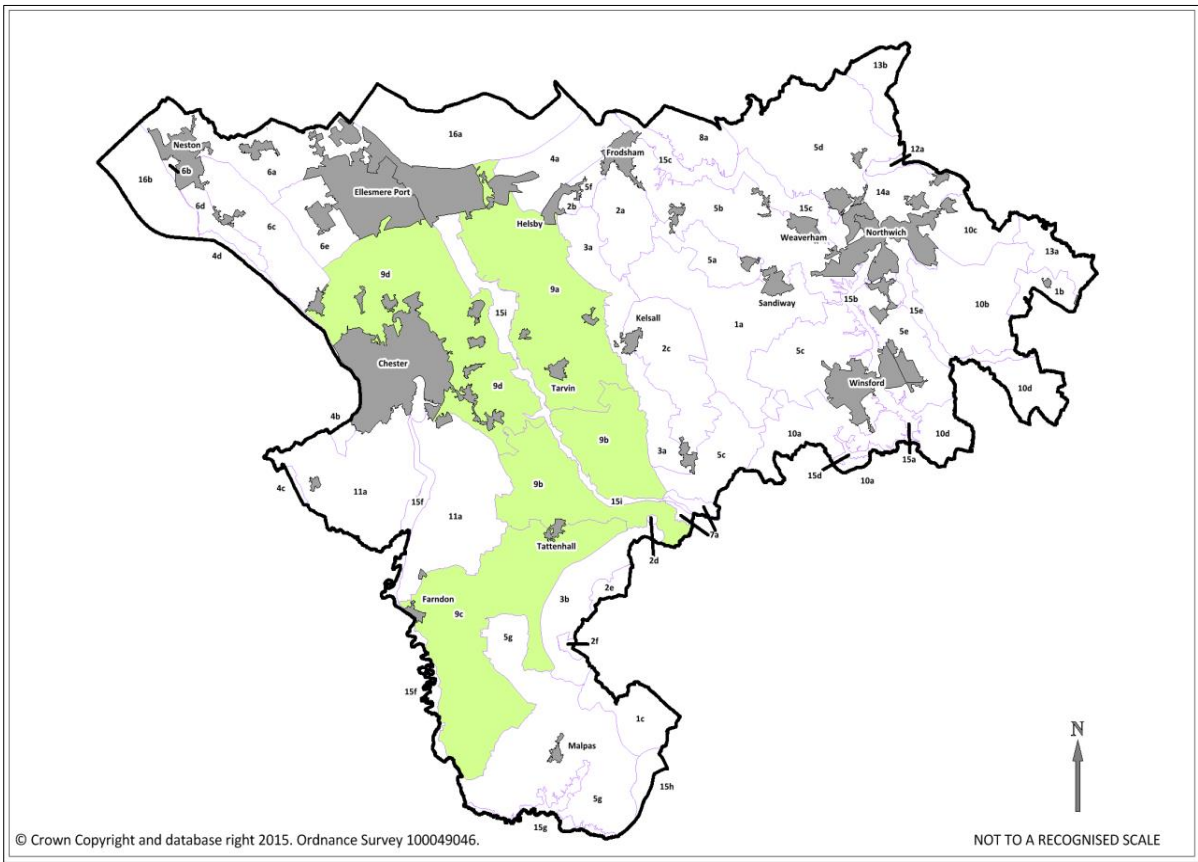


LCT 9: Cheshire Plain West



General Description

This character type dominates a large proportion of CWaC, and as such it has been broken down into four character areas which reflect the subtle variations that exist in the landscape. It extends from Stanlow and Helsby in the north, as far south as Threapwood at the south-westerly tip of the borough. It bounds the northern and eastern fringes of the City of Chester and is framed by the *Sandstone Fringe* to the east. Its northern portion, from around Beeston, is bisected along a south-east to north-west line by the linear *Gowy Valley* LCA.

This landscape type is defined by its flat or very gentle topography enclosed by hedgerows and standard trees in small-medium enclosures that follow an irregular and semi-regular field pattern. It is differentiated from the *Cheshire Plain East* by the physical barrier of the *Sandstone Ridge*. However, in many respects there are shared characteristics and features between the *Cheshire Plain East* and *Cheshire Plain West* landscape character types.

Woodland cover is very low, with small blocks scattered intermittently across the area. The field patterns comprise a mix of ancient enclosure and post medieval improvement. Settlement is predominantly dispersed and has a low density.

Visual Character

This landscape type is represented by a generally flat agricultural plain where the prevailing field pattern and condition of the hedgerows can account for subtle differences in landscape character. Where fields are smaller, hedges higher and hedgerow trees more abundant, the sense of enclosure is much stronger. Long distance views are blocked or filtered, creating a perception of a smaller scale and much more verdant landscape. Where the fields are larger, with low trimmed hedgerows and

fewer trees, the lack of enclosure means that the landscape character appears to be more open and larger scale. At such locations the views are much more extensive and panoramic and often extend as far as the high ground of the surrounding areas. To the west this extends to the Clwydian Hills and to the east the *Sandstone Ridge*.

The high number of hedgerow trees scattered across the plain can lead to a false perception of the landscape. Viewpoints are low due to the absence of high vantage points and the nearest tall hedgerow tends to form the visual horizon. Views from more open ground can feature a succession of hedgerows receding into the distance, and these coalesce visually into a single mass of tree crowns creating a false impression of woodland cover. In reality the woodland cover is low across the *Cheshire Plain West*, being restricted to small copses, game coverts and groups of trees associated with ponds and lines of drainage.

Physical Influences

The topography of the landscape is predominantly flat with a range of between 10-40m AOD. This is lower than the *Cheshire Plain East* (40-80m AOD). The solid geology comprises Chester Pebble Beds, banded with Kinnerton Sandstone and Salop Formation (mudstone, sandstone and conglomerate) in the central area of the plain. To the east is an area of Wilmslow Sandstone. Overlying this is a large expanse of glacial till (Devensian) interspersed with occasional pockets of sand and gravel. This supports argillic stagnogley soils which are the most widespread type in Cheshire. These fine textured soils are ideally suited to grass and are a major factor in the development of the dairy farming industry on the plain. Much of the type is given over to permanent pasture but more favourable sites are also used to grow fodder crops.

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

The natural processes of vegetation succession have reduced many ponds to small, shallow features, over shaded with trees and with little open water. Nevertheless, the remaining ponds still provide a significant wildlife resource. Characteristic plant species include bur marigold, water plantain, tubular water-dropwort, reedmace, branched bur-reed, water horsetail, common spike-rush, purple loosestrife, water milfoil, various water lilies and pondweeds. A wide range of invertebrates is associated with marl pits as well as all 5 species of amphibian found in Cheshire, including the European protected great crested newt.

The *Cheshire Plain West* is naturally badly drained, despite a large number of water courses. There is a network of rivers and brooks that drain into the River Dee. Woodland is mainly restricted to small copses, shelter belts and along river sides. The landscape type is notable for its lack of ancient woodland; just one area is mapped at Long Wood to the north of Ashton Hayes, while the greatest concentration of broad leaved woodland occurs around Churton Heath. Scattered examples of species-rich grassland survive throughout the area, with particularly important examples in the south between Shocklach, Tilston and Threapwood.

Hawthorn hedgerows and standard trees (oaks, ash and sycamore) are distinctive features of this type. In some areas hedgerows have been lost or have grown out, leaving mature trees which give a false impression of parkland and an unrealistic proportion of woodland. The sense of a well-wooded landscape is enhanced by the tree growth that now surrounds many of the ponds and small water bodies which occur throughout the area.

Cultural Influences

A handful of Bronze Age round barrows such as the bowl barrow near Coddington provide some of the earliest indicators of human activity, while the first example of settlement is indicated by the discovery of the remains of a series of Iron Age round houses to the south of Tarvin. It is likely that much of the Plain was dotted with similar settlement on the higher, better drained areas with associated fields and animal husbandry enclosures. Two Roman Roads cross the Plain – leading to Wilderspool and Manchester. Medieval features such as moated sites are common features with fine examples of these ornamental water features at Bruera and Lower Huxley Hall on the fringe of the *Gowy Valley*. There are also fishponds and field systems as well as expanses of ridge and furrow.

The predominant settlement character consists of low density dispersed hamlets and farmsteads. There are also a small number of nucleated villages including Ashton, Great Barrow, Tarvin and Tattenhall.

The *Cheshire Plain West* landscape is dominated by enclosure and field sizes are mainly a mix of small (under 4 hectares) and medium scale enclosure (4 to 8 hectares) with an irregular and semi-regular pattern. Around half of fields in this type, particularly within the central *Hargrave, Hoofield & Beeston Plain* LCA and within the western *Tattenhall to Shocklach Plain* LCA contain a regionally significant late medieval landscape which preserves elements of the earlier medieval open fields. The historic landscape of these areas is generally cohesive and un-fragmented and is considered to contain some of the best preserved late medieval field systems and ridge and furrow in Cheshire (together with LCA 5g: *Malpas*). Amongst these are townfields associated with ancient settlement. Some of these have escaped agricultural improvement and still support species-rich grassland.

Dispersed settlement is typical as is a sinuous network of footpaths and country lanes that link hamlets and farmsteads together across the landscape. Much of this landscape type therefore has medieval origins and there has been very little change in recent centuries.

There are a small number of large fields that have been created in recent decades as boundaries have been lost or deliberately removed, while the remaining proportion of field types are post medieval in date, which indicate either later phases of enclosure (there is a small percentage of enclosure by Act of Parliament) or the reorganisation and rationalisation of field size and shape in order to improve productivity, mainly associated with the surrounding Eaton, Bolesworth and Tollemache estates.

Industrial heritage is evident as the Shropshire Union Canal and the former London and North Western Railways both utilised the flat landscape, running northwest-southeast across the Plain. The canal stretches from Ellesmere Port through Chester and Barbridge and eventually to Wolverhampton. It was constructed as a number of waterways that were brought together as the Shropshire Union in the mid 19th century. The M56, a major communication route runs east-west across the north of the Plain.

Buildings include timber-framed and brick-built structures as well as a small number constructed from sandstone (mainly high status – churches for example) and some stone walls are evident.

There are **four Landscape Character Areas** within LCT 9:

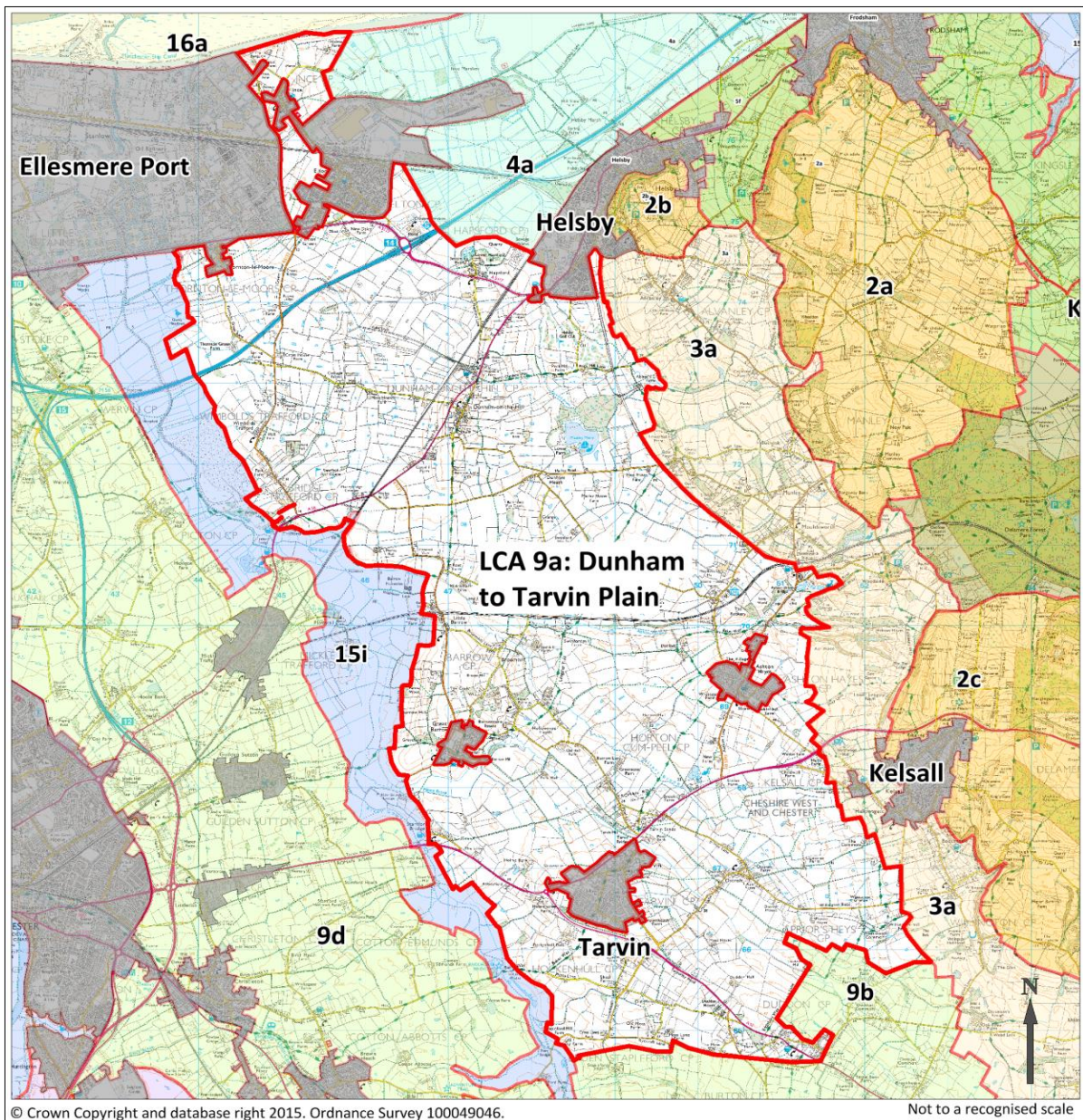
9a: *Dunham to Tarvin Plain*

9b: *Hargrave, Hoofield & Beeston Plain*

9c: *Tattenhall to Shocklach Plain*

9d: *Saughall to Waverton Plain*

LCA 9a: Dunham to Tarvin Plain



Location and Boundaries

The **Dunham to Tarvin Plain LCA** falls between the *Gowy Valley* and *Sandstone Fringe* LCAs across the north-eastern parts of the *Cheshire Plain West* LCT. It includes urban fringe area around the south of Stanmore and Elton to the north and includes the free-standing rural settlements of Tarvin, Ashton Hayes and Great Barrow across its south. Duddon lies to its southern-most point.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 9a: Dunham to Tarvin Plain

- A broad, gently shelving and mostly flat plain landscape characterised by hedges and hedgerow trees providing limited vistas
- Wide areas of improved grassland for dairy farming and fodder crops
- Limited woodland, confined to isolated coverts and copses, although hedgerow oaks are important elements of the landscape
- Historic medieval field patterns and increases in tree cover are still found around smaller settlements
- Extensive network of small field ponds which are generally inconspicuous in the landscape
- Larger settlements punctuate the plain where historic form has often been lost within areas of 20th century and later housing development, e.g. at Tarvin
- Elsewhere, settlement is scattered across the plain in small linear hamlets and freestanding farmsteads
- Petro-chemical and Industrial development outside the character area is prominent across the north of the LCA
- The Sandstone Ridge presents a more elevated skyline to the east of the LCA
- Where hedgerows and tree networks remain, the area can present some degree of limited enclosure due to an absence of elevation and viewpoints
- Some loss of field boundaries diminishes this enclosure where some arable farming has been established
- Significant transport infrastructure dissects the area and diminishes tranquillity and rurality, particularly across the north of the LCA

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- A generally flat landscape with some gentle undulation, for example at Dunham-on-the-Hill, at Great Barrow which stands raised above the Gowy Valley, and along parts of the transition with the Sandstone Fringe LCA around Ashton Hayes;
- Fields are a mix of mainly small-medium (up to 8ha) semi-regular, regular and some irregular enclosures, with hedgerow boundaries and numerous marl pits;
- A considerable treescape created by abundance of hedgerow trees, predominantly oak, but which is perceived as being denser than it is as a consequence of level terrain;
- Woodland is otherwise limited to isolated coverts and copses, often under-managed;
- Evidence of the enclosure of surviving heath in the character area, sometimes associated with dispersed settlement;
- In certain areas hedgerow loss has resulted in a more open landscape with larger fields, isolated oak trees and post and wire fences;
- Land use is predominantly dairy agriculture with some limited pockets of arable farming and for fodder production;
- Surface water drainage limited to small inconspicuous streams such as Peckmill Brook and Salters Brook;
- Manley Mere presents a significant open water feature with uncharacteristic, more wooded vegetation context of planted immature woodlands than elsewhere in the LCA;
- The plain is dotted with hundreds of small field ponds providing an important habitat network and reflecting historic marl pit excavations for soil improvement;

- However, designated ecological sites are limited as consequence of the historically farmed landscape and improved grassland;
- Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Site at Dunham-on-the-Hill cutting.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- The combination of medieval fields alongside those that have undergone post medieval improvement and 20th century adaptation;
- The Roman Roads to Wilderspool and Manchester both cross this area;
- Medieval moated sites are located at Foulk Stapleford and Elton and designated as Scheduled Monuments;
- A number of ancient settlements were mentioned at Domesday and notably ancient field systems developed in the surrounding area, which includes some surviving areas of ridge and furrow;
- Fields were reorganised into a more regular pattern in the 18th and 19th centuries especially around Ashton Hayes, which alongside the parkland may form a wider estate landscape;
- Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments are generally sparse across the open plain, although a number of medieval and later country halls and houses can be found including Peel, Hockenhull, Mouldsworth and Lower Hapsford Halls are exceptions to this;
- Elsewhere, Listed Buildings, primarily churches and historic houses are restricted to the historic cores of the villages, such as Tarvin and Dunham-on-the-Hill;
- Conservation Areas reflect the historic significance of many of the LCAs villages, such as Tarvin, Great Barrow, Little Barrow and Dunham-on-the-Hill;
- Recreational opportunities across an extensive Public Rights of Way network, including parts of the Longster Trail and North Cheshire Way;
- Golf courses provide recreational opportunities near Dunham-on-the-Hill, Oscroft and at Sandfield;
- Multiple outdoor adventure, water sports and training activities at the Manley Mere education centre.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- The most built-up of the *Cheshire Plain West's* character areas;
- A greater proportion of villages, which have undergone modern expansion (Tarvin, Great Barrow and Dunham-on-the-Hill) than elsewhere on the plain which is typified by dispersed settlement of small hamlets and farmsteads;
- These villages, outside their significant historic cores, reflect suburban type development and present very limited local distinctiveness;
- Traditional farm buildings and distinctive brick barns have often been converted to residential or rural business uses;
- Farmsteads are scattered across the plain but generally well-spaced, suggesting quite large farm size;
- Large modern dairy unit buildings and agricultural infrastructure can be locally prominent;
- Building types are typically red and brown brick;
- Some sporadic ribbon development can be found outside settlements such as at Long Green and Old Moss;
- Much of the character area the landscape has a very rural feel with small, winding roads and lanes connecting isolated farms and hamlets;
- This contrasts with the significant local impact of a number of busy highways, noticeably the M56 and A56 in the north and the A41 and A54 in the south;
- Brick-built buildings of the Royal Ordnance Factory at Dunham-on-the-Hill ammunition store are a feature in the landscape;
- Overhead electricity lines and pylons are sometimes prominent;

- The settlement of Dunham-on-the-Hill identifies an isolated point of high ground within the prevailing flat agricultural plain;
- A number of golf courses are located in the north of the area near Helsby and this has significantly changed the character of the landscape.

Perceptual / Visual

- Away from transport and energy infrastructure, the plain presents a pastoral and peaceful character with some degree of tranquillity possible, particularly across the footpath network;
- The relative elevation of Dunham-on-the-Hill provides views to the north over the flat, sparsely developed landscape surrounding the M56, to the industrial areas of Stanlow and Ellesmere Port;
- The massive petrochemical industrial complex dominates many outward views in the north of the character area;
- An intrusive overhead power line also traverses this part of the character area introducing industrial scale infrastructure to a large swathe rural parts of the LCA;
- Views to the east are dominated by the *Sandstone Ridge*, which appears to be very well-wooded in contrast to this area, where woodland is scarce;
- There are distant views to the hills of North Wales to the west;
- Hedgerows and hedgerow trees, as well as limited coverts and woodlands associated with settlement and the halls, present a changing seasonal colour in contrast to the rich but improved pastoral fields;
- Field ponds are often inconspicuous in the landscape despite their number due to thick hedge enclosure of the fields they lie within and general absence of elevated viewpoints into them;
- In other cases pond-side vegetation and trees within a field belie their existence rather than any glimpse of surface water;
- In some areas where hedgerows have been lost but mature trees remain, a 'false parkland' character can pervade;
- The flatness of the landscape provides opportunities for long views to the *Sandstone Ridge* which forms a dominant backdrop and prominent skyline to the east. Relatively open character of the plain means there is little opportunity for screening large scale elements, however the visual impact of low level elements could be mitigated using native planting that would not in itself be highly visible.

Landscape Condition

Generally good, with key characteristic elements that make up the plain generally intact. However, some field boundaries are undermanaged or being removed. Suburban and settlement fringe land use, such as equine related sites serve to erode pastoral character in places.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 9a: *Dunham to Tarvin Plain*:

- Green Belt and Countryside;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV) to the far south-east of the area at Prior Heys;
- Natural heritage sites of local importance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management;
- Candidate Key Settlement Gap between Tarvin and Oscroft.

Forces for Landscape Change

Past change

- Agricultural intensification with enlargement of fields and loss of hedgerow boundaries (oak trees left 'in-field') with loss of historic field pattern;
- Under management and deterioration of some small farm woodlands;
- A shift from pasture grazing with increasing areas being cultivated for arable cropping, silage or feed crops including cereals and maize;
- Loss of historic parkland to recreational use (such as golf courses) or farmland;
- Loss of unimproved grassland;
- Loss of ridge and furrow;
- Limited management of field ponds has resulted in some silting up and drying out due to natural processes of vegetation succession and overshadowing from trees;
- Prominent transport and energy transfer infrastructure;
- Erosion of local distinctiveness in larger settlements;
- Increased visual intrusion and loss of tranquillity from industrial and transport infrastructure to the north, including the M56.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 9a: *Dunham to Tarvin Plain*

- Farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;
- Pressure for Solar PV farms;
- Pressure for residential/employment development, for example at Tarvin and Ashton Hayes;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Degradation of vernacular building style through alteration;
- Pressure for built development around settlements and associated with the main M56 corridor at Junction 14 that passes through the landscape.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 9a: Dunham to Tarvin Plain

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **restore** the historic field pattern of hawthorn hedgerows and hedgerow oak trees and **enhance** the grassland and small woodland network, and to limit the influence of urban and industrial development to the north on the rural character of the plain.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerows.
3. Consider opportunities to replace hedgerows where they have been lost utilising appropriate species of hawthorn and oak standards.
4. Conserve the remaining hedgerow trees and seek opportunities to encourage a new generation of hedgerow trees to increase their presence in the landscape.
5. Manage existing small woodlands and coverts to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
6. Consider opportunities to plant simple, small pockets of trees and small blocks of woodland in field corners to ensure the continuation of these declining characteristic features.
7. Conserve the small to medium scale pattern of fields, particularly early field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape, particularly around settlements.
8. Maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil (for example as a result of increased crop growing).
9. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
10. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.

11. Encourage sympathetic integration of golf courses through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries and existing woodland rather than planting of alien ornamental species - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
12. Conserve the remnant fragments of unimproved grassland that is of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.
13. Encourage the retention and management of field ponds and brooks that are of wildlife importance as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
14. Conserve the remaining areas of ridge and furrow by restricting use of fields to pasture.
15. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as kerbs and large-scale signage.
16. Conserve distant views to the Welsh hills and take account of views from the *Sandstone Fringe* and *Sandstone Ridge* when planning for change.

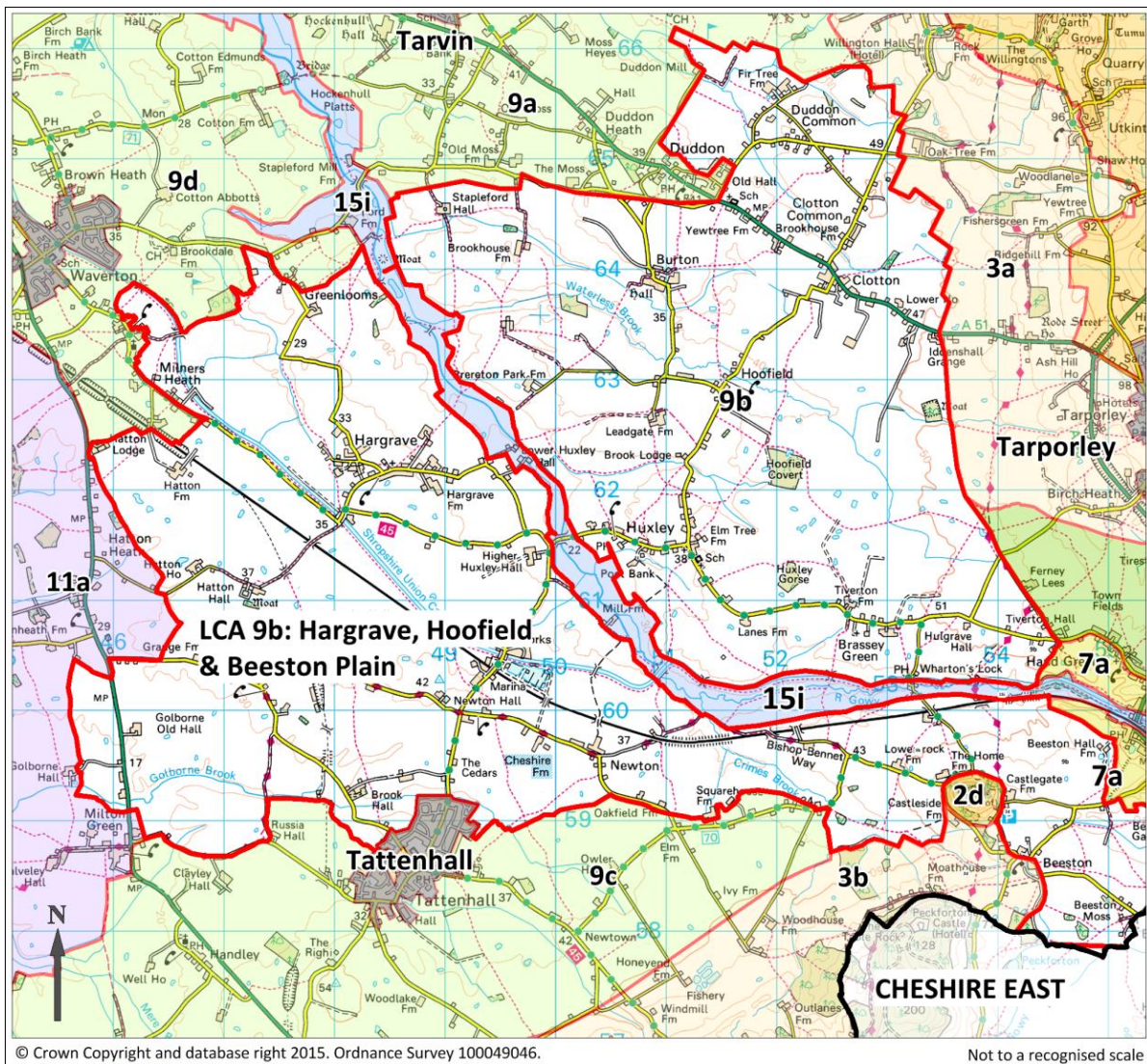
Built Development Guidelines

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of villages, hamlets, halls and farmsteads and isolated cottages, retaining the main villages as the main focus for development.
2. Conserve the local vernacular built form –simple red-brown brick buildings with steeply pitching welsh slate roofs.
3. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting.
4. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
5. Soften built edges by introducing small scale planting schemes using native broadleaved species. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows rather than close-board fencing.
6. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
7. Conserve rural views towards the *Sandstone Ridge* in the east.

8. Maintain the rural setting to villages and farmsteads which are features of the landscape.
9. Conserve the open undeveloped area between Tarvin and Oscroft that has been identified as a Candidate Key Settlement Gap where development would lead to coalescence and the loss of identity of the two communities.
10. Ensure any industrial character or large scale commercial development in M56 corridor and beyond is appropriately sited, designed and orientated so as to limit its influence on the rural and tranquil plain to the south, with extensive mitigating planting as necessary.
11. Ensure the design of elements associated with new development such as boundary treatments and surfacing recognise, respond to and reflect the traditional vernacular of existing landscape elements that help to define the landscape character, in order to prevent encroaching sub-urbanisation.
12. Ensure that the siting of Solar PV farms is not visually prominent from higher ground.



LCA 9b: Hargrave, Hoofield & Beeston Plain



Location and Boundaries

The **Hargrave, Hoofield and Beeston Plain LCA** character area lies to the south of Duddon and extends as far south as Tattenhall. It is bisected by the **Gowy Valley LCA** in a south-east to north-west line. It has dispersed settlement pattern with villages limited to the free-standing small rural settlements of Hargrave, Hoofield, Clotton and Burton. The LCA abuts the large village of Tattenhall to the south.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 9b: Hargrave, Hoofield and Beeston Plain

- A broad and gently undulating plain landscape characterised by hedges and hedgerow trees providing limited vistas
- The area is bisected by the narrow line of the Gowy River LCA
- Wide areas of improved grassland for dairy farming and fodder crops
- Limited woodland, confined to isolated coverts and copses, although hedgerow oaks are important elements of the landscape
- Cohesive and un-fragmented regionally significant historic landscape with extremely well preserved late medieval field systems and extensive ridge and furrow; abundant hedgerows and hedgerow trees creating a characteristic patchwork with preserved elements of the earlier medieval open fields and common land (which is sometimes associated with dispersed settlement)
- Extensive network of small field ponds which are generally inconspicuous in the landscape
- Low settlement density of small agricultural hamlets with loose-knit settlement form and freestanding farmsteads
- Absence of significant urban or industrial influence
- The Sandstone Ridge presents a more elevated skyline to the east of the LCA
- Beeston Castle provides a strong landscape focus and reference point to the south
- Where hedgerows and tree networks remain, the area can present some degree of limited enclosure due to an absence of elevation and viewpoints
- Some loss of field boundaries diminishes this enclosure where some arable farming has been established
- Historic transport infrastructure of the Shropshire Union Canal and railway dissects the area

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- A gently undulating topography with some limited increase in elevation to the east as the area transitions with the Sandstone Fringe LCT;
- Some slight fall in elevation and local topography is associated with the margins of the Gowy Valley LCA which effectively runs through this character area;
- The character of the landscape is strongly influenced by the ubiquitous coverage of hedgerows and pasture, their pattern and abundance of individual hedgerow trees;
- A considerable treescape is created by repeated lines of hedgerow trees, predominantly oak, but which is perceived as being denser than it is as a consequence of limited elevation change;
- Many hedgerows are tightly trimmed, but where allowed to grow taller restrict ground level views;
- Woodland cover is low and usually associated with watercourses and small copses;
- Barn owl populations are significant in the area;
- The plain is dotted with hundreds of small field ponds providing an important habitat network and reflecting historic marl pit excavations for soil improvement;
- Designated ecological sites are limited within the LCA as a consequence of the historically farmed landscape and improved grassland but a small number of sites of ecological importance are associated with species rich grassland, small woodlands and coverts for example at Clotton Common, Hoofield Covert, Huxley Gorse and the disused railway at Gatesheath;

- Surface water drainage is limited to small inconspicuous streams such as Guylance, Waterless and Southey Brooks, which are occasionally prominent only as a consequence of increased riparian tree cover rather than the water feature itself;
- In certain areas hedgerow loss has resulted in a more open landscape with larger fields, isolated oak trees and post and wire fences.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- The area contains a regionally significant late medieval landscape which preserves elements of the earlier medieval open fields. The historic landscape of this area is generally cohesive and unfragmented and is considered to contain some of the best preserved late medieval field systems and ridge and furrow in Cheshire, providing historic continuity in the landscape;
- The landscape to the southwest, in Wales and known as the Maelor Saesneg, is included on the Countryside Council for Wales/CADW/International Council on Monuments and Sites (UK): Historic Landscapes Register; Part 2.2 Register of Landscapes of Special Historic Interest in Wales. England has no equivalent register, however this landscape is clearly of regional, if not national, importance;
- Large blocks of small to medium (up to 8ha) irregular and semi-regular field enclosure (mainly a medieval field system);
- A dispersed ancient settlement pattern and dense network of footpaths;
- Little Post-Medieval and Modern re-organisation of the field systems although increases in arable farming to the south east have resulted in some hedgerow loss, such as south of Huxley and north of Gatesheath, reflecting better drained soils;
- A fragment of heath survives into the post medieval period, which was enclosed by Parliamentary Act at Duddon;
- There are a number of halls and moated sites such as the late 15th century manor house of Lower Huxley Hall, which is a Scheduled Monument;
- The outline of the medieval Stapleford Park survives in the landscape at Brereton Park Farm;
- An important resource of archaeological sites associated including Saxon coins horde and medieval kiln sites.;
- Civil war skirmish site at Tiverton Heath;
- Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments are generally sparse across the open plain, although a number of medieval and later country halls and houses can be found including those at Hatton, Hoofield and Burton are exceptions to this;
- Elsewhere, Listed Buildings, primarily churches and historic houses are restricted to the historic cores of the villages and hamlets such as Burton and Clotton where Conservation Areas are also designated;
- The Shropshire Union Canal reflects more recent industrial heritage of the area including listed bridges;
- Recreational opportunities across an extensive Public Rights of Way network, including the Eddisbury Way, Bishop Bennet Way and the canal towpath;
- Navigation on the canal and moorings at Tattenhall Marina;
- Brereton Park Farm visitor attraction.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- A very low settlement density with few small loose-knit villages, hamlets and dispersed isolated farmsteads and cottages;
- Settlements which have avoided significant enlargement and loss of character, although Hargrave, Clotton and Huxley display varying degrees of a mid 20th century ribbon and in-fill development;
- Traditional farm buildings and distinctive brick barns have often been converted to residential or rural business uses;

- Farmsteads are scattered across the plain but generally well-spaced, suggesting quite large farm size;
- Modern dairy unit buildings and agricultural infrastructure can be locally prominent, including within settlements such as Clotton;
- Building types are typically red and brown brick simple cottages with some whitewash and timber framed buildings;
- Much of the character area the landscape has a very rural feel with small, winding roads and lanes connecting isolated farms and hamlets;
- The Crewe-Chester railway traverses the area in close proximity to the Shropshire Union Canal, both in a generally east-west direction;
- In the north the busy A51 passes through Duddon and Clotton.

Perceptual / Visual

- Where middle distance views are available the hedgerow trees in successive field boundaries can appear to coalesce to form a solid mass on the horizon, creating the effect of a well-wooded landscape;
- The striking landmark of Beeston Castle, perched high upon the precipitous sandstone crag on the area's southern boundary is a dominant visual feature and reference point;
- The castle, in combination with the much greater mass of the *Sandstone Ridge* in the vicinity of Peckforton and Buckley Hill, terminate all views to the south and contribute significantly to the landscape character;
- To the north-east the *Sandstone Ridge* is prominent around Utkinton;
- Away from transport infrastructure such as the railway and A51, the LCA presents a pastoral and peaceful character with some degree of tranquillity possible, particularly across the footpath network and along the canal towpath;
- Hedgerows and hedgerow tress, as well as small coverts and woodlands associated with settlement and the halls, present a changing seasonal colour in contrast to the rich but improved pastoral fields;
- The ubiquitous field ponds are often inconspicuous in the landscape despite their number due to hedge enclosure of the fields they lie within and general absence of elevated viewpoints;
- In other cases pond-side vegetation and trees within a field belie their existence rather than any glimpse of surface water;
- In some areas where hedgerows have been lost but mature trees remain, a 'false parkland' character can pervade;
- The relatively open character of the plain means there is little opportunity for screening any large scale elements, however the visual impact of low level elements could be mitigated using native planting that would not in itself be highly visible.

Landscape Condition

Generally good, with key characteristic elements that make up the plain generally intact. However, some field boundaries are undermanaged or being removed as arable land use has increased in places.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 9b: *Hargrave, Hoofield and Beeston Plain*:

- Countryside;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV) to the far south-east of the area at Beeston and to the far north-east beyond Duddon Common;

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

Forces for Landscape Change

Past change

- Some agricultural intensification with enlargement of fields and loss of hedgerow boundaries (oak trees left 'in-field') with loss of historic field pattern;
- Under management and deterioration of some small farm woodlands;
- A shift from pasture grazing with increasing areas being cultivated for arable cropping, silage or feed crops including cereals and maize;
- Loss of unimproved grassland;
- Loss of ridge and furrow;
- Limited management of field ponds has resulted in some silting up and drying out due to natural processes of vegetation succession and overshadowing from trees;
- Transport infrastructure improvements and increase in traffic;
- Expansion of Tattenhall Marina;
- Dilution of built vernacular character in settlements;
- Change of use of traditional farm buildings to residential use with loss of character and unsympathetic detailing.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 9b: *Hargrave, Hoofield and Beeston Plain*

- Continued deterioration in field boundary maintenance and management;
- Farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks, and Ice Cream Farm;
- Erosion of built environment character through incremental development –pressure for expansion of existing settlement, ribbon development and in-fill (particularly Tattenhall area including Newton-By-Tattanhall)
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Decline in the vernacular building character;
- Climate change leading to changing agricultural practice and impacts upon field ponds and water ecology.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 9b: Hargrave, Hoofield & Beeston Plain

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

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerows.
3. Consider opportunities to replace hedgerows where they have been lost utilising appropriate species of hawthorn and oak standards.
4. Manage existing small woodlands and coverts to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
5. Consider opportunities to plant simple, small pockets of trees and small blocks of woodland in field corners to ensure the continuation of these declining characteristic features.
6. Conserve the small to medium scale pattern of fields, particularly early field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape, particularly around settlements.
7. Maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil (for example as a result of increased crop growing).
8. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
9. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
10. Conserve the remnant fragments of unimproved grassland that is of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.
11. Encourage the retention and management of field ponds and brooks that are of wildlife importance as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.

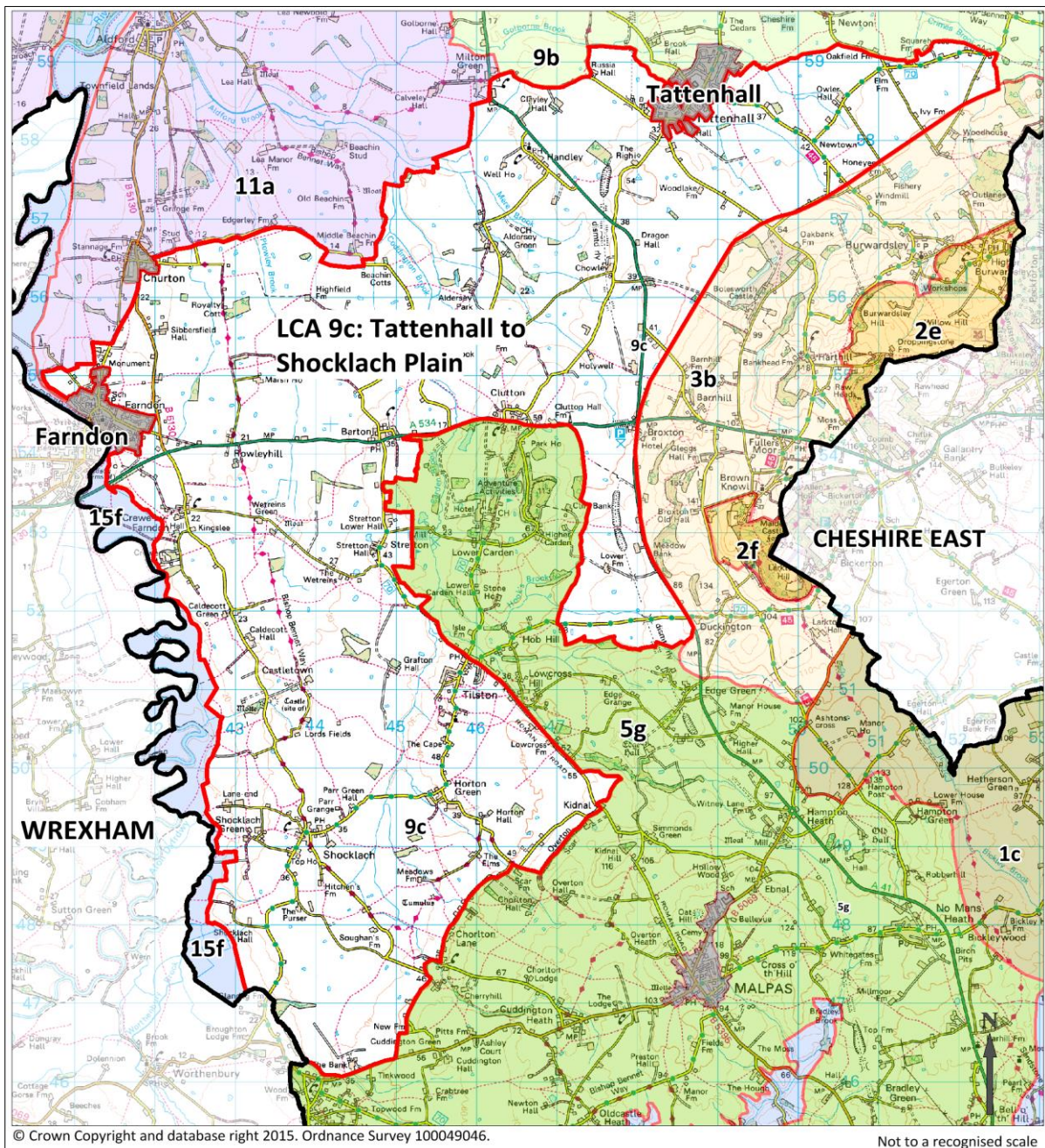
12. Conserve the remaining areas of ridge and furrow by restricting use of fields to pasture.
13. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as kerbs and large-scale signage.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Maintain the loose-knit, low-density, scattered settlement pattern of very small villages, hamlets, halls and farmsteads and isolated cottages. Tightly control settlement expansion.
2. Conserve the local vernacular built form –simple red-brown brick buildings with steeply pitching Welsh slate roofs and white washed brick and timber frames.
3. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting.
4. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
5. Soften built edges by introducing small scale planting schemes using native broadleaved species.
6. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows rather than close-board fencing.
7. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development does not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
8. Conserve rural views towards the *Sandstone Ridge* in the east, Beeston Castle and Peckforton Castle to the southeast, and the Welsh hills to the west.
9. Maintain the rural setting to villages and farmsteads which are features of the landscape.
10. Ensure the design of elements associated with new development such as boundary treatments and surfacing recognise, respond to and reflect the traditional vernacular of existing landscape elements that help to define the landscape character, in order to prevent encroaching sub-urbanisation.
11. Encourage new development to include new footpath connections.



LCA 9c: Tattenhall to Shocklach Plain



Location and Boundaries

The **Tattenhall to Shocklach Plain** character area lies to the south of the *Hargreave, Hoofield and Beeston Plain* from Tattenhall, in a large south-westerly swathe of thinly populated deeply rural countryside extending as far south as Threapwood, with a long western boundary with the *Dee Valley*. Its eastern boundary runs from Threapwood in a north-easterly to the foot of the *Sandstone Fringe* near Beeston. This boundary is indented by the Carden Park estate and hotel facility which is included within the *Malpas* LCA to the south and east.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 9c: Tattenhall to Shocklach Plain

- A broad and mostly flat plain landscape characterised by hedges and hedgerow trees providing limited vistas
- Wide areas of improved grassland for dairy farming and fodder crops
- Limited woodland, confined to isolated coverts and copses, although hedgerow oaks are important elements of the landscape
- Cohesive and un-fragmented regionally significant historic landscape with extremely well preserved late medieval field systems and extensive ridge and furrow; abundant hedgerows and hedgerow trees creating a characteristic patchwork with preserved elements of the earlier medieval open fields and common land (which is sometimes associated with dispersed settlement)
- Extensive network of small field ponds which are generally inconspicuous in the landscape
- Small settlements punctuate the plain where historic form has often been retained although limited within areas of 20th century and later housing development has occurred
- Farndon and Tattenhall have seen recent residential development. Elsewhere, settlement is scattered across the plain in small, nucleated hamlets and freestanding farmsteads
- The *Sandstone Ridge* presents a more elevated skyline to the east of the LCA, with the Clwydian Hills to the west
- Distant views over the Dee valley into Wales are possible from the western fringe of the area
- Where hedgerows and tree networks remain, the area can present some degree of limited enclosure due to an absence of elevation and viewpoints
- Some loss of field boundaries diminishes this enclosure where some arable farming has been established
- An absence of significant transport infrastructure or industrial development helps retain a deeply rural and tranquil character

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- A gently undulating topography with some increase in elevation to the east as the area transitions with the *Sandstone Fringe* LCT towards Malpas and Tilston;
- The central area is predominantly flat pastoral plain with elevations typically of 35m AOD;
- To the west the land surface falls gently and evenly to the *Dee Valley* at around 10m AOD offering some loner views out to the Welsh hills;
- It includes small, nucleated villages such as Clutton, Barton, Tilston and Shocklach, while the remaining settlement pattern is made up of isolated hamlets and farmsteads;
- Fields are small – medium (up to 8ha) and comprise medieval enclosures with post-medieval reorganisation;
- The land along the western boundary of the character area slopes gently down to the *Dee Valley* and elsewhere the ground rises;
- Although there are few woodland areas, small copses associated with field ponds or small streams combine with the abundant hedgerow trees to filter views within the landscape, creating the impression of well-wooded landscape;
- The character of the landscape is strongly influenced by the ubiquitous coverage of hedgerows and pasture, their pattern and abundance of individual hedgerow trees;
- Dairy farming is the predominant land use but pockets of arable farming are also scattered, such as north of Tilston and south of the hamlet of Crewe;

- Treescape is created by repeated lines of hedgerow trees, predominantly oak, but which can be perceived as being denser than it is where there is limited elevation change;
- Many hedgerows are tightly trimmed and sometimes gappy, but where allowed to grow taller restrict ground level views;
- Woodland cover is low and usually associated with small coverts such as Fox Covert, Grafton Gorse, New Covert and the Royalty, some recognised as local wildlife sites;
- Sites of semi-natural vegetation are isolated, for example, at Pump Lane Wood, Tom Irons' Rough and Castletown Rough;
- The plain is dotted with hundreds of small field ponds providing an important habitat network and reflecting historic marl pit excavations for soil improvement;
- Designated ecological sites are found across the LCA associated with concentrations of unimproved grasslands near Shocklach, Tilston, Castletown and Aldersey;
- The River Dee SSSI with its important mixed ecological community lies along much of the LCA's western fringe;
- Surface water drainage is limited to small streams which mainly run northwards parallel to the Dee such as Plowley, Coddington and Alderley Brooks, which are often inconspicuous but occasionally prominent only as a consequence of increased riparian tree cover rather than the water feature itself;
- In certain areas hedgerow loss has resulted in a more open landscape with larger fields, isolated oak trees and post and wire fences, particularly to the north east of the LCA.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- The area contains a regionally significant late medieval landscape which preserves elements of the earlier medieval open fields. The historic landscape of this area is generally cohesive and unfragmented and is considered to contain some of the best preserved late medieval field systems and ridge and furrow in Cheshire, providing historic continuity in the landscape;
- The landscape to the southwest, in Wales and known as the Maelor Saesneg, is included on the Countryside Council for Wales/CADW/International Council on Monuments and Sites (UK): Historic Landscapes Register; Part 2.2 Register of Landscapes of Special Historic Interest in Wales. England has no equivalent register, however this landscape is clearly of regional, if not national, importance;
- Large blocks of small to medium (up to 8ha) irregular and semi-regular field enclosure (mainly a medieval field system);
- A dispersed ancient settlement pattern and network of footpaths;
- There are a number of medieval monuments in this character area including Shocklach castle motte and moated enclosure, a deserted medieval settlement and ornamental moat at Grafton and medieval field system and settlement at Castletown Farm;
- The route of the Roman road partly defines the eastern boundary of the LCA at Tilston;
- Listed buildings are found in small concentrations within the small settlements of Coddington, Barton and Stretton;
- Conservation Areas have been designated in Tilston, Stretton, Handley, Tattenhall, Barton, Coddington, Aldersey Green and Farndon;
- A dense Public Rights of Way network falls across the central parts of the character area around Tilston and Horton Green, but is less extensive to the northern and southern parts of the LCA;
- The Bishop Bennet Way long distance path, for much of its route along green lanes, dissects the western half of the area in a north-south direction;
- A manicured and well-wooded golf course is found at Aldersey Green, adding an atypical landscape character to the area, including larger lake than the frequent field ponds;
- Ridge and furrow is a frequent landscape characteristic - the greatest concentration of ridge and furrow in CWaC is located in the Shocklach area;

- Listed Buildings are generally sparse across the open plain, reflecting low settlement density, although a number of medieval and later country halls and houses can be found including those at Shocklach and Parr Green Halls, as well as farmhouses and lodges such as at Yew Tree Farm, Well House and Bank House;
- The Bolesworth Estate lies to the east of Tattenhall.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- A very low settlement density with few small nucleated villages, hamlets and dispersed isolated farmsteads and cottages;
- The A534 between Farndon and Clutton is the only major highway traversing this area and this has relatively little impact upon the rural atmosphere of the surrounding landscape;
- The area's road network is characterised by an extensive system of narrow and winding country lanes running between solid, intact hedgerows connecting small settlements and farmsteads;
- Tattenhall and Farndon have seen recent residential development. Otherwise settlements are small and have generally avoided significant enlargement and loss of character, although Tilston, Barton and Shocklach display varying degrees of a mid 20th century ribbon and in-fill development;
- Traditional farm buildings and distinctive brick barns have often been converted to residential or rural business uses;
- Farmsteads are scattered across the plain but generally well-spaced, suggesting quite large farm size;
- Modern dairy unit and other agricultural buildings infrastructure can be locally prominent, including close to settlements such as Shocklach and Barton;
- Building types are typically red and brown brick simple cottages with some whitewash and timber framed buildings;
- The whole character area the landscape has a very rural feel with small, winding roads and lanes connecting isolated farms and hamlets.

Perceptual / Visual

- Many areas have a strong feeling of tranquillity and isolation;
- Local variations in topography allow more extensive and distant views than elsewhere in the type, over the Dee valley to the west, with the Clwydian Hills in the far distance;
- To the east the *Sandstone Ridge* is visible;
- The Grade II* Obelisk Monument at Farndon (to commemorate Roger Barnston) is a key feature in views to the west;
- Where middle distance views are available the hedgerow trees in successive field boundaries can appear to coalesce to form a solid mass on the horizon, creating the effect of a well-wooded landscape;
- The striking landmark of Beeston Castle, perched high upon the precipitous sandstone crag on the area's north-eastern boundary, and to a slightly lesser extent Peckforton Castle are dominant visual features and reference points from the north-east of the area;
- The castles, in combination with the much greater mass of the Sandstone Ridge in the vicinity of Peckforton terminate all views to the east and contribute significantly to the landscape character;
- Hedgerows and hedgerow tress, as well as small coverts and woodlands present changing seasonal colours and cover in contrast to the verdant improved pastoral grassland;
- The ubiquitous field ponds are often inconspicuous in the landscape despite their number due to hedge enclosure of the fields they lie within and general absence of elevated viewpoints;
- In other cases pond-side vegetation and trees within a field belie their existence rather than any glimpse of surface water;

- In some areas where hedgerows have been lost but mature trees remain, a ‘false parkland’ character can pervade;
- The relatively open character of the plain means there is little opportunity for screening any large scale elements, however the visual impact of low level elements could be mitigated using native planting that would not in itself be highly visible.

Landscape Condition

Generally good, with key characteristic elements that make up the plain generally intact. However, some field boundaries are undermanaged or being removed as arable land use has increased in places.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 9c: *Tattenhall & Shocklach Plain*:

- Countryside;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV) to the far north-east of the area at Beeston;
- Natural heritage sites of national and local importance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England’s National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

Forces for Landscape Change

Past change

- Some agricultural intensification with enlargement of fields and loss of hedgerow boundaries (oak trees left 'in-field') with loss of historic field pattern;
- Under management and deterioration of some small farm woodlands;
- A shift from pasture grazing with increasing areas being cultivated for arable cropping, silage or feed crops including cereals and maize;
- Loss of unimproved grassland;
- Loss of ridge and furrow;
- Limited management of field ponds has resulted in some silting up and drying out due to natural processes of vegetation succession and overshadowing from trees;
- Transport infrastructure improvements and increase in traffic;
- Tattenhall and Farndon have seen recent residential development;
- Dilution of built character and form in settlements;
- Change of use of traditional farm buildings to residential use with loss of character and unsympathetic detailing.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 9c: *Tattenhall & Shocklach Plain*

- Continued deterioration in field boundary maintenance and management;
- Farm diversification, potentially including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;
- Erosion of built environment character through incremental development –pressure for expansion of existing settlement, ribbon development and in-fill, particularly Tattenhall and Farndon;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Decline in the vernacular building character;
- Climate change leading to changing agricultural practice and impacts upon field ponds and water ecology.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 9c: Tattenhall & Shocklach Plain

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

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerows.
3. Consider opportunities to replace hedgerows where they have been lost utilising appropriate species of hawthorn and oak standards.
4. Manage existing small woodlands and coverts to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
5. Consider opportunities to plant simple, small pockets of trees and small blocks of woodland in field corners to ensure the continuation of these declining characteristic features.
6. Conserve the small to medium scale pattern of fields, particularly early field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape, particularly around settlements.
7. Maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil (for example as a result of increased crop growing).
8. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
9. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
10. Conserve the remnant unimproved grassland that is of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.

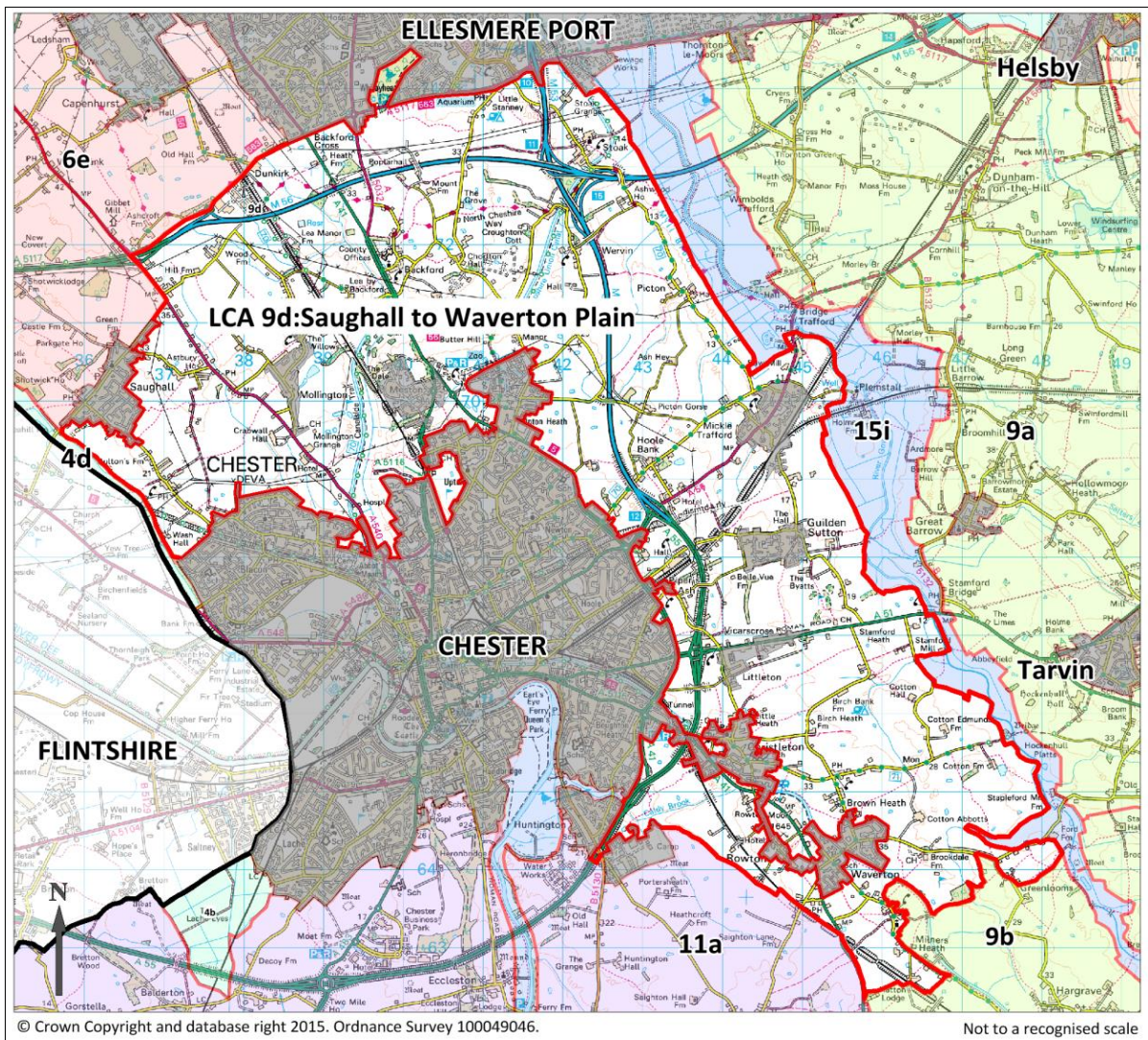
11. Encourage the retention and management of field ponds and brooks that are of wildlife importance as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
12. Conserve the remaining areas of ridge and furrow by restricting use of fields to pasture.
13. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as kerbs and large-scale signage.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Maintain the low-density, scattered settlement pattern of very small villages, hamlets, halls and farmsteads and isolated cottages. Tightly control settlement expansion.
2. Conserve the local built form –simple red-brown brick buildings with steeply pitching Welsh slate roofs, white washed brick and timber frames.
3. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting.
4. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
5. Soften built edges by introducing small scale planting schemes using native broadleaved species.
6. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows rather than close-board fencing.
7. Conserve rural views towards the *Sandstone Ridge*, Beeston Castle and Peckforton Castle to the northeast, and views to the Welsh hills to the west. Maintain local views such as to the Farndon Obelisk Monument to Roger Barnston.
8. Maintain the rural setting to villages and farmsteads which are features of the landscape.



LCA 9d: Saughall to Waverton Plain



Location and Boundaries

The **Saughall to Waverton Plain** character area lies to the immediate east and north of Chester City urban area, in a large arc of well-populated countryside characterised by larger villages and transport infrastructure. Its eastern boundary abuts the linear *Gowy Valley* LCA and its narrow southern edge abuts the *Hargrave, Hoofield and Beeston Plain*, within the same LCT - *Cheshire Plain West*. Its northern edge is defined by the urban edge of Ellesmere Port and the *Enclosed Farmland* LCT. To the north of Chester, its western edge is defined by its meeting with the very narrow, linear *Drained Marsh* LCT.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 9d: *Saughall to Waverton Plain*

- Urban-fringe landscape with significant settlement density
- Prominent infrastructure characterises the urban fringe of Chester and routes radiating from it
- The urban and industrial character and infrastructure of Ellesmere Port to the north is a prominent landscape feature
- Rural pastoral landscape is diluted by many urban fringe uses which introduce complexity and intrusion to the landscape
- Elsewhere, a gently undulating landscape characterised by hedges and hedgerow trees providing limited vistas
- Areas of improved grassland for dairy farming and fodder crops, increasingly being challenged by other uses
- Limited woodland, confined to shelter belts and screening planting, some small copses, although hedgerow oaks are important elements of the landscape
- Historic medieval field patterns are still found across the area
- Extensive network of small field ponds which are generally inconspicuous in the landscape
- Significant villages of a suburban character punctuate the plain where historic form has often been diluted through of 20th century and later housing and employment development
- Elsewhere, settlement is scattered across the plain as freestanding farmsteads and some ribbon development
- The *Sandstone Ridge* presents a more elevated skyline to the east of the LCA
- Where hedgerows and tree networks remain, the area can present some degree of limited enclosure due to an absence of elevation and viewpoints
- Some loss of field boundaries diminishes this enclosure where some arable farming has been established
- The overall character of the area is of a transitional landscape from rural pasture to suburbanised, busy urban fringe with consequent dilution in tranquillity

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- Undulating, medium-scale landscape of a series of gently rolling hillocks, gradually falling to the low-lying Gowry Valley to the east ranging from around 45m AOD to less than 10m AOD, but is typically around 20m AOD;
- This gently rolling topography is incised by the important Deva Spillway (former course of the river Mersey) and small channels emptying into the *Gowry Valley*;
- The western boundary of the area with the *Drained Marsh* LCT also slopes down gently to the west;
- A diverse landscape with significant urban influences on its rural character;
- Predominance of arable farming with some pastoral uses;
- Fields are a mix of medieval and post medieval, regular to irregular in pattern, of mainly small to medium scale (up to 8ha);
- Away from urban and suburban influences, hedges and hedgerow trees are the predominant landscape components;
- There are numerous mature and over mature hedgerow oaks creating a well wooded appearance without any great occurrence of woodland, apart from a few small copses typical of the type;
- Field boundaries defined by fragmented hawthorn hedges;

- Marl ponds are common (but less so than elsewhere within the LCT), and with drainage ditches provide wetland habitats of some local conservation value;
- Other surface water features include a series of larger ponds to the north of Chester at Mollington Grange;
- Blocks of trees, often oak, Scots pine and birch, screen development e.g. Dale MOD land, with other woodland at golf courses, Mickle Trafford Green Way and small copses such as Acres Wood;
- Ornamental or non-native species present in the landscape reflect urban and suburban influences;
- Important ecological corridor within the Deva Spillway which now contains the Shropshire Union Canal - the canal and adjoining wet meadows are designated as local wildlife sites;
- Surface water drainage is limited to very small streams and drainage ditches. Streams mainly run eastwards to the Gow, with minor brooks emptying to the canal. These are often inconspicuous in the landscape but occasionally prominent as a consequence of increased riparian tree cover rather than the water feature itself;
- Some increased regularity of field size and shape with drainage ditches can be identified towards the western boundary with the Drained Marsh LCT;
- In certain areas hedgerow loss has resulted in a more open landscape with larger fields, isolated oak trees and post and wire fences, particularly to the north east of the LCA.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- The area has a rich historic environment and the landscape is partially defined by its medieval and post medieval field structures;
- The prosperous, historic City of Chester has acted as an economic stimulus for the area since its foundation as a Roman Fort in AD 70;
- The site of Roman camps have been identified at Elm Bank near Rowton and at Upton Heath and are Scheduled Monuments;
- The moated site of Upton Grange is a Scheduled Monument;
- The site of the English Civil War *Battle of Rowton Heath* 1645, on the southern boundary of the LCA, is registered within the Register of Historic Battlefields by Heritage England for its special historic interest;
- Listed Buildings are not particularly common across the character area outside the settlements (particularly Waverton and Backford) where greater concentrations are found;
- The Shropshire Union Canal winds its way through the 'Deva Spillway' south of Backford where, at the end of the Devensian glaciation, meltwater from the Mersey drained into the Dee, leaving an obvious dry valley within the Cheshire Plain;
- The canal reflects the area important industrial heritage with numerous listed structures such as the railway viaduct at Moston and bridges along its stretch through the LCA;
- Conservation Areas have been designated at Christleton, Waverton and Picton;
- Recreation opportunities reflect proximity to major urban concentrations, including urban fringe uses such as riding schools and sports fields such as at Chester Rugby Club, Cheshire County Sports Club at Hoole;
- Golf courses at Upton-by-Chester, Waverton, Vicars Cross and Mollington;
- Access to the rural hinterland of Chester is available across the Public Rights of Way network, including the Baker Way trail, the disused railway line east of Chester and the Shropshire Union Canal towpath.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- High settlement density, where suburban and light industrial expansion around nucleated village cores punctuate the landscape, for example at Saughall, Christleton, Guilden Sutton, Mickle Trafford and Waverton;

- Intrusive transport infrastructure, including the M53, M56, other radial main routes (A51, A55, A56 and A41) and railway infrastructure creating visual and noise intrusion to the landscape around Chester;
- Energy infrastructure, such as high voltage lines and pylons are conspicuous features in the landscape;
- The large former utilitarian Saughton (army) Camp was established in the 20th century south of the A55, now a significant sized recent housing development;
- There is significant visual influence of major industry at Ellesmere Port and the urban area of Chester;
- Ribbon development is evident on radial routes out of Chester, such as at Mannings Lane, Tarvin Road and Guilden Sutton Lane;
- Urban fringe uses with associated buildings are common, such as plant nurseries, golf clubs, business parks, oil depot at Chorlton by Backford, and the extensive Chester Zoo car park ;
- Small scale, red brick and welsh slate building vernacular, but with strong Victorian *villa* and farmhouse influences can still be found across the character area, but this is much diluted by much uniform suburban development and urbanisation;
- More recent development of contemporary designs and materials;
- The Shropshire Union Canal offers a more attractive transport corridor and reflects industrial heritage north east of Chester;
- Traditional farm buildings and distinctive brick barns have often been converted to residential or rural business uses;
- Farmsteads are scattered across the plain but generally well-spaced, suggesting quite large farm size;
- Modern agricultural buildings infrastructure can be locally prominent, including close to settlements such as Wervin and Mickle Trafford;
- Chester Zoo has recently expanded;
- The Countess of Chester Hospital site includes a new Country Park.

Perceptual / Visual

- Contrasting and complex character of rural and urban landscapes together in fragmented patterns;
- Physical and perceptual separation and fragmentation of spaces by major transport infrastructure;
- Moving and stationary traffic can be conspicuous in the landscape;
- The combination of generally flat terrain and low, closely trimmed hedgerows means that heavy traffic on the motorways, and associated signage and lighting, can be visible over an extensive area, particularly when embanked or crossing numerous bridges;
- Highway planting schemes partially mitigate this intrusion;
- Overhead wires and pylons locally dominate the skyline;
- The northern extent of the Sandstone Ridge, forming an important visual feature to the east and appearing as a wooded mass of high ground beyond the low lying and visually insignificant Gowy Valley is visible over a very extensive area;
- To the north the massive Industrial complex around Stanlow and Elton dominates the skyline beyond character area;
- Any sense of tranquillity and isolation is highly diluted apart from secluded areas, such as parts of the canal corridor;
- The ubiquitous field ponds are often inconspicuous in the landscape despite their number due to hedge enclosure of the fields they lie within and general absence of elevated viewpoints;
- In other cases pond-side vegetation and trees within a field belie their existence rather than any glimpse of surface water;

- In some areas where hedgerows have been lost but mature trees remain, a ‘false parkland’ character can pervade;
- The relatively open character of the gently undulating plain means there is little opportunity for screening any large scale elements, however the visual impact of low level elements could be mitigated using native planting that would not in itself be highly visible.

Landscape Condition

Landscape condition is varied, with key characteristic elements that make up the plain generally being challenged by urban fringe uses and pressure for development despite Green Belt designation. Field boundaries are often undermanaged or being removed as arable land use has increased in places, particularly across the north of the LCA.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 9d: *Saughall to Waverton Plain*:

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

Forces for Landscape Change

Past change

- Urban expansion and dilution of settlement identity;
- Intrusion, physically and perceptually of major transport infrastructure and the influence of traffic on the landscape;
- 'Urban fringe' uses challenging the predominance of agriculture as land use close to Chester;
- Some agricultural intensification with enlargement of fields and loss of hedgerow boundaries (oak trees left 'in-field') with loss of historic field pattern away from the urban fringe;
- Under-management and deterioration of some small farm woodlands;
- A shift from pasture grazing with increasing areas being cultivated for arable cropping, silage or feed crops including cereals and maize;
- Loss of unimproved grassland;
- Limited management of field ponds has resulted in some silting up and drying out due to natural processes of vegetation succession and overshadowing from trees;
- Significant dilution of built vernacular character and form of settlements;
- Change of use of traditional farm buildings to residential use with loss of character and unsympathetic detailing;
- A suburbanisation of the countryside.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 9d: *Saughall to Waverton Plain*

- Pressure for major urban expansion and employment space provision;
- Further transport infrastructure improvements;
- Continued deterioration in field boundary maintenance and management;
- Farm diversification, potentially including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Decline in the vernacular building character;
- Climate change leading to changing agricultural practice and impacts upon field ponds and water ecology.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 9d: Saughall to Waverton Plain

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **enhance** the rural character and historic field pattern of hawthorn hedgerows and hedgerow oak trees and field ponds, and to manage development pressure so to strengthen the rural setting of Chester and deliver sensitive character restoration.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerows.
3. Consider opportunities to replace hedgerows where they have been lost utilising appropriate species of hawthorn and oak standards.
4. Manage existing small woodlands and coverts to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
5. Consider opportunities to plant simple, small pockets of trees and small blocks of woodland in field corners to ensure the continuation of these declining characteristic features.
6. Conserve the historic scale and pattern of fields, particularly early field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape, particularly around settlements.
7. Maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil (for example as a result of increased crop growing).
8. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors, with increased public access where practical.
9. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
10. Conserve the fragments of unimproved/wet grassland that is of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.

11. Encourage the retention and management of field ponds and brooks that are of wildlife importance as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
12. Conserve the remaining areas of ridge and furrow by restricting use of fields to pasture.
13. Conserve the remaining sense of peace and quiet away from the main transport infrastructure and urban fringe areas, and conserve the rural character of minor lanes.
14. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as kerbs and large-scale signage.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Recognising the significant on-going pressure for development of various types, seek to ensure this is delivered sensitively and in ways which off-sets visual harm and loss of character and delivers landscape and habitat enhancements appropriate to the character of the plain and furthering landscape objectives.
2. Conserve the local vernacular built form –simple red-brown brick buildings with steeply pitching welsh slate roofs and white washed brick and black oak frames.
3. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting where this is not already the de-facto vernacular.
4. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish.
5. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
6. Soften built edges by introducing small scale planting schemes using native broadleaved species.
7. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows rather than close-board fencing.
8. Conserve rural views towards the sandstone ridge in the east.
9. Encourage new development to include new footpath connections.

