

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

Wirral Landscape Character Assessment

Final report

Prepared by LUC

October 2019



Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

Wirral Landscape Character Assessment

Version	Status	Prepared	Checked	Approved	Date
1.	Draft Final Report	A Knight K Davies	K Davies	K Davies	07.10.2019
2.	Final Report	A Knight	K Davies	K Davies	30.10.2019

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Introduction and Landscape Context

Chapter 1

Introduction and Landscape Context

Structure of this report

1.1 This report is structured as follows:

■ Part 1: Overview

- **Chapter 1: Introduction** presents the background and purpose of the Landscape Character Assessment, existing policy context and relationship to other landscape studies (this chapter).
- **Chapter 2: Methodology for the Landscape Character Assessment** presents a summary of the method and approach to the landscape character assessment.
- **Chapter 3: Formative Influences** looks at the physical and cultural influences that have shaped Wirral's landscape in the past.
- **Chapter 4: Summary of Landscape Issues** looks at the influences which shape the current and future landscape.

■ Part 2: The Landscape Character of Wirral

- Presents an outline of the landscape character of the Borough and the landscape classification and character of Wirral through a series of area profiles.

1.2 The report is supported by the following appendices:

- **Appendix A:** A glossary of terms;
- **Appendix B:** Historic Landscape Character terminology; and
- **Appendix C:** User guide for decision makers.

Background and purpose of the Landscape Character Assessment

1.3 LUC was commissioned in May 2019 to review and refresh Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council's landscape evidence base. This included a requirement to update the Wirral Landscape Character Assessment and Visual Appraisal produced in 2009 by TEP to provide a comprehensive and up to date landscape character assessment for all land outside defined settlements.

1.4 The Wirral Landscape Character Assessment will form part of the evidence base for the Borough's emerging Local Plan. It is intended to both inform work on policy development and development management, guiding development and land management that is sympathetic to local character and the special qualities of the Borough, including encouraging the protection and enhancement of valued landscapes in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019. It is also intended to promote an understanding of how the landscapes of the Borough are changing as a result of a combination of natural, economic and human factors, and how they can be strengthened in response.

1.5 The LCA can be used to consider landscape character when planning any type of change. It is therefore designed to be used by all involved in decisions about proposals for change and development including:

- Landscape architects;
- Developers, members of professional development project teams and other organisations who own or manage land;
- Other professionals involved in assessing the consequences of change on other aspects of the environment;
- Planners and other officers in local government and government agencies who may be the recipients of reports on the consequences of change and development; and
- Politicians, parish councils, local interest groups, amenity societies and the general public who may be involved in decisions about proposals for change and development.

1.6 A User guide is set out in **Appendix C**.

The role of Landscape Character Assessment

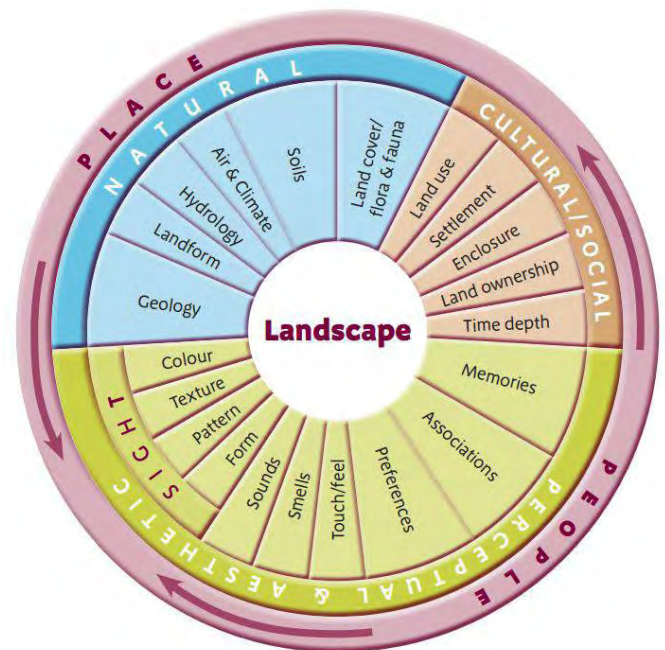
1.7 Landscape character is defined as:

“a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse”¹.

1.8 Landscape character assessment is the process of identifying and describing such variations in character across a landscape – in this case the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral. It also seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of features and attributes (characteristics) that make different landscapes distinctive. The landscape is the result of the interaction between people and the environment that gives an area a local identity. The ‘landscape wheel’ below illustrates how the different natural, cultural and perceptual attributes of a landscape combine to produce character.

1.9 The process of Landscape Character Assessment is described in *“An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment”* (Natural England, October 2014).

1.10 Understanding the character of place and evaluating an area’s defining characteristics is a key component in managing growth sustainably and ensuring that the inherent qualities of Wirral’s landscape can continue to be appreciated. Understanding of character can be used to ensure that any change or development does not undermine whatever is valued or characteristic in a particular landscape.



The ‘landscape wheel’ (Natural England, 2014)

Wirral in context

1.11 Wirral is a metropolitan authority of 160 square kilometres (60 square miles), located on the Wirral Peninsula, a large peninsula between the Dee and Mersey estuaries. Cheshire West and Chester Borough borders Wirral to the south and occupies the remainder of the Wirral Peninsula. The City of Liverpool lies to the east, and Sir y Fflint (Flintshire) to the south-west across the Dee Estuary. The Irish Sea lies to the north. The location and context of the study area is shown on **Figure 1.1**.

1.12 The Borough has a population of 323,235, with a population density of 2,058 people per square kilometre². Urban development is concentrated east of the M53 along the River Mersey extending from Eastham in the south to Wallasey and New Brighton in the north. In the west, development is characterised by a series of suburban settlements and smaller villages including the larger settlements of Caldy, Heswall, Pensby, Hoylake, West Kirby, Moreton and Greasby. The rural environment of Wirral adds significantly to the quality of life enjoyed by both urban and rural residents of the Borough and is a conservable asset for the wider area.

¹ Natural England (2014), An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/691184/landscape-character-assessment.pdf

² Office for National Statistics (2019), Mid-year 2018, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates>

1.13 Wirral is well connected in transport terms. The M53 runs through the centre of the Borough, and railway lines provide connections within the Borough to the rest of Cheshire and Liverpool. These locational factors, combined with the quality of the rural areas and coastline, contribute towards making the area a popular place to live and work.

Policy context

The European Landscape Convention

1.14 The European Landscape Convention (ELC) came into force in the UK in March 2007. It establishes the need to recognise landscape in law; to develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and planning of landscapes; and to establish procedures for the participation of the general public and other stakeholders in the creation and implementation of landscape policies. The ELC definition of 'landscape' recognises that all landscapes matter, be they ordinary, degraded or outstanding:

"Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors"

1.15 The ELC puts emphasis on the whole landscape and all its values and is forward looking in its approach, recognising the dynamic and changing character of landscape. Specific measures promoted by the ELC of direct relevance to this study include:

- The identification and assessment of landscape; and
- Improved consideration of landscape in existing and future sectoral and spatial policy and regulation.

1.16 This updated Landscape Character Assessment will continue to make a key contribution to the implementation of the ELC in Wirral. It helps to reaffirm the importance of landscape, coordinate existing work and guide future work to protect, manage and plan the landscapes of Wirral.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

1.17 The revised NPPF, published in June 2019, states in paragraph 170 that:

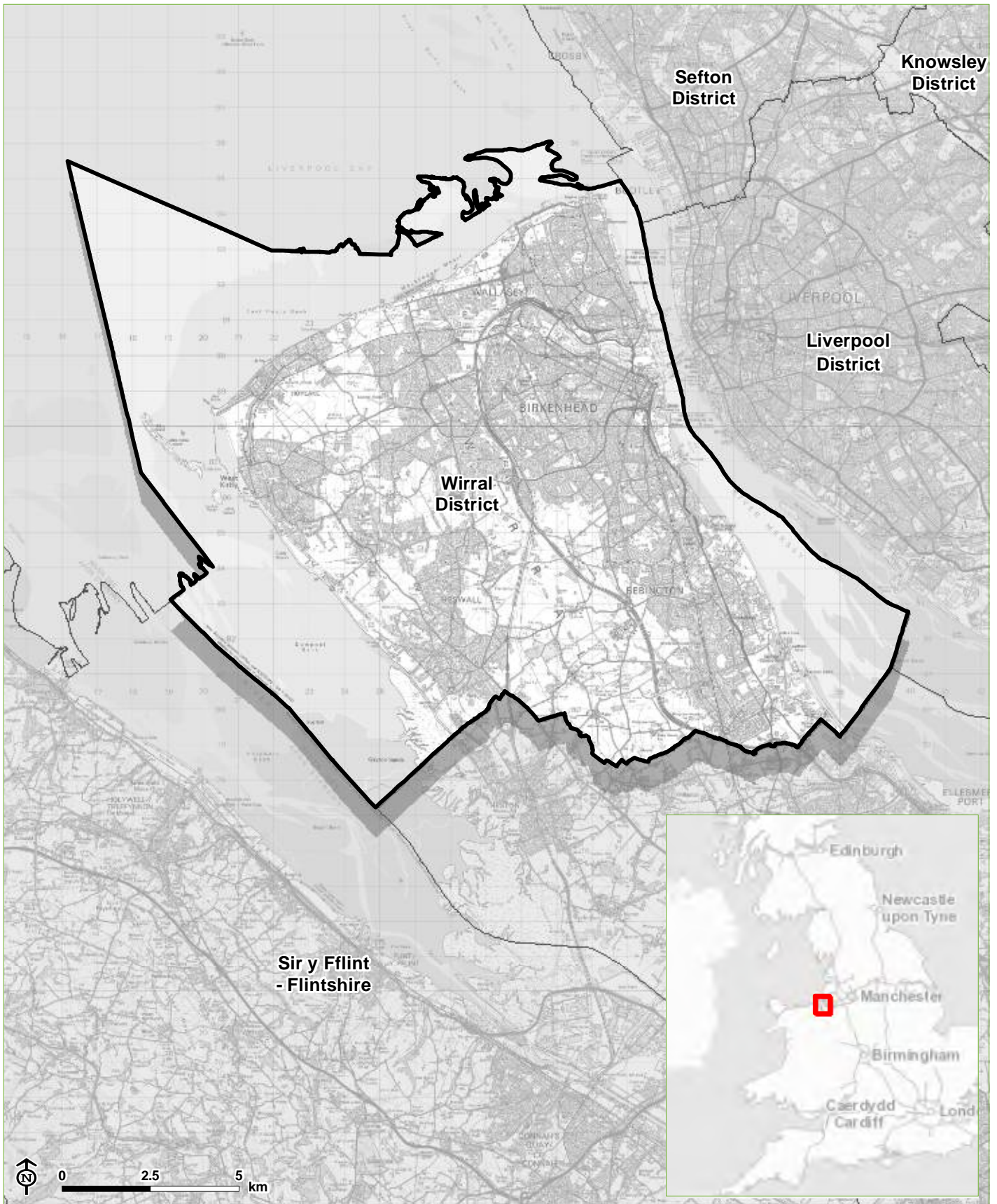
'Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:



...protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality)' (para 170.a)

...recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and the wider benefits from natural capital and

ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland ...' (para 170.b).

1.18 The NPPF is supported by Planning Practice Guidance which recognises the role that Landscape Character Assessment plays in helping to understand the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape.



-  Wirral Borough Boundary
-  Adjacent Local Authority Boundary

Wirral Local Plan
Landscape Assessment



Fig 1.1
Location plan

Existing Policy Context

1.19 The existing local plan, the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) for Wirral was adopted in February 2000. The strategic policies in the UDP will soon be replaced by a new Local Plan. This will update the council's long-term vision, objectives and strategy for the Borough and will identify land allocations for development up to 2035.

1.20 The local landscape is valued and protected by a series of 'saved' UDP policies. There is a general resistance to development in the countryside or protected landscapes which would have an adverse effect on the appearance or character of the landscape.

Green Belt

1.21 Most of the Borough's remaining open land has been designated as Green Belt. The Green Belt in Wirral was adopted by the former Merseyside County Council in 1983. There is a general presumption against inappropriate development within the Green Belt and it remains important in ensuring new development is concentrated in existing urban areas. Green Belt boundaries are however designated with the primary purpose of preventing urban sprawl rather than on the grounds of landscape quality.

1.22 The boundaries of the Green Belt were reviewed and extended in 2000. An Initial Review of the Green Belt was published in September 2018 and as part of the Local Plan evidence base, a further Green Belt study is being undertaken to inform the final content of the emerging Local Plan as part of a wider review of development options, by investigating sites that could potentially be suitable for release from the Green Belt.

Areas of Special Landscape Value

1.23 Landscapes considered to be amongst the most outstanding within the Borough were identified within the UDP in **Proposal LA2**. These included formal landscapes created by former large country estates and rural areas, natural coastal scenery, and wooded slopes related to Wirral's sandstone ridges.

1.24 Four Areas of Special Landscape Value were identified:

- Bidston Hill;
- Dee Coast, including Heswall Dales, Thurstaston Common and Royden Park;
- Caldy Hill, including Stapledon Wood; and

- Thornton Hough.

Areas Requiring Landscape Renewal

1.25 Areas of degraded landscape detract from the image and attractiveness of the Borough. These are of particular importance where they occur as tracts of under-utilised land in prominent locations, visible from major highways, where they have potential to become environmental assets. Three Areas Requiring Landscape Renewal were identified within the UDP in **Proposal LA4**:

- The M53 Corridor and Bidston Moss;
- North Wirral Plain (Moreton); and
- North Wirral Plain (Hoylake).

Landscape policies within adjacent Cheshire West and Chester

1.26 Open countryside overlooking the Dee Estuary which adjoins Wirral in Cheshire West and Chester is designated as An Area of Special County Value for its special landscape character and scenic value. Policy GBC2 Protection of Landscape of Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan (Part Two) Land Allocations and Detailed Policies aims to preserve, enhance and improve public access to Areas of Special County Value.

The Mersey Forest

1.27 The Mersey Forest is part of the National Programme for Community Forests and works in partnership with partners, communities and landowners to bring about change to the character and landscape of Merseyside and Cheshire through increasing woodland to 20% of the area. The work of The Mersey Forest is guided by the Mersey Forest Plan (2014)³ which has 20 overarching policies to get 'more from trees' to help make Merseyside and North Cheshire one of the best places in the country to live. Since The Mersey Forest was established in 1991 woodland cover has doubled from 4% to 8%.

1.28 Within Cheshire West and Chester, adjacent to Wirral, the aspiration is to increase woodland cover to 10- 30%, through the creation of small woodlands. Wirral Council is not a contributing partner to the Mersey Forest. However extensive woodland planting has been undertaken within the Borough along the M53 motorway corridor (in an Area Requiring Landscape Renewal) by the local Groundwork Trust and on former landfill sites at Bidston Moss and Cross Lane,

³ The Mersey Forest (2014), More from trees: The Mersey Forest Plan, https://www.merseyforest.org.uk/The_Mersey_Forest_Plan_web_version_single_new.pdf

Wallasey by the Forestry Commission as part of the Newlands Initiative.

Relationship to published landscape studies

1.29 Landscape Character Assessment can be undertaken at a variety of scales and levels of detail, with the Wirral Landscape Character Assessment included within a hierarchy of landscape character assessment information cascading down from the national to local level.

National level

1.30 At a national level, England is divided into 159 distinct National Character Areas (NCAs). Each is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, history and cultural and economic activity. There are descriptive profiles available for each NCA (published in 2014 by Natural England⁴) setting out information on landscape character, changes in the landscape and an assessment of ecosystem services delivered. Wirral is largely covered by two NCAs: NCA 58 Merseyside Conurbation (which continues east across the Mersey to Liverpool) and NCA 59 Wirral (which continues south into Cheshire).

1.31 The Marine Management Organisation has commissioned strategic-scale seascape assessments to produce a national seascape character map for all England's inshore and offshore areas. This consists of individual Marine Character Areas (MCAs) which cross marine plan areas and administrative boundaries. Wirral is largely covered by MCA 36: Dee and Mersey Estuaries and Coastal Waters (while MCA 01 Dee Estuary covers the Welsh side of the Dee Estuary outside the Wirral Borough boundary).

1.32 National landscape and seascape character areas within Wirral are illustrated in **Figure 1.2**.

NCA 58 Merseyside Conurbation

1.33 This NCA is an urban and suburban landscape based around the city of Liverpool and includes the urban and industrial areas of Birkenhead/ Wirral, to the east of the M53 motorway and the mid-Wirral sandstone ridge. It sits on a low-lying but gently rolling platform, punctuated by low sandstone ridges and bisected by the Mersey Estuary. There is a dense settlement pattern of housing and large-scale industry. Where present, views of the Mersey Estuary provide a visual break between the dense urban conurbations of Liverpool and Birkenhead.

NCA 59 Wirral

1.34 The NCA covers the Wirral peninsula, extending west from the M53 motorway, from the mid-Wirral sandstone ridge to the coast along the Dee Estuary. It is based on the formal landscape of former large country estates, rural areas, natural coastal scenery and wooded sandstone ridges. It is a rich pastoral landscape interspersed with settlements. The field pattern is generally medium-sized with clipped hedgerows, frequent copses and field ponds. In coastal areas, the pattern changes to geometric fields bounded by drainage ditches. Heathland and mixed woodlands are frequent and the coastal scenery along the Dee Estuary has a marked influence over the character of the landscape.

MCA 36: Dee and Mersey Estuaries and Coastal Waters

1.35 This area comprises the Dee and Mersey estuaries, which are related but contrasting, and the coastal waters that link them. The Mersey Estuary is characterised by urban development and docklands and provides shipping and access inland at the Manchester Ship Canal. The Dee Estuary is much less developed and is characterised by tidal mud and sand flats backed by dunes and saltmarsh.

Local level

1.36 Landscape does not stop at administrative boundaries but continues seamlessly into surrounding boroughs. This assessment therefore sits alongside the Landscape Character Assessment of the adjacent authority of Cheshire West and Chester.

Cheshire West and Chester LCA (2016)

1.37 The Cheshire West and Chester Landscape Character Assessment (2016) characterises the land adjacent to Wirral as LCT6: Enclosed Farmland and LCT16: Mudflats and Saltmarsh.

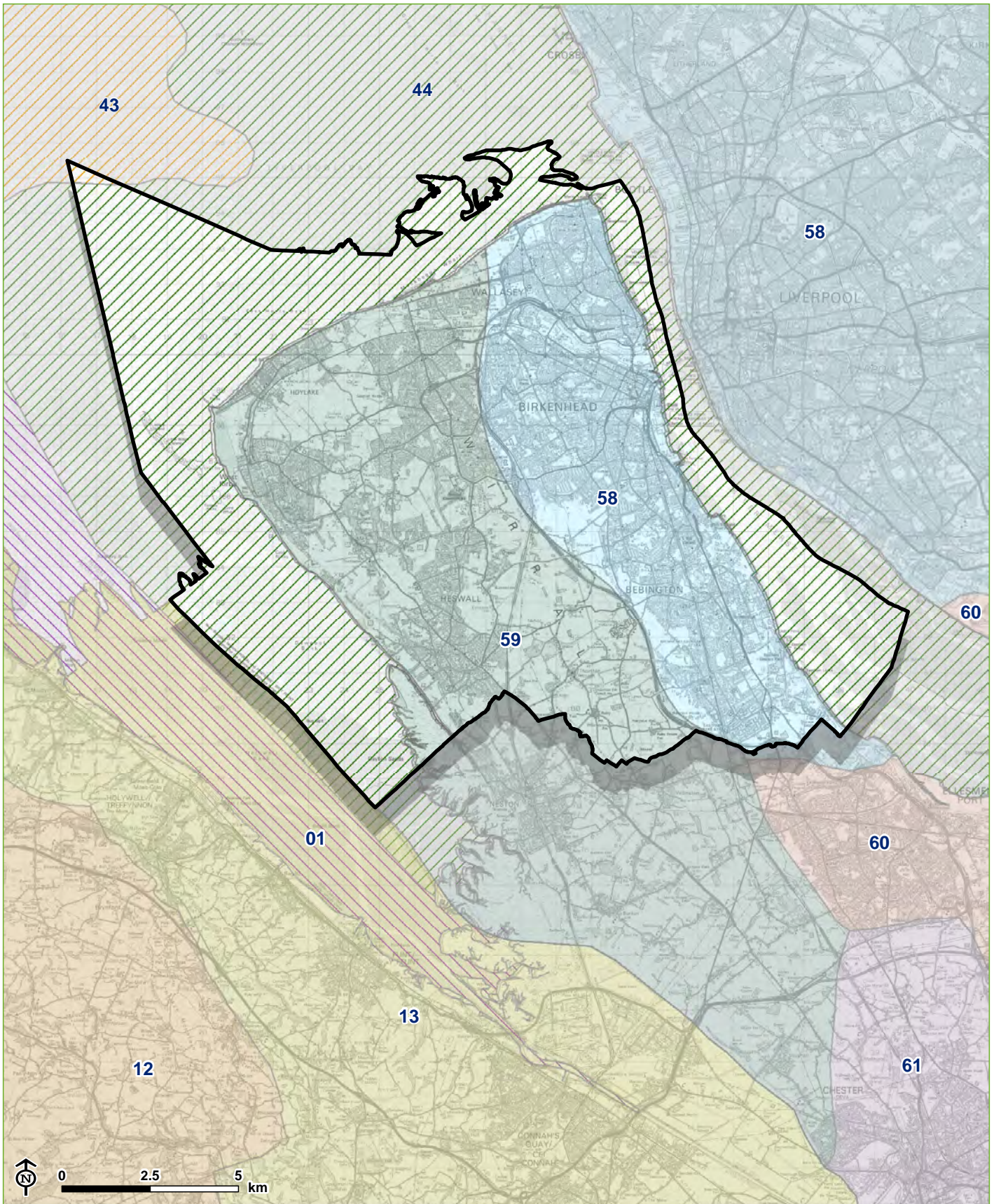
1.38 Enclosed Farmland LCT is described as low lying, gently undulating or sloping farmland with a small to medium scale field pattern. Key characteristics include strong field patterns, small woodlands, ponds and streams and nucleated rural villages and scattered farmhouses.

1.39 Mudflats and Saltmarsh LCT is described as flat open areas of intertidal mudflats and saltmarsh with no tree cover, providing internationally important bird habitats.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making/national-character-area-profiles>

Wirral Landscape and Visual Appraisal (2009)

1.40 This assessment builds on the existing Wirral Landscape Character Assessment and Visual Appraisal produced for the authority in 2009. It has been updated in line with current good practice and to reflect the present state of the landscape. Further details of the approach are set out in **Chapter 2**.



Wirral Borough Boundary

National Landscape Character Areas (Wales)

- 12: Bryniau Clwyd/Clwydian Range
- 13: Glannau Dyfrdwy a Wrecsam/Deeside and Wrexham

National Character Areas (England)

- 58: Merseyside Conurbation
- 59: Wirral
- 61: Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain
- 60: Mersey Valley

Marine Character Areas (North West)

- 43: Liverpool Bay
- 44: Dee and Mersey Estuaries

Marine Character Areas (Wales)

- 01: Dee Estuary (Wales)

Wirral Local Plan
Landscape Assessment



Fig 1.2:
National Character Areas
and Marine Character Areas

Source: OS, NE

Map Scale @ A4: 1:150,000



Methodology for the Landscape Character Assessment



Chapter 2

Methodology for the Landscape Character Assessment

Approach

2.1 This Landscape Character Assessment follows the method promoted by Natural England through ‘An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment’ (2014)⁵, which embeds the principles of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) within it.

2.2 It supersedes the 2009 Wirral Landscape Character Assessment and Visual Appraisal.

Process of assessment

2.3 The process for undertaking the study involved four main stages described below:

- Desk-based review and classification;
- Field survey;
- Draft Report; and
- Final Report.

2.4 GIS was used throughout the study as the tool for collating, manipulating and presenting data.

Desk study

2.5 The initial desk-based stage involved the collation of a wide range of mapped information to ‘sense-check’ the existing landscape classifications and to update the baseline. Designations relating to cultural heritage, nature conservation and landscape were checked for any changes. Newly available data such as light pollution and tranquillity mapping has also been used to further strengthen an up-to-date understanding of key trends.

2.6 Data used within the report, including data collated in the GIS database is shown in **Table 2-1**.

Table 2-1: GIS data

Name	Source
Base OS mapping at 1:25k and 1:50k	Ordnance Survey
Terrain 50 Contour data	Ordnance Survey
Linear features, mass movement, artificial ground, superficial deposits and bedrock geology 1:50K	British Geological Survey
Administrative boundaries	Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
National Character Areas	Natural England
Public Rights of Way	Natural England
River features & flood zones	Environment Agency
Nature conservation designations	Natural England (national datasets) and Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council (local datasets)
Priority habitats	Natural England and Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
Historic Landscape Characterisation dataset	Cheshire County Council and English Heritage
Heritage designations	Historic England (national datasets) and Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council (local datasets)
Dark skies	CPRE
Infrastructure	Ordnance Survey
Local Plan	Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

⁵ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/396192/landscape-character-assessment.pdf

Classification

2.7 Classification is concerned with dividing the landscape into areas of distinct, recognisable and consistent common character and grouping areas of similar character together.

- **Landscape Character Types** share broadly similar patterns of geology, topography, vegetation and human influences in each area in which they occur. Although not identical they share a common pattern of elements e.g. Lowland Farmland and Estates LCT.
- **Landscape Character Areas** – Each landscape type is divided into a number of geographically specific character areas. These share generic characteristics with other areas of the same type but have their own particular identity or ‘sense of place’ e.g. Raby Lowland Farmland and Estates LCA.

2.8 The update of the landscape classification for Wirral is based on a review of the 2009 LCT and LCA boundaries. Some minor adjustments were made to boundaries (e.g. border between 4b Thornton Hough Lowland Farmland and Estates, 4c Clatterbrook and Dibbin Valley Lowland Farmland and Estates and 4d Raby Lowland Farmland and Estates) and some areas were reclassified into a different Landscape Character Type (e.g. 1c Eastham Estuarine Edge).

2.9 Seascape assessments for the three coastal landscape character areas have been added.

2.10 This process resulted in the definition of 6 Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and 16 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) for Wirral. The classification was undertaken at a scale of 1:25,000 and is shown on a 1:250,000 scale base map at **Figures 5.1 and 5.2**.

Field survey

2.11 A field survey was undertaken in August and September 2019 to review and refine the draft classification, make notes on landscape character and take photographs to help with subsequent assessment. This specifically focussed on:

- Verifying and fine-tuning the classification of the landscape types and areas identified;
- Verifying and identifying key characteristics;
- Collecting aesthetic/perceptual information on character;
- Identifying valued landscape attributes;
- Assessing landscape conditions; and
- Gathering visual information on key issues and opportunities for future management.

Draft report

2.12 A draft LCA report was submitted to Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council for comment in September 2019.

Final report

2.13 The 2019 Landscape Character Assessment report and updated LCA classification were finalised in October 2019.

Landscape Character Area description

2.14 The descriptive profiles for the updated Wirral LCA are presented at Landscape Character Area level and arranged by their respective Landscape Character Type within the Borough. Descriptions of each area were updated to reflect changes in the landscape since the Wirral Landscape Character Assessment and Visual Appraisal was written in 2009.

2.15 Each LCT section begins with an overview map showing the location of the LCT within Wirral and its relationship with other LCTs, a summary of the character of the LCT and the component LCAs within it.

2.16 The subsequent descriptive profiles of the LCAs within Wirral are then structured as follows:

Map and summary of location and landscape character

- A location map (1:25,000 scale) which shows the extent of the LCA and its relationship with other LCAs, followed by a summary paragraph explaining its defining landscape character and location.

Representative photos

- Photos to help the reader appreciate the visual character of the LCA.

Landscape character

2.17 This section provides a description of the landscape character of the LCA under each of the following headings:

- **Key Characteristics:** In bullet point format, provides a summary explanation of the character of the LCA;
- **Natural Landscape:** a description of the most significant natural features in the landscape including designated habitats;
- **Cultural Landscape:** a description of the most significant cultural heritage features in the landscape including designated cultural heritage assets;
- **Perceptual Landscape:** a description of the most significant perceptual features in the landscape.

Evaluation

2.18 The evaluation provides an understanding of what is important in each LCA and why. The condition of the landscape and key issues impacting each area are analysed and landscape guidelines provided, to help inform a forward-looking strategy for the Borough under each of the following headings:

- **Valued Landscape Attributes:** identifies the qualities that are particularly valued for their contribution to landscape character (i.e. if any one of these attributes ceased to exist, it would change the character to the detriment of the landscape);
- **Landscape Condition:** summarises the condition of the landscape;
- **Key Issues:** identifies factors, including past and current trends, that bring about change in the landscape;
- **Landscape Guidelines:** provides landscape guidance focussed on development management considerations to conserve and enhance the landscape of the area.

A scenic landscape featuring a large, gnarled tree on the left side. A path leads through lush green and yellow vegetation towards a dense forest in the background. The sky is clear and blue. A semi-transparent white box is overlaid on the top right, containing the text "Formative Influences" in green.

Formative Influences

Chapter 3

Formative Influences

This chapter summarises the main physical and cultural influences which have shaped the landscape of Wirral. The detailed descriptions of different Landscape Character Areas, that appear later in this report, highlight the key characteristics (both positive and negative) and valued attributes that are of most significance to the particular landscape concerned.

3.1 The landscape of Wirral has evolved over many hundreds and thousands of years through the interaction of the natural environment and human activities, through the combination of physical and cultural influences. Physical influences such as geology and landform, together with the pattern of settlement and land use are key determinants of landscape character.

Physical influences

3.2 The physical components of the landscape have the most tangible and fundamental influences upon its character, being the most permanent and least changeable aspect of its appearance. The underlying geology creates the 'backbone' of the landscape. The actions of weathering, erosion and deposition alter the landform, consequently influencing hydrological patterns and affecting the nature of soil conditions. This affects how humans have used and continue to exploit the landscape for agriculture, settlement and industry and, consequently, influences the nature of the vegetation and fauna that the landscape can support.

Geology

3.3 **Figure 3.1** illustrates the solid (or bedrock) geology that underlies the Borough. **Figure 3.2** shows the drift (or superficial) geology formed during the Quaternary period, which overlies the bedrock in places.

3.4 The geology of the Wirral peninsula is dominated by glacial till overlying Triassic sandstones and red mudstones with sandstone ridges and outcrops. The only exception to this is a small area of Carboniferous sandstone and shales near Neston along the Dee Estuary. These combine to form a low-lying but gently rolling geological platform punctuated by low sandstone outcrops. The pastoral landscape of central Wirral which stretches to the Dee Estuary is separated from the industrial areas of Merseyside by a sandstone ridge that

extends from Bidston Hill in the north, through Noctorum and Mountwood, to Storeton and Bebington in the south.

3.5 All the sub-divisions of the Triassic sandstone series are found on the surface or in exposed cuttings in some parts of Wirral, but for the most part they are hidden under superficial glacial deposits.

3.6 Dry desert conditions prevailed through most of the Permo-Triassic era and consequently fossils are scarce. There have been local discoveries at the Hilbre Islands of reptilian footprints⁶.

3.7 Local sandstones were formed through a variety of circumstances. The Sherwood Sandstone Group were deposited in riverine conditions and the Mercia Mudstone Group were probably in a tidal brackish environment. Harder and coarser red Triassic sandstones were present close to the surface, give rise to free-draining soils which support heathland vegetation at Thurstaston and Bidston Hill. No rocks younger than the Triassic are found within the area, suggesting that terrestrial conditions have prevailed since this time.

3.8 Where the superficial geology mainly consists of till and associated glacial and fluvio-glacial deposits, there are spreads of blown sand along the Irish Sea Coast, notably at Meols, and a complex series of coastal zone deposits, including a clearly marked buried channel linking to the River Mersey between Birkenhead and Wallasey.

3.9 Glaciations during the Pleistocene caused a reduction and erosion of the Triassic sequence as a result of ice sheets extending southwards. The glaciation resulted in most of the low-lying land being covered by boulder clay.

3.10 During the post glacial period the climate began to warm, and vegetation cover increased. Many glacially formed lakes became swamp and fen, followed by a succession to climax woodland. Initially the melting of ice sheets led to sea level rise flooding lower-lying land. Isostatic uplift continued at a slower rate than the melting of ice sheets but gradually saw the rise of land which formed the coastlines evident today.

3.11 Deposition of mud and sand continues up to the present day especially along the northern and western coastlines resulting in extensive beaches along the foreshore. Material

⁶ Natural England (1997), Natural Area: The Mersey Urban Basin

transported by rivers which settles within estuaries has created the salt marshes and sand dunes which provide a natural barrier against marine flooding of lower-lying areas.

Landform and drainage

3.12 The underlying geology has been weathered to create the distinctive landforms seen across the Borough today.

Figure 3.3 illustrates the topography and main hydrological features on Wirral.

3.13 The Borough is mostly a low-lying gently undulating landscape influenced by small streams with a series of elevated sandstone ridges that run north-west to south-east. The ridges are distinctive features which have a strong influence on the landscape of the Borough. They give a high, open outlook from Bidston and Oxtan and the hills between West Kirby, Thurstaston and Heswall. The highest point within the Borough is Poll Hill, Heswall at 108m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). At local sandstone outcrop rises to 91m AOD at Thurstaston and is a local landmark and viewing point. Other high points include Heswall Dales, an area of sloping heathland and establishing woodland on the western fringes of Heswall, Bidston Hill at 65m AOD, Caldly Hill at 70m AOD and Grange Hill at 52m AOD.

3.14 The central part of Wirral is gently undulating with more defined changes in level occurring around Clatterbridge Hospital where the land falls sharply towards the M53; Storeton Wood where the land rises towards the edges of Higher Bebington; and around Landican with land rising from 20m AOD to 70m AOD around Thingwall. Other landform changes are present along the western coast where the land falls to the west of Heswall from 100m AOD to 20m AOD along the coast.

3.15 The low-lying landforms of the coastal plain in the north, adjacent to Leasowe, Moreton, Hoylake and West Kirby, are the lowest areas in the Borough. The land is almost flat at 5-6m AOD and protected from flooding by a series of flood defences along the northern coast. Drainage ditches are present along almost all field boundaries to prevent flooding.

3.16 Apart from residential development along the waterfronts at West Kirby and Hoylake, the coastline on the North Wirral coast and along the Dee Estuary is generally undeveloped and the coastal influence extends inland. This stretch of coastline has a wide tidal range and is important for coast-related recreation, nature conservation and archaeology.

3.17 The banks of the Mersey are characterised by residential and industrial development behind a high seawall which limits

the visibility and influence of the coast inland. Between New Brighton and Seacombe, residential development extends up to a coastal promenade. South of this point, the Mersey coast is heavily industrialised except for short stretches without sea defences at New Ferry and Eastham, much of it with industries and activities which relate to ship building, the oil and chemical industries and other port related activities. The Manchester Ship Canal runs along the coast to the south of Eastham Ferry.

3.18 Wirral's hydrology is strongly influenced by its position as a peninsula and a network of small streams and drainage ditches drain into the Dee Estuary and Mersey Estuary. These watercourses have a local influence on land use, field pattern and landform influencing the landscape character immediately surrounding them, most notably the narrow wooded river valleys of Clatter Brook and Dibbinsdale Brook to the west of Bromborough and the more open engineered banks of The Birket and The Fender and their tributaries in north Wirral plain.

3.19 Wirral also has a network of large field ponds with concentrations to the immediate west of Saughall Massie, between Frankby and Newton and throughout the farmland east of Heswall. However, due to surrounding woodland copses these are not prominent landscape features other than at a local scale.

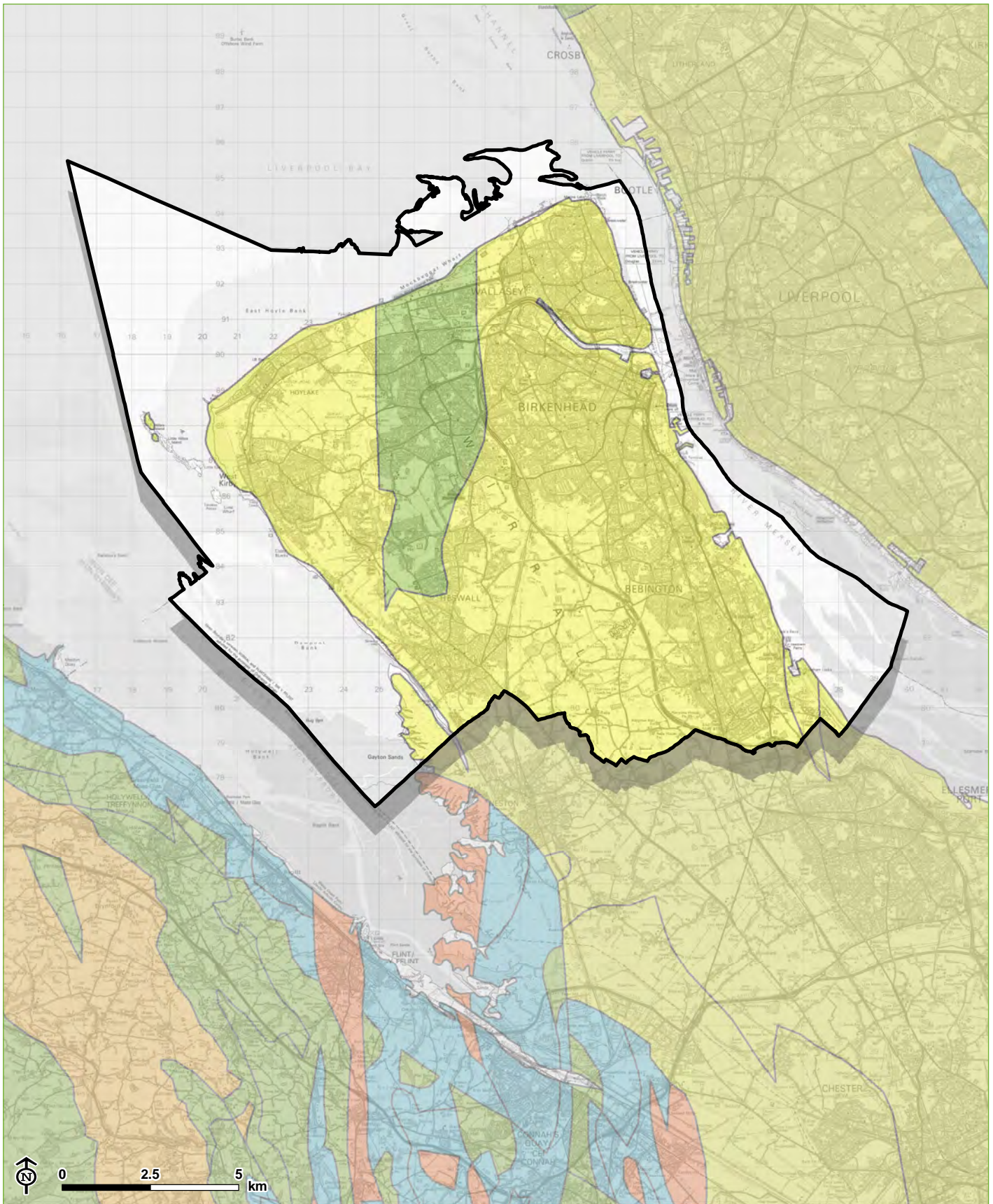
Soils

3.20 The soil types found across Wirral are influenced by a combination of underlying geology, climate, drainage and vegetation cover. Human activity over many centuries, particularly vegetation clearance and land management has also influenced soil development.

3.21 The national Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) analyses soils for their intrinsic quality and value. A grading of 1 indicates excellent soils which have few limitations to agricultural use where high crop yields can be expected. Grade 5 indicates poor soils which produce low yields where few suitable crops can be grown; these areas tend to be best suited to permanent pasture and rough grazing.

3.22 Accurate figures for ALC in Wirral are currently not available, however 50% of the agricultural land within Wirral is considered to be high quality. Estimates of ALC derived from historic ALC surveys undertaken in Wirral suggest a predominance of Grade 3a soils within the Borough⁷.

⁷ ADAS (June 2019), Study of Agricultural Economy and Land in Wirral

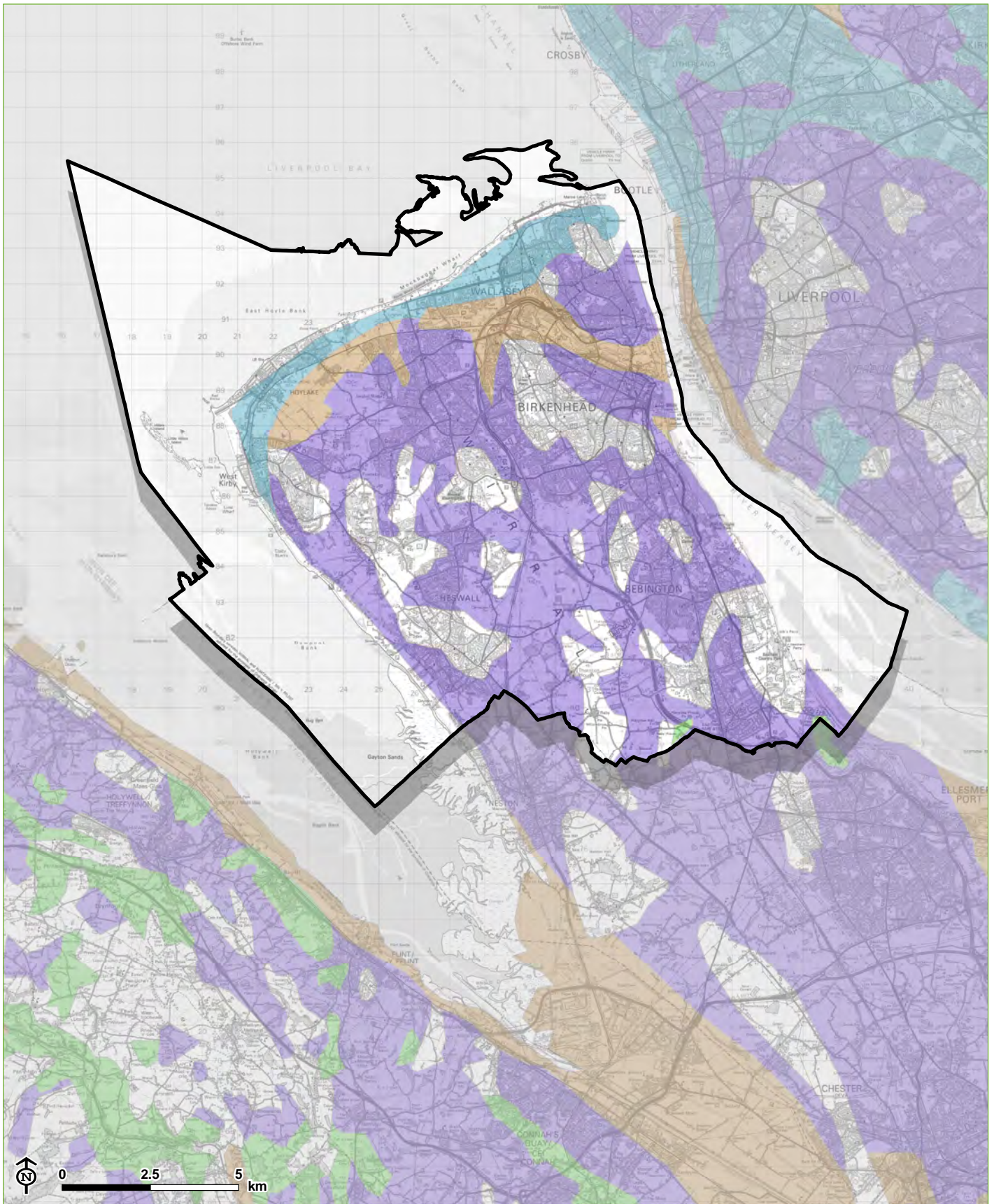



- Wirral Borough Boundary
- Bedrock Geology**
- Limestone With Subordinate Sandstone And Argillaceous Rocks
- Mudstone, Siltstone And Sandstone
- Mudstone, Siltstone, Sandstone, Coal, Ironstone And Ferricrete
- Sandstone And Conglomerate, Interbedded
- Siltstone And Sandstone With Subordinate Mudstone

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Landscape Assessment







Fig 3.1:
Bedrock Geology



 Wirral Borough Boundary

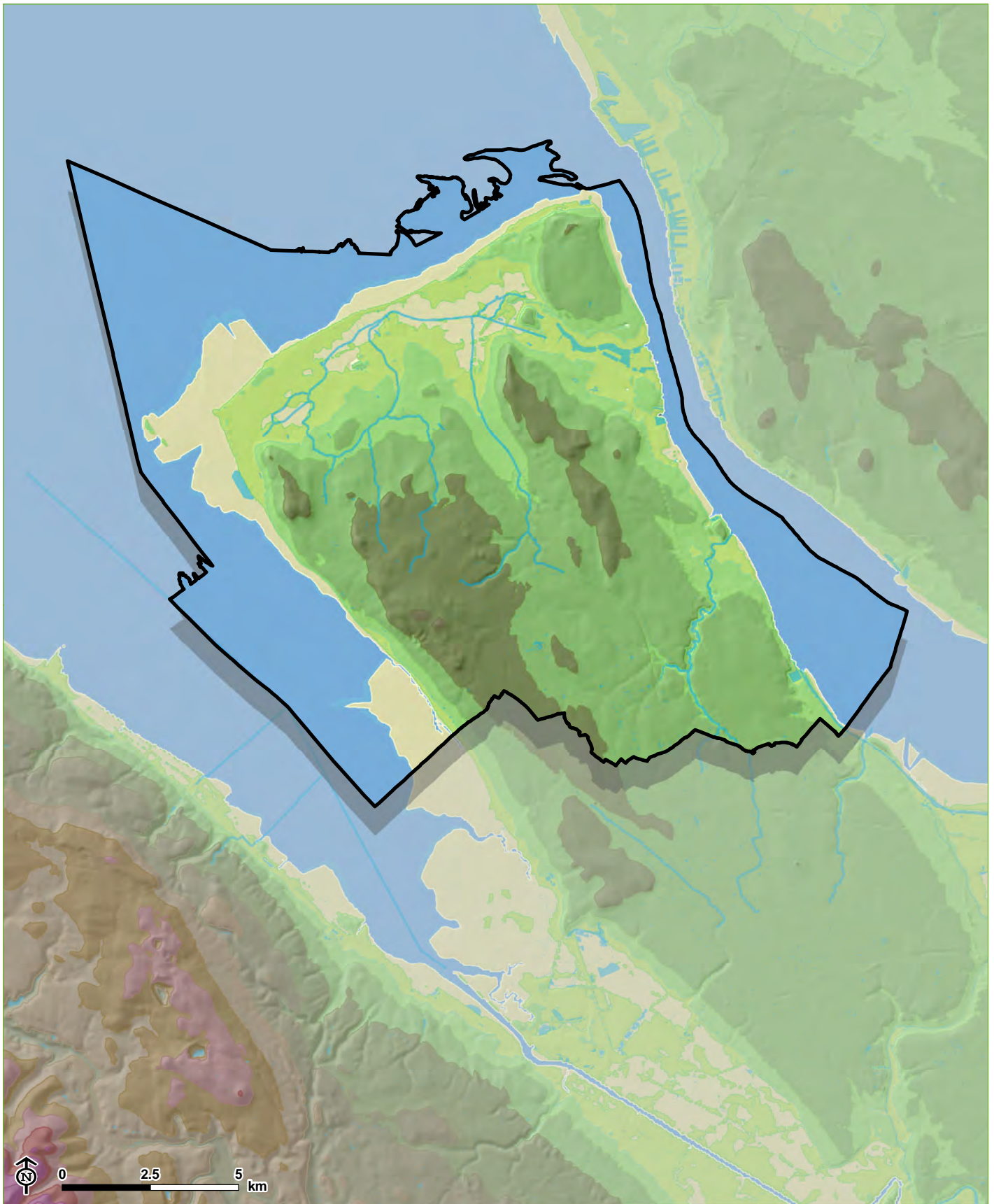
Superficial Geology

-  Clay, silt and sand
-  Diamicton
-  Sand
-  Sand and Gravel

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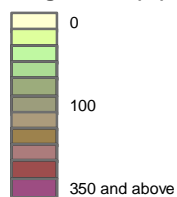


Fig 3.2: Superficial Geology



Wirral Borough Boundary
 Watercourses and Waterbodies

Height AOD (m)



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Landscape Assessment



Fig 3.3:
Topography and Watercourses

Landcover and habitats

3.23 The distribution of habitats and natural features across Wirral is influenced by the landform, geology, land uses both current and past and hydrology across the area. Important ecological habitats are recognised through designation. These designations are illustrated in **Figure 3.4**. The general distribution of woodland, including ancient woodland extent is shown on **Figure 3.5**.

3.24 Although much of the Borough is characterised by urban development and agricultural land use, there are a variety of undeveloped natural and semi-natural areas which support significant biodiversity. Along the Wirral coast and the estuaries of the Dee and Mersey is a wide range of internationally and nationally important habitats including coastal saltmarshes and sand dunes as well as intertidal mud and sand banks, and estuarine marsh. On the poorer sandy soils associated with the outcrops of sandstone along the low ridges that run across Wirral are important areas of lowland heath. Areas of lowland mixed woodland are found throughout Wirral, primarily towards the central and western parts of the Borough, on the sandstone ridges, along the brooks and ponds and within the country parks and country estates.

Seascape Nature Conservation Sites

3.25 The seascapes and coasts of Wirral are subject to overlapping designations for their international and national importance for nature conservation.

3.26 The Dee Estuary, Mersey Estuary and Mersey Narrows & North Wirral Foreshore are designated as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. The Dee Estuary, North Wirral Foreshore, Mersey Estuary and Liverpool Bay are designated as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the EC Wild Birds Directive (79/409/EEC). Both estuaries are important resources for internationally important wintering birds and are protected and managed to prevent the disturbance of identified species. The Dee Estuary is also designated as a Special Area of Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive.

3.27 Liverpool Bay, Dee Estuary and Mersey Estuary are also internationally designated as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs or OSPARs).

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

3.28 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are designated under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. These include the majority of the intertidal coastal and estuarine areas, coastal cliffs and dunes within the remaining natural coastline of the Dee Estuary, and areas of lowland heath, species-rich unimproved grassland and

deciduous woodland inland. There are 12 SSSI designations in Wirral, which are listed below:

- The Dee Estuary;
- The Mersey Estuary;
- North Wirral Foreshore;
- Red Rocks, Hoylake;
- Dee Cliffs, Thurstaston;
- Heswall Dales;
- The Dungeon, Heswall;
- Thurstaston Common;
- Dibbinsdale, Bromborough;
- Meols Meadows, Moreton;
- Mersey Narrows; and
- New Ferry.

3.29 There are numerous additional Local Wildlife Sites / Sites of Biological Importance designated for their local contribution to ecology.

Local Nature Reserves

3.30 Five Local Nature Reserves (LNR) have been designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 to preserve features of interest, provide opportunities for further research and encourage public appreciation of nature. These sites represent easily accessible natural areas particularly beneficial for education. The LNRs in Wirral are:

- Bidston Moss
- Brotherton Park/ Dibbinsdale
- Hilbre Islands
- Heswall Dales
- Thurstaston Common

Local biodiversity targets

3.31 The 2003 Wirral Biodiversity Action Plan (WBAP) identifies a number of habitats of principal interest (HoPI) for the purpose of conserving biodiversity which are important within Wirral; reflecting the richness of the biodiversity present within the Borough.

3.32 The presence of these sites of nature conservation interest has been noted within this assessment.

Nature Improvement Areas

3.33 Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) were proposed by government as the principal mechanism for delivering wildlife restoration and management, NIAs are mapped at a sub-regional level in the Liverpool City Region Ecological Network Report⁸. They combine designated sites and priority habitats with habitats and features of strategic importance and linear features such as rivers and canals. They also include land where targeted action can contribute to habitat creation and management and to complement other land uses. The NIAs in Wirral are:

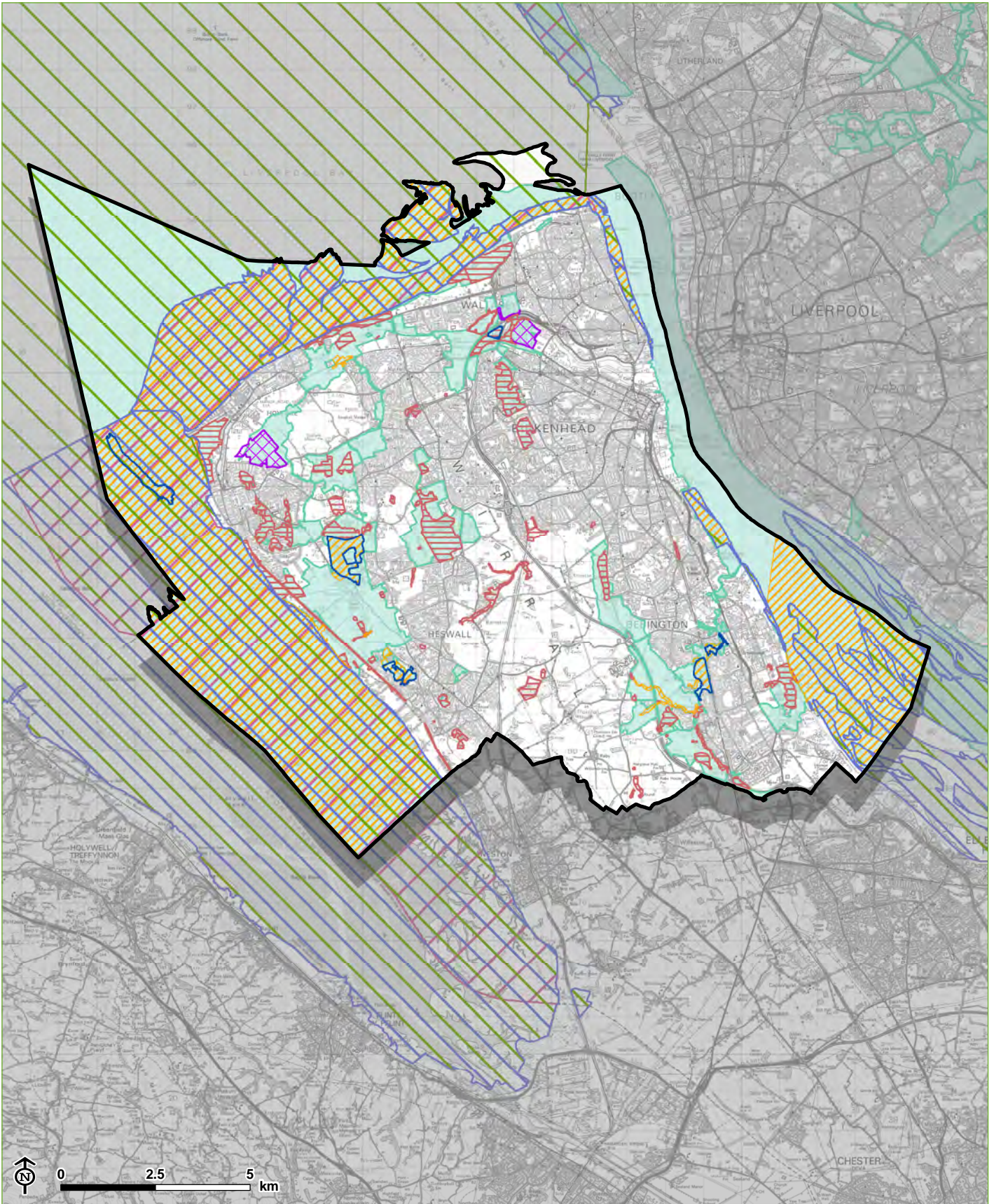
- 10: Mersey Estuary;
- 11: Dibbinsdale, Raby Mere and Eastham Country Park;
- 12: East Wirral Heathlands;
- 13: West Wirral Heathlands and Arrowe Park;
- 14: Dee Estuary;
- 15: North Wirral Coast and Liverpool Bay; and
- 16: River Birket Corridor

Local Geological Sites

3.34 There are several Local Geological Sites. These are sites designated for their significant exposures of underlying geology, good examples of geological formations or geomorphological processes, especially where they have educational value. Designated areas within the study area (outside the urban areas) are:

- Irby Quarry;
- Hilbre Point/Red Rocks, Hoylake;
- Hilbre (Main Island, Middle Island, Little Eye and Tanskey Rocks) Hoylake, West Kirby;
- Caldy Hill;
- Thurstaston Hill
- Telegraph Road cutting;
- Dee Cliffs, Caldy;
- Storeton Hill, Bebington;
- Bidston Hill;
- Boundary Road, Bidston; and
- Arrowe Brook, Woodchurch.

⁸ Merseyside EAS (2015), Liverpool City Region Ecological Network Report

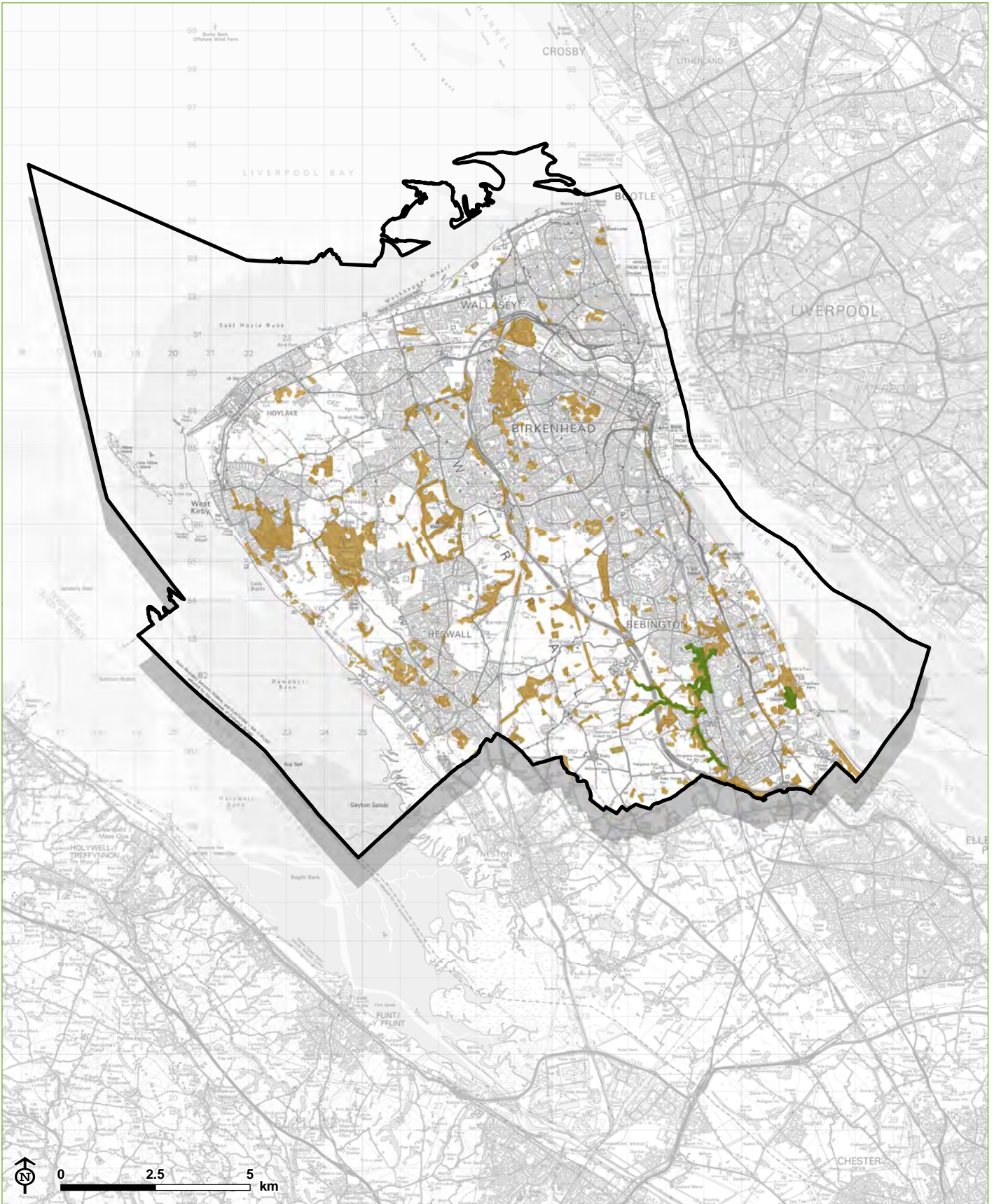


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Fig 3.4:
Nature Conservation Designations

- Wirral Borough Boundary
- Ramsar
- Special Protection Area
- Special Area of Conservation
- Local Nature Reserve
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Site of Biological Importance/Local Wildlife Site
- Potential Local Wildlife Sites
- Nature Improvement Areas



- Wirral Borough Boundary
- Ancient Woodland
- National Forest Inventory

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Fig 3.5:
Woodland

Cultural influences

3.35 Wirral has a diverse historical landscape as the landscapes and settlements of the Borough have developed over time. They have been influenced by man's use of the land as population and agricultural pressure have ebbed and flowed. The important historical features that remain in the landscape today and contribute to landscape character are mostly recognised through national and local designations (such as Scheduled Monuments, Registered Parks and Gardens, Conservation Areas and listed buildings). These can be seen on **Figure 3.6**.

Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation

3.36 Away from the Mersey conurbation on the eastern side of the Wirral Peninsula, the centre and south of the Borough is predominately mixed agricultural land and the field pattern results from the later enclosure and re-organisation of a mix of Medieval Townfields and ancient fields.

3.37 The majority of extant historic field systems can be found in the central part of the Wirral Peninsula, although a few outlying fields can be found in West Kirby. Many field patterns have remained unaltered since ancient and post-medieval times, although in places agricultural intensification and increases in the size of land holdings have resulted in larger field patterns. These more recent field patterns are identified by their large size and more intermittent field boundaries.

3.38 The Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation⁹ (Cheshire HLC) also highlights Wirral's historical importance for recreation as evidenced by the presence of historic parklands and public parks created in response to rapid industrialisation in the 19th century. The 19th century also saw an increase in the number of golf courses.

Landscape history

3.39 The Cheshire HLC also provides a commentary on the historic and cultural influences on the Cheshire County and Wirral. A summary of the main influences affecting the landscape within Wirral based upon the study's more detailed information is set out below.

Palaeolithic

3.40 Evidence of human and Neanderthal presence has been discovered within caves in the eastern part of Cheshire and recent evidence has discovered a small rock shelter at Carden Park near Chester. There is however little recorded evidence on Wirral.

Mesolithic

3.41 Wirral contains some significant Mesolithic sites with evidence of one of the earliest forms of 'house' at Greasby. Environmental evidence suggests that the site was seasonally occupied. Further sites have been identified at Thurstaston, Irby, Hilbre and New Brighton. At the time, these sites were considerably further away from the sea, in places up to 8km; sea level rises have brought the sea much closer, evidenced by a submerged post glacial forest at Meols.

Neolithic

3.42 The Neolithic period marked the shift from hunter-gatherer to agricultural lifestyles. During this time there was a local decline in tree cover and a greater incidence of open grassland followed later by natural regeneration back to woodland. This trend may have been a result of slash and burn woodland clearance. There is however no specific evidence of Neolithic activity in Wirral.

Bronze Age

3.43 During the Bronze Age, settlement and agricultural expansion continued. A deterioration in climate around 1500BC resulting in possible crop failures led to abandonment of marginal settlements on moorland and heath. Evidence suggests that woodland clearance continued although it was more extensive and permanent. There is little evidence of Bronze Age settlement in Wirral, although one settlement was discovered in Irby which comprised an oval building. Further north a midden with animal bones has been dated to 2000BC.

Iron Age

3.44 Evidence of the Iron Age primarily comprises the presence of hillforts and some lowland farmsteads along the River Mersey. Settlements such as one discovered at Irby, suggest that their form was a curvilinear single or double ditched enclosure, usually less than 2 hectares, containing one or more circular buildings. Mixed farming is also evident.

Roman

3.45 Roman occupation resulted in the construction of fortresses; the most prominent was the Fortress of Deva (Chester) using the Dee as access to the sea. Long linear roads were constructed to link the larger settlements, some of which are still evident today. There are ongoing investigations by Wirral Archaeology to research the Roman road network. Outside Roman settlements, field patterns were often small and rectangular, outlined by ditches with a mix of agriculture

⁹ Cheshire County Council and English Heritage (2008), The Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation

and buildings. There is little evidence of how the Roman occupation affected the settlement pattern of smaller villages in Wirral; with many established in the Iron Age continuing largely unaltered.

Post Roman – Early Medieval

3.46 Anglo-Saxon influence is difficult to determine in Wirral although their occupation is reflected in the use of 'by' in place names. There is little evidence of how the Anglo-Saxons may have influenced the Wirral landscape.

Medieval

3.47 The Norman Conquest resulted in changes to the landscape, as large areas were cultivated by plough with woodland cleared and marshes drained. Evidence of the resultant ridge and furrow remains within some fields across the Borough. Strip cultivation of fields was common practice. Settlement increased and cloth manufacture and leather workings began to develop. The peninsula was subject to forest law as part of The Forest of Wirral, from the early 12th century until the later 14th century but was an area of comparatively dense settlement with low woodland cover. This included areas of sandy soil and heath associated with the sandstone ridges and parts of Wirral described in the fourteenth century as a 'wilderness' and a 'resort for bands of armed men'.

3.48 The HLC records a high proportion of field types originating from medieval woodland clearance.

Post Medieval

3.49 Towns and villages continued to expand and be rebuilt to accommodate a rapidly expanding population. Dairy farming expanded to accommodate increases in demand for dairy products. The greatest changes occurred to the landscape in the 18th and 19th century, which remains evident today due to the enclosure or re-organisation of existing field systems with hedgerows. At the far north of the peninsular, low marshy areas behind the sand dunes were drained and enclosed into a geometric field pattern bounded by ditches. Other changes included increased industrialisation, rapid settlement expansion particularly around Birkenhead as a response to the successful dockland trade along the River Mersey and increased investment in transport networks. Anchorages were established along the Dee shore of Wirral and large-scale coal mining began on the peninsula in the 18th century. A large stone quarry was located at Storeton.

3.50 It is evident from historic maps that over the past 100 years, east Wirral developed considerably as a result of the success of Liverpool with the Wirral coastline developed for trade and industry. The urban area expanded with small

individual villages merging to form one continuous conurbation along the Mersey shoreline. Rapid expansion also occurred after the Second World War. Since this time, additional development has largely been contained by the designation of the Green Belt in the early 1980s.

Heritage

Scheduled Monuments

3.51 Scheduled Monuments are nationally designated. The site and its immediate setting are included within this designation and must be preserved, where possible in-situ and in good condition. Only three such monuments lie within the countryside of Wirral at Irby, Storeton and Thornton Hough.

Listed Buildings

3.52 Wirral has over 1,800 buildings of architectural or historic interest related to the Borough's social, cultural and aesthetic history. It includes entries that are Grade I of outstanding interest, Grade II* and Grade II.

3.53 The vast majority are within urban areas, but a significant number contribute to the character of settlements within or adjoining the countryside, for example at Brimstage, Raby and Thornton Hough.

Conservation Areas

3.54 Areas with high concentrations of listed buildings or where the collective built form contributes strongly to the character and heritage of a place are often designated as Conservation Areas. The designation of a Conservation Area is based upon the contribution of buildings, historic layout of roads, paths and boundaries; characteristic building and paving materials; a particular combination or style of building uses; public and private spaces, such as gardens, parks and greens; and trees and street furniture, which contribute to particular views to give a distinctive character or street scene. Conservation Areas give broader protection to areas of character than listing individual buildings. All the features within the designated area are recognised as integral parts of its character and should therefore be protected or enhanced.

3.55 All the main rural settlements in Wirral, apart from Landican, Brimstage, Raby and Storeton, are Conservation Areas.

3.56 Heritage features are vulnerable to change. It is important that the most valuable sites and structures are protected, and local planning policies seek to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of Conservation Areas at Barnston, Eastham, Frankby, Gayton, Saughall Massie,

Thornton Hough and Thurstaston (adopted in the UDP February 2000); the setting of other designated and un-designated heritage assets, and the rural character of the smaller settlements at Brimstage, Raby and Storeton (in the approved but unadopted Proposed Submission Draft Core Strategy, December 2012).

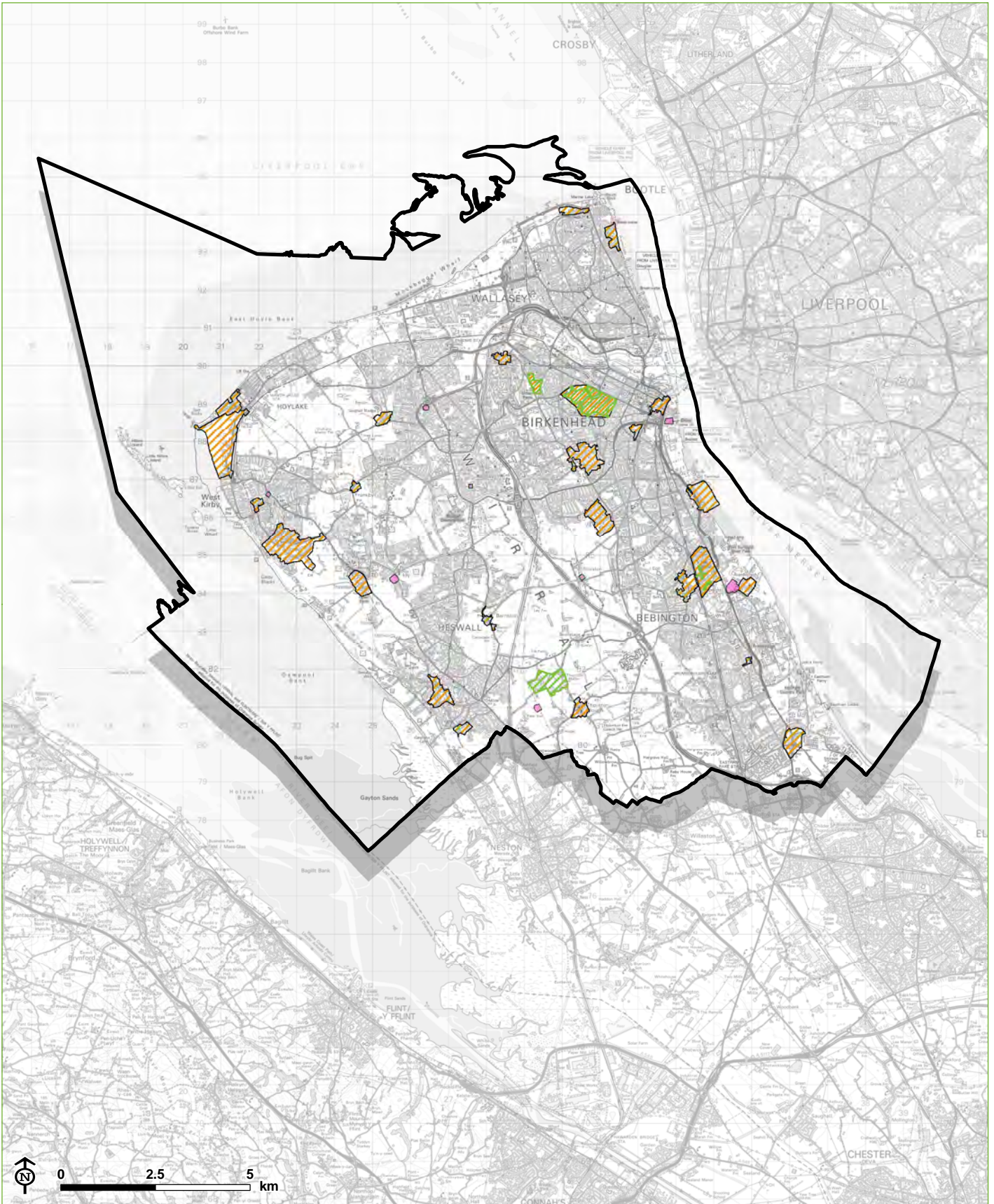
Historic Parks and Gardens

3.57 Only one registered historic park is within the countryside: Thornton Manor Gardens, Thornton Hough (Grade II*). Local and national policies seek to ensure that the special character of historic parks and gardens, together with their setting, are protected from inappropriate development.

Perceptual landscape

3.58 Away from the settlements and main roads, significant areas of the Borough are scenically and distinctly diverse. Whether through their distance from large settlements or as a result of containment from urbanising influences by woodland cover, they enjoy relatively high levels of tranquillity. This is shown in **Figure 3.7**.

3.59 The levels of light pollution and dark night skies within Wirral are illustrated in **Figure 3.8**. Although light pollution decreases with distance from the main settlements, dark night skies free from interference from artificial light are only found out to sea.

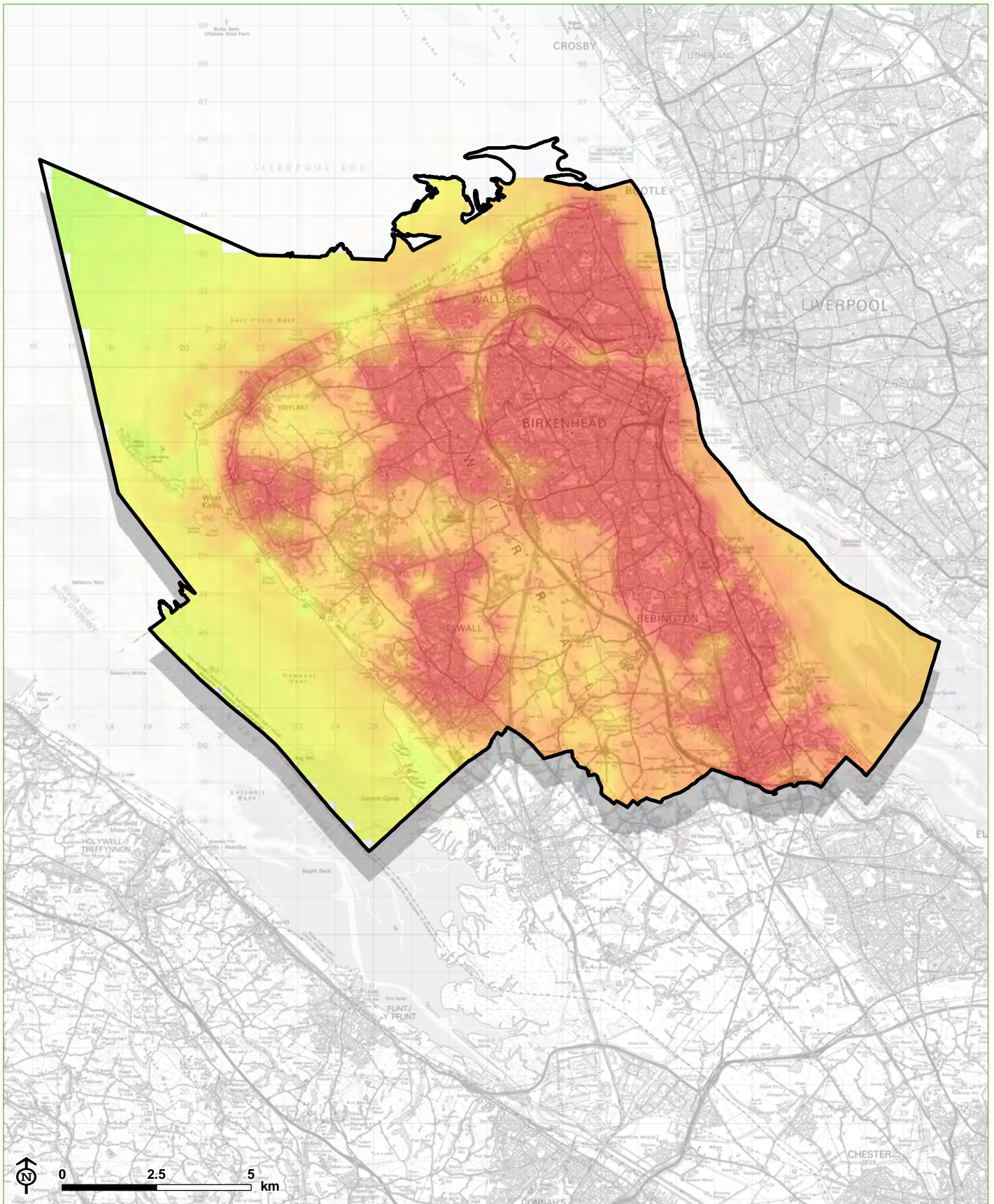


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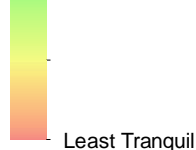
Fig 3.6:
Cultural Heritage Designations

- Wirral Borough Boundary
- Scheduled Monuments
- Registered Parks & Gardens
- Conservation Area



Wirral Borough Boundary

Most Tranquil

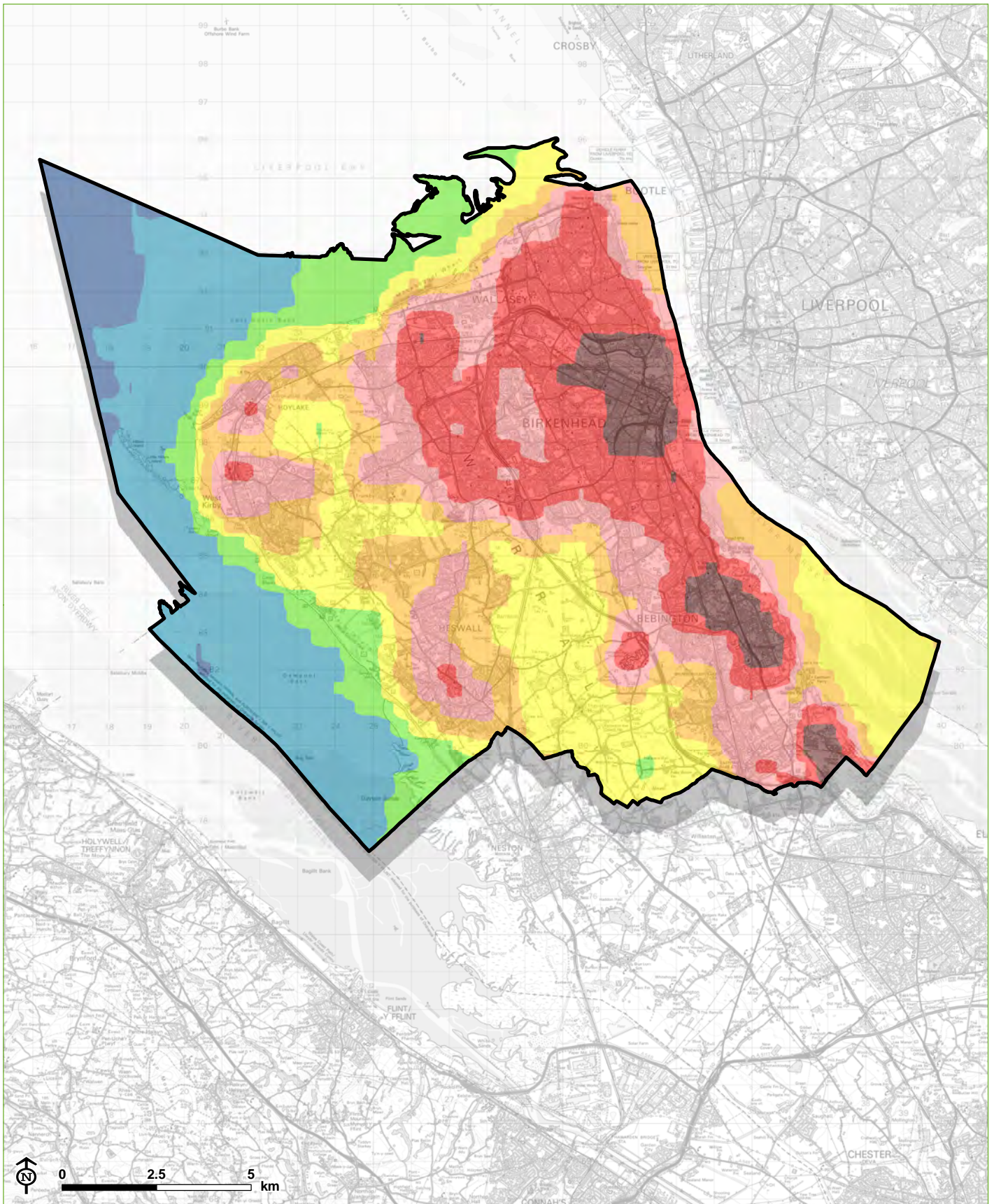











Least Tranquil

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Landscape Assessment



Fig 3.7:
Tranquility



-  Wirral Borough Boundary
- Night light (NanoWatts)**
-  >32 (Highest Levels of Light Pollution)
-  16 - 32
-  8 - 16
-  4 - 8
-  2 - 4
-  1 - 2
-  0.5 - 1
-  0.25 - 0.5 (Lowest Levels of Light Pollution)

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Fig 3.8:
Levels of Dark Skies and
Light Pollution

Source: LUC, CPRE

Map Scale @ A4: 1:140,000



Summary of Landscape Issues



Chapter 4

Summary of Landscape Issues

4.1 Wirral's landscape is constantly changing through human activity and natural processes. The cumulative effects of these processes can considerably alter the character of the landscape.

4.2 The descriptions of individual landscape character areas include reference to key pressures derived from discussions with Council Officers and a review of relevant information relating to land use, agricultural trends and development pressures and previous public consultation¹⁰. The main pressures that have potential to influence the landscape character of Wirral as a whole are set out below.

Climate change

4.3 Climate change is a major pressure on rural landscapes and is likely to result in increasingly unpredictable weather with hotter drier summers, more intense rainfall and longer dry periods resulting in the need for agriculture to adapt to grow different crops and develop more flexible and responsive land management practices. Hotter summers and increases in temperatures could result in increased demands for agricultural irrigation. Responses to climate change may also result in pressure for development of renewable energy.

4.4 Climate change resulting in more extreme weather could alter the species composition of existing species-rich woodlands and hedgerows, favouring species with lower water demand. Increasing incidences of pathogens may change the species mix of woodlands and higher temperatures and prolonged drought are likely to put woodlands under further stress and increase the risk of wildfires.

4.5 Climate change is also likely to affect other important semi-natural habitats, particularly river and wetland habitats throughout the Borough. This will include water shortages in summer and increased water flows and flooding in winter, causing potential damage to habitats and species. These changes may manifest themselves within the natural environment through changes in habitats and a decline of flora and fauna which are unable to adapt quickly enough to the changing habitat conditions. Rising water and sea levels may also impact migrant bird habitats of mudflats and salt marshes. Longer drier summers may affect heathland and coastal habitats and increase the risk of fire.

4.6 Approximately 11% of Wirral's land area is currently at risk from flooding from the sea and/or from watercourses, including river valleys associated with the Fender, Birket, Arrowe Brook and Dibbin. Measures to provide river and coastal flood protection may lead to conflict between defences and wildlife value, particularly along coastlines as sea level rises threaten coastal towns and villages.

Coastal processes

4.7 Wirral's coast has a major influence on the character of the Borough and is a major asset for tourism. Whilst most of the Mersey coast is heavily developed, the natural character of Wirral's undeveloped northern and western coastline is of considerable importance for recreation and nature conservation. The inter-tidal foreshores and their supporting habitats are of national and international importance and form one of the most significant wetland habitats for birds in western Europe.

4.8 A central aim of local planning policy for the environment is the preservation and enhancement of the character of the coast. Many visitors are attracted to the coastline for its visual quality as well as its nature conservation value. This is true of the Dee coast, sections of which form part of Wirral Country Park and the north coast, sections of which form part of the North Wirral Coastal Park. Protection of landscape quality particularly on the undeveloped coastline is of considerable importance and will continue to be important for increasing tourism and leisure.

4.9 Stretches of the developed coast along the Mersey Estuary have considerable economic value and are important resources for achieving urban regeneration within Wirral. The value of access to this coast will help to reduce the pressure on the undeveloped coast.

4.10 The coastline, particularly between West Kirby and New Brighton, has been subject to intensive flood engineering works which are visually prominent. The threat of coastal flooding from sea level rises will continue to place pressure along these coastlines and potentially along other sections of coastline which may require additional flood defence works to be carried out.

¹⁰ Undertaken for the 2009 Landscape Character Assessment: TEP (2009), Wirral Landscape Character Assessment and Visual Appraisal

4.11 Sand dunes are continuing to accrete along the North Wirral coast and will continue to develop and alter the character of this coastline. Nascent sand dunes to the front of flood defences around West Kirby, are beginning to naturalise the appearance of some flood defences.

4.12 Spartina grass is continuing to colonise the Dee estuary and is starting to colonise the coastline to the north of Hoylake. This is altering the sandy coastal environment along the north Wirral coastline and extending the 'green' marsh areas evident around Heswall. While this can have an important function in stabilising the coast and protecting coastal development and emerging dune systems from damage, by dissipating wave energy, the Council is working with Natural England to manage spartina grass on Hoylake Beach.

4.13 The Wirral Coastal Strategy¹¹ sets out different approaches for each part of the coastline, which should be viewed as a system rather than in isolation. This includes identifying areas where there is to be no active intervention and areas where maintaining existing defences will continue to be maintained.

Agricultural change

4.14 Agriculture is still of considerable significance in terms of its effect on the local landscape in Wirral. However, agricultural changes, particularly related to the viability of traditional small-scale farming, are leading to the diversification of farm-based activities which could lead to a change in traditional field patterns and farming methods.

4.15 Just under one third of Wirral's land area is used for agriculture¹² and the 2016 Defra Agricultural Survey¹³ indicates that over half the agricultural land is grassland, predominantly used for dairy farming. The 2019 Study of Agricultural Economy and Land in Wirral report shows a decrease in the number of dairy holdings, with 30% of agricultural land in Wirral in use by just seven dairy holdings.

4.16 Intensification is associated with a loss of pasture for cereal production, providing fodder crops (maize) and straw for bedding, which is in turn resulting in field enlargement and subsequent loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Hedgerows can lose their function in arable landscapes and are often replaced by post and wire fences. There has been a general decline in hedgerow maintenance and condition. Arable cropping has increased in Wirral since 2007 in Wirral, with cereals predominant, now using 22% of agricultural land.

4.17 More intensive farming practices often result in larger amalgamated farms with new agricultural buildings. These agricultural buildings tend to be large scale and have no local distinction and can be detractors within the landscape.

4.18 Intensification means that farms are generally decreasing in number with many smaller farms diversifying or going out of business and traditional agricultural buildings steadily converted to residential or commercial use, with accompanying change in lighting and access requirements, noise and roadside signage, further eroding rural character.

4.19 Most of the land across the central part of Wirral is owned by the Leverhulme Estate, and has retained a rural, unchanged character over the past 20 years. The Estate is now taking an increasingly commercial approach to the land, which may result in changes in land management including amalgamation of farms and field expansion which will have an influence over the central Wirral countryside. Other holdings are fragmented, with fields in the same ownership often detached from each other, leading to difficulties in management.

4.20 Grazing livestock has increased since 2000, and in 2016 was the second most common land use in Wirral at 25%. This increase is most likely to be for horse grazing, resulting in an increase of horse-paddocks, and other non-traditional use of farmland particularly at settlement edges. Increased equine activity is having an impact on the character of the countryside with division of existing fields into individual paddocks defined by post and wire or horse tape, increasing stabling and degradation of pasture due to lack of active grassland management leading to either scrub invasion or over grazing. Loss of sustainable grazing for heathland can also lead to soil erosion.

4.21 The current political situation means there is considerable uncertainty about the future of the agricultural sector. The Agriculture Bill 2017-19 had its first reading in September 2018 and covers issues such as expenditure on agriculture, direct support payments, causes for intervention in agricultural markets and World Trade Organisation regulations. Direct payments to farmers through the Common Agricultural Policy and direct support payments are intended to be phased out from 2021. From 2025 it is proposed that the Countryside Stewardship Scheme will begin to be replaced by a new Environmental Land Management Scheme, based on natural capital benefits. However, the method and rate of payment has yet to be decided.

¹¹ AECOM (2013), Wirral Coastal Strategy Executive Summary

¹² ADAS (June 2019), Study of Agricultural Economy and Land in Wirral

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/structure-of-the-agricultural-industry-in-england-and-the-uk-at-june>

Land management

Trees and Woodland

4.22 Trees and woodland make a valuable contribution to the character of the Wirral landscape. However, pressure for development means there is potential for loss of woodland, including valuable semi-natural woodlands.

4.23 The ongoing decline in traditional woodland management practises is leading to under management of farm woodlands and copses resulting in the loss of species diversity. There is pressure on semi-natural woodlands (including ancient woodland) from a lack of management or inappropriate management, as well as from the spread of invasive non-native plants which can prevent regeneration of native woodland.

4.24 There is also an issue with inappropriate management through lack of understanding or education leading to the introduction of non-native garden species or the spread of invasive alien species (such as Japanese knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and giant hogweed) in parts of the Borough.

4.25 Mature hedgerow trees (particularly oak) are an integral part of the traditional hedge system and contribute to the wooded context of the Borough in both the urban and rural areas. The loss of these trees through senescence, development pressure or climate change and associated pests and diseases together with a lack of replacement, is a key challenge to the existing landscape character.

4.26 Agricultural intensification and consequent field enlargement are leading to direct felling and grubbing up of hedgerow trees. Tree loss is also caused by direct or indirect damage from agricultural machinery, leading to early decline or death.

4.27 Neglect of hedgerows, leading to their degradation to a line of standard trees or the development of gaps within hedgerows, is also an issue. Too frequent or badly timed cutting can also result in gaps in hedgerows or the decline in the variety and age structure of hedgerows and hedgerow trees, and ultimately the loss of hedgerows. The use of fencing, which reduces the agricultural necessity for hedge maintenance, is also hastening the decline of the hedgerow network.

Waterbodies

4.28 Wirral's marl ponds are a recognisable feature of the agricultural landscape. However, these ponds are ageing,

struggling with excess nutrients from farming and rainfall, or being lost due to encroachment, or natural succession due to a lack of management.

4.29 The Pond Life Project was established in the 1990s to test a model for sustaining the pond landscapes of North West England. The Wirral report had two aims: to present information on pond loss, persistence, and status in Wirral; and to stress the ecological importance of connected pond landscapes.

4.30 The survey found that pond numbers had significantly reduced over 30 years between 1969 and 1991, particularly the instances of wet ponds. Pond loss was primarily caused by development, drainage or a lack of management.

4.31 Wirral's network of streams and rivers and associated wetlands are vulnerable to agricultural diffuse pollution and are at risk of saline incursion as a result of sea level rise. The latest information on river water quality, from 2016, shows both Dibbinsdale Brook and Clatter Brook classified as 'Poor' overall; and the Birket, including Arrowe Brook and the Fender, classified as 'Moderate'¹⁴.

Development pressure

Housing and employment

4.32 The presence of large urban areas both within and immediately outside the Borough boundaries means that pressure for development and accompanying infrastructure, particularly major housing or employment development, remains a challenge to the existing landscape character. Development in Wirral has historically been limited outside existing settlement boundaries, except for restricted infill and redevelopment on existing footprints. The development of the new Wirral Local Plan will require a commitment to new housing and employment delivery over the next plan period up to 2035.

4.33 Infill development or the expansion of existing settlements is likely to lead to the loss of open agricultural land and woodland challenging the rural character of landscapes immediately adjacent to these areas. New or extended development also risks the urbanisation of rural villages. Redevelopment of major sites at Clatterbridge and Arrowe Park Hospitals may also impact on the local landscape.

4.34 The requirement for additional public open space adjacent to new development may also impact the character of the local landscape by changing land use from agriculture to recreation.

¹⁴ Environment Agency (2016), <http://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/RiverBasinDistrict/12/classification?item=all&status=all&format=csv>

Infrastructure

4.35 Infrastructure works can have a significant influence on landscape character through the upgrading of existing facilities and the provision of new infrastructure to facilitate additional development.

4.36 Strategic road improvements, including new or re-aligned roads and junctions, planned to help alleviate the impact of additional traffic could result in a negative impact on landscape character in terms of fragmentation of the landscape and a loss of tranquillity.

4.37 Narrow rural roads are vulnerable to widening, new wider visibility splays for new development, and an increase in the number of vehicles. These cause damage to grass verges and hedgerows, which can degrade their rural character and lead to the decline of species rich roadside grassland.

4.38 The upgrading of footpaths/cycleways in rural and coastal locations can also lead to a loss of their rural character.

Recreation and tourism

4.39 Wirral offers a wide variety of visitor attractions and wildlife sites which can make a valuable contribution to the rural economy and sustainable rural development. However, increasing visitor pressure also has the potential to affect the character of the area's natural and historical assets, and particularly the area's tranquillity.

4.40 Wirral's Visitor Economy Strategy 2017 – 2020¹⁵ pledges to grow Wirral's visitor economy, with an aim of increasing the value to £450million by 2020. The coast, parks, heritage features and golf courses are the main attractions, as well as its close proximity to visitor attractions and destinations including Chester and Liverpool's World Heritage Site. The strategy places equal emphasis on the improvement of tourist 'destinations' and improving everyday experiences for local residents.

4.41 However, tourism can also lead to development and that can adversely affect the local landscape by inadvertently damaging the very features which attract visitors. Relatively high visitor pressure at certain locations can result in a loss of tranquillity, damage or fragmentation of sensitive habitats or species. Increased recreational activity can also lead to demand for additional facilities at popular locations, resulting in visual intrusion from car parks or visitor centres, increased traffic at 'honey-pot' sites and potential urbanising of more rural parts of Wirral through the provision of more formalised cycle and walking routes. There may also be increased demand for visitor accommodation such as caravan parks,

hotels and leisure complexes and for the expansion of golf courses. An increased resident population within the Borough will add to these pressures.

Minerals and waste management

4.42 Any proposed sites for mineral extraction or waste disposal are a source of potential landscape change for both landscape, coastal and seascape wildlife habitats. Mineral working can affect the viability of agricultural holding through the loss of land, including the best and most versatile agricultural land.

4.43 Wirral has few workable resources for commercial land-won minerals. The remaining workable site for clay extraction, located at Carr Lane, Moreton, in the north of the Borough, is now only used intermittently.

4.44 The substantial outcrops of sandstone in Wirral most notably in the sandstone ridges from Storeton to Bidston in the east of the Borough, and from West Kirby to Heswall in the west, contribute to the unique landscape character of Wirral and are protected as Areas of Special Landscape Value and through ecological or nature conservation designation.

4.45 Significant amounts of marine-won sand and gravel from Liverpool Bay has previously been landed at Birkenhead and Eastham and a purpose-built facility on the Bromborough coast has now closed. A further expansion of existing facilities is not expected to be required.

4.46 There are no remaining operational or planned landfill sites in Wirral and no planned mineral extraction sites. The restoration of existing mineral sites and landfill however will have an ongoing influence on the character of the landscape.

Renewable energy

4.47 The need to meet the requirement for 20% of UK electricity to be sourced from renewable energy by 2020 could also have a significant impact on the character of the landscape and seascape in the Borough.

4.48 Offshore wind turbine development in Liverpool Bay has already cumulatively affected skylines. These large-scale wind farms off the northern coast of Wirral, including the Burbo Bank Extension which opened in 2017, are visible from many coastal and inland areas within Wirral. Pressure for additional development is likely to continue.

4.49 Increased emphasis placed on developers to improve sustainability in new developments with increased requirements for achieving high BREEAM ratings, may affect

¹⁵ The Wirral Partnership (2017), Wirral Visitor Economy Strategy 2017-2020

the appearance of buildings through use of sustainable materials and renewable energy sources.

4.50 Rural diversification and a trend towards green energy from biomass or waste in the future is also likely to have a localised influence on the character of the rural landscape through changes in vegetation patterns such as large-scale single species planting and land management.



Part 2: The Landscape Character of Wirral

Chapter 5

The Landscape Character of Wirral

Outline of the landscape character of the Borough

The landscape of Wirral is a mixture of lowland farmland, rocky outcrops covered by heathland and establishing woodland, coastal farmland and recreational areas with extensive views.

5.1 Sandstone outcrops such as Bidston Hill and Thurstaston Hill are prominent features within Wirral and punctuate the generally low-lying landform; extensive areas of lowland heathland and establishing woodland are associated with the sandy soils of the sandstone ridgelines. Extensive views across Wirral towards Wales and Liverpool are possible from these vantage points.

5.2 Several watercourses run through the area, including Clatter Brook, Arrowe Brook, Greasby Brook, Prenton Brook, The Dibbin, Fender and Birket and a small stream at Thingwall. These are generally set within narrow wooded river valleys although some become more open in character in northern Wirral. Field ponds (marl pits) are a common feature.

5.3 Pockets of woodland often create the impression of a wooded landscape. Woodland is predominantly broadleaved, with woodland cover concentrated on sandstone ridges and in country parks and estates. Prominent woodlands include the ornamental woodland at Thornton Manor and naturally regenerated woodland at Storeton Woods. Ancient woodland is set within narrow wooded valleys along the Dibbinsdale, Clatter Brook and Raby Brook, and within Eastham Country Park. Linear tracks lined with distinctive ornamental avenues of trees, extend from Thornton Manor towards Storeton.

5.4 The core of Wirral is a gently rolling low-lying farmland which is a mixture of arable and pasture with extensive areas given over to grazing horses. Fields are mostly small to medium in size and bounded by mature hedgerows and frequent hedgerow trees.

5.5 Land towards urban fringes is often influenced by horses, with fields sub-divided by fencing. The fields are of variable condition and a general decline in the condition of hedgerows often creates an untidy appearance to the landscape.

5.6 Wirral has a significant coastline, with internationally, nationally and locally recognised wildlife and habitats that

include intertidal mudflats, sand flats and coastal marshes, with coastal sand dune systems.

5.7 Undeveloped coastal areas contain a mixture of farmland and recreational facilities. There are extensive views across the Dee Estuary towards the Welsh coastline and Clwydian Hills. There are fewer woodlands in the north and west although the former railway line, now the Wirral Way, is now a prominent wooded feature. Recreational land is naturalistic in character and includes grassland and regenerating woodland often set within lower ground which is sheltered from prevailing winds. Rock outcrops such as Red Rocks, Hilbre, Middle Eye and Little Eye are distinctive features of the coast and popular tourist attractions.

5.8 Within the low-lying floodplain in the north of Wirral, farmland is generally flat and has a distinctive geometric field pattern drained by ditches draining the former marshlands. Watercourses through these landscapes are often engineered to prevent flooding. Flood defences along the north Wirral coast restrict views towards the sea despite the land's close proximity to it. Woodland is scarce within this area and hedgerows tend to be fragmented or absent creating an open and exposed character.

5.9 Large areas of parkland and former parkland have been created by former large country estates. The largest are at Royden Park, Arrowe Country Park and Eastham Country Park. They comprise large tracts of mature woodland often containing ornamental species, man-made ponds and lakes and other features such as disused bear pits or former fountains.

5.10 The rural landscape is interspersed with residential commuter belt development, with towns and villages coalescing due to suburban development linked by an intricate network of lanes, bridleways and footpaths. Villages tend to be small in nature and of distinctive rural character. Raby is strongly associated with farming with most houses being former farmsteads. Thornton Hough is a particularly distinctive model village and contains prominent buildings set around a village green. Red sandstone is common throughout the area, and brings a unifying theme to buildings, boundary walls, bridges and churches.

5.11 Around Moreton and Bidston the landscape is strongly influenced by urban land uses, residential development and industry. Major roads raised above the surrounding land are prominent within views. The land often contains a mixture of

small irregular pockets of farmland, regenerating wet woodland, ponds and wetlands.

5.12 Recreation and tourism are supported by good access to the coastal landscapes through designated country parks, Local Nature Reserves and Local Wildlife Sites. Golf courses are common and where close to the coast are formed on former sand dunes with few trees creating an open and exposed character with views of the coast. Further inland the golf courses are characterised more by wooded boundaries and pockets of mature planting within them.

Landscape types and character areas

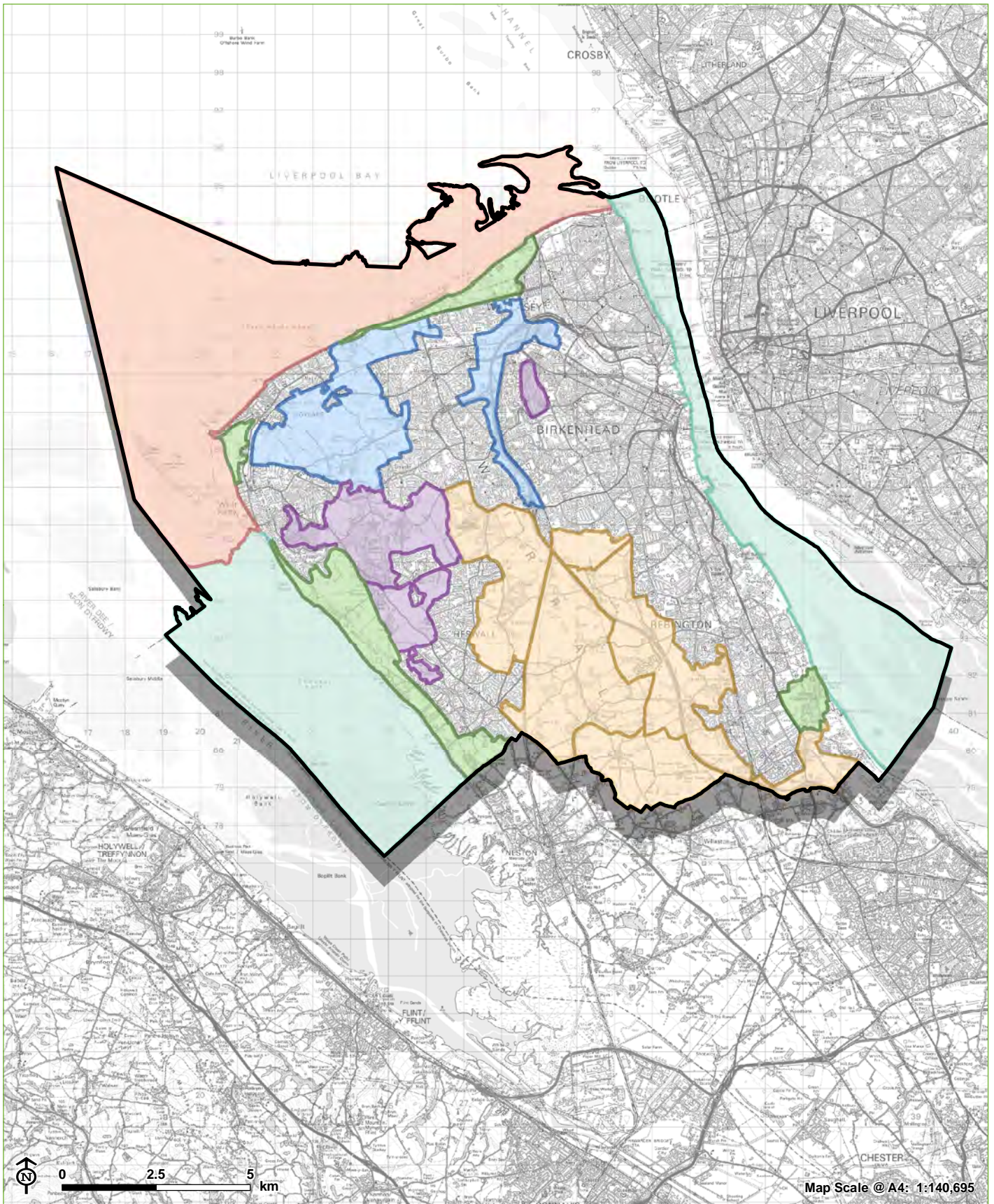
5.13 The updated landscape classification identifies 6 landscape/seascape character types (LCTs), each representing a distinct identity and reflecting the range of contrasting landscapes across the Borough. These are illustrated in on **Figure 5.1**.

5.14 The landscape character types are sub-divided into local landscape character areas (LCAs), which are discrete geographic areas that possess the characteristics described for the landscape type but have a recognisable local identity. The revised classification identifies 13 landscape character areas and 3 seascape areas. These are listed in **Table 5.1** below and shown on **Figure 5.2**.

It is important to note that boundaries between one character type or area and the next are transitional and there is rarely a clear-cut change. The precision of boundaries drawn around landscape character areas and types vary with the scale and level of detail of the assessment. This assessment has been mapped at a scale of 1:25,000 which provides a significant level of detail for the landscape character assessment.

Table 5.1: Landscape Character Types and Area

LCT	Landscape Character Type	LCA	Landscape Character Area
1	Coastal/ Estuarine Edge	1a	North Wirral Coastal Edge
		1b	Dee Estuarine Edge
		1c	Eastham Estuarine Edge
2	River Floodplains	2a	The Birket River Floodplain
		2b	The Fender River Floodplain
3	Sandstone Hills	3a	Bidston Sandstone Hills
		3b	Thurstaston and Greasby Sandstone Hills
		3c	Irby and Pensby Sandstone Hills
		3d	Heswall Dales Sandstone Hills
4	Lowland Farmland and Estates	4a	Landican and Thingwall Lowland Farmland and Estates
		4b	Thornton Hough Lowland Farmland and Estates
		4c	Clatterbrook and Dibbin Valley Lowland Farmland and Estates
		4d	Raby Lowland Farmland and Estates
5	Coastal Waters	5a	North Wirral Foreshore and Coastal Waters
6	Estuaries	6a	Dee Estuary
		6b	Mersey Estuary

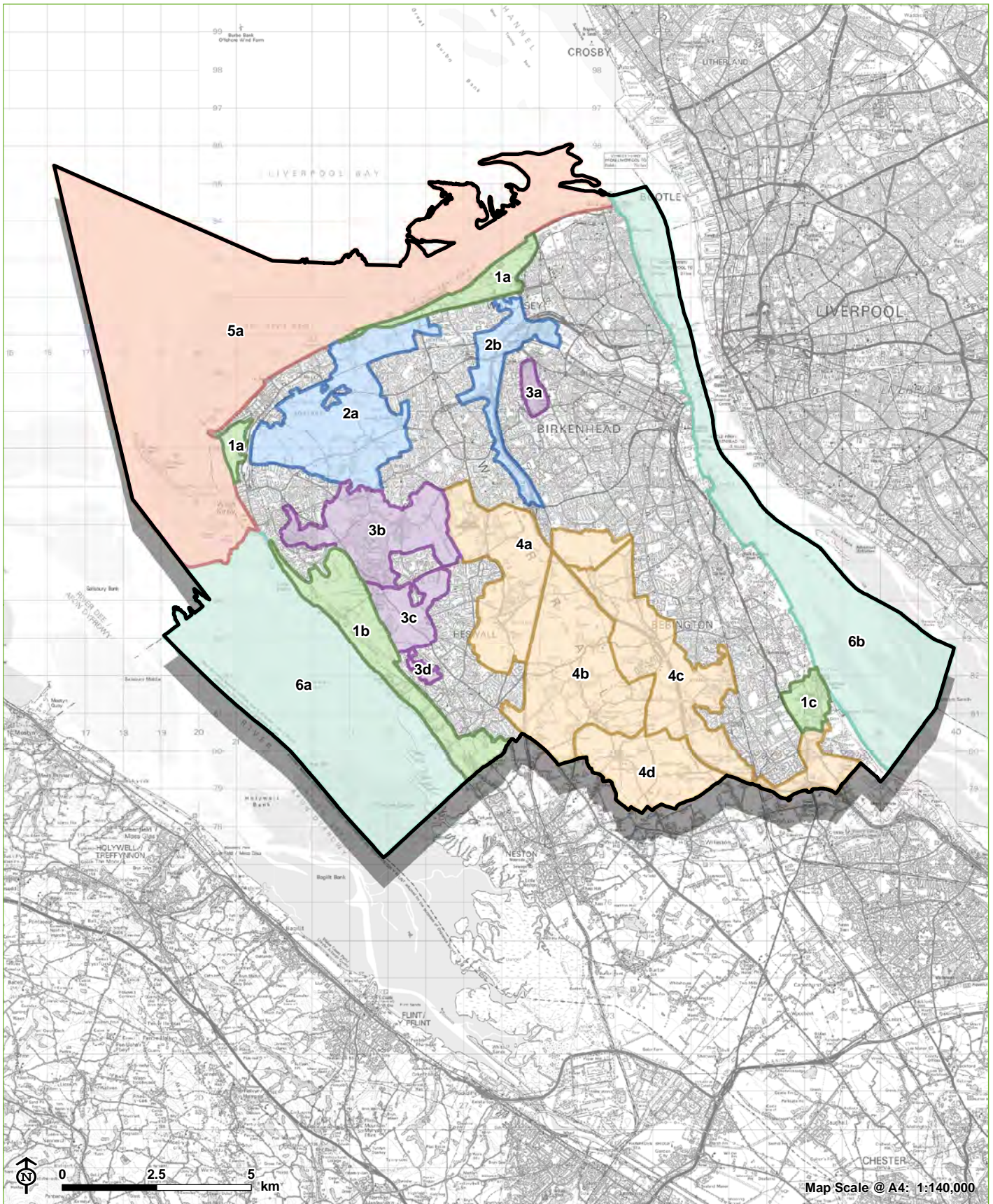


Wirral Local Plan
Landscape Assessment



Fig 5.1:
Landscape Character
Types

-  Wirral Borough Boundary
-  LCT 1: Coastal/Estuarine Edge
-  LCT 2: River Floodplains
-  LCT 3: Sandstone Hills
-  LCT 4: Lowland Farmland and Estates
-  LCT 5: Coastal Waters
-  LCT 6: Estuaries



Wirral Local Plan
Landscape Assessment



Fig 5.2:
Landscape Character
Areas

- Wirral Borough Boundary
- 1a: North Wirral Coastal Edge
- 1b: Dee Estuarine Edge
- 1c: Eastham Estuarine Edge
- 2a: The Birket River Floodplain
- 2b: The Fender River Floodplain
- 3a: Bidston Sandstone Hills
- 3b: Thurston and Greasby Sandstone Hills
- 3c: Irby and Pensby Sandstone Hills
- 3d: Heswall Dales Sandstone Hills
- 4a: Landican and Thingwall Lowland Farmland
- 4b: Thornton Hough Lowland Farmland and Estates
- 4c: Clatterbrook and Dibben Valley Lowland
- 4d: Raby Lowland Farmland and Estates
- 5a: North Wirral Foreshore and Coastal Waters
- 6a: Dee Estuary
- 6b: Mersey Estuary

Source: OS, WC

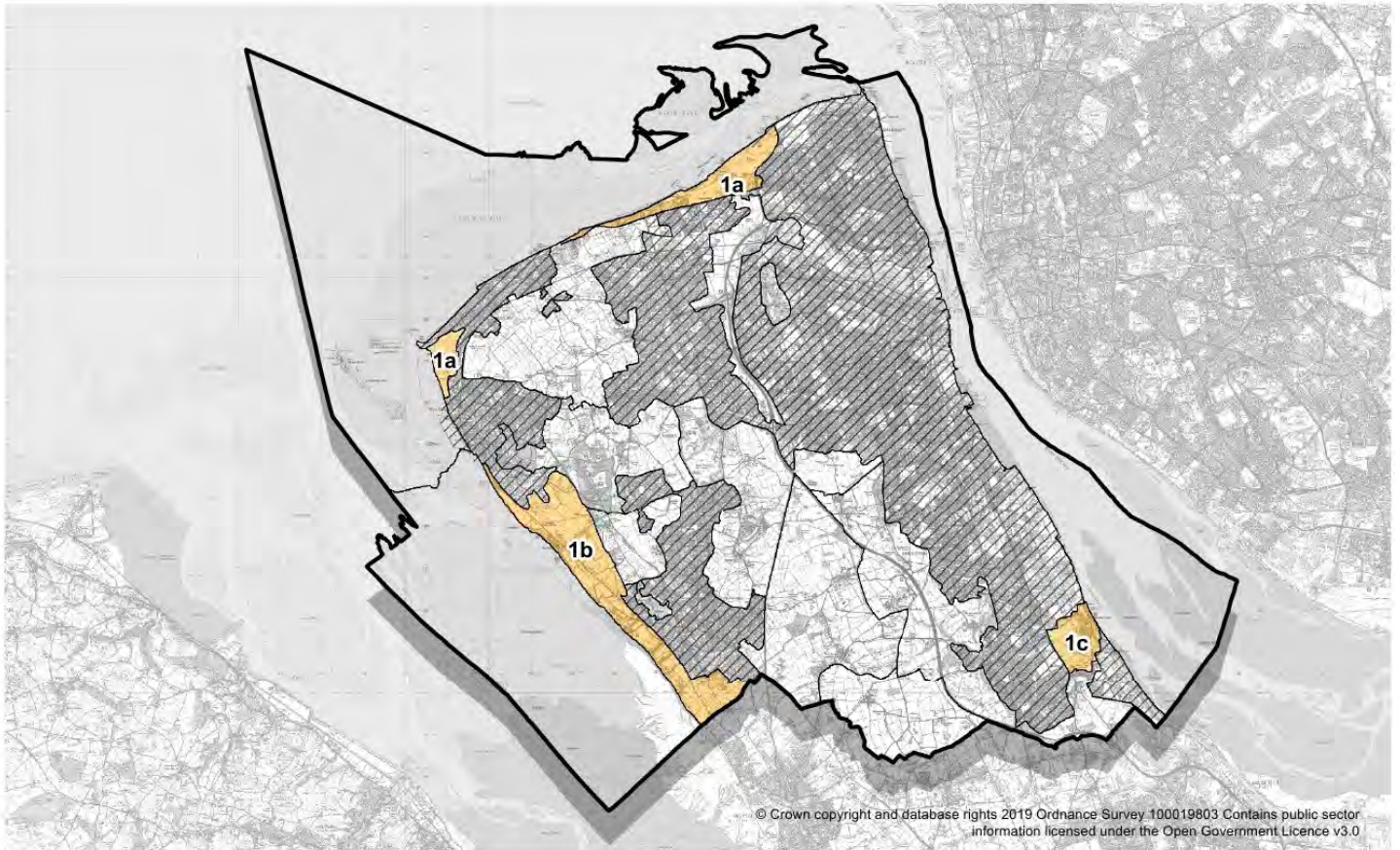
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Chapter 6

LCT 1: Coastal / Estuarine Edge



Description

This LCT is distinguished by flat or slightly sloping land with a strong relationship with the coast and estuary. Sand dunes, clay cliffs, mudflats, and saltmarsh border the coast, and provide an open naturalistic landscape. Land use is often recreational, with several golf courses and country parks. Trees, where present, often have a wind-swept appearance. There are expansive views across the landscape towards the estuaries and out to sea.

Landscape Character Areas

The Coastal/Estuarine Edge LCT is subdivided into three Landscape Character Areas:

- 1a: North Wirral Coastal Edge
- 1b: Dee Estuarine Edge
- 1c: Eastham Estuarine Edge

These are closely related to and should be considered alongside the seascape character assessments within this report:

- SCA 5a: North Wirral Foreshore and Coastal Waters
- SCA 6a: Dee Estuary
- SCA 6b: Mersey Estuary

1a: North Wirral Coastal Edge

Summary

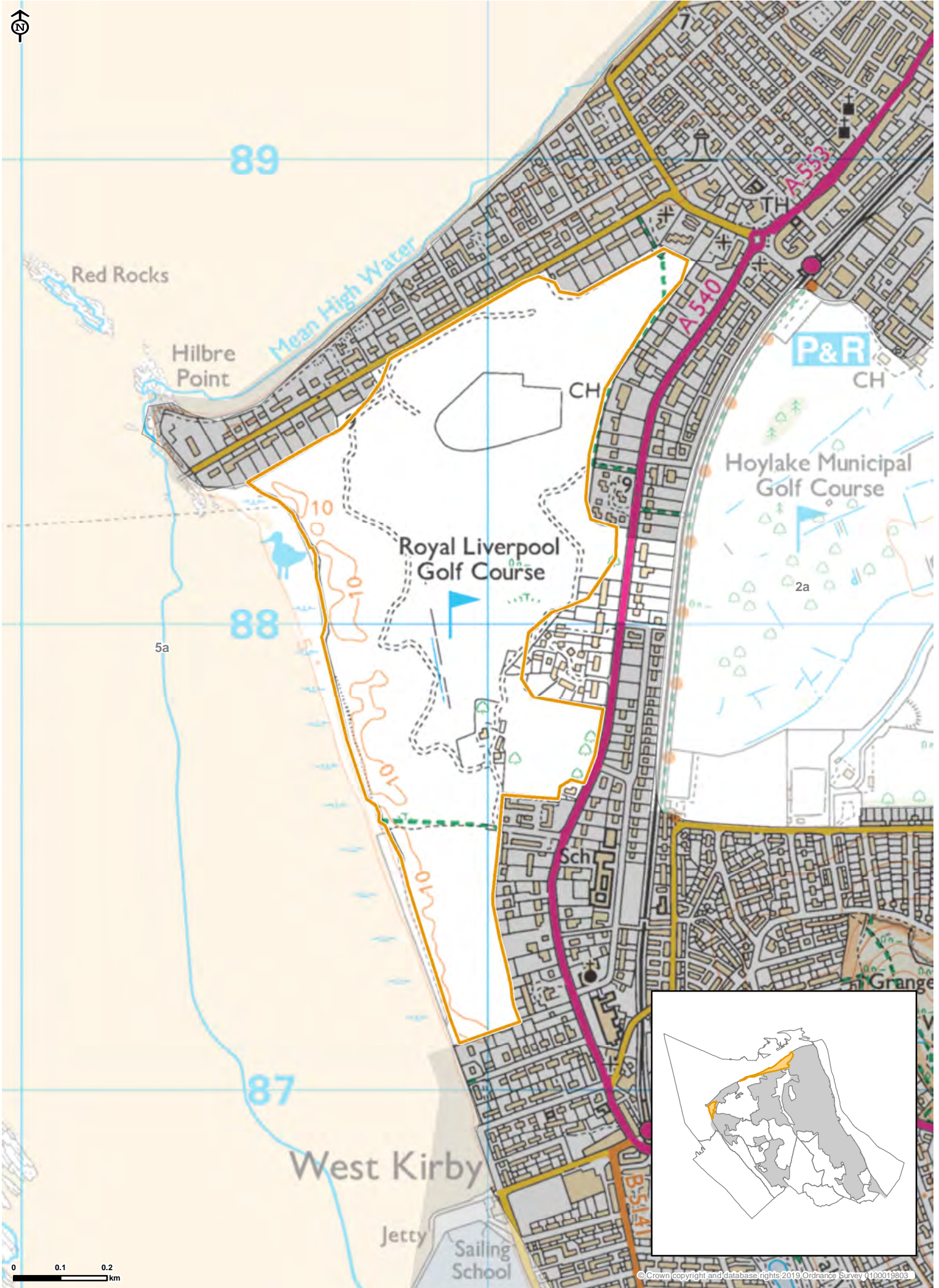
North Wirral Coastal Edge LCA is a narrow strip of open coastal landscape along the north shore of Wirral (the character of the adjacent seascape is described in SCA 5a: North Wirral Foreshore and Coastal Waters). It consists of the foreshore, the engineered Wallasey embankment, and recreational areas including the Royal Liverpool Golf Course, Wallasey Golf Course and the North Wirral Coastal Park.

Boundaries are generally formed by the coastline and urban settlement edge. The area extends in the north from Wallasey Village to the edge of Meols with the southern boundary formed by the A551 Leasowe Road and field boundaries, and in the west from Hilbre Point to West Kirby. SCA 5a: North Wirral Foreshore and Coastal Waters lies to the north and west of the area, and SCA 6a: Dee Estuary lies to the south-west.

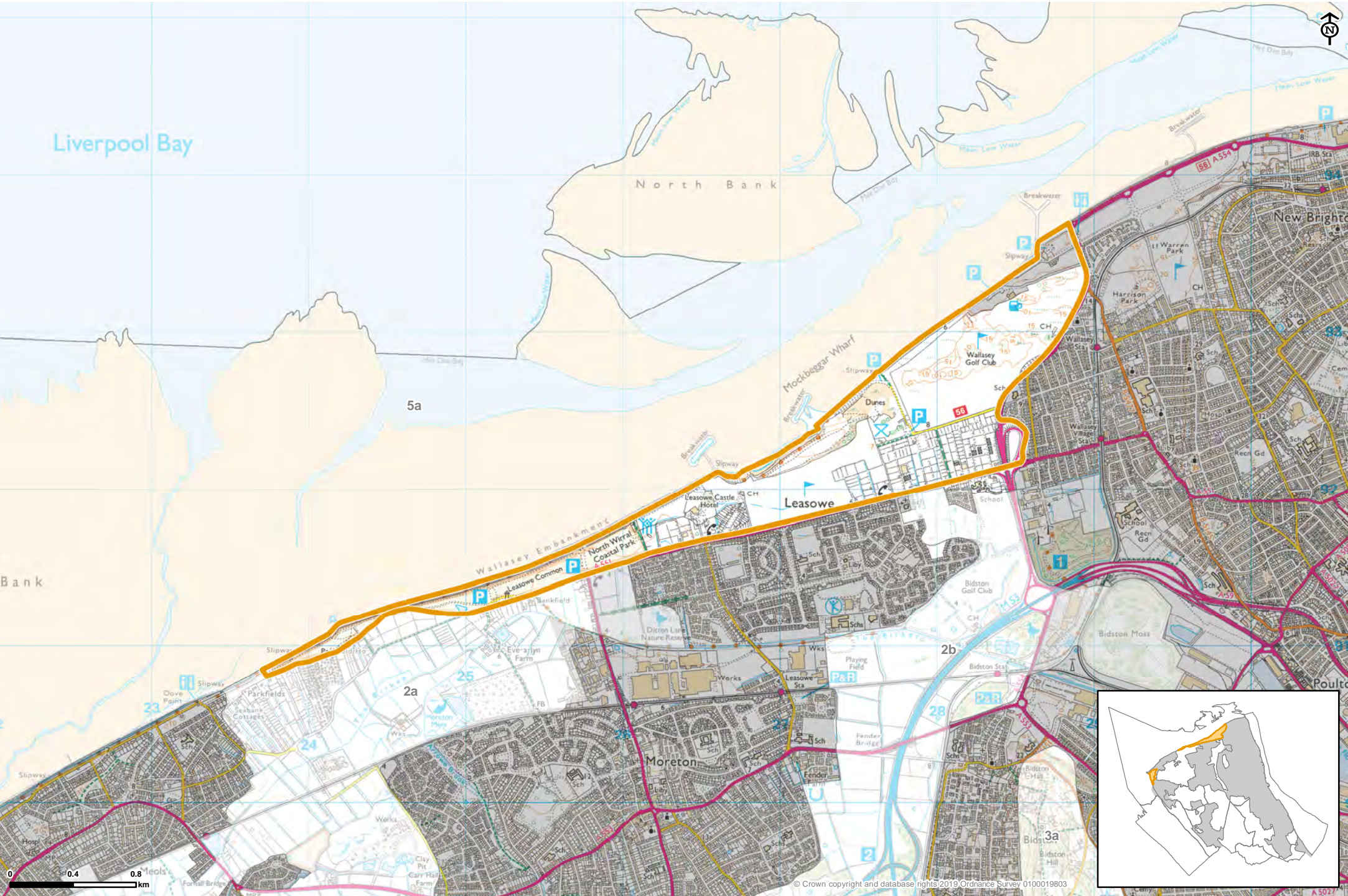


Leasowe Bay looking west

1a: North Wirral Coastal Edge



1a: North Wirral Coastal Edge



Key Characteristics

- Flat or nearly flat inland coastal plain with extensive sandy and muddy/sandy beaches and rocky outcrops along the foreshore.
- Marine-influenced habitats, including sand dunes, saltmarshes, intertidal mudflats, maritime cliff and slopes and reedbeds extend along the foreshore.
- The coastal habitats and the open hinterland beyond are important in supporting populations of breeding, passage and overwintering birds.
- Open exposed landscape with low woodland cover. Small windswept trees limited to areas sheltered by sand dunes or within golf courses.
- Engineered sea defences, including the concrete embankment at Wallasey, separate the foreshore from undulating grassed sand dunes.
- Informal recreation is supported by good access to the dramatic coastline with its beaches and open access land within North Wirral Coastal Park.
- Large links-style golf courses are a distinctive feature. The Royal Liverpool Golf Course is designated as part of Meols Drive Conservation Area.
- Hedged boundaries mark a small area of former market gardens at Leasowe.
- The coastline within the LCA is largely undeveloped. Prominent historic buildings at Leasowe Castle and the lighthouse at Leasowe provide distinctive features on the skyline.
- Expansive views over the open water of Liverpool Bay to Sefton and beyond and across the adjacent estuaries, east towards Liverpool Docks and west towards the Welsh coast. Extensive offshore and onshore windfarms are prominent across these views.
- Despite surrounding coastal settlement, the area retains a sense of remoteness with strong sensory characteristics including the contrasting colour and texture of habitats and changing sea moods.

Natural Landscape

6.1 The area is underlain by Triassic sandstones and mudstones, overlain by tidal and blow Quaternary sand deposits. Small cliffs and rock outcrops are a feature of this part of Wirral and include a series of small rock outcrops within the beach at Red Rocks and Hilbre Point.

6.2 The land is generally fairly flat around 5m AOD with the only undulations formed by sand dunes, engineered sea defences and bunkers within golf courses. Coastal defences along the length of the North Wirral shore have been in place as early as the late 1700s to protect the low-lying farmland in north Wirral from flooding due to the 10m tidal range. The Wallasey Embankment, a large concrete embankment installed in the late 1970s/early 1980s, is the most prominent of these.

6.3 Remnant sand dunes at Leasowe and embryonic dunes establishing against the sea defences are a unique feature within North West England. Wallasey Golf Course, Leasowe Gun Site, Leasowe Common and Royal Liverpool Golf Course are all designated as Local Wildlife Sites and Sites of Biological Importance for their priority habitat sand dunes, saltmarsh and lowland mixed broadleaf woodland.

6.4 Red Rocks SSSI, on the edge of the Royal Liverpool Golf Course, is important in Merseyside as a typical example of a sand dune system including brackish dune slack and reedbed. The area supports diverse flora and fauna including the only English locality of Mackay's horsetail, and is a breeding site for frogs, common toads and natterjack toads.

6.5 The character area is strongly influenced by the coastal waters and the coastal end of the Dee Estuary. At low tide, large sand and mudflats are visible, incised by a series of small water channels, particularly between West Kirby and the Hilbre Islands.

6.6 Woodland is sparse and where present tends to appear windblown with its growth formed by wind direction. Small linear shelterbelt planting and small informal clumps of trees are present between sand dunes and along the fringes of Leasowe Golf Course. White poplar is a common tree species and is prominent within the landscape due to its white foliage which contrasts with the softer muted tones of grassland and sand. Other common species are alder, elder and small amounts of pine and birch.

6.7 Wallasey Golf Club, Leasowe Common and North Wirral Coastal Park are part of the North Wirral Foreshore and Liverpool Bay Nature Improvement Area. This prioritises the management of the designated sites, and enhancing the sand dunes at Leasowe Common, Wallasey Golf Course and Leasowe Gun Site. The Royal Liverpool Golf Course is part of

the Dee Estuary Nature Improvement Area and prioritises the management of the designated sites, including the Red Rocks SSSI.



Sand dunes behind Leasowe Bay beach

Cultural Landscape

6.8 The area is very popular for recreation and offers good access to the coast via a number of car parks and footpaths. Informal recreational activities including walking, cycling and bird watching along the coastline and in North Wirral Coastal Park. More formal recreation is available at the Wallasey, Leasowe and Royal Liverpool Golf Clubs.

6.9 There are pockets of neglected and underused land particularly in the east around Leasowe. Small square fields bounded by tall privet hedge mark an area of former market gardens. These fields still contain several commercial nurseries, however other areas are under-used or subdivided for horse grazing.

6.10 Much of the area was formed from large scale reclamation of intertidal land, from canalisation of the River Dee in the 18th century. As the Dee silted up and Liverpool became more prosperous, the north Wirral coast became more important as a health resort in the late 18th century, when sea bathing was recommended by the medical profession. The Royal Liverpool Golf Course was originally laid out as a race course in 1840 and converted to a golf course by the late 1880s, making it one of the oldest golf courses in England.

6.11 The landscape is undeveloped except for residential properties at Castlefield Estate and small horticultural buildings and glass houses adjacent to Leasowe Road. Scattered industry, individual houses and some man-made landforms are visible across rough grassland. The landscape

has a rougher less rural appearance within this part of the character area.

6.12 Historic landmarks, including the Grade II listed Leasowe Lighthouse and Grade II* listed Leasowe Castle are located along the Wallasey embankment. The castle is an octagonal tower which dates from 1593, built for the Earls of Derby, and was extended in the 17th and 19th centuries. It is now a hotel and conference centre. The lighthouse is a relatively early example of a lighthouse, built in 1763 for the Liverpool Docks Committee, and operated until 1908. A proposal to provide a visitor centre has not yet been taken forward.

6.13 The area is surrounded by the linear coastal settlements of West Kirby, Hoylake, Leasowe and New Brighton. Urban development is almost always visible from the area due to the lack of trees, although the settlement edge is generally contained by roads.

6.14 Prominent Victorian villas to the north of the Royal Liverpool Golf Course with distinctive red brick and black and white panelling provide a sense of time-depth to this area.



Royal Liverpool Golf Course

Perceptual Landscape

6.15 This character area has extensive views due to its relatively low-lying position. Along Wallasey Embankment, views extend along the north Wirral coastline across the open sea to the dock area within Bootle and the Liverpool coastline towards Formby Point. To the west, there are views across to the mountains along the North Wales coast, including the Great Orme headland at Llandudno and the eastern end of Anglesey. The mountains provide a distinctive backdrop to urban development at Meols and Hoylake.

6.16 Large scale off-shore wind farms in the Irish Sea, including the Burbo Bank and Burbo Bank extension, form dominant vertical structures off the coast. These are prominent within views from most of the character area.

6.17 From high points on the sand dunes, which are crossed by a network of informal footpaths, extensive views are also possible inland across the golf courses towards the urban edge. These views are typically characterised by housing with prominent wooded ridgelines behind, including Bidston Hill in the east and Caldy and Grange Hills in the west.

6.18 From the Royal Liverpool Golf Course, views extend across the Dee Estuary to the Hilbre Islands, and towards the Welsh coastline including mountains within the Clwydian Range and northern part of Snowdonia. These provide a distinctive backdrop to views over sand dunes and the golf course.

6.19 Tidal movement and waves contribute to the exposed character of the landscape. At high tide, waves often wash against and sometimes over the embankment, which creates an element of drama and interest.

6.20 The area is tranquil when looking out to sea, however the presence of recreational facilities and proximity to urban areas at Hoylake, Leasowe and Wallasey reduce the sense of rurality and remoteness.

Valued Landscape Attributes

- Dynamic relationship between the windswept coastline and open sea which changes with the tides and provides a sense of place.
- Recreational opportunities on the coastline and North Wirral Coastal Park, and in more formal settings at golf courses, allow for enjoyment of the landscape.
- Highly valued marine-influenced terrestrial habitats including sand dunes, saltmarsh and mudflats, provide important coastal and estuarine habitats, particularly for wetland birds.
- Prominent historic buildings at Leasowe Castle and Leasowe Lighthouse provide a visual contrast to the flat landscape and a sense of time depth and contribute to local character.
- Open expansive views along the north Wirral coast across the adjacent estuaries and out to sea.
- Open undeveloped coastal character with a sense of remoteness despite the proximity of more developed coastal areas.

Landscape Condition

6.21 The area has a strong character due to its association with natural coastal landscapes. Sand dunes and golf courses are managed to have a natural appearance in keeping with their coastal location. The former market gardens at Leasowe have an unmanaged character which weakens landscape character locally.



Leasowe Lighthouse

Key Issues

- Coastal erosion resulting in the need for new sea defences or upgrading of existing sea defences closing views and introducing engineered structures.
- Siltation of the Dee Estuary and gradual colonisation by Spartina grass.
- Establishment of embryonic sand dunes softening the edge of concrete embankments and sea defences.
- Scrub establishment eroding the open character of the sand dunes.
- Planting of woodlands and individual trees eroding the natural sand dune characteristics of the golf courses.
- Increase of neglected and under-used land resulting in scrub establishment and unmanaged boundaries, particularly related to the decline of market gardening.
- New isolated development within golf courses which contrasts with surrounding development and the open undeveloped character of land.

- Expansion of tourist facilities such as caravan parks, car parks and toilets reducing the naturalistic character of the landscape.
- Urban expansion into the character area particularly along Leasowe Road.
- The development of large scale off-shore wind farms has resulted in highly visible large-scale infrastructure within the area. Further developments may affect views, diluting the perception of remoteness.

neighbouring urban areas of Wallasey Village, Leasowe, Morton, Meols, Hoylake and West Kirby.

- Where tree planting is proposed, ensure it is small-scale in nature, uses appropriate species, and is implemented close to urban fringes where it will soften the urban edge.
- Conserve the exposed character of the landscape ensuring that open views along the coast and out to sea are protected.

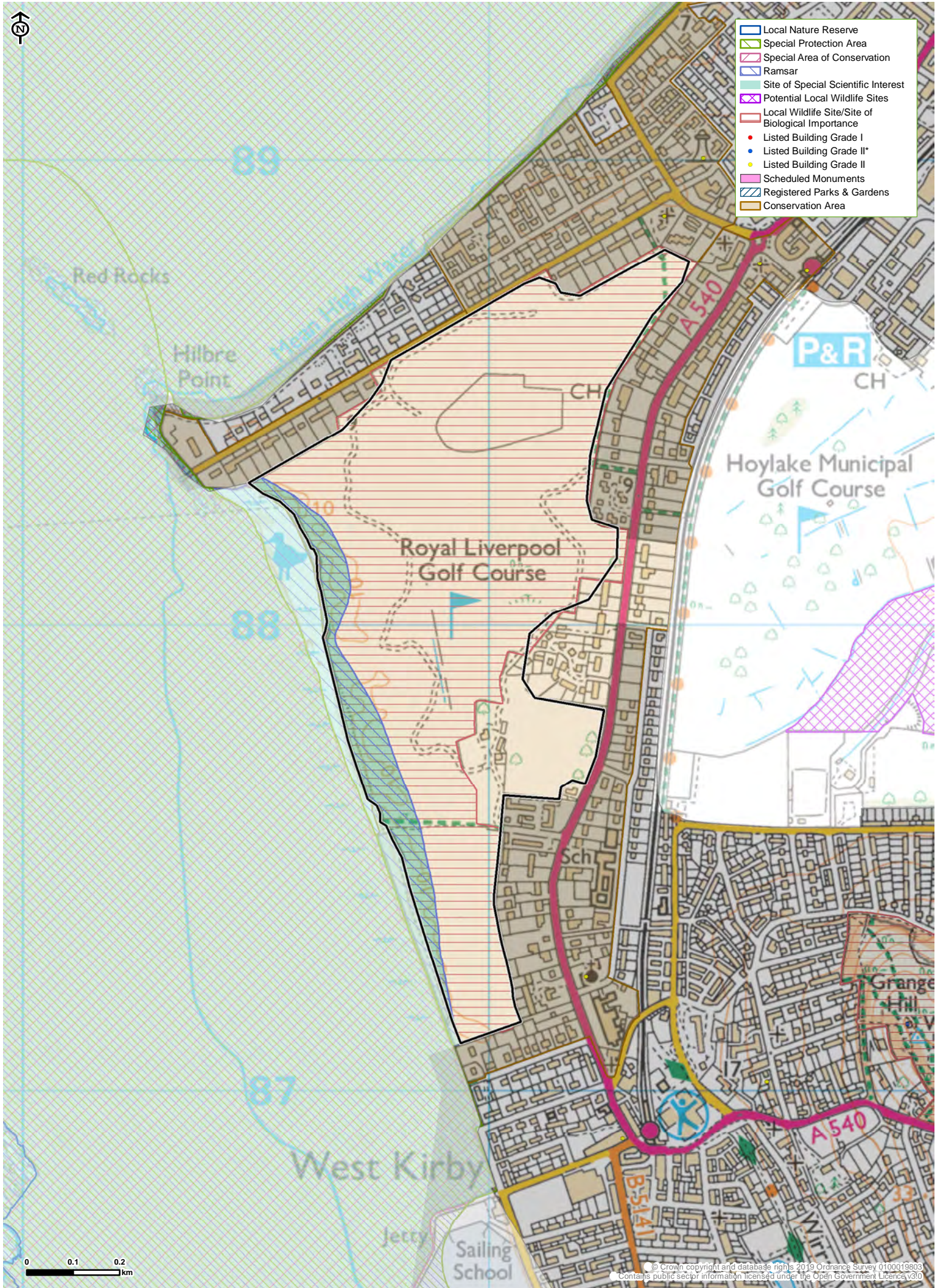
Landscape Strategy

6.22 The landscape strategy for the North Wirral Coastal Edge LCA is to conserve key coastal features of this landscape to retain it as a distinctive landscape within Wirral.

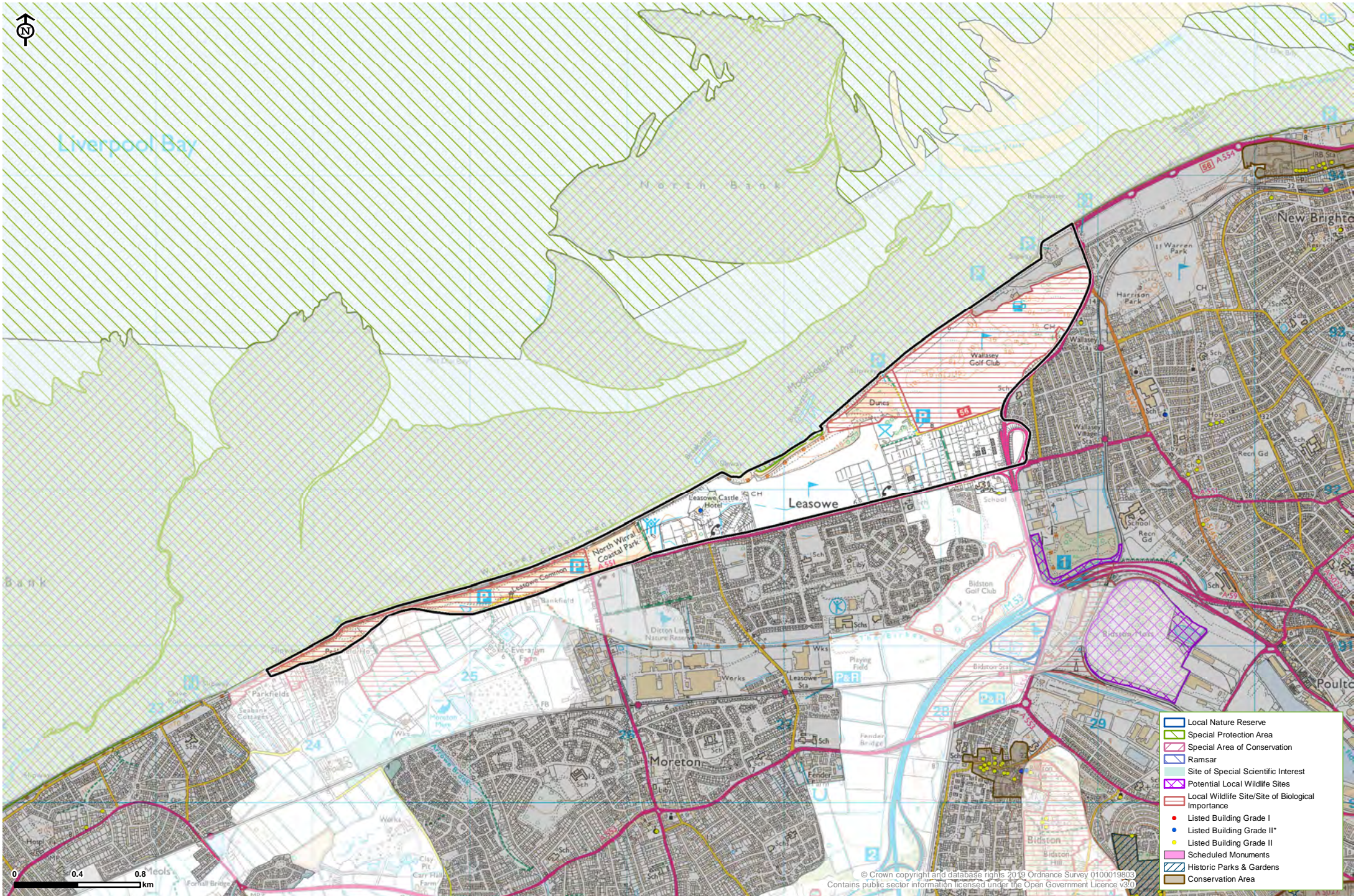
Landscape Guidelines

- Work with natural coastal processes to conserve and enhance the coastal landscape, including the distinctive pattern of intertidal mudflat, coastal saltmarshes and coastal sand dunes, enhancing the sense of place and conserving important coastal and estuarine habitats.
- Manage scrub encroachment to maintain the open character of the grassed sand dunes and transitional shoreline vegetation.
- Conserve and manage the natural sand dune characteristics of golf courses, allowing dune grasslands to develop, particularly where expansion or new areas of golf course are proposed. Ensure that the layout reflects the character of grassed sand dunes and minimises the prominence of formally managed putting greens.
- Enhance and augment hedged field boundaries in former market gardens, replacing horse tape where possible.
- Conserve the open setting of locally distinctive historic buildings at Leasowe.
- Carefully manage tourist pressures along the coast ensuring that recreation use is balanced with nature conservation objectives. Retain a natural and informal character to new tourist features such as car parks, footpaths, signage, interpretation and facilities.
- Conserve the open and largely undeveloped character of the landscape, ensuring any limited development or landscape change is unobtrusive and sensitively integrated and retains a well-defined distinction between the open coastline and

1a: North Wirral Coastal Edge



1a: North Wirral Coastal Edge



1b: Dee Estuarine Edge

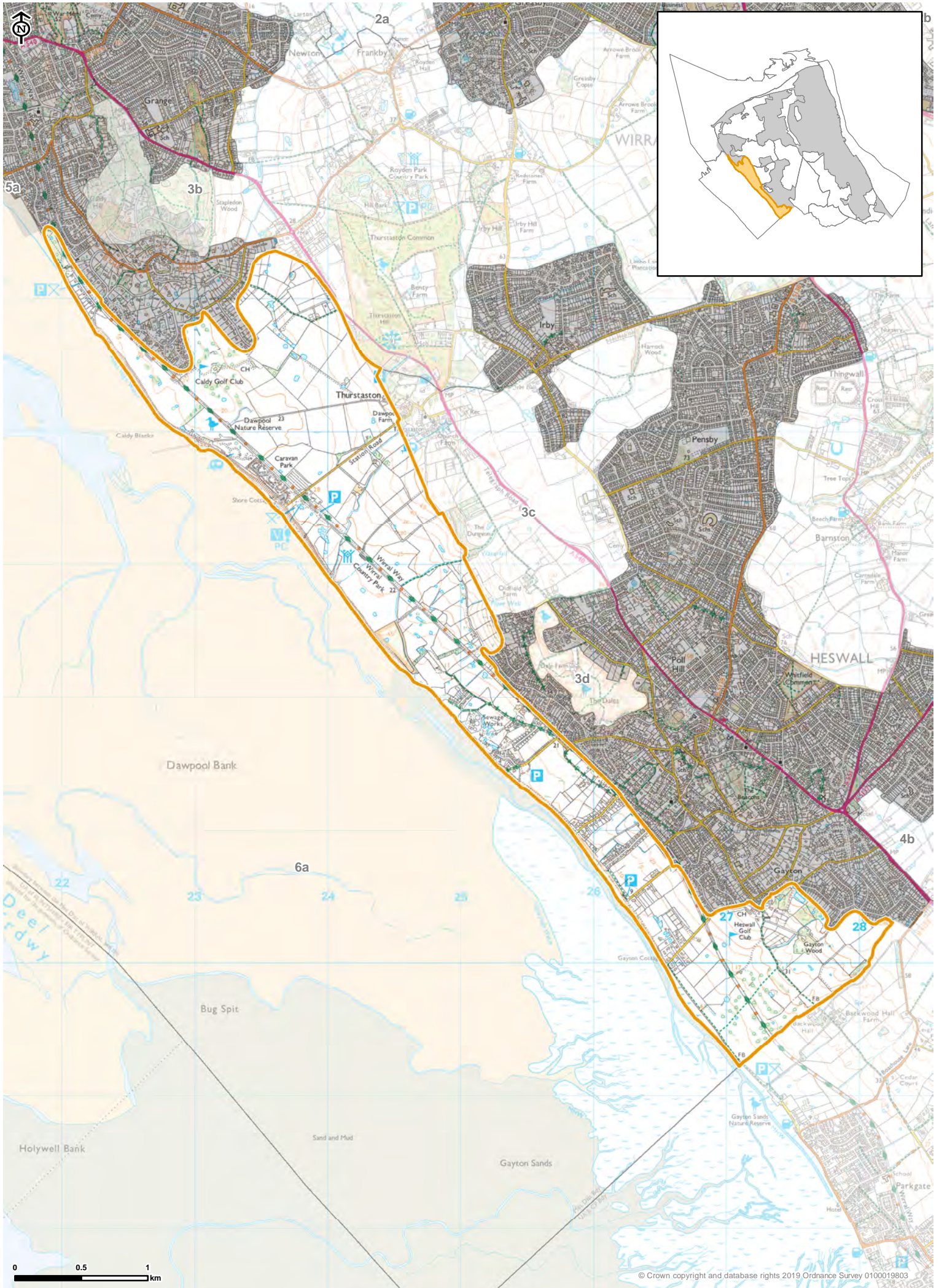
Summary

Dee Estuarine Edge LCA is located on the south-western coastline of Wirral peninsula and is strongly associated with the Dee Estuary to the west (the character of the adjacent seascape is described in SCA 6a: Dee Estuary). It encompasses the undeveloped foreshore and saltmarsh and mudflats on the edges of the estuary, from where it extends up through arable and pasture farmland and recreational areas including Wirral Country Park, Caldy Golf Course and Heswall Golf Club at Gayton. The northern boundary is formed by the settlement edge of Caldy, and the eastern boundary is drawn along the 50m contour line at the bottom of the wooded ridge line at Thurstaston and the settlement edge of Heswall. The borough boundary marks the southern boundary, and the shoreline the western boundary.



Thurstaston Beach looking south-east

1b: Dee Estuarine Edge



Key Characteristics

- A gently undulating landscape rising from the Dee Estuary. The coastline varies with staggered cliffs in the north and a low-lying plain alongside extensive vegetated saltmarshes in the south.
- Small wooded streams in steep narrow valleys flow west into the Dee. There are a few field ponds scattered across the area.
- Extensive estuarine habitats associated with the wider Dee Estuary including intertidal mudflats, coastal saltmarsh, and maritime cliffs and slopes.
- Coastal habitats and the rural hinterland beyond are internationally important in supporting bird populations.
- Woodland is limited, with small windblown clumps or linear woodland along the coast and more extensive woodland inland around the settlements of Caldy and Heswall, much of which is locally designated.
- Mixed pastoral and arable farmland with a regular pattern of small to medium sized fields, many of historic origin, with dense hedgerows.
- A popular recreational area centred on Thurstaston Beach and Wirral Country Park with more formal recreation at Heswall and Caldy Golf Courses.
- A sparse settlement pattern with scattered farms except for ribbon development between Lower Heswall and the coast, and large caravan sites on the cliff top at Thurstaston. The surrounding urban areas are often screened by woodland. Roads are narrow and rural, and lined with hedgerows.
- Expansive views from the beach and higher ground over the open water, mudflats and saltmarsh of the Dee Estuary, to the Welsh coastline.
- Wooded ridgelines in the east form a backdrop to the area, and restrict views further inland, except for the spire of St Bartholomew's Church in Thurstaston which forms a landmark feature above the woodland.
- The area retains a sense of remoteness and tranquillity especially along the coastline. The changing character of the Dee Estuary has a strong influence on the coastal landscape, with contrasting colour and texture between the open water to the north and the broad green expanse of the coastal marsh to the south.

Natural Landscape

6.23 The area is underlain by Triassic Wilmslow and Chester Formation sandstones, overlain by Devensian till inland and saltmarsh and tidal flat deposits on the coastline.

6.24 The gently undulating landform slopes down to the coast from the bottom of the ridge line at 50m AOD (within Pensby and Irby Wooded Sandstone Hills and Dales). The coastal landform is varied, with staggered soft clay cliffs (designated as the Dee Cliffs SSSI for their geological interest) between Caldy and Heswall which form a stepped vertical drop to the sandy beach at Thurstaston. The coastline at Caldy and the Dee Sailing club is protected from erosion by rock armour coastal defences. Further south, a flatter coastline runs alongside the estuary.

6.25 Small streams flow east to west through the area towards the coast, many within steep narrow valleys forming wooded dells or carved into the cliffs where the streams flow out into the estuary. There are a few small ponds scattered across the area and some drainage ditches, which contain aquatic vegetation, emergent vegetation, marshy grassland and willow carr.

6.26 Extensive estuarine-influenced habitats of saltmarshes, intertidal mudflats and sandflats are important breeding grounds and overwintering sites for a range of wildfowl and wading bird populations. These are internationally designated as the Dee Estuary SPA, SAC and Ramsar Site, and nationally, the Dee Estuary SSSI also extends into the south of the area. The Dee Cliffs SSSI is the best example of clay cliff and bank habitat in Merseyside. It contains priority habitat maritime cliff and slopes, coastal saltmarsh and lowland mixed broadleaf woodland. The clay cliffs also support an open grassland.

6.27 Woodland appears in predominantly small clumps, copses and shelter belts and patches of linear woodland. In exposed places, tree growth appears stunted and trees are windblown in appearance. Woodland is mainly deciduous, and contains priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland, often locally designated as Local Wildlife Sites and Sites of Biological Importance (including Wirral Way; Caldy Golf Club; Heswall Fields; Wittering Lane; Gayton Wood; Gayton Hall Wood; and Backwood Hall Farm).

6.28 Coniferous woodland and pine trees are more frequent along the settlement edges of Caldy and Heswall. On the estuary, vegetation is minimal and consists of coarse grasses such as marram grass and sea aster.

6.29 The West Wirral Heathlands and Arrowse Park Nature Improvement Area covers the area east of Wirral Way and priorities are to create and maintain the extent and species

diversity of grassland and to enhance the existing woodland. West of Wirral Way, the area is partially covered by the Dee Estuary Nature Improvement Area, which prioritises the maintenance of the designated sites.



Looking south from The Dungeon

Cultural Landscape

6.30 Land cover is a mix of rough grassland and pastoral land with flatter arable farmland to the south at Lower Heswall. Fields are regular in pattern and small to medium in size, although they become larger in the north of the area. The Cheshire HLC report identifies historic field patterns including pre-1600s field patterns south of Gayton and Medieval Townfields west of the town along the coast, as well as 19th century reorganised fields to the north. Fields are characteristically bordered by dense hedgerows, and include gorse, blackthorn, hawthorn, rose and bracken. There are areas of horse pasture where the fields are sub-divided by post and tape fences, which is often untidy in appearance.

6.31 Wirral Country Park, the first designated country park in Britain, extends along the route of a former railway and forms a wooded linear feature through the landscape. The park contains amenity grassland, dense scrub, tourist facilities, car parks and a popular visitor centre on Station Road. The long-distance Wirral Way and route 56 of the National Cycle Route follow the route of the former railway through Wirral Country Park. More formal recreational opportunities are found at the Heswall and Caldy golf courses, at either end of the character area.

6.32 There is little development within most of the area apart from a few scattered farms. Part of the Gayton Conservation Area lies in the south-east and contains the Grade II* Gayton Hall and dovecot. Suburban residential ribbon development lines the small roads which run in parallel from Lower Heswall

towards the coast. There are large caravan parks north of Station Road, however they are screened from views by high hedges and are not prominent in the landscape. The urban edges of Caldy and Heswall are screened by woodland and do not form prominent features in the landscape.

6.33 There are few roads within the area. They are rural, lined by hedgerows and link the settlements to the coastline.

Perceptual Landscape

6.34 Views vary between extensive, panoramic views from higher ground and along the coastline, and enclosed short distance views on lower lying fields which are lined by residential roads in Lower Heswall. Dense hedgerows, particularly along Wirral Country Park, channel views, and create an enclosed character. Where views are possible, on the beach and on higher ground, these are long distance over the Dee Estuary, to the Welsh coast and the Clwydian Range beyond.

6.35 The area is relatively tranquil, particularly along the coastline. The changing character of the Dee Estuary has a strong influence on the adjacent landscape, changing from sandy beaches with open water where tidal movement and waves contribute to the exposed character of the landscape, to the quieter coastline to the south of Heswall which is now separated from the water channel by the broad green expanse of the saltmarsh that has developed on Gayton Sands with open water a considerable distance beyond.

6.36 The visual values and landscape quality of much of the area are recognised locally as an Area of Special Landscape Value, except for the land between Dee Side and Cottage Lane in the south. This area is considered to be among the most outstanding landscapes within Wirral and provides an important and positive contribution to the distinctive attractiveness of the peninsula.



Wirral Way

Valued Landscape Attributes

- A varied coastal landscape where character changes gradually from north to south with the increasing coastal saltmarsh accretion of the Dee Estuary, which provides natural interest.
- Internationally important estuarine habitats including sand dunes, saltmarsh and mudflats, supporting important populations of breeding, passage and overwintering birds.
- Small regular field pattern reflecting the time depth of the area.
- Rural character of the lanes, especially due to hedgerows, provides a sense of tranquillity and enclosure.
- Recreational opportunities on the coastline and Wirral Country Park and in more formal settings at golf courses allow for enjoyment of the landscape.
- Open expansive views over the Dee Estuary to the Welsh hills beyond.
- Tranquil rural area, which provides space for quiet enjoyment of the countryside and coastline.
- Majority of the area is recognised locally as an Area of Special Landscape Value, considered to be amongst the most outstanding landscapes within Wirral, and provide an important and positive contribution to the distinctive attractiveness of the peninsula.

Landscape Condition

6.37 The area has a rural character which is strongly influenced by the coastline and Dee Estuary. Dense hedgerows along fields and roads provide a coherent character and screen the limited settlement pattern. Recreational areas including Wirral Way and golf courses are well integrated into the landscape. Areas of horse pasture, where the fields are sub-divided by post and tape fences, locally weaken the landscape character. However, most of the landscape is well managed and landscape features are intact.

Key Issues

- Coastal erosion resulting in the need for new sea defences or upgrading of existing defences introducing engineered structures.
- Siltation of the Dee Estuary and increasing coastal saltmarsh accretion, changing the character of the adjacent coastline.

- Scrub encroachment along the coastline, eroding its open character.
- Increase in coniferous plantation woodland, which is out of character with the landscape.
- Hedgerow fragmentation through lack of management and replacement planting, resulting in the loss of more intimate field patterns.
- Diversification of agricultural land uses, including equestrian, leading to subdivision of fields for horse paddocks, using post and tape fencing,
- Expansion of ribbon development along existing roads eroding the scattered settlement pattern.
- Expansion of recreational facilities such as caravan parks, golf courses, car parks and toilets reducing the naturalistic character of the landscape.



Arable farmland looking north from Riverbank Road

Landscape Strategy

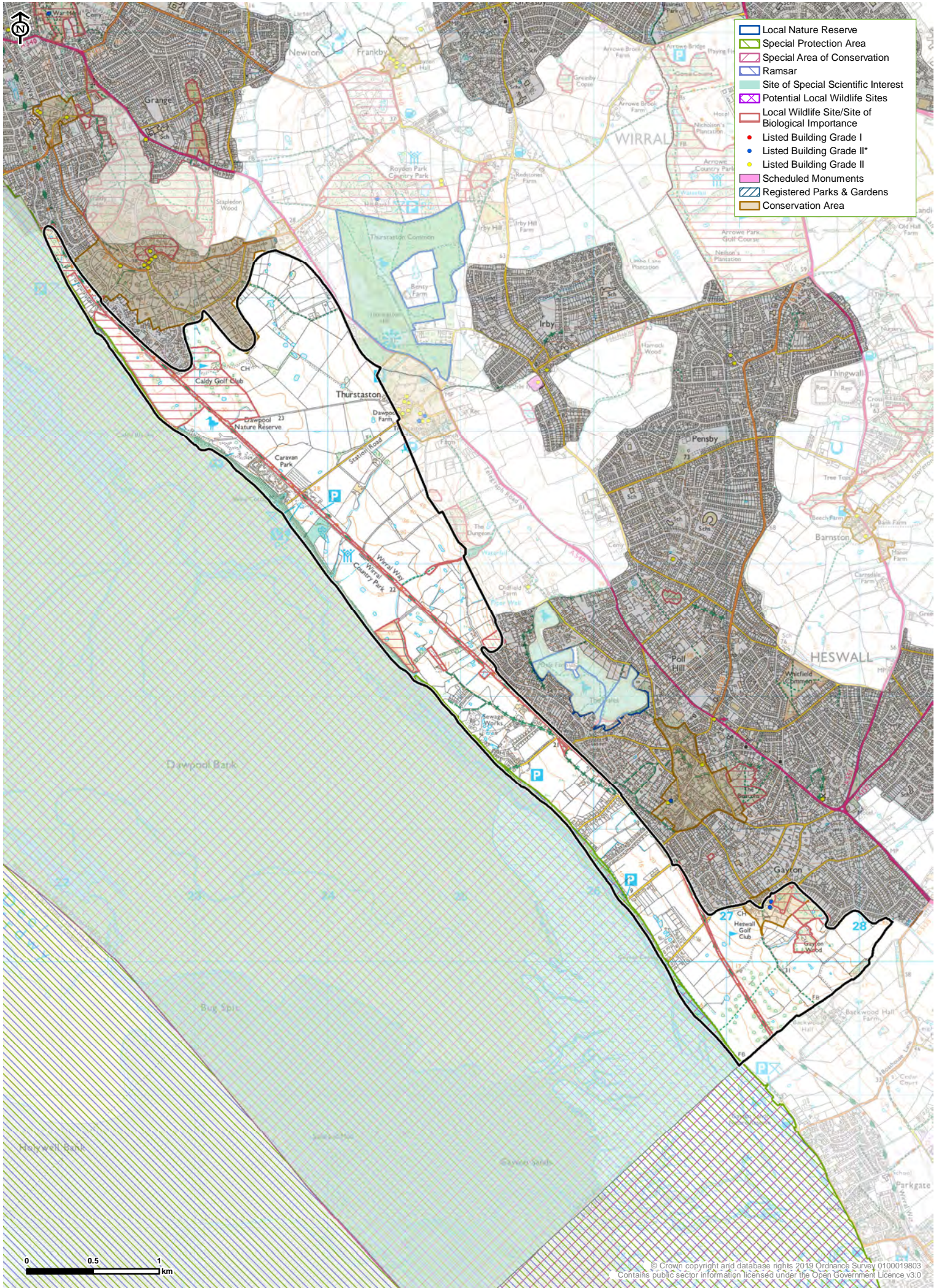
6.38 The overall strategy for the Dee Estuarine Edge LCA is to conserve the coastal character with open coastal views and distinctive estuarine habitats. The rural character of the landscape with a sparse settlement pattern should also be conserved, and tourist pressures carefully managed.

Landscape Guidelines

- Work with natural coastal processes to conserve and enhance the coastal landscape, including the distinctive pattern of intertidal mudflat and coastal saltmarshes, enhancing the sense of place and conserving important coastal and estuarine habitats. Manage designated sites as part of the Dee Estuary Nature Improvement Area.

- Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland away from the coastline, using locally occurring native species in order to link to existing woodland. Seek to avoid the introduction of coniferous boundaries.
- Conserve and manage hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features.
- Conserve, enhance and manage valued grassland and woodland habitats. Implement habitat creation and management as recommended within the West Wirral and Arrowe Park Nature Improvement Areas.
- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods.
- Conserve the sparse settlement pattern, restricting new development to limited infilling within existing urban areas.
- Conserve the well-defined distinction between the open coastline and the urban areas of Heswall and Caldy, enhancing the integration of these settlement boundaries through native woodland and trees.
- Maintain and enhance the character of the rural lanes with their dense hedgerows. Resist unsympathetic highway improvements that would threaten their rural character.
- Carefully manage tourist pressures along the coast and at Wirral Country Park. Ensure a natural and informal character for tourist features such as car parks, footpaths, signage, interpretation and facilities.
- Enhance the sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale and materials) to minimise the impacts of any new development.
- Conserve the open character of the landscape along the coast ensuring expansive views across the Dee Estuary to the Welsh hills are protected. Conserve intermittent open views of the Dee Estuary from Wirral Way footpath by managing vegetation.
- Conserve the rural qualities of the landscape, with its perceptions of tranquillity and remoteness.

1b: Dee Estuarine Edge



1c: Eastham Estuarine Edge

Summary

Eastham Estuarine Edge LCA lies south of Bromborough in the south-east of the borough. It is a largely flat area, with sandstone cliffs dropping to the Mersey Estuary (described in SCA 6b: Mersey Estuary). The area is heavily wooded in the north-east and is almost exclusively used for recreation including Eastham Country Park, the Leverhulme Sports Field and Eastham Lodge Golf Club. Limited settlement at Carlett Park and few roads lead to an isolated character, despite being bordered by settlement and industry. There are views across the Mersey and the entrance to the Manchester Ship Canal from the coast.

Although the area has limited visual relation with the Mersey, it is still located along the estuary. The area is bound to the north by industrial development on the edge of Bromborough at Wirral International Business Park, and to the west by the A41 New Chester Road, which forms the settlement edge of the town of Eastham. The southern boundary is formed by Eastham village, and the eastern boundary by industry at the Manchester Ship Canal and QEII Dock and the Mersey Estuary.



Eastham Ferry

1c: Eastham Estuarine Edge



Key Characteristics

- Low-lying, relatively flat landform, sloping from 37m to 10m AOD to sandstone cliffs which drop sharply to the River Mersey.
- The area provides a break in the extensive urban development which generally dominates the Wirral bank of the Mersey Estuary. The Estuary has a strong influence on the character of the landscape, with wide intertidal mudflats and saltmarsh extending from red sandstone cliffs.
- Estuarine habitats associated with the wider Mersey Estuary including intertidal mudflat and saltmarsh (Mersey Estuary SSSI) support wetland birds.
- A well wooded landscape particularly within Eastham Country Park which contains priority habitat deciduous woodland, including ancient woodland, and is locally designated.
- Recreation is the main land use, with Leverhulme Sports Field and Eastham Lodge Golf Club providing more formal recreation and open access parkland at Eastham Country Park which runs along the coast. The park was formerly a pleasure garden providing entertainment for Victorian visitors from Liverpool.
- Limited development with few roads, except for a small residential development at Carlett Park.
- Expansive views across the River Mersey towards Liverpool with glimpsed views of the Runcorn Bridge and Pennines beyond and views south to oil refineries at Ellesmere Port. Woodland encloses views within Eastham Country Park. The Eastham Ferry jetty and Job's ferry are local landmarks offering open views of the River Mersey.
- The park and green spaces provide valued local tranquillity offering woodland walks and contrasting views across the tidal estuary with its abundant birdlife and busy shipping lanes. Overhead powerlines are discordant features.

Natural Landscape

6.39 The area is underlain by Chester and Wilmslow Triassic Sandstone Formations, with a small area of Devensian till overlain in the north.

6.40 Landform is fairly flat around 35m AOD; however it becomes slightly more undulating within Eastham Country Park and slopes towards the River Mersey. Natural red sandstone cliffs, and engineered embankments create a sharp drop to the Mersey; the scale and height of this drop varies with tidal movements along the River Mersey.

6.41 Mature woodlands and trees characterise the landscape and priority habitat deciduous woodland cover almost the entirety of the area. The largest woodland is at Eastham Country Park, which contains deciduous woodland, much of which is ancient, and is designated as a Local Wildlife Site and Site of Biological Importance. Understorey planting includes evergreen species such as holly and mature rhododendron. In spring, large areas of woodland contain bluebells.

6.42 The majority of the area, apart from the Leverhulme Sports Field, is part of Dibbinsdale, Raby Mere and Eastham Country Park Nature Improvement Area. The priorities are to create new woodland to buffer the ancient woodland, as well as to improve the structure and quality of wet woodland and wetland habitats.

6.43 The coastline is part of the Mersey Estuary Nature Improvement Area, where the priorities are to manage the designated sites, maintain and enhance ancient woodland and semi-natural woodland and maintain the increasing species diversity of the existing grassland, to support breeding, passage and overwintering birds.



Eastham Country Park

Cultural Landscape

6.44 Land cover is predominately recreational, including wooded parkland in the Eastham Country Park. This large area of informal open space was formerly public gardens in Victorian times and popular with visitors from Liverpool. The Leverhulme Sports Field with its extensive formal playing fields and the Eastham Lodge Golf Course are both characterised by mature trees and surrounded by broadleaved woodland.

6.45 There is industry both within and outside the area, including an oil refinery, Eastham Locks, Wirral Industrial Business Park to the north and industry at Hooton Park to the south. Industrial areas are often surrounded by marginal farmland and pockets of regenerating scrub. The entrance to the Manchester Ship Canal borders the area, although this is partially obscured from view by the landform and by industrial development. An overhead powerline runs through the area.

6.46 A ferry service across the Mersey operated from Eastham since the 14th century, originally run by the monks of St Werburgh's Abbey. The ferry service became increasingly important as a means of linking Liverpool with other cities including Chester, and turnpike roads were built in Wirral from the 1780s. The first paddle steamer between Liverpool and Eastham began sailing in 1816. The arrival of the railway in the 1840s reduced the necessity of the ferry service, but the Eastham Ferry Pleasure Gardens continued to attract numerous visitors. The gardens were landscaped and included attractions such as a zoo, open-air stage, bandstand, ballroom and boating lake. In its heyday the area was known as the 'Richmond of the Mersey'. Its popularity decreased in the inter-war years, and the last paddle steamer crossing took place in 1929. Eastham Ferry Hotel (Grade II listed), built in 1847 as the Stanley Arms, the former landing stage and landscape features such as a bear pit and former fountains, are remnants of the area's importance as a leisure site.

6.47 The area was designated as the Eastham Country Park in 1970 and is now managed for informal recreation and wildlife and is mostly woodland and a series of small fields of both amenity and rough grassland. Opposite Eastham Country Park is the Mayfield woodland burial ground and memorial site. Other recreational opportunities are provided by numerous sports pitches, and the Eastham Lodge Golf Club. There are a few public rights of way in the north, which connect the A41 and Eastham Ferry.

6.48 The area has very limited development with the exception of a small modern development at Carlett Park. This was built on the site of a former technical college, which in turn was built on the grounds of Carlett Park mansion. The development retains the 19th century Grade II listed chapel.

6.49 Urban residential areas at Eastham are separated from the area by the A41 New Chester Road, which provides a strong boundary feature. This busy road is largely screened by trees within the Eastham Lodge Golf Course. Ferry Road and Torr Drive are the only roads which run through this area. Ferry Road is well wooded, particularly on the western side, with scrubby trees and hedgerows to the east, with occasional views to the Mersey Estuary. Torr Drive was the original driveway entrance to Carlett Park, and still retains a parkland character, although it now runs through the Eastham Lodge Golf Course.



Mayfields Remembrance Park

Perceptual Landscape

6.50 Much of the area has short distance views, contained by wooded boundaries around fields or by development. This is particularly the case in the west of Eastham Country Park.

6.51 There are important views towards the River Mersey and the industry along its banks. Key viewing points in Eastham Country Park, Job's Ferry and Eastham Ferry have expansive views across the River Mersey towards Liverpool airport and along the coastline including Otterspool and key buildings within Liverpool. The Three Graces are prominent features on the Liverpool waterfront. In clear weather, views towards the Runcorn Bridge and Pennines beyond are possible. Industry such as Vauxhall at Hooton Park and other buildings within Ellesmere Port are also prominent in the foreground of views.

6.52 Surrounding residential development at Eastham and Bromborough, although close by, is mostly obscured from view by woodland and wooded roads, including the A41 New Chester Road.

6.53 Despite proximity to industry and large settlements at Bromborough and Eastham, the area is relatively tranquil. The

park offers peaceful woodland walks and contrasting views across the tidal estuary with its abundant birdlife and busy shipping lanes. Overhead powerlines which cross the area are discordant features.

Valued Landscape Attributes

- The variety of undeveloped coastal features, including sandstone cliffs, providing natural interest.
- Areas of parkland with strong links to the Victorian pleasure gardens with remaining features providing a sense of place and time-depth.
- Valued for recreation, providing quiet enjoyment and ready access to the natural coastal environment which is uncommon on the Wirral bank of the Mersey.
- Valued semi-natural habitats, including deciduous woodland and important estuarine-influenced terrestrial habitats including mudflats and saltmarshes.
- Expansive views across the River Mersey which provide a sense of place.

Landscape Condition

6.54 Eastham Country Park contains woodland and recreational routes and has a coherent parkland character. This wooded character is echoed within the golf course. There is a small area of unmanaged made ground crossed by pipelines to the south of the Mayfield Remembrance Garden, which weakens the landscape character locally. However, the majority of the landscape is well managed, and landscape features are intact.



Eastham Ferry looking south-east

Key Issues

- Industrial expansion increasing urban influences.
- Expansion of housing at Carlett Park may dilute the wooded parkland character.
- Increasing recreational pressures impacting Eastham Country Park and Leverhulme Sports Field.
- Loss of views across the Mersey through maturation of woodland along river banks and scrub establishment within fields.
- Loss of public access to coastal frontages.

Landscape Strategy

6.55 The overall strategy for the Eastham Estuarine Edge LCA is to conserve the wooded naturalistic character of the area, and the views and relationship with the Mersey Estuary. Recreational pressures should be carefully managed to ensure the landscape character is maintained.

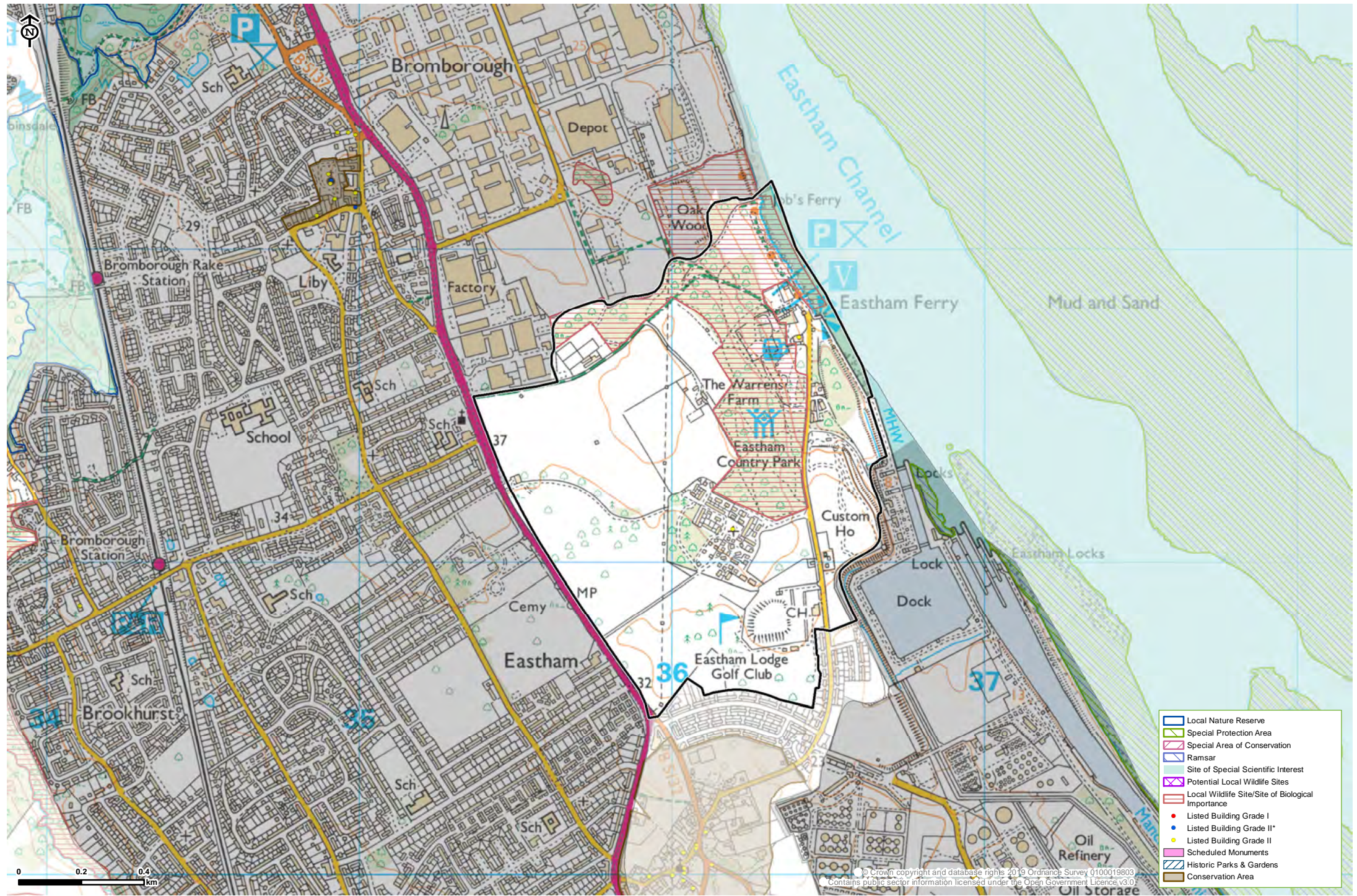
Landscape Guidelines

- Work with natural coastal processes to conserve and enhance the coastal landscape, including the sandstone cliffs, intertidal mudflats and coastal saltmarshes. Implement coastal habitat creation and management as part of the Mersey Estuary Nature Improvement Area.
- Conserve, enhance and manage valued woodland habitats, particularly within Eastham Country Park. Implement habitat creation and management within these areas as part of the Dibbinsdale, Raby Mere and Eastham Country Park Nature Improvement Area.
- Conserve and protect historic features of the Victorian pleasure gardens.
- Manage the area's popularity for recreation, encouraging the use of existing facilities, whilst providing sustainable transport options to reduce levels of traffic.
- Maintain and enhance the wooded character of roads and footpaths with their tree-lined avenues.
- Conserve the sense of separation between Eastham village and Bromborough to the north.
- Retain a balance between recreational, residential and industrial land uses ensuring that new development does not intrude into areas retaining naturalistic characteristics. Minimise the impacts of any new development through careful design

(including siting, massing, scale, materials and landscaping).

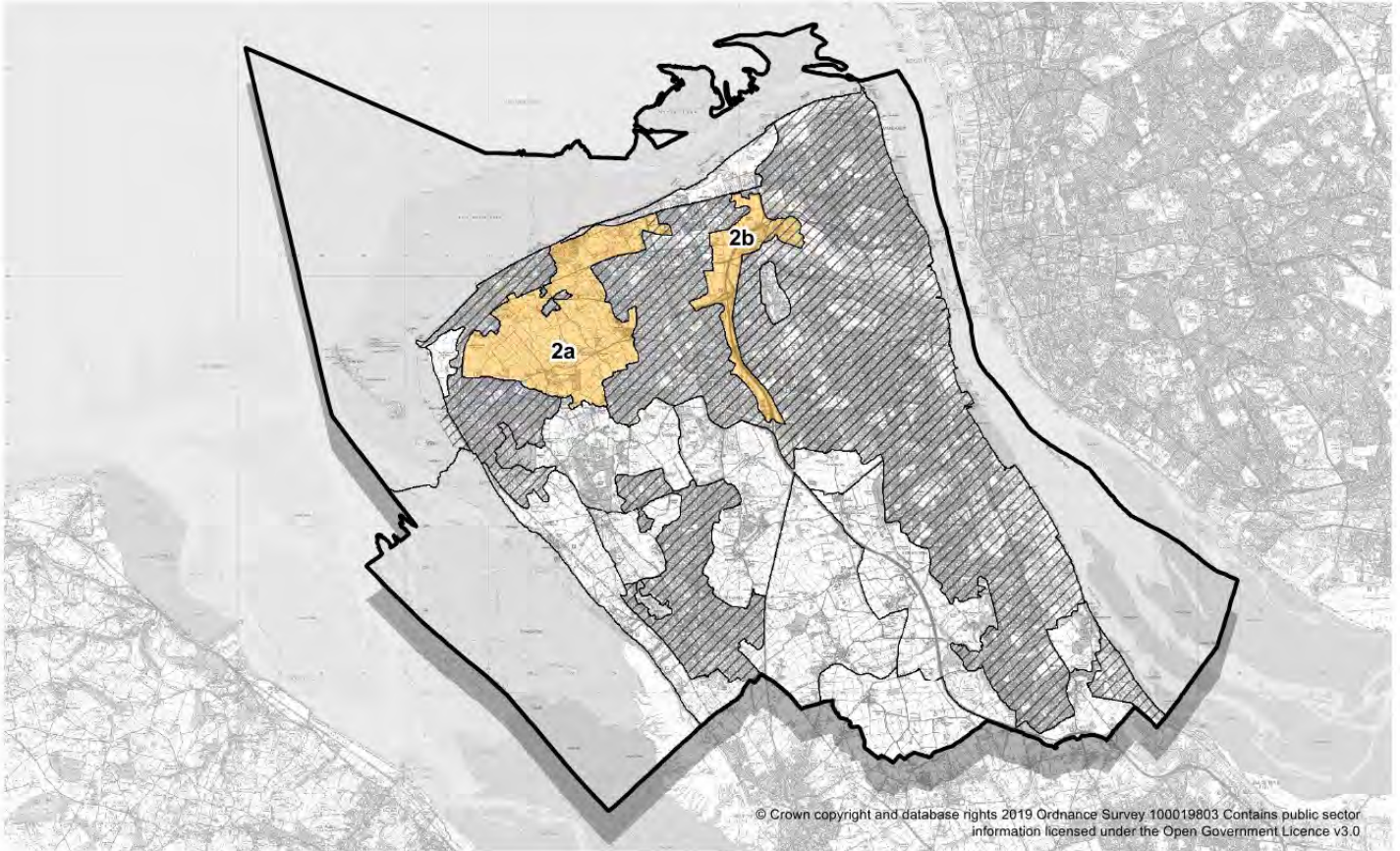
- Consider planting along the edges of industrial development to provide further screening from the character area.
- Maintain expansive views towards the River Mersey, particularly where public access is possible along the waterfront.

1c: Eastham Estuarine Edge



Chapter 7

LCT 2: River Floodplains



Description

The LCT is distinguished by flat low-lying land, draining into a linear pattern of streams and engineered watercourses. These are surrounded by wetland habitats. The areas themselves have a sparse settlement pattern although industry, infrastructure and settlement are common along the edges. A generally open and exposed character, although woodland within the areas and on wooded ridgelines outside the area provide some sense of enclosure. Agricultural land is a mix of arable and pasture, predominately horse grazing. The LCT is popular for recreation, although there are large areas of underused land.

Landscape Character Areas

The River Floodplains LCT is subdivided into two Landscape Character Areas:

- 2a: The Birket River Floodplain
- 2b: The Fender River Floodplain

2a: The Birket River Floodplain

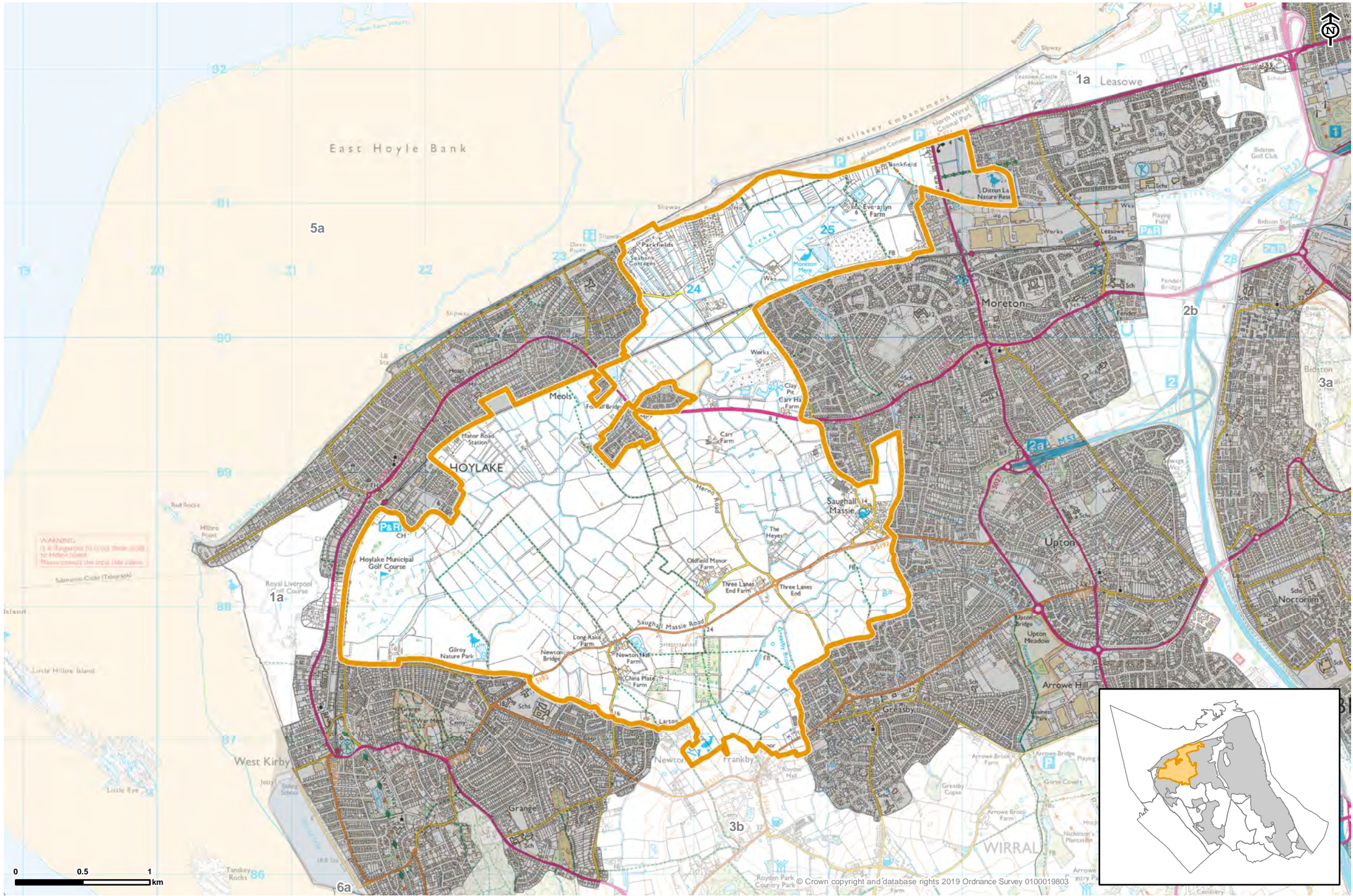
Summary

The Birket River Floodplain lies in the north-west of the Wirral peninsula. It is a flat open area of mixed farmland, with a geometric field pattern defined by watercourses. The area has a sparse settlement pattern and good public access. Despite proximity to Hoylake, West Kirby, Greasby and Moreton, wooded horizons screen much of the urban development. The northern boundary follows the coastal footpath, North Wirral Coastal Park and the settlement edge. The east and west boundaries also follow the settlement edges, while the southern boundary follows field boundaries, and includes all the river floodplain land between Newton and Greasby.



Looking north from Saughall Massie Road

2a: The Birket River Floodplain



Key Characteristics

- Flat, low-lying farmland inland from the coast generally between 5m and 10m AOD, rising to 25m AOD in the south and east.
- Numerous tributary streams and ditches drain the surrounding farmland into the engineered River Birket. Field ponds are common and manmade pools from former quarrying and industry, many of which contain priority habitat reedbeds.
- Inland wetland and grassland habitats, including Meols Meadows SSSI and Meols Field LWS, are designated for their nature conservation value and their importance for overwintering migrating and breeding birds.
- The area is open with low woodland cover except for small copses and linear woodlands along ditches and settlement edges.
- Large scale arable farmland with pasture and horse paddocks more common in the north, although some land is under-utilised. Geometric fields are bounded by ditches and grassed bank with scrub, trees or fragmented hedgerows.
- Formed by draining marshland, the area retains extensive areas of pre-1600s field patterns including Medieval Townfields around Saughall Massie.
- A sparse settlement pattern limited to red sandstone farmhouses with large outbuildings. Saughall Massie is the only historic clustered settlement, with a number of Grade II listed buildings within its Conservation Area.
- Limited road access with roads and tracks bordered by tall intact hedgerows. The A553 is more open, with wide verges and no hedgerows. The railway crosses the north of the area, but is not dominant.
- Recreational opportunities are provided by the good network of footpaths, part of North Wirral Coastal Park and Hoylake Municipal Golf Course.
- Large scale open and exposed character with increasing tranquillity away from settlement edges.
- Development on exposed urban edge of adjacent settlements, landfill and mineral operations and overhead powerlines are discordant features.
- The coastline is mostly screened by the wooded edge of settlements to the north or the Wallasey Embankment, although off-shore wind turbines are often visible on the skyline beyond.

Natural Landscape

7.1 The area is underlain by Triassic sandstone, siltstone and mudstone. This is overlain by Devensian till in the south of the area, and Quaternary tidal flat deposits in the north.

7.2 The landscape is mostly flat and open farmland between 5m AOD and 10m AOD. The land rises slightly to 25m AOD in the south and east further inland, east of China Plate Farm. Man-made embankments around industrial areas in the north are prominent in the generally flat landscape.

7.3 There are a high number of small streams and drainage ditches throughout the area which provide drainage to the farmland. The Birket is a small engineered and locally prominent river, with a wide floodplain, which flows through the north of the area, rising south of Hoylake and flowing east towards the Mersey with a wide floodplain. The land is also protected from flooding by the Wallasey Embankment. There are numerous small ponds within the fields in the east of the character area and larger man-made lakes and pools associated with former quarrying and industry. There are also areas of lowland wetland and standing water on lower ground.

7.4 Semi-natural habitats include areas of priority habitat lowland meadow and wetland reedbeds concentrated along the River Birket and at Moreton Mere. Meols Meadows SSSI is located between Arroe Brook and the River Birket and is notified for rare damp unimproved neutral grassland. The area contains the best example of crested dog's-tail-common knapweed type of grassland in Greater Manchester and Merseyside. It also supports a large colony of chimney sweeper moth and locally rare saltmarsh money spider. The Former RAF Camp, Greasby and Meols Field are designated as Local Wildlife Sites and Sites of Biological Importance for their grassland and wetland habitats. The small Gilroy Nature Park in the south-west is a pond which attracts duck, warblers and other birds, and is part of the larger Hoylake Langfields potential Local Wildlife Site. These inland wetland areas provide supporting, feeding and roosting habitat for overwintering, passage and breeding birds that provide an extension to the internationally important sites along the Wirral coast and beyond.

7.5 Woodland is confined to pockets of small linear regular and irregular shaped woodlands along ditches, the settlement edges and the West Kirby Birkenhead railway line, much of which is priority habitat mixed deciduous woodland. There is a plantation south of Saughall Massie Road, and groups of trees within the Hoylake Golf Course. Willow and poplar are common tree species.

7.6 Much of the area is part of the River Birket Corridor Nature Improvement Area, where priorities are to; create and enhance existing wetlands including the River Birket, support

the existing wetland habitats; create new hedgerows and trees to join existing networks, maintain the extent and diversity of wetlands and grasslands and maintain the value of supporting habitat for overwintering migrating and breeding birds south of Hoylake, Saughall Massie and Leasowe.



Looking south from Lingham Lane

Cultural Landscape

7.7 Land use is predominantly agricultural, with a mix of arable and pasture, although there are areas of under-used open land. Horse paddocks are common north of the railway line, with smaller fields often subdivided with horse tape. Field boundaries are often formed by ditches. These are accompanied by associated vegetation including dense trees, scrub and grassed banks, and unmanaged or fragmented hedgerow, often reinforced or replaced by post and wire fencing. Patches of scrub and isolated bushes are sometimes the only remaining signs of a hedgerow. The dominant hedgerow species is hawthorn although black thorn occurs in places.

7.8 The former coastal marshes were drained in the middle ages and the area retains a significant area of irregular pre-1600s field pattern west of Heron Road and Medieval Townfields around Saughall Massie. The rest of the field pattern is of later origin, encompassing pre-Parliamentary marsh enclosure and Parliamentary planned enclosure. The landscape is protected from flooding by the Wallasey Embankment.

7.9 The settlement pattern is sparse and consists of large red sandstone farmsteads with large out-buildings and prominent agricultural sheds. A caravan park is situated off Park Lane in the north.

7.10 Saughall Massie is the only historic cluster of development within the area; the small rural village has grown from its medieval origins. It contains six Grade II listed buildings and is designated as a Conservation Area. The vernacular is soft red brick or sandstone with Welsh slate roofs. Stone buff sandstone boundary walls are common. The Grade II listed bridge over the Arrowe Brook is the first known work of the 19th century engineer and railway contractor Thomas Brassey.

7.11 The proximity of adjacent towns and related industrial and commercial developments on the urban edge, particularly in the north are often untidy and visible from the surrounding landscape. This includes landfill, mineral extraction, water treatment works and commercial units along the A553 Hoylake Road consisting of urban edge land uses such as garden centres and kennels. Industrial units along Carr Lane, on the edge of Hoylake are also visible, although slightly filtered by scrub and planting on the edges of Hoylake Golf Course. Overhead powerlines cross the area and are a detracting feature.

7.12 Modern residential expansion on the edge of the surrounding settlements at West Kirby, Hoylake, Greasby and Moreton is sometimes visible and contrasts with the rural character of the landscape. The urban edge of Meols is generally well contained by woodland, including three small areas of development along the A553 Birkenhead Road and Heron Road, which are excluded from this LCA as they form part of the urban area.

7.13 Road access is limited and the two main roads crossing the area are busy and dilute perceptions of tranquillity. Saughall Massie Road was realigned in the early 2000s, however plans to recontour the windy narrow lanes further west towards West Kirby and at Heron Road and Pump Lane have yet to be implemented. Roads are often bordered by hedgerows, which provide a rural enclosed character. The A533 which runs along the north of the area connecting Moreton and Meols is much more open with wide verges and very few hedgerows. The railway line in the north of the area is well contained by woodland and has little impact on rural character.

7.14 There is a good network of public rights of way particularly west of Heron Road, including the Wirral Circular Trail which runs along the coast and includes part of a traffic-free cycle route. North Wirral Coastal Park offers informal recreation. Hoylake Municipal Golf Course is also popular for more formal recreation. North of the railway line there is a golf centre and driving range, and recreational fishing at Lingmere Fishery.



Grade II listed Poplar Farmhouse, Saughall Massie

Perceptual Landscape

7.15 The landscape is low and flat with few trees, woodland or other visual barriers, which gives an exposed and open character. There are long views over farmland to the rising slopes outside the character area to the south at Caldy, West Kirby and Thurstaston and to the east at Bidston Hill.

7.16 North of the railway line (east of Meols) there is a more enclosed character due to trees and hedgerow boundaries around small fields subdivided for horse paddocks. However engineered bunds around industrial areas, landfill and water treatment works give this area a degraded appearance.

7.17 The coast itself is largely obscured by the wooded settlement edge and the Wallasey Embankment, although Leosowe Lighthouse, off-shore wind turbines and occasional ships out to sea are visible in the distance.

7.18 The landscape is relatively screened from outside the character area although there are views possible from Thurstaston Hill, Bidston Hill and Grange Hill, and from the Wallasey Embankment.

7.19 Man-made embankments around landfill and mineral operations, large farm buildings, transport infrastructure and overhead powerlines appear larger in the landscape as there are so few other vertical elements. Hedgerow fragmentation and sub-division of fields with horse tape are also detracting elements. These all reduce the rural nature of the landscape particularly along the settlement edge.

7.20 The intrusion of built development into the landscape, and views to modern industrial, commercial and residential development along the surrounding settlement edge, along with the busy nature of the main roads crossing the area,

affects rural quality and tranquillity, particularly near the coastal settlements.

Valued Landscape Attributes

- Flat landscape provides an open character, with views across rural farmland.
- The geometric pattern of streams and drainage ditches which add interest to the landscape.
- Ecologically important grassland and wetland habitats associated with the River Birket and its tributaries, man-made ponds and ditches which provide important habitats for birds and are valued locally and nationally as Local Wildlife Sites and SSSI.
- Sparsely settled character, including the historic village of Saughall Massie, with its Conservation Area and concentration of historic field patterns.
- Recreational value including woodlands, playing fields, caravan parks and public rights of way which enable enjoyment of the landscape.
- Contrast of views to coastal features on the horizon and views inland to wooded hills at Bidston, West Kirby, Caldy and Thurstaston.



The Birket, from A551 Pasture Road

Landscape Condition

7.21 The area has a relatively coherent character, created by flat lowland farmland with streams and drainage ditches and limited settlement. The surrounding urban edges are often screened by woodland, but industrial and commercial development intrudes into the landscape. Detracting features include transport infrastructure and overhead powerlines.

Hedgerow fragmentation, sub-division of fields with horse tape, and horse paraphernalia create a slightly neglected appearance, and weaken landscape character in some areas.

Key Issues

- Increased flooding due to sea level rises and climate change leading to further engineering of rivers and watercourses to prevent flooding resulting in open channels with severe bank sides
- Degradation of the existing ditch networks and scrub encroachment.
- Changes in agricultural practices that could result in further loss and fragmentation of valued grassland habitats.
- Wetland and lowland meadows are influenced by seasonal variation in the water table. They will therefore be sensitive to changes in rainfall pattern due to climate change.
- Hedgerow fragmentation and loss, and sub-division of fields with horse tape.
- Conversion of farmland to horse and pony paddocks with temporary fencing and structures, resulting in a decline in rural intactness.
- Replacement of traditional farm buildings with larger modern agricultural sheds.
- Urban expansion of surrounding settlements which could be highly visible across the flat landscape.
- Increase in areas of under-used or degraded land which detracts from the attractiveness of the landscape.

Landscape Strategy

7.22 The overall strategy for the Birket River Floodplain is to conserve and enhance existing grassland and wetland habitats. The key aspects to be conserved, enhanced and actively managed are the streams, ditches and linear woodland. Hedgerow field boundaries should be restored, and the sparse settlement pattern retained. The wooded ridgeline which visually separates the area from surrounding development should also be maintained and enhanced.

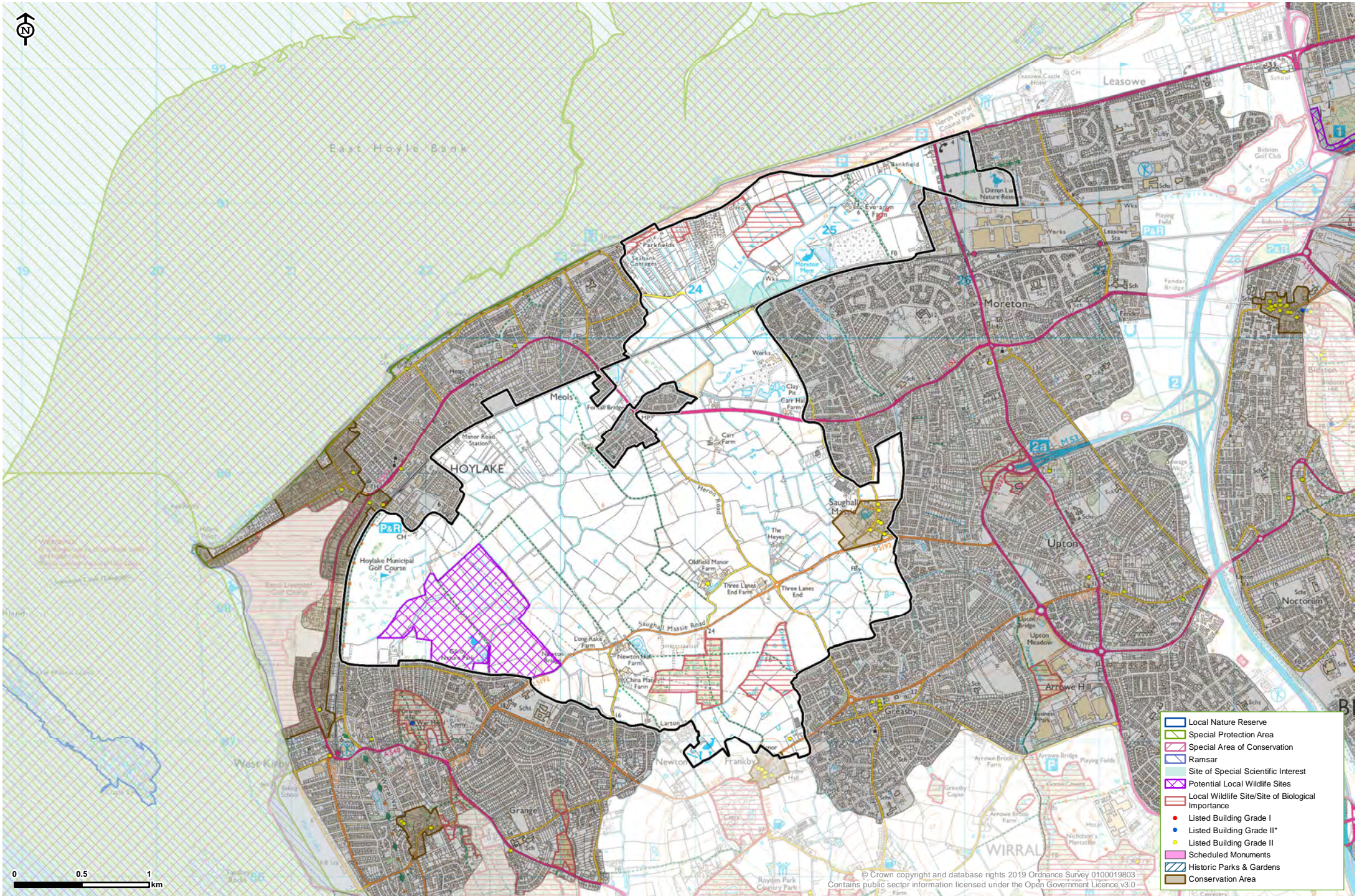
Landscape Guidelines

- Conserve and restore the use of linear ditch networks. Enhance ditch vegetation by managing scrub encroachment.
- Conserve, enhance and manage valued grassland and wetland habitats, open water and ponds

maintaining their value for overwintering, passage and breeding birds. Implement habitat creation along the narrow river corridor as part of the River Birket Corridor Nature Improvement Area.

- Conserve and enhance woodland belts, particularly where trees are becoming over mature. Promote appropriate woodland management.
- Conserve and manage hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features.
- Enhance and augment fragmented field boundary hedgerows with native species. Put in place a programme of hedgerow and hedgerow tree replacement.
- Seek opportunities for landscape enhancement for areas of degraded or underused land through habitat creation, including woodland, wetland and grassland planting.
- Enhance the appearance of horse paddocks through use of consistent boundary materials, either timber fencing or stock proof fences set within hedgerows.
- Conserve and enhance the dispersed settlement pattern of isolated farms through control of new development.
- Conserve the local distinctiveness of historic buildings and settlements, particularly within Saughall Massie Conservation Area.
- Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges, through native wooded boundaries and hedgerows to provide visual screening.
- Enhance the sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale and materials) to minimise the impacts of any new development. Ensure new industrial or agricultural development is designated to integrate into the landscape.
- Conserve the open qualities of the landscape, with its long views over the farmed landscape, and the strong perceptions of tranquillity away from the settlement edge.

2a: The Birket River Floodplain



0 0.5 1 km

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- Local Nature Reserve
- Special Protection Area
- Special Area of Conservation
- Ramsar
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Potential Local Wildlife Sites
- Local Wildlife Site/Site of Biological Importance
- Listed Building Grade I
- Listed Building Grade II*
- Listed Building Grade II
- Scheduled Monuments
- Historic Parks & Gardens
- Conservation Area

2b: The Fender River Floodplain

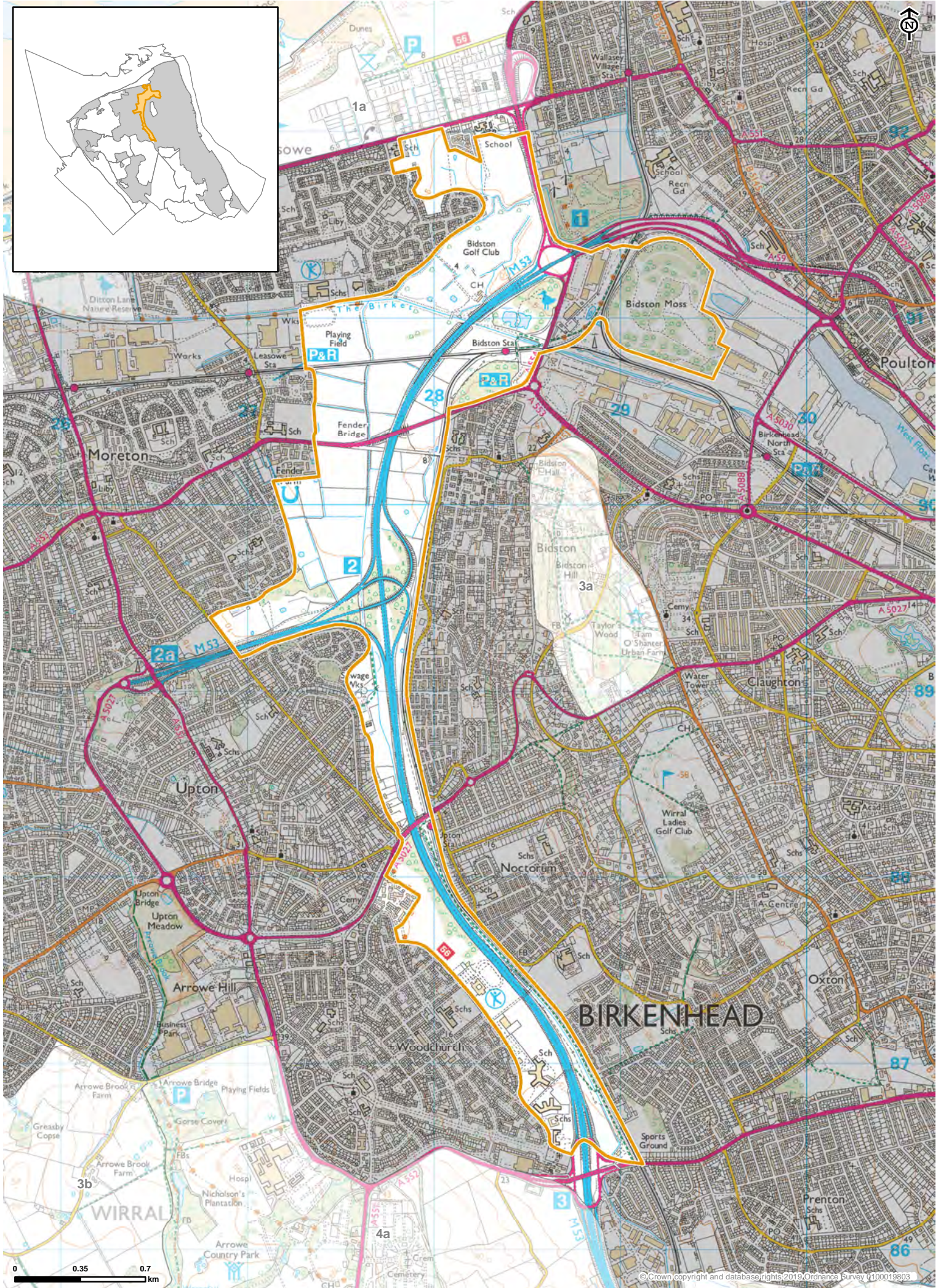
Summary

The Fender River Floodplain is a narrow linear area of floodplain between the mid-Wirral settlements of Leasowe, Moreton, Upton, Woodchurch and Birkenhead. Its character is strongly associated with the adjacent urban settlements. There are areas of farmland, recreation land and open space as well as transport corridors including the M53. The boundaries are mainly formed by roads and settlement edges, including the A551 to the north, the A554 and the Bidston Wrexham and Liverpool to West Kirby railway lines to the east and Junction 3 of the M53 to the south. The settlement edges of Woodchurch, Upton, Moreton and Leasowe form the western boundary.



River Fender with the M53 in the background

2b: The Fender River Floodplain



Key Characteristics

- Flat low-lying area around 8m AOD interrupted by small hills up to 30m AOD formed by former landfill sites and waste pits from the construction of the M53.
- A linear pattern of engineered watercourses flow through the area into the River Birket and its tributary the River Fender. Wetland habitats associated with these watercourses are often locally designated for their nature conservation value.
- Deciduous woodland is concentrated along the M53 and along urban fringes. Bidston Moss Local Nature Reserve contains smaller woodland blocks.
- Land use is dominated by the M53 and land uses associated with the urban edge, including recreation and horse pasture. Some land is naturalised and under-utilised.
- Recreational opportunities are provided by playing fields, informal paths at Bidston Moss and more formally at Bidston Golf Club.
- A largely 20th century landscape, influenced by the construction of the M53 in the 1970s. The remaining farmland around Fender Bridge has a small and irregular pre-Parliamentary enclosure. Where present, field boundaries are formed by fragmented hedgerows reinforced by post and wire fencing.
- Transport links dominate, including the M53 and railways. School grounds in the north and south of the area include the Grade II listed Solar Building. A small housing estate south of the A5027 is the only residential development within the area.
- Views to wooded hills including Bidston Hill provide an enclosed setting.
- Surrounding industrial and residential areas and transport routes are largely screened by woodland, although the M53 is aurally intrusive.

Natural Landscape

7.23 The area is underlain by Triassic period Tidmouth Mudstone Formation in the north and Wilmslow Sandstone Formation in the south, overlain by Quaternary period tidal flat deposits, till and alluvium.

7.24 The land is generally flat across the area, around 8m AOD. Small hills of up to 30m AOD are present in the north at Bidston Moss and south of the Bidston golf club, as a result of former landfill sites and waste pits from the construction of the M53. These hills contrast with the surrounding flat landscape and provide local viewing points.

7.25 There are a number of watercourses which flow through this area into the Birket and its tributary the Fender. The majority of watercourses are engineered in straight lines along field boundaries and contained within grass banks with no trees and therefore only evident in the landscape when close by. Small ponds occur throughout the area but are concentrated around Bidston Golf Course. Local Wildlife Sites and Sites of Biological Importance at Old Birket, Leasowe; Leasowe Pond and Reedmarsh; and Sandbrook Lane Pond are designated for their wetland habitats including priority habitat reedbeds.

7.26 Bidston Moss Local Nature Reserve was used as a borrow pit during construction of the M53. It now contains a variety of habitats including ponds, wetlands, marshes and establishing woodland. The presence of priority habitat mixed deciduous woodland and reedbed has resulted in designation as a Site of Biological Importance and Local Wildlife Site.

7.27 Woodland is concentrated along the M53, Cross Lane and Bidston Moss with smaller blocks and linear strips of woodland along the settlement edge of Moreton. Woodland is a mix of broadleaf species with a high proportion of oak, rowan, birch and ash and includes priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland. Willow and poplar trees are frequent within the landscape close to watercourses or on other areas of low-lying ground. Most planting has been provided as part of environment improvements to soften the urban fringes and the impact of the M53.

7.28 The area north of Junction 2 of the M53 forms part of the River Birket Corridor Nature Improvement Area. This promotes the creation of supporting wetland habitats including swamp, open water and ponds, and creating, maintaining and strengthening the habitat links through the rural and urban landscape.



Upton Park looking towards the M53

Cultural Landscape

7.29 Land use is one of the most varied within the borough owing to the close association with urban development. There are transportation routes, formal and informal recreation and areas of pasture close to the Birket and around Fender Bridge. There are also areas of undeveloped and under-used open land adjacent to the M53. Much of the undeveloped land is amenity grass verge bordered by fencing, the railway or young woodland.

7.30 The field pattern tends to be small and irregular in shape bordered by scrubby fragmented hedgerows, in some places reinforced by post and wire fencing. Fields have often been subdivided by horse tape, which is often variable in condition and appearance. The majority of the land is pasture, with horse grazing prominent, particularly adjacent to the road junctions and roundabouts.

7.31 The field pattern of the area has predominantly been shaped by 20th century infrastructure and recreation. The area still in agricultural use around Fender Bridge retains a pre-Parliamentary enclosure field pattern.

7.32 The area has good opportunities for recreation, including Upton Park, footpaths and National Cycle Route 56 within Bidston Moss and the Bidston Moss Local Nature Reserve itself. More formal recreation uses are available at Bidston Golf Club, and playing fields attached to school buildings and Woodchurch Leisure Centre.

7.33 Infrastructure has a strong influence on the character of this landscape. The elevated M53 runs north to south parallel to the railway which runs on a slight embankment. Where other roads cross these routes, they are also elevated e.g. the A554 and A553. However, these are all largely screened by

vegetation except for signage, associated overhead lines and lighting columns.

7.34 A new cul-de-sac development at New Hey Road (the former St Benedict's High School) consisting of 2 and 3 storey housing is the only residential development within the area. There are three schools in the south of the area, between New Hey Road and the M53. The Solar Building, part of the former St George's School on Leasowe Road, in the north of the area, is the only Grade II listed building within the area, listed for its pioneering use of passive solar energy.

7.35 A retail park at Junction 1 of the M53, east of the A554, is formed of large warehouse-type buildings. There is also a line of wind turbines at Cross Lane. Other detracting features include a sewage works south of Junction 2 and an overhead powerline running parallel with the railway line. The area is surrounded by the settlements of Birkenhead, Woodchurch, Upton, Moreton and Leasowe.



Upton Park

Perceptual Landscape

7.36 Views are fairly complex with many elements including farmland, housing, industry, recreational land, woodland, motorway and railway. Distant views are generally prevented by urban development, although from Bidston Moss there are some views towards the Wirral and North Wales coasts, and of churches within Wallasey. Bidston Hill is a prominent wooded ridgeline with the Bidston Observatory and Windmill clear visible landmarks.

7.37 Surrounding development and the M53 have a strong influence on landscape character. The overhead power lines, fenced railway, post and wire fencing and areas of neglected scrub also add to the neglected character.



East of Upton Park Drive

Valued Landscape Attributes

- The river corridors along the Birket and the Fender which provide open space between the surrounding urban areas.
- The geometric pattern of watercourses which feed into the Fender, which add interest to the landscape.
- Semi-natural wetland habitats associated with watercourses which are valued locally through nature conservation designation.
- Bidston Moss Local Nature Reserve is important for its wetland and woodland habitats, and for informal recreational opportunities.
- Time-depth from the pre-Parliamentary enclosure field pattern around Fender Bridge.
- Recreational value, for both formal and informal recreation through the presence of parks, footpaths and playing fields.
- The wooded horizon and woodland planting along transport corridors which provide screening and enclosure.

Landscape Condition

7.38 The wooded horizon and woodland planting along the transport corridor provide unity to the area. However, in general the area does not have a coherent or distinctive character. Although the recreational areas are well maintained, unmanaged land and fragmented or absent field boundaries create a neglected appearance to much of the landscape.

Key Issues

- Increased flooding due to sea level rises and climate change leading to further engineering of rivers and watercourses to prevent flooding resulting in open channels with severe bank sides.
- Degradation of the existing ditch networks and scrub encroachment.
- Further loss and fragmentation of valued wetland habitats. Wetland habitats are influenced by seasonal variation in the water table and will therefore be sensitive to changes in rainfall patterns due to climate change.
- Loss of field pattern through hedgerow decline and replacement with post and wire fences.
- Increase in areas of under-used or degraded land which detract from the attractiveness of the landscape.
- Expansion of urban areas resulting in further fragmentation and isolation of farmland.
- Insensitive expansion of large public infrastructure.

Landscape Strategy

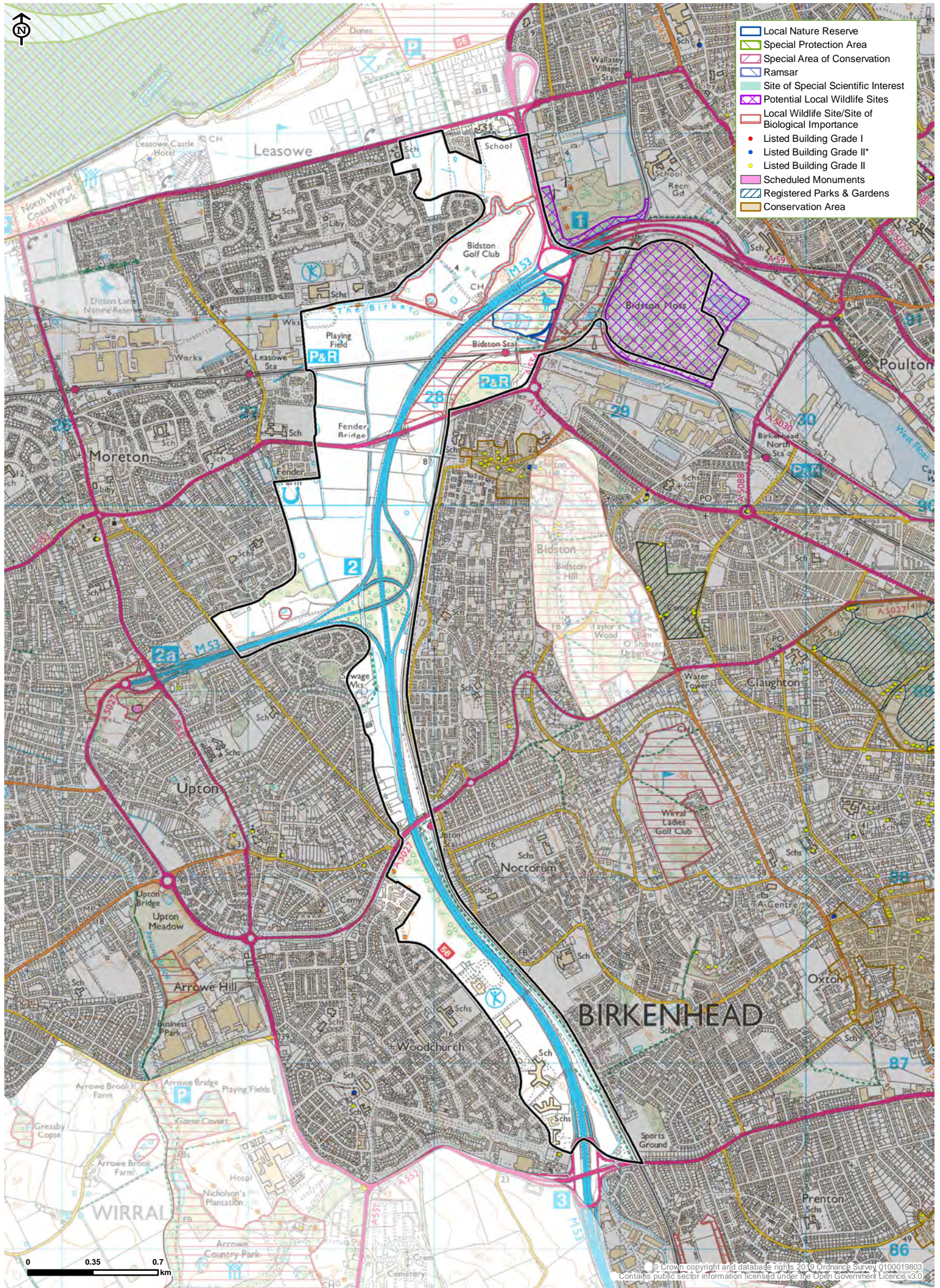
7.39 The overall strategy for the Fender River Floodplain is to restore and enhance the rural character of the remaining agricultural landscape and the screening woodland along the settlement edges and transportation routes. The key aspects to be restored are the wetland habitats associated with the watercourses. There are opportunities to integrate the landscape with the surrounding urban environment to alter its unmanaged character.

Landscape Guidelines

- Conserve and restore the existing linear ditch networks, enhance ditch vegetation by managing scrub encroachment.
- Conserve, enhance and manage valued wetland habitats. Implement habitat creation along the narrow river corridors of the Birket and Fender, as part of the River Birket Corridor Nature Improvement Area.
- Conserve and enhance linear copses and woodland planting along transport corridors and the urban edge to reduce their influence on the landscape, using locally occurring native species in order to link existing woodland.
- Enhance and augment fragmented field boundary hedgerows with native species, replacing post and wire fencing with native hedgerows and put in place a programme of hedgerow tree replacement.

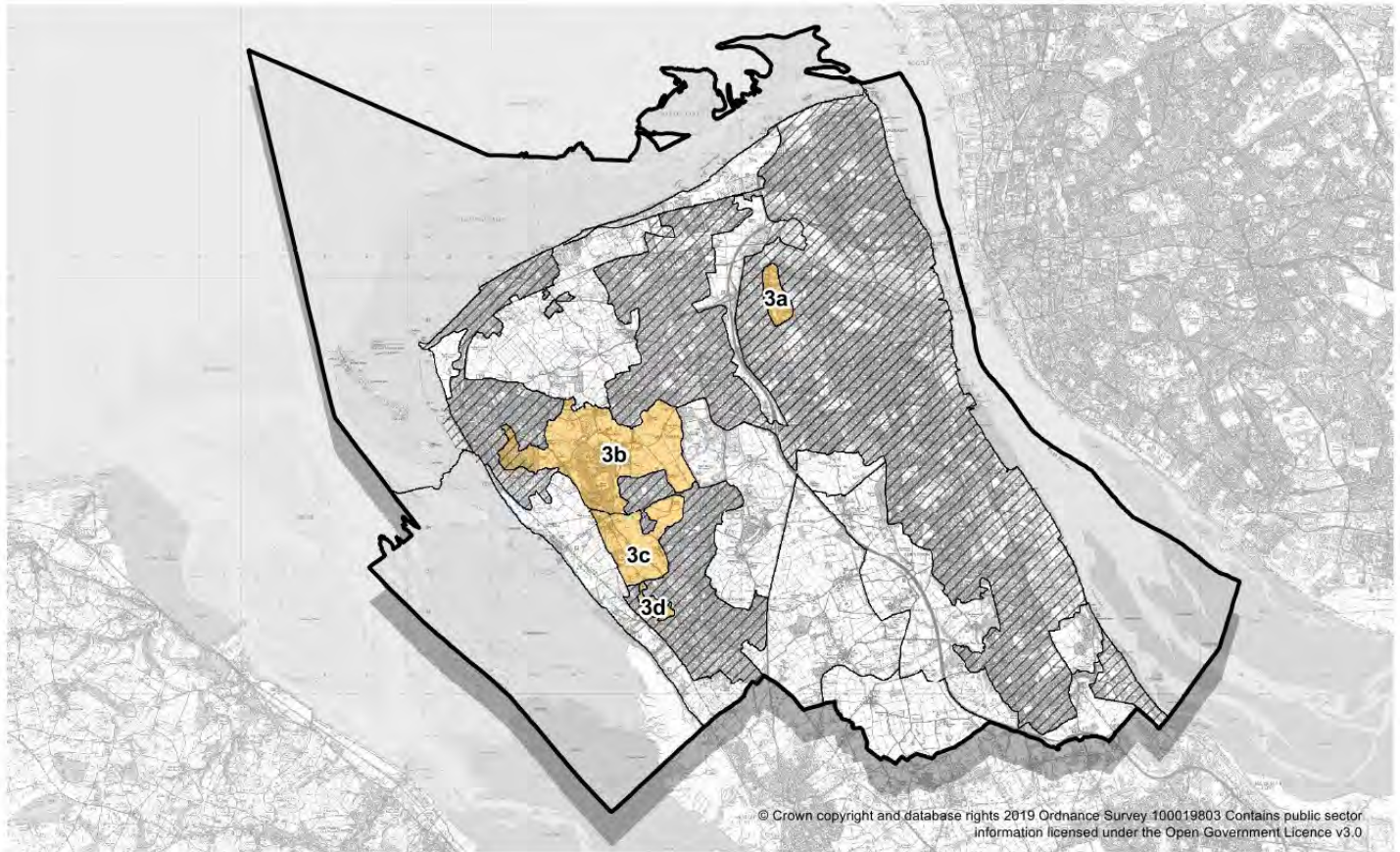
- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods.
- Seek opportunities for landscape enhancement of areas of neglected or underused land through habitat creation, including new woodland, wetland and grassland planting.
- Conserve and enhance the integration of the urban edges and infrastructure through native wooded boundaries and mature trees to provide visual screening.

2b: The Fender River Floodplain



Chapter 8

LCT 3: Sandstone Hills



Description

This LCT is distinguished by prominent sandstone ridgelines interspersed with rolling farmland. The ridgelines often have exposed sandstone pavements and contain important woodland and heathland habitats. From the highest ground there are expansive views across Wirral, east across the Mersey towards Liverpool and west across the Dee towards North Wales. Land use is predominantly recreational, with a very limited settlement pattern.

Landscape Character Areas

The Sandstone Hills LCT is subdivided into four Landscape Character Areas:

- 3a: Bidston Sandstone Hills
- 3b: Thurstaston and Greasby Sandstone Hills
- 3c: Irby and Pensby Sandstone Hills
- 3d: Heswall Dales Sandstone Hills

3a: Bidston Sandstone Hills

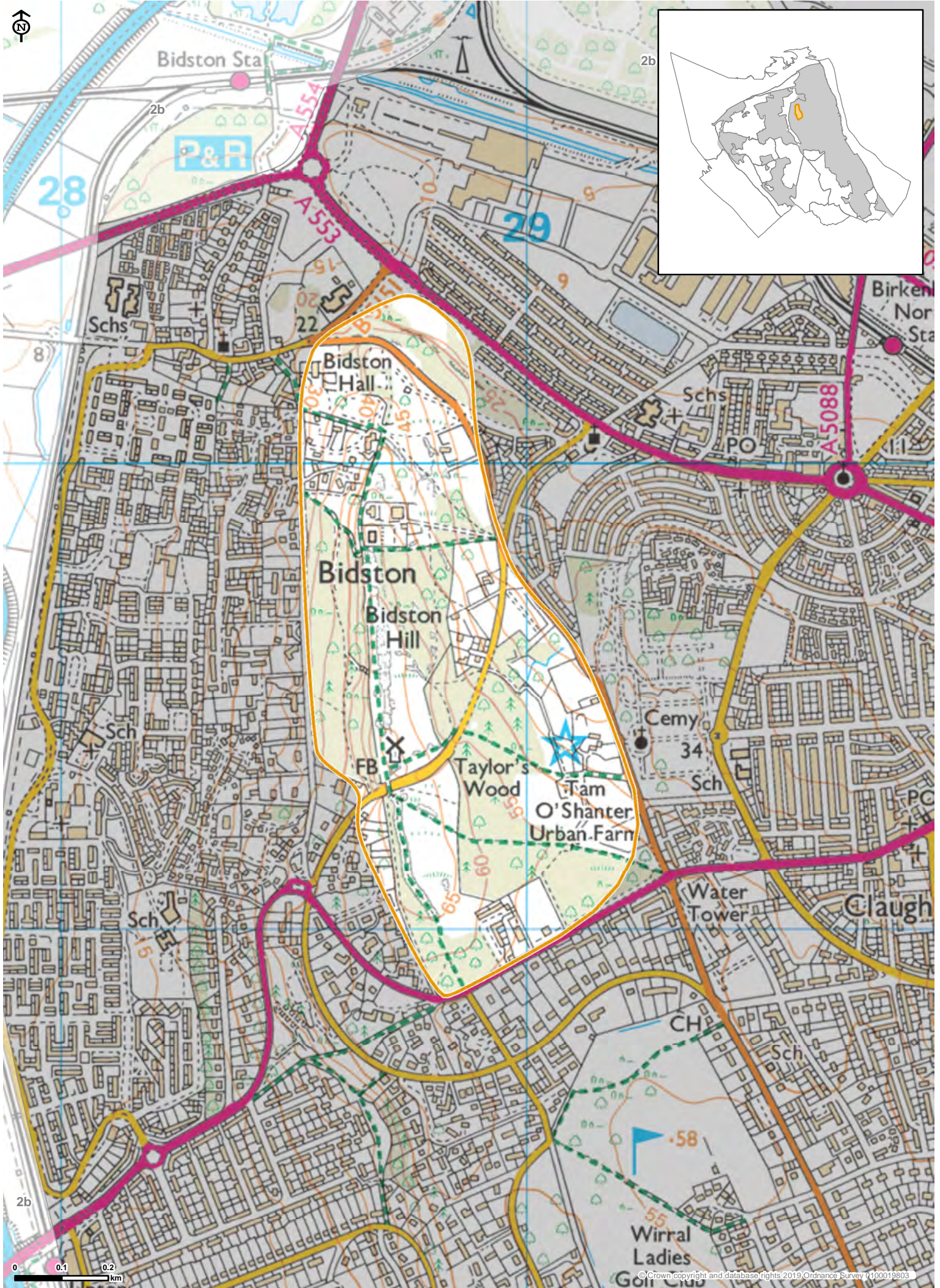
Summary

Bidston Sandstone Hills LCA lies in the east of the borough, within the Birkenhead urban area. It is a high ridge of wooded sandstone, which is prominent within the wider landscape. It is very popular for recreation and retains a remote and natural character. The boundaries are formed by the settlement edge.



Bidston Hill

3a: Bidston Sandstone Hills



Key Characteristics

- Prominent wooded hill at Bidston Hill, part of a sandstone ridgeline which extends south into the urban area. Characterised by distinctive sandstone pavement outcrops, it is one of the highest points in Wirral at 70m AOD.
- Small bogs and wetlands are establishing in depressions on the exposed sandstone.
- Characterised by mature priority habitat deciduous woodland and lowland heathland with areas of scrub and establishing birch woodland.
- The area is managed for informal recreation and contains a number of public rights of way and the Tam O'Shanter urban farm.
- Bidston Lighthouse, Bidston Observatory (Grade II listed) and Bidston Windmill (Grade II* listed) are landmark features set within woodland on the highest ground.
- Limited settlement except for small scale housing and allotments extending from the surrounding urban areas and the historic Bidston village which lies on the north-west edge of the area, including the Grade II* Bidston Hall. Strong local vernacular of buff sandstone particularly for boundary walls.
- Heavily wooded minor roads run through the area, providing connection between the settlements, and access to the area.
- Panoramic framed views from viewing points along the ridgeline across Birkenhead towards Liverpool and the Pennines to the east and to the North Wirral coast and North Wales to the north-west and west.
- An area of natural 'wilderness' which, although surrounded by urban development, has some sense of remoteness.

Natural Landscape

8.1 The area is underlain by Triassic period Wilmslow Sandstone Formation and Helsby Sandstone Formation and is designated as a Local Geological Site. On frequently used routes and where the soils are shallowest, the sandstone rock is exposed. This is particularly evident on the highest ground. The extent of bare rock is gradually reducing as grassland and scrub re-establishes.

8.2 This landscape is one of a series of sandstone ridges within Wirral and rises to a height of 70m AOD. The lowest land is on the outskirts of the character area, at 25m AOD in the north and 55m to 60m AOD in the south. The ridgeline continues to the south beyond the character area as part of the urban area and is covered by a mix of housing and Wirral Ladies Golf Course.

8.3 There are pockets of bog and wetland establishing where shallow depressions occur on the sandstone rock. No watercourses are present, although there are small drains to the north of Tam O'Shanter Farm and Nursery House.

8.4 The area is used for informal recreation, with a network of paths through the establishing and mature woodland, scrub and heathland. There are allotments on low ground adjacent to Boundary Road where the soil is deeper and more fertile, surrounded by mature woodland.

8.5 This is one of the most wooded areas within Wirral, with areas of priority habitat mixed deciduous woodland distributed across the landscape. Mature woodland is present at Taylors Wood and Park Wood. Woodland species include a mix of beech, oak, silver birch, whitebeam, rowan, holly, sweet chestnut, Scots and Corsican pine. Mature laurel and rhododendrons add an element of formality although their dense foliage prevents the regeneration of tree saplings. All of the undeveloped area is designated as the Bidston Hill Local Wildlife Site and Site of Biological Importance.

8.6 On the higher ground, Bidston Hill contains areas of priority habitat lowland heathland, which include common heather; bell heather; cross-leaved heath and tormentil. In many places natural succession is occurring reducing the extent of heathland and species such as gorse, silver birch and Scots pine are frequently present.

8.7 On lower ground adjacent to car parks there are small areas of frequently mown grassland surrounded by mature woodland.

8.8 The area forms part of the East Wirral Heathlands Nature Improvement Area, and ecological priorities are to create, restore, maintain and enhance heathland habitats; create, maintain and enhance species diversity of grassland; and enhance the existing woodland to support the heathland.



Bidston Hill

Cultural Landscape

8.9 The area is popular for recreation, with the lighthouse, observatory and windmill opening regularly for public visits. There are a series of footpaths across Bidston Hill, and a designated Heritage Trail. There is some small-scale car parking at the observatory and Tam O'Shanter urban farm. The urban farm includes a collection of farm animals and is used as an educational and recreational resource for local communities. A formal area of open space, the Rhododendron Gardens, borders the woodland and scrub on the lower slopes of Bidston Hill; however, this has been neglected in recent years.

8.10 The lighthouse, observatory and windmill are landmark buildings on the top of the ridgeline and provide a link to the industrial and maritime history of the region. There are a number of rock carvings close to the observatory, including a 'Sun Goddess' of possible Norse- Irish origin, dating from c1000AD and an ancient carving of a horse.

8.11 Bidston Lighthouse was built in 1873 and used in conjunction with Leasowe Lighthouse to ensure ships avoided sandbanks in the channel on their approach to Liverpool. It is a distinctive tower constructed from local stone and is Grade II listed.

8.12 The Grade II listed Bidston Observatory was built in 1866, originally to rate mariners' chronometers and later to analyse tidal flows, which led to reliable tidal predictions worldwide. The observatory is a distinctive building faced in local stone excavated from the site, with a domed roofline.

8.13 Bidston Windmill (Grade II* listed) dates from the late 18th century and was restored in 1894 and again in 1971. It is a circular tapering tower with boarded cap and sails.

8.14 There are few buildings within the character area; settlement is restricted to the edge of Bidston in the north-west and small housing estates on Vyner Road North and Upton Road. Bidston Village Conservation Area extends into the north of the area, and includes the Grade II* Bidston Hall, set within mature gardens and constructed from yellow sandstone. There is a strong vernacular of local buff sandstone, particularly for boundary walls, and the houses are largely well integrated into the surrounding woodland.

8.15 Bidston village retains a rural character and has an agricultural setting despite being surrounded by more recent suburban development. The tower of St Oswald's Church is a prominent feature of the village roofline and is visible from the M53. The village retains a medieval pattern set around the civic grounds of the church. Buildings are predominantly farmsteads and cottages within an irregular layout. Features include stone mullioned windows, stone coped gables and steeply pitched roofs.

8.16 The character area is surrounded by urban areas of Birkenhead. Housing is at its highest density on the lowest ground and contains little woodland or trees.

8.17 Vyner Road North and Boundary Road cut through the area. Vyner Road North effectively separates the north and south of the woodland, and a footbridge is provided for pedestrian access between the two elevated areas.



Bidston Windmill

Perceptual Landscape

8.18 This character area exerts a strong influence over the surrounding landscape and urban area and forms a wooded backdrop in views from Liverpool, central and northern Wirral.

Bidston Lighthouse, Observatory and Windmill are landmark features set within woodland on the highest ground.

8.19 Extensive panoramic views are possible from viewing points along the sandstone ridgeline, although these are being gradually reduced to selectively managed viewpoints due to encroaching woodland and scrub.

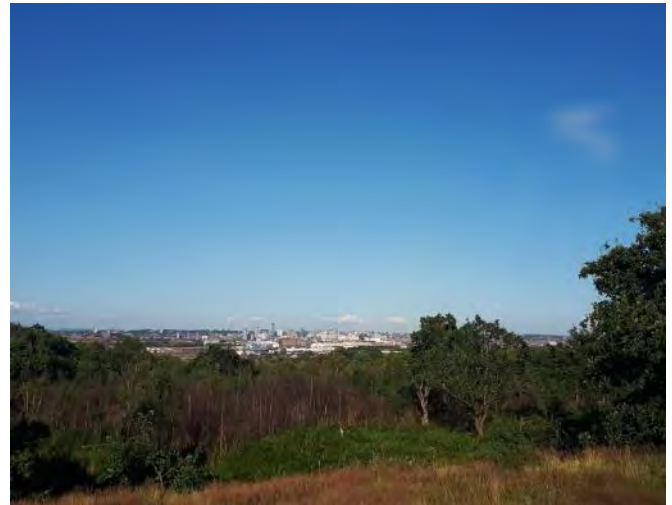
8.20 Views to the east are characterised by housing and industry around the docks in Birkenhead at East and West Float, the Liverpool waterfront and landmark buildings within the city, including the two cathedrals, Radio City tower and the Three Graces. On clear days it is possible to see the Pennine hills beyond Liverpool.

8.21 Viewpoints are less frequent to the west but where present include views to the Thurstaston ridgeline and Caldly Hill, and across to the hills within North Wales.

8.22 On lower ground views are enclosed by woodland and are only possible across a short distance. These views tend to be of woodland and small pockets of grassland and heathland. Built development is generally not visible.

8.23 Despite its proximity to the urban environment, the elevation of the area above surrounding development and woodland along its fringes provides a sense of separation and remote naturalistic character, particularly along the windblown ridgeline. However, the noise of the urban area below, particularly of traffic on the M53 detracts from the sense of tranquillity.

8.24 The visual values and landscape quality of the area are recognised as an Area of Special Landscape Value. The visually prominent and distinctive ridge of wooded high ground, the archaeological and historic associations and fine views of the rest of Wirral are considered to be of considerable importance to the borough's landscape.



View east to Liverpool

Valued Landscape Attributes

- The distinctive sandstone pavement along the ridgeline and the surrounding heathland and woodland provides a sense of place and a distinctive backdrop to surrounding areas.
- Heathland and mature deciduous woodland are important habitats, designated as a Local Wildlife Site and Site of Biological Importance.
- Historic landmark buildings, Bidston Windmill, Observatory and Lighthouse, provide a link to the maritime and industrial history of Wirral.
- Recreational value as an informal public park and country park with a linked network of footpaths and visitor attractions.
- Panoramic views from the ridgeline across Birkenhead to the Liverpool waterfront and towards the Thurstaston ridgeline and Welsh hills.
- An area of 'natural wilderness', which has a remote character despite surrounding development.
- The area is recognised locally as an Area of Special Landscape Value, considered to be of considerable importance to the landscape of Wirral.

Landscape Condition

8.25 Bidston Hill has a strong coherent character due to its elevation, wooded hillsides, sandstone pavement and heathland. The heathland is declining as natural succession takes place to birch and ultimately oak woodland. The

maturing woodland is also starting to impact on the expansive views from the ridgeline.

Key Issues

- Loss of heathland through fire damage and natural colonisation.
- Lack of natural regeneration within existing woodlands.
- Decline in the condition of the historic windmill, observatory and lighthouse on Bidston Hill.
- Recreational pressures on the landscape, resulting in erosion of the sandstone rocks and habitats and accidental fires.
- Demand for additional car parking and upgrade of walking routes, which threatens the 'wilderness' character.
- Pressure for development leading to urban encroachment along the fringes of Bidston Hill.
- Maturing woodland and scrub encroachment leading to a loss of expansive panoramic views.

Landscape Strategy

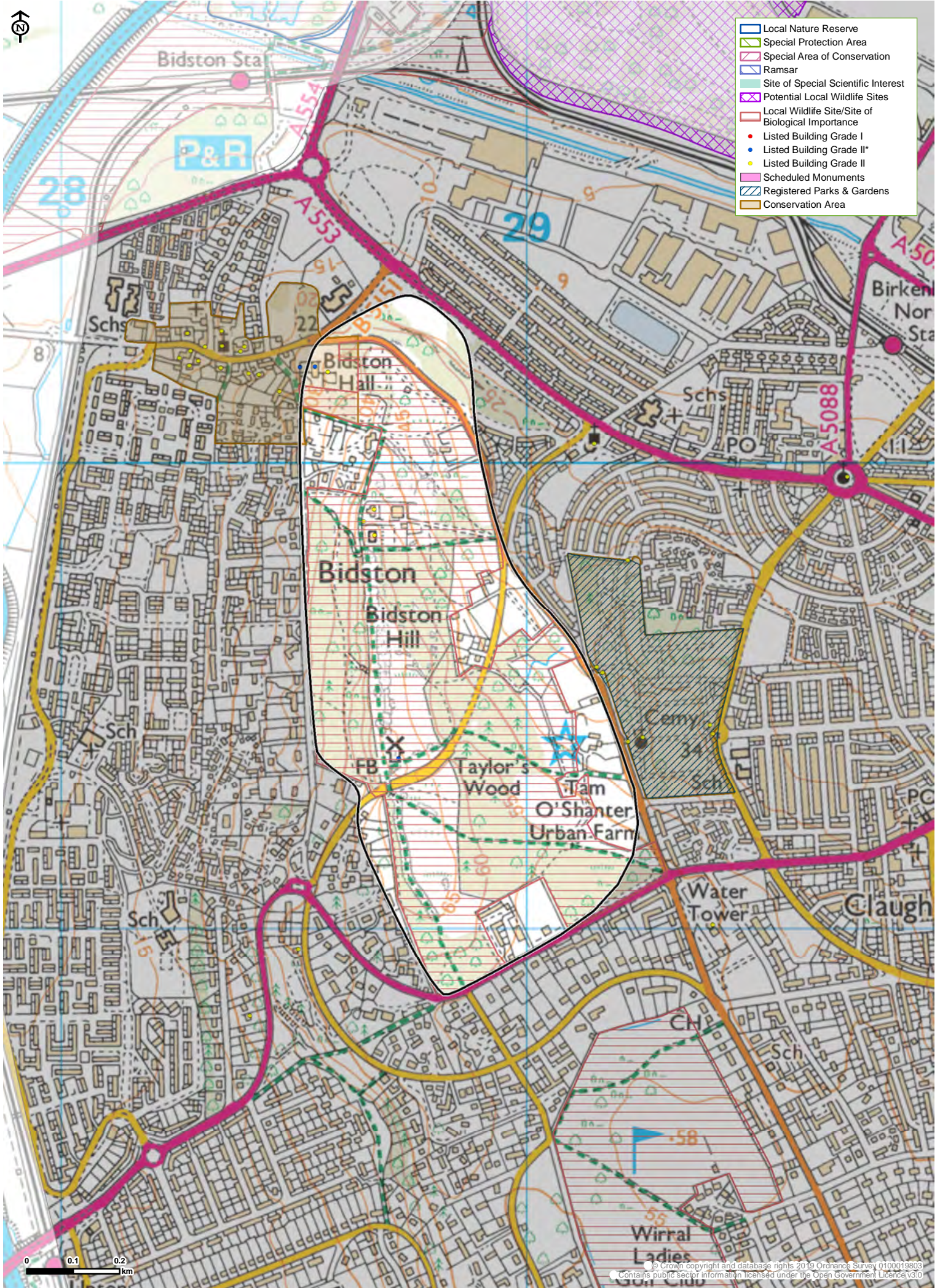
8.26 The overall strategy for the Bidston Sandstone Hills is to conserve and manage key features including the wooded hills, landmark historic buildings, and heathland and woodland. Far reaching views from the ridgeline should be conserved.

- Conserve the open character of the ridgeline between the windmill and observatory to retain views between these landmarks.
- Conserve the historic visual connection between Bidston Lighthouse and Leasowe Lighthouse through management of scrub and woodland.
- Protect the traditional building styles of buff sandstone, particularly within the Bidston Village Conservation Area.
- Carefully manage visitor pressures within the area, ensuring the retention of inherent levels of tranquillity and lack of built development. Retain informal character to any new recreational features such as car parks, footpaths and interpretation.
- Avoid visually intrusive development on the ridgeline, and any development which would detract from the distinctive character of the landmark historic buildings on the skyline.
- Protect the landscape's far reaching views across Wirral by maintaining the open character of high points along the ridgeline through management of vegetation.
- Conserve the sense of 'wilderness' and remoteness within the character area.

Landscape Guidelines

- Conserve the openness of the sandstone ridge with its distinctive rocky outcrops and heathland through vegetation management.
- Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the area, promoting appropriate woodland management.
- Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, using locally occurring native species and thin some of the dense evergreen shrubs. New woodland should not detract from the key landmark buildings on Bidston Hill or result in the loss of heathland.
- Conserve, enhance and manage valued heathland and grassland habitats, through clearance and control of areas of trees and scrub adjacent to existing heathland to allow for natural expansion. Implement habitat creation and management as part of the East Wirral Nature Improvement Area.
- Conserve and protect the historic landmark buildings along the ridgeline.

3a: Bidston Sandstone Hills



3b: Thurstaston and Greasby Sandstone Hills

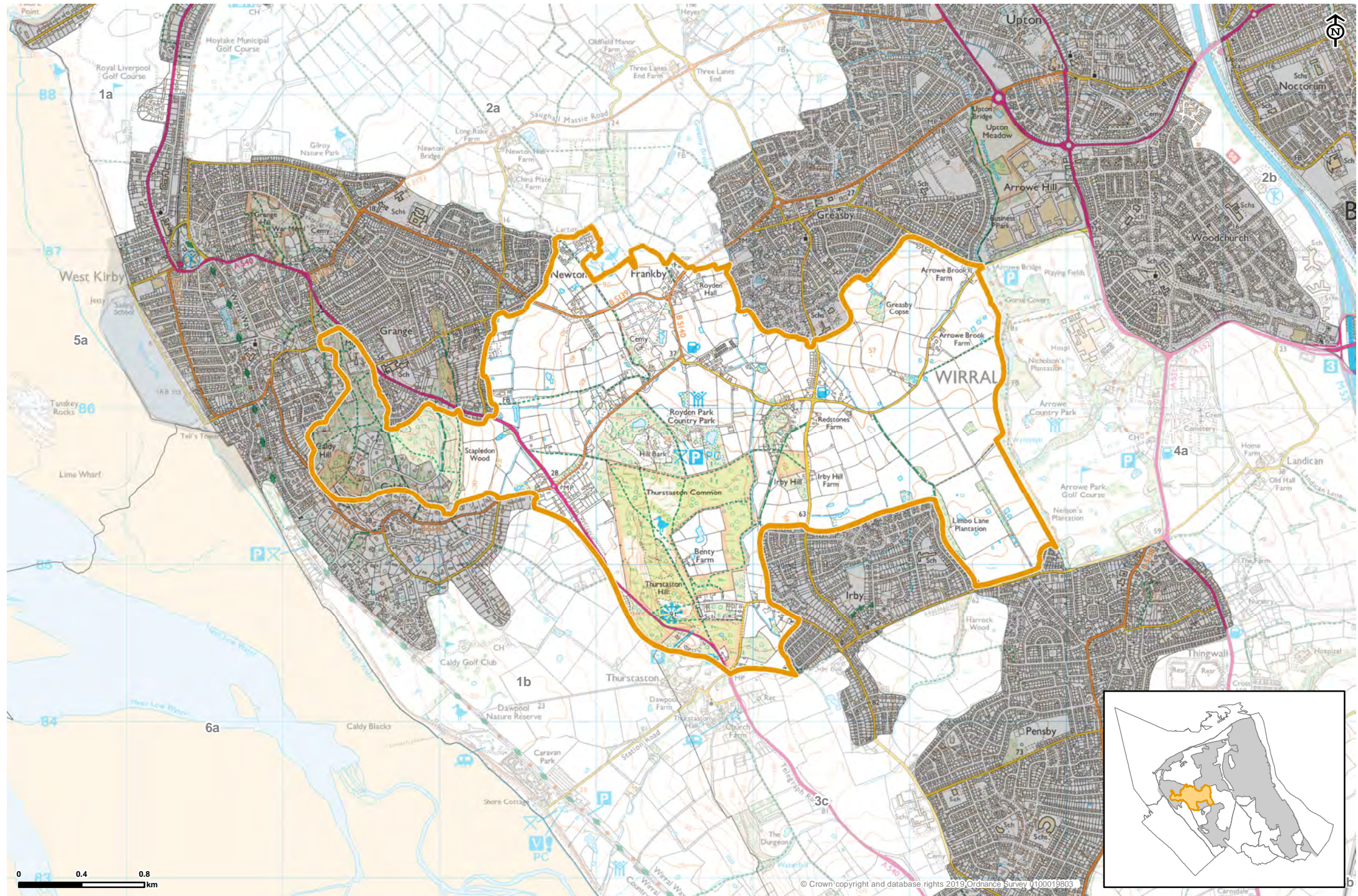
Summary

Thurstaston and Greasby Sandstone Hills LCA lies in the centre of Wirral and is largely surrounded by urban development which forms the boundary to the character area. It is a rural area of undulating farmland with distinctive wooded sandstone hills. The area is popular for recreation and includes Royden Park, Thurstaston Common and Caldly Hill.



Thurstaston Common

3b: Thurstaston and Greasby Sandstone Hills



Key Characteristics

- Wooded hills which form part of a prominent sandstone ridge running north west to south east, interspersed with rolling farmland. The highest point at Thurstaston Hill (91m AOD) has distinctive sandstone pavement outcrops.
- Small wooded brooks flow through the area. Field ponds are common, often surrounded by reedbeds and woodland. There are man-made pools and meres within Royden Park.
- A densely wooded landscape, with mature deciduous woodland on higher slopes and along the fringes of brooks, emphasising the landform.
- Thurstaston Common, designated as a SSSI, is the largest and best example of lowland heathland in Merseyside, supporting dry acid grassland, lowland heathland and lowland mixed deciduous woodland.
- Mixed farmland with a higher proportion of pasture to arable. A varying field pattern bordered by mature hedgerows and trees and narrow woodland belts.
- Much of the area is managed for informal recreation, with a good network of footpaths linking Royden Country Park and open access land at Thurstaston Common and Caldly Hill.
- Historic landscapes include Medieval Townfields around Newton and Frankby and parkland at Royden Park.
- Sparsely settled except for scattered farms and the compact historic village of Frankby, nestled within woodland with a strong vernacular of sandstone or red brick. Small scale ribbon development extends from the urban areas.
- Roads are rural, except for the A540, bound by intact hedgerows or low sandstone walls around settlements.
- Expansive views from the ridgeline across Wirral towards Liverpool and Frodsham and over the Dee Estuary to the Welsh hills. The wooded slopes of Thurstaston Hill and Caldly Hill are prominent features within the wider landscape.
- Strong naturalistic qualities and tranquillity despite the proximity of urban settlement, which is mostly screened by woodland.
- The landform and vegetation create variety between the enclosed woodland and exposed and windswept ridgeline.

Natural Landscape

8.27 The area is underlain by a variety of Triassic era sandstones, mostly overlain by Devensian till. The red sandstone pavement outcrops on the ridge are a distinctive feature, including Thor's Stone, once believed to be the site of Viking ceremonies but now thought to be a natural formation, as a result of periglacial weathering. Irby Quarry, Thurstaston Common, and Telegraph Road Cutting, Thurstaston are all designated as Local Geological Sites.

8.28 The area includes some of the highest land in the borough with a series of small hills which form part of a prominent sandstone ridgeline. High points include Thurstaston Hill at 91m AOD and Caldly Hill at 77m AOD. Lower-lying land between the hills drops to 35m and 25m AOD at the Arrowe and Greasby Brooks respectively.

8.29 A series of small wooded brooks and streams flow south to north through the northern part of the character area and to the east of Thurstaston Common. Field ponds are common with many fields containing more than one pond. These are designated as Local Wildlife Sites and Sites of Biological Importance for their reedbed and deciduous woodland at Arrowe Brook Farm Ponds, Limbo Lane Pond and Greasby Copse and Ponds. Smaller seasonal ponds and wetlands are beginning to form within Thurstaston Common where depressions exist in the rocks.

8.30 This is one of the most wooded character areas within Wirral with woodland concentrated around Thurstaston Hill, Caldly Hill and Royden Park. Deciduous woodland is mostly located on the slopes of the hills, although there is some tree cover on the ridgeline. Narrow bands of mature woodland along the fringes of fields and periphery of public open spaces create the impression of a densely wooded landscape, particularly when viewed from high ground.

8.31 Woodlands contain a high proportion of oak and beech with sycamore and pine present within the central part of the character area. Where the underlying soils support heathland pine and birch woodlands, a strong understory of gorse and ferns are frequent, particularly around Irby Hill. In these locations, sessile and turkey oak and downy birch are also common. Woodlands are of variable age with the most mature along brooks, within Royden Park and at Caldly Hill. There are a number of areas designated for deciduous woodland habitats as Local Wildlife Sites and Sites of Biological Importance including Irby Quarry, Royden Park, Stapledon Wood, Caldly Hill, Caldly Hospital Grounds, and Frankby Cemetery (SBI only).

8.32 Within Royden Country Park, the presence of large mature holly and rhododendron bushes and the mature plantation woodland including beech, ash, Scots pine and

Norway maple add an element of formality to woodland character.

8.33 Along the ridgeline at Thurstaston Common, sections of sandstone rock outcrops are surrounded by a mosaic of heathland and regenerating scrub of birch and gorse. The woodland is predominantly birch woodland, although if left, will ultimately succeed to oak woodland. Thurstaston Common is notified as a SSSI for dry heath, wet heath and acidic marshy grassland in damp peaty hollows. Succession to birch-oak woodland is well developed on the eastern side, and the area provides important habitat for passage, wintering and breeding birds.

8.34 Farmland is mixed with a higher proportion of pasture to arable. Field pattern varies; to the south, fields are often long and linear, and bordered by heavily wooded boundaries, while to the north and on the urban edge, fields are smaller and irregular, their shape influenced by a number of small watercourses.

8.35 Hedgerows are mostly tall with numerous hedgerow trees, usually oak although sycamore is present along roads. Towards the northern part of the character area, the hedgerows become smaller and more fragmented. Hawthorn is the most prominent species within hedgerows although in places gorse, blackthorn and holly are present.

8.36 The small brooks are part of the River Birket Corridor Nature Improvement Area, where the priorities are to create wetlands supporting the existing habitats, particularly field ponds. Areas to the east and west of the LCA form part of the West Wirral Heathlands and Arrowe Park Nature Improvement Area, where the priorities are to create heathland, by clearing areas of scrub and tree adjacent to existing heathland habitat to allow natural expansion of heathland, and also by planting heathland species and altering management.



West towards Stapledon Wood

Cultural Landscape

8.37 There are extensive recreational land uses within this area, particularly at Royden Park. The country park contains a number of formal pools and meres, and has two miniature railways. A number of footpaths and bridleways cross the area, and there is open access land at Thurstaston Common, Caldly Hill and Irby Common, much of which is managed by the National Trust.

8.38 The landscape has a field pattern of diverse historic origin. The Cheshire HLC notes areas of Medieval Townfields around Newton and Frankby in the north, pre-Parliamentary enclosure and 19th century reorganised field pattern in the centre of the area and formal ornamental parkland at Royden Park.

8.39 Royden Park was laid out in the mid-19th century as part of larger country estates owned by Sir Ernest Royden, a wealthy Liverpool ship owner. Hill Bark, a Grade II* listed country house was built in 1891 on Bidston Hill but dismantled and re-erected at Royden Park 1929-31. It is now the UK's smallest 5* hotel.

8.40 Frankby, which lies in the north of the character area, is a small compact historic village centred around a village green and nestled within woodland. The Frankby Conservation Area includes a cluster of Grade II listed buildings. Buildings are typically small, with a strong vernacular of sandstone or red brick with Welsh slate roofs. The properties are generally set back with small front gardens and red sandstone walls, while larger properties have gate post entrances. Royden Hall, Manor Farm and farm buildings characterise the fringes of the village, although many farm buildings have been converted into private residences. Trees and hedgerows within the village soften and integrate the properties with the surrounding landscape. There is a large cemetery to the south west of Frankby in the former grounds of Old Frankby Hall.

8.41 Small scale 20th century ribbon development extends along roads at Irby Hill, Montgomery Hill and Hillbark Road. Large farms, such as Redstones Farm, Arrowe Brook Farm and Larton, contain a mixture of small-scale residential buildings and large agricultural barns. Thurstaston village to the south of the A540 Telegraph Road is designated as a Conservation Area, and housing on the western edge of the area is part of Caldly Conservation Area. Roads tend to be small scale and bound by hedgerows or red sandstone walls, except for the A540.

8.42 The adjacent urban fringes of Irby, Greasby and Caldly are located on rising ground with housing typically set within mature wooded gardens. Mature hedgerows around adjacent fields limit and contain the prominence of the urban fringe

maintaining a sense of separation when viewed in the wider landscape.



North towards Limbo Lane Plantation

Perceptual Landscape

8.43 There are expansive panoramic views across Wirral from the ridgeline at Caldy and Thurstaston Common which has a promoted viewpoint. To the east, there are views towards Liverpool across a series of wooded ridgelines, including Bidston Hill, with glimpses of small pockets of farmland and housing. Prominent landmarks include the observatory and windmill on Bidston Hill, the Mersey, and the two cathedrals, Radio City tower and Liver Building in Liverpool. To the west, views are strongly characterised by the coast, the mudflats and saltmarsh within the River Dee, pockets of urban and industry along it and the mountains and hills within Wales beyond. In good weather the high points within the Clywdian Range such as Moel Famau are visible above the sloping countryside bordering the River Dee.

8.44 Within the central part of the character area, views are enclosed and channelled towards the northern coast, wind turbines and ships at sea. Although the area is surrounded by the larger urban areas of Greasby, Irby, Caldy and Newton, views of urban development are largely obscured by wooded belts and hedgerows, with the exception of Arrowe Park Hospital and incinerator tower, which is visible above the surrounding woodland.

8.45 The mature wooded boundaries around fields and open spaces provide a unified character to the area, integrating the different land uses. The woodland creates a rural and remote character to the area, and is impacted by few modern intrusions, with the area around Thurstaston Common and Royden Park particularly tranquil. The vegetation and topography create variety between the enclosed woodland,

open formal parkland and exposed and windswept ridgeline with its dramatic views over the estuary and out to sea.

8.46 Thurstaston Common, Royden Park, Irby Hill, Stapledon Wood and Caldy Hill are recognised locally as Areas of Special Landscape Value. These areas are considered to be among the most outstanding landscapes within Wirral and provide an important and positive contribution to the distinctive attractiveness of the peninsula.

Valued Landscape Attributes

- The distinctive form of the sandstone ridge with rocky outcrops, particularly at Thurstaston and Caldy, which provide a sense of place.
- The wooded hillsides which provide a backdrop to the wider landscape and surrounding urban areas.
- Valued semi-natural habitats including woodland, heathland and wetland, reflected through local and national designation.
- The wooded parkland and historic field patterns giving the landscape a strong sense of time-depth.
- The recreational value of the country park, open access common land and the network of public rights of way.
- Strong vernacular of the historic buildings at Frankby which provides a rural and coherent character to the settlement.
- The contrast of enclosed views within the wooded landscape and expansive views from the ridgeline east towards Liverpool, and west to Wales and channelled views to the north Wirral coast.
- An area retaining a strong rural character, with a sense of remoteness particularly along the ridgeline.



East towards Greasby Copse

Landscape Condition

8.47 The sandstone ridgeline with heathland, wooded hills and rolling farmland provide a coherent character. The surrounding urban edges of Irby, Greasby and Newton are not in keeping with the rural nature of the area. However, the landscape is generally well maintained with little evidence of loss of features.

Key Issues

- Loss of heathland through natural colonisation of scrub and woodland.
- Scrub and woodland establishment on wetland meres, field ponds and formal ponds within parkland.
- Diversification of agricultural land uses, including equestrian, leading to the subdivision of fields for horse paddocks.
- Agricultural intensification leading to the expansion of farms and construction of prominent large-scale farm buildings.
- Hedgerow fragmentation through field amalgamation, lack of management or lack of replacement planting.
- Recreational pressures on the landscape, especially within Thurstaston Common, resulting in erosion of sandstone rocks and habitats, or accidental fires on heathland. Increased car traffic and demand for additional parking and related development near popular sites.
- Expansion at Arrowe Park Hospital further increasing its prominence in views.
- Pressure for development leading to urban expansion of villages or encroachment of adjacent settlements along the fringes of the character area.
- Maturing woodland and scrub encroachment leading to a loss of expansive panoramic views from the ridgeline.

Landscape Strategy

8.48 The overall strategy for the Thurstaston and Greasby Sandstone Hills is to conserve the existing landscape pattern. The key aspects to be actively managed are the heathland habitats, particularly at Thurstaston Common and Caldly Hill. There are also opportunities to strengthen the wooded hills and field pattern with wooded boundaries. Expansive views from Thurstaston Common and Caldly Hill should also be conserved.

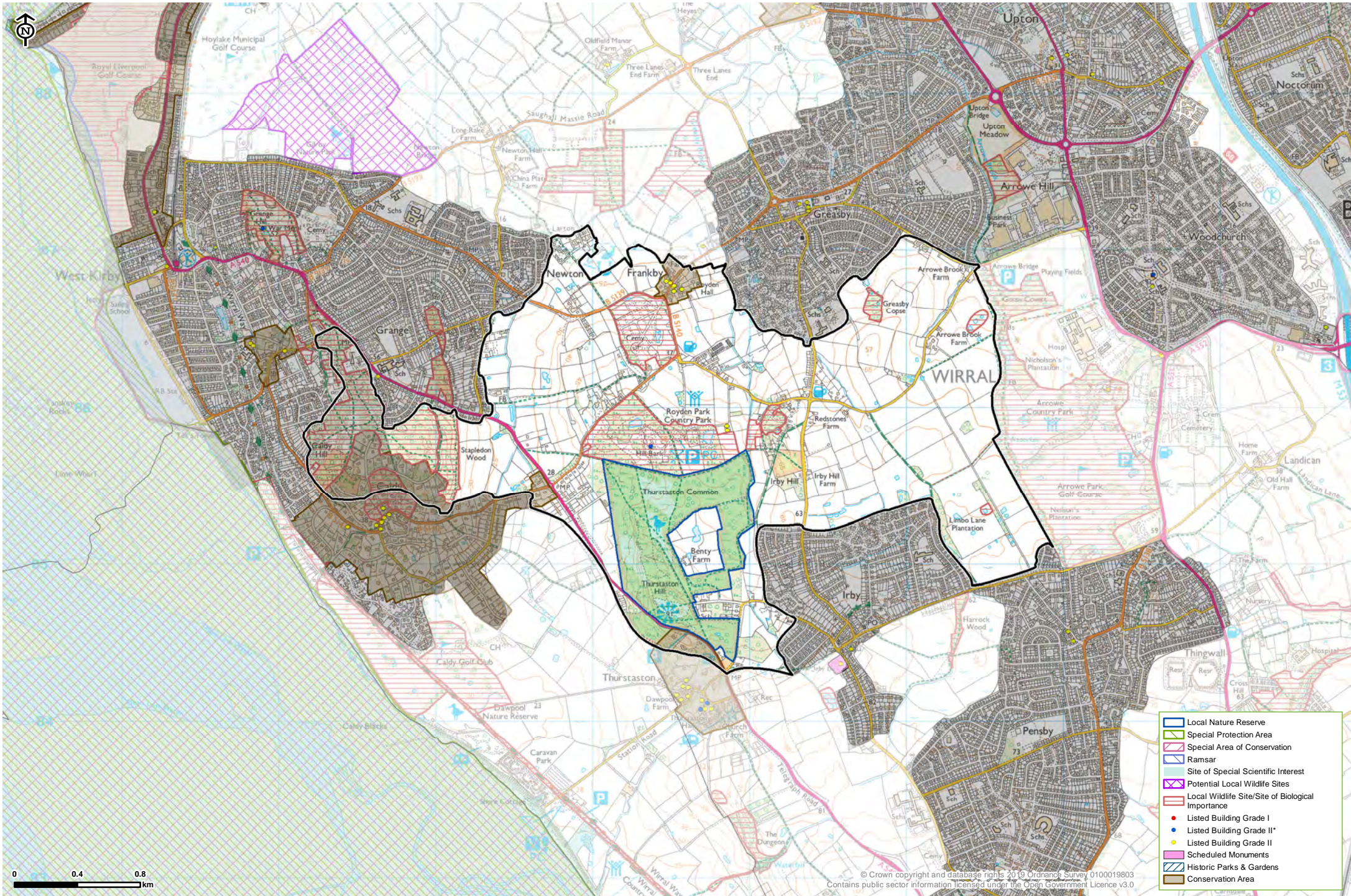
Landscape Guidelines

- Conserve the openness of the sandstone ridge with its distinctive rocky outcrops through vegetation management.
- Conserve the pattern of field ponds and meres across the area through appropriate land management regimes, selectively removing and thinning encroaching woodland vegetation, particularly along the brooks as part of the River Birket Corridor Nature Improvement Area.
- Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the area, particularly on the hills and ridgeline. Promote appropriate woodland management.
- Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, using locally occurring native species in order to link to existing woodland. Seek to set these within slopes and high ground reflecting the long and linear character of existing woodland.
- Conserve, enhance and manage valued heathland habitats, through clearance and control of areas of trees and scrub adjacent to existing heathland to allow for natural expansion. This is particularly important within Thurstaston Common, Stapledon Wood and Caldly Hill as part of the West Wirral Heathlands and Arrowe Park Nature Improvement Area.
- Conserve and manage the distinctive historic field patterns with their mature hedgerows and wooded field boundaries as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and encourage replanting where appropriate. Conserve and protect the parkland landscape at Royden Park and plan for the next generation of parkland trees.
- Conserve the sparse settlement pattern of dispersed farms and the rural compact character of Frankby. Protect the traditional building styles of local red sandstone, particularly within Frankby Conservation Area.
- Maintain the well-defined distinction between the rural landscape and urban areas of Greasby, Irby and Newton.
- Maintain and enhance the character of rural roads, particularly the approach to Royden Park. Resist unsympathetic highway improvements that would threaten their rural character.
- Carefully manage the use of the area for recreation, especially at Thurstaston Common, ensuring the retention of inherent levels of tranquillity and

absence of built development. Retain a rural character to new tourist features such as car parks, footpaths and interpretation.

- Avoid visually intrusive development on prominent ridgelines and wooded hills.
- Enhance the sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale and materials) to minimise the impacts of any new development/agricultural buildings.
- Maintain the open character of high points along the ridgeline, particularly at Thurstaston Hill, protecting far-reaching views through management of vegetation.
- Conserve the rural and naturalistic qualities of the landscape with its strong perceptions of tranquillity and remoteness.

3b: Thurstaston and Greasby Sandstone Hills



3c: Irby and Pensby Sandstone Hills

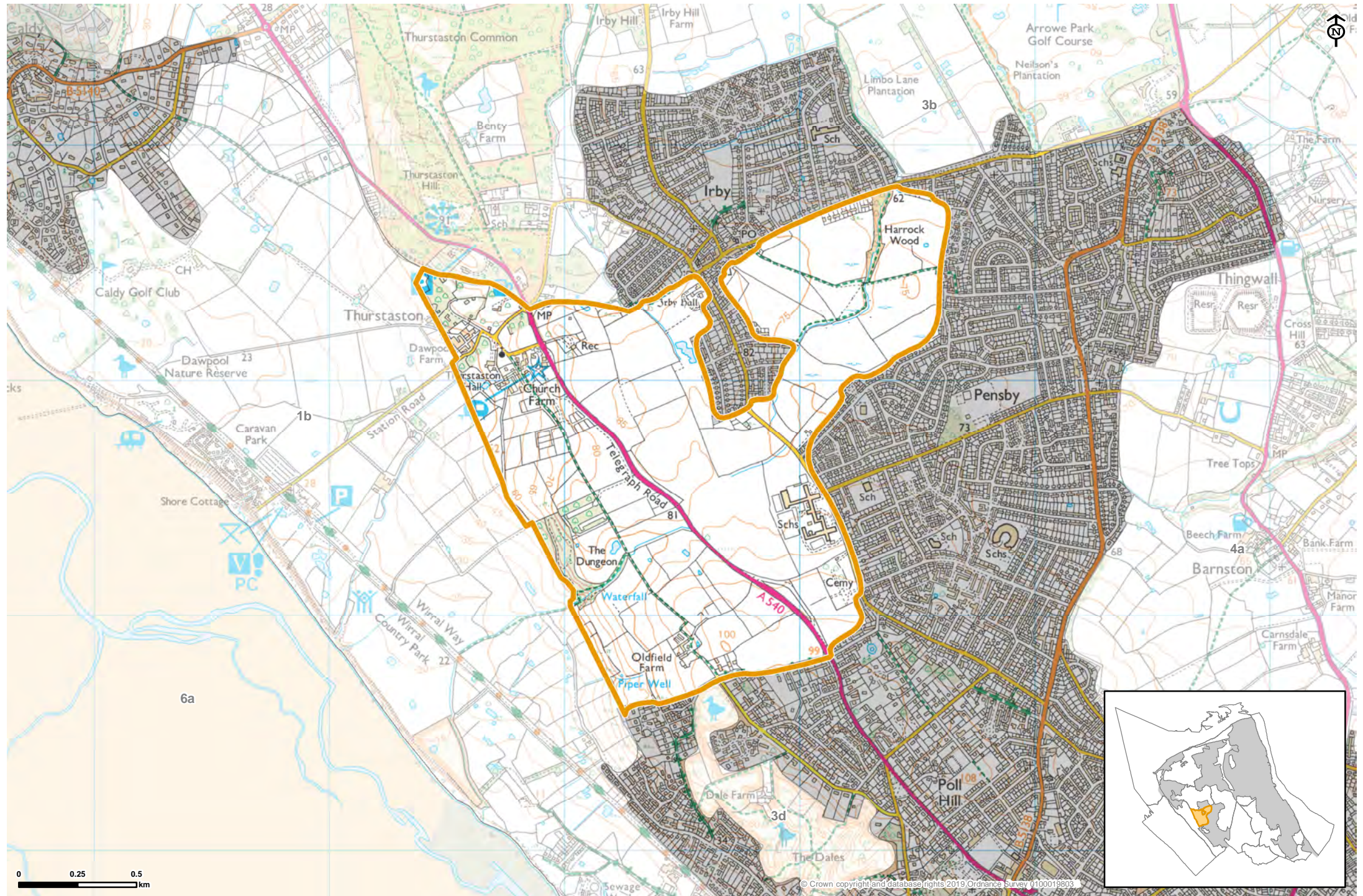
Summary

Irby and Pensby Sandstone Hills LCA lies in the west of the borough and is an area of high ground which forms part of the sandstone ridge which runs along the west side of the Wirral Peninsula. It is surrounded by settlements to the south and east, with open views from the edge of the escarpment over the Dee Estuary. It is characterised by small scale pastoral farmland and mature woodland and contains the historic village of Thurstaston. The southern and eastern boundaries are formed by the settlement edges at Irby, Pensby and Heswall, the western boundary is defined the edge of the steep slope, along the 50m contour line which sits above the gentler slopes falling to the Dee. The northern boundary is defined by the wooded edge of Thurstaston Common and the footpath to Irby Hall.



View west across the Dee Estuary from Oldfield Farm

3c: Irby and Pensby Sandstone Hills



Key Characteristics

- Elevated undulating landform along a sandstone ridgeline, rising to 85m AOD east of Telegraph Road before falling steeply towards the Dee Estuary in the west.
- Small brooks including the Arrove Brook flow through the area, lined by wetland and mature woodland.
- Prominent mature deciduous woodland, particularly along watercourses, including Harrock Wood and The Dungeon, with smaller woodland blocks around Thurstaston.
- Mixed farmland with a higher proportion of pasture to arable. Fields are bordered by hedgerows which are fragmented in places with infrequent hedgerow trees.
- Varied historic field pattern across the area, including pre-1600s field patterns, Medieval Townfields and pre-Parliamentary enclosure.
- The historic village of Thurstaston has a strong vernacular of local red sandstone evident in the many listed buildings and the Church of St Bartholomew and Thurstaston Hall (both Grade II*). The timber framed Irby Hall is Grade II listed and a Scheduled Monument.
- The two roads connecting the surrounding settlements have wide verges and low hedgerows. Roads around Thurstaston are narrow and rural, with sandstone boundary walls or grass banks.
- Public rights of way run to Harrock Wood, owned by the National Trust, and to The Dungeon. There is minimal public access between Telegraph Road and Irby Road.
- Varied views, with more enclosed views to urban areas and wooded ridgelines and open views west to the Dee Estuary and Welsh hills.
- The urban edges of Irby, Pensby and Heswall are often visible, and Pensby High School is a dominant feature within the landscape.
- Pockets of rural tranquillity in Thurstaston and along enclosed pathways and through the wooded watercourses.

Natural Character

8.49 The area is underlain by Triassic Tarporley Siltstone Formation and Helsby Sandstone Formation, overlain in much of the area by Devensian till. The Dungeon SSSI is a small wooded ravine with a natural stream section through the Tarporley Siltstone and the faulted contact with the older Wilmslow Sandstone Formation.

8.50 The area forms part of the prominent sandstone ridgeline which runs north-west to south-east along the west side of the Wirral peninsular. The land reaches its highest point of 85m AOD close to Telegraph Road, and then slopes steeply towards the coast to 50m AOD. The elevated landform in the east is gently undulating around 75m AOD dipping slightly along the watercourse which bisects it.

8.51 Arrove Brook flows through the centre of this character area and is characterised by a strongly meandering course and lush wetland vegetation where it flows through Harrock Wood. The watercourse has low vertical sides and in other places more gently sloping banks. A few ponds are present in the area, characterised by shallow banks and wetland. Backford Road Pond is designated as a Local Wildlife Site and Site of Biological Importance for its priority habitat reedbed.

8.52 Harrock Wood is a prominent woodland owned by the National Trust. It contains priority habitat lowland deciduous woodland and is designated as a Local Wildlife Site and Site for Biological Importance. It has a strong structure including shrubs and ground flora such as wood anemone, bluebells, pockets of wetland and rushes.

8.53 The Dungeon in the south-west of the area is a dark and enclosed wooded ravine along a stream. Water flowing over faults in the sandstone and mudstone geology has created a distinctive waterfall. The Dungeon contains priority habitat deciduous woodland and is designated as a Local Wildlife Site and Site of Biological Importance and as Wirral's only geological SSSI.

8.54 There is a small belt of mature woodland around Irby Hall which screens the hall from view although glimpsed views are possible through trees from Irby Road. There is also woodland within and to the north of the village of Thurstaston and around the Old Rectory on Telegraph Road, which is also designated as a Local Wildlife Site.

8.55 Other vegetation is generally restricted to some large mature hawthorns, oak and ash trees and smaller shrubs such as gorse along Arrove Brook. Isolated hedgerow trees mostly oak and ash are found throughout the character area. Isolated trees along urban fringes include native and ornamental species.

8.56 Farmland is the main land use and dominated by pasture. The field pattern is irregular and generally small scale. Hedgerows are almost all hawthorn with few other species; some are fragmented or reinforced or replaced by post and wire fencing. A large arable field borders the east of Telegraph Road, and in contrast with the surrounding fields has low hedgerows and few hedgerow trees.

8.57 Harrock Wood and land west of Irby Road are part of the West Wirral Heathlands and Arrowe Park Nature Improvement Area. This encourages the creation of grassland to support heathland habitats outside of the area (e.g. Thurstaston Common), and the maintenance and enhancement of existing woodland.



The Dungeon

Cultural Landscape

8.58 The area predominantly retains its historic field pattern, noted in the Cheshire HLC as including pre-1600s field systems, Medieval Townfields and pre-Parliamentary enclosure. There is an area of 20th century amalgamated fields in the south-west, adjacent to the A540 Telegraph Road.

8.59 Thurstaston is the only settlement within the character area and is a small historic village designated as a Conservation Area. It has an open character arranged around a village green. Most properties are large and detached, with a strong vernacular of brick and local red sandstone with sandstone boundary walls. St Bartholomew's church and Thurstaston Hall (both listed Grade II*) are the key buildings in the historic core of the village.

8.60 Irby Hall is another historic feature of note. This large moated site, now dry, surrounded the site of the 11th century manor and courthouse of St Werburgh's Abbey and is listed as a Scheduled Monument. Irby Hall, a 17th century Grade II

listed building, built on the moated site, lies within wooded grounds, and is characterised by black and white Tudor style panelling above red sandstone. There are a few detached modern properties in the south along Oldfield Drive and Oldfield Road, leading to the Grade II listed Oldfield Farmhouse.

8.61 Pensby High School is a prominent flat roofed modern building which, due to a lack of vegetation around its fringes, is prominent within the landscape. It is characterised by a number of large buildings, hard standing and playing fields bordered by security fencing. Heswall Cemetery lies south of Pensby High School.

8.62 The area is surrounded by residential development on three sides. Houses are a mix of bungalows, semi-detached and detached properties set within small back gardens which contain a mix of shrubs but few trees. Houses mostly back onto this character area with their front elevations facing out from it. Their boundaries are demarcated by timber fencing and hedges, and due to the lack of vegetation on the settlement edge, only one or two rows of houses are typically visible.

8.63 There are two main roads within the area, which connect Heswall, Pensby and Irby. Telegraph Road and Irby Road both have wide verges and low hedgerows, which have been replaced by post and timber fencing in places. Telegraph Road also has a pavement / cycleway along its length. Roads around Thurstaston are narrow and rural, with sandstone boundary walls and grass banks.

8.64 There are a few footpaths within the area, linking the settlements and running through Harrock Wood and the Dungeon. There is however little public access between Telegraph Road and Irby Road.



Looking east from the A540 Telegraph Road towards Pensby High School

Perceptual Landscape

8.65 The open farmland to the east of the character area at Irby is surrounded by urban settlement and wooded ridgelines to the south at Ridgewood Park and Heswall Dales enclose it from views of the wider area. Distant views of the Liverpool cathedrals are possible on the horizon above the housing and woodland. The surrounding urban fringes are visible, and the buildings, playing fields and security fencing at Pensby High School are prominent features within the landscape. A mast along the fringes of Irby village is a prominent feature of the skyline. The farmland provides the remaining sense of separation between Pensby and Irby.

8.66 Higher ground on the edge of the ridgeline between Thurstaston and Heswall allows long views west across gently sloping farmland bordering the River Dee towards the Welsh hills including the Clwydian Range. There are also views north towards Caldly Hill and Thurstaston Hill. The village of Thurstaston is enclosed by woodland.

8.67 There are pockets of tranquillity within the area, which increase with distance from the settlement edge. The proximity of the surrounding housing reduces the remoteness of the landscape to the east. A sense of remoteness can be found around Thurstaston and on enclosed pathways through Harrock Wood along the course of the Arroe Brook, and further west within the wooded dell by the Dungeon waterfall.

8.68 The area west of the A450 Telegraph Road and the Old Rectory are recognised locally as an Area of Special Landscape Value. This area is considered to be among the most outstanding landscapes within Wirral and provides an important and positive contribution to the distinctive attractiveness of the peninsula.



St Bartholomew, Thurstaston

Valued Landscape Attributes

- An elevated ridgeline, which is wooded in parts, and provides a backdrop to the surrounding landscape, and a sense of separation between the urban settlements and the coastal landscape along the Dee Estuary.
- The meandering course of local brooks which provide visual interest to the area.
- Semi-natural wetland habitats, including priority habitat reedbeds, which are characteristic of the area and valued through designation at Backford Road Pond Site of Biological Importance and Local Wildlife Site.
- Prominent woodlands including Harrock Wood and The Dungeon, which contain priority habitat lowland deciduous woodland and are valued as Sites of Biological Importance and Local Wildlife Sites.
- The historic field patterns which provide time-depth and interest to the landscape.
- The cohesive vernacular of brick and red sandstone in the historic village of Thurstaston, which is designated as a Conservation Area and provides a rural and coherent character to the settlement.
- Recreational opportunities along public rights of way, particularly along the wooded watercourses, which provide opportunities for quiet enjoyment of the landscape.
- Open character which provides separation between Irby and Pensby.
- Long distance views to the west of the Dee Estuary and the Welsh hills and glimpsed views to the east of the Liverpool cathedrals which provide a sense of place.
- Majority of the area is recognised locally as an Area of Special Landscape Value, considered to be amongst the most outstanding landscapes within Wirral, and provide an important and positive contribution to the distinctive attractiveness of the peninsula.

Landscape Condition

8.69 The elevated landform, mature woodland along watercourses, historic field pattern and sparse settlement provide a coherent character. The proximity of modern settlements at Irby, Pensby and Heswall, Pensby High School, and fragmented hedgerows weaken the character locally.

Key Issues

- Loss of hedgerows and replacement with post and wire/post and rail fencing.
- Changing agricultural practises resulting in field amalgamation, further fragmenting the historic field pattern.
- Diversification of agricultural land uses, including equestrian, leading to the subdivision of fields for horse paddocks, using timber and electric fences which often have an untidy appearance.
- Increasing urban encroachment from surrounding settlement, impacting the rural character and potentially resulting in the coalescence of Pensby and Irby.
- Pressure for development on the edge of the historic village of Thurstaston.

Landscape Strategy

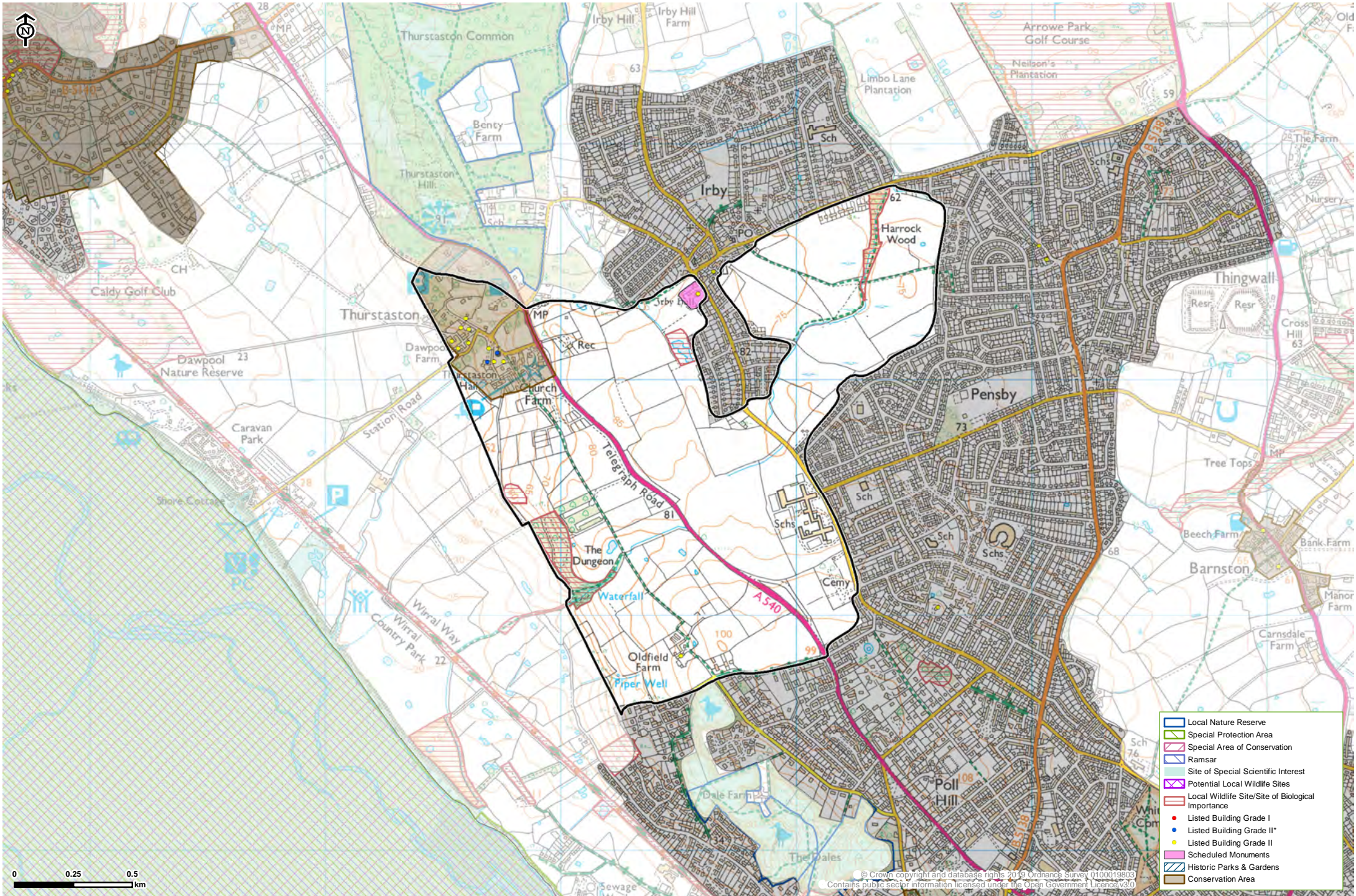
8.70 The overall strategy for Irby and Pensby Sandstone Hills is to conserve and enhance the existing historic field pattern, hedgerows and woodland areas.

Landscape Guidelines

- Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the area, particularly the wooded ridgelines, enclosed woodland dells, and wooded setting of Thurstaston and Irby Hall.
- Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, using locally occurring native species in order to link to existing woodland. Seek to avoid the introduction of coniferous boundaries.
- Conserve and manage hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features. Enhance and augment fragmented field boundary hedgerows with native species and put in place a programme of hedgerow tree replacement.
- Conserve, enhance and manage valued wetland and woodland habitats. Implement habitat creation and management within Harrock Wood and west of Irby Road, as part of the West Wirral and Arrowe Park Nature Improvement Area.
- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods.
- Conserve the strong vernacular of red brick and sandstone of historic buildings, particularly within Thurstaston Conservation Area.

- Reduce the prominence of the urban edges within the landscape through localised woodland planting and restoration of hedgerow boundaries to provide visual screening.
- Conserve the rural character of the landscape with its well-defined distinction between the pastoral farmland and the surrounding urban areas of Heswall, Irby and Pensby.
- Enhance the sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale and materials) to minimise the impacts of any new development/agricultural buildings.
- Protect woodland on high ground, avoiding visually intrusive development.
- Protect views across the open landscape to North Wales and the Liverpool cathedrals, through careful management of vegetation and built form.

3c: Irby and Pensby Sandstone Hills



3d: Heswall Dales Sandstone Hills

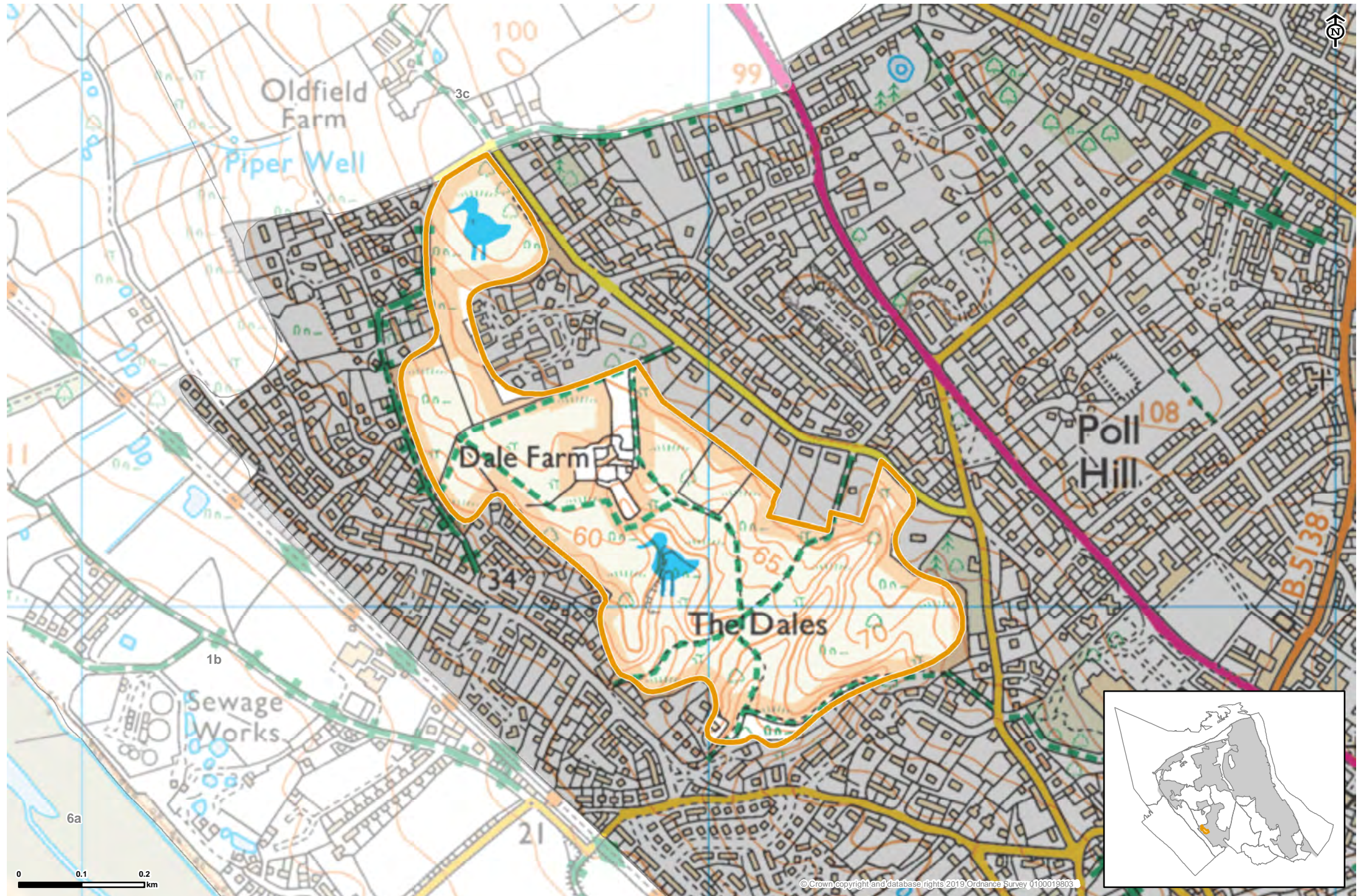
Summary

Heswall Dales Sandstone Hills LCA lies in the south west of the borough. A small high area of wooded heathland to the west of Heswall, it retains a remote and 'natural' character. It has expansive views over the Dee Estuary to the Welsh coastline and hills beyond and is popular for informal recreation. The boundaries are all formed by the settlement edge of Heswall.



Heswall Dales looking west

3d: Heswall Dales Sandstone Hills



Key Characteristics

- A small sandstone outcrop, forming a distinct landform rising between 60m and 70m AOD above the coastal plain along the Dee Estuary.
- Watercourses are limited to a small stream in the east, with wet heath on lower lying ground and damp areas in sandstone depressions.
- A mosaic of lowland heathland, deciduous woodland and establishing birch scrub and gorse, notified as the nationally important Heswall Dales SSSI.
- Dale Farm, a horticultural training centre, is the only development within the area. The town of Heswall surrounds the area.
- Open access area with a number of public rights of way.
- Expansive views across the Dee Estuary towards the Welsh coastline from higher ground, contrast with enclosed wooded views on lower slopes.
- A tranquil area, with a sense of isolation and separation from urban areas despite their proximity.



Heswall Dales

Natural Landscape

8.71 The area is underlain by a variety of Triassic sandstones: Thurstaston Sandstone, Thurstaston Hard Sandstone Bed and Helsby Sandstone Formation. These form outcrops which reach 70m AOD at its highest point. The land falls to the south west to 60m AOD. The land is steeply undulating throughout, with the steepest slopes along the southern and eastern fringes and flatter plateaux on the northern and western fringes.

8.72 A stream within the eastern part of the Dale flows through mature woodland, and there are pockets of wet heath and damp areas on lower ground and in small depressions within sandstone.

8.73 Woodland is predominantly establishing birch-oak woodland, which is present as birch scrub, and more mature areas particularly along access tracks from Oldfield Road and on lower ground around Warren Way, Pipers Lane and Queens Park.

8.74 Heswall Dales is characterised by pockets of heathland within more open areas, steeply sloping wooded sides and damp woodland along the lower lying areas. Dry heathland areas are dominated by heather, bell heather with some bilberry and western gorse. The extent of heathland is gradually reducing as a result of bracken establishment and natural succession to woodland. Pockets of acidic grassland are present within lower lying areas and natural valleys. On lower ground, woodland becomes more mature.

8.75 The area was notified in 1979 as the Heswall Dales SSSI and is an important example of lowland heath within Merseyside. Locally the area is designated as the Heswall Dales and Cleaver Heath Local Nature Reserves and Bush Way Local Wildlife Site and Site of Biological Importance and contains priority habitat dry heathland, gorse, purple moor-grass, and developed birch-oak woodland.

8.76 The landscape is home to breeding birds including wren, yellowhammer and chaffinch, as well as specialist lizard, butterfly and invertebrate species including the Southern Hawker Dragonfly.

8.77 The landscape forms part of West Wirral Heathlands and Arrowe Park Nature Improvement Area, and ecological priorities are to create, restore, maintain and enhance heathland habitats, and create, maintain and increase species diversity of grassland habitats.

Cultural Landscape

8.78 Heswall Dales is popular for informal recreation and is an open access area. There are a number of footpaths within

the area, and recreation is encouraged through the designation as a Local Nature Reserve.

8.79 Dale Farm is the only development within the LCA. It is located in the centre of the Dales and comprises a farm and large market garden cultivating fruit and vegetables. The farm buildings are surrounded by mature woodland, which limits views from the surrounding area.

8.80 Housing within Heswall surrounds the area, however due to the woodland within the area, and mature trees in the gardens of properties, housing is often not noticeable, with the exception of large detached properties on the ridgeline. In the south, some properties are discernible from footpaths through the scrub and woodland.



Heswall Dales looking north-east

Perceptual Landscape

8.81 In the north of the area there are extensive panoramic views across the Dee Estuary towards the Welsh coastline. These contrast with enclosed views on lower ground and in areas of more established woodland.

8.82 The area is not prominent in the wider landscape, and only becomes visible within close proximity. Residential development prevents views of the area from central Heswall, and intervening vegetation prevents views from the immediate coast.

8.83 Built development tends to be well screened by mature vegetation and is not prominent within views. This helps to reinforce a sense of separation and remote, naturalistic character, particularly on the windblown ridgeline. The gorse, heather and bracken along the ridgeline create a variety of colours and textures which contrast with thick woodland below and openness of the Dee Estuary in the distance.

8.84 The visual values and landscape quality of the area are recognised locally as an Area of Special Landscape Value. This area is considered to be among the most outstanding landscapes within Wirral and provides an important and positive contribution to the distinctive attractiveness of the peninsula.

Valued Landscape Attributes

- Windblown vegetation on the ridgeline contrasting with dense woodland on lower slopes create a variety of colours and textures which change with the seasons and provides a sense of place.
- Nationally important mosaic of open heathland and enclosed woodland, with high biodiversity value reflected in designation as SSSI, LNR, LWS and SBI.
- Recreational value, providing quiet enjoyment of the wooded countryside in close proximity to the urban area, through a network of footpaths.
- Expansive and panoramic views across the Dee Estuary towards the Welsh coast.
- A naturalistic ridgeline with a sense of remoteness despite the proximity of the surrounding conurbation.
- The area is recognised locally as an Area of Special Landscape Value, considered to be amongst the most outstanding landscapes within Wirral, and provide an important and positive contribution to the distinctive attractiveness of the peninsula.



Heswall Dales looking west

Landscape Condition

8.85 Heswall Dales has a strong coherent character due to its elevation, enclosed heathland and woodland habitats, and expansive views across the Dee Estuary towards Wales. The heathland is declining as natural succession takes place to birch and ultimately oak woodland. The maturing woodland is also starting to impact on the expansive views from the ridgeline.

Key Issues

- Loss of heathland through fire damage and natural colonisation, including bracken establishment.
- Recreational pressures on the landscape, resulting in the upgrading of routes or signage, which may reduce the natural remote character.
- Pressure for development leading to urban encroachment along the fringes of the character area.
- Maturing woodland and scrub encroachment leading to a loss of panoramic views from the ridgeline.

Landscape Strategy

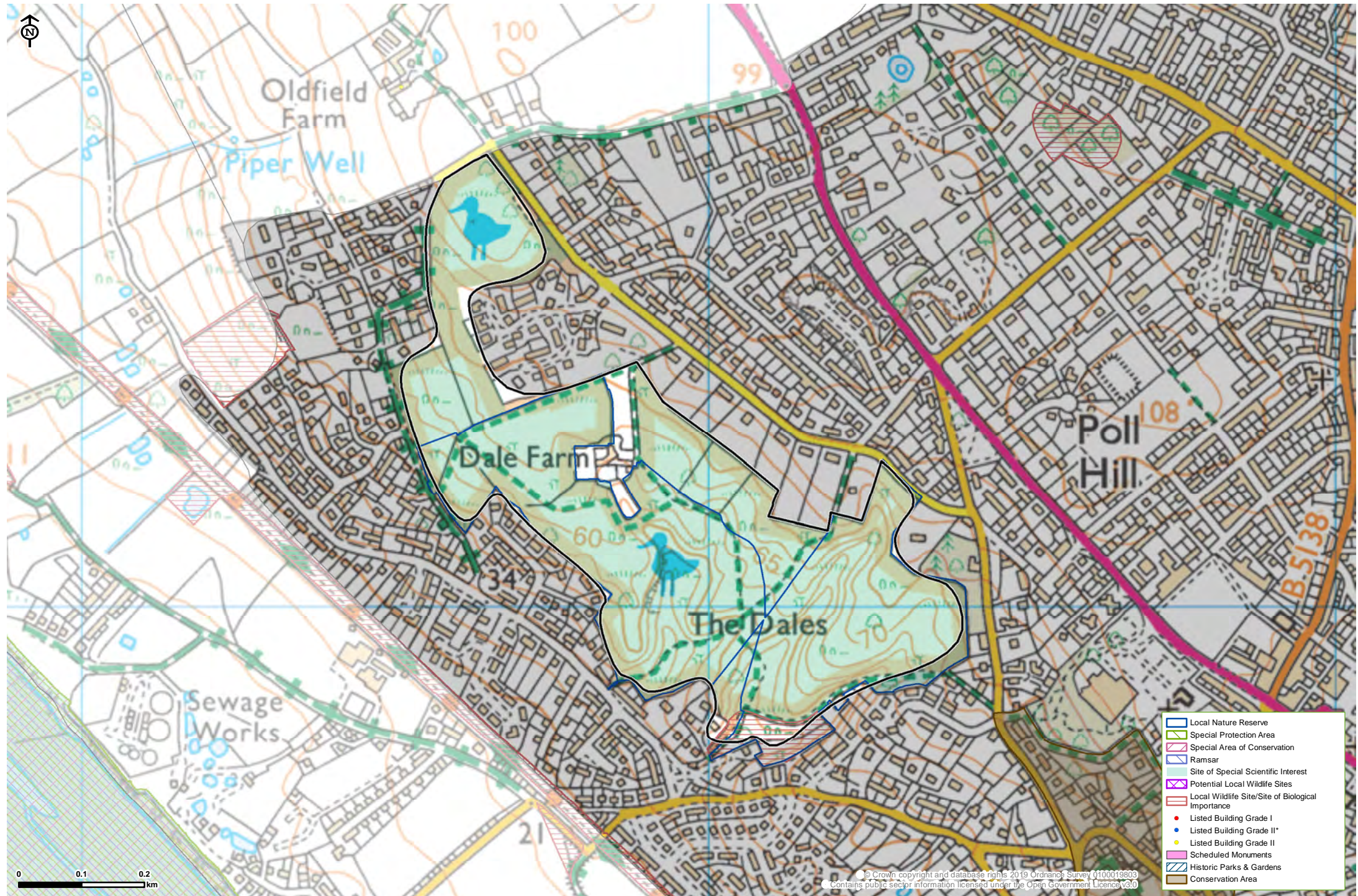
8.86 The overall strategy for the Heswall Wooded Sandstone Hills and Dales is to conserve and enhance key features including the heathland and woodland mix and expansive views to the west.

- Conserve existing expansive views across the Dee Estuary to North Wales maintaining the open character of high points along the ridgeline through management of vegetation.
- Conserve the naturalistic qualities of the landscape with its perceptions of remoteness.

Landscape Guidelines

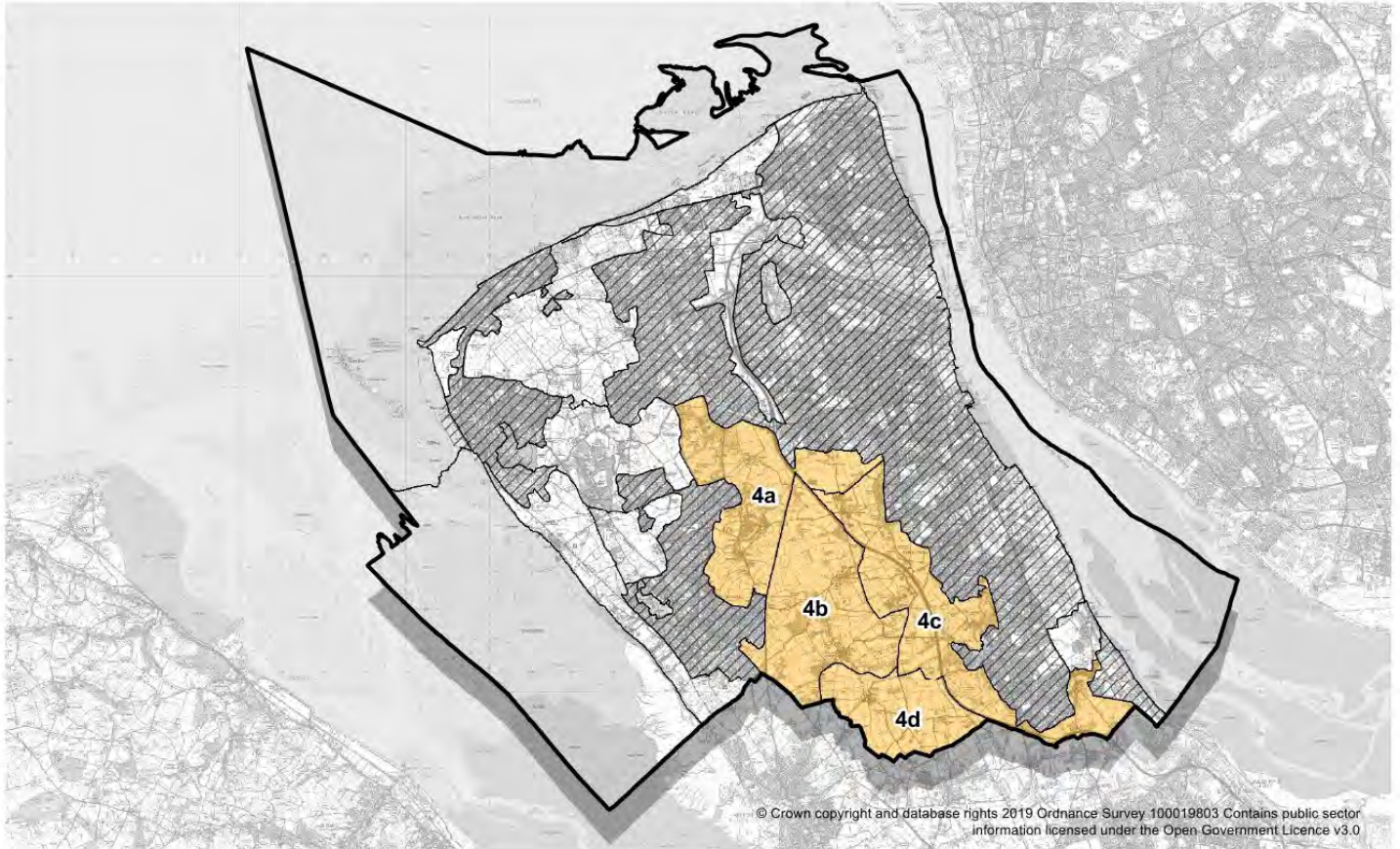
- Conserve the mosaic of open heathland and enclosed woodlands. Protect the heathland through vegetation management.
- Conserve, enhance and manage the valued heathland, grassland and woodland habitats. Implement habitat creation and management, as part of the West Wirral Heathlands and Arrowe Park Nature Improvement Area.
- Conserve the wooded character of Dale Farm and resist any further development within the area.
- Carefully manage visitor pressures within the area. Retain the informal and natural character of the footpaths and interpretation.
- Conserve the mature boundaries around properties along the fringes of the character area.
- Avoid visually intrusive development, ensuring that any new development along the surrounding roads is set within woodland.

3d: Heswall Dales Sandstone Hills



Chapter 9

LCT 4: Lowland Farmland and Estates



Description

The LCT is characterised by gently rolling farmland in mixed arable and pastoral use with a strong estate character around historic country houses. Frequent semi-natural woodland, including small copses, prominent woodland blocks on high ground and lining brook valleys and field ponds contribute to a wooded character. Settlement is limited to small villages and scattered farmhouses, with a strong vernacular of red sandstone. Wooded ridgelines provide a sense of enclosure.

Landscape Character Areas

The Lowland Farmland and Estates LCT is subdivided into four Landscape Character Areas:

- 4a: Landican and Thingwall Lowland Farmland and Estates
- 4b: Thornton Hough Lowland Farmland and Estates
- 4c: Clatterbrook and Dibbin Valley Lowland Farmland and Estates
- 4d: Raby Lowland Farmland and Estates

4a: Landican and Thingwall Lowland Farmland and Estates

Summary

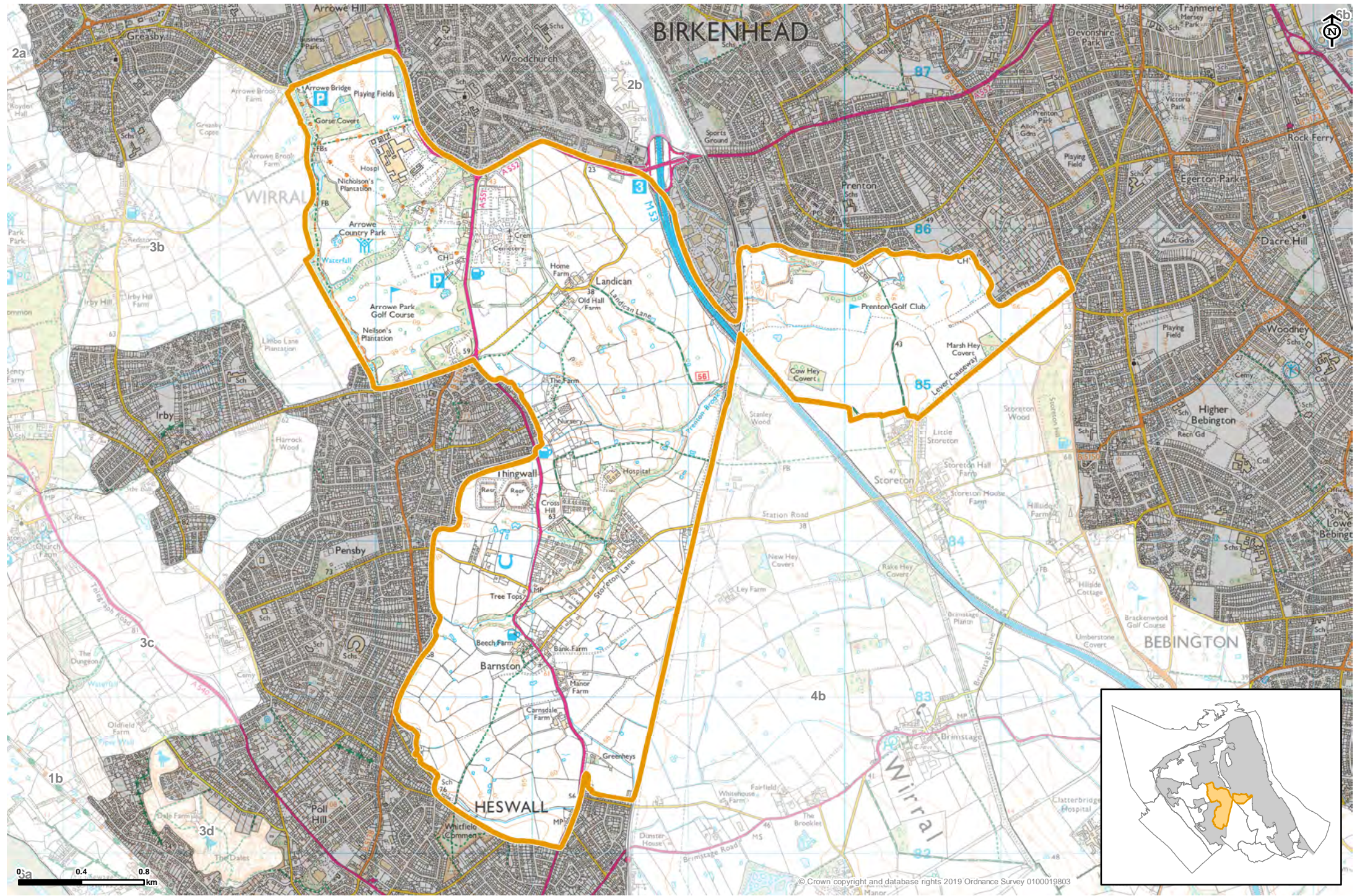
The Landican and Thingwall Lowland Farmland and Estates LCA lies in the centre of the borough. It is an undulating landscape of mixed farmland interspersed with recreational parkland at Arrowe Country Park and the villages of Barnston and Landican. Views are enclosed by wooded horizons, although there is some visual intrusion from surrounding urban settlement at Heswall, Prenton, Pensby and Thingwall, the M53 and railway line.

The northern boundary runs along the settlement edge of Upton, Woodchurch and Prenton. The eastern boundary follows Lever Causeway and the Bidston-Wrexham railway line to the southern boundary along the edge of Heswall. The western boundary follows the settlement edge of Heswall, Pensby and Thingwall and the woodland which marks the extent of Arrowe Country Park.



Looking east from Storeton Lane

4a: Landican and Thingwall Lowland Farmland



Key Characteristics

- Undulating landform which slopes from 25m AOD at the M53 and railway to 50m-80m AOD along the urban fringe of Prenton to the north and east and Heswall to the south west.
- Scattered field ponds are a characteristic feature often surrounded by wetland trees and shrubs.
- Prenton Brook and Arrove Brook create narrow valleys lined by deciduous woodland which contrast with the surrounding open landscape.
- Woodland, much of which is locally designated, is concentrated along watercourses particularly at Barnston Gap, within Arrove Country Park and on high ground on the edge of surrounding settlements.
- Arable and some pasture farmland in small-medium scale regular fields, which become smaller closer to the settlements. Fields are bordered by low hedgerows of variable condition with hedgerow trees.
- Recreational opportunities at Arrove Country Park and the public rights of way extending from surrounding urban areas. More formal recreational opportunities at Prenton Golf Club.
- High concentration of historic field patterns including Medieval Townfields at Barnston and Landican, and pre-Parliamentary enclosure field patterns in much of the area. Formal ornamental parkland and manor house at Arrove Country Park.
- Settlement concentrated at Barnston, which has a historic core, designated as the Barnston Conservation Area. Sandstone is commonly used in buildings and garden boundaries including in large sandstone farms on the edge of villages.
- Wooded ridgelines form a backdrop to urban development screening it from the wider landscape, except at Arrove Park Hospital.
- Varied views with enclosed views on lower ground and expansive long-distance views from the high ground to focal buildings in Liverpool and industrial areas at Ellesmere Port.
- A rural area with increasing tranquillity away from settlement edges. Industry along the M53, housing within Woodchurch and on the fringes of Heswall, overhead powerlines and Landican Crematorium are discordant features within views.

Natural Landscape

- 9.1** The area is underlain by Triassic bedrock Wilmslow Sandstone Formation and conglomerate, overlain in the majority of the area by Quaternary till. Arrove Brook within Arrove Country Park is designated as a Local Geological Site.
- 9.2** The landform along the eastern boundary by the railway is gently undulating between 50m and 55m AOD and rises to a high point of 80m on the fringes of Heswall. The land slopes most distinctly from Woodchurch and at Landican village rising from a low point at 25m along the M53 to 60m by Landican Cemetery and 60m along the fringes of Prenton.
- 9.3** Field ponds and depressions are present across the area possibly formed as a result of locally dug marl pits used for field improvement. Some of the ponds are surrounded by small pockets of trees and shrubs others are more open in character and visible as small depressions and low points within fields.
- 9.4** Prenton Brook creates a narrow enclosed wooded valley at Barnston Dale between Barnston and Thingwall, which contrasts with surrounding open landscape. It is a prominent linear feature on lower ground, and the surrounding priority habitat woodland is designated as Local Wildlife Sites and Sites of Biological Importance at Barnston Dale; Murrayfield Hospital; and Lower Heath Wood.
- 9.5** Arrove Country Park contains the wooded course of the Arrove Brook as well as a number of man-made pools, meres and a constructed waterfall. The park is designated as a Local Wildlife Site and Site of Biological Importance for its deciduous woodland and grassland habitats, including priority habitat lowland meadows and rough grassland. The presence of large mature holly and rhododendron bushes and the mature plantation woodland including beech, ash, Scots pine and Norway maple add an element of formality to the woodland character of the parkland.
- 9.6** Prenton Golf Course contains linear strips of woodland along a watercourse, and priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland at Prenton Dell and Claypit Local Wildlife Site and Site of Biological Importance. Cow Hey Covert is a distinctive geometric copse to the south of the golf course.
- 9.7** Woodland on higher ground along urban fringes creates an impression of higher levels of woodland cover, particularly at Heswall and Prenton and integrates prominent development at Landican Cemetery and Arrove Park Hospital. This urban fringe woodland has a high proportion of ornamental species and evergreen trees such as pines. Woodland strips
- 9.8** A mixed farmed landscape, predominantly arable with some localised pasture. Horse paddocks have introduced visually intrusive fencing instead of hedgerows, usually on

settlement edges. The field pattern is small to medium in size, and either geometric or rectangular in pattern. Field size increases in the north of the area. Fields are bounded by low hedgerows in variable condition, with well-maintained hedgerows concentrated within the south becoming more fragmented and overgrown to the north. Hedgerow trees are common although often concentrated in groups along one or two sides of a field and along roads. On higher land these often have a windswept, gnarled and twisted appearance.

9.9 Along the fringes of Heswall, gorse replaces hawthorn as the dominant species in hedgerows. The soil changes in this area and small patches of remnant heath with birch regeneration are present. Whitfield Common has remnant heathland although birch woodland is establishing on its fringes. Scrub with a high proportion of birch, gorse and broom is developing on the fringes of adjacent farmland and non-farmed land.

9.10 Arrowe Country Park and Landican Cemetery and Crematorium are part of the West Wirral Heathlands and Arrowe Park Nature Improvement Area, where the priorities are to create heathland and grassland, and enhance the existing woodland to support these habitats.



Manor Farm, Barnston

Cultural Landscape

9.11 The engineered grassed mounding of above ground reservoirs at Thingwall contrasts with the lower open character of the surrounding agricultural landscape. The Landican Cemetery and Crematorium in the north-west was opened in 1934 and has recently been extended.

9.12 There is a high concentration of historic field patterns. The Cheshire HLC notes Medieval Townfields around Barnston and Landican, and a pre-Parliamentary enclosure

field pattern through much of the area. South of Prenton Golf Course the field pattern becomes larger as a result of 20th century field amalgamation for arable farming.

9.13 Arrowe Country Park contains formal ornamental parkland laid out in the mid-19th century as part of a larger country estate owned by wealthy Liverpool shop owners. The Grade II listed Arrowe Hall is now in use as a care facility, and the Grade II listed entrance gates and lodge are still standing.

9.14 Barnston is mentioned in the Domesday survey, and may have been settled prior to the Norman Conquest. The old village is largely linear and there has been little modern development. The earliest remaining buildings date from the 18th century and there are a number of sandstone working farms. The Barnston Conservation Area contains two Grade II Listed Buildings: Christ Church with its distinctive red tile roof and Beech Farmhouse.

9.15 Landican is a small hamlet with a rural and remote character which sits on the top of a hill. Properties with sandstone boundaries are set in small groups along the road which provides interest and variety. The majority of buildings are working or converted farms with a few larger properties, constructed of red brick with banding or detail provided in a contrasting colour. The roads through the hamlet are narrow and well vegetated; this in combination with housing set on higher ground creates a high degree of enclosure.

9.16 Post-war suburban development off Storeton Lane and the A551 Barnston Road is isolated from the older village of Barnston although the low-lying enclosing landform and mature trees along their boundaries and within gardens reduce their visual prominence within the landscape. Spire Murrayfield Hospital at Thingwall is a low-lying hospital complex which is largely enclosed by mature vegetation.

9.17 The landscape is crossed by few roads, most of which are rural in character except for the busy A551 Barnston Road which runs across the centre from Heswall to Thingwall and Storeton Lane which is characterised by street lighting and ribbon development extending from Barnston. The M53 and railway line which along the edge of the area are largely screened by vegetation.

9.18 There are frequent recreational land uses within this area, particularly in the open parkland at Arrowe Country Park which offers peaceful woodland walks along a series of formal pools. A number of public rights of way cross the area, particularly around Landican which connect the area to the surrounding urban edges. National Cycle Route 56 follows Landican Lane in the north. Prenton Dell is also popular for informal recreation with links to Storeton in the south along the Roman Road. More formal recreation is found at Prenton

Rugby Club, Prenton Golf Course and Arrowe Park Golf Course.

9.19 The settlement edges of Woodchurch, Prenton, Thingwall and the North Cheshire Trading Estate in Prenton intrude into this otherwise rural landscape, although much of the settlement is screened by woodland. An overhead powerline runs parallel with the railway line and is a detracting feature.



Home Farm, Landican

Perceptual Landscape

9.20 Development within this area is generally well screened by mature woodland or topography. The Church of St Saviour, Oxtan is a prominent landmark punctuating the woodland on the rising skyline at Prenton. The roofs of the crematorium buildings within Landican Cemetery and the incinerator tower at Arrowe Park Hospital are detracting skyline features.

9.21 Adjacent settlements on rising ground outside the character area are visible but generally dispersed within woodland and do not punctuate the skyline, reducing their urbanising influence. However, from Landican Lane in the north of the area there are open close-distance views of housing development at Woodchurch, Prenton and Oxtan, the Asda store and industrial development immediately east of the M53.

9.22 Views from lower ground close to the railway and along Barnston Road are generally only over short distances with tall hedgerows reducing the scale of the view. From higher elevations, particularly around the eastern fringes of Heswall (the highest point within this character area) there are open long-distance views across wooded ridgelines within eastern Wirral. Key buildings in Liverpool, most notably Liverpool

Cathedral and Radio City tower are visible above the skyline and between the wooded hills there are views of industry at Ellesmere Port and Eastham.

9.23 The M53 and railway line are aurally intrusive and provide a barrier between the east and west of the character area. There is greater tranquillity towards Landican and Barnston, away from the transport corridors and urban edges.

Valued Landscape Attributes

- The narrow wooded valleys of Arrowe Brook within the country park and Prenton Brook at Barnston Dale provide an intimate character which contrast with the open character of the surrounding farmland.
- Priority habitat deciduous woodland, grasslands and wetlands in Arrowe Park, along brook valleys and around field ponds, which are locally valued through designation.
- Small to medium size historic field pattern, many with intact hedgerows and hedgerow trees and historic wooded parklands which give the landscape a strong sense of time-depth.
- Small-scale intimate villages and hamlets, including the historic village of Barnston, with its Conservation Area and listed buildings.
- The recreational value of the country park and network of public rights of way, including National Cycle Route 56, which enable local communities to enjoy the landscape and link with adjacent settlements.
- Long distance views from higher ground across wooded ridgelines in east Wirral to landmark buildings in Liverpool.



Landican Lane looking east towards Prenton

Landscape Condition

9.24 The area has a rural farmed character with a historic field pattern, scattered woodland and small-scale villages. The M53, railway line and the visual intrusion of the settlement edge, particularly at Prenton and Woodchurch, along with field expansion and hedgerow fragmentation create a slightly neglected appearance to the area which weakens landscape character locally. The prominence of the Arrowe Park Hospital complex in the west and overhead power lines are detracting features. However, the majority of the landscape is well managed and landscape features are generally intact.

Key Issues

- Hedgerow fragmentation through lack of management and lack of replacement planting.
- Damaged fences within stretches of hedgerows.
- Untidy and inconsistent fence boundaries around private properties along roads through the area.
- Gorse and scrub establishment at field margins, particularly around former heathland areas.
- Agricultural intensification leading to expansion of farms, and prominent large-scale farm buildings and visible storage yards with materials and machinery storage.
- Diversification of agricultural land uses, including equestrian leading to the subdivision of fields for horse paddocks, using timber and electric fences which often have an untidy appearance.
- Expansion at Arrowe Park Hospital further increasing its prominence in views.
- Pressure for new development on the edge of existing settlements and along transport routes.
- Backland nature of the countryside at Thingwall.

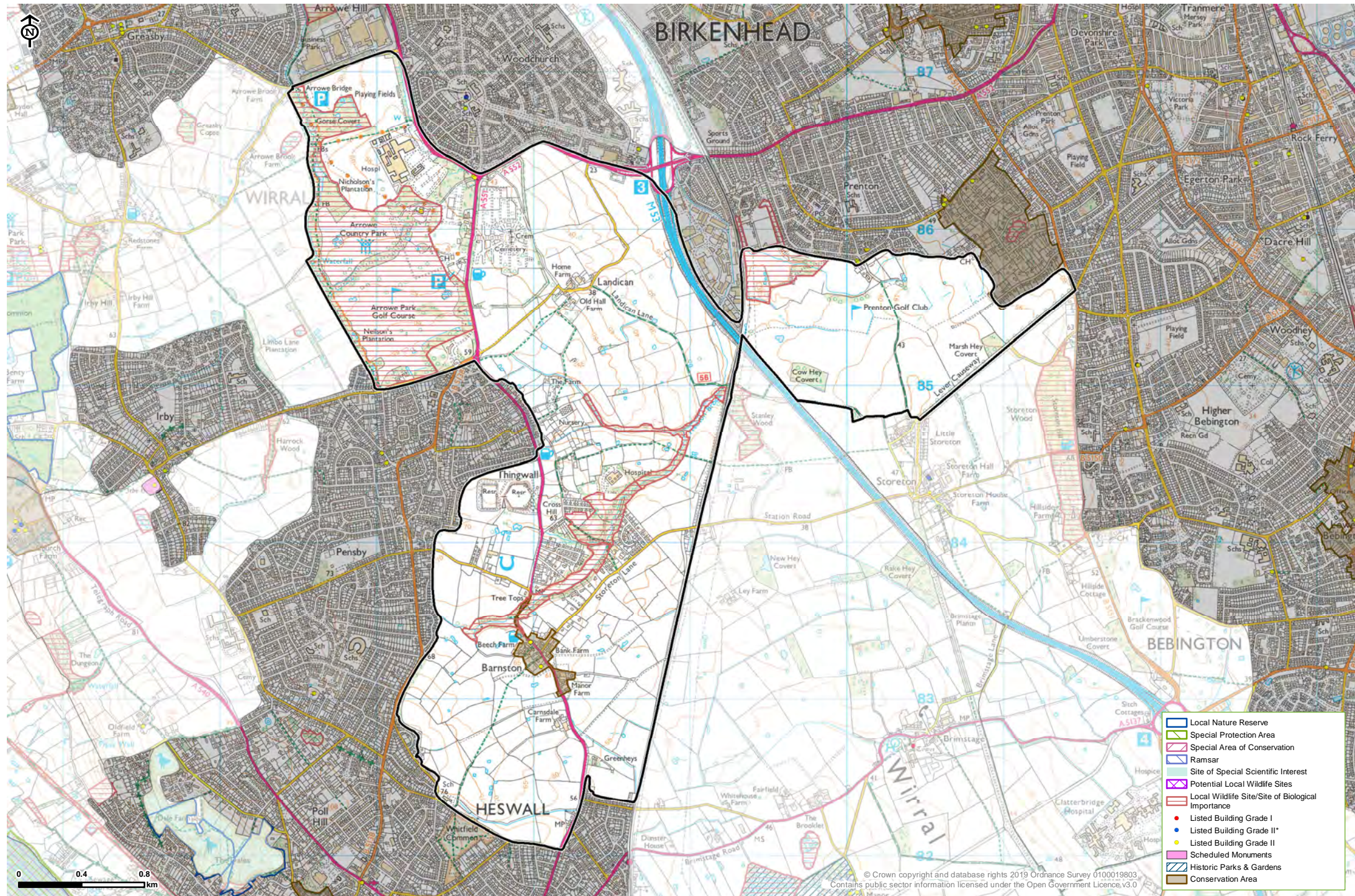
Landscape Strategy

9.25 The overall strategy for the Landican and Thingwall Lowland Farmland and Estates is to conserve and enhance the existing historic field pattern and woodland habitats, particularly the linear woodlands along watercourses. Hedgerow field boundaries should be restored and strengthened, and woodland planting should be encouraged along roads and urban edges.

Landscape Guidelines

- Conserve the intimate wooded character of the Prenton Brook valley at Barnston Dale and Arrowe Brook valley within Arrowe Country Park.
- Conserve the mixture of wooded and open field ponds across the area. Maintain and enhance the integration of major roads through native woodland and hedgerow tree planting particularly to soften the appearance of industry along the M53.
- Retain and enhance the integration of urban fringes both within and outside the character areas through native wooded boundaries and trees to reduce their prominence, particularly in relation to Woodchurch, Prenton and Heswall.
- Conserve the wooded fringes of Landican Cemetery to further integrate it into the surrounding landscape.
- Conserve the historic pattern of small to medium size fields with intact hedgerows.
- Enhance and augment any fragmenting field boundaries through planting new native hedgerows and encourage replanting where appropriate.
- Conserve and protect the parkland landscape at Arrowe Country Park and plan for the next generation of parkland trees.
- Avoid visually intrusive development, particularly on prominent slopes or ridgelines both within and outside the character area.
- Conserve and enhance the dispersed settlement pattern and the local distinctiveness of village buildings, particularly within Barnston Conservation Area.
- Carefully manage the use of the area for recreation, especially at Arrowe Country Park. Retain a rural character to new tourist features such as car parks, footpaths, signage and interpretation.
- Conserve long distance views to the wooded horizon by limiting built form which punctuates the skyline, ensuring that rooflines are dispersed within the woodland.

4a: Landican and Thingwall Lowland Farmland



4b: Thornton Hough Lowland Farmland and Estates

Summary

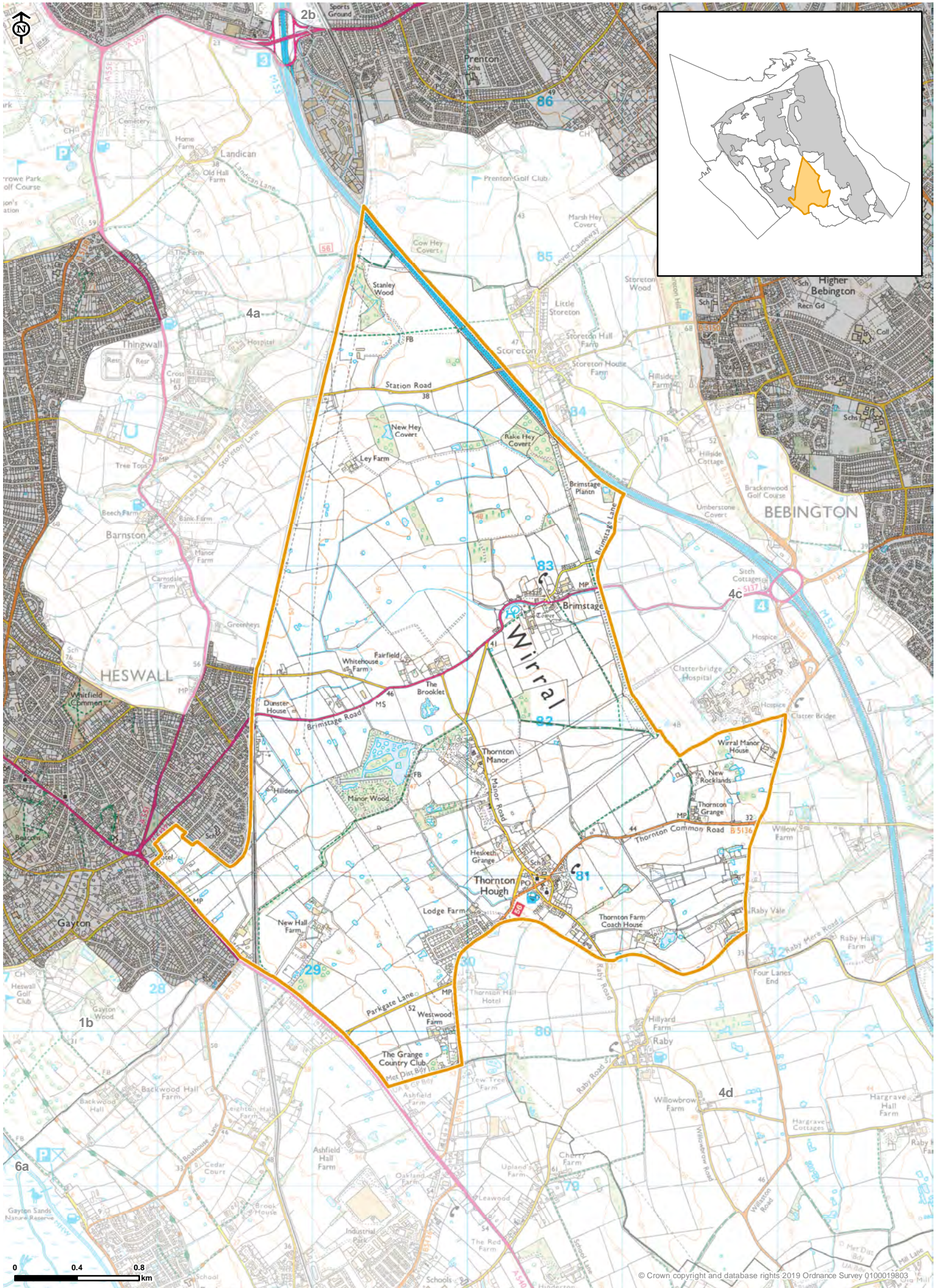
Thornton Hough Lowland Farmland and Estates LCA lies in the centre of Wirral. It is a largely flat agricultural landscape with a strong rural character and few urban detracting features. There is an estate character in the landscape connected to Thornton Manor. Buildings in the historic village of Thornton Hough has a distinctive vernacular of black and white detailing and red sandstone.

The southern boundaries are formed by the Raby Brook and B5136, and the west by the borough boundary, the settlement edge of Gayton and Heswall and the railway line. The northern boundary is formed by the M53 and the eastern by a combination of roads and field boundaries.



Manor Road looking north-east towards Storeton Wood

4b: Thornton Hough Lowland Farmland and Estates



Key Characteristics

- A largely flat landform between 40m and 50m AOD, rising to wooded ridgelines outside the area which create a bowl-like landscape.
- Small watercourses run north to join the Prenton Brook and east to join the Clatter Brook.
- Numerous field ponds are found throughout the area, typically set within priority habitat mixed deciduous woodland, with some reedbed.
- Substantial geometric blocks of priority habitat mixed deciduous woodland are prominent within large arable fields. There are some areas of conifer planting.
- An agricultural landscape, with regular large fields in arable and pastoral use. Fields are bordered by well-maintained mature hedgerows with hedgerow trees or Cheshire rail fencing which provides an estate character.
- Pockets of parkland around halls and former estates including Grade II* Registered Park and Garden at Thornton Manor. Formal avenues extending from Thornton Manor are bordered by ornamental trees such as sweet chestnut and sycamore.
- Little settlement except for the villages of Thornton Hough and Brimstage and scattered historic farmsteads built of red sandstone. Thornton Hough has a distinct historic vernacular of black and white panelling on red brick or sandstone.
- The road pattern is sparse and largely rural, with the exception of the M53 which cuts through the north east of the area.
- Few public rights of way, particularly in the north.
- There has been some diversification of farms for recreational use e.g. maize maze at Brimstage Hall.
- Open views across farmland, framed by woodland blocks and the wooded ridgeline of Storeton Woods on the horizon.
- A rural and tranquil landscape despite its proximity to the M53 and large urban areas to the east. Overhead electricity wires and pylons are a discordant feature.

Natural Landscape

9.26 The area is underlain by Triassic bedrock Chester Sandstone Formation and Wilmslow Sandstone Formation, and the majority of the area is overlain by Quaternary till, with some small fingers of Quaternary Head deposits.

9.27 The land is generally flat, between 40m and 50m AOD with minor undulations around Thornton Hough and along watercourses. The land rises to the west and east, to ridgelines outside the character area and creates the impression of the landscape being set within a wide 'bowl'.

9.28 There are a number of small watercourses in the north and east of the area, which are tributaries of the Prenton and Clatter Brooks respectively. Field ponds are present throughout the area, although often not visible from roads as they are set within priority habitat deciduous woodland and reedbed. These priority habitats have led to designation as Local Wildlife Sites and Sites of Biological Importance at Thornton Hough Ponds and Rake Hey Covert Pond.

9.29 Woodland blocks are geometric in shape, following the shape and size of adjacent fields. Woodland forms narrow belts on estate tracks which cross the area and join the Lever Causeway at Storeton. The woodland blocks in the north are particularly prominent and contrast with lower more infrequent hedgerows. Woodland tends to be predominantly oak with a varied mix of deciduous species. Priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland is found throughout the area, and Stanley Wood and Manor Wood are designated as Local Wildlife Sites and Sites of Biological Importance. Beech is often present in more formal woodland such as at Thornton Manor.

9.30 The area east of the B5151 is part of the Dibbinsdale, Raby Mere and Eastham Country Park Nature Improvement Area, and there are opportunities to create new woodland to buffer the ancient woodland, and to create more field ponds to support the existing network.



Thornton Hough

Cultural Landscape

9.31 The area is almost entirely farmed, with a mix of both arable and pasture although arable farming becomes more prominent within the northern part of the character area. The field pattern is mostly large, regular and geometric. There are few other land uses within the character area and farmland extends up to village boundaries.

9.32 Fields adjacent to Brimstage and Thornton Hough are bound by well-maintained mature hedgerows, which vary in height. Some resemble small wooded belts preventing views beyond each field. Cheshire rail estate fencing is also common within the landscape, which provides a coherent estate character.

9.33 Small pockets of parkland are present around halls and former estates such as Wirral Manor House, and the Grade II* Registered Park and Garden at Thornton Manor. These are characterised by specimen trees, with mature trees, sandstone walls or boundary hedgerows obscuring the houses.

9.34 The historic field pattern is largely intact, with the Cheshire HLC noting a pre-Parliamentary enclosure field pattern in the west and 19th century reorganised fields in the east. There are some 20th century field systems around the M53 in the north.

9.35 Settlement is sparse with little modern development and consists of the villages of Thornton Hough, Brimstage and scattered farmsteads.

9.36 Thornton Hough is a Victorian village expanded by Lord Leverhulme in the 1880s. It retains a strong vernacular with the majority of properties having distinctive red roofs and black and white panelling above a red brick or sandstone base

reflected in its designation as a Conservation Area. Other buildings are constructed completely from red sandstone. Chimneys on many of the buildings in the village centre have distinctive patterns in the brickwork. The village is centred on a village green and has two churches, which are both Listed Buildings.

9.37 Thornton Manor is a Grade II* Listed country house, set within a Grade II* Registered Park and Garden, designed by Thomas Hayton Mawson for the industrialist and philanthropist William Lever, later Viscount Leverhulme. Lever began works on the house and gardens in the late 19th century. It was his principle residence and acted both as a family home and as a place for meetings and entertaining as part of his work for Lever Brothers. The company founded by the Lever brothers is still in operation today as Unilever.

9.38 A series of prominent linear avenues lined by ornamental trees such as sweet chestnut, sycamore and Norway maple link Thornton Manor with the Lever Causeway in Storeton to the east. These were private roads used by Lord Leverhulme to travel between his house at Thornton Manor and business at Port Sunlight. When viewed from the wider landscape these appear as linear native woodlands. Native tree and shrub planting on adjacent field margins often softens and naturalises their appearance.

9.39 Brimstage is a small hamlet with properties set around a small central green. The majority of properties are semi-detached or detached with white render and distinctive red roofs. The village is set either side of a small wooded brook on lower ground. The Grade I listed 12th century Brimstage Hall and Tower lies to the south of the village, and now houses a boutique shopping centre.

9.40 A modern small housing estate lies south west of Thornton Hough and is one of the few examples of modern housing within the area. A small residential development south east of Thornton Hough was under construction at the time of this assessment.

9.41 Farmhouses across the character area tend to be large and farmsteads often contain a number of large agricultural buildings in addition to a residential property. Thatch is present on older barns and stables. Sandstone barns and stables have been converted to private residences or other facilities, including recreational uses e.g. Brimstage Maze. Larger modern agricultural buildings are present and contrast with the surrounding distinctive built form, but are generally well screened.

9.42 The agricultural landscape is crossed by largely quiet roads lined by low hedges leading to small historic villages, with the exception of the A5137 Brimstage Road.

9.43 There are a number of public rights of way, particularly south of Brimstage Road. National Cycle Route 4 follows the rural roads from the south west and crosses the M53 along Brimstage Lane.

9.44 The Bidston-Wrexham railway line cuts across the south west of the landscape, and there is a prominent overhead powerline running parallel to the railway. These, combined with the M53 in the north-east, are the only modern intrusions in an otherwise mature rural landscape.



Formal linear avenue opposite Thornton Manor

Perceptual Landscape

9.45 Thornton Hough has a slightly rising roofline, however much of the village is screened by woodland vegetation with only some of the larger properties and the churches visible above. There are distinctive views of the village from across the village green and from footpaths around Raby (within Raby Lowland Farmland and Estates LCA).

9.46 Distant views are contained by woodland ridgelines particularly Storeton Woods to the east and the tree-lined railway which obscures Heswall to the west. Views close to wooded tracks are often localised and only stretch across one or two fields. Views along many of the roads and footpaths within the character area are more open and channelled or framed by woodland blocks.

9.47 The combination of woodlands on higher ground, geometric woodland blocks, wooded linear features and tree-lined field boundaries gives the impression of a highly wooded landscape.

9.48 The agricultural landscape has few detracting features except for overhead power lines and the M53 on its periphery. It is nestled at the base of a series of wooded ridgelines which helps to maintain its separation from the large urban areas to

the east and increases the sense of remoteness and rural tranquillity.

Valued Landscape Attributes

- Distinctive 'bowl' landform, surrounded by woodland on higher ground outside of the area, provides a clear sense of place and enclosure to the landscape.
- Numerous field ponds and water courses support ecologically important habitats including wet woodland, deciduous woodland and reedbed.
- Intact historic field pattern bounded by well-maintained hedgerows or estate fencing found through much of the area, which provides time-depth and contributes to the sense of place.
- Parkland landscape associated with the Thornton Manor estate designated as a Registered Park and Garden provides a cultural record of the past and layers of history within the landscape.
- Distinctive linear avenues of ornamental trees are a distinctive feature and provide a sense of formality with links to the past.
- Strong sandstone vernacular in the historic village of Thornton Hough and Brimstage provides a coherent and distinctive sense of place.
- Quiet rural roads with low hedgerows allow views across the character area, access to the area and enjoyment of the countryside.



Brimstage Road looking south-west towards Thornton Hough

Landscape Condition

9.49 The area has a coherent character formed by the historic field pattern, areas of parkland and woodland. There is little evidence of hedgerow fragmentation, field amalgamation or loss of boundary features. The northern and western fringes are more vulnerable to increasing urban influences, from Heswall and the M53, which reduce the rural character of the area.

Key Issues

- Loss of the distinctive pattern of field ponds and associated habitats.
- Shelterbelts of poplar which emphasise the presence of development and contrast with the softer more natural appearance of other linear belts of mixed native woodland.
- Risk of maturing mixed woodland being replaced by single species plantations.
- Loss of hedgerows through lack of management or replacement planting, resulting in the loss of more intimate landscapes and fragmentation of the historic field pattern.
- Diversification of agricultural land uses, including equestrian, leading to the subdivision of fields for horse paddocks using timber and electric fences which often have an untidy appearance.
- Degradation of the parkland landscape associated with Thornton Manor estate, including the avenues of ornamental trees on the causeways extending from Thornton Manor.
- Agricultural intensification leading to the expansion of farms and construction of associated large-scale farm buildings.
- Pressure for development on the edge of the historic villages, the M53 and adjacent settlements outside the character area.
- Visual intrusion of urban development at Bebington extending into the wooded ridgelines.

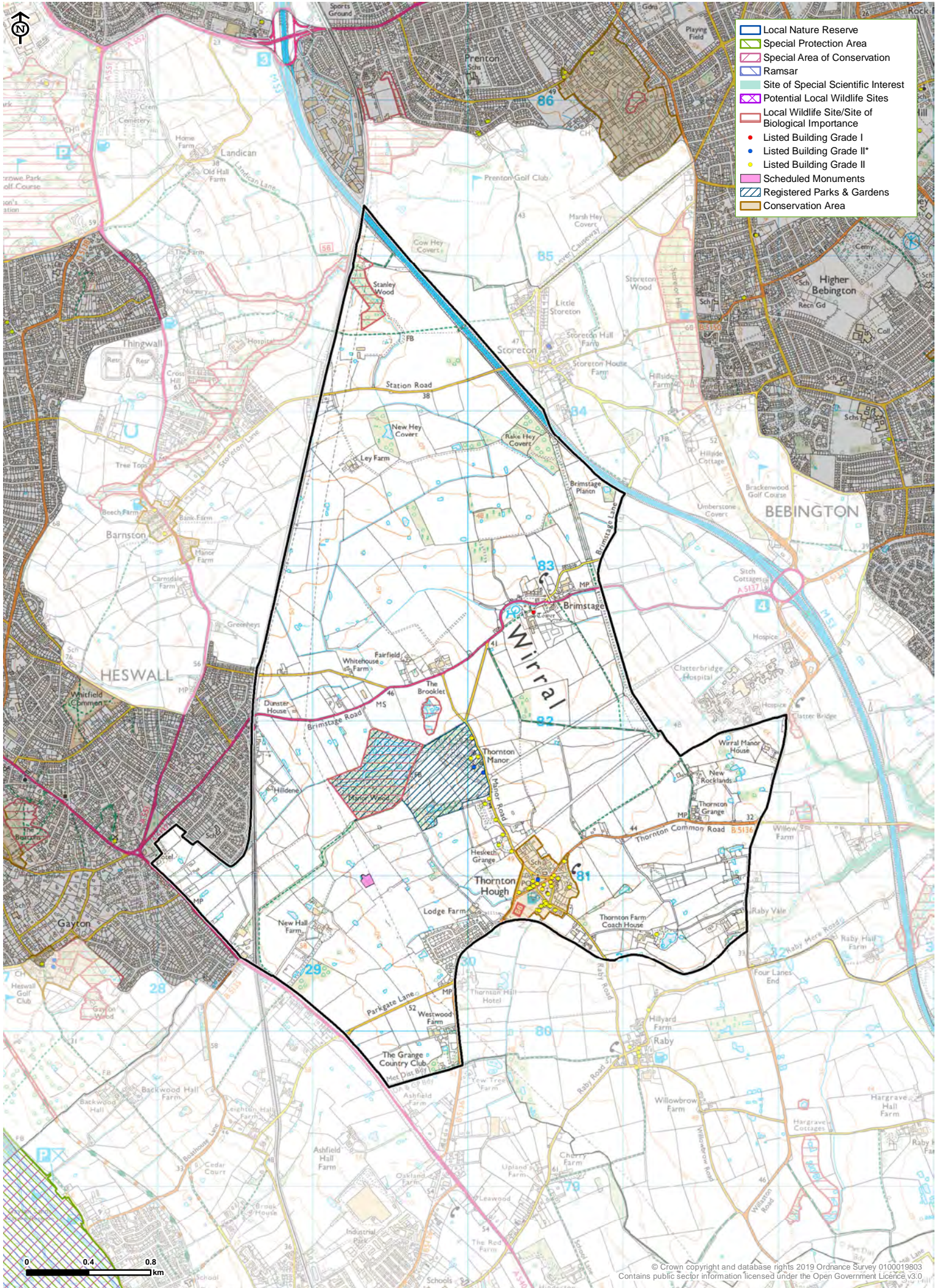
Landscape Strategy

9.50 The overall strategy for Thornton Hough Lowland Farmland and Estates is to conserve the intact historic field pattern and settlement pattern, and the estate and parkland character. Open views to the prominent wooded horizon should be maintained.

Landscape Guidelines

- Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, using locally occurring native species to link to existing woodland. Seek to avoid the introduction of non-native boundaries.
- Conserve the pattern of woodland surrounding watercourses, field ponds, open fields and geometric woodland blocks.
- Enhance and augment fragmented field boundary hedgerows with native species and put in place a programme of hedgerow tree replacement, especially around Manor Wood and in the north of the area.
- Conserve, enhance and manage the wide distribution of field ponds with their valued wet woodland, deciduous woodland and reedbed habitats, particularly within locally designated sites.
- Conserve and protect the historic parkland landscape around the halls and country houses, and plan for the next generation of parkland trees and linear causeways extending from Thornton Manor.
- Conserve and enhance the dispersed settlement pattern of nucleated villages and farmsteads.
- Conserve the local distinctiveness and vernacular of Thornton Hough and Brimstage, particularly within the Thornton Hough Conservation Area.
- Maintain and enhance the character of the rural lanes. Resist unsympathetic highway improvements that would threaten their rural character.
- Enhance the sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale and materials) to minimise the impacts of any new development, including agricultural buildings.
- Ensure the distinctive rural character of agricultural buildings is not significantly altered if they are converted to alternative uses, e.g. Brimstage Craft Centre.
- Conserve and enhance the integration of urban fringes and transport routes both within and outside the character area, through native wooded boundaries and trees to provide visual screening, particularly in relation to Heswall, the railway line and the M53.
- Protect woodland on high ground and the wooded horizon, avoiding visually intrusive development.
- Conserve rural views towards skyline features including Thornton Hough and All Saints Church.

4b: Thornton Hough Lowland Farmland and Estates



4c Clatterbrook and Dibbin Valley Lowland Farmland and Estates

Summary

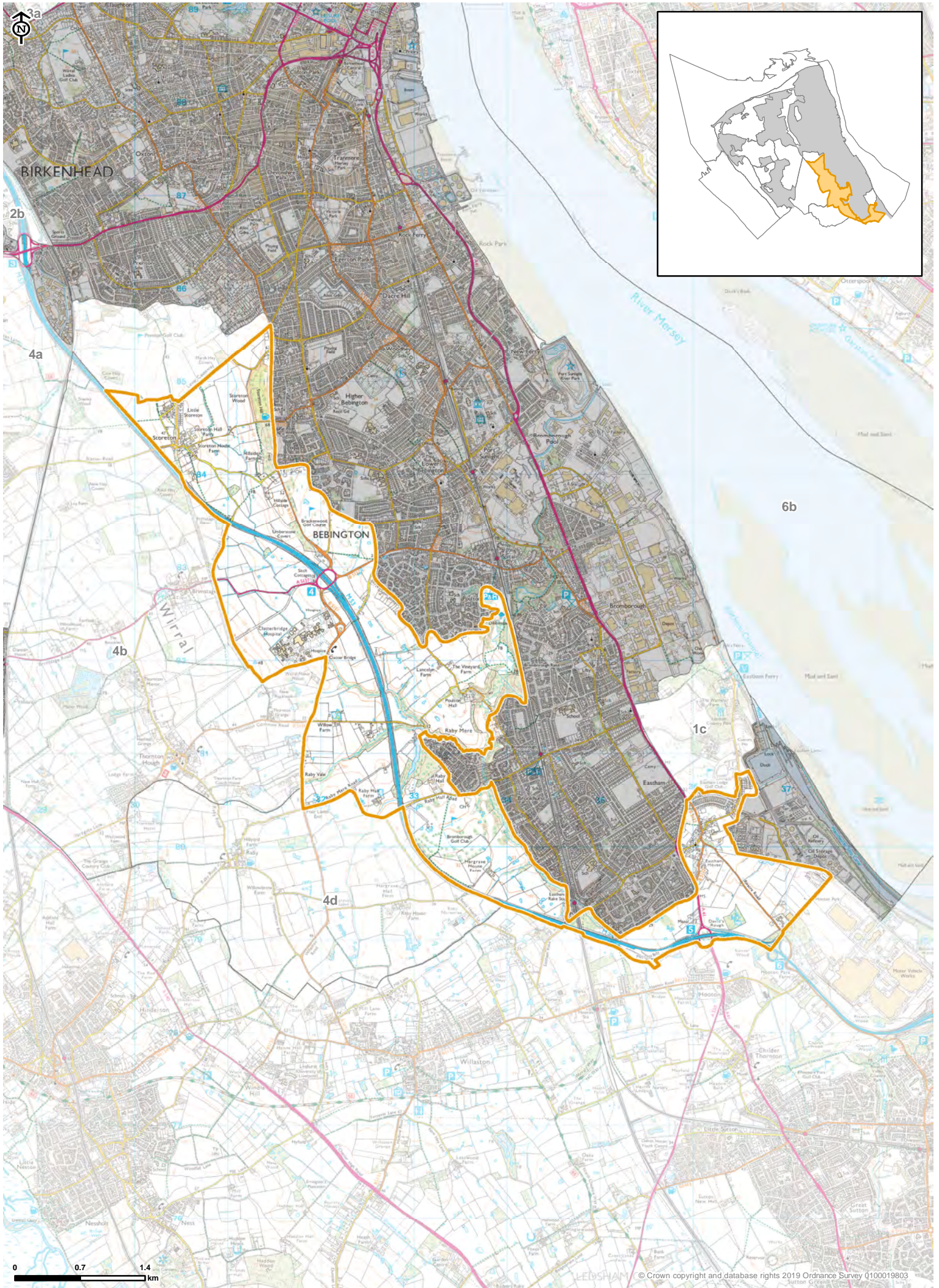
Clatterbrook and Dibbin Valley Lowland Farmland and Estates LCA lies in the south-east of the borough. It is a narrow agricultural area which follows river valleys and extends from the urban edge. It contains many important wetland habitats extending south from Levers Causeway along the well-wooded urban fringe. There are few urbanising features and built development is generally well screened which contributes to its largely rural character. The main urban influences are Clatterbridge Hospital, junctions on the M53 and industry along the Mersey.

The western boundary generally follows the M53 although it extends to the west around Clatterbridge Hospital to encompass the Clatter Brook and Raby Brook valleys. The northern boundary follows the Lever Causeway and Landican Lane. The southern boundary is formed by the borough boundary and the M53, and the eastern boundary is formed by the urban edge of Bebington, Poulton, Spital, Bromborough and Eastham, which is often enclosed by woodland. The south-east boundary is formed by industry along the Mersey Estuary at Eastham and Ellesmere Port.



Looking south-east from Red Hill Road

4c: Clatterbrook and Dibben Valley Lowland



Key Characteristics

- Narrow valley landform following the course of several small watercourses. The valleys become wider and shallower to the south around the wooded course of the Raby, Dibbinsdale and Clatter Brook.
- Elevation ranges from 40m to 10m AOD rising to a local high point at 68m AOD on Storeton Hill which forms part of Wirral's eastern sandstone ridgeline.
- Frequent field ponds are often set in small copses of priority habitat deciduous woodland and reedbed. The man-made lake at Raby Mere is the largest open water in Wirral.
- Ecologically important woodland and wetland habitats around the watercourses are recognised nationally and locally through nature conservation designations.
- A well wooded landscape with broadleaved woodland concentrated along watercourse, prominent wooded ridgelines, a distinctive roadside avenue at Lever Causeway, frequent copses and in-field trees.
- Farmland is mostly pasture in small to medium fields, with some larger arable fields near Poulton and in the south-east and pockets of parkland around halls and large farms on higher ground.
- Settlement is limited to the historic village of Eastham in the south-east and Storeton in the north. Urban fringes are mostly screened by woodland and topography, although Clatterbridge Hospital is a large low-level site west of the M53.
- Rural roads bordered by hedge banks with high hedgerows increase the sense of enclosure on country lanes.
- Brotherton Park and Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve, and fishing at Raby Mere offer recreational opportunities. Storeton Wood is open access, and other public rights of way link the rural roads to settlements and farms. Frequent wooded golf courses offer formal recreation.
- Long distance westerly views from high ground across to Welsh Hills, although much of west Wirral is obscured by intervening landform. The wooded ridgeline at Storeton Hill is prominent in views north and east.
- The M53 is an urbanising feature although it is in cutting through much of the area.

Natural Landscape

9.51 The area is underlain by Triassic bedrock Wilmslow Sandstone and Chester Formation. The majority of the area is overlain by Quaternary till, with alluvium along watercourse corridors. Storeton Hill is designated as a Local Geological Site.

9.52 The area is formed by a shallow valley following a number of small watercourses including the Clatter Brook, Dibbinsdale Brook and Raby Brook. In the north the landform rises steeply to form a narrow valley with a high point of 68m AOD at Storeton Wood to the east and a lower slope at 48m AOD at Storeton to the west. The valley becomes wider and shallower further south with Clatter Brook and Dibbinsdale Brook creating a series of much smaller and shallower valleys intersecting the farmland. Within the northern part of the character area watercourses are generally more open in character with grassed rather than wooded banks. To the south the course of the Clatter Brook and Dibbinsdale Brook are more distinctive with priority habitat wet woodland and deciduous woodland, much of which is ancient as well as reedbed and lowland fen.

9.53 Raby Mere is a local feature within low-lying woodland adjacent to Clatter Brook, and is part of a former watermill, although little evidence of this exists. The mere is the largest area of open water on Wirral and is surrounded by priority habitat deciduous woodland. It is designated as a Local Wildlife Site and Site of Biological Importance.

9.54 Field ponds are present throughout the area. These are often set within priority habitat deciduous woodland and reedbed and are often not visible from roads. Bromborough Golf Course Ponds, Hargrave House Farm Ponds are designated as Local Wildlife Sites and Sites of Biological Importance for their priority habitats.

9.55 Dibbinsdale SSSI follows the course of Dibbinsdale and Clatter Brook and is notified for semi-natural broadleaved woodland which covers most of the site and is mostly ancient, as well as reed swap, fen pasture and neutral grassland. The SSSI supports a number of breeding bird species including tawny owl and kingfisher. Brotherton Park and Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve is within the SSSI area, and includes informal open space, ancient woodland and small pockets of wooded farmland which can be subject to seasonal flooding.

9.56 The river valley north and south of the SSSI also contains priority habitat lowland deciduous woodland and grasslands, which are locally designated at Thornton Common and at The Marfords, Plymyard Dale, and Lowfields Local Wildlife Sites and Sites of Biological Importance along the edge of the urban area.

9.57 There is extensive woodland within the golf courses, and some prominent geometric blocks within farmland such as David's Rough in the south-east. Storeton Hill which borders the urban area is heavily wooded and has established naturally over the site of a former quarry. It contains birch, oak, sycamore and beech with an understorey of gorse, holly and elder and is designated as a Local Wildlife Site and Site of Biological Importance. The Old Sewage Works, Clatterbridge is also locally designated.

9.58 The area south of the B5137 is part of the Dibbinsdale, Raby Mere and Eastham Country Park Nature Improvement Area, and promotes opportunities to create new woodland to buffer the ancient woodland, and to create more field ponds to support the existing network.

9.59 The area around Storeton Wood and down to the B5137 is part of the East Wirral Heathlands Nature Improvement Area, and promotes opportunities to create new heathland and grassland, and to manage the woodland as part of the heathland habitat mosaic.



Eastham Village Conservation Area

Cultural Landscape

9.60 Land use is a mix of pasture and some arable farmland, with a high proportion of horse grazing in the north. Fields are generally irregularly shaped and small to medium scale, although arable fields are larger reflecting 20th century field amalgamation. In the north hedgerows have been lost to subdivision and replacement by horse fencing or tape, increasing the perceived scale and the landscape feels more open. Former hedgerow trees remain within fields as small copses and groups of trees with any understorey planting now lost to grazing, often by horses. Farmland in the south is largely enclosed by numerous hedgerow trees which are almost all mature or senescent.

9.61 The Cheshire HLC records a variety of historic field patterns, the majority of which are 19th century reorganised fields. There are small areas of pre-1600s field patterns around Hargrave House Farm and Clatter Bridge. Storeton Wood covers the site of a former quarry which was worked as early as 3AD and was finally closed and filled in the early 20th century.

9.62 Brotherton Park and Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve is popular for informal recreation and contains a number of public rights of way. Storeton Woods are popular for walkers and dog walkers, and National Cycle Route 4 runs from the M53 through Storeton. Public rights of way extend from settlements, although there is limited public access south of Eastham and Eastham village. The wooded golf courses within the area at Bromborough and Brackenwood offer formal recreation. They are well-established and well-integrated with the surrounding farmland due to their substantial wooded boundaries and use of native planting. There is a motorsport and go-karting centre in the south-east of the area.

9.63 Pockets of parkland with scattered in-field trees are concentrated in the south of the character area at Poulton Hall (Grade II listed), Raby Hall and Eastham House. The halls are surrounded by walled woodlands and therefore are not apparent in general views. The estate character is echoed in the built form of Sitch Cottages and the former gate entrance on Brimstage Road.

9.64 Hooton Park, which extends across the borough boundary into Chester and Cheshire West, was requisitioned during World War I and used as an RAF airfield. Following its closure, the former airfield was redeveloped with modern residential development along Rivacre Road, warehousing and distribution sheds and a go-kart centre at West Road. The remaining open land between the former runways is used for arable cultivation.

9.65 There is relatively little built form within the character area, with settlement is limited to the villages of Storeton in the north and Eastham in the south-east. The vernacular of red sandstone or brick with contrasting brickwork detailing, and sandstone boundary walls occurs across the area. Storeton village is centred on Red Hill Road and Keepers Lane and includes the Grade II* Storeton Hall. The majority of buildings are farmhouses and associated out-buildings or converted farmhouses. Ribbon development to the west of Little Storeton consists of a row of large detached properties separated by mature vegetation.

9.66 Eastham village contains a number of Grade II listed buildings, including St Mary's church, and the primary school, and is covered by the Eastham Village Conservation Area. Sandstone boundary walls are particularly evident along

Rivacre Road, and Eastham Village Road. There is more modern residential development to the north of Eastham village. New housing is planned on the Anselmians Rugby Club ground, between Eastham Village Road and New Chester Road.

9.67 Farmsteads are a mix of sizes and scales and include historic buildings such as the Grade II listed Lancelyn Farm and Vineyard Farm, constructed from local red sandstone with small farm buildings arranged around small courtyards. Storeton Hall Farm is the largest farmstead with large modern barns and some smaller sandstone and brick buildings, which are being converted to residential use. The Clatterbridge Hospital complex is the largest area of built development within the area, and consists of a number of buildings within a clearly defined estate. The hospital buildings are generally well screened by vegetation.

9.68 Roads are small and lined by mature hedgerows and more formal avenue tree planting, creating an enclosed character. Yew trees are common along the roads within Eastham village with a concentration close to St Mary's church. Hedgerows on high banks create narrow enclosed routes with views channelled along the roads through the farmland areas, particularly on Poulton Hall Road. Views out are only possible at gate entrances into fields. Other routes close to watercourses are characterised by steep sided wooded valleys and narrow twisty lanes.

9.69 The M53 is in a cutting for much of its length along the western edge of the area and has heavily wooded banks. However, it remains a prominent feature within the landscape, particularly around the junctions where traffic movement, motorway signage and lighting are evident.

9.70 The urban fringes of Brookhurst, Eastham Rake, Bromborough Rake and Higher Bebington are screened by mature vegetation along Dibbinsdale Brook and around the fringes of Brackenwood Golf Course. Housing and gardens at Poulton increase the urban character and provide a reminder of the close proximity of urban fringes. The railway line, transmitter tower at Storeton Hill and the modern buildings and access roads at Clatterbridge Hospital provide discordant urban features in this rural landscape.



Rest Hill Road looking south with Storeton Wood and transmitter to the east

Perceptual Landscape

9.71 Views throughout much of the character area are contained within river valleys with woodland and Storeton village visible on high ground containing views. On the lower lying ground views are enclosed by adjacent woodland and are only over short distances.

9.72 The most extensive views across the character area are from Rest Hill and Red Hill Road where the land rises and along Poulton Road. Views towards the Welsh coastline and Clywdian Range are possible at these locations. The rising valley on the western edge of the character area prevents and obscures much of west Wirral which appears as a series of very gently rolling wooded valleys or hills with little development visible with a backdrop of the Welsh coastline and beyond. Moel Famau is a distinctive feature in these views.

9.73 Storeton Hill and its upper slopes, Storeton Wood, which are largely covered by Storeton Wood, form prominent features in views from western Wirral. The transmitter at Storeton Hill is also highly visible.

9.74 Storeton Wood and the woodland lining the Dibbinsdale restrict views to the urban edges of Bebington, Poulton, Spital, Bromborough and Eastham as the development is lower than the woodland. This woodland screen helps to maintain an enclosed rural character, despite proximity to the urban areas.

9.75 In the south-east there are views across the farmland to industrial development at Eastham Dock, and Eastham Oil Refinery. The industry is not well-integrated into the landscape and creates a marginal farmland character in this area.

9.76 The lack of hedgerow boundaries or hedgerow trees increases the perceived scale, despite the relatively small field

pattern. The landscape feels open in character, particularly in the north and south-east. South of Poulton, Spital and around Raby Mere there is a more enclosed character due to increased woodland and tree-lined roads.

9.77 The lighting columns at junctions on the M53 have an urbanising effect on the area. The motorway also decreases tranquillity as the noise of traffic is heard through much of the area, despite the road not often being visible.



Eastham Oil Refinery looking east from Rivacre Road

Valued Landscape Attributes

- Prominent woodland on high ground on ridgelines provides a backdrop to the wider area.
- Wooded watercourses are ecologically valued habitats and provide a rural wooded character to the area.
- Pattern of farmland and areas of parkland character, including isolated trees, provides a sense of place and time-depth.
- Historic rural village of Eastham, recognised as a Conservation Area, and Storeton with red brick and sandstone vernacular provide sense of place and time-depth.
- Minor roads lined by avenues of trees provide an enclosed and rural character.
- Long views towards Wales from high points both into and out of the area.
- Sharp well-defined woodland transition from urban to rural landscape, which reinforces a sense of place and provides an enclosed character.

Landscape Condition

9.78 The area has a relatively coherent character, created by the landform and watercourses with wetland vegetation. The surrounding urban edges are largely screened by woodland, although there are intrusions from industry along the Mersey and the M53. There has been some hedgerow fragmentation and replacement by post and wire fencing, and areas of scrub which weaken the landscape character.

Key Issues

- Loss of landscape features such as hedgerows through field expansion and lack of management.
- Increasing establishment of sycamore within hedgerows reducing the diversity of species present.
- Diversification of agricultural land uses, including equestrian, leading to the subdivision of fields for horse paddocks.
- Reduction in woodland cover, particularly along urban edges and the M53.
- Unsympathetic barn conversions to private residences.
- Industrial expansion and increasing urban influences, including predominantly visually intrusive expansion at Clatterbridge Hospital.
- Intrusion of new development into existing open and long-range views.
- Changes to the M53 junction with any additional new signage and lighting.

Landscape Strategy

9.79 The overall landscape strategy for Clatterbrook and Dibbin Valley Lowland Farmland and Estates is to enhance and restore the valley character. The key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are the fragmented hedgerows and field boundaries, wetland habitats and woodland screening of urban edges and transportation corridors.

Landscape Guidelines

- Conserve and enhance woodland planting along the river valleys, within copses and at Storeton Hill. Consider further planting along the M53 and on the edge of industrial development to provide screening from the character area.
- Conserve and manage hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features.

- Enhance and augment fragmented field boundary hedgerows with native species, replacing post and wire fences and horse tape, and put in place a programme of hedgerow tree replacement.
- Conserve, enhance and manage valued woodland and wetland habitats. Implement habitat creation and management as part of the East Wirral Heathlands Nature Improvement Area.
- Conserve the pattern of small wooded river valleys and farmland surrounded by woodland.
- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods.
- Conserve and protect parkland landscapes, and plan for the next generation of parkland trees.
- Conserve the local distinctiveness and strong vernacular of historic buildings, particularly within Eastham Village Conservation Area and Storeton village.
- Conserve the rural character of the landscape with its well-defined distinction between the rural character of the area and the adjoining urban development enclosed by woodland.
- Maintain and enhance the character of rural roads with their tree-lined avenues. Resist unsympathetic highway improvements that would threaten their rural character.
- Carefully manage tourist and recreational pressures at Brotherton Park and Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve and in golf courses. Retain an informal character to new features such as car parks, footpaths and interpretation.
- Enhance the sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale and materials) to minimise the impacts of any new residential or industrial development.
- Avoid visually intrusive development on the wooded ridgeline to conserve the distinctive wooded horizon.
- Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges, though native wooded boundaries and mature trees to provide visual screening.
- Protect long distance views to the Welsh hills from high ground and views into the area from further west.
- Conserve the rural enclosed character of the landscape, with strong perceptions of tranquillity.

4c: Clatterbrook and Dibben Valley Lowland

