

# 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 consultation<sup>10</sup>. 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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 Strategy<sup>11</sup> 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 agriculture<sup>12</sup> and the 2016 Defra Agricultural Survey<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> AECOM (2013), Wirral Coastal Strategy Executive Summary

<sup>12</sup> ADAS (June 2019), Study of Agricultural Economy and Land in Wirral

<sup>13</sup> <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'<sup>14</sup>.

## 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.

<sup>14</sup> 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 – 2020<sup>15</sup> 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

<sup>15</sup> 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

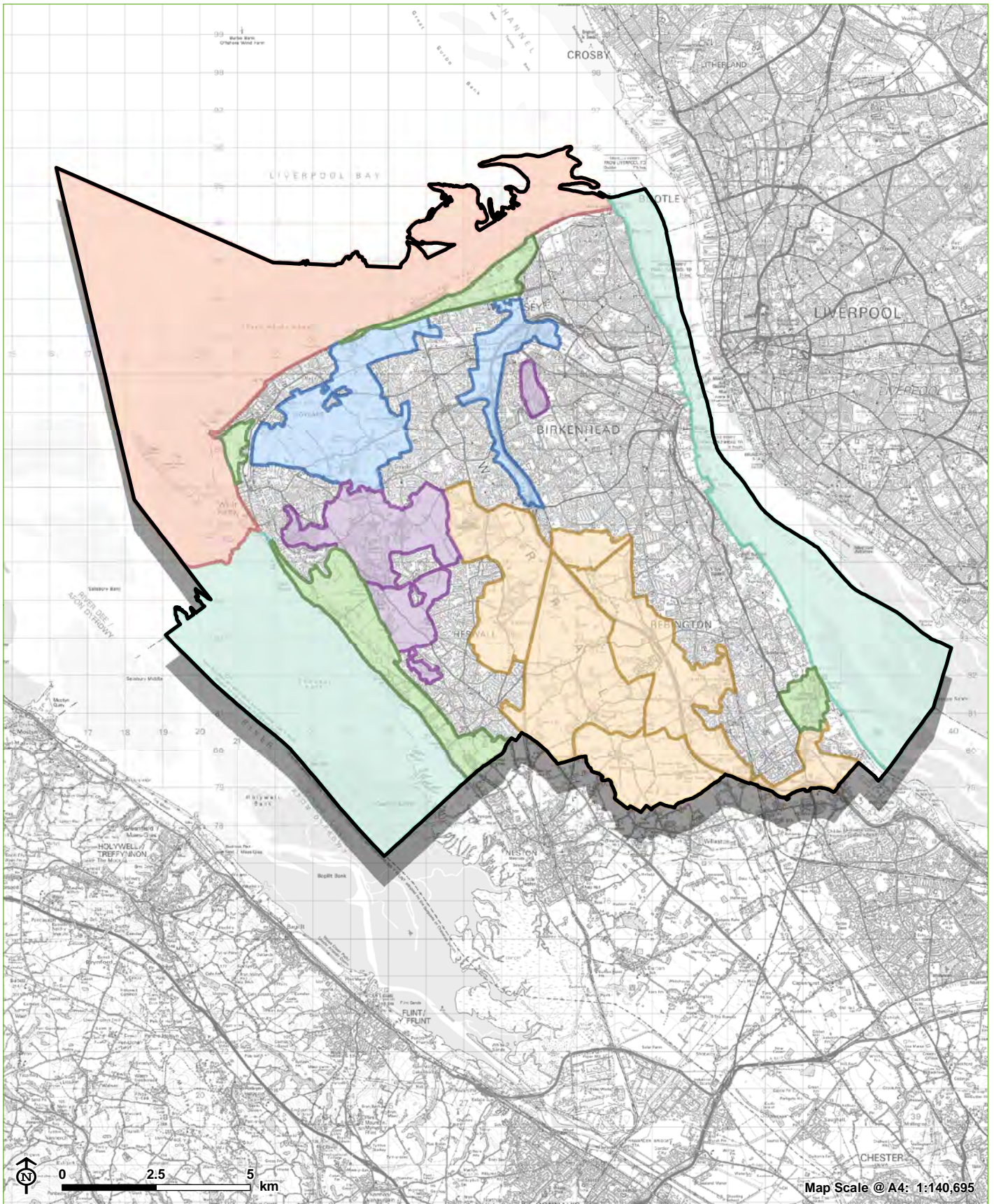
**5.13** The updated landscape classification identifies 6 landscape/seascape character types (LCTs), each representing a distinct identity and reflecting the range of contrasting landscapes across the Borough. These are illustrated in on **Figure 5.1**.

**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
<b>1</b>	<b>Coastal/ Estuarine Edge</b>	1a	North Wirral Coastal Edge
		1b	Dee Estuarine Edge
		1c	Eastham Estuarine Edge
<b>2</b>	<b>River Floodplains</b>	2a	The Birket River Floodplain
		2b	The Fender River Floodplain
<b>3</b>	<b>Sandstone Hills</b>	3a	Bidston Sandstone Hills
		3b	Thurstaston and Greasby Sandstone Hills
		3c	Irby and Pensby Sandstone Hills
		3d	Heswall Dales Sandstone Hills
<b>4</b>	<b>Lowland Farmland and Estates</b>	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
<b>5</b>	<b>Coastal Waters</b>	5a	North Wirral Foreshore and Coastal Waters
<b>6</b>	<b>Estuaries</b>	6a	Dee Estuary
		6b	Mersey Estuary



Wirral Local Plan  
Landscape Assessment



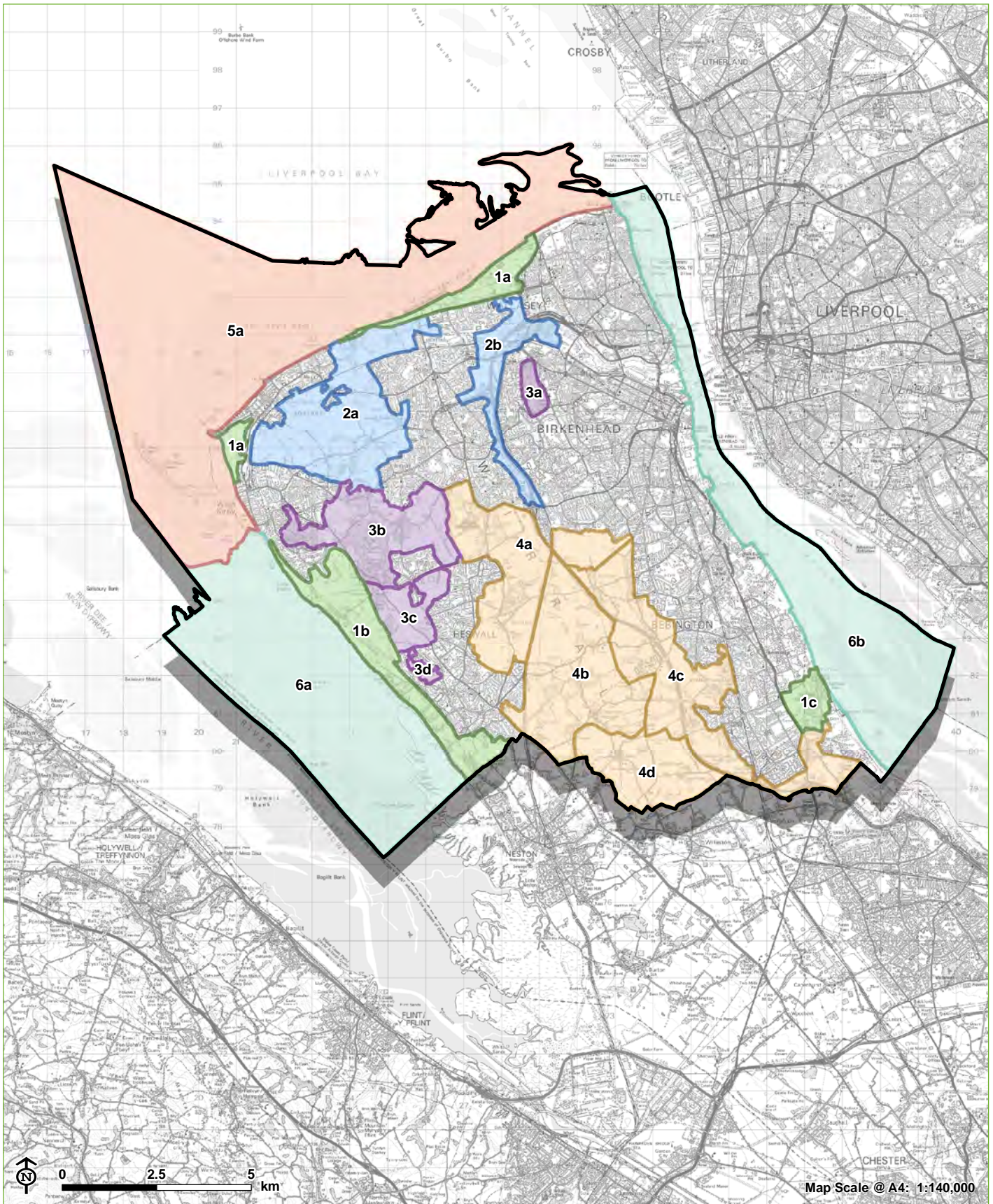
**Fig 5.1:**  
Landscape Character  
Types

-  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

Source: OS, WC

© Crown copyright and database rights 2019 Ordnance Survey 100019803  
Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0





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: Thurstaston 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

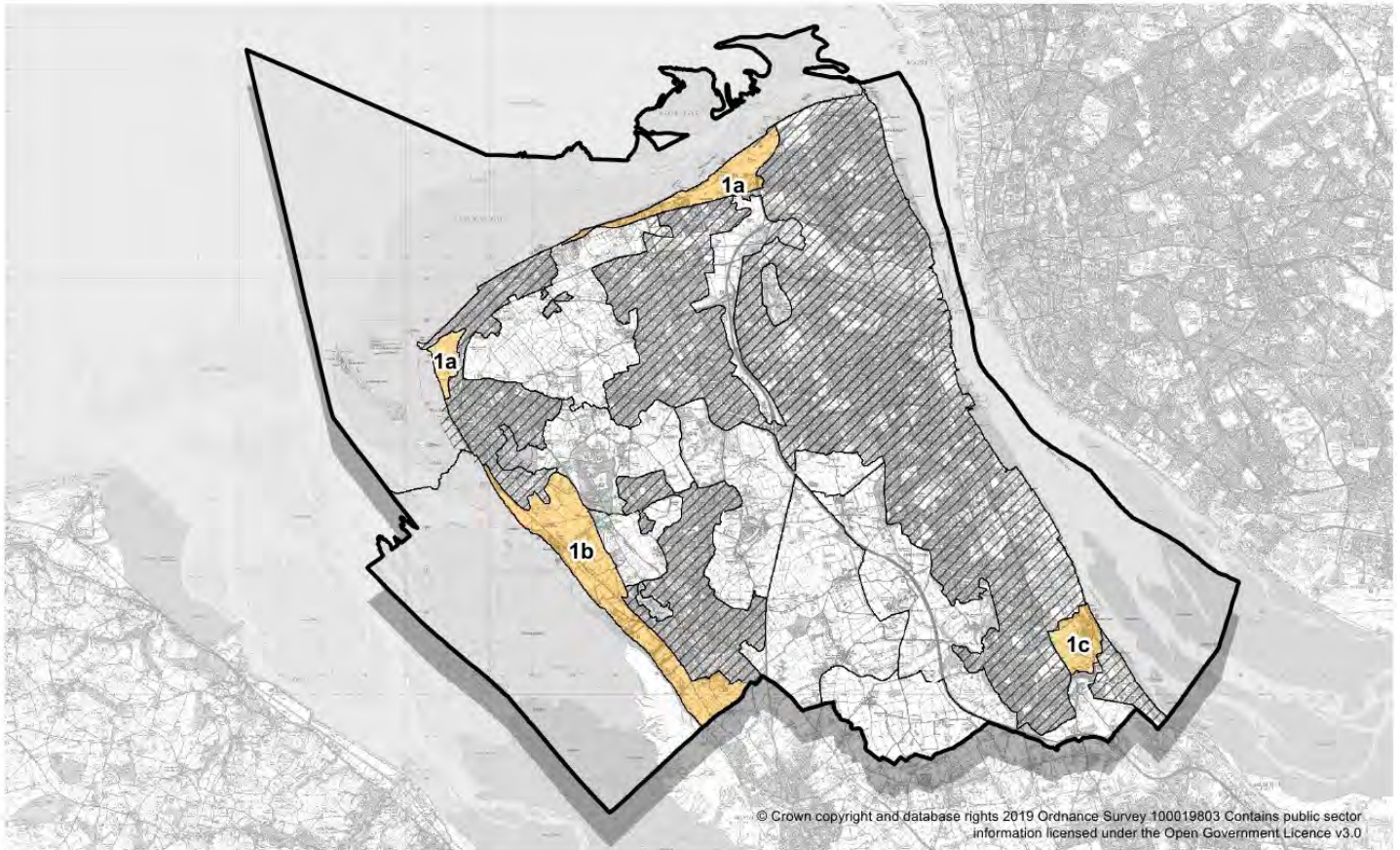
5a: North Wirral Foreshore and Coastal Waters

6a: Dee Estuary

6b: Mersey Estuary

## 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

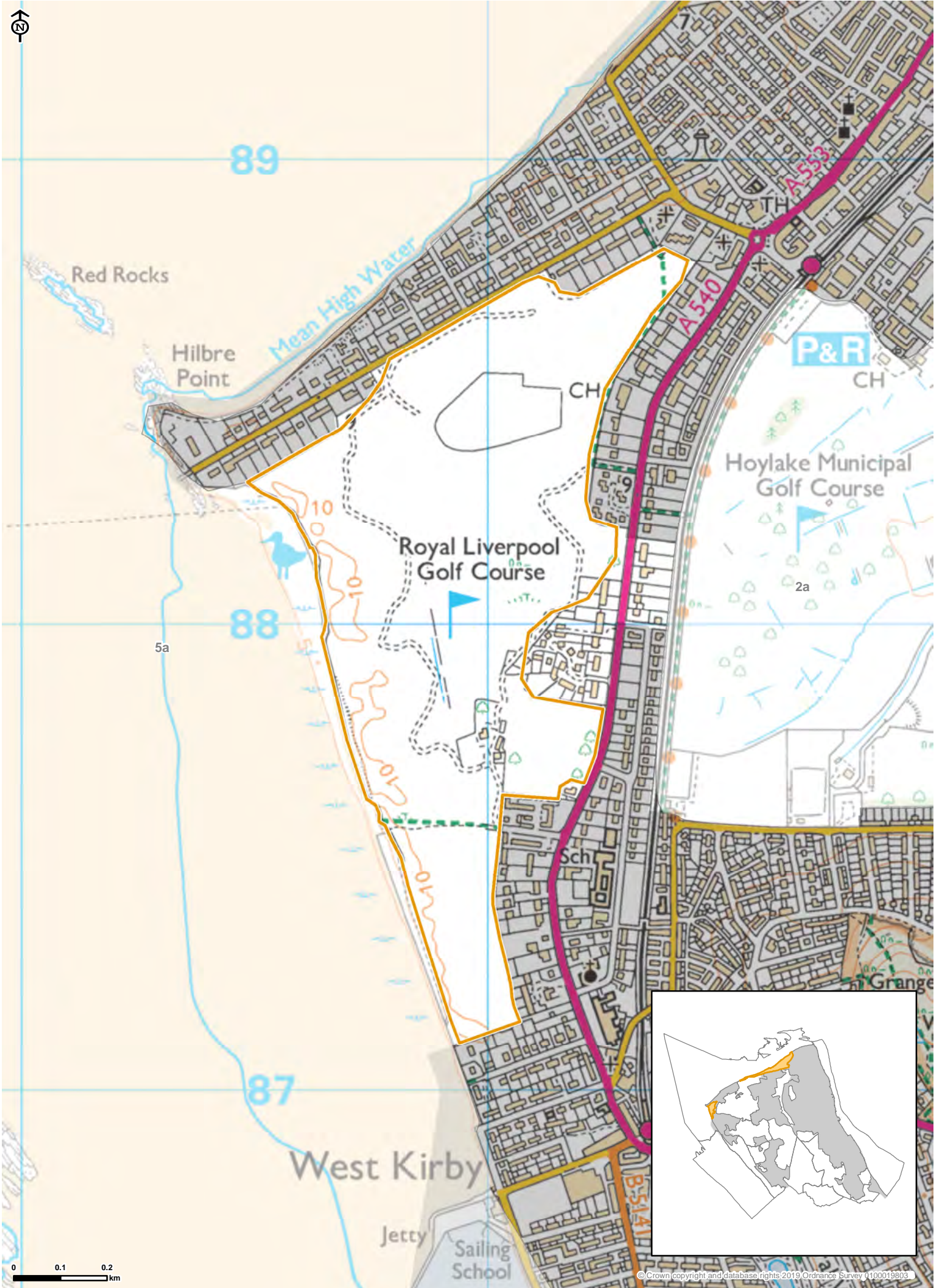
North Wirral Coastal Edge LCA is a narrow strip of open coastal landscape along the north shore of Wirral (the character of the adjacent seascape is described in SCA 5a: North Wirral Foreshore and Coastal Waters). It consists of the foreshore, the engineered Wallasey embankment, and recreational areas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

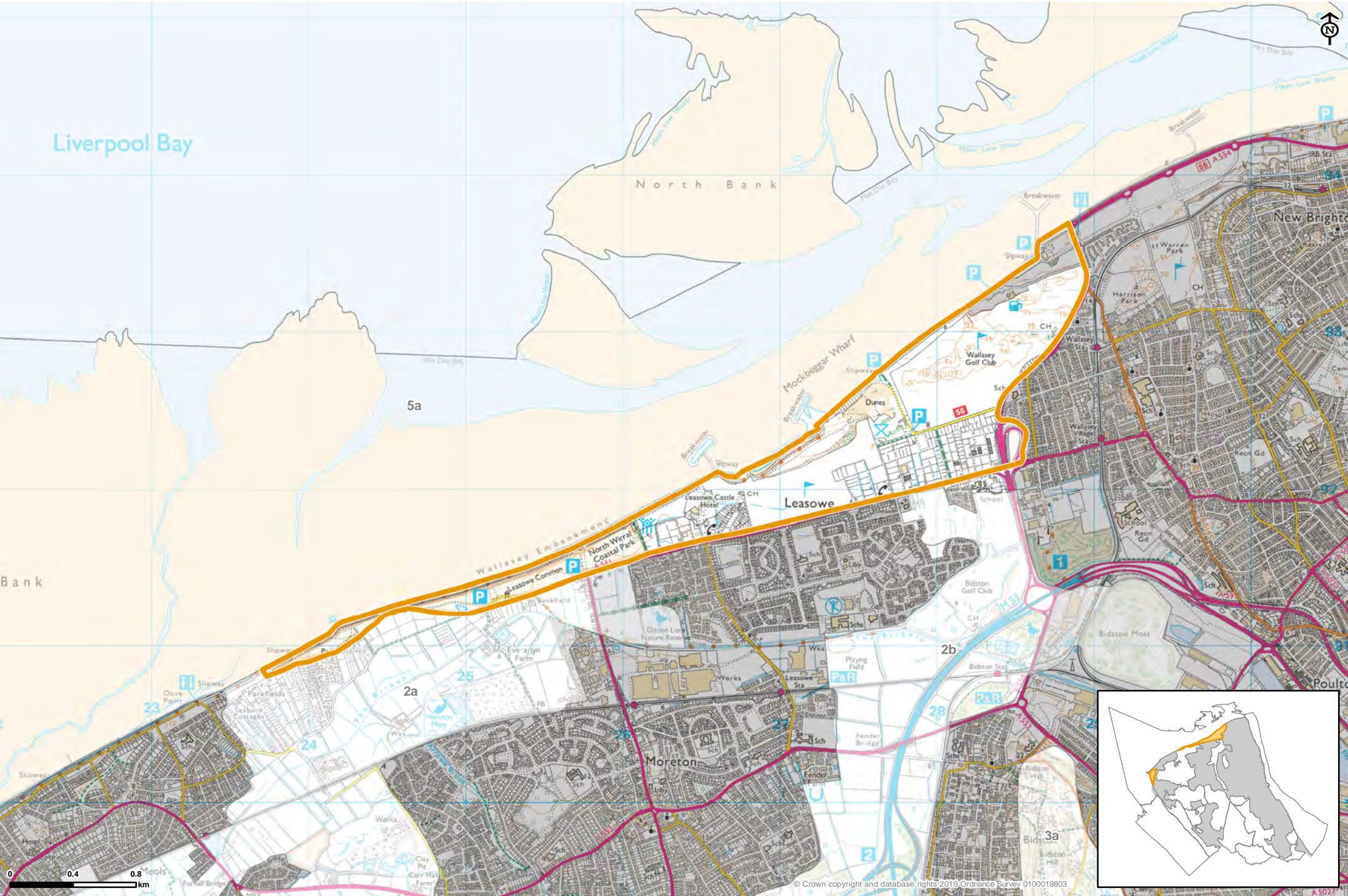


Leasowe Bay looking west

# 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> 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.

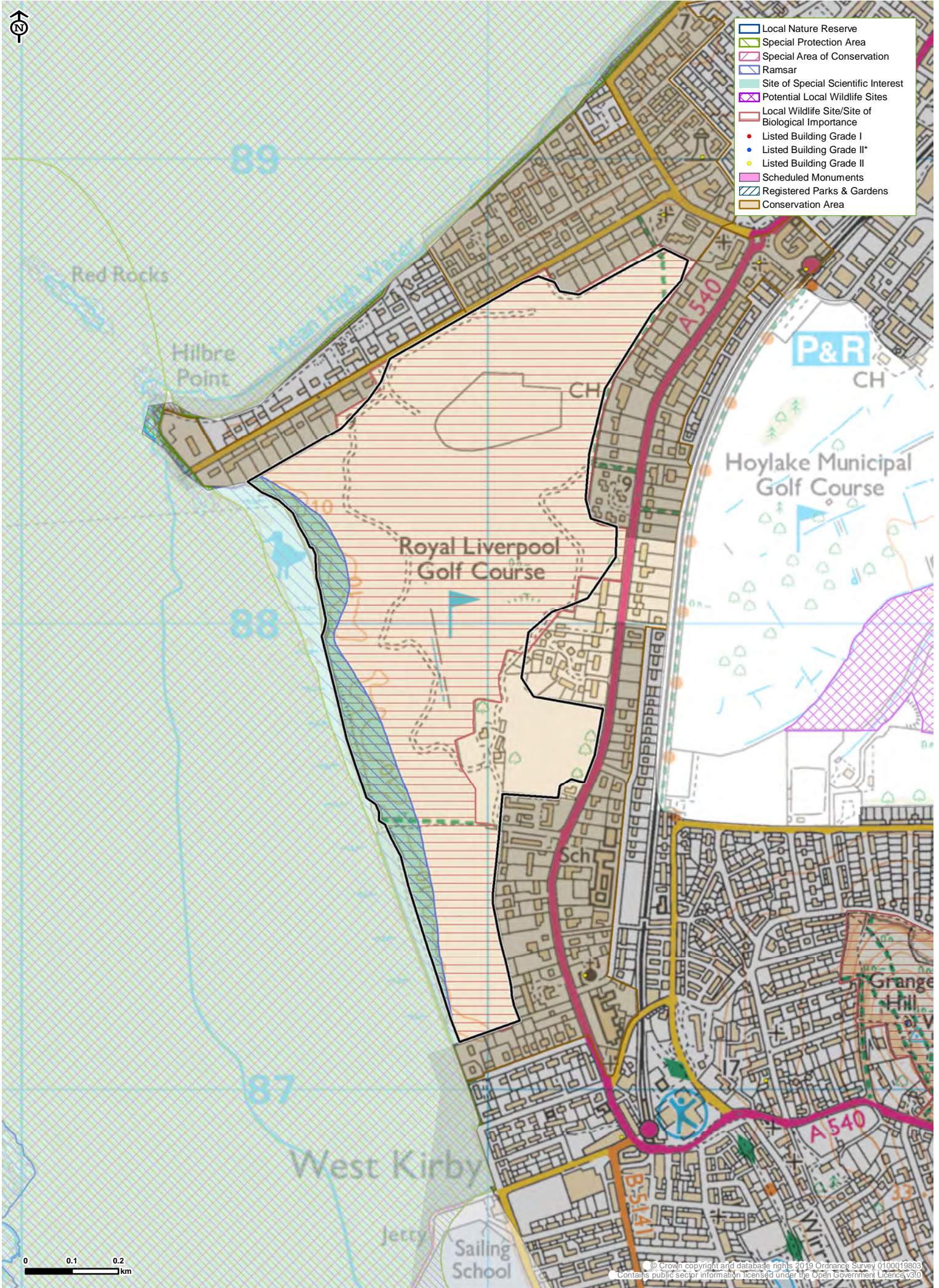
### Landscape Strategy

**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.

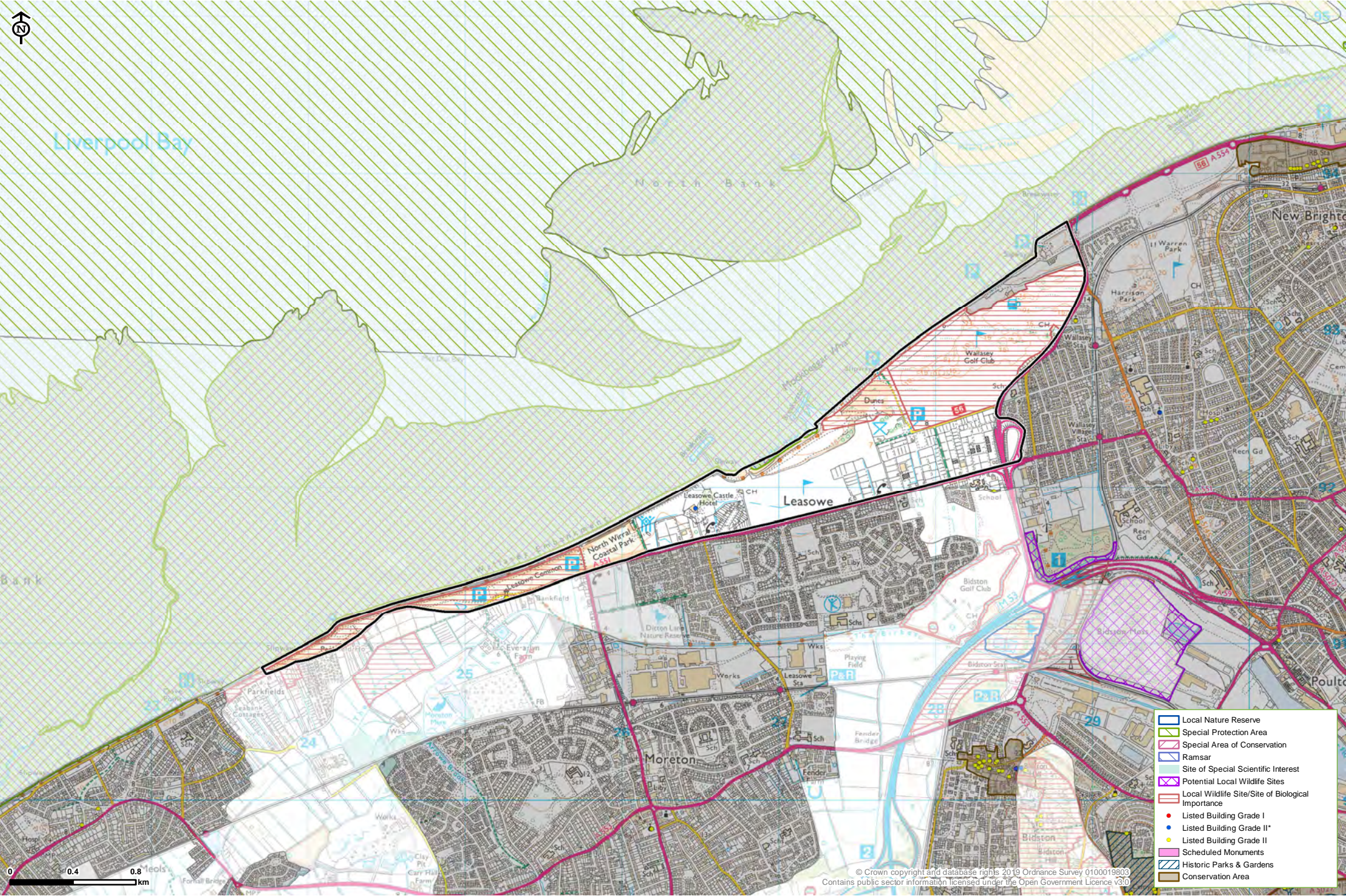
#### Landscape Guidelines

- 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

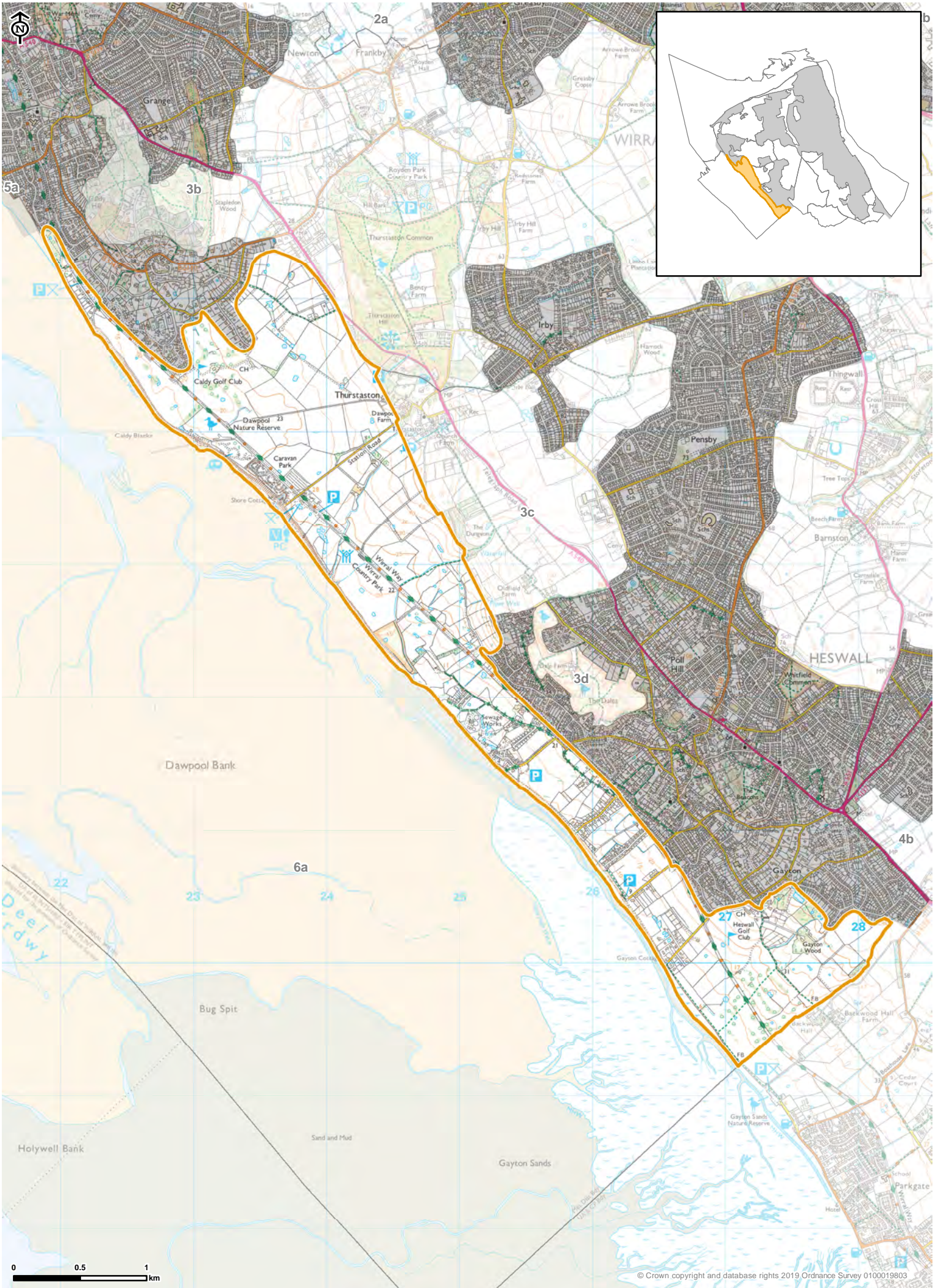
### Summary

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 19<sup>th</sup> 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

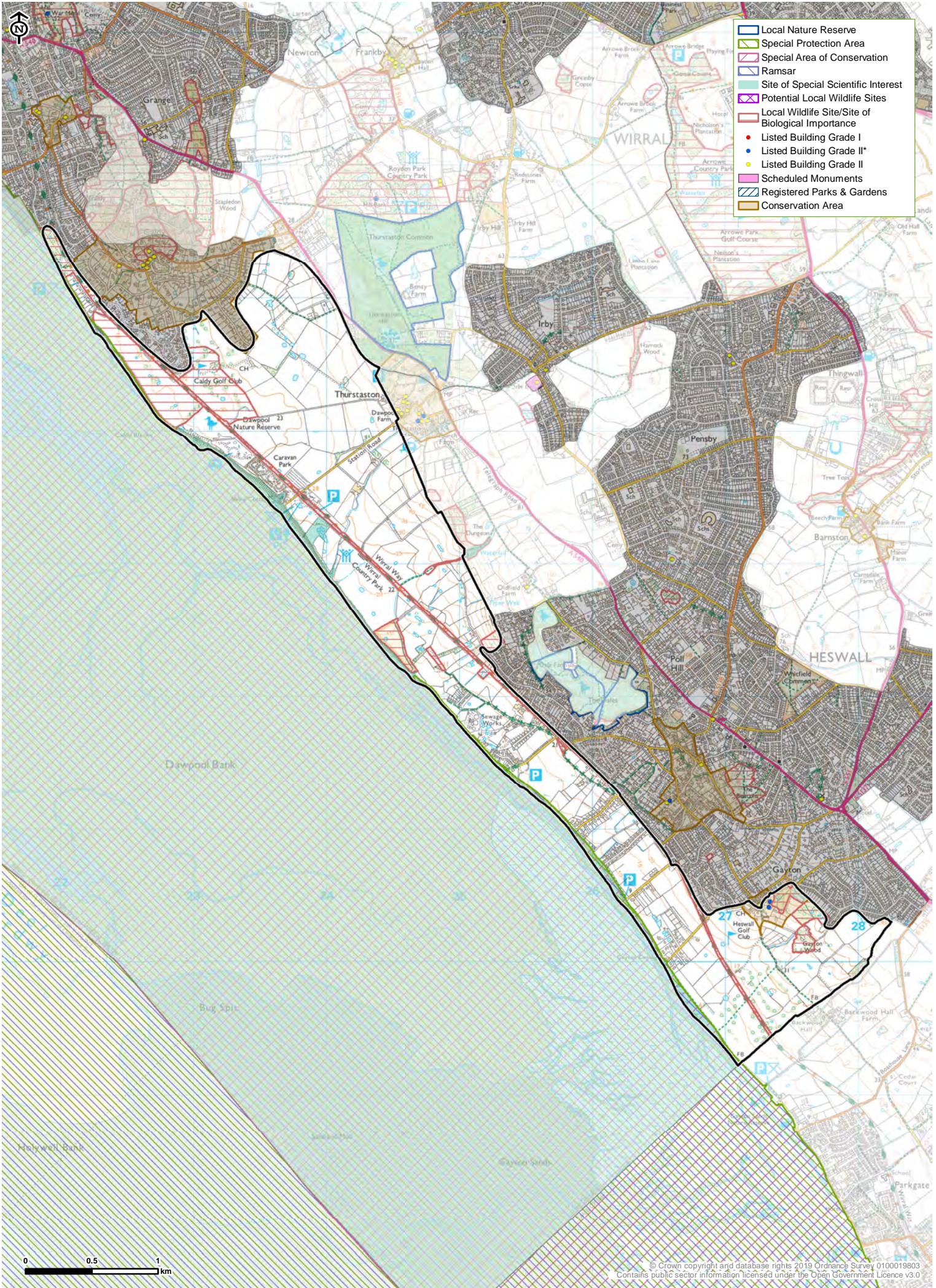
**6.38** The overall strategy for the Dee Estuarine Edge LCA is to conserve the coastal character with open coastal views and distinctive estuarine habitats. The rural character of the landscape with a sparse settlement pattern should also be conserved, and tourist pressures carefully managed.

### 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

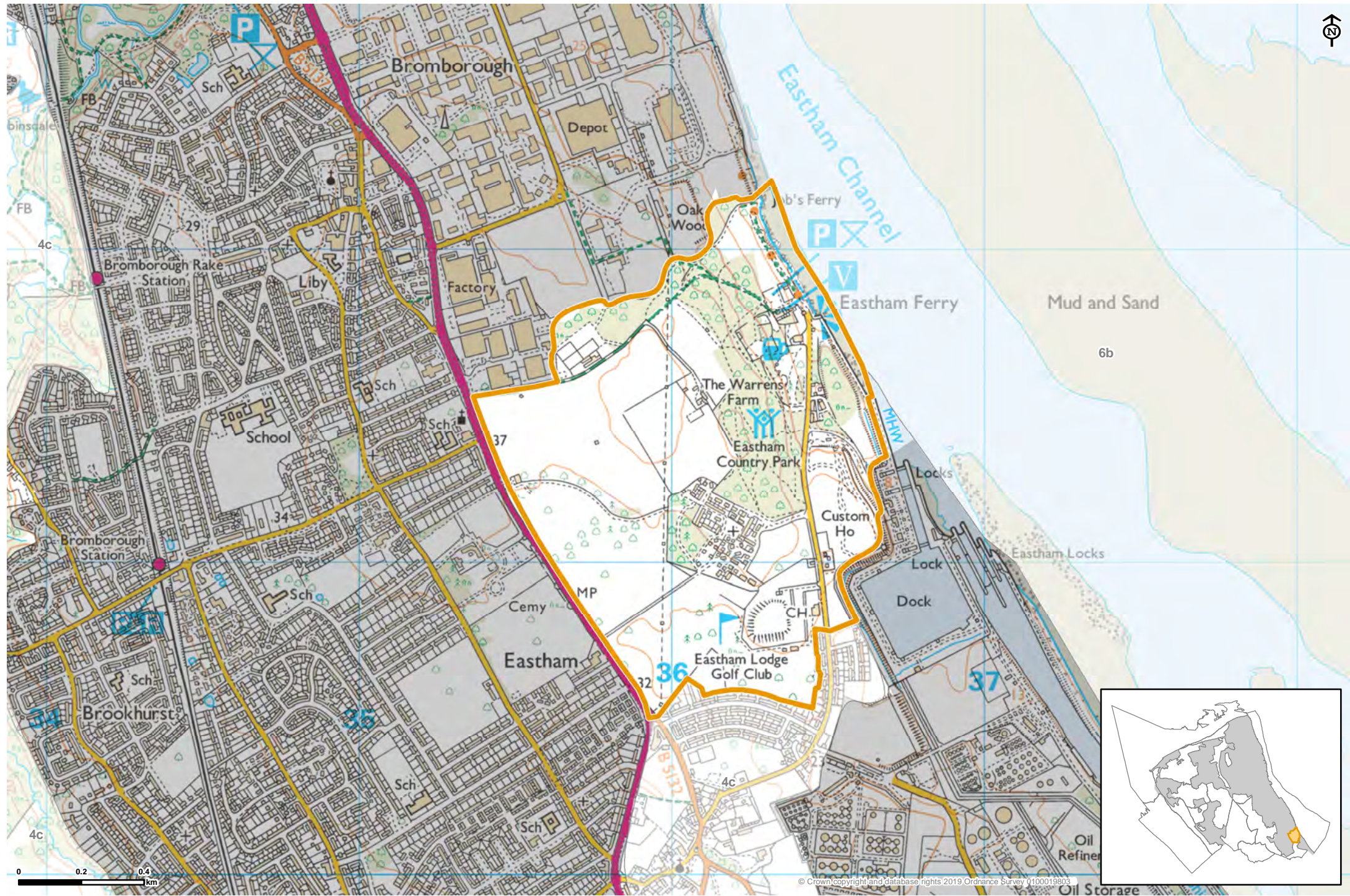
Eastham Estuarine Edge LCA lies south of Bromborough in the south-east of the borough. It is a largely flat area, with sandstone cliffs dropping to the Mersey Estuary (described in SCA 6b: Mersey Estuary). The area is heavily wooded in the north-east and is almost exclusively used for recreation including 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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

