Country Park;
- Scattered buildings associated with the mere e.g. a boat house and sailing club.

### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The 'intimate', hidden landscape character that is separated from the surrounding *Whitley & Comberbach Undulating Enclosed Farmland* by a change in topography;
- The presence of water and woodland contributes to a colourful scene and sailing brings colour and activity to the Mere Basin;
- There are panoramic views from the northern edge of the basin across Budworth Mere;
- There are also views to Budworth Church;
- The peaceful character and absence of settlement contribute to a sense of tranquillity. However, the presence of a sailing club and landing stages on Budworth Mere, as well as other forms of recreation, bring activity to the area;
- The industrial works at Northwich are visible from the northern edge of the basin;
- The northern 'crest' of the basin forms a skyline in views from within the basin. The basin is hidden from the adjacent *Whitley & Comberbach Undulating Enclosed Farmland* due to its low-lying basin topography. However, the landform of the basin means Budworth Mere is highly visible from the slopes enclosing the basin and, conversely, the slopes are highly visible from the mere.
- Where woodland is present (e.g. along the south side of Budworth Mere) it provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the basin slopes.

### **Landscape Condition**

While the elements that make up the basin (open water, reed beds, woodland, meadow, pastoral and arable farmland) are generally intact and the majority of the basin is in active agricultural use, some of the hedgerow boundaries on the basin slopes are gappy and some woodlands under-managed.

### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 12a: *Budworth Mere*:**

- Green Belt;
- Natural heritage sites of local importance;
- Flood risk and water management.

## ***Forces for Landscape Change***

### **Past change**

- Budworth Mere lies at the northern end of Northwich Woodlands, part of The Mersey Forest, created from largely derelict land left over from the salt and brine industries and now a popular outdoor destination on the outskirts of Northwich;
- There has been spread of invasive species such as bracken, rhododendron and sycamore, for example in and around Budworth Mere. However, recent management work around the mere has attempted to reduce the spread of invasive species;
- Tree planting using British native trees has recently been undertaken around Budworth Mere Local Wildlife Site by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust;
- Arable land use has replaced pastoral uses on the basin slopes and some hedgerows have fallen into decline;
- The sailing club and club house was built in 1948 and is virtually the only built development within the LCA. Although there are other landing stages surrounding the mere, there has been no development at the sailing club for 50 years.

### **Potential future change/ key issues affecting LCA 12a: *Budworth Mere***

- The area is located in The Mersey Forest although significant woodland creation (policies in the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan) is unlikely to occur within this LCA;
- Climate change may influence water tables and changes in woodland composition;
- Silting-up of the meres;
- Proposed Lostock-Carrington pylon route.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 12a: Budworth Mere***

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** the inherent sense of tranquillity of the landscape and diversity of natural habitats.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

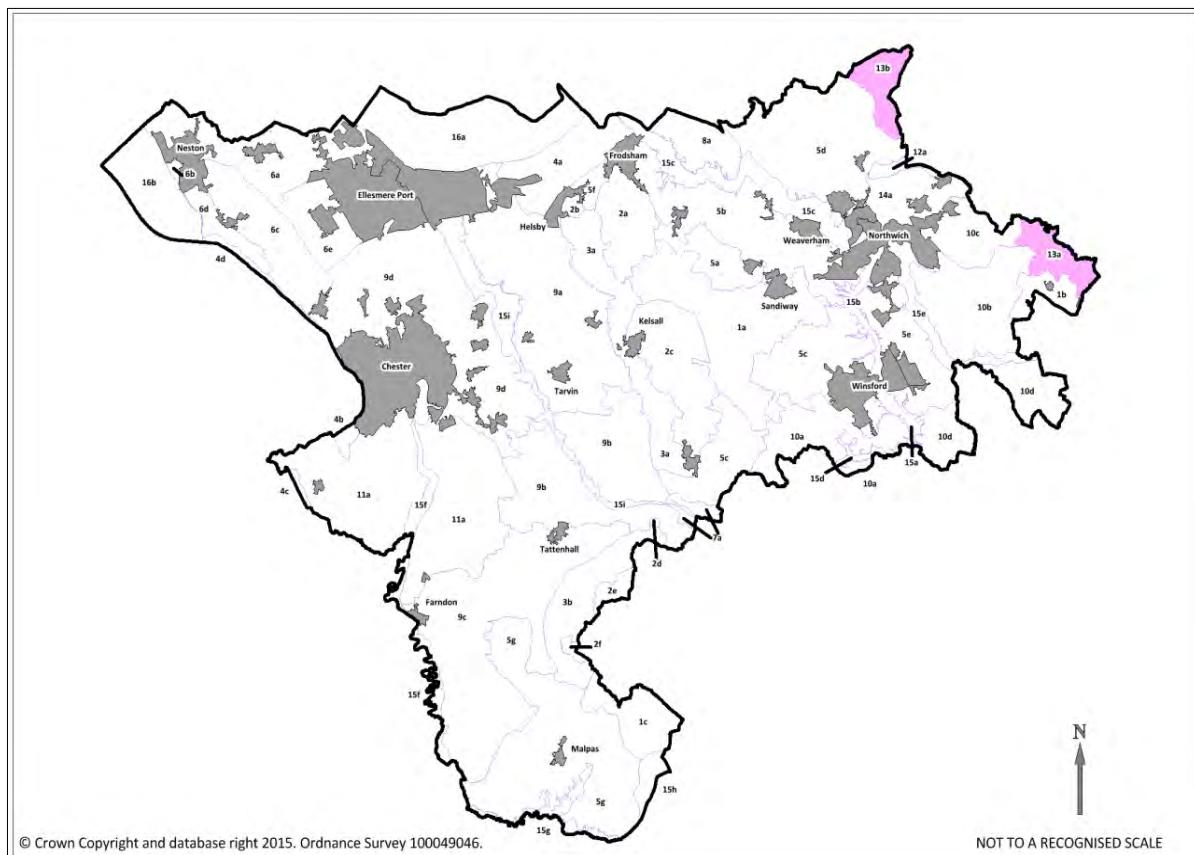
1. Promote traditional woodland management techniques of the valuable woodland on the mere edge and basin slopes to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
2. Continue to control and reduce the spread of invasive species such as bracken, rhododendron and sycamore, Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed where they threaten native habitats.
3. Planting near waterbodies should consist of native species.
4. Seek opportunities to expand and link existing woodland through new tree planting in areas currently of low ecological value, ensuring no detriment to heritage assets.
5. Encourage reversion of arable back to pasture, particularly on the basin floor and seek to extend traditionally managed meadows.
6. Seek to improve management of hedgerows on the basin slopes to strengthen this feature of the basin.
7. Monitor potentially conflicting uses, such as water sports, nature conservation, bird watching and walking.
8. Monitor the effects of climate change, particularly changes in water table and changes in species composition.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Support recreational use of the landscape, ensuring any visitor facilities are integrated into their landscape context.
2. Maintain the unsettled character of this intimate 'hidden' landscape and ensure any facilities associated with recreation are integrated into their landscape setting.
3. The valley crests are particularly sensitive to large scale, or tall, built development.
4. Protect views to Budworth Church.



# LCT 13: LOWLAND FARMLAND AND MOSESSES



## General Description

This character type is found in two localities within CWaC; at its north-eastern tip to the east of Antrobus, and to the far eastern fringe of the borough between Peover and Allostock. Both areas extend beyond the CWaC boundary into Cheshire East. The *Lowland Farmland and Mosses* landscape type is a flat or gently undulating farmland landscape, of intermediate to low elevation. This landscape type is characterised by its strong field patterns, seasonally waterlogged soils, presence of peat mosses and wetland habitats.

This very gently undulating landscape type has many similarities with the *Cheshire Plain West*, yet it has a greater concentration of woodland and a slightly higher settlement density with a greater occurrence of nucleated hamlets and villages. Land use is a mix of arable and pasture, while settlement largely retains a dispersed pattern. Intensive reorganisation during the post-medieval period saw the break up of medieval field patterns. Small surviving mosses are typical in most areas, as are ponds.

## Visual Character

This landscape type is characterised by a medium scale landscape, with local variations in enclosure and views dependent upon the presence of woodland and the condition of hedgerows. Local increases in vegetation density are often riparian associated with larger brooks or minor watercourses. The better drained areas tend to favour arable farming. There is a great variety in the range of available views but these are often limited in extent due to the lack of elevated vantage points or blocked or filtered by high hedgerows or woodland. To the west there are no obvious landmarks but where views are available to the east the Peak District hills are visible in the distance.

Many locations have a very rural character with small, winding country lanes and traditional farm buildings still in active use.

In a limited number of localities there is evidence of field boundary rationalization. The removal of hedgerows has created a larger-scale landscape with more extensive views. In such areas the larger blocks of woodland can appear as prominent features in an open, low lying landscape.

### ***Physical Influences***

The flat or gently undulating landscape is formed above bedrock geology of Mercia Mudstones. Quaternary deposits mask the underlying solid geology – comprising glacial till (boulder clay) with pockets of glacio-fluvial sand and gravels, alluvium and peat. Surface deposits give rise to complex soils patterns including clay and sandy soils with pockets of peat.

Peat supports mosslands, some of which have been colonised by birch. Ditches and books drain the landscape. Field ponds are also a feature of the seasonally waterlogged soils. Major watercourses are not found within this landscape character type.

### ***Cultural Influences***

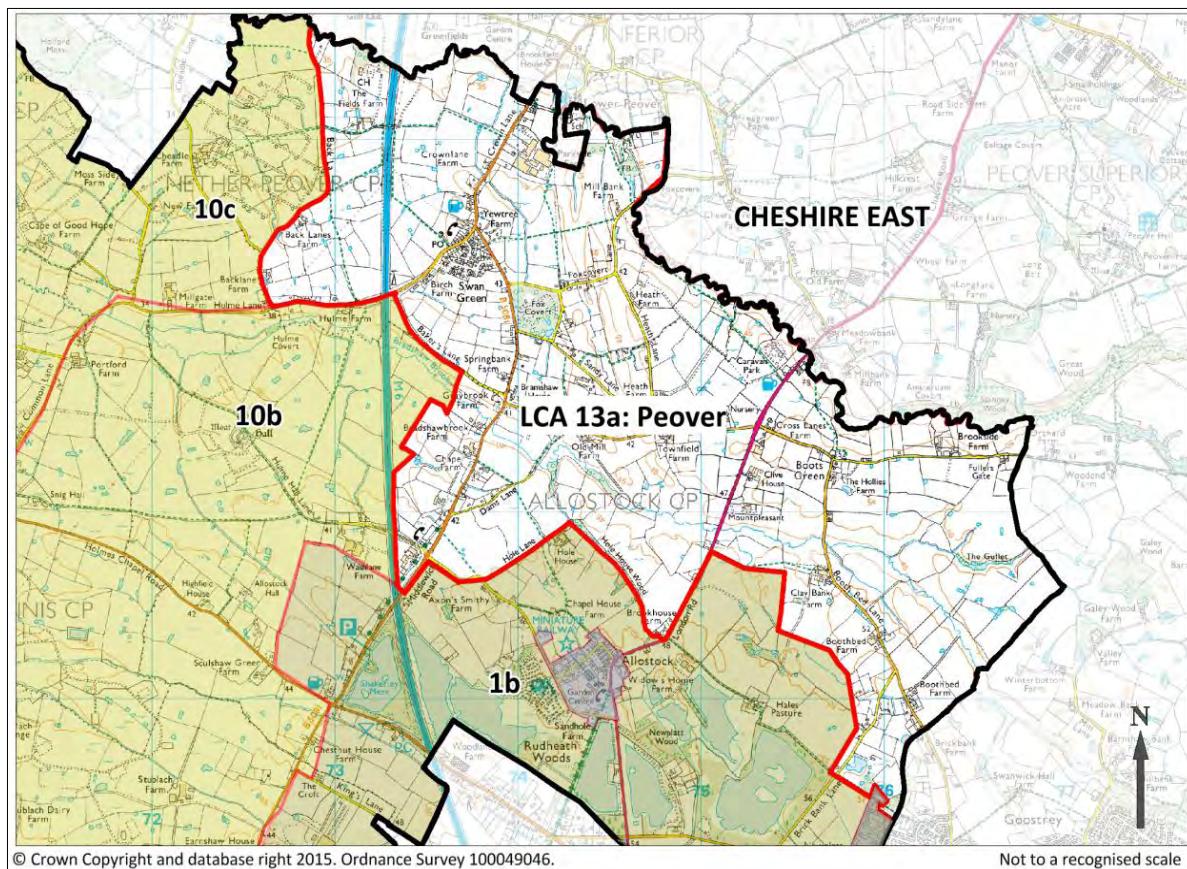
A variety of field sizes and shapes are found across the landscape, relating to different periods of enclosure and reflecting the complex underlying soil types. Public rights of way typically provide passive recreational opportunities with some mosses providing additional access.

There are **two Landscape Character Areas** within LCT 13:

**13a: Peover**

**13b: Arley West**

## LCA 13a: Peover



### Location and Boundaries

The **Peover Lowland Farmland and Mosses** character area represents an area of undulating farmland located mainly to the east of the M6, on the north-eastern boundary of CWaC. To the south-west it forms a transition to the distinctive sandy landscape of *Allostock* while to north-eastwards the character area continues beyond the borough boundary into Cheshire East.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 13a: Peover***

- Bedrock geology of the soft salt-bearing strata of the Northwich Halite Formation (forming part of the Mercia Mudstone Group) gives rise to a landscape of intermediate to low elevation, ranging mostly between 35m and 50m AOD
- Glacial till (boulder clay) deposits and pockets of glacio-fluvial sand and gravels produce a locally undulating topography, including distinct NW-SE ridges
- The area is drained by numerous streams and brooks, including Bradshaw Brook, which produces further undulations in the surface. The courses of the brooks are often wooded
- The combination of slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged soils deep, permeable sandy and coarse loamy soils support a mixture of fertile pasture and arable farmland. Ditches drain areas of heavier clay soil
- Medieval and early post medieval enclosure of small irregular/semi-irregular assarts bounded by tall hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees which produce a strong field pattern and time depth
- Contrasting 20<sup>th</sup> century fragmentation of fieldscapes through field enlargement and industrial land use
- Small farm woodlands and coverts are important features of the landscape
- Dispersed settlement pattern characterised by a network of rural winding lanes linking significant nucleated communities at Swan Green and along the Middlewich Road with scattered farms, hamlets and cottages
- The small scale undulating topography, high enclosing hedgerows, narrow lanes, small irregular fields and small scale built development combine to form an intimate character
- Generally quiet and rural in character, although 'suburban' style development, nurseries, the M6 and A50 ensure that the area does not feel 'remote'
- The skyline is generally formed by hedgerow trees. The church tower at Lower Peover is a landmark feature on the skyline.

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The distinct NW-SE ridges which mark the location of glacio-fluvial sand and gravel deposits;
- The numerous streams and brooks, and their sandstone bridges, which support wetland and woodland habitats and provide diversity in the landscape;
- The tall, species rich hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees which produce a strong field pattern;
- The small farm woodlands and coverts that provide variety and cover in a landscape with relatively low woodland cover.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The quite tightly enclosed landscape of small irregular/semi regular assarts of the medieval and early post medieval periods arranged around Swan Green, an area of common/waste (probably heathland) which persisted into the late eighteenth, early nineteenth century, and which provide a sense of time depth;
- The pattern of enclosure has become increasingly fragmented in the twentieth century through field enlargement and industrial use;
- Listed farmhouses and agricultural buildings, such as Boothbed Farm and Townfield Farm;
- Part of Lower Peover Conservation Area falls within this character area;

- Limited passive recreational opportunities on a sparse public rights of way network.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- The dispersed settlement pattern of scattered farms, hamlets and cottages, of a relatively high density, which is common in landscapes of this type, but significant nucleated communities at Swan Green and along the Middlewich Road that have developed in the latter half of the twentieth century;
- Redbrick and sandstone bridges.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The network of narrow, rural winding lanes that respond to topography and give the sense of a small scale, intimate landscape;
- Uniformity in its topography, land use, views and built form giving a marked commonality in the combination of these features;
- The church tower at Lower Peover that forms a landmark feature on the skyline;
- The quiet and rural in character despite the presence of 'suburban' style development, nurseries, the M6 and the A50;
- Since this is a comparatively low lying landscape it doesn't have a strong skyline from a distance and is not greatly inter-visible with other landscapes;
- The undulating nature of the landscape means the low lying areas are hidden and the presence of high hedgerows and wooded water courses provides further visual screening and enclosure;
- Residential settlement is scattered throughout the area indicating the presence of sensitive residential receptors, but the relatively low recreational use of the landscape means few recreational receptors;
- The presence of undulating topography, woodland and hedgerow trees means there is some potential for mitigating visual impact of low lying elements without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

#### **Landscape Condition**

This area is in active agricultural use and is managed for these land uses. Although hedgerows are generally intact there are some gaps in the network. Some woodlands are not being actively managed. There is also some horse grazed pasture and associated equestrian clutter.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 13a: *Peover*:**

- Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

## ***Forces for Landscape Change***

### **Past change**

- Limited boundary management and evidence of decline in hedgerow boundaries;
- Decline in hedgerow trees due to old age and/or inappropriate management resulting in loss of diversity and suppression of emerging saplings;
- Increase in the number of fences to replace hedgerow boundaries;
- Increase in horse paddocks surrounded by ranch style fencing;
- A shift from grassland to crops, fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Steady intensification of grassland management has resulted in the loss of species rich grassland;
- Presence of nurseries and stables indicating diversification of farming;
- Presence of 'lifestyle farms' including development of tennis courts and swimming pools.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 13a: *Peover***

- Pressure for built development including large house extensions, redevelopment of existing dwellings and new build dwellings in the countryside which may result in ornamental gardens and suburban style boundaries in the rural landscape;
- On going change of use from agriculture to 'hobby-farming' and equestrian land use with associated pressure for field structures and paraphernalia;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings as a result of continued agricultural diversification in this area of small scale farming, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- The M6 runs through this area – expansion of the motorway would affect this area;
- Planting of new woodland and hedgerow trees (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan) as a buffer to ancient semi-natural woodland and to screen views of large scale industry (but without obstructing long distance views of the Sandstone Ridge and Peak District);
- Part of Cheshire's area of search for sand and gravel falls within this area.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 13a: Peover***

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** the rural and intimate character of the landscape and to **enhance** the condition of woodland.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensure a young stock of hedgerow trees is present.
2. Conserve the strong field pattern, particularly ancient field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
3. Conserve the drainage ditches, brooks and field ponds that provide wetland habitats and visual diversity in the landscape.
4. Protect trees by maintaining a buffer around the field margin.
5. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors. Seek opportunities to re-create species rich grasslands, particularly alongside brooks.
6. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
7. Support the management of all existing woodlands. Promote traditional woodland management techniques to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
8. Seek to enhance woodland cover, including restoring and creating streamside woodlands and copses/small woodlands within the existing field pattern. Respect the scale of the landscape pattern when designing new woodland and avoid planting on areas of existing ecological value, ensuring no detriment to historic assets.
9. Consider views when designing new woodland - conserve views to the church tower at Lower Peover from key public viewpoints.
10. Conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as kerbs, lighting and large scale signage.

## ***Built Development Guidelines***

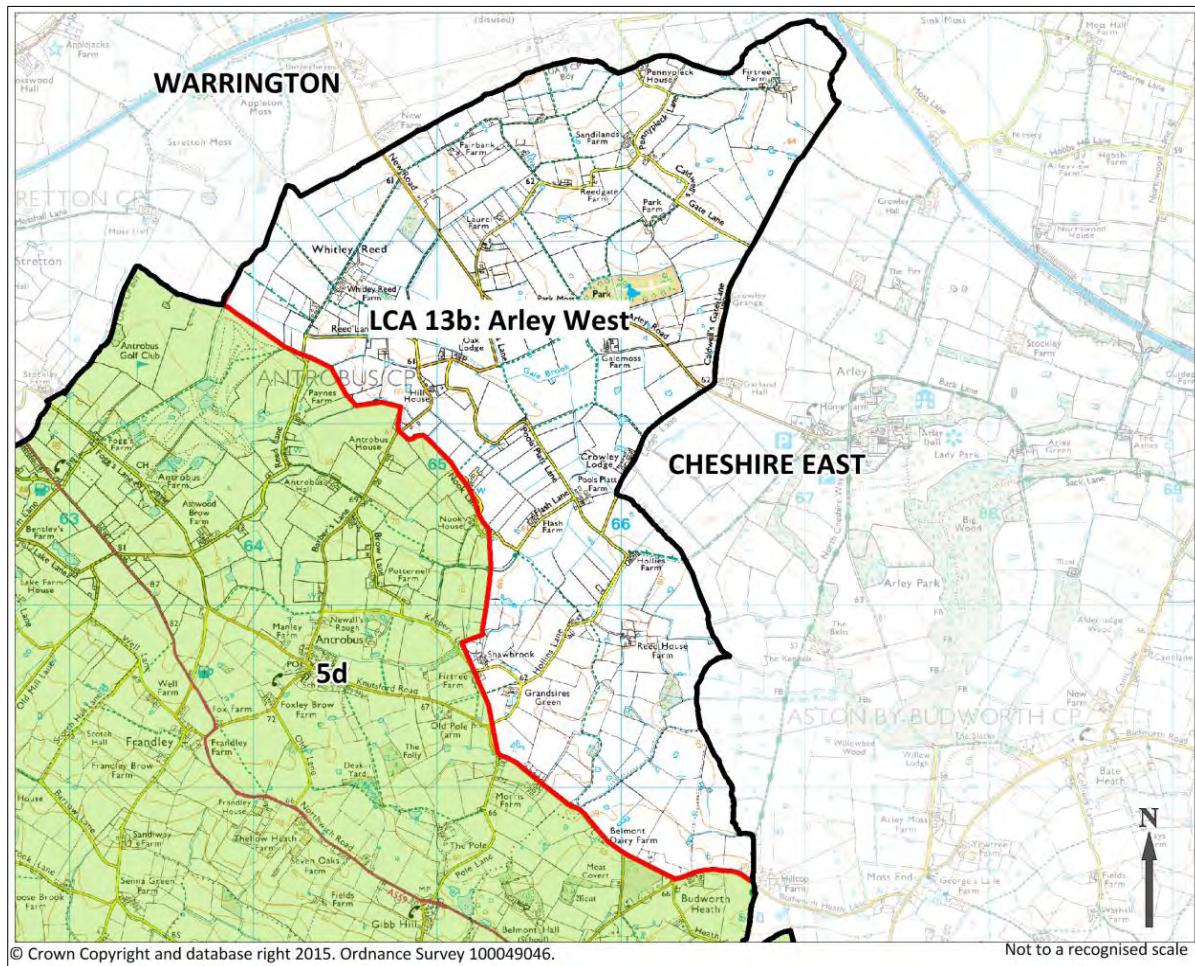
- 1.** Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of farms, hamlets and cottages – conserve the rural settings of villages and views to landmark features such as the church tower at Lower Peover.
- 2.** Ensure redevelopment of existing buildings and large house extensions do not obscure the local vernacular.
- 3.** Monitor the cumulative effect of piecemeal change in this area – ensure new built single dwellings and their gardens, drives, gates etc. do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area.
- 4.** Conserve the local building vernacular including local red brick and white wash materials/finishes - ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting outside the main settlements. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows.
- 5.** Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the rural landscape - pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways, gateways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
- 6.** Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development does not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
- 7.** Soften built edges and views of infrastructure by introducing small scale planting schemes using native broadleaved species. Use similar planting schemes to integrate new development into the landscape.
- 8.** Screen neighbouring LCA quarrying activity using broadleaved species. Consider the long-term restoration of sand and gravel quarries for the benefit of wildlife, creating new wetland habitats and recreational access where possible.



LCT 13: Lowland Farmland  
& Mosses

LCA 13a: *Peover*

## LCA 13b: Arley West



### Location and Boundaries

The **Arley West Lowland Farmland and Mosses** landscape character area represents an area of undulating farmland located between the M56 and M6, on the north-eastern boundary of CWaC. To the south-west it forms a transition to the distinctive sandy landscape of *Allotstock* while to the north-east the character area continues beyond the borough boundary into Cheshire East.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 13b: Arley West***

- Surface deposits give rise to complex soils patterns including a large extent of sandy soils with a peaty surface horizon which supports peaty mosslands at Park Moss and sheep grazed pasture
- Ditches and brooks drain the area. Field ponds are also a feature of this seasonally waterlogged landscape
- Distinctive small irregular/semi regular assarts of the medieval and early post medieval periods, followed by the regular enclosure patterns of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century
- The influence of the Arley Estate is evident in the large areas of reorganised fields, which replaced the earlier small irregular/semi regular assarts
- A landscape of colonisation by successive generations of sizable areas of common/waste (i.e Whitley Reed)
- Dispersed settlement pattern is characterised by low density, scattered farmsteads linked by a network of narrow, rural lanes
- Built materials include red brick and white wash finishes. Red brick barns are a feature of the landscape
- A sense of openness results from the flat topography, large fields, low cut hedgerows and low woodland cover
- However, the skyline appears to be wooded, formed by hedgerow trees and birch woodland at Park Moss
- Public rights of way create passive recreational opportunities and an area of open access land at the Woodland Trust's Park Moss provides trails through woodland
- Quiet and rural in character, with some areas having a sense of 'remoteness' due to the general absence of large scale visually intrusive built elements.

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The area is unified by its flat landform and open character;
- NW-SE ridges which mark the location of glacio-fluvial sand and gravel deposits;
- Bedrock geology of the soft Bollin Mudstones that form part of the Mercia Mudstone Group;
- A landscape of intermediate to low elevation at around 60m AOD;
- Quaternary deposits mask the underlying solid geology – comprising glacial till (boulder clay) with pockets of glacio-fluvial sand and gravels, alluvium and peat;
- Slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged soils that support a mixture of pasture and arable crops bounded by hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees;
- Complex soils patterns including a large extent of sandy soils with a peaty surface in the centre of the area. This supports peaty mosslands and sheep grazed pasture;
- The area is drained by numerous drainage channels and the natural meandering course of Gale Brook;
- Ditches surround fields and run alongside road verges;
- Woodland cover is generally low in this area, but the Woodland Trust's wooded mossland at Park Moss is an important feature of the landscape;
- Numerous streams and brooks, and their sandstone bridges, support wetland and woodland habitats and provide diversity in the landscape;
- The tall, species rich hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees which produce a strong field pattern;
- The small farm woodlands and coverts that provide variety and cover in a landscape with relatively low woodland cover.

### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The landscape is divided into a variety of field sizes and shapes with distinctive narrow fields relating to post-Medieval planned enclosure along Pools Platt Lane, and the Parliamentary enclosures around Fairbank Farm;
- Areas of ancient fields e.g. along Hollins Lane and areas of 20th century field re-organisation where much larger field dominate e.g. at Whitley Reed and around Firtree Farm;
- Scattered listed farmsteads provide some limited built heritage value;
- Passive recreational opportunity in the form of public rights of way and quiet lanes, and an area of open access land providing trails through the Woodland Trust's Park Moss.

### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Dispersed settlement pattern of low density is characterised by scattered farmsteads linked by a network of narrow, rural lanes;
- Built materials include red brick and white wash finishes and some are listed buildings;
- Redbrick barns are a feature of the landscape.

### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Comparatively low lying landscape which doesn't have a strong skyline from a distance and is not inter-visible with other landscapes;
- The skyline is generally formed by hedgerow trees and Park Moss which creates the perception of a wooded skyline;
- Residential settlement is at a low density indicating the presence of few sensitive residential receptors;
- There are relatively few recreational users of the landscape, although visitors to Park Moss may be considered to be sensitive visual receptors;
- The landscape is quiet and rural in character, with some areas having a sense of 'remoteness' due to the lack of large-scale visually intrusive built elements;
- Despite its remote character, it is clearly a settled landscape as a result of its agricultural land use resulting in a strong landscape pattern;
- The flat and open nature of the landscape means it is visually sensitive. However, the filtering provided by hedgerow trees and birch woodland provides some potential for mitigating visual impact of low lying elements without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

### **Landscape Condition**

This area is in active agricultural use and is managed for these land uses. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network. It is likely that drainage schemes have led to drying of wetland habitats, affecting their condition. Some pasture is horse grazed.

### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 13b: *Arley West*:**

- Green Belt and Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

## ***Forces for Landscape Change***

### **Past change**

- Previous decline in hedgerow field boundaries and hedgerow trees due to flail mowing (which reduces diversity and kills emerging saplings) now reversed by programme of hedgerow tree planting led by Antrobus Heritage supported by The Mersey Forest;
- Farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;
- Off-road motorbike / trial bike areas;
- A shift from grassland to crops, fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Steady intensification of grassland management has resulted in the loss of species rich grassland;
- Past drainage schemes have resulted in the gradual drying out of wetland habitats and reduction in the size of mossland in the past.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 13b: Arley West**

- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings as a result of agricultural diversification, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Pressure for built development in this area including new build dwellings in the countryside and extensions, which may result in ornamental gardens and suburban style boundaries in the rural landscape;
- Any future development on the disused Stretton airfield alongside the M56 (just beyond the LCA) could affect the northern edge of the LCA;
- Planting of new woodland on open agricultural land and hedgerow trees (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan).

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 13b: Arley West***

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** the remote and rural character of the landscape and to **enhance** the variety and condition of wetland and mossland habitats.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

- 1.** Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensure a young stock of hedgerow trees is present.
- 2.** Conserve the strong field pattern, particularly the distinctive areas of post-medieval planned and Parliamentary enclosures.
- 3.** Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerow.
- 4.** Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
- 5.** Conserve the drainage ditches, brooks and field ponds that provide wetland habitats and visual diversity in the landscape.
- 6.** Seek opportunities to re-create species rich grasslands, particularly alongside brooks.
- 7.** Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
- 8.** Support the management of existing woodland at Park Moss. Promote traditional woodland management techniques to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
- 9.** Seek to re-create new, and manage existing, mosses on the peaty soils by ensuring wet conditions for the establishment of sphagnum moss, and removing invasive succession species such as silver birch from these sites.
- 10.** Conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that ‘suburbanise’ the landscape such as kerbs, lighting and large scale signage.

## ***Built Development Guidelines***

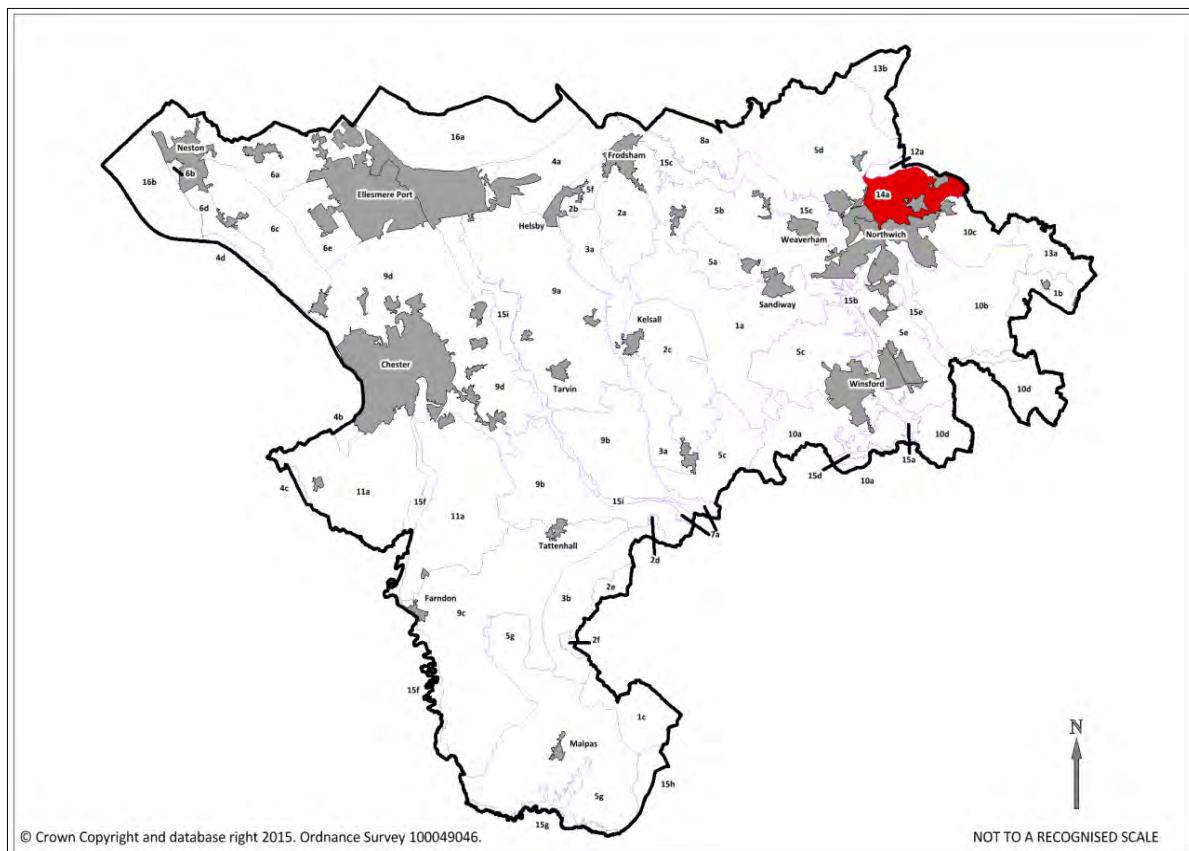
- 1.** Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of farmsteads.
- 2.** Monitor the cumulative effect of piecemeal change in this area – ensure new built single dwellings and their gardens, drives, gates etc. do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area.
- 3.** Conserve the local building vernacular including local red brick and white wash materials/finishes - ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting outside the main settlements. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows.
- 4.** Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
- 5.** Maintain red brick barns as features of the landscape. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the rural landscape - pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways, gateways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.



LCT 13: Lowland Farmland  
& Mosses

LCA 13b: *Arley West*

## LCT 14: SALT HERITAGE LANDSCAPE



### General Description

The presence of salt in parts of Cheshire has had a considerable and dramatic impact on the landscape of the Cheshire West and Chester borough. What began as the small-scale exploitation of naturally occurring brine springs escalated following the industrial revolution. The intensive process of extracting salt via brine pumping and mining led to the creation and eventual collapse of a number of large underground cavities, thus forming the flashes, which are effectively water-filled craters. Another feature associated with salt production is lime beds, the waste products from the production of soda ash.

The presence of salt in CWaC has resulted in three unique and valuable wildlife habitats: *saltflashes*-lakes caused by subsidence, *lime beds* produced by spoil from the chemical industry and *inland salt marsh* due to natural brine springs and spillage from the salt industry.

Factories and infrastructure have been cleared away, and areas of derelict land regenerated under England's national programme of Community Forests. The Mersey Forest Partnership has been the catalyst since the early 1990s for the transformation of approximately 350 hectares of former industrial land on the northern edge of Northwich into nine inter-connected landscapes that make up the Northwich Woodlands.

### Visual Character

A complex 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, post-industrial, gently undulating urban fringe landscape, punctuated by extensive salt flash lakes and river valleys of the River Weaver and River Dane, themselves fed by brooks in deeply incised valleys. Remnant and derelict salt industry infrastructure is evident, particularly the brine cisterns and lime beds with some industrial buildings remaining.

Some more pronounced areas with elevated topography are evident by the river valleys and where reclaimed lime beds have been modelled into the landscape creating public spaces, such as Carey Park and Anderton Nature Park, part of the extensive Northwich Woodlands. Wetland habitat successions have served to soften former industrial flash waterscapes caused through subsidence and where unique calcareous habitats have developed in the wake of industrial decline. Maturing woodland is prominent across the river valley sides and brook valleys. Areas of newly planted woodlands are evident across the area, creating a mosaic of land use with mixed pastoral and arable farming across the northern fringes of the area. Past and current industrial infrastructure outside the area dominates many views, none less so than the imposing Winnington Works.

### ***Physical Influences***

The solid geology beneath the salt flashes comprises Wilkesley Halite. This is overlain by Devensian till interspersed with glacio-fluvial sand and gravel. Soils are pelo-stagnogleys and typical stagnogleys.

Rock salt deposits in Cheshire are not exposed and always terminate some distance below the ground surface. Within the borough, as elsewhere in Cheshire, salt has therefore been obtained by mining or brine pumping or in the early days from natural brine springs, rather than being worked from the surface.

There are limited natural calcareous substrata and therefore the only extensive calcareous habitats that occur are the result of the salt and chemical industries. For example, the lime bed at Ashton's Flash supports calcareous grassland and the site has been colonised by a wide range of species that are typical of calcareous habitats. Inland saline habitats are also extremely rare and are of considerable interest because of the unusual associations of plants and animals normally found near the coast.

The 'wich' (see Cultural Influences below) saltland areas are also of considerable interest for breeding and migrating birds including teal and wigeon. The shallow water and muddy margins of Neumann's Flash attracts wildfowl and waders. The open lime beds are important for invertebrates, especially butterflies. For example Ashton's Flash near Northwich is one of only four known breeding sites in Cheshire for the Dingy Skipper.

### ***Cultural Influences***

Salt has been an important Cheshire product from at least the Iron Age. The small settlements (vicus) which grew up adjacent to the Roman roads and Auxiliary Cavalry forts at Northwich and Middlewich industrialise what may have been a domestic industry prior to the Roman occupation. A further settlement specialising in salt production was subsequently established at Nantwich and these three settlements develop into the three Cheshire 'wich' towns. By the medieval period, Nantwich is by far the most significant producer of salt in the county, but by the eighteenth and nineteenth century the focus has shifted to Northwich, and to a lesser degree, Winsford and Middlewich.

By the industrial revolution it was possible to raise large quantities of brine to the surface utilising steam pumps. From the mid-19th century competition for salt production saw brine pumping enter a frenzied phase pumping 'mine' or 'bastard' brine from the old salt workings. The fresh water that rushed in to replace the pumped brine dissolved the mine support pillars causing massive and spectacular subsidence, hence creating the flashes at the surface.

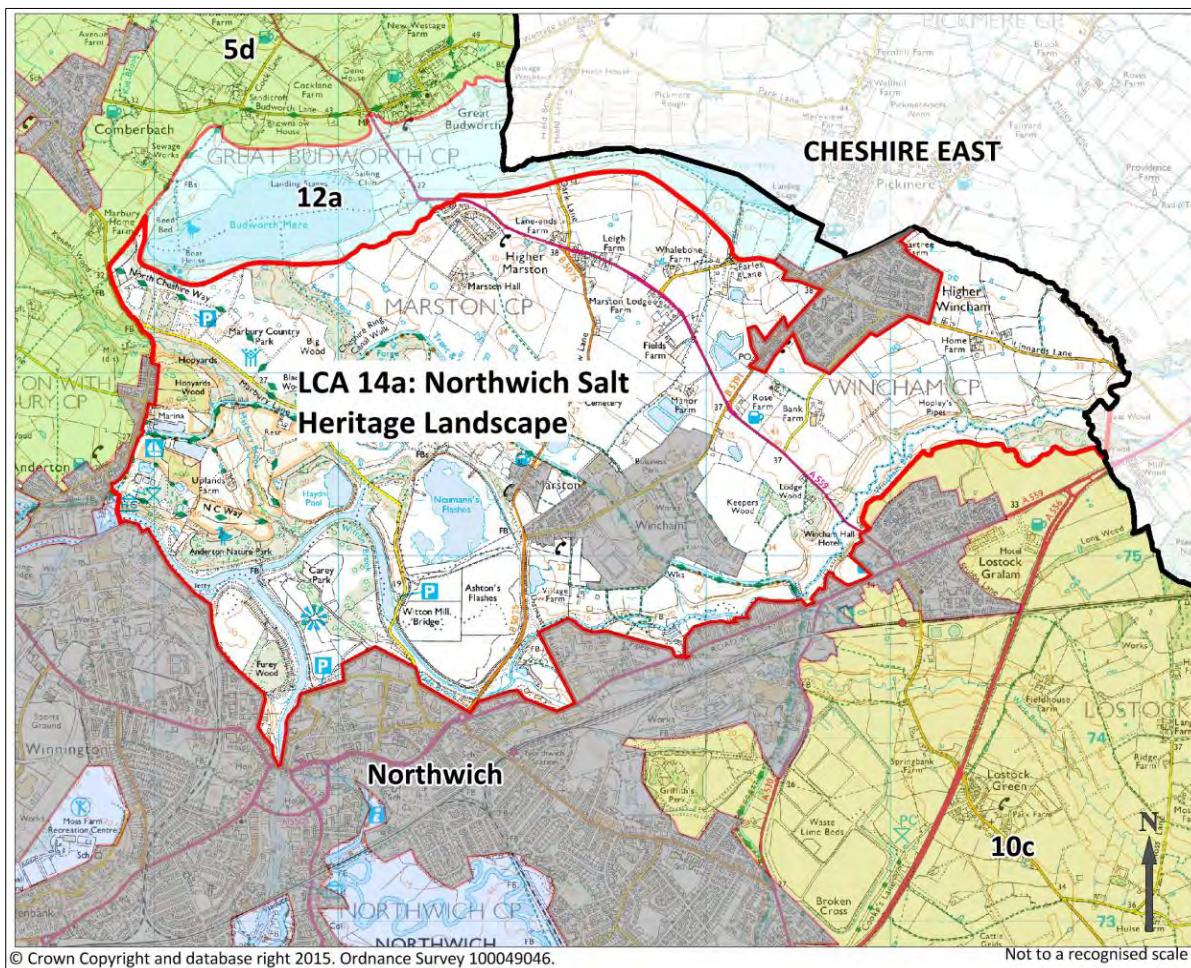
Calcareous wastes (calcium carbonate and calcium sulphate) from soda ash production have historically been pumped as sludge into lagoons to settle. The artificial boundary walls of these

lagoons are also calcareous. It is these lime lagoons, both wet and dried out, that have produced unique inland calcareous habitats.

There is **one Landscape Character Area** within LCT 14:

**14a: *Northwich***

## LCA 14a: Northwich



### Location and Boundaries

The **Northwich Salt Heritage Landscape** is an area of formerly extensive salt works on the northern outskirts of Northwich. It incorporates the confluence of Wade Brook and Marbury Brook with the River Weaver and a large area of subsidence flashes. To the north lies the *Mere Basin* and to the south is the urban area of Northwich.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 14a: Northwich***

- Naturally flat low-lying topography, but with man-made mounds in areas of reclamation
- Underlying geology containing rock salt
- A post-industrial landscape of subsidence flashes surrounded by a mosaic of grassland, marsh, scrub and woodland forming the heart of the Northwich Woodlands
- Brooks in mostly steep-sided valleys, including Wincham Brook, Wade Brook, Witton Brook and Marbury Brook
- Lime beds, containing the waste products from the production of soda ash, support calcareous grassland within prominent bunds
- Inland salt marsh is also present, due to natural brine springs and spillage from the salt industry
- Former salt works and industrial archaeology characterise the area e.g. standing remains of the Lion Salt Works preserved at the Lion Salt Works Museum and remnants of the Adelaide works beneath the Adelaide Flash
- Current industry influences the area - including the prominent E.ON steam pipeline and the Brunner Mond works in the adjacent Lower Weaver Valley
- To the north-east of Marston is an area of post medieval enclosure, recognisable as irregular, straight-sided fields
- Part of the Trent and Mersey Canal (a Conservation Area) passes through this area with its associated artefacts of industrial archaeology including wharves, bridges, canal loading bays, waterside pubs
- Anderton Boat Lift, a Scheduled Monument and major visitor attraction, lifts boats from the River Weaver up to the Trent and Mersey Canal
- Unique diverse range of habitats and landscapes and extensive recreational opportunities within Northwich Woodlands comprising Carey Park, Ashton's Flash, Neumann's Flash, Dairy House Meadows, Witton Mill Meadow, Marbury Country Park, Anderton Nature Park and Furey Wood. Marbury includes the formal designed landscape and estate grounds of Marbery Hall (demolished)
- Settlement is defined by the 19th century village of Marston (a Conservation Area), scattered farmsteads, and 20th century development at Higher Marston and Higher Wincham
- The village of Marston and the Trent and Mersey Canal have strong connections with the salt industry
- Beyond Northwich Woodlands, typical built materials are red Cheshire brick and Welsh slate roofs, although industrial buildings include cast iron and timber
- The skyline is not prominent – horizon views are formed by new tree planting and industrial buildings both inside and outside the character area
- There are panoramic views from artificially created high points within the Northwich Woodlands e.g. Carey Park – these are typically long views across the River Weaver to a backdrop of woodland, industry and Northwich town centre.

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### ***Natural / Physical***

- The thick beds of rock salt contained in the Northwich Halite Formation which underlies the area has had a considerable influence on the appearance of the landscape of this area;
- The area also incorporates the confluence of Wincham Brook/Wade Brook/Witton Brook and Marbury Brook with the River Weaver which adds to the complexity of the landscape with steep sided valleys over-deepened by the erosive power of the glacial meltwaters;

- Winnington & Peas Wood and neutral semi-improved grassland meadows on the Wincham valley floor are examples of habitats recognised as sites important for nature conservation;
- Underground salt extraction processes have led to the creation of a number of large underground cavities. Following ground collapse, the craters filled with water, creating flashes;
- These water bodies are surrounded by a mosaic of grassland types, marshy hollows containing species rich grassland, ditches and minor pools, earthworks and industrial archaeological features;
- Marston Meadows is an area of species rich grassland adjacent to the Trent and Mersey Canal - the canal was realigned in 1957 because of threatened subsidence, and excavated material led to the formation of this wet meadow with fen vegetation and scattered scrub;
- Salt industry lime beds, (the waste products from the production of soda ash) have created calcareous habitats, including Anderton lime bed and Witton lime bed (in Carey Park), designated a SSSI;
- Birch and willow has colonised extensively and provides habitat for warblers and other birds as part of Anderton Nature Park;
- Furey Wood (a former landfill site) has been colonised by plants that are typical of calcareous habitats, and a significant amount of trees;
- Marbury lime bed was never used for lime disposal and is now a mixture of arable land, improved grassland, semi-improved grassland, scrub, wetland and open water—an area known as Dairy House Meadows - all Local Wildlife Sites;
- Adjacent to Dairy House Meadows is Marbury Country Park which includes Lime Avenue within the formal designed landscape and estate grounds of Marbury Hall (demolished), with ancient broadleaved semi-natural woodland dominated by oak, sycamore and ash with a diverse ground flora;
- Inland salt marsh is also present, due to natural brine springs and spillage from the salt industry. These are of considerable interest because of the unusual associations of plants and animals normally found near the coast.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- Salt extraction has been influential on the landscape of the area since Roman times;
- The first rock-salt mines date from the 17th century – one was located near Marbury lime bed, while another is under Neumann's lime bed;
- The last rock salt mine to be worked was Adelaide in Marston, which collapsed to form the Adelaide Flash in 1928. Remains of the works can be seen when water levels are low;
- Today the New Cheshire Salt Works is the only remaining works based on natural underground brine and forms a modern landmark building on the B5391 through Wincham;
- Standing remains of the Lion Salt Works at Marston are preserved at the Lion Salt Works Museum and include distinctive industrial buildings, including an engine shed and brick chimney that forms a local landmark and are designated as Scheduled Monument;
- The Trent and Mersey Canal, constructed in 1777 by James Brindley, passes through this area with its associated artefacts of industrial archaeology including wharves, bridges, canal loading bays and waterside pub (the former Wincham Hotel);
- The canal corridor is a Conservation Area and some of the structures are listed. It provides recreational opportunity for walking, navigation and other informal outdoor pastimes;
- Anderton Boat Lift, a Scheduled Monument and major visitor attraction, lifts boats from the River Weaver up to the Trent and Mersey Canal;
- To the north-east of Marston is an area of post medieval enclosure, recognisable as irregular, straight-sided fields;
- Marbury Country Park has been developed from the relic designed landscape of Marbury Hall, although the hall itself was demolished in 1968. The historic parkland is of local significance and

is now a recreational attraction providing a well-surfaced network of paths and bridleways as well as picnic facilities in a parkland setting;

- Largely derelict land left over from the salt and brine industries has been regenerated to provide a mosaic of habitats, landscapes and extensive urban fringe outdoor recreation opportunities covering approximately 350 hectares at Northwich Woodlands (part of The Mersey Forest) through access to Carey Park, Ashton's Flash, Neumann's Flash, Dairy House Meadows, Witton Mill Meadow, Marbury Country Park, Anderton Nature Park and Furey Wood, which together with the river and canal corridors present a significant green infrastructure asset close to Northwich.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Settlement consists primarily of the 19<sup>th</sup> century village of Marston, later development at Higher Wincham and Higher Marston, and scattered farmsteads;
- Modern industrial and business estates at Wincham;
- The built environment and historic building patterns have been damaged through significant subsidence;
- Houses are typically red brick terraces with two storeys and Welsh slate roofs.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Landscape that appears large in scale, but contains great variety and interest at the local level;
- The presence of derelict, new landforms, lime bed bunds, industrial archaeology and waterways, designed estate landscape at Marbury, produces a complex landscape although unified by its connection with the salt industry;
- There are panoramic views from artificially created high points e.g. from Carey Park – these are typically long views across the River Weaver to a backdrop of woodland, industry and Northwich town centre;
- The large amount of woodland provides changing colour with the seasons;
- Although this is a man-made landscape, it has a naturalistic character due to the presence of woodland, water and grassland. It lies to the north of Northwich where it forms a transition between town and country;
- The sense of naturalness is likely to increase with time as the woodland matures and artificial embankments blend with their surroundings;
- Despite the presence of industry within the area this landscape feels 'remote' from its context;
- Views and proximity to large scale industry (at Winnington and East Northwich) outside the character area have been retained to provide a connection to the areas industrial heritage;
- There are views from Marbury Country Park, on the north of the area, across Budworth Mere to the landmark of Great Budworth Church;
- Since this area is relatively low lying it does not have a strong skyline. The horizon, viewed from within the area, is formed by trees and industrial buildings. The undulating nature of the landscape means the low lying areas are hidden while hill tops are open and visually more sensitive;
- The lime bed bunds are prominent features locally;
- The area now contains a large amount of woodland planting and is mostly well screened from adjacent landscapes. This reduces its visual sensitivity. Furthermore the presence of woodland means there is some potential for mitigating visual impact of low lying features without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape;
- Residential settlement at Marston indicates the presence of sensitive residential receptors while the extensive recreational opportunities indicate presence of a large number of recreational receptors.

### **Landscape Condition**

This is a landscape that has seen dramatic change since the decline of the salt industry. Many parts of the landscape have been regenerated and improved over recent years and are now in an improving condition with significant tree growth on former industrial land. However, the area still includes some elements in poor condition.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 14a: *Northwich***

- Green Belt and Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of national, regional and/or local importance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

### ***Forces for Landscape Change***

#### **Past change**

- An historic industrial landscape where industrial processes have literally shaped the landscape through creation of flashes, lime beds and tips;
- Now being actively managed by rangers and volunteers over large parts for recreation, habitat and other green infrastructure benefits as Northwich Woodlands, part of The Mersey Forest;
- Significant increase in woodland cover and softening of industrial influences;
- Loss of architectural detail through rebuilding and modification of brick terraces in Marston village;
- Some loss of industrial heritage (although standing remains of the Lion Salt Works are preserved at the Lion Salt Works Museum) whilst natural heritage has become a principal land use;
- Loss of other heritage assets such as Marbury Hall, demolished in 1968, although the designed landscape remains as an important visitor attraction within Marbury Country Park.

#### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 14a: *Northwich***

- Under the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan the Northwich Woodlands Forest Park will continue to be developed to provide further recreational facilities and habitats, screening, connectivity and interconnection with Northwich;
- Natural vegetation succession changing the character of the lime beds and bund walls;
- Urban / industrial expansion of Northwich;
- Inappropriate urban-edge informal recreation e.g. motorcycles / trial bikes;
- Climate change impacts of increased flooding on the water environment, leisure uses and habitats.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 14a: Northwich***

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to continue to **restore** and **enhance** the landscape and industrial archaeology through continued management, while **conserving** the unique habitats of the area and increasing connectivity with and the setting of Northwich and Wincham.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

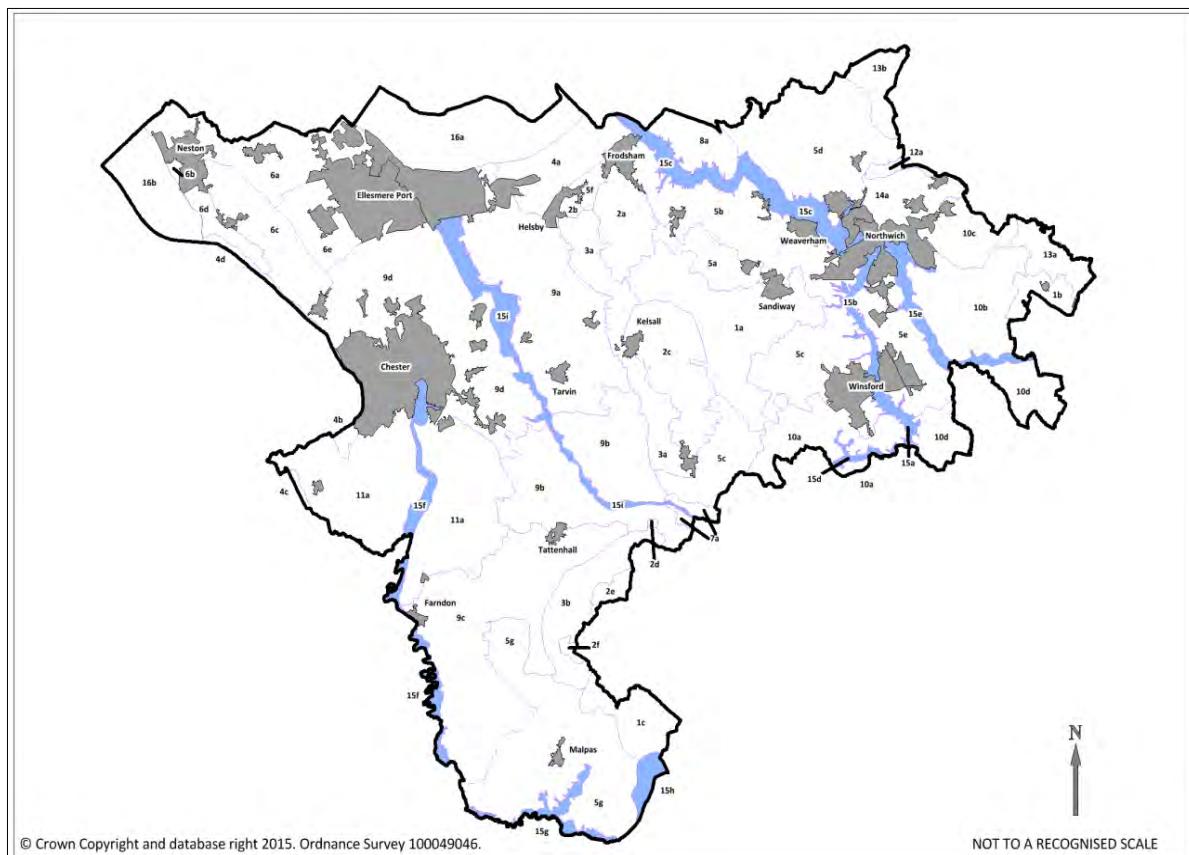
1. Support continued management of the Northwich Woodlands for nature conservation and recreation.
2. Support 'wood allotments' which provide firewood, and traditional woodcraft skills e.g. hazel coppicing.
3. Conserve the diversity of habitats that are of importance for biodiversity as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape. Seek opportunities to extend/re-create areas of reedswamp, inland salt-marsh, marshy species-rich grassland and other wetland habitats.
4. Support the planned expansion of woodland (policy within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan) to compliment the regeneration of Northwich and the setting for the employment areas to the east, principally at Wincham.
5. Planting near watercourses should consist of native species.
6. Control and reduce the spread of invasive species such Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.
7. Conserve and actively manage the lime beds that support calcareous grassland (for example through grazing) to maintain the open calcareous habitats.
8. Preserve the industrial aesthetic of the Trent and Mersey Canal and its setting – including associated artefacts of industrial archaeology such as wharves, bridges and canal loading bays.
9. Conserve the 'remote' and tranquil character of the area which results from the presence of naturalistic habitats and planting schemes.
10. Maintain views to the landmark of Great Budworth Church, for example from Marbury Country Park (across Budworth Mere).

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Preserve the structure and setting of the village of Marston that has strong connections with the salt industry and a unique character.
2. Seek to restore the original architectural detail of the brick terraces in Marston village.
3. Use of built materials such as red Cheshire brick and welsh slate roofs in residential buildings, and cast iron, Cheshire red brick and timber in industrial buildings, will maintain a continuity in use of materials and create a stronger sense of place.
4. Enhance boundaries within the area by promoting repair of traditional brick wall boundaries and creating new boundaries that may enhance the apparent condition of the landscape.



# LCT 15: RIVER VALLEYS



## General Description

Cheshire West and Chester borough is partly bounded by the Mersey estuary to the north and the River Dee to the west, both of which largely drain areas outside the district. The River Weaver flows northwards into the Mersey and is an important main river originating within Cheshire East, with its tributary the River Dane which arises in the Derbyshire Peak District to the east. The Dane and the Gowy also flow northwards and are also important for draining large parts of the district. There are many smaller incised rivers and streams across the district but most of these are too small to constitute character areas and instead contribute to the character of other landscape types. However, the Ash Brook, flowing eastwards into the Weaver, and the Grindley Brook and Wych Brook flow westwards into the River Dee south of Chester, have distinctive valley contexts significant enough to be recognised as separate landscape character areas.

## Visual Character

In most cases a steep slope, predominantly wooded, marks the transition between the Cheshire Plain and a narrow valley floor and meandering watercourse. The existence or extent of a flood plain varies greatly within the different character areas, as does the depth of incision of the river within its wider environs. The great contrast with the surrounding areas, the steep ground of the valley sides compared to the surrounding flat plain and the dense tree cover within the valleys compared to the scarcity of woodland upon the plain, strongly influences the character and perception of this landscape type. Views are generally restricted within the valley due to the physical enclosure provided by the deep incision of the riverbed, the steep topography and the dense vegetation. Where the vegetation is less enclosing the visual horizon may extend to the valley shoulder. Any

longer distance views tend to be along the watercourse, i.e. up and downstream, but in many locations even these are curtailed by bank-side trees or topography as they follow the acute meandering of the watercourse.

A number of substantial properties, often of architectural and historic interest, have been established upon the valley shoulders or upper slopes to exploit the scenic value of the rivers. These provide attractive and imposing landmarks when viewed from the lower ground or riverside footpaths, and are often surrounded by mature amenity planting which complement the buildings and can make a positive contribution to the riparian landscape.

A number of highways cross the river valleys at historic and more recent bridging points. These small-scale structures, constructed in local materials, are easily integrated into the landscape and contribute to the perceived picturesque character of these locations. Elsewhere, modern bridging structures of steel and concrete can appear incongruous and out of scale, especially if associated with large earthwork embankments. Where a major highway traverses the valley the visual intrusion of the engineered structure and moving vehicles is often accompanied by the noise of busy traffic with resulting loss of tranquillity.

### ***Physical Influences***

At the height of the last glaciation (the Devensian), the whole of Cheshire was covered by a continuous ice sheet. CWaC has a number of 'tunnel valleys' including the Weaver and the Dane where the erosive power of glacial melt water has deepened the river channel into the bedrock. In the case of the River Weaver the melt water drained in the opposite direction from the current river - south to the River Severn. When the ice retreated it left 90% of the county covered with glacial sediments and the present day rivers have cut through these sediments down to the bedrock in most places. As this process developed, progressive abandonment of floodplains left a series of descending river terraces with fluvial deposits lying parallel to the river channels.

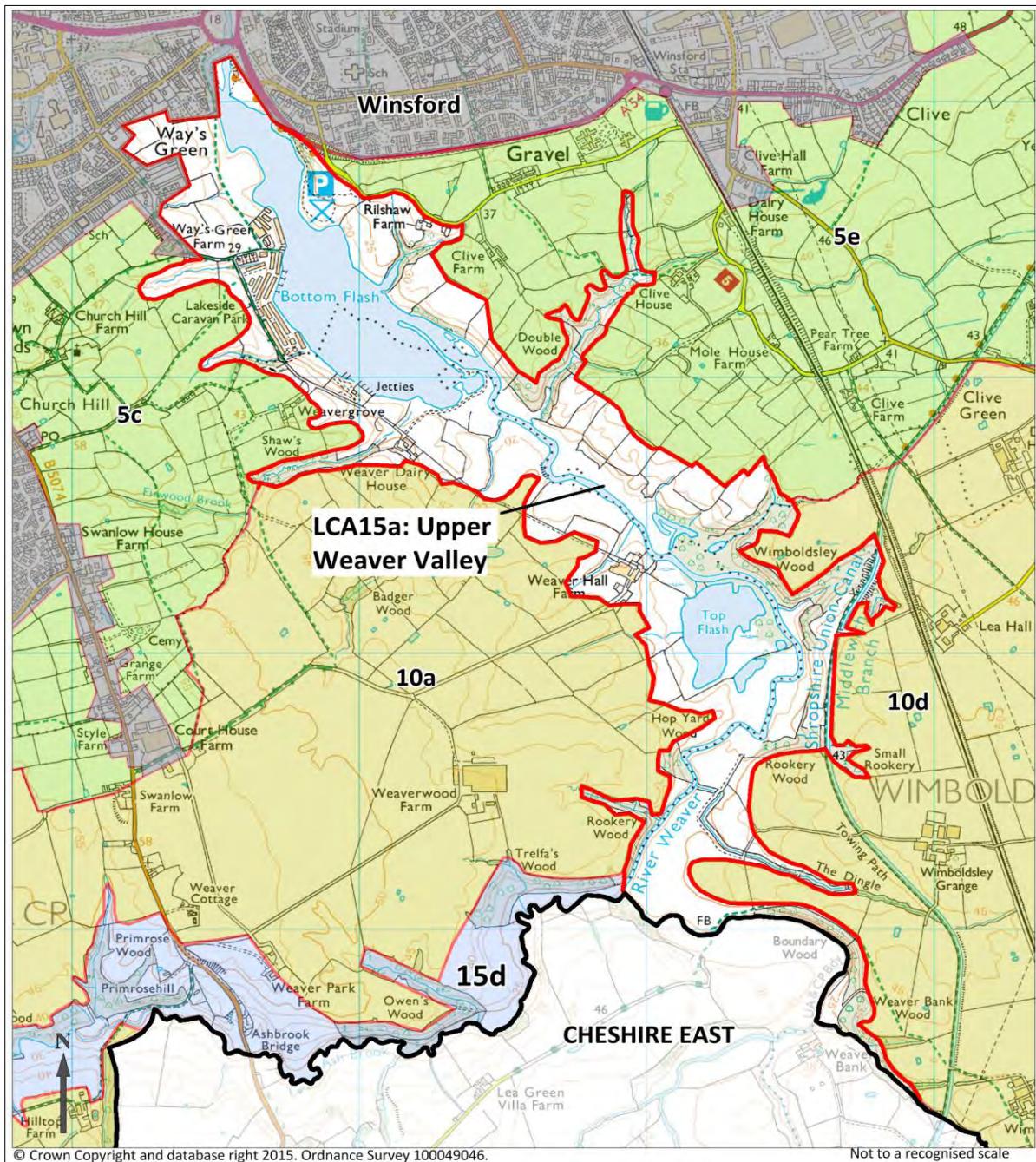
### ***Cultural Influences***

Rivers are distinctive features within the landscape which are frequently used to identify geographical and administrative boundaries. The importance of the rivers within the CWaC area as a means of transport has led to some major changes in the landscape. The River Dee downstream from Chester was canalised in 1735 producing much reclaimed land including *The Lache Eyes*. The River Weaver was similarly canalised at the same time producing the Weaver Navigation with various side channels and ox-bow lake features.

There are **nine Landscape Character Areas** within LCT 15:

- 15a: Upper Weaver Valley**
- 15b: Mid Weaver Valley**
- 15c: Lower Weaver Valley**
- 15d: Ash Brook Valley**
- 15e: Dane Valley**
- 15f: Dee Valley**
- 15g: Wych Valley**
- 15h: Grindley Valley**
- 15i: Gowdy Valley**

## LCA 15a: Upper Weaver Valley



### Location and Boundaries

The **Upper Weaver Valley** is a relatively shallow valley containing the upper reaches of the River Weaver. It includes the River Weaver from where it enters the borough (at Boundary Wood) to Winsford. The boundaries of the valley are defined predominantly by landform with the top of the slopes meeting the adjacent landscapes types of the *Undulating Enclosed Farmland* and *Cheshire Plain East*.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 15a: Upper Weaver Valley***

- Relatively shallow valley containing the natural meandering course of upper reaches of the River Weaver
- Large flashes (formed by subsidence as a result of brine pumping) occupy the valley floor upstream of Winsford
- Steeper valley sides and series of steep sided tributary valleys support distinctive clough woodland, much of which is ancient e.g. Wimboldsley Wood SSSI
- Less steep valley sides support small/medium scale arable and pastoral fields, bounded by low gappy hedgerows
- Alluvium on the valley floor gives rise to waterlogged soils which generally support permanent pasture including unimproved and semi-improved species rich grassland
- The majority of the valley is inaccessible to the public, although there is some access on the edges of Winsford
- Views are typically restricted to within the valley, for example there are views across the valley from either side, and from floodplains to the valley sides. The top of the valley side forms a skyline
- Generally a quiet, tranquil landscape with a low settlement density

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### ***Natural / Physical***

- Semi-natural clough woodlands that provide change with the seasons and are of high biodiversity interest;
- A natural, meandering river course with its rich riparian vegetation and wetland habitats;
- The pastoral character of the floodplain and the survival of unimproved seasonally wet species rich grassland;
- The large flashes (formed by subsidence as a result of brine pumping) which contribute a sense of naturalness to the landscape, support important wetland habitats, and provide recreational opportunities;
- The permanent pasture including unimproved and semi-improved species rich grassland.

#### ***Cultural / Heritage / Historic***

- The Shropshire Union Canal Middlewich Branch bounds a section of the eastern boundary;
- The Middlewich Branch Canal Bridge that is a listed structure;
- Area of archaeological potential of St Chad's (Winsford) Conservation Area;
- Listed Farmhouses;
- Country Park and boating facilities at Bottom Flash provide significant recreation opportunities on the edge of Winsford.

#### ***Built Development and Settlement Pattern***

- General absence of settlement within the LCA although it closely bounds the southern parts of Winsford;
- Large farmsteads are scattered along the valley sides above the flood plain, such as Weaver Hall and Weaver Dairy House Farms;
- Caravan and holiday chalet parks characterise the north-western fringe at Bottom Flash;
- Boating facilities on Bottom Flash with associated jetty, parking and clubhouse infrastructure.

### Perceptual / Visual

- A low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length;
- The landform of the valley means the floodplain is highly visible from the valley sides and, conversely, the valley sides are highly visible from the valley bottom;
- The crests of the valley sides form a skyline from within the LCA;
- The low settlement density means there are relatively few residential receptors for visual impacts – although the recreational opportunities presented by the valley mean there are likely to be a number of recreational receptors, particularly in the north of the valley;
- Where clough woodland is present, it provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the valley sides. However, the floodplain is open and provides extremely few opportunities for mitigating visual impacts;
- The valley side crests that form skylines from within the valley and are visually sensitive;
- Boating activity on the Flash can introduced movement and colour to the open water and waterside environment.

### Landscape Condition

The elements that make up the river valley (open water, woodland, pastoral and arable farmland) are generally intact and the majority of the valley is in active agricultural use. However, some of the hedgerow boundaries are gappy and some woodlands under-managed.

### CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 15a: *Upper Weaver Valley*:

- Countryside;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV) across most of the LCA;
- River corridor;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Minerals supply and safeguarding;
- Flood risk and water management.

## ***Forces for Landscape Change***

### **Past change**

- Under-management and/or inappropriate management of some of the clough and wet woodland;
- Built development encroaching down the valley sides, particularly chalet housing on the southern edge of Winsford at Bottom Flash;
- Visual prominence of farmstead expansion and diversification;
- Evidence of arable land use replacing some pastoral uses on the valley floor;
- Limited management has caused decline in hedgerow boundaries in the past;
- River bank erosion is an issue in some areas;
- Erosion of tranquillity through visitor pressure at Bottom Flash.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 15a: *Upper Weaver Valley***

- Erosion of built environment character through incremental development;
- Built development encroaching further down the valley sides, particularly on the south-eastern edge of Winsford where significant urban expansion is planned;
- Decline of important ancient and semi-natural woodland habitats through reduction, fragmentation and deterioration of clough and wet woodlands;
- Increased river levels as a result of climate change could affect established vegetation/water environment balance;
- Extension of the wooded nature of the valley by more planting on valley shoulders, sides and, where appropriate, the valley floor buffering and connecting ancient semi-natural woodland (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan);
- Further river bank erosion;
- Localised deterioration of wetland habitats, wet grassland etc. through drainage and in-fill plus nutrient run-off from surrounding farmland.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 15a: Upper Weaver Valley***

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** the ancient clough woodlands, unimproved grassland and wetland habitats of the Weaver Valley, seeking to **extend** and **enhance** these features where possible, and to **restore** the traditional field systems.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Use ASCV designation to protect the area from inappropriate development and enhance when possible.
2. Support the management of all existing woodlands and pay special regard to the ancient woodland sites. Promote traditional woodland management techniques of the valuable clough woodland on the valley sides to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
3. Support plans to extend woodland cover by planting on the valley shoulders and valley sides, avoiding planting on areas of existing ecological value. Where possible, new woodlands should be established adjacent to ancient woodland or to connect to separate wooded blocks, ensuring no detriment to historic assets.
4. While wet woodland may be appropriate alongside the river on the valley floor care should be taken to conserve the pastoral and open character of the valley floor. Care should be taken not to block the line of the valley floor by extensive planting.
5. Encourage reversion of arable back to pasture on the floodplain. Encourage seasonal grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the floodplain.
6. Seek to improve boundary management e.g. of hedgerow boundaries, to strengthen this feature of the valley sides that are significant heritage assets in their own right.
7. Conserve and extend characteristic floodplain habitats such as unimproved grassland, traditionally managed meadows, reedbeds and riverside trees which contribute to the natural character of the floodplain.
8. Support recreational use of the landscape, particularly passive recreation, and ensure that any visitor facilities are integrated into their landscape context. Seek to improve access to and along the river in this part of the Weaver valley, but manage recreational use to maintain the tranquil quality of the valley.
9. Conserve the Middlewich Branch Canal Bridge and its setting.

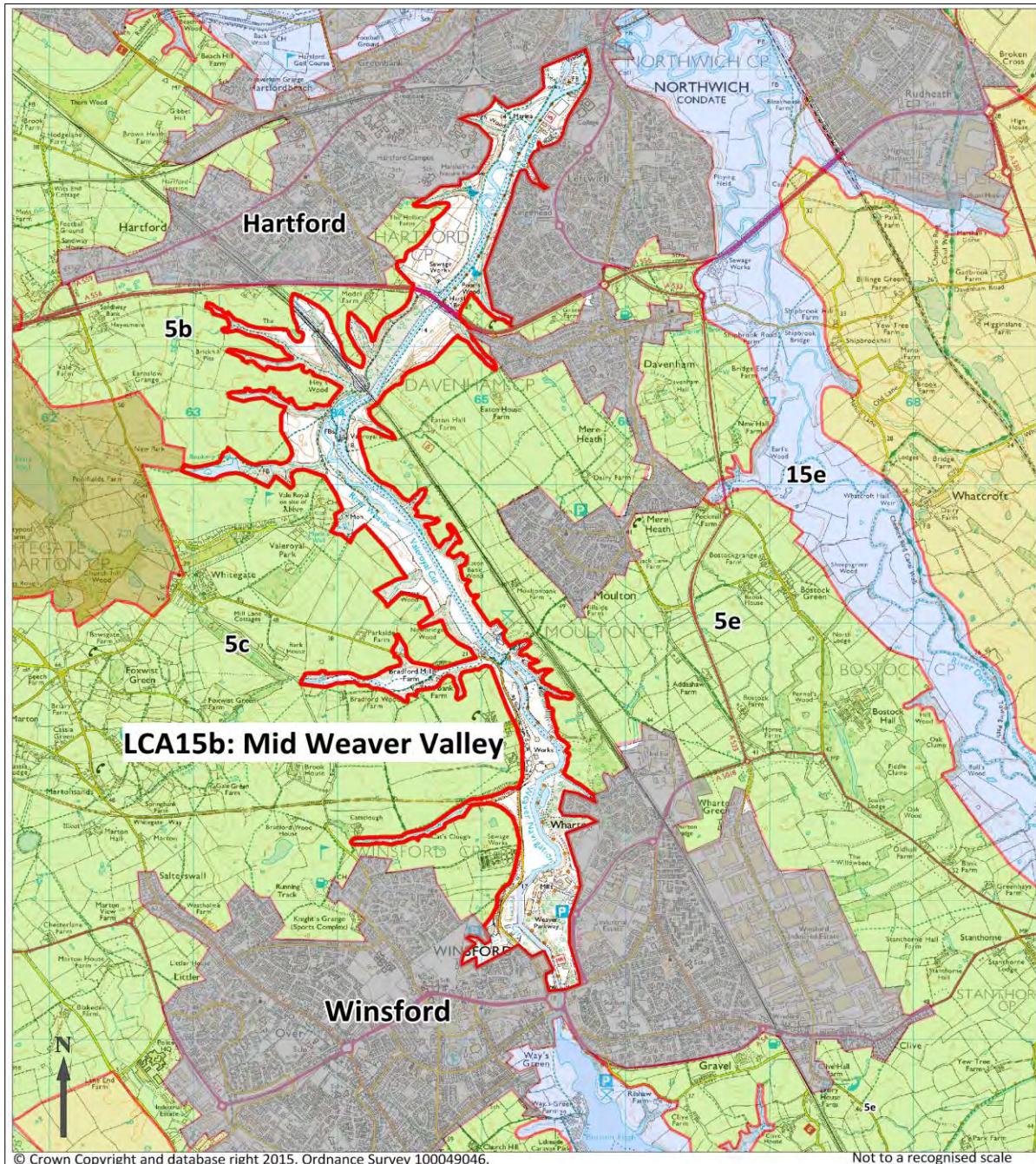
10. Support proposals for the Bottom Flash as part of the Weaver Valley Regional Park.
11. Monitor water levels and manage water abstraction to prevent drying out wetland habitats.
12. Support research into physical improvements to Bottom Flash to prevent continued siltation of this feature (including dredging of the Top Flash).
13. Planting near watercourses should consist of native species.
14. Control spread of invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Minimise the visual impact of existing built development on the character of the valley sides using native planting where appropriate.
2. Protect the valley 'crests' from large scale built development that would detract from the 'intimate', hidden character of the valley.
3. Conserve the low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length.
4. Conserve the undeveloped character of the floodplain.
5. Conserve and maintain the mills that are typical of tributaries of the Weaver and provide an indication of the former use of the river.
6. Invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, should be eradicated prior to any development taking place, and where species are present a method statement should be produced on how to deal with them.



## LCA 15b: Mid Weaver Valley



### Location and Boundaries

The **Mid Weaver Valley** has fairly low, but steep valley sides. It flows between Winsford and Northwich and contains the course of the Weaver Navigation as well as the Winsford Salt Works. The floodplain is narrow, the valley sides rising steeply to the *East Winsford Undulating Enclosed Farmland* to the east, and to the *Eaton, Marton & Over Undulating Enclosed Farmland* to the west.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 15b: Mid Weaver Valley***

- Distinct valley with a relatively narrow, flat floodplain and steep, wooded, valley sides
- Containing the course of the Weaver Navigation with many artificial channels ('cuts'), locks and bridges, including Vale Royal Locks
- The steep valley sides and series of steep sided tributary valleys support distinctive clough woodland, much of which is ancient
- Alluvium on the valley floor gives rise to waterlogged soils which generally support permanent pasture including unimproved seasonally wet species rich grassland
- Recreational opportunities are provided by public footpaths alongside the river/navigation, and the river itself which supports boat traffic
- Views are typically restricted to within the valley, for example there are views across the valley from either side, and from floodplains to the valley sides. The top of the valley side forms a skyline
- Generally a quiet, tranquil landscape with a low settlement density. However, industrial elements have a defining visual influence on parts of the valley – particularly close to Northwich and Winsford
- Steel road bridges, such as in the centre of Northwich and at Hartford Bridge, and two huge sandstone arched railway viaducts contribute to the industrial character of the valley
- Settlement is generally absent from the floodplain, except at locks and in the centre of Northwich. Scattered farms are typical of the less steep valley sides
- Industry has had a great influence on the valley with old works sites now supporting a wide range of habitats, for example at Weaver Parkway
- Large scale industrial works have a defining visual influence on the valley between Winsford and Meadowbank (the Winsford Salt Works)

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### **Natural / Physical**

- Semi-natural clough woodlands of high biodiversity interest, much of it ancient (e.g. Heys Wood and the Riddings, Bradford Mill Wood and woodland on the eastern slopes of the valley);
- The river course with its rich riparian vegetation and wetland habitats (e.g. Marshall's Arm Local Nature Reserve);
- The pastoral character of the floodplain and the survival of unimproved seasonally wet and dry species rich grassland (e.g. the extensive area of grassland and other vegetation of biological importance between Meadowbank and Hunt's Lock);
- The rich wildlife habitats including grassland and heaths that have developed on old industrial land;
- The naturalistic meandering course of the River Weaver including a series of oxbows;
- Mid Weaver Valley Area of Special County Value (ASCV) between Hartford Bridge and Bradford Mill.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- Recreational opportunities along the river corridor, including Sustrans NCN 5, River Weaver Canoe Trail, and car parks, picnic facilities and walks at the Weaver Parkway greenspace on former industrial land on the edge of Winsford;
- The industrial archaeology formed by the Weaver Navigation with its 'cuts', locks, sluices and accompanying built heritage, much of which is listed;

- Steel bridges and arched railway viaducts are features of the valley and provide historical interest;
- Northwich Conservation Area includes many listed buildings.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- The presence of infrastructure and industry and the proximity to built development influences the character of the northern and southern ends of the LCA around Northwich and Winsford; the area south of New Bridge is more industrial in character particularly the west bank area where industrial degradation remains;
- Low settlement density, being generally absent from the floodplain but with a scattering of modern buildings and car parks at Northwich and industrial buildings in the floodplain on the outskirts of Winsford;
- Low density scattered farms are typically found on the shallow valley sides, but development is more concentrated where the River Weaver passes through Northwich.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Visibility is confined to the floodplain and valley sides; clough woodland provides some screening on valley sides but the floodplain is open with few opportunities to mitigate visual impacts;
- Low settlement density results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length (particularly between Meadowbank and Hartford Bridge);
- In places an 'intimate' hidden valley with a great sense of enclosure due to the steep valley sides and clough woodland;
- Distinctive clough woodland on steep valley sides and within a series of steep sided tributary valleys provide change with the seasons;
- Meadowbanks Saltworks (now the Salt Union salt mine) forms a landmark building within the valley;
- The landform of the valley means the floodplain is highly visible from the valley sides and, conversely, the valley sides are highly visible from the valley bottom. The crests of the valley sides form a skyline and are visually sensitive;
- The low settlement density means there are relatively few residential receptors for visual impacts – although the recreational opportunities presented by the valley mean there are likely to be some recreational receptors;
- Where clough woodland is present, it provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the valley sides. However, the floodplain is open and provides extremely few opportunities for mitigating visual impacts.

#### **Landscape Condition**

Generally good, with key characteristic elements that make up the river valley generally intact. However, some woodlands are under-managed and some old industrial land lies derelict particularly on the edges of Winsford and Northwich. Some areas of former industrial land have been brought back into positive use e.g. in connection with The Mersey Forest at Weaver Parkway greenspace.

### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 15b: *Mid Weaver Valley*:**

- Countryside;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV) between Hartford Bridge and Bradford Mill;
- River Weaver corridor;
- Green network / wedges;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

### ***Forces for Landscape Change***

#### **Past change**

- Under-management and/or inappropriate management of some of the clough woodland;
- Built development encroaching down the valley sides, particularly housing on the edges of Winsford and Northwich, and the development of car parks and light industrial units alongside the river. For example, the 'Winsford Gateway' residential-led development on the edge of Winsford; large scale industry occupying the valley floor on the outskirts of Winsford;
- Past industrial use of the valley has resulted in the presence of derelict and unmanaged land. However, more recent creation of greenspace, managed for public access as a Country Park within the Mersey Forest, and biodiversity on former derelict land has been a positive change;
- Evidence of arable land use replacing some pastoral uses on the valley floor;
- Limited management has caused decline in hedgerow boundaries in the past;
- River bank erosion is an issue in some areas.

#### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 15b: *Mid Weaver Valley***

- Erosion of built environment character through incremental development;
- Built development encroaching further down the valley sides, particularly on the edges of Winsford, Northwich and Hartford. For example, an approved development for 350 dwellings off School Lane which will reduce the open land between Hartford and Leftwich Grange/Kingsmead (a former ASLEV). ASCV designation should protect the central area of the LCA from inappropriate development;
- Decline of important ancient and semi-natural woodland habitats through reduction, fragmentation and deterioration of clough woodlands;
- Drought could lead to loss of trees, particularly on the steeper slopes;
- Extension of the wooded nature of the valley by more planting on valley shoulders, sides and, where appropriate, the valley floor buffering and connecting ancient semi-natural woodland (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan);
- Further river bank erosion;
- Localise deterioration of wetland habitats, wet grassland etc. through drainage and in-fill plus nutrient run-off from surrounding farmland.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 15b: Mid Weaver Valley***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the ancient clough woodlands, unimproved grassland and wetland habitats, and to **restore** / regenerate industrial sites whilst preserving the industrial interest of the Weaver Valley and its links with the salt industry.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Support the management of all existing woodlands and pay special regard to the ancient woodland sites. Promote traditional woodland management techniques of the valuable clough woodland on the valley sides to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
2. Support plans to extend woodland cover by planting on the valley shoulders and valley sides, avoiding planting on areas of existing ecological value. Where possible, new woodlands should be established adjacent to ancient woodland, or to connect separate wooded blocks, ensuring no detriment to historic assets.
3. While wet woodland may be appropriate alongside the river on the valley floor care should be taken to also conserve the pastoral and open character of the valley floor. Care should be taken not to block the line of the valley floor by extensive planting.
4. Encourage reversion of arable back to pasture on the floodplain. Encourage seasonal grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the floodplain.
5. Conserve and extend characteristic floodplain habitats such as unimproved grassland, traditionally managed meadows, reed beds and riverside trees which contribute to the natural character of the floodplain.
6. Support recreational use of the landscape, particularly passive recreation, and ensure that any visitor facilities are integrated into their landscape context.
7. Seek to improve boundary management e.g. of hedgerow boundaries.
8. Support creative use of derelict and neglected land to improve the area's image – conserve existing industrial and heritage features associated with the salt industry and extend the wooded character of the valley.
9. Minimise the impact of built development on the valley sides using native planting of locally appropriate species to create a landscape buffer where appropriate.

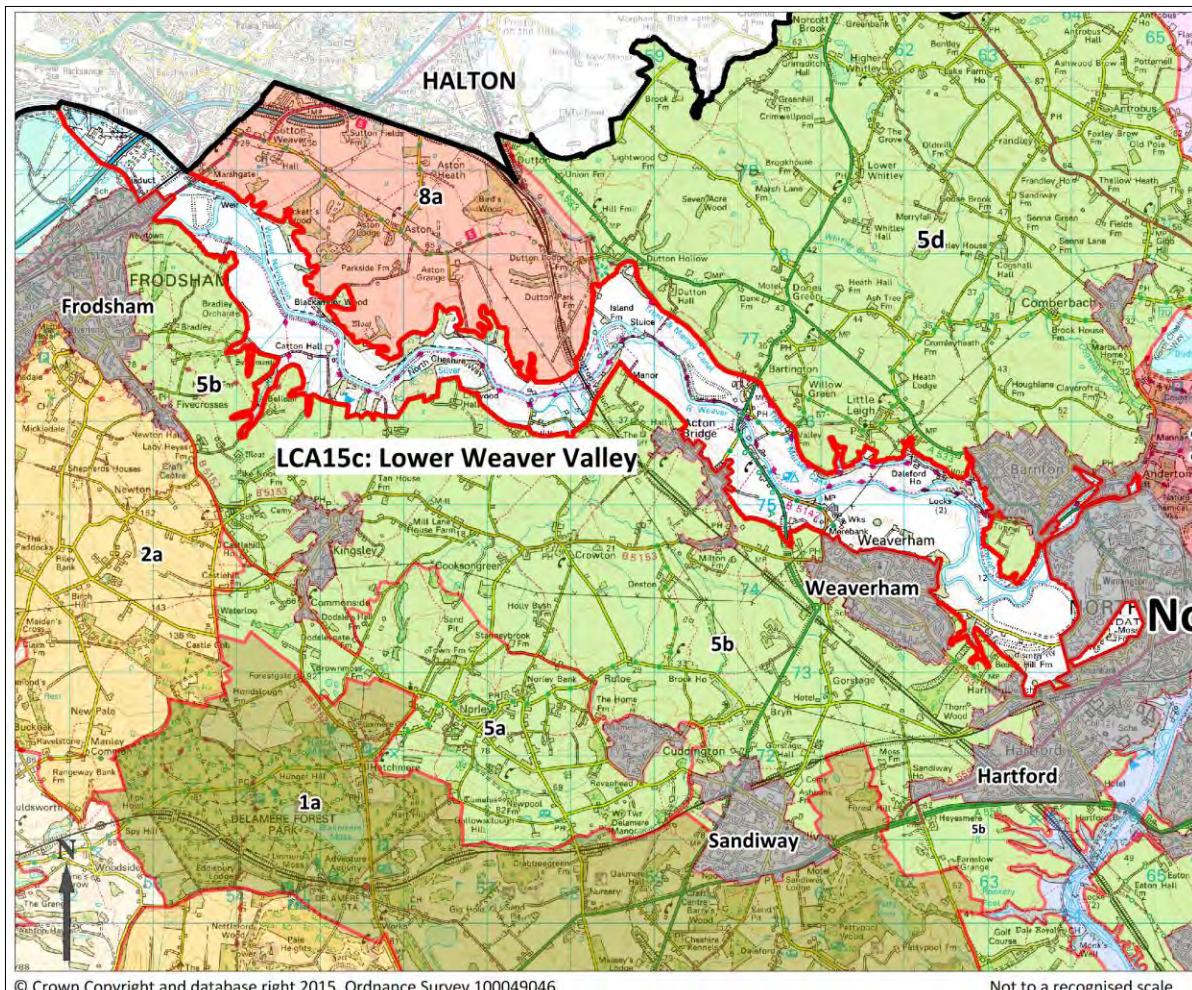
10. Use ASCV designation to protect the central area of the LCA from inappropriate development.
11. Monitor water levels and manage water abstraction to prevent drying out of wetland habitats.
12. Seek to increase opportunities for views into the valley.
13. Planting near watercourses should consist of native species.
14. Control spread of invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Support river and canal-side regeneration that provides opportunities to preserve river structures integral to its function as a navigation.
2. Protect the valley 'crests' from conspicuous built development that would detract from the 'intimate', hidden character of the valley.
3. Conserve the low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length, particularly between Meadowbank and Hartford Bridge.
4. Conserve the undeveloped character of the floodplain – this part of the valley is generally unsuitable for built development and would be a risk from flooding. Avoid the use of the floodplain for car parks and light industrial units.
5. Invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, should be eradicated prior to any development taking place, and where species are present a method statement should be produced on how to deal with them in accordance with best practice guidance.



## LCA 15c: Lower Weaver Valley



### Location and Boundaries

The **Lower Weaver Valley** has fairly low, but steep valley sides rising to an elevation of approximately 30m AOD. It flows from Northwich to the Mersey Estuary. The boundaries of the valley are defined predominantly by landform with the top of the slopes meeting the adjacent landscapes types of the *Undulating Enclosed Farmland* and *Cheshire Plain East*.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 15c: Lower Weaver Valley***

- Distinct valley with a flat open floodplain and steep, wooded, valley sides
- Containing the course of the River Weaver and Weaver Navigation with many artificial channels ('cuts'), remnant meanders, locks at Dutton and sluices/weirs
- The steep valley sides and series of steep sided tributary valleys support distinctive clough woodland, much of which is ancient - some have extensive displays of bluebells
- The LCA includes Beechmill Wood and Pasture SSSI and Warburton's Wood and Well Wood SSSI
- Valley sides also support small/medium scale arable and pastoral fields, bounded by low gappy hedgerows
- Alluvium on the valley floor gives rise to waterlogged soils which generally support permanent pasture including seasonally wet species rich grassland
- Recreational opportunities are provided by public footpaths alongside the river/navigation, including Delamere Way and the Cheshire Ring Canal Walk long distance recreational footpaths
- The locks and 'boat graveyard' at Dutton, and the Anderton Boat Lift are visitor attractions
- Views are typically restricted to within the valley, for example there are views across the valley from either side, and from floodplains to the valley sides. The top of the valley side forms a skyline
- Generally a quiet, tranquil landscape with a low settlement density. However, industrial elements have a defining visual influence on parts of the valley
- The Trent and Mersey Canal (a Conservation Area) follows the northern bank of the valley – contributing associated structures and artefacts of industrial archaeology, many of which are listed
- Marker stones at the meadows at Frodsham are listed
- Steel road bridges, such as at Frodsham (A56), Acton (A49), and Northwich Swing Bridge (A533) and two huge sandstone arched railway viaducts (Frodsham and Dutton viaducts) contribute to the industrial character of the valley
- Settlement is generally absent from floodplain, except at locks and alongside the A49. Scattered farms are typical of the less steep valley sides
- Industry has had a great influence on the valley with old tipping lagoons, dredging lagoons and deposit grounds now forming rich wildlife habitats including open water, reed beds and unimproved grassland
- Large scale industrial works have a defining visual influence on the valley at Winnington (Northwich) and Rocksavage (Runcorn)

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### ***Natural / Physical***

- The River Weaver is the key feature of the valley. Although the river has been canalised and made navigable through a series of 'cuts', the naturalistic meandering course of the river is still evident particularly adjacent to Barnton Cut;
- The steep valley sides and series of steep sided tributary valleys support distinctive clough woodland, much of which is ancient and ecologically diverse;
- Fields on the valley sides are small/medium in size and separated by low, gappy hedgerows, whereas on the valley floor they are much larger in scale and bounded by low hedgerows or post and wire fences which maintain the open character of the alluvial plain;

- Woodland is some of the highest wildlife value woodland in the borough, for example Hatton's Hey Wood, Beechmill Wood and Pasture SSSI, Warburton's Wood and Well Wood SSSI, Whittles Corner and Bank Rough SSSIs;
- The river course with its rich riparian vegetation and wetland habitats;
- The pastoral character of the floodplain and the survival of unimproved seasonally wet species rich grassland;
- The rich wildlife habitats including open water, reed beds and unimproved grassland that have resulted from past industrial use including old tipping lagoons, dredging lagoons and deposit grounds.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The steel road bridges and arched sandstone railway viaducts that are features of the valley and provide historical interest;
- The Trent and Mersey Canal (a Conservation Area) that contributes structures and artefacts of industrial archaeology as well as recreational opportunities and wetland habitats;
- The dramatic engineering of the Anderton Boat Lift, Scheduled Monument;
- Winnington Hall (a listed building) and park (of local significance);
- The industrial archaeology formed by the Weaver Navigation with its 'cuts', locks, sluices/weirs, accompanying built heritage much of which is listed;
- Recreational opportunities along the river corridor, including Sustrans NCN 5, North Cheshire Way, and car parks, picnic facilities and walks;
- River Weaver Canoe Trail runs between Northwich and Acton Bridge and caravan and camping facilities are found by the river at Acton Bridge.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- The presence of infrastructure and industry (past and present) and the proximity to built development influences the character of the eastern and western ends of the LCA around Northwich and Frodsham;
- M56 flyover at Frodsham Bridge is a dominant visual feature to the west of the LCA;
- The area east of Barnton is more industrial in character particularly the south bank area where industrial degradation remains;
- Within the valley low density, scattered farms are typically found on the shallow valley sides, but development is more concentrated where the River Weaver passes through Northwich.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- Landscape is generally quiet and contains a low density of settlement;
- The presence of major river crossing points, infrastructure and industry, and proximity to built development, all contribute to the incidence of human influences and lighting at night detract locally from the overall perception of tranquillity at the eastern and western edges of the LCA;
- The valley side crests that form skylines from within the valley and are visually sensitive;
- Visibility is confined to the floodplain and valley sides; clough woodland provides some screening on valley sides but the floodplain is open with few opportunities to mitigate visual impacts;
- In places an 'intimate' hidden valley with a great sense of enclosure due to the steep valley sides and clough woodland which provide change with the seasons;
- The valley is hidden from the adjacent landscapes (*Undulating Enclosed Farmland* and *Cheshire Plain East*) due to its steep sides resulting in little inter-visibility between it and adjacent landscapes;
- Where clough woodland is present, it provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the valley sides. However, the floodplain is open and provides extremely few opportunities for mitigating visual impacts.

### **Landscape Condition**

The condition of the valley varies along its length. While the elements that make up the river valley (woodland, pastoral and arable farmland) are generally intact and the majority of the valley is in active agricultural use, some of the hedgerow boundaries are gappy and some woodlands under-managed. Land surrounding the chemical works close to Northwich is generally in poor condition with presence of invasive species in the grassland and hard standing/waste ground.

### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 15c: *Lower Weaver Valley*:**

- Green Belt and Countryside;
- Extensive parts of the LCA are Area of Special County Value (ASCV) between the A56 in the west and Weaverham in the east;
- Flood risk and water management;
- River Weaver corridor;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets.

### ***Forces for Landscape Change***

#### **Past change**

- Under-management and/or inappropriate management of some of the clough woodland;
- Past industrial use of the valley has resulted in the presence of derelict and unmanaged land;
- Evidence of arable land use replacing some pastoral uses on the valley floor;
- Limited management has caused decline in hedgerow boundaries in the past;
- River bank erosion is an issue in some areas;
- Loss of riparian habitat for navigation maintenance.

#### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 15c: *Lower Weaver Valley***

- Decline of important ancient and semi-natural woodland habitats through reduction, fragmentation and deterioration of clough and wet woodlands;
- Climate could affect established vegetation balance and water environment;
- Extension of the wooded nature of the valley by more planting on valley shoulders, sides and, where appropriate, the valley floor buffering and connecting ancient semi-natural woodland (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan);
- Further river bank erosion.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 15c: Lower Weaver Valley***

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the ancient clough woodlands, unimproved grassland and wetland habitats, and to preserve designated and undesignated heritage assets associated with the Weaver Navigation and past agricultural activity and links with the salt industry.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Use ASCV designation to protect the LCA from inappropriate development and enhance when possible.
2. Support the management of all existing woodlands and pay special regard to the ancient woodland sites. Promote traditional woodland management techniques of the valuable clough woodland on the valley sides to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
3. Support plans to extend woodland cover by planting on the valley shoulders and valley sides, avoiding planting on areas of existing ecological value. Where possible, new woodlands should be established adjacent to ancient woodland, or to connect to separate wooded blocks, ensuring no detriment to historic assets.
4. While wet woodland may be appropriate alongside the river on the valley floor care should be taken to also conserve the pastoral and open character of the valley floor. Care should be taken not to block the line of the valley floor by extensive planting.
5. Encourage reversion of arable back to pasture on the floodplain. Encourage seasonal grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the floodplain.
6. Conserve and extend characteristic floodplain habitats such as unimproved grassland, traditionally managed meadows, reedbeds and riverside trees which contribute to the natural character of the floodplain.
7. Support recreational use of the landscape, particularly passive recreation. However, ensure that any visitor facilities are integrated into their landscape context and that recreational pressure is managed, including boat traffic.
8. Seek to improve boundary management e.g. of hedgerow boundaries to strengthen this feature of the valley sides.
9. Support creative use of derelict and neglected land to improve the area's image.
10. Minimise the impact of roads, signage and associated development on the valley sides

using native planting where appropriate.

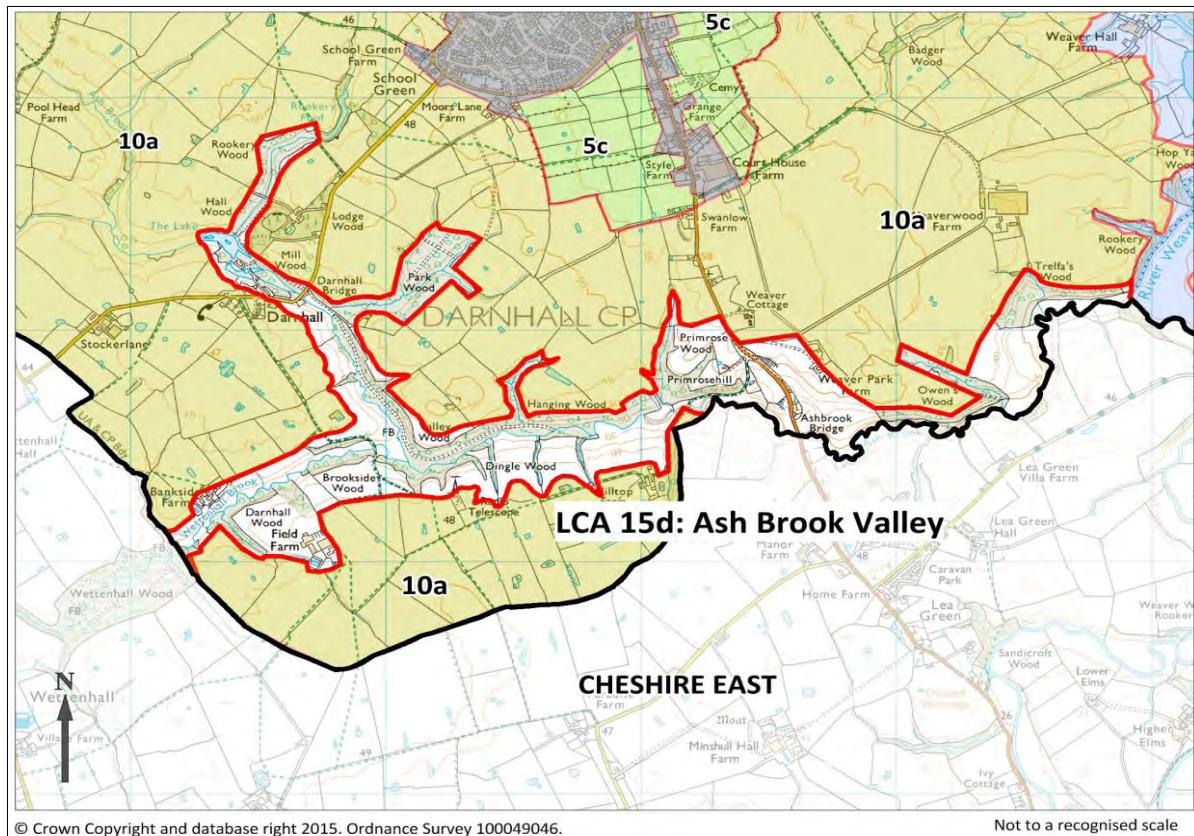
11. Monitor water levels and manage water abstraction to prevent drying out wetland habitats.
12. Seek to increase opportunities for views into the valley.
13. Planting near watercourses should consist of native species.
14. Control spread of invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Avoid ribbon development along main roads which could obstruct views across the valley and erode the sense of tranquillity of the valley.
2. Support Weaver Navigation and canal-side regeneration that provides opportunities to preserve river structures integral to its function as a navigation.
3. Preserve the industrial aesthetic of the Trent and Mersey Canal and its setting, including associated structures and artefacts of industrial archaeology. Consider views from the canal in planning new built development.
4. Preserve the character of the bridges across the Weaver.
5. Protect the valley 'crests' from large scale built development that would detract from the 'intimate', hidden character of the valley.
6. Conserve the low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length.
7. Conserve the undeveloped character of the floodplain away from the industrial works at Winnington.
8. Invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, should be eradicated prior to any development taking place, and where species are present a method statement should be produced on how to deal with them.



## LCA 15d: Ash Brook Valley



### Location and Boundaries

The **Ash Brook Valley** is a narrow, steep and wooded valley containing tributaries of the River Weaver. It includes Ash Brook between Darnhall and its confluence with the Weaver, and Wettenhall Brook between Wettenhall Wood and its confluence with Ash Brook. The boundaries of the valley are defined predominantly by landform with the top of the slopes meeting the adjacent *Cheshire Plain East*.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 15d: Ash Brook Valley***

- Steep, wooded valley containing the Ash Brook and Wettenhall Brook, tributaries of the River Weaver
- The steep valley sides support distinctive clough woodland, much of which is ancient semi-natural woodland of oak, ash, hazel and elm – the main east-west valley includes Wettenhall and Darnhall Woods, both SSSI
- A narrow band of alluvium on the valley floor gives rise to waterlogged soils that support some unimproved species rich grassland
- The majority of the valley is inaccessible to the public, although a public footpath crosses the valley at Brookside Wood
- Views are typically restricted to within the valley, for example there are views across the valley from either side, and from the valley floor to the valley sides. The top of the valley side forms a skyline
- Generally a quiet, tranquil landscape with a low settlement density
- Mills and stone bridges are a feature e.g. Darnhall Mill and Darnhall Bridge
- Darnhall radio telescope dish is a feature in the local landscape at the top of the valley to the south

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### **Natural / Physical**

- Ash Brook Valley has been carved from the soft Eldersfield Mudstone to form a relatively steep sided Valley;
- Semi-natural woodlands of high biodiversity interest;
- The natural courses of the tributary streams with rich riparian vegetation and wetland habitats;
- The natural courses of Ash and Wettenhall Brooks are a key feature of the valley;
- The survival of unimproved seasonally wet species rich grassland;
- Narrow alluvial deposits occur at the bottom of the valley which support unimproved and semi-improved species rich grassland along much of the valley bottom;
- Woodland clings to the steep valley sides of these tributary streams much of which is ancient, for example Park Wood, Wettenhall and Darnhall Woods;
- The Wettenhall and Darnhall Woods complex is recognised as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- Fields on the valley sides are small/medium in size and separated by hedgerows remnants of ancient field systems;
- Settlement is generally absent from these tributary valleys, except for a small hamlet at Darnhall, on the fringe of the Ash Brook LCA, where Darnhall Mill, a listed building, is located;
- The mills that are typical of tributaries of the Weaver and provide an indication of the former use of the river;
- There are a number of listed structures within the hamlet of Darnhall, including Darnhall Bridge and associated water management features such as sluice/weir structures.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Very low settlement density;
- Field Farm and Bankside Farm are the main built components of the area beyond the hamlet of Darnhall.

### Perceptual / Visual

- Semi-natural woodlands that provide change with the seasons;
- An 'intimate', hidden valley that has a sense of enclosure resulting from the steep valley sides and extensive woodland that clings to the valley sides;
- A quiet and tranquil landscape – the presence of woodland, unimproved grassland and water contribute to the perception of a 'natural' landscape with an extremely low density of settlement;
- The top of the valley sides form a skyline in views from within the valley. This is partly wooded and partly open. The valley is hidden from the adjacent *Cheshire Plain East* due to its valley sides resulting in limited inter-visibility between it and adjacent landscapes;
- The majority of the valley is inaccessible to the public, although a public footpath crosses the valley at Brookside Wood;
- Where clough woodland is present it provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the valley sides.

### Landscape Condition

The elements that make up the valley (woodland, water, unimproved grassland and farmland) are generally intact and the majority of the valley is either managed for nature conservation or in agricultural use. However, some of the hedgerow boundaries are gappy and some woodlands under-managed.

### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 15d: *Ash Brook Valley*:**

- Countryside;
- Flood risk and water management areas in the valley floor;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets.

### **Forces for Landscape Change**

#### **Past change**

- Under-management and/or inappropriate management of some of the clough woodland and species-rich grassland;
- Limited boundary management has caused decline in hedgerow boundaries in the past;
- River bank erosion is an issue in some areas;
- Large agricultural buildings on the valley's crest and fringe.

#### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 15d: *Ash Brook Valley***

- Climate change could affect established vegetation balance and water environment;
- Some of the woodland on the valley sides is currently under-managed;
- Drought could lead to loss of trees and wet woodland, particularly on the steeper slopes;
- The location of the area within The Mersey Forest means that the valley may see further tree planting to extend the wooded nature of the valley (particularly on valley shoulders and valley sides, and to connect separate woodland blocks);
- Agricultural intensification and large scale buildings.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 15d: Ash Brook Valley***

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the ancient woodlands, unimproved grassland and wetland habitats of this tributary valley.

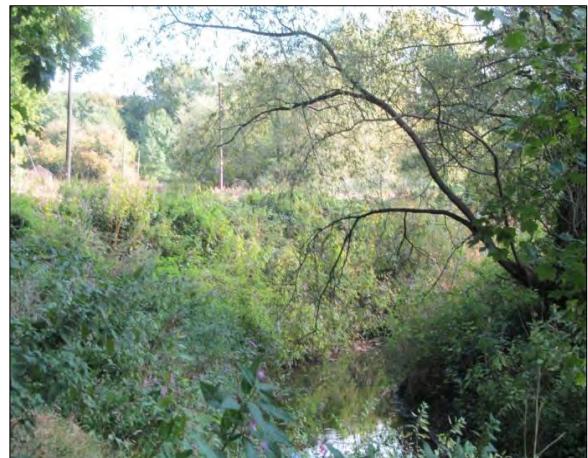
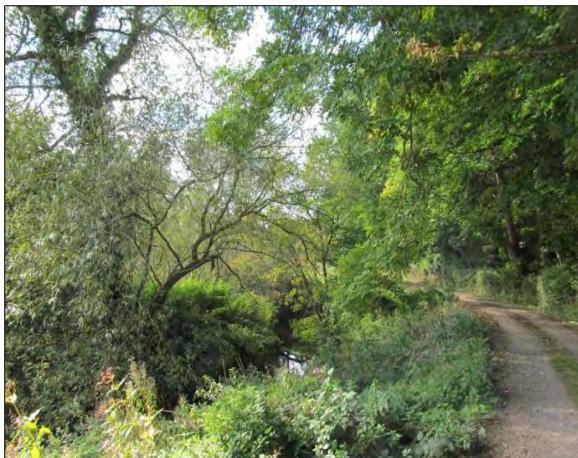
### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Support the management of all existing woodlands and pay special regard to the ancient woodland sites. Promote traditional woodland management techniques to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
2. Support plans to extend woodland cover by planting on the valley shoulders and valley sides, avoiding planting on areas of existing ecological value and ensuring no detriment to historic assets. Where possible, new woodlands should be established adjacent to ancient woodland, or to connect separate wooded blocks.
3. Wet woodland may be appropriate alongside the tributary streams on the valley floor, but this should not be at the expense of botanically rich grasslands.
4. Conserve and extend characteristic floodplain habitats such as unimproved grassland, traditionally managed meadows, reedbeds and riverside trees which contribute to the natural character of the valley floor.
5. Support recreational use of the landscape, particularly informal passive recreation, but ensure the tranquil character of the valley is maintained.
6. Monitor water levels and manage water abstraction to prevent drying out wetland habitats.
7. Planting near watercourses should consist of native species.
8. Control spread of invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

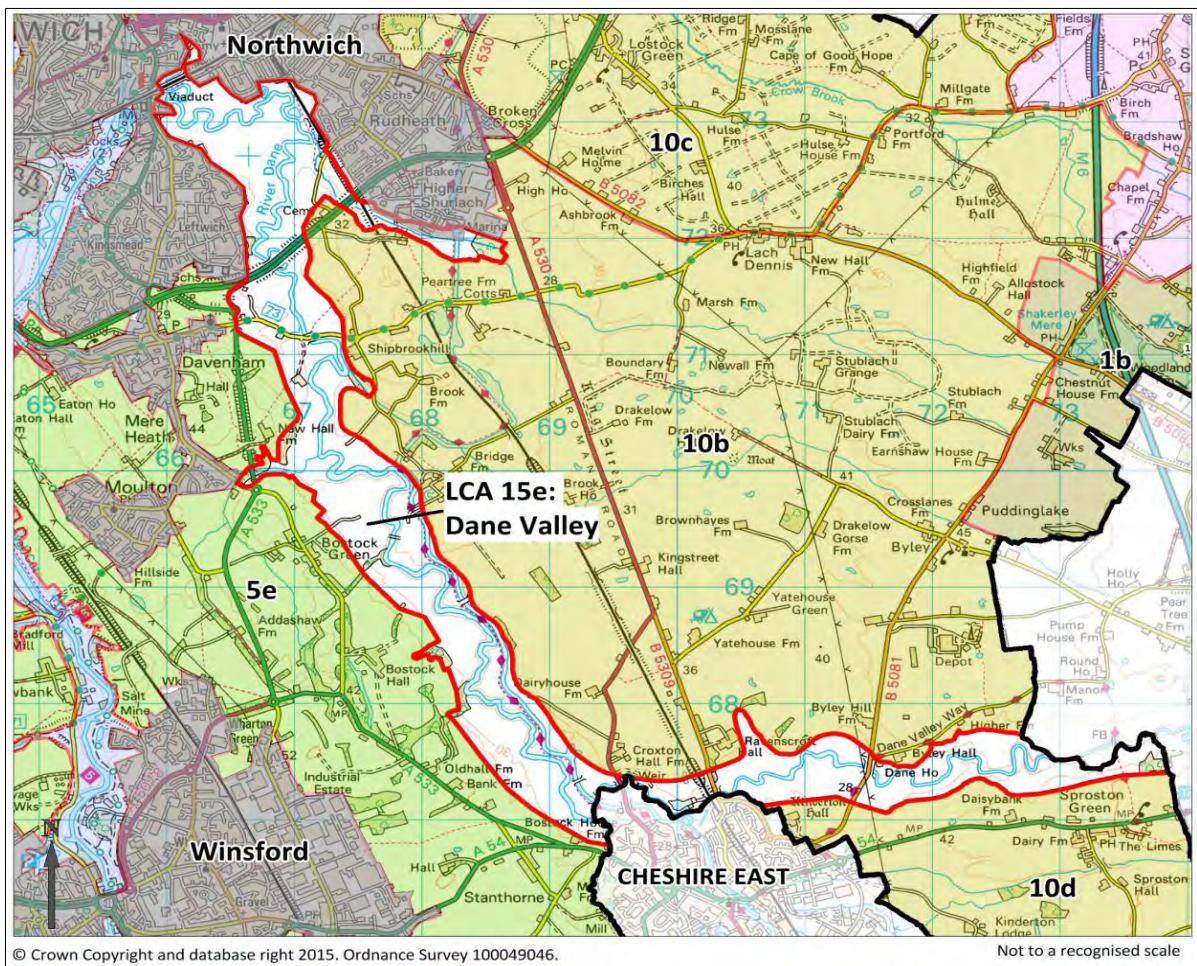
### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Protect the valley 'crests' from built development that would detract from the 'intimate', hidden character of the valley.
2. Conserve the low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape.
3. Conserve and maintain the mills that are typical of tributaries of the Weaver and provide an indication of the former use of the river.

4. Invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, should be eradicated prior to any development taking place, and where species are present a method statement should be produced on how to deal with them.



## LCA 15e: Dane Valley



### Location and Boundaries

The **Dane Valley** is a relatively shallow valley containing the course of the River Dane. It runs from Sproston Wood (where it enters the borough) to its confluence with the River Weaver in the centre of Northwich. The boundaries of the valley are defined predominantly by landform with the top of the slopes meeting the adjacent landscapes types of the *Undulating Enclosed Farmland* and *Cheshire Plain East*.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 15e: Dane Valley***

- Shallow valley with low, steep sides containing the natural meandering course of the River Dane and part of the Trent and Mersey Canal
- The valley sides support small remnants of ancient woodland, e.g. Sproston Wood and Peck Mill Valley
- Alluvium on the valley floor gives rise to waterlogged soils which generally support pasture, but also some arable farmland. Only small remnants of unimproved or semi-improved grassland
- Fields tend to be relatively large in size on the floodplain with smaller fields on the valley sides
- Willows and riverine vegetation border the river, marking its meandering course across the landscape
- Part of the Trent and Mersey Canal, constructed in 1777 by James Brindley to link the navigable River Trent to the River Mersey, contributes associated structures and artefacts of industrial archaeology, including a listed milepost
- Recreational opportunities are provided by the towpath alongside the Trent and Mersey Canal (forming part of the Cheshire Ring Canal Walk) and the Dane Valley Way
- Sandstone bridges are distinctive features of the valley, located at historic listed crossing points of the River e.g. Shipbrook Bridge and Ravenscroft Bridge
- A notable absence of settlement/development – forms a ‘green lung’ entering Northwich
- A highly tranquil landscape due to lack of settlement, natural meandering river course, presence of woodland, pasture and riverside vegetation
- Views are generally restricted to within the valley, although St Wilfred’s Church spire in Davenham is prominent on the skyline

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The *Dane Valley* has been carved from soft mudstone formations to form a relatively shallow valley with a wide, flat floodplain;
- Alluvial soils support a pastoral landscape grazed by cattle and sheep, interspersed by some arable farmland;
- The valley sides support some unimproved grassland and scrub and small remnants of once much larger woodlands that clothed the valley sides;
- Oak and sycamore woodland occupies the valley of tributary Peck Mill Brook and is recognised as local wildlife sites;
- The River Dane is a key feature of the valley with a naturalistic meandering course across the wide, open floodplain;
- Willows and riverine vegetation border the river, marking its meandering course across the landscape;
- Fields tend to be relatively large in size on the floodplain with smaller fields on the valley sides;
- A group of ponds stand in the lower reaches of the valley at Rudheath.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The floodplain includes a mixture of ancient fields (e.g. between Shipbrook Bridge and Whatcroft Hall) as well as post medieval and fields enlarged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. on the floodplain between Leftwich and Rudheath);

- The Trent and Mersey Canal (Conservation Area) passes along the eastern edge of the Dane Valley between Middlewich and Whatcroft and links the navigable River Trent to the River Mersey;
- Some listed features include Bridge End Farmhouse, on the on the western bank;
- Sandstone Bridges are distinctive features of the rural valley, located at historic crossing points of the River e.g. Shipbrook Bridge (listed) and Ravenscroft Bridge;
- The eastern fringe of Bostock Hall Conservation Area falls within the LCA;
- Recreational opportunities are provided by the towpath alongside the Trent and Mersey Canal (forming part of the Cheshire Ring Canal Walk) the Dane Valley Way;
- Angling in ponds at Rudheath.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Settlement is typically absent from valley, although there is some development both in the floodplain and on the valley sides as the Dane passes through Northwich;
- Residential development to the north of the area at Leftwich has been permitted within the valley which will significantly alter this balance of landscape features;
- The A556 is a dominant feature on the edge of Northwich.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The landscape is quiet away from road crossings and contains no settlement;
- The sense of perceived naturalness (due to the natural river course, presence of woodland, pasture and riverside vegetation), contributes to a highly tranquil landscape;
- The area is unified by the meandering course of the River Dane;
- This valley has a partial sense of enclosure resulting from the steep valley sides that separate the valley from the surrounding farmland;
- Valley sides are steep but shallow and allows *some* inter-visibility between the valley and its urban fringes surrounds e.g. views of built development on the edge of Middlewich from Byley Bridge, and views of built development at Leftwich and Northwich;
- The low levels of woodland on the valley sides further emphasises its open character;
- The landform of the valley means the floodplain is highly visible from the valley sides and, conversely, the valley sides are highly visible from the valley bottom. The crests of the valley sides form a skyline in views from within the valley, punctuated by trees, woodland and farmsteads that typically sit at the crest of the valley;
- The valley is hidden from the adjacent landscapes (*Undulating Enclosed Farmland* and *Cheshire Plain East*) due to its steep, but low, valley sides resulting in little inter-visibility between it and adjacent landscapes;
- There are good views from the residential properties on the edge of Northwich over the undeveloped valley and Leftwich Meadow;
- Views are generally restricted to within the valley although St Wilfred's Church spire in Davenham is prominent on the skyline;
- The lack of settlement means the only residential receptors for visual impacts are located on the crests of the valley. Recreational receptors are located along the Trent and Mersey Canal and along the Dane Valley Way;
- Where woodland is present, it provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the valley sides, but this is rare. The floodplain is open and therefore particularly visually sensitive.

### **Landscape Condition**

The condition of the valley is good – the area is managed as agricultural land and its hedgerows network is generally intact. There has been some replacement of pasture by arable land.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 15e: *Dane Valley*:**

- Countryside;
- Flood risk and water management;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- The northern part of the Dane Valley between Rudheath and Leftwich (Northwich) is identified as a Candidate Key Settlement Gap.

### **Forces for Landscape Change**

#### **Past change**

- Some of the clough woodland on the valley sides is currently under-managed;
- There is evidence of some arable land use replacing pastoral land uses on the valley floor, as well as 20th century field re-organisation;
- The area of ancient woodland and unimproved/ semi-improved grassland indicates that these habitats have been lost during the 20th century;
- Limited boundary management has caused decline in hedgerow boundaries.

#### **Potential future change/ key issues affecting LCA 15e: *Dane Valley***

- There is no existing settlement in the valley and but significant pressure for built development south of Northwich continues;
- Proximity to built development brings with it pressures from recreational uses e.g. unauthorised use of motorbikes;
- Although the valley lies within The Mersey Forest there are no particular plans to enhance woodland within the Dane valley;
- Climate change could lead to loss of trees, particularly on the steeper slopes;
- Decline of important ancient and semi-natural woodland habitats through reduction, fragmentation and deterioration of clough woodlands;
- Part of Cheshire's area of search for rock salt extraction is located in the Upper Dane Valley;
- High Speed Phase 2 (HS2) route will potentially pass north-south through the valley.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA15e: Dane Valley***

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** the rural, pastoral character of the valley, and to **extend/enhance** woodland, unimproved grassland and wetland habitats where possible.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Seek to maintain the openness of the lower, enclosed valley landscape at Rudheath, Leftwich and Northwich where the potential Key Settlement Gap is identified through which settlement identity and separation can be secured.
2. Support the management of all existing woodlands and pay special regard to the ancient woodland sites. Promote traditional woodland management techniques of the valuable clough woodland on the valley sides to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
3. Seek to extend woodland cover by planting on the valley shoulders and valley sides, avoiding planting on areas of existing ecological value and ensuring no detriment to historic assets. Where possible, new woodlands should be established adjacent to ancient woodland, or to connect separate wooded blocks.
4. While wet woodland may be appropriate alongside the river on the valley floor care should be taken to also conserve the pastoral and open character of the valley floor. Care should be taken not to block the line of the valley floor by extensive planting.
5. Encourage reversion of arable back to pasture on the floodplain. Encourage seasonal grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the floodplain.
6. Conserve and extend characteristic floodplain habitats such as unimproved grassland, traditionally managed meadows, reedbeds and riverside trees which contribute to the natural character of the floodplain.
7. Support and provide additional opportunities for recreational use of the landscape, particularly passive recreation, and ensure that any visitor facilities are integrated into their landscape context.
8. Seek to improve boundary management e.g. of hedgerow boundaries.
9. Minimise the impact of existing built development using native planting where appropriate.

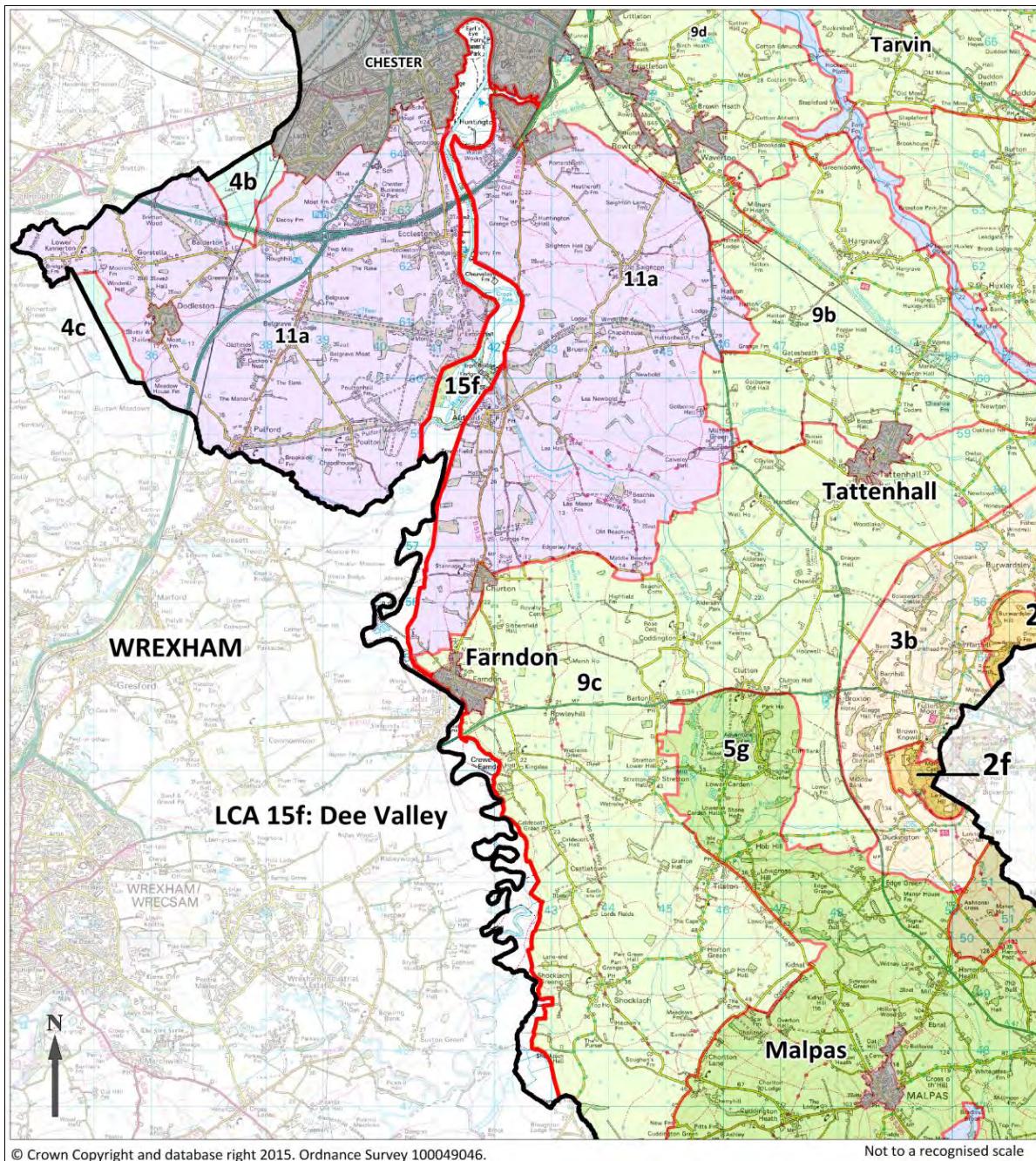
10. Manage recreational use of the vulnerable floodplain, monitoring effects of activities such as off-road motorcycling and providing restrictions where necessary.
11. Monitor water levels and manage water abstraction to prevent drying out wetland habitats.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Conserve the undeveloped character of the floodplain and maintain the low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape.
2. Protect the valley 'crests' from large scale built development that would detract from the 'intimate', hidden character of the valley.
3. Conserve the sandstone bridges that are distinctive feature of the valley, reflect the local geology and mark historic crossing points of the river.
4. Preserve the industrial aesthetic of the Trent and Mersey Canal and its setting, including associated structures and artefacts of industrial archaeology. Consider views from the canal in planning new built development in adjacent areas.
5. Ensure rock salt extraction does not threaten the floodplain habitats such as unimproved grassland, traditionally managed meadows, reedbeds and riverside trees which contribute to the natural character of the floodplain.
6. Conserve the open undeveloped area between Rudheath and Leftwich (Northwich) identified as a Candidate Key Settlement Gap where development could lead to coalescence and the loss of the separate identity of the communities.
7. Protect views to St Wilfred's Church spire in Davenham.



## LCA 15f: Dee Valley



### Location and Boundaries

The **Dee Valley** extends as a narrow and sinuous landscape area reflecting the course of the River Dee and administrative boundaries from Chester through Aldford and Farndon, south as far as the borough boundary north of Worthenbury. It defines a significant length of the western boundary of Cheshire West and Chester borough area.

### **Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 15f: *Dee Valley***

- Sinuous valley corridor dominated by the River Dee within a shallow valley setting with pronounced meander loops
- Seasonal flooding particularly at Chester Meadows and south of Farndon
- In parts defines the border between England and Wales
- Characterised by low lying, shallow valley sides of arable farmland and pasture on rich alluvial soils punctuated by pocket woodland and estate plantation
- For most parts the narrow valley lies within a wider context of the *Cheshire Plain West* and low topography limits elevated views to the river itself, although the valley widens in places e.g. Chester Meadows
- Dense riparian vegetation often presents the main indication of the river's course
- Remnant historic ridge and furrow along the valley sides
- The north of the LCA is dominated by the historic City of Chester, presenting a green corridor into the city and elevated views into it
- South of Chester the area passes through the extensive and managed landscape of the *Estate Farmlands*
- Fine residential estate properties of Eaton Hall and other parts of the Grosvenor Estate punctuate the central part of the area
- Strong hedgerows and significant hedgerow trees limit views along much of the LCA across low lying land
- Views to the west dominated by the Welsh hills
- Internationally significant ecological and nationally important geomorphological features
- Few (although strategic) river crossings within the area over a long stretch of the watercourse
- Sandstone arched Farndon Bridge is a listed building crossing the River Dee and the England-Wales border
- Located directly adjacent to the Maelor Saesneg historic designated landscape in Wales

### **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

#### **Natural / Physical**

- Sinuous meandering river course defines the character of the LCA;
- River becomes a significant scale navigable further watercourse downstream towards Chester;
- The river presents rich riparian vegetation, water and wetland habitats (e.g. Special Area of Conservation and SSSI);
- Rich ecological community value of the river and its riparian environs, including migratory salmon and otter habitat;
- Between Farndon and Worthenbury some of the most spectacular and intricately developed river bends or meanders to be found anywhere in Britain. The area is of national importance for studies of fluvial geomorphology; Localised exposed sandstone cliffs e.g. Dee Cliffs, Farndon SSSI;
- Rich hedgerow field boundaries with increasing levels of hedgerow tree cover to the south of the LCA;
- Generally large rectilinear field pattern of mixed arable and pasture use;
- Estate landscape setting of the river through the mid-section of the LCA presents rich tree-lined river course and small estate woodlands.

### Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- Nationally significant historic sites from the Roman Road, Holt Castle (Farndon) to the Eaton and Eccleston Estate landscapes and villages;
- Grade II\* Registered Historic Park and Garden at Eaton Hall;
- Farndon Bridge listed building crossing the River Dee and the England-Wales border;
- Important remaining areas of ridge and furrow indicating historic agricultural land use on the shallower valley sides;
- Chester, Eccleston and Farndon Conservation Areas overlap the LCA;
- Recreational opportunities along the river corridor, including riverside footpaths, angling, boating and river cruises to the northern parts of the area;
- Located directly adjacent to the Maelor Saesneg historic landscape designated in the Register of Landscapes of Special Historic Interest in Wales.

### Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- Outside Chester, extremely limited settlement exists, being absent from the floodplain but with a scattering of estate buildings at Eaton and Eccleston and estate farm on the valley side at Cheaveleyhall Farm;
- Few, but strategic river crossings where south of Chester (A55) and Farndon (A534) modern structures are found, with the historic Farndon/Holt bridge remaining in use between the two settlements on the national border;
- Private estate bridge at Aldford is a public right of way but not to traffic;
- Limited road network within the LCA.

### Perceptual / Visual

- The shallow valley side merges gradually with the *Cheshire Plain East* LCA to the east;
- Visibility is confined to the floodplain and valley sides, foreshortened by the meandering and dense riparian vegetation; the valley sides form a skyline which is visually sensitive;
- Occasional views to the Clwydian hills to the west offer limited longer distant views;
- In some locations land within the meander loops of the river afford a sense of localised enclosure, whilst in other locations the flat landscape gives a perception of open countryside;
- Absence of settlement and few river crossings results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length, but with movement provided by the river's flow;
- Rich and managed treescape (estate woodlands and bankside vegetation) affords change with the seasons;
- Dramatic and attractive views out of Queens Park and Earl's Eye to the semi-enclosing Chester historic riverside neighbourhoods;
- The low settlement density outside Chester means there are relatively few residential receptors for visual impacts, however several recreational receptors along the river path;
- Where woodland is present, it provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the valley sides.

### Landscape Condition

Generally good, with key characteristic elements that make up the river valley generally intact, particularly in the estate areas. However, some hedgerows have been lost or are gappy particularly in the south of the LCA.

### CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 15f: *Dee Valley*:

- Green Belt;
- Countryside;
- Green network / wedges (Chester);

- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

### ***Forces for Landscape Change***

#### **Past change**

- Modern transport Infrastructure (road bridges) at Farndon and Chester ring road introducing functional structures to an undeveloped area;
- Under-management and/or inappropriate management of some field boundaries to the south and north of the area;
- Settling lagoons at Huntington;
- Sporadic bankside chalets downstream of Farndon;
- Fish farm ponds and infrastructure at Townfield Lane, Farndon;
- Some water management infrastructure adjacent to the A55;
- Urban development encroaching down the valley sides, particularly housing at Chester;
- Evidence of arable land use replacing some pastoral uses on the valley floor;
- Limited management has caused decline in hedgerow boundaries in the past;
- River bank erosion by livestock is an issue in some areas (natural erosion by the river is generally to be encouraged).

#### **Potential future change/ key issues affecting LCA 15f: *Dee Valley***

- Built development encroaching further down the valley sides, particularly at Farndon and Chester;
- Consolidation of sporadic chalet development north of Farndon;
- Location within The Mersey Forest is likely to result in further tree planting north of the A55 around Chester (although presence of existing habitats, archaeology etc. likely to limit new planting);
- Further river bank erosion by livestock;
- Localised deterioration of wetland habitats, wet grassland etc. through drainage and in-fill plus nutrient run-off from surrounding farmland;
- Use of farmland for arable and maize production could lead to soil erosion;
- Further hedgerow loss across the southern farmland elements of the area;
- Impact of non-native invasive species, in particular Himalayan balsam.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 15f: Dee Valley***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the riverside environs, particularly its tree and riparian vegetation cover, and the special ecological community.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Support the management of all existing riparian trees and vegetation.
2. While wet woodland may be appropriate alongside the river on the valley floor care should be taken to also conserve the pastoral and open character of the valley floor.
3. Encourage reversion of arable back to pasture on the floodplain. Encourage seasonal grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the floodplain.
4. Conserve and extend characteristic floodplain habitats such as unimproved grassland, traditionally managed meadows, reed beds and riverside trees which contribute to the natural character of the floodplain.
5. Support recreational use of the landscape, particularly passive recreation, and ensure that any visitor facilities are integrated into their landscape context.
6. Seek to improve boundary management e.g. of hedgerow boundaries.
7. Minimise the impact of built development on the valley sides using native planting of locally appropriate species to create a landscape buffer where appropriate.
8. Monitor water levels and manage water abstraction to prevent impact on water and wetland ecosystems.
9. Control spread of invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

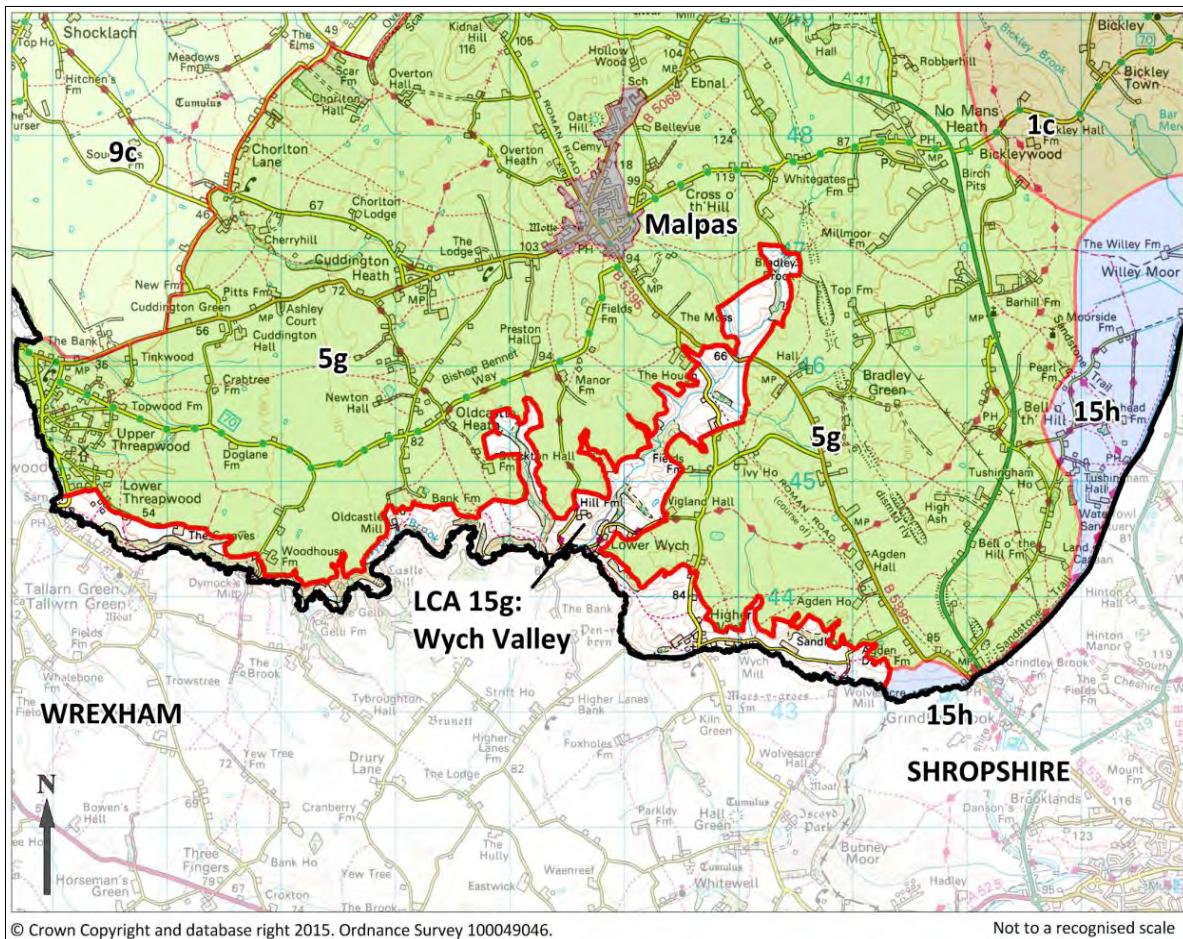
### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Strictly control built development to that necessary for appropriate water management to reflect the undeveloped character of the area, protect special habitats and geomorphological sites and historic features.
2. Avoid development, such as communication or renewable energy infrastructure in the LCA (or adjoining areas) which would visually challenge the prominence and architectural value of the clock tower at Eaton Hall.

3. Where new development is appropriate reflect the distinctive and high value brickwork and roofing materials of estate buildings.
4. Protect the valley 'crests' from conspicuous built development that would detract from the 'intimate', hidden character of the valley.
5. Conserve the low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length.
6. Conserve the undeveloped character of the floodplain –the valley is generally unsuitable for built development and would be a risk from flooding. Avoid the use of the floodplain for car parks and or agricultural development.
7. Invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, should be eradicated prior to any development taking place, and where species are present a method statement should be produced on how to deal with them in accordance with best practice guidance.



## LCA 15g: Wych Valley



### Location and Boundaries

The **Wych Valley** is a steep sided and tightly defined rural valley which forms part of the southern borough boundary between Threapwood and Grindley Brook. The LCA takes on an irregular 'inverted T' shape with the Grindley and Bradley Brooks forming the Wych Brook where they meet at the hamlet of Lower Wych. Topography within the steep-sided valleys varies from 50-80m at the crest and the brook is c 30-40m AOD. The main crossings are located at Higher and Lower Wych and Sarn Bridge.

### **Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 15g: Wych Valley**

- Fast flowing shallow watercourse within steep, partly wooded valley sides
- Intimate, small scale landscape
- Highly limited inter-visibility within the valley to other adjacent LCAs
- The landscape has a coarse grain and texture of a mosaic of woodland, scrub, high hedges and small field size
- Complex topography is found as a result of several minor watercourses flowing into the valley from the *Malpas* LCA to the north through steep woodlands
- Deep rural character and resultant tranquillity
- Mix of woodland types, including semi-natural ancient oak woodland, with willow and elder dominant at lower levels - Taylor's Rough & Wellmeadow Wood are SSSI
- Important woodland ecosystems with national and local designation
- Settlement limited to small hamlets at Higher and Lower Wych and several scattered farmsteads and former mills of attractive vernacular character
- Heritage interest includes medieval salting sites and corn mills e.g. Dymocks Mill, one of several former mills and associated watercourse infrastructure, and historic river crossings
- (Old) Castle Hill is the site of a Norman motte earthwork and timber castle Scheduled Monument dating from the 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century
- Located directly adjacent to the Maelor Saesneg historic designated landscape in Wales

### **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

#### **Natural / Physical**

- Well-defined, incised valley sides resultant of soft boulder clay erosion;
- Semi-natural valley side woodlands of high biodiversity interest, much of it ancient (such as Stockton Dingle and Greaves Wood);
- Small but sinuous, fast flowing, shallow watercourses of Wych Brook and Grindley Brook with several minor tributary streams;
- Valley profile becomes more defined to the west as the brook's size and flow increases;
- High ecological importance of woodland, flushes and unimproved grassland mosaic, notably Well Rough SSSI along the Wych Brook and Taylor's Rough SSSI and Wellmeadow Wood SSSI within the Bradley Brook valley. Most of the valley is designated as a Local Wildlife Site. The area is particularly important for lichen communities;
- Pastoral land use outside the wooded areas in small-scale fields.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- Long history of small-scale settlement from Saxon times based upon salt extraction, with later mills utilising the brooks' flow;
- Old Castle Hill is the site of a Norman motte earthwork castle and is a Scheduled Monument;
- Scattered small farmsteads include listed farmhouses at Bank Farm and Hill Farm;
- Rights of way network is extensive to the east of the area but more restricted in the more wooded western parts;
- Located directly adjacent to the Maelor Saesneg historic landscape designated in the Register of Landscapes of Special Historic Interest in Wales.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Small-scale groups of buildings and hamlets sit into the landscape and are rarely prominent;

- Upper and Lower Wych are the two areas of slightly more concentrated settlement but here buildings are loosely scattered around bridging points;
- Building vernacular of local stone and brickwork emphasises local distinctiveness.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The valley side crests that form skylines from within the valley and are open pasture or wooded and visually sensitive and create a significant sense of enclosure;
- Topography and dense valley side woodlands confine visibility to short vistas within the valley with little inter-visibility between the area and neighbouring landscape types;
- Low settlement density results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length;
- In places is an 'intimate' hidden valley with a great sense of enclosure due to the steep valley sides and woodland, particularly from the public footpath network;
- Distinctive broadleaved, mixed species woodland on steep valley sides and within a series of steep sided tributary valleys provide change with the seasons;
- Where clough woodland is present, it provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the valley sides.

#### **Landscape Condition**

Generally good, with key characteristic elements that make up the river valley generally intact. However, some woodlands are under-managed and some built development has diluted the local vernacular value.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 15g: *Wych Valley*:**

- Countryside;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV) across most of the Wych and Grindley Brook valleys;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

#### **Forces for Landscape Change**

##### **Past change**

- Under-management and/or inappropriate management of some of the woodland;
- Sporadic built development within the valley sides and valley shoulder has left some prominent, sky-lining buildings;
- Conversion of mills to residential property has resulted in some vernacular and character loss;
- Limited management has caused decline in hedgerow boundaries in the past.

##### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 15g: *Wych Valley***

- Decline of important ancient and semi-natural woodland and grassland habitats through under / inappropriate management;
- Climate change could lead to change in ecological community mix;
- Increased incidence of significant rainfall events may have implications for valley floor flooding and riparian erosion.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 15g: Wych Valley***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the valley woodlands, unimproved grassland and wetland habitats, and to **restore** field boundaries.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

- 1.** Support the management of all existing woodlands and pay special regard to the ancient woodland sites and special mosaic communities.
- 2.** Promote traditional woodland management techniques of the valuable valley side woodland to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
- 3.** Support plans to extend woodland cover by planting in woodland blocks, particularly where tree loss has occurred. Where possible, new woodlands should be established adjacent to ancient woodland, or to connect separate wooded blocks, avoiding areas of existing ecological value and ensuring no detriment to historic assets.
- 4.** While wet woodland may be appropriate alongside the river on the valley floor care should be taken to also conserve the mix with pastoral and broken open character of the valley floor.
- 5.** Encourage seasonal grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the floodplain.
- 6.** Conserve and extend characteristic habitats such as unimproved grassland, traditionally managed meadows and riverside trees which contribute to the natural character of the valley.
- 7.** Support recreational use of the landscape, particularly passive recreation, and ensure that any visitor facilities are integrated into their landscape context.
- 8.** Seek to improve boundary management e.g. of hedgerow boundaries.
- 9.** Minimise the impact of built development on the valley sides using native planting of locally appropriate species to create a landscape buffer where appropriate.
- 10.** Use ASCV designation to protect the area of the LCA from inappropriate development.
- 11.** Monitor water levels and manage water abstraction to prevent drying out of wetland habitats.

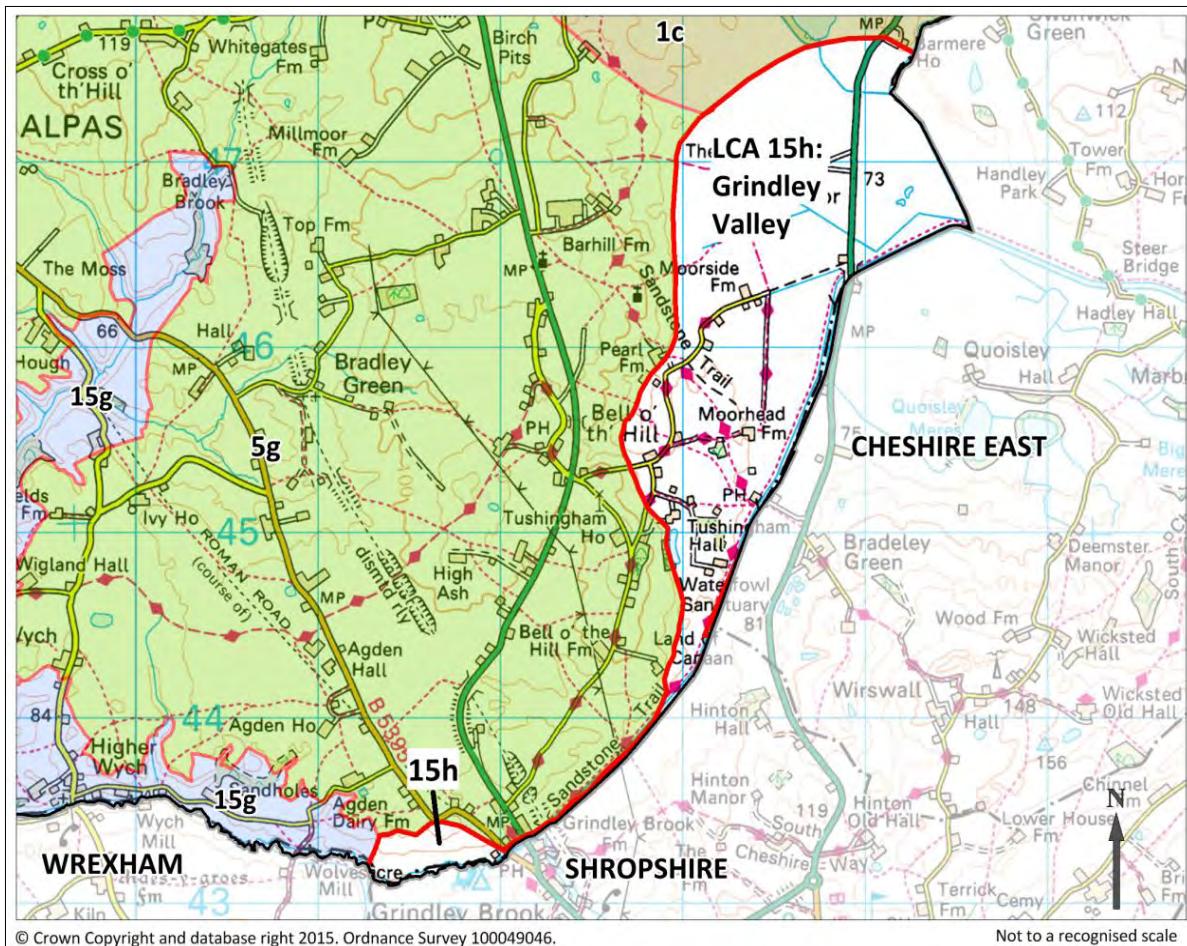
12. Seek to increase opportunities for views into the valley.
13. Planting near watercourses should consist of native species.
14. Control spread of invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Ensure new buildings respect the density and scale of existing settlement, reflecting local vernacular character with appropriate planting to break ridgelines over time.
2. Support river and canal side regeneration that provides opportunities to preserve the industrial archaeology of its small-scale water mills and salt industry and accompanying built heritage.
3. Protect the valley 'crests' from conspicuous built development that would detract from the 'intimate', hidden character of the valley.
4. Conserve the low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length.
5. Invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, should be eradicated prior to any development taking place, and where species are present a method statement should be produced on how to deal with them in accordance with best practice guidance.



## LCA 15h: Grindley Valley



### Location and Boundaries

The **Grindley Valley** is a low-lying, level valley floor and canal corridor which abuts a significant part of the south-eastern boundary of CWaC as it extends into Cheshire East. The southern section of the area is very narrow, effectively restricted to the immediate corridor of the Llangollen Canal where it follows the Grindley Brook watercourse, before it merges into the *Wych Valley* character area to the west. The floodplain is wide and open to the eastern parts of the character area but elsewhere occasionally enclosed due to vegetation and minimal change in relief.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 15h: Grindley Valley***

- Distinct valley floor and floodplain area with a relatively narrow flat pastoral character falling between shallow but steeper and sometimes valley sides
- Alluvium on the valley floor gives rise to waterlogged soils dissected by drainage ditches which generally support permanent pasture including localised unimproved seasonally wet species rich grassland
- Species-rich ditches at Bickley Hall Farm are a local wildlife site
- Recreational opportunities are provided by the towpath alongside the canal and the Bishop Bennet Way and Llwydor Maelor Way marked trails, but the public rights of way network is otherwise limited
- Views are typically restricted to within the valley, for example there are views across the valley from either side, and from the floodplain to the valley sides. The shoulder of the neighbouring valley sides can form a middle distance skyline where longer vistas are possible over hedges and through tree groups
- Generally a quiet, tranquil landscape with a low settlement density. However, the A49 is a main road with noise and movement disturbing the tranquillity
- Settlement is virtually absent from the floodplain; scattered farms are typical of the less steep valley sides
- The canal is the main feature of visual and historical interest and provides some habitat value

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### ***Natural / Physical***

- Mainly large, open, low lying and level pastoral fields defined by tightly clipped low hedges;
- The Llangollen Canal provides a focal corridor of the area but is often inconspicuous because of its low relief and lack of contrast with other field boundaries in short views;
- Localised important linear wildlife habitats along the canal corridor;
- Ditches at Bickley Hall Farm are species-rich and local wildlife site;
- Sporadic concentrations of hedgerow trees across the central areas provide contrasting areas of openness and localised enclosure.

#### ***Cultural / Heritage / Historic***

- Recreational opportunities along the canal corridor, including Bishop Bennet Way, the southern part of the Sandstone Way and Llwydor Maelor Way trails, but elsewhere limited;
- The industrial archaeology formed by the canal with locks and bridges and accompanying built heritage, much of which is listed (such as Willey and Pavey Locks);
- Listed country house at Tushingham Hall;
- Evidence of lost hedgerows across the north of the area;
- Drainage ditches without hedgerows are characteristic across the northern parts of the area;
- Wetlands have high palaeo-environmental potential;
- Some introduction of arable farming across the mainly pastoral plain.

#### ***Built Development and Settlement Pattern***

- Particularly low settlement density, being generally absent from the floodplain with a scattering of farm houses and agricultural buildings concentrated on slightly raised land towards the area's edges, such as The Willey Farm;

- Limited canal-side buildings including public house and former lock-keeper's cottages at Willey Moor Lock;
- The A49 road provides a linear significant transport corridor from south to north;
- The narrow central section of the area passes through the scattered settlement of *Grindley Brook* caravan site, but is atypical of the character area.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The low valley side crests that form skylines from within the valley are visually sensitive with very limited visible built development;
- Visibility is confined to within the floodplain and middle distance valley sides, often through gaps between hedgerow trees;
- Where groups of hedgerow trees are found, visibility across and out of the area can be significantly restricted in the absence of any variation in relief;
- Where groups of hedgerow trees are present they provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the low valley sides;
- Low settlement density results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length, although interrupted by road noise from the A49.

#### **Landscape Condition**

Partly eroded, with key characteristic elements that make up the river valley generally in mixed condition, such as lost or gappy hedges with drainage ditches retained.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 15h: *Grindley Valley*:**

- Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of regional and / or local importance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

#### **Forces for Landscape Change**

##### **Past change**

- Loss of hedgerows across the floodplain with increase in field size;
- Some iterative erosion of vernacular character of the limited built stock in the area, such as at Willey Moor Lock Tavern;
- Evidence of arable land use replacing some pastoral uses on the flood plain.

##### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 15h: *Grindley Valley***

- Limited settlement suggests that future built change is unlikely;
- Large modern agricultural buildings can be prominent where vistas are possible;
- Climate change could lead to loss change from pastoral to arable predominance, or changes to the canal corridor habitats;
- Canal bank erosion through on-going barge and leisure craft traffic;
- Deterioration of wetland habitats.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 15h: Grindley Valley***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the canal corridor and vegetation and unimproved grassland with wetland habitats, and to **restore** hedgerows and replace lost hedgerow trees.

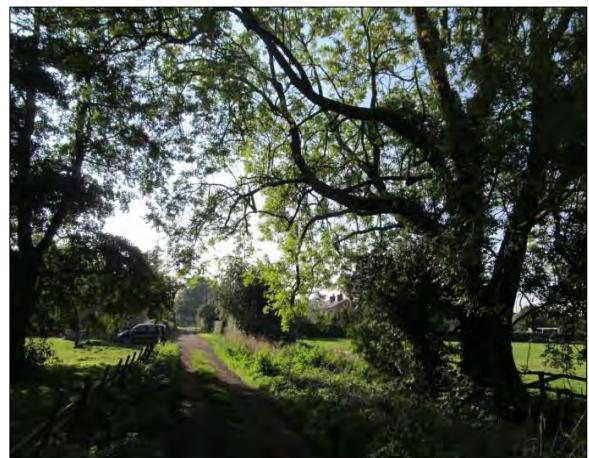
### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Support the management of all existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Promote traditional hedgerow management on the flood plain.
2. Support plans to extend hedgerow tree planting, particularly to the north of the area.
3. Care should be taken not to block the line of the valley floor by extensive planting.
4. Encourage reversion of arable back to pasture on the floodplain. Encourage seasonal grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the floodplain.
5. Restore and extend characteristic floodplain habitats such as unimproved grassland, traditionally managed meadows, and riverside/canal side trees which would contribute to a more natural character of the floodplain.
6. Support recreational use of the landscape, particularly passive recreation, and ensure that any visitor facilities are integrated into their landscape context.
7. Conserve existing industrial and heritage features associated with the canal corridor.
8. Monitor water levels and manage water abstraction to prevent drying out of wetland habitats.
9. Planting near watercourses should consist of native species.
10. Control spread of invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Support localised, sensitive river and canal side regeneration that provides opportunities to preserve the industrial archaeology formed by the canal with its, locks, sluices, and accompanying built heritage.
2. Protect the valley 'crests' from conspicuous built development that would detract from the tranquil and deep rural character of the valley.

3. Where feasible, manage new agricultural built development to restrict prominence on the flood plain.
4. Conserve the low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape.
5. Conserve the undeveloped character of the floodplain – this part of the valley is generally unsuitable for built development and would be a risk from flooding.
6. Invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, should be eradicated prior to any development taking place, and where species are present a method statement should be produced on how to deal with them in accordance with best practice guidance.



## LCA 15i: Gowy Valley



### Location and Boundaries

The **Gowy Valley** is a narrow, linear and elongated river corridor landscape which extends over 20km from the CWaC boundary with Cheshire East near Tilston Lock to the urban fringe of Ellesmere Port to the north-west. The southern parts of the character area which initially run on an east-west orientation are characterised by steep and semi-enclosed shallow valley sides within which the Shropshire Union Canal and Chester to Crewe railway line runs, whilst to the north, as the area takes a south-east to north-west direction, the valley loses most of its incision and is weakly defined by topographical features, with subtle drainage and field patterns defining extent.

### **Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 15i: *Gowy Valley***

- A transitional river corridor landscape where the small watercourse evolves from distinct valley profile to a weak visual feature within a wider *Cheshire Plain West* landscape
- In places across its northern extent the river becomes almost indiscernible in the landscape as it is managed, embanked and dispersed across a network of drains and cuts, particularly around Stamford Bridge and Plemstall
- Mixed low hedge and drainage ditch field boundaries, with evidence of boundary loss, resulting in generally large, poorly delineated field pattern
- Ridge and furrow remains in some areas, often associated with late medieval field systems
- Contains the Shropshire Union Canal and railway for its southern parts between Tilston Lock and the aqueduct near Newton-by-Tattenhall
- Shallow but pronounced and rolling valley sides characterise the passage of the river through the Beeston Hills with the canal and railway slightly elevated on the valley sides above the river
- The northern reaches of the area are characterised by open, very low lying pasture and some arable land use, with embanked river channel and an extensive drainage ditch network
- Valley peat on the valley floor gives rise to waterlogged soils which generally support permanent pasture
- Locally important riparian vegetation and wetland habitats
- Trees and woodland is sparse in the area, although more prevalent around small settlements and buildings and along limited stretches of the river as riparian habitat
- Stands of *Black Poplar* trees, one of Britain's rarest native tree species
- Public footpaths alongside the canal and riverside in places provide recreational opportunities
- To the south of the area views are typically restricted to within the river valley, for example there are views across the valley from either side, and from the transport corridors on the valley sides. The top of the valley side generally forms a skyline between Tilston and Huxley
- To the northern reaches open vistas in all directions become possible over open and sometimes bleak drained landscape
- To the northern elements of the area the M56 motorway and the oil refinery complex at Stanlow dominate views out of the area with few screening elements in the landscape to mitigate the visual impact
- Minerals extraction and landfill at Wimbolds Trafford
- Away from its northern parts, it is generally a quiet, tranquil landscape with a low settlement density. However, railway and canal infrastructure provides built features and movement as well as industrial heritage value
- Water management features associated with mills and drainage are significant heritage assets in their own right
- Historic bridges punctuate the valley, such as at Huckenhull Bridge and Bridge Trafford
- Significant settlement is generally absent from the area, except at locks across the south and farmsteads to the northern reaches

### **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

#### **Natural / Physical**

- Extensive drained farmland with complex drainage network;
- River course as a subtle or inconspicuous feature in the landscape over much of its length due to absence of riparian trees and low changes in relief;
- Wide open, windswept and flat landscape from Huxley northwards;

- Noticeable scarcity of trees and hedgerows across the wider character area, particularly to the northern parts;
- Locally important riparian vegetation and wetland habitats (e.g. Gowy Meadows and Ditches, Stapleford Meadows and Brook Hole local wildlife sites); Gowy Meadows have high palaeo-environmental potential;
- Extensive Cheshire Wildlife Trust managed nature reserve at Thornton-le-Moors;
- Stands of *Black Poplar* trees, one of Britain's rarest native tree species;
- A strongly pastoral character of the floodplain with grazing cattle common;
- The transition from a naturalistic, intricate meandering course of the River Gowy in the south to an engineered and managed river course north from Huxley;
- Complex rolling slopes of the valley sides across the southern reaches of the area, where trees and hedges marginally more prevalent.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- Recreational opportunities along the public rights of way within the river and canal corridor, including parts of Bishop Bennett's trail, and fishing ponds at Trafford Bridge;
- Leisure craft navigation along the canal;
- The industrial archaeology formed by the Shropshire Union Canal in the south, with its locks, sluices and accompanying built heritage, much of which is listed, such as Wharton's Lock and Dale's Bridge;
- Drainage and water management features such as sluices and weirs across the northern reaches of the river's course;
- Roman and medieval historic features including the twin packhorse bridges at Hockenhull Platts and the Scheduled Monuments of the moated sites at Foulk Stapleford and Lower Huxley;
- Ridge and furrow remains in some areas, often associated with late medieval field systems;
- Former waterside mills such as the listed Mill Farm;
- St Peters Church, Plemstall, stands alone as one of the few buildings on an island of higher land in the flood plain.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Very low density of scattered farms and former mills reflect the flood plain influence;
- Buildings occasionally found on the shallow valley sides such as farms and former mills, and at historic crossing points such as Stamford Bridge;
- Increasing influence of infrastructure and industrial facilities to the northern reaches of the area including overhead pylons and power lines, the M56 and Stanlow Refinery;
- Important and historic infrastructure and buildings associated with the canal corridor, including the aqueduct west of Williamson's Bridge;
- Absence of transport infrastructure running within the valley from north to south.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The valley side crests that form skylines from within the valley and are visually sensitive at the southern reaches of the area as it runs east to west;
- Visibility across the floodplain in the northern and central parts of the area is generally unrestricted as a consequence of an absence of significant hedgerows or vegetation, but restricted by an absence of elevated viewpoints across it from within the area;
- Low settlement density results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length (particularly south of the A56);
- In places an open and melancholic landscape with a sense of remoteness and exposure due to absence of enclosing features or vegetation;

- Dramatic views from the southern reaches of the area to the twin castles and sandstone ridge at Beeston and Peckforton (in Cheshire East);
- Northern parts of the area are significantly influenced by the movement, lighting and noise generated by major transport infrastructure including the M56 M53 and railways;
- Open landscape to the north provides limited opportunities to accept change;
- Where woodland is present, it provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the lower valley sides.

### **Landscape Condition**

Generally intact, although the character is of an open, altered and relatively feature-free landscape where some industrial elements dominate. Key characteristic elements that make up the river valley itself are however generally intact.

### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 15i: *Gowy Valley*:**

- Countryside;
- Green Belt (northern areas);
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

### **Forces for Landscape Change**

#### **Past change**

- Historic river channel management and extensive drainage of former estuarine marsh;
- Significant transport infrastructure cross the valley to the north and running within it to the south;
- Visually and perceptually dominant influence of industry and traffic noise across the northern areas;
- Past minerals and subsequent landfill use in northern parts of the valley has resulted in the artificial raising of land in places;
- Evidence of pastoral land use replacing some arable across the north of the valley.

#### **Potential future change/ key issues affecting LCA 15i: *Gowy Valley***

- Encroachment of industrial infrastructure into the area from the northern urban areas;
- Extension and alteration to major transport corridors;
- Climate change could lead to changes to water flows, hydrological sensitivity and habitats of the drained valley;
- Location within The Mersey community Forest is may result in pressure for further tree planting which might not be appropriate in landscape terms;
- Changes to river bank management and rewetting land under agri-environmental schemes;
- Localised deterioration of wetland habitats, wet grassland etc. through drainage and in-fill plus nutrient run-off from surrounding farmland;
- Loss of distinctive openness.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 15i: Gowy Valley***

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the drained farmland, semi-improved grassland and wetland habitats, and to **restore** degraded landscape areas of former minerals sites whilst preserving the unique character of the valley.

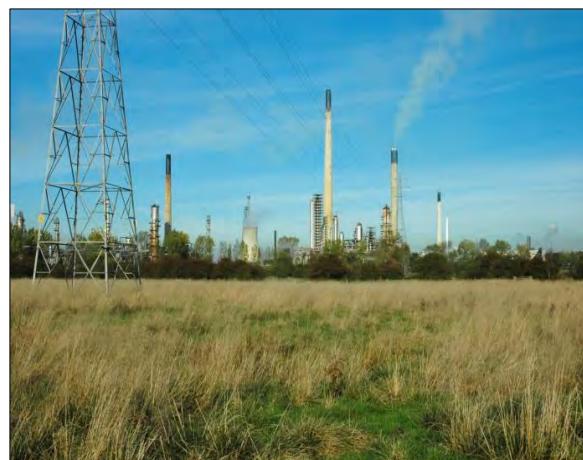
### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Support the management of existing semi-improved species rich grassland habitats.
2. Ensure any proposals to extend woodland under Mersey Community Forest programme respond appropriately to the open character of the Gowy valley landscape character by planting on the northern boundary where screening of Stanlow Refinery will be facilitated, or is restricted to the necessary management and restoration of the limited but existing woodland, such as at Foxey Wood. Woodland creation should ensure no detriment to historic assets, should avoid planting on areas of existing ecological value and should be distant from habitat important for ground nesting birds due to the risk of encouraging predation of chicks.
3. Avoid inappropriate enclosure of fields by non-characteristic hedges.
4. Encourage reversion of arable back to pasture on the floodplain. Encourage seasonal grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the floodplain and encourage grassland habitats.
5. Conserve, extend and seek to reconnect characteristic floodplain habitats such as semi-improved grassland, traditionally managed meadows, riverside trees (particularly Black Poplar) that contribute to the distinctive and natural character of the floodplain.
6. Support recreational use of the landscape, particularly passive recreation on the Public Rights of Way network, and ensure that any visitor facilities are low key, unobtrusive and integrated into their landscape context.
7. Conserve existing industrial and heritage features associated with the canal and railways.
8. Monitor water levels and manage water abstraction to prevent drying out of wetland habitats. Refrain from further drainage of grasslands.
9. Planting near watercourses should consist of native species.

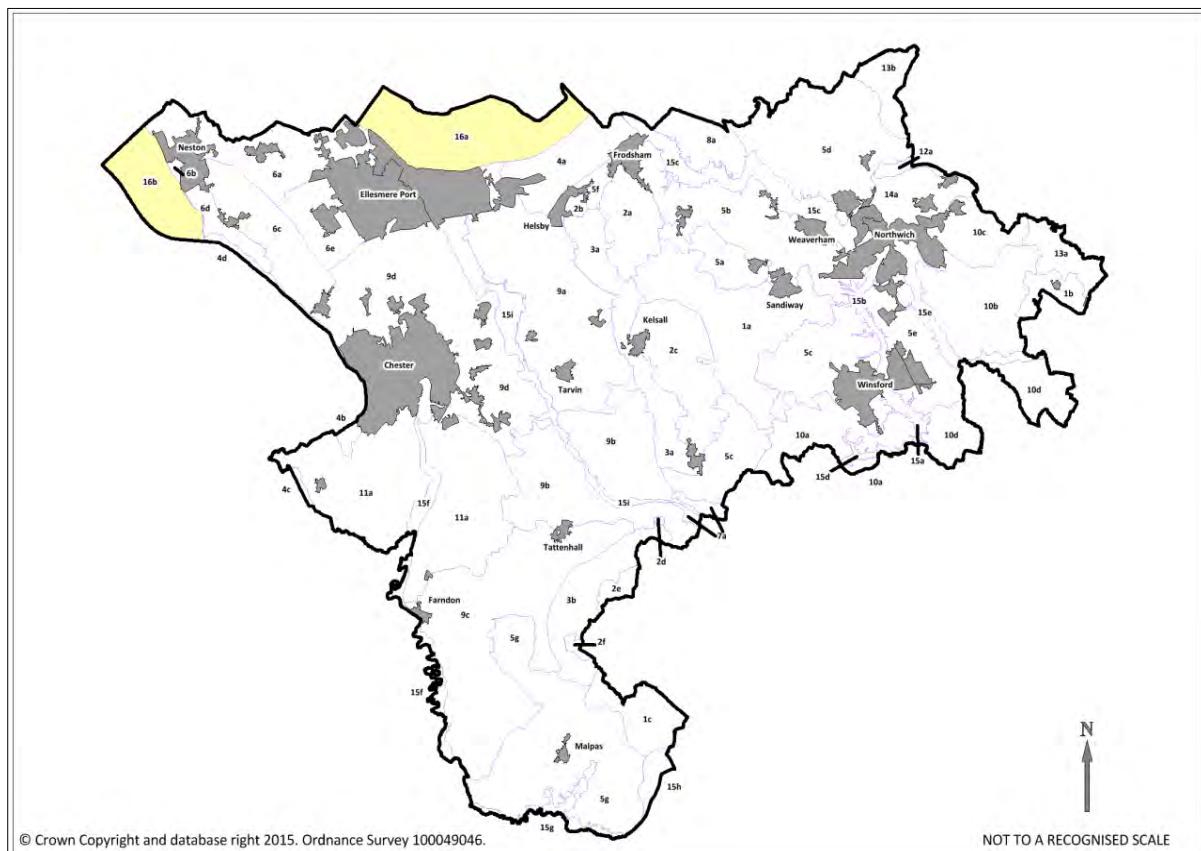
**10. Control spread of invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.**

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

- 1. In southern reaches, support canal side regeneration that provides opportunities to preserve the industrial archaeology formed by the Shropshire Union Canal with its locks, bridges, aqueduct and accompanying built heritage.**
- 2. Protect the valley from conspicuous built development that would detract from the open and undeveloped character of the valley.**
- 3. Where small scale new build development is appropriate, soften the visual impact by limited planting of native species such as Black Poplar, Alder and Willow.**
- 4. Conserve the low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length, particularly between Huxley and Bridge Trafford.**
- 5. Conserve the undeveloped character of the floodplain – this part of the valley is generally unsuitable for built development and would be a risk from flooding. Avoid the use of the floodplain for urban expansion from neighbouring settlements.**
- 6. Seek the undergrounding of major power lines across the north of the area which present significant visual intrusion across the open and empty landscape.**
- 7. Invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, should be eradicated prior to any development taking place, and where species are present a method statement should be produced on how to deal with them in accordance with best practice guidance.**



# LCT 16: MUDFLATS AND SALTMARSH



## General Description

This is a landscape character type of large tracts of intertidal mudflats and saltmarsh within the Dee and Mersey Estuaries which partially define the northern fringes of CWaC. Both are bird habitats of international importance. Estuary marsh within Cheshire is used for wildfowling and stock grazing. It has a very open aspect and due to spring tide flooding, trees are totally absent. These are flat, open areas which afford views of the estuarine landscape and beyond e.g. to the Clwydian Hills and Liverpool.

## Visual Character

This is a dramatic, large scale landscape with long distance panoramic views extending across the vast expanse of both the Dee Estuary and River Mersey towards the far shores. At low tides the full extent of the mud flats and channels is visible from a few locations but most vantage points provide views over a green expanse of salt marsh with open water a considerable distance beyond. Urban development and massive industrial structures are visible on the shores of both character areas. Monolithic structures and chimneys serve as distinctive landmarks when viewed across an empty expanse of water and mudflats.

## Physical Influences

Chester Pebble Beds and Kinnerton Sandstone provide the underlying solid geology. This is overlain by marine and alluvial deposition influenced by tidal and estuarine activity, which has led to the formation of saltmarsh and mudflats. Soils are calcareous sandy and alluvial gley soils which include finely divided marine shell fragments. It occurs at an average elevation of approximately 5m AOD.

Both estuaries provide habitats for internationally and nationally important numbers of waders and wildfowl as well as providing a staging post for migrating birds and are designated as SSSIs and also Special Protection Areas (SPA) with the Dee also a Special Area for Conservation (SAC). There is a rich diversity of waders and wildfowl found in the estuaries such as the teal, shelduck, oyster catcher and redshank.

Flora is generally restricted to cord grass (*Spartina angelica*) and other, native saltmarsh plants confined to a narrow strip along the shore in the Mersey Estuary but the Dee Estuary has a large expanse of saltmarsh.

Both estuaries have palaeo-environmental potential.

### ***Cultural Influences***

This is a character type that has grown and developed its form over time. For example, the sea wall at Parkgate delineates the former coast line before the rapid silting of the Dee Estuary following the canalisation of the River Dee in the 18th century.

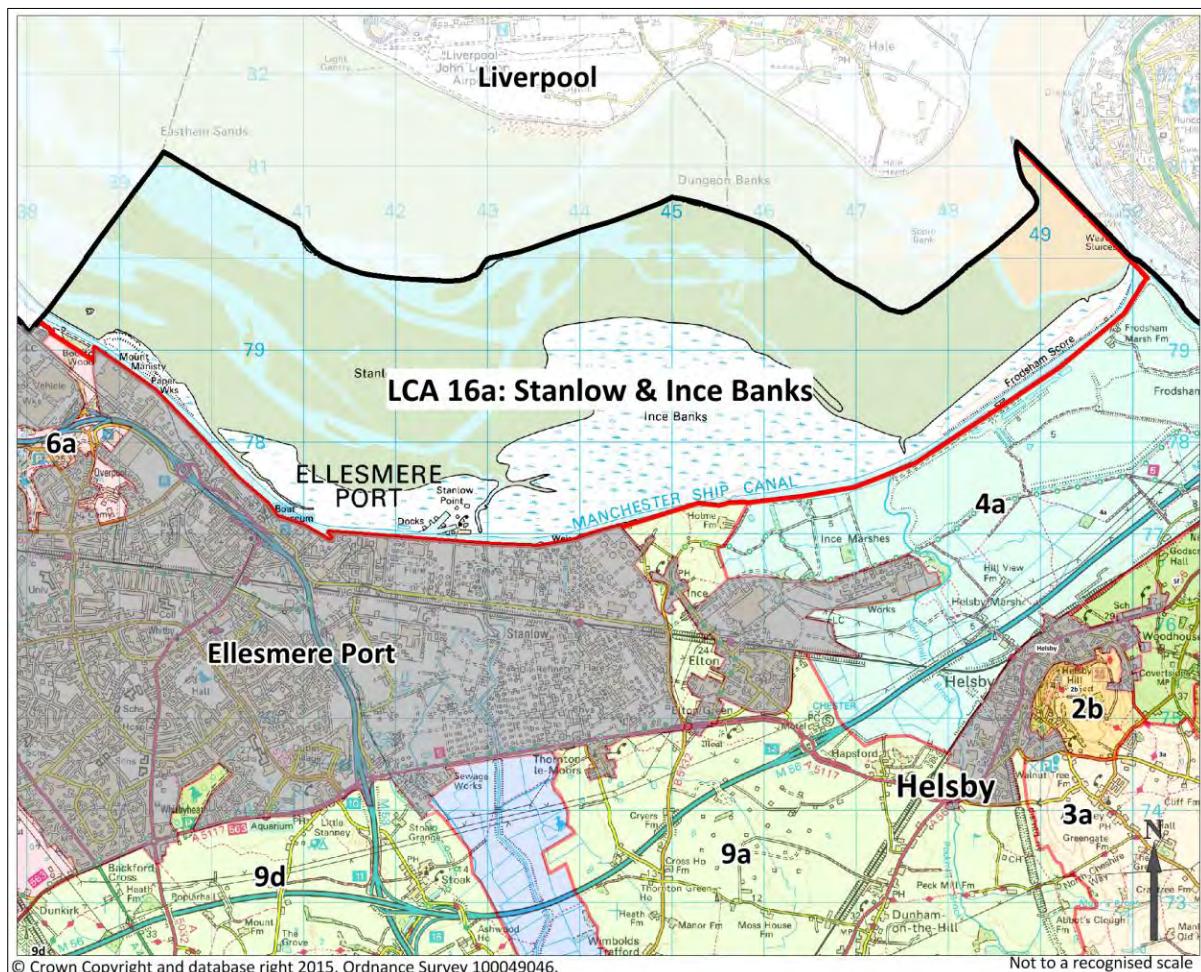
This is a peripheral, marginal landscape character type that has been utilised in the past because of those very reasons - a Cistercian monastery and monastic grange were founded in the medieval period on Stanlow Point. This isolated location suited the needs of the Cistercians who sought to remove themselves from the rest of society and to subsist on sheep rearing. It is also no coincidence that the Burton Marsh in the Dee Estuary was the site of a WWII bomb decoy, the purpose of which was to imitate settlement and cause attacking aircraft to mistake them as their targets. The southern end of the Dee Estuary across the border in Wales is still used by the military as a rifle range.

There are **two Landscape Character Areas** within LCT 16:

**16a: Stanlow and Ince banks**

**16b: Dee Estuary**

## LCA 16a: Stanlow & Ince Banks



### Location and Boundaries

**Stanlow and Ince Banks** landscape character area is an area of inter-tidal sand and mudflats and salt-marsh along the southern bank of the Mersey Estuary, and includes part of the Manchester Ship Canal. Its southern boundary is formed by an artificial bank which separates it from the Reclaimed Salt Marsh of the *Frodsham, Helsby & Lordship Marsh*. It extends beyond the administrative borough boundary into and along the Mersey Estuary.

### **Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 16a: Stanlow and Ince Banks**

- A flat, open and expansive landscape of mudflats, sandflats and saltmarsh alongside the Mersey Estuary
- Strong interconnection and intervisibility with LCT 4 *Drained Marsh* to the south
- A naturalistic landscape with winding channels forming intricate patterns in the salt marsh
- Excavation of the Manchester Ship Canal in the later 19th century resulted in the creation of the Stanlow and Ince Banks, an area of embanked land at the southern edge of the mudflats
- A dynamic landscape composed of rising and falling tides, constantly shifting sediments and flocks of over-wintering birds
- Recognised as an internationally important site for wildfowl (protected by SSSI, SPA and Ramsar designations)
- A remote and peaceful landscape relatively undisturbed by humans and of international importance for nature conservation. The area of saltmarsh between Stanlow Point in the west and Frodsham Score in the east is grazed
- No public access to this remote area, although there is a landing stage on the canal at Frodsham Score to the east of the area
- Devoid of settlement
- Long, uninterrupted views and large skies
- Industrial works at Ince Marshes, Halton and Rocksavage form a striking backdrop
- Panoramic views across the estuary from Helsby Hill (above Helsby) and Beacon Hill (above Frodsham)

### **Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value**

#### **Natural / Physical**

- Extensive area of open inter-tidal sand and mudflats and salt-marsh;
- Stanlow and Ince Banks lie above a solid bedrock of Chester Pebble Beds, the erosional base of the Sherwood Sandstones;
- Extensive alluvial deposits of sand, silt and clay left by the Mersey River give rise to the characteristics the landscape of Stanlow and Ince Banks and its wider setting - the Mersey Estuary;
- Internationally important, SPA and Ramsar overwintering habitats and staging post for migrating birds in spring and autumn;
- In winter the estuary supports large numbers of wildfowl and waders which feed on the rich invertebrate fauna of the inter-tidal sediments as well as plants and seeds from the salt-marsh and adjacent agricultural land;
- Palaeo-environmental potential of the estuary;
- Atypical canal-side, linear ridge of raised embankment at Mount Manisty with some scrub and self set pioneer woodland evident north of Ellesmere Port.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The Manchester Ship Canal forms the southern boundary of the area, constructed in the later 19th century to connect Manchester directly to the sea;
- Excavation of the canal resulted in the creation of Stanlow and Ince Banks, embanked land at the southern edge of the mudflats;
- Very limited public access;
- Site of former Cistercian abbey at Stanlow Point is a Scheduled Monument.

### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Total absence of settlement;
- Some very limited infrastructure in place in relation to the navigation and management of the ship canal.

### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The flat landform and long views contribute to the perception of a large scale, exposed landscape;
- The natural patterns of sand and mud create an organic pattern that contributes to the sense of naturalness associated with this remote and windswept landscape;
- The flat, low-lying area in itself is not visually prominent and it does not have a prominent skyline;
- The flat open nature of the landscape facilitates extensive views across the flats and estuary;
- Tides and light on the wet and dry mosaic of land and sea provide shifting visual appearance of the Banks;
- The embankment at Frodsham Score facilitates views over the Estuary. There are also panoramic views across the estuary from *Helsby Hill Sandstone Ridge* (above Helsby) and Beacon Hill (above Frodsham) on the *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge*;
- The open character means there is little opportunity for screening any large scale elements or for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves being highly visible - making it a visually sensitive landscape.
- The absence of settlement and lack of public access means there are few sensitive visual receptors within the area. However, adjacent landscapes overlook the estuary.

### **Landscape Condition**

The Mersey Estuary is highly dynamic and there are continuous shifts in the transport and distribution of sediments and therefore the development of habitats, but visual balance of features remains similar.

### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 16a: Stanlow and Ince Banks:**

- Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

## ***Forces for Landscape Change***

### **Past change**

- A highly dynamic landscape where natural tidal forces and some ship canal management alters the locally detailed, visual mosaic of the Banks, but maintain their balance of features.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 16a: *Stanlow and Ince Banks***

- Activities or developments in adjacent areas could result in siltation and deposition on intertidal habitats;
- Activities or developments in adjacent areas could impact on the visual amenity of the LCA;
- Recreational use of the landscape and surrounds could result in physical damage through abrasion caused by the wash from boats or by trampling from walkers;
- Industrial, transport and recreational activities in adjacent areas may result in noise and visual disturbance;
- In this heavily industrialised area, pollution arising upstream, or seepage from old landfill sites, could adversely affect the habitats of the Banks;
- The large numbers of outfalls around the Mersey Estuary could result in nutrient and organic loading in the Estuary that may affect habitats of the Stanlow and Ince Banks;
- Hydro dynamic changes in the estuaries will lead to changes in the pattern of erosion and deposition;
- Climate change – sandbanks, mudflats and salt marshes are vulnerable to sea level rise due to increased storm frequency, particularly where they lie in front of flood defences;
- Susceptible to artificial enrichment by sewage pollution, discharges from agriculture, industry and urban areas;
- Alien species.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 16a: Stanlow & Ince Banks***

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** the naturalistic and dynamic qualities of this landscape, relatively undisturbed by humans.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

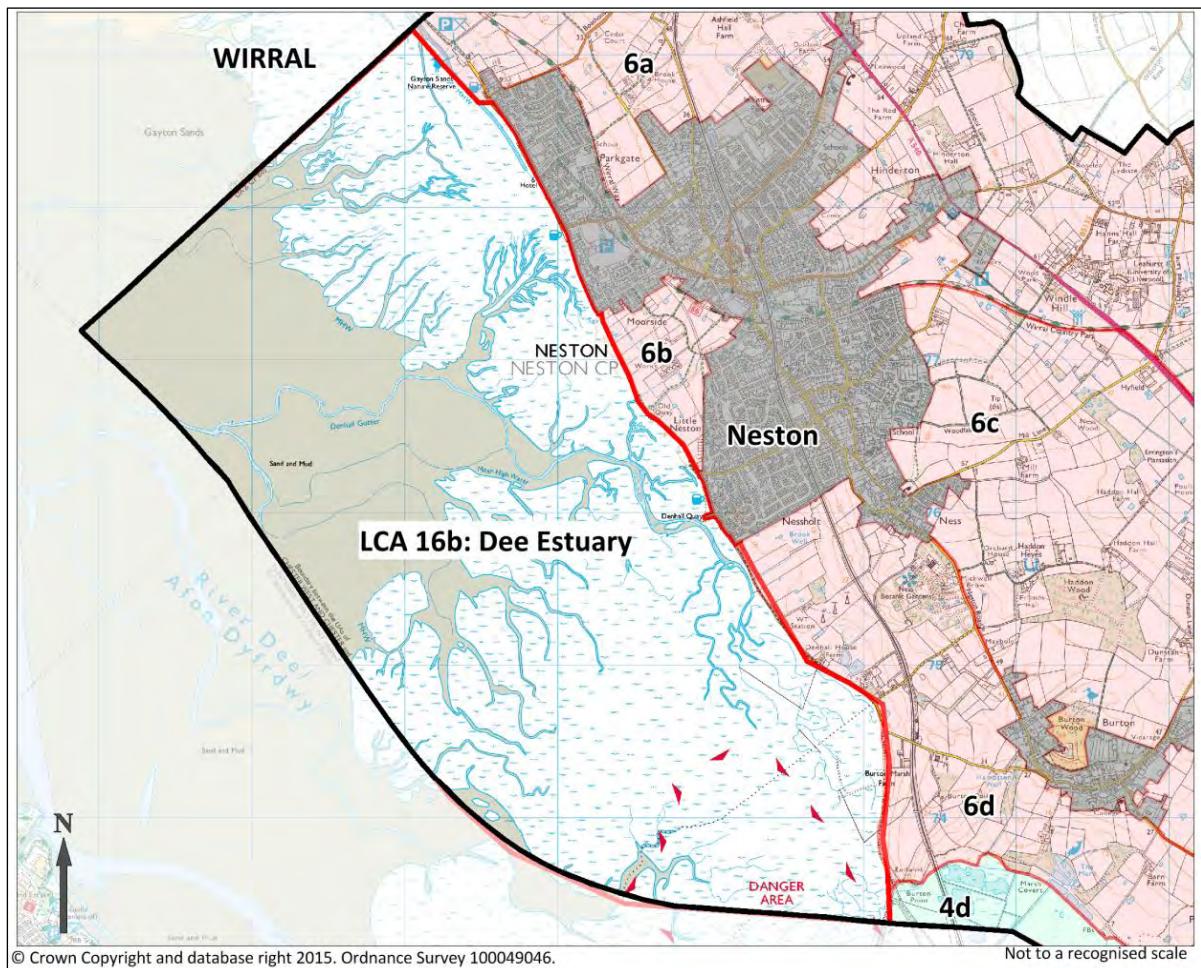
1. Conserve and enhance coastal and estuarine habitats.
2. Monitor the area to ensure activities or developments in adjacent areas do not result in siltation and deposition on the inter-tidal habitats of the Frodsham Score.
3. Ensure abrasion caused by the wash from boats does not affect the inter-tidal habitats and salt-marsh in this area.
4. Ensure pollution arising upstream, or seepage from old landfill sites, does not adversely affect the habitats of the Stanlow and Ince Banks.
5. Minimise nutrient and organic loading in the Estuary upstream.
6. Conserve the remote character of the area.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Conserve the open, undeveloped character of this area.
2. Minimise noise and visual disturbance arising from industrial, transport and recreational activities in adjacent areas.



## LCA 16b: Dee Estuary



### Location and Boundaries

The **Dee Estuary** landscape character area is an area of inter-tidal mudflats and salt-marsh along the western coastline of the Wirral peninsula. Its eastern boundary is sometimes defined by embankment and walling where it meets permanently dry land at high tide level. It extends northwards beyond the administrative borough boundary into The Wirral.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 16b: Dee Estuary***

- A flat, open and expansive landscape of mudflats, and saltmarsh alongside the Dee Estuary
- A naturalistic landscape with winding channels forming intricate patterns in the salt marsh
- A dynamic landscape composed of rising and falling tides, constantly shifting sediments and flocks of over-wintering birds
- Recognised as an internationally important site for wildfowl (protected by SSSI, SPA, SAC and Ramsar designations). It is largely owned and managed by the RSPB
- A remote and peaceful landscape relatively undisturbed by humans and of international importance for nature conservation
- Public access is largely limited to the edge of the area (access is not actively encouraged by the RSPB; MOD firing range at the southern end)
- Devoid of settlement
- Large skies with long, uninterrupted views out to sea and to the Welsh hills
- Industrial works at Shotton and the Dee Bridge form a striking backdrop to the south
- Inter-tidal range has decreased historically following the canalisation of the Lower Dee with silting of the estuary, with only the highest tides inundating the whole marsh
- Historic port and seaside resort of Parkgate.

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### ***Natural / Physical***

- Extensive area of open inter-tidal sand and mudflats and salt-marsh;
- Extensive alluvial deposits of sand, silt and clay left by the River Dee give rise to the distinctive characteristics the landscape of the Dee Estuary;
- Extensive, complex system of gullies and streams emptying to the Dee from the eastern edge of the area;
- Internationally important, SPA, SAC and Ramsar overwintering habitats and staging post for migrating birds in spring and autumn;
- Particularly important for populations of black-tailed godwit, grey plover, oystercatcher, curlew, pintail, teal, shelduck and redshank;
- In winter the estuary supports large numbers of wildfowl and waders which feed on the rich invertebrate fauna of the inter-tidal sediments as well as plants and seeds from the salt-marsh and adjacent agricultural land;
- Visible succession of pioneer vegetation colonizing the mudflats through to lower, middle and upper saltmarsh and on to brackish and freshwater transitions with reed beds to the top of the shore;
- Palaeo-environmental potential of the estuary;
- Landscape type extends to the north into Wirral and to the south and west into north Wales.

#### ***Cultural / Heritage / Historic***

- Historic trading port and ferry crossing associations at Parkgate and Neston;
- Canalisation of the lower Dee has influenced an increased rate of land reclamation from the estuary;
- Historically, Parkgate was an important resort in the 18<sup>th</sup> century for sea bathing;
- Public access essentially limited to the edge of the area;
- MOD live firing range to the southern end of the LCA restricts access here;

- Significant built heritage sites lie immediately beyond and along the landward boundary but outside the LCA.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- Total absence of settlement;
- Some limited historic infrastructure in place in relation the sea wall at Parkgate.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The flat open landform and long views contribute to the perception of a large scale, exposed landscape;
- The natural patterns of sand, mud, gullies, channels and vegetation successions create an organic pattern that contribute to the sense of naturalness associated with this remote and windswept landscape;
- Abrupt transition from landward side LCAs to the mudflats and estuary;
- This is a flat, open low-lying area with extensive views to the distant seaward horizon and closer, prominent and dramatic Welsh hills;
- Tides and natural light on the wet and dry mosaic of land and sea provide shifting visual appearance of the estuary mudflats;
- The sloping landscape of landward LCAs (Wirral, Neston, Burton to Shotwick - amongst others) afford extensive views into and across the area;
- The open character means there is little opportunity for screening any large scale elements or for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves being highly visible - making it a visually sensitive landscape.

#### **Landscape Condition**

The **Dee Estuary** is highly dynamic and there are continuous shifts in the transport and distribution of sediments and dependent development of habitats, but the visual balance of features remains similar and in good condition.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 16b: *Dee Estuary*:**

- Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Flood risk and water management.

## **Forces for Landscape Change**

### **Past change**

- A highly dynamic landscape where natural tidal forces and navigation management in the River Dee alters the locally detailed, visual mosaic of the mudflats, but maintain their balance of features;
- Loss of the beach at Parkgate through introduction and colonisation of cord grass in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 16b: *Dee Estuary***

- Salt marsh continues to accrete;
- Activities or developments in adjacent areas could result in siltation and deposition on intertidal habitats;
- Recreational use of the landscape and surrounds could result in physical damage through abrasion caused by the wash from boats or by trampling from walkers;
- Industrial, transport and recreational activities in adjacent areas may result in noise and visual disturbance;
- In this heavily industrialised area, pollution arising upstream could adversely affect the habitats of the Banks;
- The large numbers of outfalls around the Dee Estuary could result in nutrient and organic loading in the estuary that may affect habitats;
- Climate change – sandbanks, mudflats and salt marshes are vulnerable to sea level rise due to increased storm frequency, particularly where they lie in front of flood defences.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 16b: Dee Estuary***

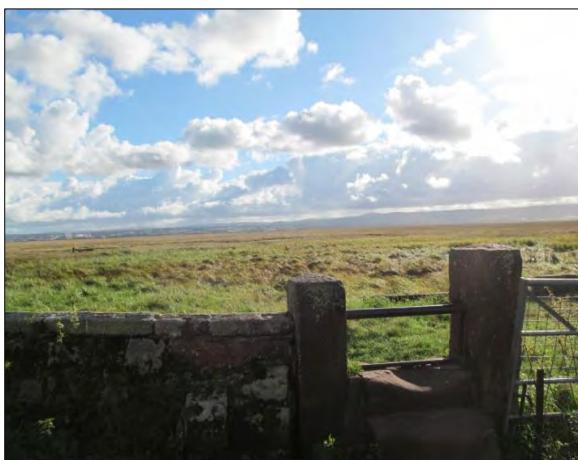
The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** the naturalistic and dynamic qualities of this landscape, relatively undisturbed by human activity.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Conserve and enhance coastal and estuarine habitats.
2. Monitor the area to ensure activities or developments in adjacent areas do not result in siltation and deposition on the inter-tidal habitats of the Dee Estuary.
3. Ensure abrasion caused by the wash from boats or by trampling from walkers does not affect the inter-tidal habitats and salt-marsh in this area.
4. Ensure pollution arising upstream does not adversely affect the habitats of the Dee Estuary.
5. Minimise nutrient and organic loading in the Dee Estuary upstream.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Conserve the open, undeveloped character of this area.
2. Minimise noise and visual disturbance arising from industrial, transport and recreational activities in adjacent areas.



LCT 16: Mudflats and  
Saltmarsh

LCA 16b: *Dee Estuary*