

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

**Wirral Local Landscape
Designations
Review and
Recommendations**

Final report

Prepared by LUC

April 2020



Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

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Review and Recommendations**

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10997

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council (WMBC) commissioned LUC in February 2020 to undertake a review of local landscape designations across the Borough to form part of the emerging Wirral Local Plan 2020 to 2035. This report presents the results of the review and recommendations on local landscape designations.

Background

1.2 WMBC has existing local landscape designations that require special attention to be given to landscapes considered to be *'amongst the most outstanding within the Borough'*. These are primarily designated for their scenic importance and represent *'outstanding landmarks and other characteristic landscapes which make a prominent or positive contribution to the distinctive image and attractiveness of the peninsula'*¹.

1.3 Four Areas of Special Landscape Value (ASLV) are identified in the Wirral Unitary Development Plan (2000).

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

1.4 The Dee Coast, Caldy Hill and Thornton Hough ASLV were originally designated in the Merseyside Structure Plan (1980), although the Dee Coastline ASLV was originally designated as a heritage landscape.

1.5 Bidston Hill ASLV was designated in the Wirral UDP (2000).

This study

1.6 WMBC's ASLV have little evidence setting out the reasons behind their initial designation in the 1980s and in 2000. To address this, LUC was commissioned to provide a full review of the landscape across the Borough to provide evidence to underpin a robust set of up-to-date Local Landscape Designation (LLD) areas, to inform landscape policies in the Wirral Local Plan.

1.7 In summary, the objectives of this study are to:

¹ The Wirral UDP (2000) Section 14. Policy LA1

- Review the Wirral landscape to identify the landscapes of the highest quality and most value in the Borough that could potentially merit local designation in line with current best practice;
- Provide up to date evidence and justification for the recommended LLD areas and their boundaries.

1.8 Local landscape designations can play an important part in protecting and enhancing landscapes with special qualities. Information on LLD areas can be useful to inform development management and potential site allocation and landscape policies.

Clarification note on meaning of Valued Landscapes

1.9 A summary of current thinking on the meaning and terms relating to valued landscapes is set out below, with an indication of what this means for the WMBC Review.

All landscapes are of value

At the outset it is important to note that all landscape is of value. This principle was established by the European Landscape Convention (ELC), which came into force in the UK in March 2007. The ELC recognises that landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas. The ELC definition of 'landscape' considers that all landscapes matter, be they ordinary, degraded or outstanding. It defines landscape as: "an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors".

The ELC establishes the need to recognise landscape in law; to develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and planning of landscapes; and to establish procedures for the participation of the general public and other stakeholders in the creation and implementation of landscape policies. The 'all landscape' approach in WMBC is represented by the comprehensive updated Wirral Landscape Character Assessment (2019).

Valued Landscapes and the NPPF

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), re-issued in February 2019, recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services that it provides.

In paragraph 170, it states that: "Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: ...protecting and enhancing valued landscapes...(in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);"

It goes on to say in paragraph 171 that "Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries."

The NPPF does not offer a definition of what constitutes a 'valued landscape'. However, case law has reached a broad consensus among planning, law and landscape professionals on issues around valued landscapes. While designated landscapes, including LLD, are likely to be considered 'valued' for the purposes of para 170 of the NPPF, it is important to note that non-designated areas can also be 'valued'.

Case law indicates that:

- Many areas of countryside are understandably valued by local residents, but to be considered "valued" in the context of the NPPF, there needs to be something "special" or out of the ordinary that can be defined;
- To be valued a site is required to show some demonstrable physical attributes rather than just popularity.

What does this mean for Local Landscape Designation in Wirral?

The retention of LLD in Wirral is in line with the NPPF. This review is therefore timely and will help:

- elucidate those 'special' landscapes within Wirral that are valued;
- define the attributes and identify the qualities (ref NPPF) that make them worthy of local designation;
- ensure a robust and consistent criteria-based approach to defining locally designated landscapes;
- develop appropriate recommendations for policy implementation.

As noted above, there will also be areas outside the LLD that may also have a high landscape value, be locally valued and popular or possess features, attributes or qualities of value that may also merit protection. This 'all landscapes' approach is the basis of the Wirral Landscape Character Assessment (2019) which should be used to inform decisions.

Chapter 2

Method

2.1 An essential element in reviewing and proposing areas for local landscape designation is the adoption of a consistent systematic and transparent process.

2.2 There is no current generally accepted methodology for reviewing or updating LLD in England. Natural England recommended 'Approach to Landscape Character Assessment' (2014) includes a definition of 'Landscape Value' in Annex 1, stated as:

"The relative value or importance attached to a landscape... which expresses national or local consensus, because of its quality, special qualities including perceptual aspects such as scenic beauty, tranquillity or wildness, cultural associations or other conservation issues".

2.3 The current Landscape Institute/ IEMA Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (third edition, 2013) (GLVIA3) also includes a helpful summary of the range of factors that can help in the identification of valued landscapes, set out in Box 5.1:

- Landscape quality (condition);
- Scenic qualities;
- Rarity;
- Representativeness;
- Conservation interests;
- Recreation value;
- Perceptual aspects; and
- Associations.

2.4 Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Environment Scotland jointly published Guidance on Local Landscape Designations in 2006, the revision of which (Draft – Guidance on Local Landscape Areas, SNH and Historic Environment Scotland, 2017) was being finalised at the time of this review. This includes recommendations on the key steps to follow and criteria to use when undertaking local landscape designation studies.

2.5 The methodology for this study of Wirral draws from the above guidance as well as LUC's experience in undertaking designation reviews elsewhere in the UK.

Geographic scope

2.6 The scope of this study includes a full review of the whole of the Borough, including the existing ASLVs, shown on **Figure 2.1**.

Links to the Wirral Landscape Character Assessment

2.7 This review has been undertaken following the update of the Wirral Landscape Character Assessment (2019), also by LUC. The review uses the framework of the Landscape Character Areas (LCA), of which there are 16 within the Borough, including three Seascape Character Areas. However, it should be noted that the Landscape Character Assessment is based on broad variations in landscape character and not quality and value. There may, therefore, be differences in boundaries between the LCAs and LLD areas. In general, where an LCA is indicated to merit designation, the neighbouring LCA has also been reviewed to assess how it relates to the area and relevant qualities. It should also be noted that all LCAs within Wirral are likely to include some valued qualities or features, even if they do not form part of an LLD area.

2.8 **Figure 2.2** illustrates the landscape character framework and the existing landscape designations (ASLVs).

Size and coherence

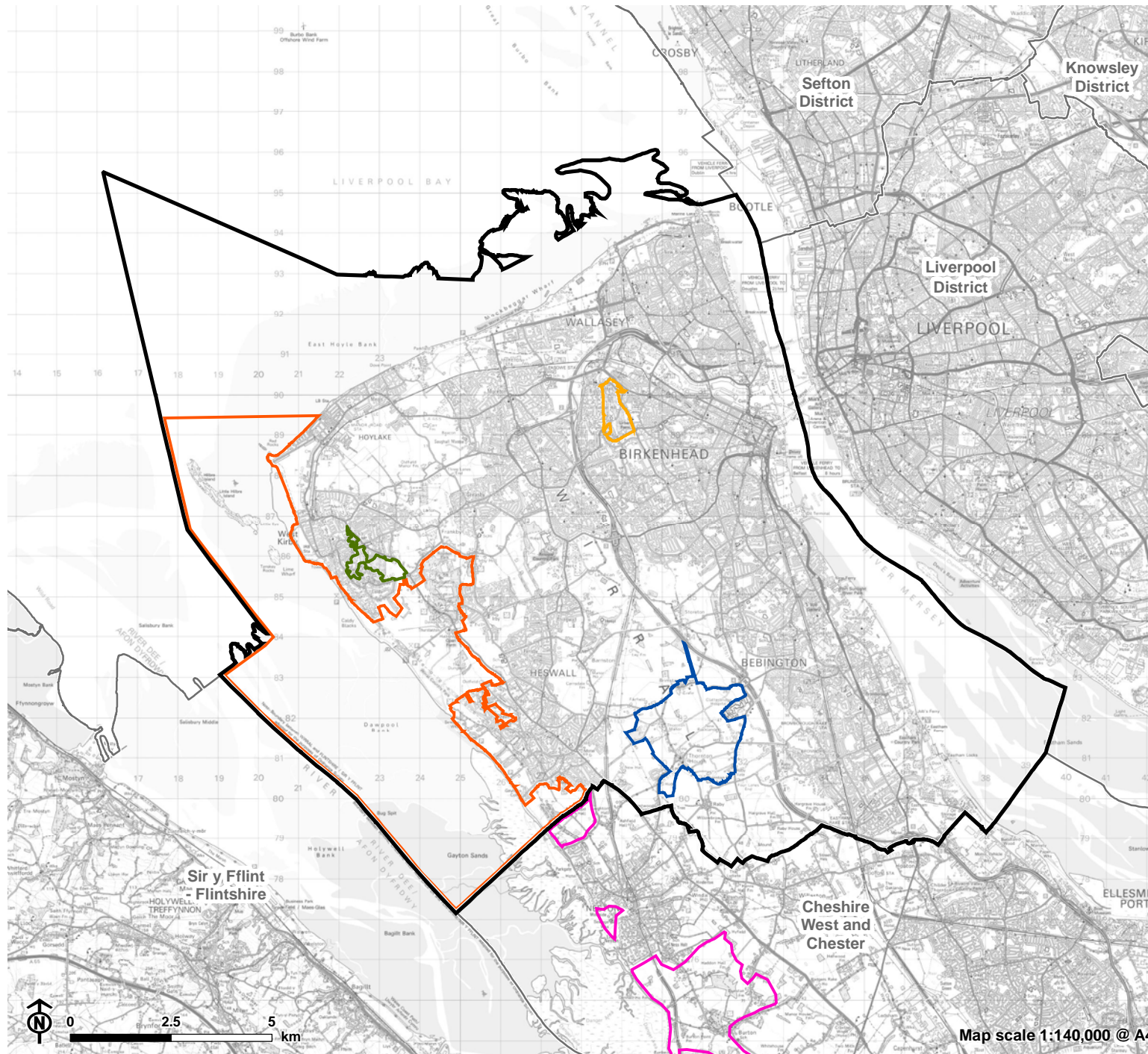
2.9 LLD areas should be of a sufficient size and form a coherent recognisable area. An important feature or site is not, on its own, enough to merit landscape designation. The following points are relevant:

- Is the area of sufficient size to make it practical to develop policies for its protection, management and planning?
- Is the area recognisable as a cohesive place or entity, of consistent character?

2.10 There will be many individual places, sites and features within the wider landscape of the Borough which are of high quality but not within an LLD area due to the reasons above.



Figure 2.1: Areas of Special Landscape Value



- Wirral boundary
- Adjacent Local Authority boundary
- Existing Area of Special Landscape Value**
 - Bidston Hill
 - Dee Coast, including Heswall Dales, Thurstason Common and Royden Park
 - Caldley Hill, including Stapledon Wood
 - Thornton Hough
- Areas of Special County Value (CWaC)**
 - Dee Coastal Area

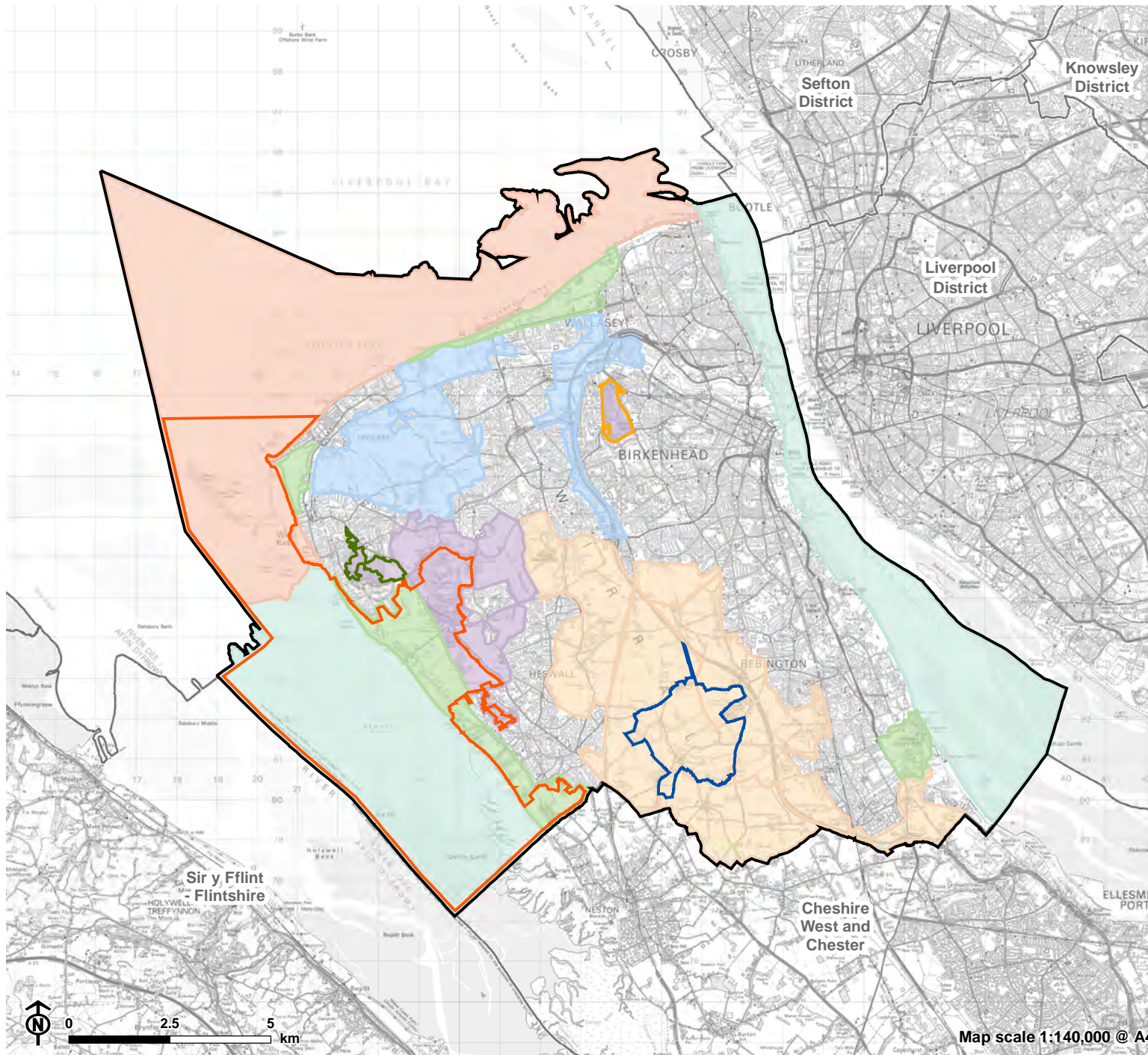


Map scale 1:140,000 @ A4





Figure 2.2: Areas of Special Landscape Value and Landscape Context



- Wirral boundary
- Adjacent Local Authority boundary
- Landscape Character Type**
- 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
- Existing Area of Special Landscape Value**
- Bidston Hill
- Dee Coast, including Heswall Dales, Thurston Common and Royden Park
- Caldry Hill, including Stapledon Wood
- Thornton Hough



Map scale 1:140,000 @ A4



Key stages and tasks

2.11 The review followed five main stages, each focussing in at a more detailed level to develop the confirmed LLDs and identifying their qualities.

Stage 1: Method development

2.12 This required discussion with WMBC to understand the background to LLD and the desired outcomes of the study.

Stage 2: Develop criteria

2.13 The evaluation criteria are drawn from the source documents listed in Chapter 1, including the SNH guidance and Box 5.1 in GLVIA3. They also draw on criteria developed by LUC in previous local designation studies which have been assessed as robust through the Local Plan examination process. They have been refined to reflect the particular landscape of Wirral. They are based on the following six factors:

- Local distinctiveness and sense of place;
- Landscape quality;
- Scenic qualities and perceptual aspects;
- Natural and cultural qualities.
- Recreation value
- Associations

2.14 The relationship with GLVIA3 criteria is provided below.

Table 2.1: GLVIA Box 5.1 Criteria

Wirral LLD Review Criteria	GLVIA Box 5.1 Criteria
Local distinctiveness and sense of place	Rarity Representativeness
Landscape quality	Landscape quality
Scenic qualities and perceptual aspects	Scenic quality Perceptual aspects
Natural and cultural qualities	Conservation Interests
Recreation value	Recreation value
Associations	Associations

2.15 The criteria, potential indicators and evidence are set out in **Table 2.2** at the end of this chapter.

Stage 3: Desk review and identification of 'areas of search'

2.16 The desk review involved a review of the LCAs against the criteria to identify broad 'areas of search' that 'stood out' as potentially distinctive or of high landscape quality in the context of the Borough as a whole. Any area currently within an ASLV was automatically taken forward to the more detailed study and additional potential areas were identified. The results are presented in **Chapter 3**.

Stage 4: Full evaluation of candidate LLD areas and definition of boundaries

2.17 A bespoke field survey of candidate LLD areas was undertaken to consider the criteria in more detail and identify appropriate and robust boundaries.

2.18 Landscape is a continuum and the LLD boundaries are generally drawn to follow identifiable features on the ground such as field boundaries or roads that provide a 'best fit' and are often drawn to character area boundaries for ease of reference. As boundaries generally represent zones of transition, there will therefore rarely be a perceptible change in landscape character and quality along every boundary.

2.19 The outputs of the evaluation exercise with the recommended LLD areas are presented in **Chapter 4** of this report.

Stage 5: Confirmation of new LLD areas

2.20 Taking account of comments received from the Steering Group, the areas recommended for local landscape designation were confirmed with WMBC.

Table 2.2: Method for identifying Valued Landscapes – Wirral

NOTE: To go forward as an LLD ‘area of search’ the LCA will not need to fulfil all criteria equally. The area for LLD may be all or part of an LCA, and the evaluation should indicate any spatial differences.

Criterion	Definition	Potential Indicators	Evidence
Local distinctiveness and sense of place	<p>A landscape which is rare/unique or special in the local Wirral context.</p> <p>A landscape with a strong sense of place derived from its combinations of elements.</p> <p>A landscape which contains character/features or elements which are considered to be important, typical or rare examples.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A coherent landscape character conferring a recognisable sense of place ■ A distinct landform or topography forming a discrete or recognisable area ■ A distinctive rare or representative land cover ■ An area representative of a particular phase in landscape history/development 	<p>Landscape Character Assessment</p> <p>HLC</p> <p>Field Survey</p>
Landscape quality (Intactness/ Condition)	The physical state of the landscape, intactness of the landscape and the condition of individual natural and cultural elements e.g. hedgerows.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Functional aspects of the landscape e.g. ecological integrity, visually coherent ■ Presence of characteristic and valued features (as listed in the Landscape Character Assessment) ■ Presence of well managed features in good condition ■ Absence of incongruous features/detractors or not visually intrusive 	<p>Landscape Character Assessment</p> <p>Presence of other designations indicative of condition</p> <p>Field survey</p>
Scenic qualities and perceptual aspects	<p>A landscape that appeals to the senses – primarily visual.</p> <p>Perceptual and aesthetic qualities such as sense of tranquillity and remoteness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Strong visual character e.g. patterns/composition of vegetation/ landform ■ Memorable, important or distinctive views ■ Qualities of expansiveness, openness, enclosure, seclusion ■ Tranquillity or perceptions of tranquillity – peace, quietness, birdsong, dark skies, presence of water – streams, estuary, sea ■ Uninterrupted tracts of land with few built features ■ Relative lack of human influence/absence of incongruous features 	<p>Landscape Character Assessment</p> <p>CPRE Night Blight/Dark Skies</p> <p>CPRE Tranquillity</p> <p>Field Survey</p>
<p>Natural and cultural qualities</p> <p><i>Note: Note that this criterion alone will not be enough in its own right for an LLD as likely to be covered under other designations in the Local Plan.</i></p>	Presence of natural and cultural attributes or particular associations that contribute to the value of the landscape.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Visible expression of geology creating distinctive sense of place ■ Presence of wildlife and/or habitats/species that make a particular contribution to sense of place or scenic quality ■ Presence of settlements, buildings or other structures that make a particular contribution to sense of place or scenic quality ■ Visible presence of historic landscape types or specific landscape elements or features that provide evidence of time depth or historic influence on the landscape 	<p>Landscape Character Assessment</p> <p>Designations</p> <p>Conservation Areas</p>
Recreation value	Evidence that the landscape is valued for recreational activity where the experience of the landscape is important.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Evidence of recreational activity based on experience of the landscape (e.g. walking routes, access opportunities, activities such as birdwatching) <p><i>Note: needs to be more than just ‘popularity’</i></p>	<p>Landscape Character Assessment</p> <p>Field Survey</p> <p>OS map data</p>

Criterion	Definition	Potential Indicators	Evidence
Associations	Landscapes associated with particular people such as artists or writers or events in history that contribute to their character.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Associations with written descriptions, artistic representations, and associations of the landscape with people places or events 	Local research Landscape Character Assessment

Chapter 3

Identifying LLD areas of search

3.1 This chapter presents the results of an initial desk study evaluation of all the 16 LCAs against the agreed landscape value criteria. This provides a conclusion on whether an LCA:

- Meets;
- Does not meet; or
- Partially meets

criteria for local landscape designation, noting that 'partially meets' may either relate to a part of a geographic area or that the LCA as a whole has some value meriting designation.

3.2 This 'first principles approach' is a starting point for identifying areas that are likely to be worthy of local landscape designation and to scope out areas where further detailed work is not required. It also highlights where more detailed field survey is required to investigate the landscape and define boundaries.

3.3 The results of this desk study assessment are set out in **Table 3.1** below and the resulting 'Areas of Search' are illustrated in **Figure 3.1**.

Table 3.1: Identifying Areas of Search – Desk study review

Key	
Fully meets	
Partially meets	
Does not meet	

Criteria			Local distinctiveness and sense of place	Landscape quality	Scenic quality and perceptual aspects	Natural and cultural qualities	Recreation value	Associations	LLD area of search	Notes
LCA	Within ASLV designation	Area of LCA within ASLV								
1a North Wirral Coastal Edge	No	0%							Partially meets	<p>The North Wirral Coast is characterised by shoreside settlements stretching west to east between Hoylake and New Brighton and the naturalistic qualities of the remaining pockets of undeveloped foreshore are reduced by large-scale engineered sea defences and the visual intrusion of the surrounding settlements. The Royal Liverpool Golf Course at the mouth of the Dee Estuary retains a naturalistic foreshore with internationally designated maritime habitats.</p> <p>The pockets of undeveloped coastal landscape have expansive views over the open sea of Liverpool Bay to the north and Dee Estuary to the west characterised by large skies and changing sea moods, although offshore windfarms and industrial development at Liverpool Docks detract from the scenic qualities of these views. The landscape quality of these areas often is reduced by the presence of detracting features including glass houses and pockets of fragmented or underused land around Leasowe, urban expansion and development within golf courses</p> <p>Buildings such as the Leasowe Lighthouse reflect the area's heritage as a navigable passage to the Dee and Mersey Estuaries and contribute to the sense of place. Linear coastal parks such as Leasowe Common and footpaths provide access to the foreshore and beaches.</p>

Criteria			Local distinctiveness and sense of place	Landscape quality	Scenic quality and perceptual aspects	Natural and cultural qualities	Recreation value	Associations	LLD area of search	Notes
LCA	Within ASLV designation	Area of LCA within ASLV								
1b Dee Estuarine Edge	Yes	80%							Yes	<p>Distinctive coastal landscape with large skies, changing light and expansive views over large expanses of saltmarsh, mudflats and open water towards the Welsh hills in the west. Estuarine-influenced habitats include intertidal mudflats and sandflat and cliffs often internationally designated. Wirral Country Park and the Wirral Way offer recreational enjoyment of the coastline.</p> <p>Some detracting built features e.g. sewage works, caravan parks and ribbon development extending from the urban edge. Some areas are more influenced by the proximity of the settlement edge and fragmented land uses including horse pasture.</p>
1c Eastham Estuarine Edge	No								No	<p>A well wooded parkland and sports fields which are important for local recreation. The area has strong cultural associations due to its former use as a pleasure garden with ferry links to Liverpool. Coastal features including sandstone cliffs which drop to the Mersey and inter-tidal habitats.</p> <p>A small undeveloped area surrounded by extensive urban and industrial development along the Wirral bank of the Mersey. Channelled views across the estuary to Liverpool and oil refineries at Ellesmere Port.</p>
2a The Birket River Floodplain	No								No	<p>A relatively coherent farmland landscape with areas of natural qualities due to the presence of inland wetland and grassland habitats important for birds. Extensive historic field patterns with a geometric pattern of streams and drainage ditches contribute to the cultural qualities of the landscape.</p> <p>However, visually intrusive industrial and commercial development on the urban edge, landfill and mineral operations, transport infrastructure and overhead powerlines detract from the scenic qualities of the landscape. Hedgerow fragmentation and increasing conversion and subdivision of fields for horse paddocks result in a landscape in poor condition and weaken landscape character.</p>
2b The Fender River Floodplain	No								No	<p>The landscape lacks a coherent or distinctive character due to the influence of the M53 which runs through the area and the proximity of the adjacent urban</p>

Criteria			Local distinctiveness and sense of place	Landscape quality	Scenic quality and perceptual aspects	Natural and cultural qualities	Recreation value	Associations	LLD area of search	Notes
LCA	Within ASLV designation	Area of LCA within ASLV								
										conurbation. Land uses including recreational sports fields and horse pasture or unmanaged land with fragmented or absent field boundaries resulting in a neglected appearance. Detracting features include transport links, sewage works and a large retail park.
3a Bidston Sandstone Hills	Yes	97%							Yes	Locally distinctive wooded ridge with a strong sense of 'remoteness' despite its location within the Birkenhead urban area. The heathland and woodland provide a strong sense of place and are important habitats. Historic landmark buildings including the Bidston Windmill, Observatory and Lighthouse provide a link to the maritime and industrial history of Wirral. As a public park, the area is valued for its recreational activity and its panoramic views. Meets criteria but is a small isolated area of remaining undeveloped land.
3b Thurstaston and Greasby Sandstone Hills	Yes	39%							Yes	Distinctive wooded hills forming part of the sandstone ridge running across Wirral. The expansive views from the ridgeline provide a sense of remoteness. The woodland and heathland contribute to the strong sense of place and are important habitats, much nationally designated. The historic parkland at Royden Park and open access land at Caldý Hill and Thurstaston Common are well managed and provide recreational value. Undulating farmland to the north and east of Royden Park although well maintained and with little evidence of loss of features, lacks the distinctive character and scenic qualities of the ridgeline and are more influenced by their proximity to the settlement edge of Newton, Greasby and Irby.
3c Irby and Pensby Sandstone Hills	Yes	44%							Partially meets	Distinctive sandstone ridgeline which falls steeply to the Dee Estuary allowing expansive views over the Dee to the Welsh Hills. Mature woodland along watercourses and pastoral farmland with intact hedgerows add to the scenic qualities of the landscape. The historic village of Thurstaston and rural roads with sandstone walls add to the cultural qualities of the area. Flatter farmland to the east of the A540 Telegraph Road lacks the more scenic qualities of the farmland to the west, has more fragmented hedgerows which

Criteria			Local distinctiveness and sense of place	Landscape quality	Scenic quality and perceptual aspects	Natural and cultural qualities	Recreation value	Associations	LLD area of search	Notes
LCA	Within ASLV designation	Area of LCA within ASLV								
										weaken landscape character and is more influenced by its proximity to the settlement edge of Irby, Pensby and Heswall which surround it on three sides.
3d Heswall Dales Sandstone Hills	Yes	98%							Yes	<p>Locally distinctive wooded ridge with a strong sense of 'remoteness' despite its location within the Heswall urban area. The heathland and woodland provide a strong sense of place and are important habitats. As open access land the area is valued for its recreational activity and its panoramic views over the Dee Estuary.</p> <p>Small area of remaining undeveloped land, although has continuity with sandstone ridge to the north.</p>
4a Landican and Thingwall Lowland Farmland and Estates	No								No	Undulating mixed farmland with scattered woodland interspersed with recreational parkland. Valued locally for recreation value and natural attributes that contribute to the sense of place e.g. Arrowe Park and Barnston Dale but overall does not meet criteria due to the visual intrusion of surrounding urban settlements, the M53 and other transport infrastructure and overhead power lines. Field amalgamation as well as hedgerow fragmentation and urban edge land uses have created a slightly neglected appearance, weakening landscape character locally.
4b Thornton Hough Lowland Farmland and Estates	Yes	38%							Yes	<p>An intact agricultural landscape with a strong sense of place deriving from its distinctive estate character and association with Thornton Manor estate. The strong rural character, with historic sandstone villages and farmsteads, adds to the scenic qualities. The area around Thornton Hough is particularly well maintained and surrounded by woodland on higher ground which provides enclosure, separating it from the M53 and urban conurbation to the east.</p> <p>Areas along the LCA boundaries only partially meets criteria; to the west the landscape is influenced by urban development on the edge of Heswall, transport infrastructure and an overhead powerline, while to the north and east the landscape is influenced by the M53 and development along the motorway.</p>

Criteria			Local distinctiveness and sense of place	Landscape quality	Scenic quality and perceptual aspects	Natural and cultural qualities	Recreation value	Associations	LLD area of search	Notes
LCA	Within ASLV designation	Area of LCA within ASLV								
4c Clatterbrook and Dibbin Valley Lowland Farmland and Estates	Yes	6%							Partially meets	<p>The location of this LCA, sandwiched between the Birkenhead conurbation and the M53 and the intrusion of development along the motorway, has led to fragmentation of land uses and loss of scenic qualities. As a result, the landscape only partially meets the criteria. The south east of the LCA, adjacent to the Mersey Estuary, is also heavily influenced by industrial development and is not considered to meet the criteria.</p> <p>However, woodland on higher ground reduces the influence of the adjacent conurbation resulting in pockets of tranquillity particularly around the historic village of Storeton, where mixed farmland and areas of parkland character, including distinctive features such as the avenue of trees along the Lever Causeway, provide a sense of place and time-depth.</p>
4d Raby Lowland Farmland and Estates	Yes	4%							Partially meets	<p>Coherent and tranquil rural farmland with intact historic field pattern and discernible estate character. The historic character of the small village of Raby and sparse settlement pattern of scattered sandstone farmhouses adds to the scenic qualities of the area. There is a strong sense of separation from larger settlements to the east and west.</p> <p>Perceptual qualities of the landscape on the edge of the LCA to the east are disrupted by the M53 and to the south by settlements at Willaston and Neston.</p>
5a North Wirral Foreshore and Coastal Waters	Yes	23%							Partially meets	<p>Coherent seascape with expansive views over Liverpool Bay. The area's habitats are internationally recognised through designation. Sandy beaches fronting coastal towns offer recreational value.</p> <p>Engineered seawalls, and a developed coastline reduce the sense of remoteness and dark skies, although this is less apparent at the mouth of the Dee Estuary. Offshore windfarms and the busy shipping lanes out to sea are also a detracting feature.</p>

Criteria			Local distinctiveness and sense of place	Landscape quality	Scenic quality and perceptual aspects	Natural and cultural qualities	Recreation value	Associations	LLD area of search	Notes
LCA	Within ASLV designation	Area of LCA within ASLV								
										The area at the mouth of the Dee Estuary has stronger seascape qualities due to the undeveloped shoreline and offshore features including the Hilbre Islands and Red Rocks.
6a Dee Estuary	Yes	99%							Yes	Coherent seascape with strong sense of place and a natural coastline with an expanse of saltmarsh, mudflats and open water. These intertidal habitats are recognised through international designation, particularly for their importance for wading and migrating birds. The lack of human influence results in strong perceptual qualities of remoteness and tranquillity.
6b Mersey Estuary	No								No	Seascape with expansive vistas up and down the Mersey and natural qualities due to the internationally important intertidal habitats. However, the character of the Mersey is heavily influenced by urban development on both shores, including industrial harbour facilities. Except for short stretches, the shoreline is constrained by seawalls reducing its scenic qualities. Busy industrial areas and shipping routes also influence the character of the seascape.

Results of desk assessment

3.4 The desk assessment indicates the following:

- LCAs which are part of an existing ASLV generally meet the LLD criteria; and
- Requirements for some boundary adjustments including some extensions and deletions.

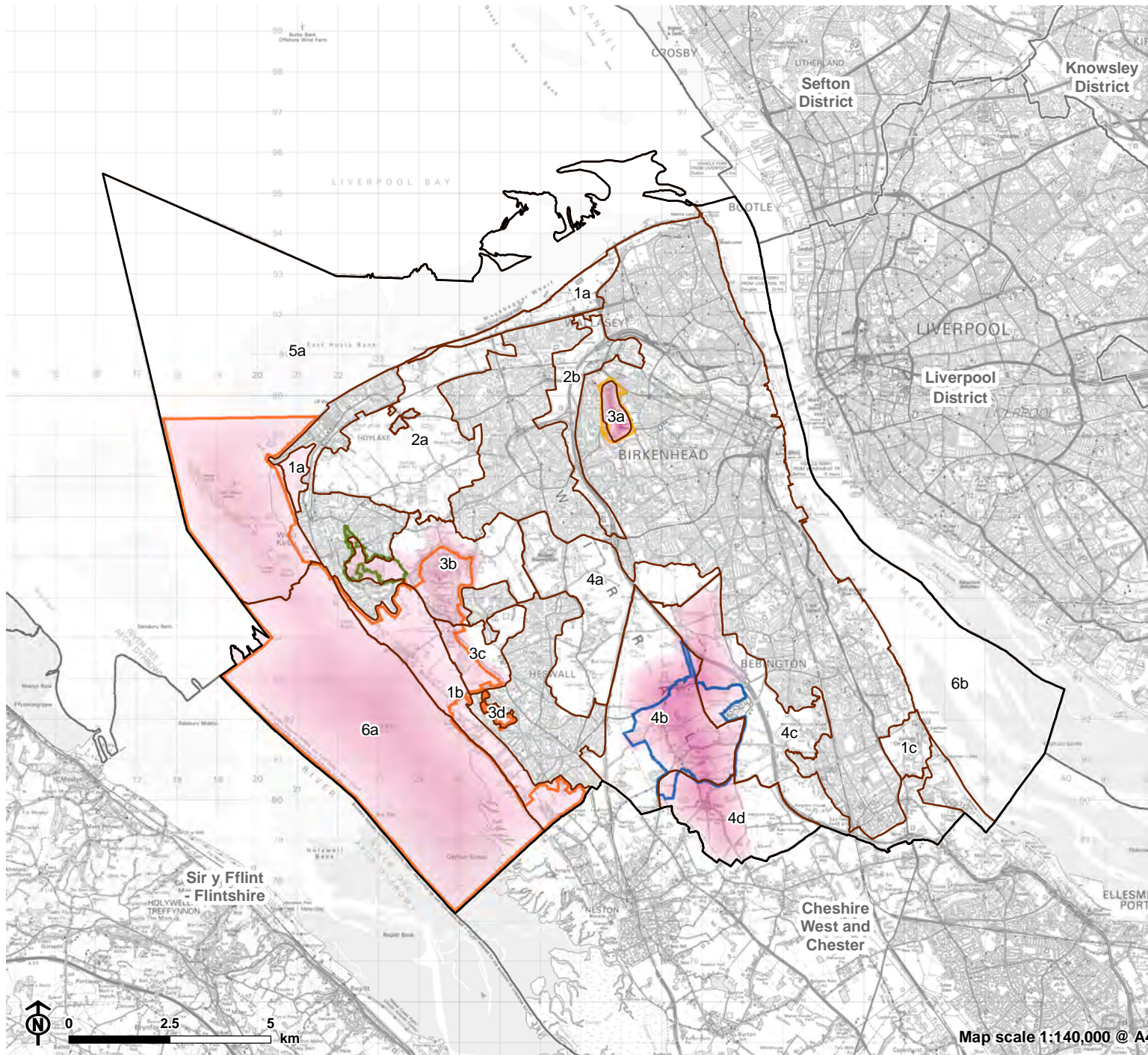
LLD Areas of Search

3.5 The Areas of Search for the Candidate LLDs are indicated on **Figure 3.1.** and consist of:

- Dee Estuary (LCA 1a/1b/5a/6a)
- Central Wirral Sandstone Hills (LCA 3a/3b/3c/3d)
- Thornton Hough Estates (LCA 4b/4c/4d)

These areas formed the basis for more detailed field survey and evaluation. The results are presented in the following sections of this report.

Figure 3.1: Areas of Search



- Wirral boundary
- Adjacent Local Authority boundary
- Areas of search
- Landscape Character Area
- 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

Existing Area of Special Landscape Value

- Bidston Hill
- Dee Coast, including Heswall Dales, Thurstaston Common and Royden Park
- Caldley Hill, including Stapledon Wood
- Thornton Hough

Map scale 1:140,000 @ A4

Chapter 4

LLD Evaluation and Recommendations

4.1 The following sections present the results of the evaluation for the three candidate LLDs, illustrated in conjunction with the existing ASLVs on **Figure 4.1** and in **Figure 4.2** as the recommended candidate LLDs.

4.2 Each LLD evaluation contains:

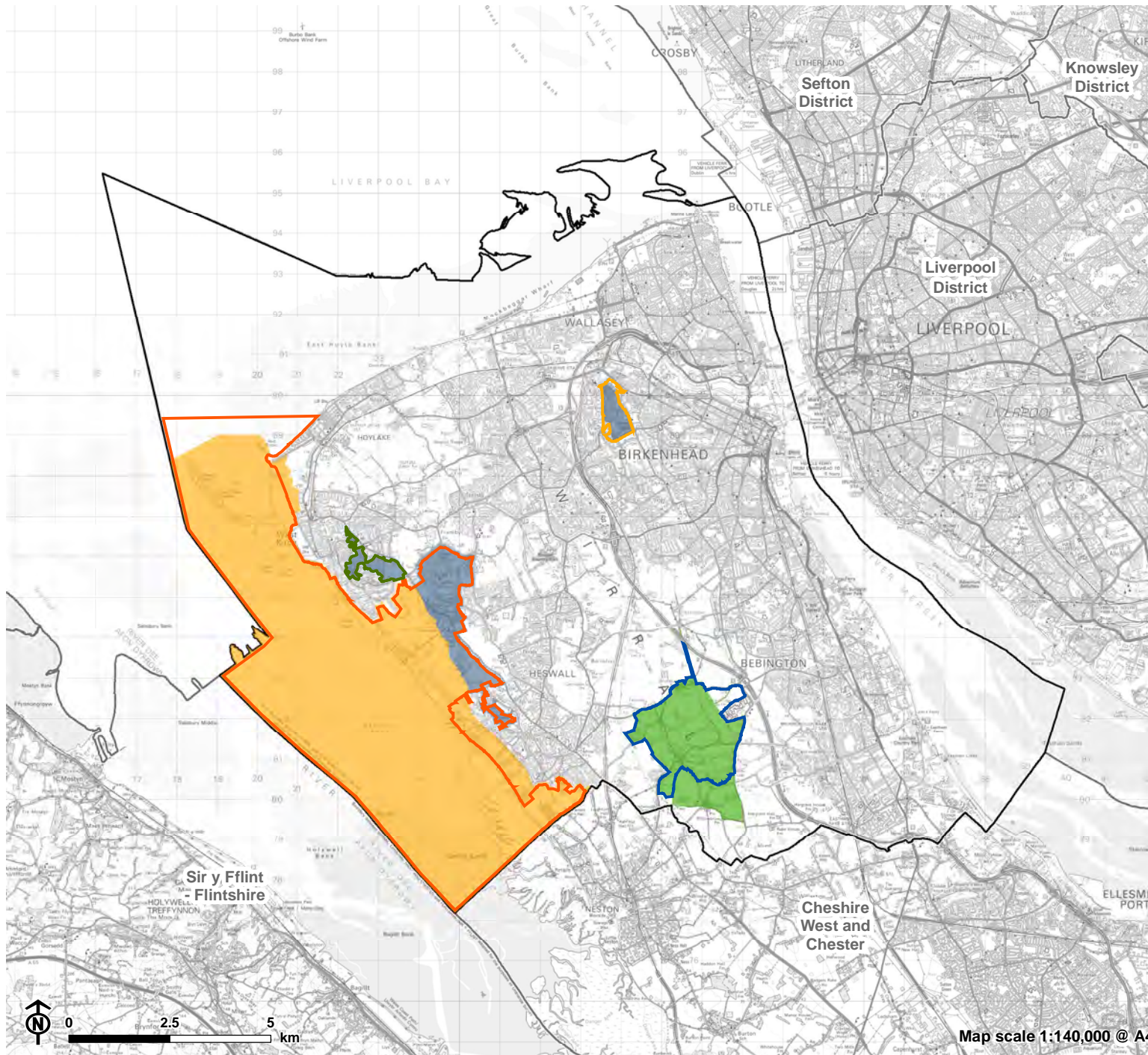
- Summary and recommendations;
- Evaluation against the criteria;
- A photo sheet illustrating representative character; and
- Mapping

A note on boundaries

4.3 Landscape is a continuum and all boundaries will generally represent zones of transition. There will rarely be a sharp change in identified landscape qualities either side of an LLD boundary. For ease, boundaries are frequently drawn along best fit physical features including lanes and field boundaries and therefore may include areas of lesser or greater quality or areas of different character. In some cases, boundaries have been extended where an area for example adjoins an urban edge and would leave a small vulnerable gap. Likewise, there may be some areas within an LLD encapsulated by the boundary that do not fully meet the criteria but are part of a wider 'whole'.



Figure 4.1: Area of Special Landscape Value and Candidate Local Landscape Designations



- Wirral boundary
- Adjacent Local Authority boundary
- Proposed Local Landscape Designation**
 - Central Wirral Sandstone Hills
 - Dee Estuary
 - Thornton Hough Estates
- Existing Area of Special Landscape Value**
 - Bidston Hill
 - Dee Coast, including Heswall Dales, Thurstason Common and Royden Park
 - Caldry Hill, including stapledon Wood
 - Thornton Hough

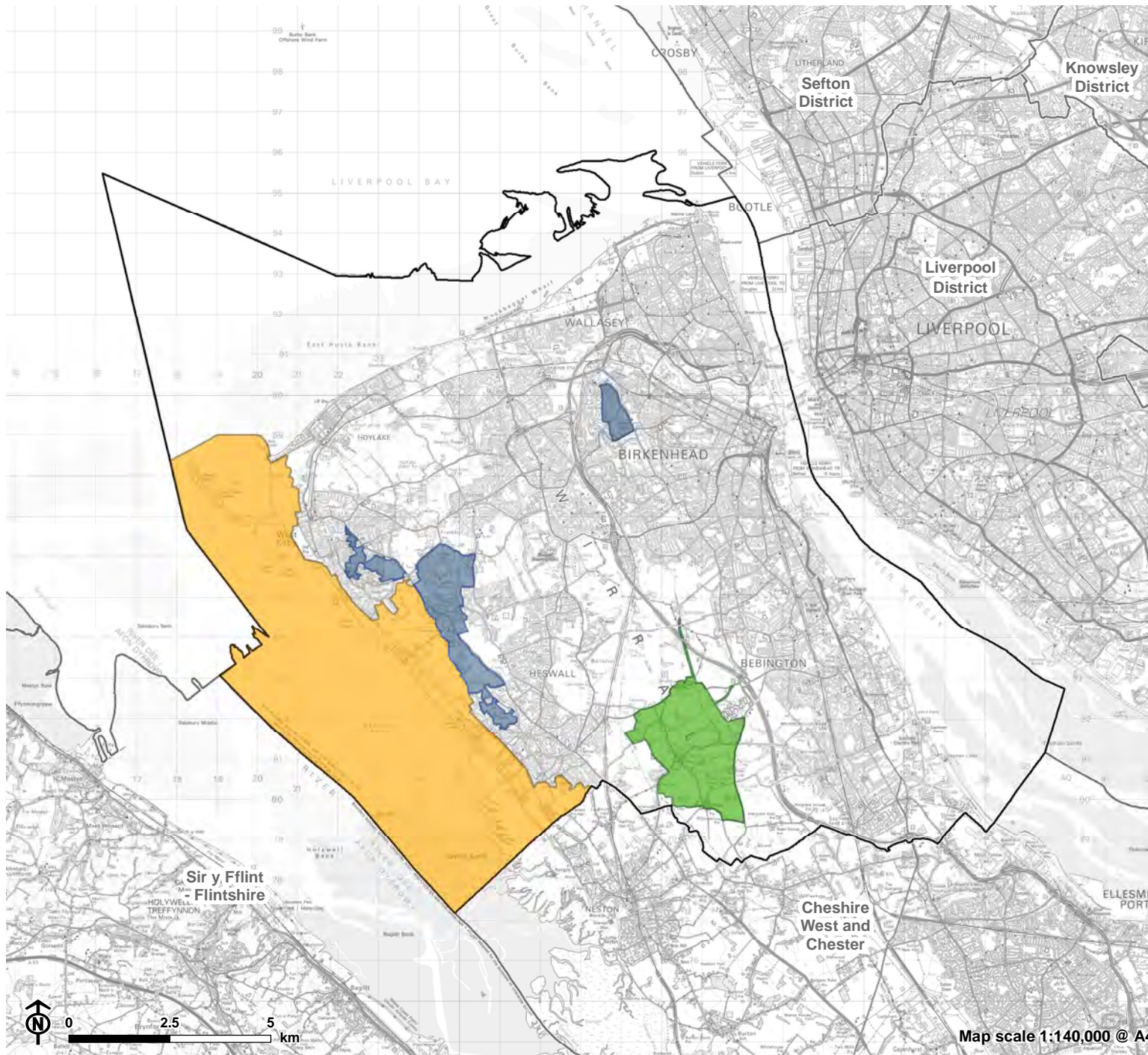


Map scale 1:140,000 @ A4





Figure 4.2: Candidate Local Landscape Designations



-  Wirral boundary
-  Adjacent Local Authority boundary
- Proposed Local Landscape Designation**
-  Central Wirral Sandstone Hills
-  Dee Estuary
-  Thornton Hough Estates



Map scale 1:140,000 @ A4





Central Wirral Sandstone Hills

Candidate LLD name	Central Wirral Sandstone Hills		
Summary Information			
Relationship to existing local landscape designation	<p>The Wirral sandstone hills were designated as separate ASLVs:</p> <p>Thurstaston Common, Heswall Dales and Royden Park were designated as part of the Dee Coast ASLV, in the Merseyside Structure Plan (1980). This was originally identified as a heritage landscape.</p> <p>Caldy Hill, including Stapledon Wood ASLV, was designated in the Merseyside Structure Plan (1980).</p> <p>Bidston Hill ASLV, was designated in the Wirral UDP (2000).</p>		
Extent of area	<p>The candidate LLD covers the sandstone hills and associated woodland between Caldly and Thurstaston in the west and extends to Heswall Dales in the south. It also covers Bidston Hill in the east. The sandstone ridges with exposed sandstone pavements and important woodland and heathland habitats are very distinctive and provide extensive views to the surrounding estuaries from higher elevations.</p>		
Landscape character context (% coverage by the existing ASLV)	<p>3a Bidston Sandstone Hills (97%)</p> <p>3b Thurstaston and Greasby Sandstone Hills (39%)</p> <p>3c Irby and Pensby Sandstone Hills (44%)</p> <p>3d Heswall Dales Sandstone Hills (98%)</p>		
Evaluation of Area of Search			
Desk review (see Table 3.1)	LCA	Take forward	Notes
	3a	Yes	Bidston Hill is a locally distinctive wooded sandstone ridge which fully meets criteria despite its location within the Birkenhead urban area. However, this is a very small isolated area.
	3b	Yes	<p>Most of the LCA is a distinctive area of wooded sandstone hills which fully meets the criteria.</p> <p>Review the current ASLV boundaries around Royden Park.</p> <p>Field survey is required to assess the undulating farmland north and east of the park which lack the distinctive character and scenic qualities of the ridgeline and are more influenced by surrounding settlement.</p>
	3c	Part	<p>Undulating farmland to the east of the LCA is more influenced by the proximity of the surrounding settlement and has lower landscape quality overall meaning it does not meet the criteria for inclusion in the LLD.</p> <p>Part of the LCA to the west of the A540 Telegraph Road fully meets the criteria due to the scenic qualities and strong rural character of the wooded farmland with its expansive views over the estuary.</p> <p>Focus review on current eastern boundary of the ASLV - the area west of Telegraph Road and around Thurstaston.</p>
	3d	Yes	Locally distinctive wooded landscape which meets criteria despite its location within the urban area. Although a small area it has continuity with the sandstone ridge to the north.
Boundary commentary	<p>See Figures 5a and 5b</p> <p>The proposed LLD boundaries have been defined to encompass the sandstone ridge which is characterised by woodland and heathland and distinctive interconnecting farmland.</p>		

The change in the current boundaries of The Dee Coast including Heswall Dales, Thurstaston Common and Royden Park ASLV reflects the division of this area into the Central Wirral Sandstone Hills LLD and Dee Estuary LLD:

- Retain the northern boundaries around Royden Park which are formed by the B5140 Montgomery Hill, Hillbark Road and Mill Hill Road. These roads, which follow the historic park boundary and feature gated entrances and lodges, provide a strong defensible boundary feature. Farmland to the north of the Park towards the historic village of Frankby was assessed as part of the Area of Search but Frankby Cemetery and Greasby Brook valley are of lower landscape quality (with fragmented hedgerows and fields divided into horse pasture) and influenced by the proximity of Greasby.
- Retain the eastern boundary formed by Mill Hill Road and the settlement edge of Irby and its extension along A540 Telegraph Road. This includes heathland and woodland at Irby Hill and Thurstaston Common but excludes farmland of lower quality to the east which is impacted by its enclosure by surrounding settlements including Greasby, Irby and Pensby.
- The new western boundary aligns closer to the Irby and Pensby Sandstone Hills LCA boundary and excludes the lower coastal area to the west of Thurstaston which is now proposed as part of the Dee Estuary LLD. The boundary follows the settlement edge of Caldy and A540 Telegraph Road, then a private road to the west of Dawpool Cottages, the settlement edge of Thurstaston village and a farm track extending south from Thurstaston Hall Farm. The boundary then follows the western edge of The Dungeon woodland before meeting the settlement edge of Heswall (**Fig 5a: point 1**).

Caldy Hill and Stapledon Wood:

- Retain the existing boundaries of the ASLV at Caldy Hill which follow the settlement edge and extend to the junction of the A540 Column Road and B5140 Caldy Road in the east. Although the open farmland along the roadside are at a lower elevation than the surrounding woodland, they provide an important connection between Caldy Hill and Thurstaston Common.

Heswall Dales:

- Retain the existing boundaries of the ASLV at Heswall which follow the settlement edge.

Bidston Hill:

- The existing northern boundary of the ASLV at Bidston Hill extends to the settlement edge on the A553 Hoylake Road. The woodland between Hoylake Road and the B5151 Boundary Road is recommended for exclusion due to its lower elevation and lower landscape quality. This also aligns the LLD boundary more closely to the Bidston Sandstone Hills LCA and Bidston Hill Local Wildlife Site/ Site of Biological Importance (LWS/SBI) boundaries (**Fig 5b: point 2**).
- Changes to the south-west boundary are recommended to exclude areas now within the urban area (**Fig 5b: point 3**).

Recommendations

- Retain the existing ASLV as an LLD but split the area to more closely reflect the LCT/LCA boundaries. The sandstone ridges and interconnecting farmland will form part of this Central Wirral Sandstone Hills LLD while the coastal areas to the west of Thurstaston will form part of the candidate Dee Estuary LLD.
- Retain existing boundaries which are robust and defensible, excluding areas now within urban settlements.
- Rename as Central Wirral Sandstone Hills LLD to match the naming of the LCT in the Wirral Landscape Character Assessment.
- The aim should be to encourage integrated management within this area of heathland and woodland along the sandstone ridge. There is an opportunity to enhance the boundaries along the urban edges to maintain the distinction between rural landscape and urban areas. Enhance the interface with the A540 Telegraph Road where the condition of the more open farmland could be improved. Improve connections between Thurstaston Common and Heswall Dales and Thurstaston Common and Caldy Hill. The long open views across the surrounding countryside and across the Dee Estuary are particularly characteristic from this elevated area and any change or development that would block these views should be avoided.

Full Evaluation – Central Wirral Sandstone Hills	
Local distinctiveness and sense of place	<p>The prominent sandstone ridgelines with steep-sided wooded hills and heathland rising out of the surrounding undulating farmland provide a coherent landscape character and a strong sense of place. The sandstone hills are a highly distinctive and unique landscape within Wirral, forming discrete recognisable areas, with their pattern of exposed sandstone pavements, woodland and heathland habitats. As high points within Wirral they provide a recognisable feature and backdrop to many parts of the Borough as they rise out of the surrounding urban areas. The ridges are interspersed with wooded farmland and historic parkland at Royden Park. Due to its lower elevation, the farmland often forms part of the wider view from more elevated areas and provides continuity to the wooded landscape.</p>
Landscape quality	<p>The sandstone hills of the LLD provide a visually coherent backdrop to many areas in Wirral, with woodland, heathland and grassland habitats providing ecological integrity. The landscape is generally well managed by the local authority and National Trust.</p> <p>There are very few detracting features, although some heathland habitats, particularly at Bidston Hill and Heswall Dales, require further management where it is succeeding to birch and ultimately oak woodland, and maturing woodland is starting to impact on expansive views from the ridgelines. The Caldý RFC sportsground is visually conspicuous from Thurstaston Common, however the majority of other development is screened by woodland.</p>
Scenic qualities and perceptual aspects	<p>The ridgelines form a distinctive skyline in views from adjacent areas. Elevated viewpoints provide spectacular views over the surrounding farmland across Wirral to Liverpool and the Pennine Hills in the east and west to the Dee Estuary and across to North Wales. Contrast is provided in areas of lower elevation where woodland provides a sense of enclosure.</p> <p>The pattern of rolling heath and woodland has a strong visual character and provides a sense of separation from the surrounding settlement and a remote naturalistic character, particularly along the windblown ridgelines.</p> <p>Proximity to urban areas results in lower tranquillity and light pollution in some parts.</p>
Natural and cultural qualities	<p>The LLD is the most wooded area within Wirral, and the presence of priority habitat deciduous woodland and lowland heathland in open areas makes a particular contribution to the sense of place. Thurstaston Common and Heswall Dales are both nationally designated as SSSI due to their lowland heath habitats, containing both wet and dry heath. Caldý Hill, Storeton Wood, Royden Park and Bidston Hill are locally designated as LWS/SBI. Pine woods are a characteristic feature. Distinctive sandstone outcrops are designated as Local Geological Sites at Caldý Hill, Thurstaston Common and Bidston Hill.</p> <p>Rock carvings dating from c1000 AD are of possible Norse-Irish origin and provide time-depth at Bidston Hill. There are three landmark historic buildings on Bidston Hill: Grade II listed Bidston Lighthouse was built in 1873 to ensure ships avoided sandbanks in the channel on their approach to Liverpool; Grade II listed Bidston Observatory was built in 1866 to rate mariners' chronometers and later to analyse tidal flows; and Bidston Windmill was built in the late 18th century and is Grade II* listed. Bidston Village Conservation Area extends into the north of the area and includes the Grade II* Bidston Hall.</p> <p>The attractive village of Thurstaston has a strong vernacular of brick and red sandstone with characteristic sandstone boundary walls. St Bartholomew's church and Thurstaston Hall are both Grade II* listed buildings key to the identity of the historic core of the village. The cultural qualities of the village are recognised through its designation as a Conservation Area and the landscape forms an important part of its setting.</p> <p>Royden Park contains three listed buildings including the Grade II* Hill Bark, and a number of Victorian buildings and structures including the coach house and walled garden.</p>

Recreation value	<p>The area is valued for recreation and is crossed by a number of footpaths and bridleways which provide links between the open access land at Thurstaston Common, Caldy Hill and Heswall Dales, much of which is managed by the National Trust. Thurstaston Common and Heswall Dales Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) add to the recreational value of the area. The Country Park at Royden Park provides formal and informal recreation opportunities, including a model railway and mere for fishing.</p> <p>Bidston Hill is popular for recreation with a series of footpaths and a Heritage Trail. The lighthouse, observatory and windmill open regularly for public visits, and there is a small urban farm which provides educational and recreational facilities for local communities. The Rhododendron Gardens is an area of formal open space on the lower slopes of Bidston Hill, although this has been neglected in recent years.</p>
Associations	<p>The historic landmark buildings on Bidston Hill provide a link to the maritime and industrial history of Wirral. Bidston Hill was a popular subject with the Liverpool Pre-Raphaelites who valued it for the humble, rural and down-to-earth character of the landscape. William Davis, a Dublin-born artist who settled in Liverpool, painted a series of paintings of Bidston Hill from the 1840s-1860s.</p> <p>Thomas Henry Ismay, co-founder and chairman of the White Star Shipping Line, which owned the Titanic, retired to Thurstaston and is buried in St Bartholomew's church. Ismay wanted an uninterrupted view of the Dee Estuary and Welsh Hills and therefore had the main Hoyle to Chester Road, now Telegraph Road, diverted, creating the Thurstaston cutting.</p>

Representative photos of the landscape



Sandstone pavement with heathland at Bidston Hill



Heathland with views across Dee Estuary to Wales from Heswall Dales



Sandstone pavement at Thurstaston Common, with Caldy Hill in the background



Pine woodland at Royden Park with red sandstone boundary walls

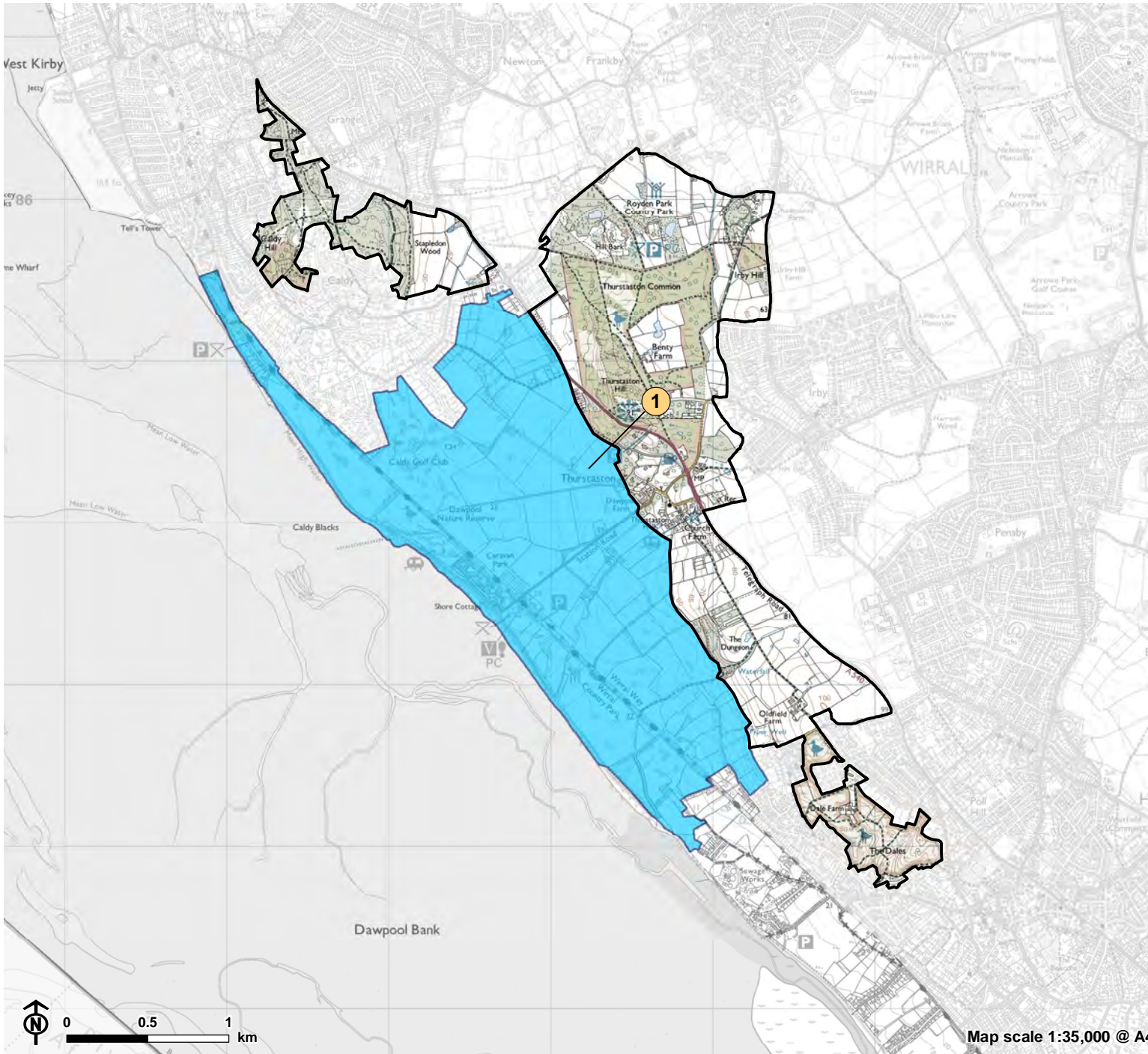
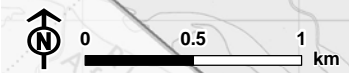


Figure 5a: Central Wirral Sandstone Hills Candidate Local Landscape Design (West)

- Wirral boundary
- Candidate Local Landscape Design**
- Central Wirral Sandstone Hills
- Changes to Area of Special Landscape Value**
- Remove

① Boundary drawn to exclude the lower coastal farmland (proposed as part of the candidate Dee Estuary LLD)



Map scale 1:35,000 @ A4



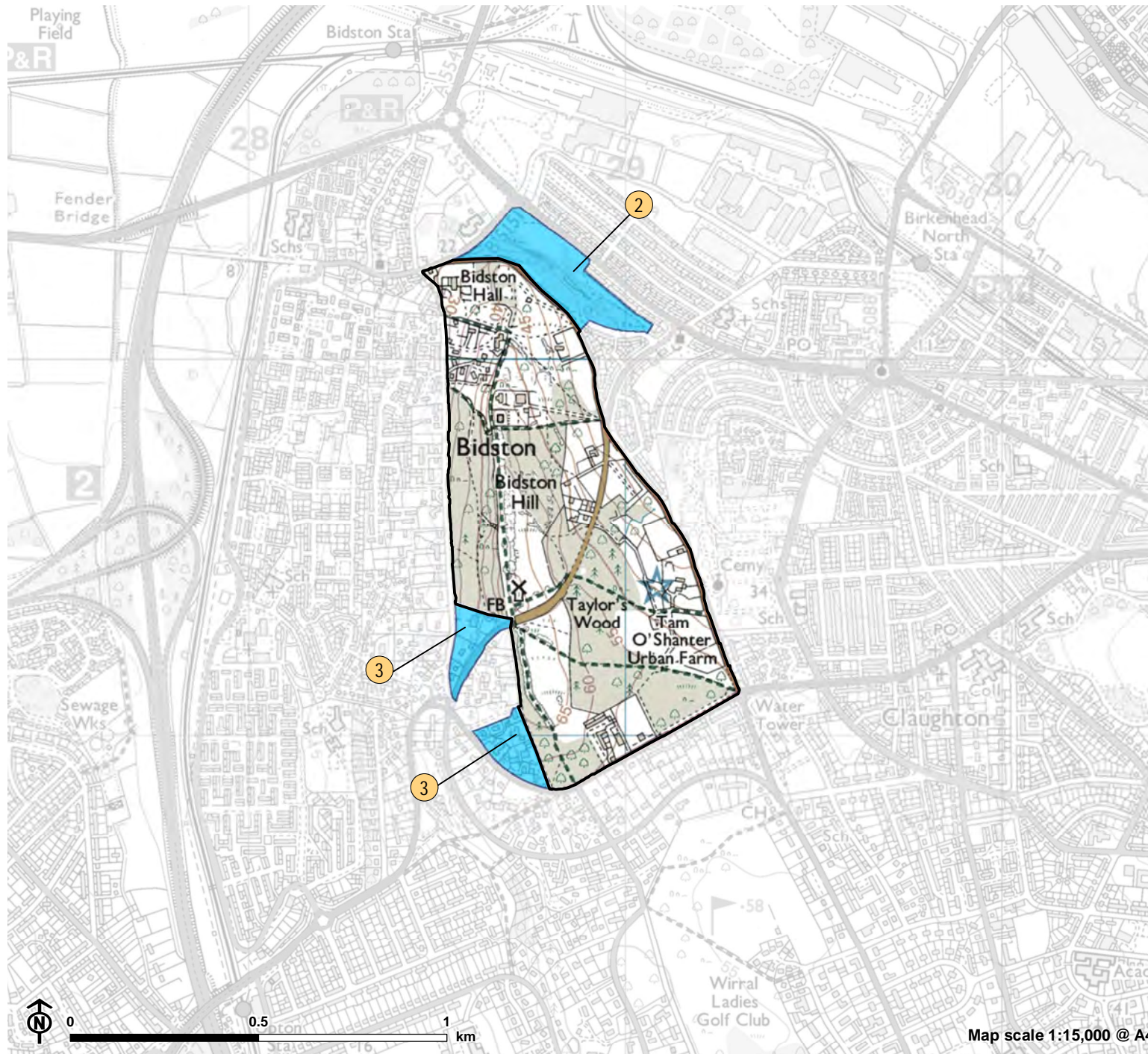





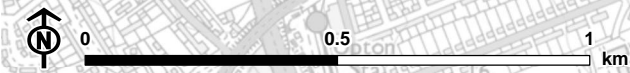


Figure 5.2b: Sandstone Hills Candidate Local Landscape Designation (East)

-  Wirral boundary
- Candidate Local Landscape Designation**
-  Central Wirral Sandstone Hills
- Changes to Area of Special Landscape Value**
-  Remove

-  Exclude woodland north of Boundary Road to better match the LCA and LWS/SBI boundaries
-  Exclude area now within the urban area



Map scale 1:15,000 @ A4



Dee Estuary



Candidate LLD name	Dee Estuary		
Summary Information			
Relationship to existing local landscape designation	<p>The Dee Estuary and a small area of coastal landscape south of Gayton (between Cottage Lane and the Borough boundary) was designated as part of the Dee Estuary ASLV in the Merseyside Structure Plan in 1980 and was identified as a heritage landscape.</p> <p>The south of the Dee Coast ASLV is contiguous with the northern part of the Cheshire West and Chester Dee Coastal Area of Special County Value (ASCV), designated in 2017.</p>		
Extent of area	<p>The candidate LLD covers the Dee Estuary and the undeveloped areas of the Wirral coast between the mouth of the Estuary and the Borough boundary. The area represents the gradual transition from sloping farmland to intertidal coastal flats and the open water of the Dee.</p>		
Landscape character context (% coverage by the existing ASLV)	<p>1a North Wirral Coastal Edge (0%)</p> <p>1b Dee Estuarine Edge (80%)</p> <p>5a North Wirral Foreshore and Coastal Waters (23%)</p> <p>6a Dee Estuary (99%)</p>		
Evaluation of Area of Search			
Desk review (see Table 3.1)	LCA	Take forward	Notes
	1a	Part	<p>Much of the North Wirral Coastal Edge LCA is characterised by shoreline settlements and the landscape quality of the remaining undeveloped land is reduced by the presence of development and large-scale engineered sea defences which reduce the naturalistic qualities of the area.</p> <p>Focus review on the undeveloped shoreline at the mouth of Dee Estuary at the Royal Liverpool Golf Course and its potential inclusion in the LLD.</p>
	1b	Yes	<p>Distinctive landscape with a strong relationship with the Dee Estuary which transitions from sloping farmland to a flat inter-tidal coastal strip. Some detracting built features e.g. sewage works, caravan parks and ribbon development.</p> <p>Further survey is required to assess the potential of including the entire undeveloped coastline along the Dee within the LLD due to the ability the area offers to enjoy a wider landscape context of land, sea and views to the Welsh hills beyond.</p>
	5a	Part	<p>Coherent seascape with a strong sense of place and natural qualities which increase with distance from the human influence of industrial development on the Mersey shore as well as windfarms and shipping lanes in Liverpool Bay.</p> <p>Review the area at the mouth of Dee Estuary which has strong seascape character due to valued offshore features including the Hilbre Islands and scenic qualities due to expansive views to the North Wales coast.</p>
	6b	Yes	<p>Coherent seascape with a strong sense of place due to the natural qualities of the coastline which is characterised by saltmarsh, mudflats and open water where the lack of human influence results in strong perceptual qualities of remoteness and tranquillity.</p>

Boundary commentary	<p>See Figures 6a and 6b</p> <p>The proposed LLD boundaries have been defined to encompass the Dee Estuary and the coastal flats and farmland along the Wirral shore.</p> <p>The change in the current boundaries of The Dee Coast including Heswall Dales, Thurstaston Common and Royden Park ASLV reflects the division of this area into the Dee Coast LLD and the Central Wirral Sandstone Hills LLD:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Refine the northern boundary at the mouth of the Estuary from Hilbre Point, following the extent of the SSSI/ Ramsar designation so that Red Rocks and Hilbre Island are included within the LLD. The seascape beyond this boundary is more heavily influenced by human activity including coastal settlement at Hoylake on the North Wirral shore and views to offshore windfarms and development on the Mersey shores (Fig 6a: point 1). ■ Include the natural shoreline of the Royal Liverpool Golf Course using the track across the golf course as the eastern boundary line (Fig 6a: point 2). ■ The new eastern boundary aligns more closely to the Dee Estuarine Edge LCA boundary and excludes the farmland at higher elevations to the east which is now proposed as part of the Central Wirral Sandstone Hills LLD. The boundary follows the settlement edge of Caldys and A540 Telegraph Road, then a private road to the west of Dawpool Cottages, the settlement edge of Thurstaston village and a farm track extending south from Thurstaston Hall Farm. The boundary then follows the western edge of The Dungeon woodland before following the settlement edge of Heswall to the Borough boundary (Fig 6a: point 3). ■ Include the coastal farmland between the open access land at Heswall Fields in the north and Cottage Lane in the south which is outside the current ASLV. This aligns more closely with the Dee Estuarine Edge LCA boundary. The eastern boundary will now follow the settlement edge of Heswall/Gayton (Fig 6b: point 1). ■ Retain the western and southern boundary in the Dee Estuary along the Borough boundary.
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Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Retain the existing ASLV as an LLD but split the area to more closely reflect the LCT/LCA boundaries. The coastal areas to the west of Thurstaston will be included within the Dee Estuary LLD while the farmland at a higher elevation to the east will form part of the candidate Central Wirral Sandstone Hills LLD. ■ Include the area between Heswall Fields and Cottage Lane within the LLD so that the whole of the undeveloped coastal strip along the Dee is protected and provides continuity with the Dee Estuary Area of Special County Value (ASCV) within Cheshire West and Chester Borough. This area meets the criteria currently except for landscape quality/condition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Local distinctiveness: A transitional coastal fringe landscape that has a strong relationship with the Estuary. – Landscape quality / condition: Fragmented hedgerows and the division of fields into horse paddocks detracts from landscape quality. – Scenic qualities: Expansive views over the Estuary to the Flintshire hills, with big skies, coastal light, seasonal and tidal change. However, tranquillity is more disrupted than other areas within the LLD due to proximity to human activity/ribbon development. – Natural / cultural qualities: Wirral Way LWS extends across the area. Field patterns are a mix of Medieval Townfields and 20th century. – Recreation value: The area allows access to the coastal saltmarshes/mudflats from shoreside car parks, the Wirral Way long distance footpath and other rights of way. ■ The area offers a coastal experience and the ability to enjoy a wider landscape context of land, sea and views to Wales. The objective would be to enhance the area, improving landscape condition and encourage enhancement of natural elements (e.g. hedgerows / hedgerow trees). ■ Include the natural coastline at the mouth of the Dee Estuary fronting the Royal Liverpool Golf Club. This area fully meets the criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Local distinctiveness: Coastal plain with a strong relationship with the Estuary. – Landscape quality / condition: The shoreline is in good condition.
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- Scenic qualities: Expansive views of the Hilbre Islands and the North Wales coast.
- Natural qualities: Nationally and internationally designated habitats extend across the coastal strip (Red Rock SSSI/Dee Estuary Ramsar).
- Recreation value: the area allows access to the Estuary through shoreline paths and is valued for birdwatching.
- The aim should be to encourage integrated management within this area of estuarine landscape/seascape. There is an opportunity to improve the coastal landscape and estuarine habitats. Enhance boundaries along the urban edges to retain a well-defined distinction between the open coastline of the LLD and these settlements. Improve conditions of the more fragmented farmland. Recreational facilities and connections along the coastline could be improved.
- Rename as The Dee Estuary LLD.

Full Evaluation – Dee Estuary	
Local distinctiveness and sense of place	<p>A highly distinctive landscape forming an important undeveloped landscape bordering the Dee Estuary. The landscape transitions from sloping mixed farmland, with golf courses or open recreational land, through to expansive sandflats, saltmarsh and the Dee Estuary. The changing character of the Dee has a strong influence on the coastal landscape, as sandy beaches with open water in the north change to the quieter coastline south of Heswall, which is separated from the narrow water channel by a broad green expanse of saltmarsh.</p> <p>The whole area has a strong sense of place with open views over the mudflats, sandflats and saltmarsh of the Dee Estuary to north Wales.</p>
Landscape quality	<p>The Dee Estuary provides a visually coherent backdrop to the area and a strong degree of ecological integrity as evidenced by the numerous international ecological designations which extend along the coast. The landscape is well managed, and the majority of landscape features are intact.</p> <p>There are very few detracting features, although the sub-division of fields for horse pasture has introduced post and tape fences, stabling and other ephemera into some areas.</p>
Scenic qualities and perceptual aspects	<p>The area has strong scenic qualities with high levels of tranquillity even close to the settlements and a sense of 'wildness' and windswept remoteness where the call of wading birds can be heard. The wide skies and transient character of the Estuary which changes with the tide, weather and light add to the strong visual character of the area.</p> <p>The sense of expansiveness is enhanced by the distinctive views over the Dee Estuary to the Welsh coast and the Clwydian Range beyond. These are expansive from the open coastline or framed by mature trees along the lanes extending from the settlements. Longer views to the three Hilbre Islands at the mouth of the Estuary and offshore windfarms out to sea are possible from along the coastline. By contrast, linear wooded corridors along the banks of the dismantled railway on the Wirral Way provides a sense of enclosure.</p> <p>Human influence is more evident west of Heswall, where small-scale ribbon development extends to the coast and there is a sewage works and caravan parks. Distant views of industry on the Welsh coast to the south do not impact on the sense of remoteness.</p>
Natural and cultural qualities	<p>The presence of natural attributes makes a particular contribution to the sense of place. Estuarine habitats including expansive intertidal mudflats, sandflats and saltmarsh which support large populations of wetland birds are internationally designated as Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA), Marine Protection Area and Ramsar and nationally as the Dee Estuary SSSI. The Dee Cliffs are designated as a SSSI for their nationally important staggered soft cliffs, and the Red Rocks are a nationally important sand dune system, also designated as SSSI.</p> <p>Small clumps, copses and shelter belts provide a wooded context to the area. Woodland is predominantly deciduous and is recorded as priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland, often locally designated as LWS/SBI.</p> <p>Historic field patterns include pre-1600s enclosure south of Gayton and Medieval Townfields west of the town, and post-medieval enclosure south of Caldy. The field pattern has been lost in places due to golf courses and 20th century amalgamation.</p> <p>Attractive historic buildings add to the cultural attributes of the area. There are two Grade II listed buildings on Hilbre Island: the telegraph station built in 1841 as part of a relay of seven stations from Point Lynus to Liverpool and the 1836 Buoy Master's house and buoy store. The Royal Liverpool golf course is the second oldest in England and is designated as part of the Meols Drive Conservation Area, valued because of the retention of natural landscape features. Gayton Conservation Area, and the parkland at Gayton Hall extends into the LLD. Spectacular views over fields and the Heswall golf course to the Dee Estuary and North Wales are noted as one of the special features of the Conservation Area.</p>

Full Evaluation – Dee Estuary	
Recreation value	<p>The landscape is valued for recreational activity and there is extensive access to the area, including shoreside footpaths, beaches and open access coastal areas. The mudflats, sandflats and saltmarsh make the Dee Estuary a very popular place for bird watching, and the south of the Dee Estuary is part of an RSPB reserve.</p> <p>Hilbre Island LNR is open for visitors to walk across the sands at low tide and is popular for wildlife spotting including seals and birds. There is open access to Heswall Fields (owned by the National Trust) and Wirral Country Park, the first designated country park in Britain, which extends along the route of a former railway and forms a wooded linear feature through the landscape. The long-distance Wirral Way and National Cycle Route 56 follow the route of the former railway. Golf courses provide opportunities for formal recreation.</p>
Associations	<p>Sandstone walls and steps which remain along the old shoreline (e.g. at Cottage Lane) provide evidence of the past importance of the Dee Estuary as a historic trading route for local industries. Canalisation of the Dee in 1737, to stem the natural siltation, diverted the river's course to the Welsh side of the estuary, increasing siltation of the Wirral side.</p>

Representative photos of the landscape



Open access land and the beach on the coastline at Caldy. The Hilbre Islands can be seen in the distance



Expansive views over the Dee Estuary to North Wales

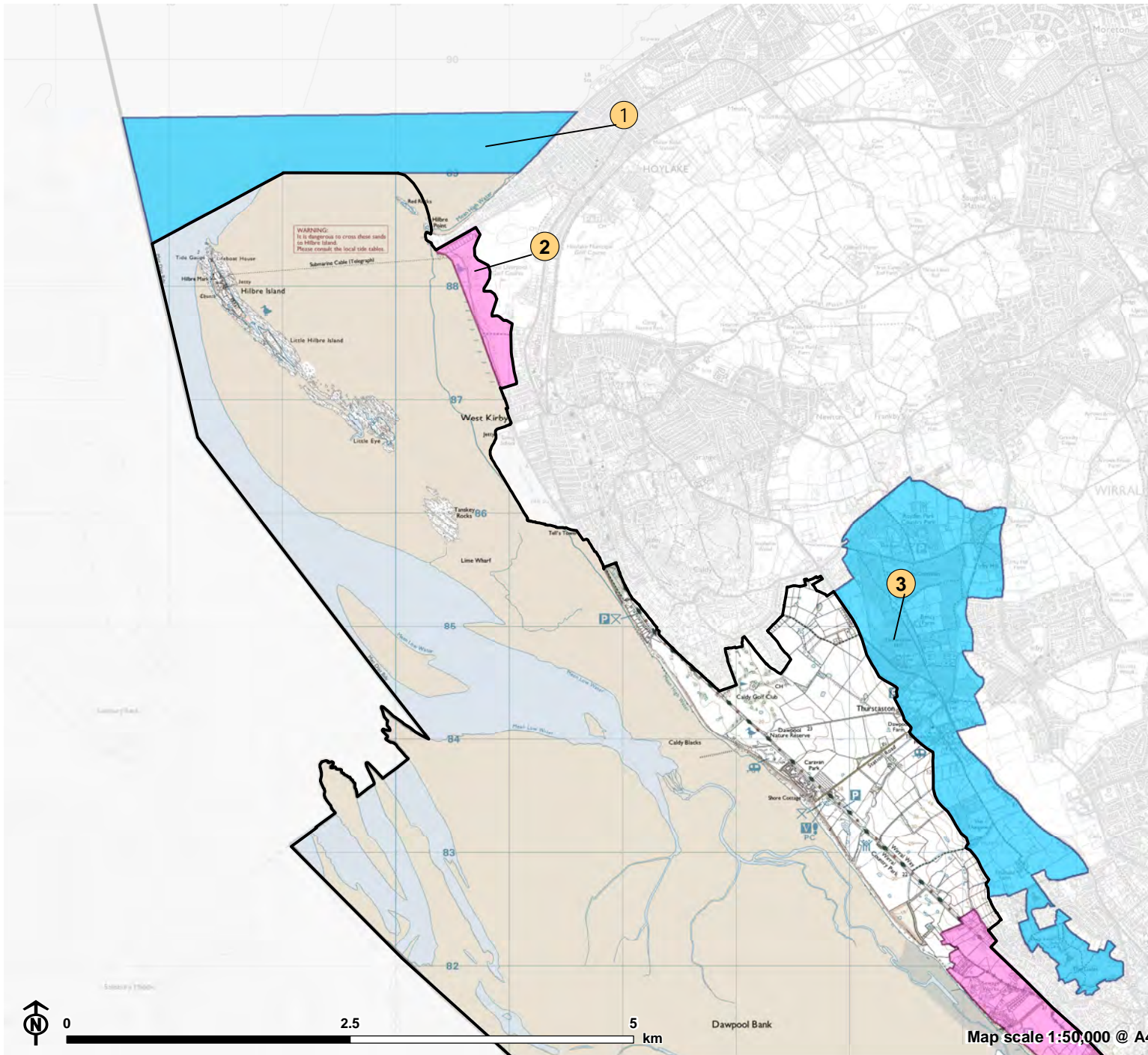


Saltmarsh in the south of the Dee Estuary with sandstone wall along the old shoreline



The Wirral Way Country Park and bridge over the former railway line

Figure 6a: Dee Estuary Candidate Local Landscape Designation (North)

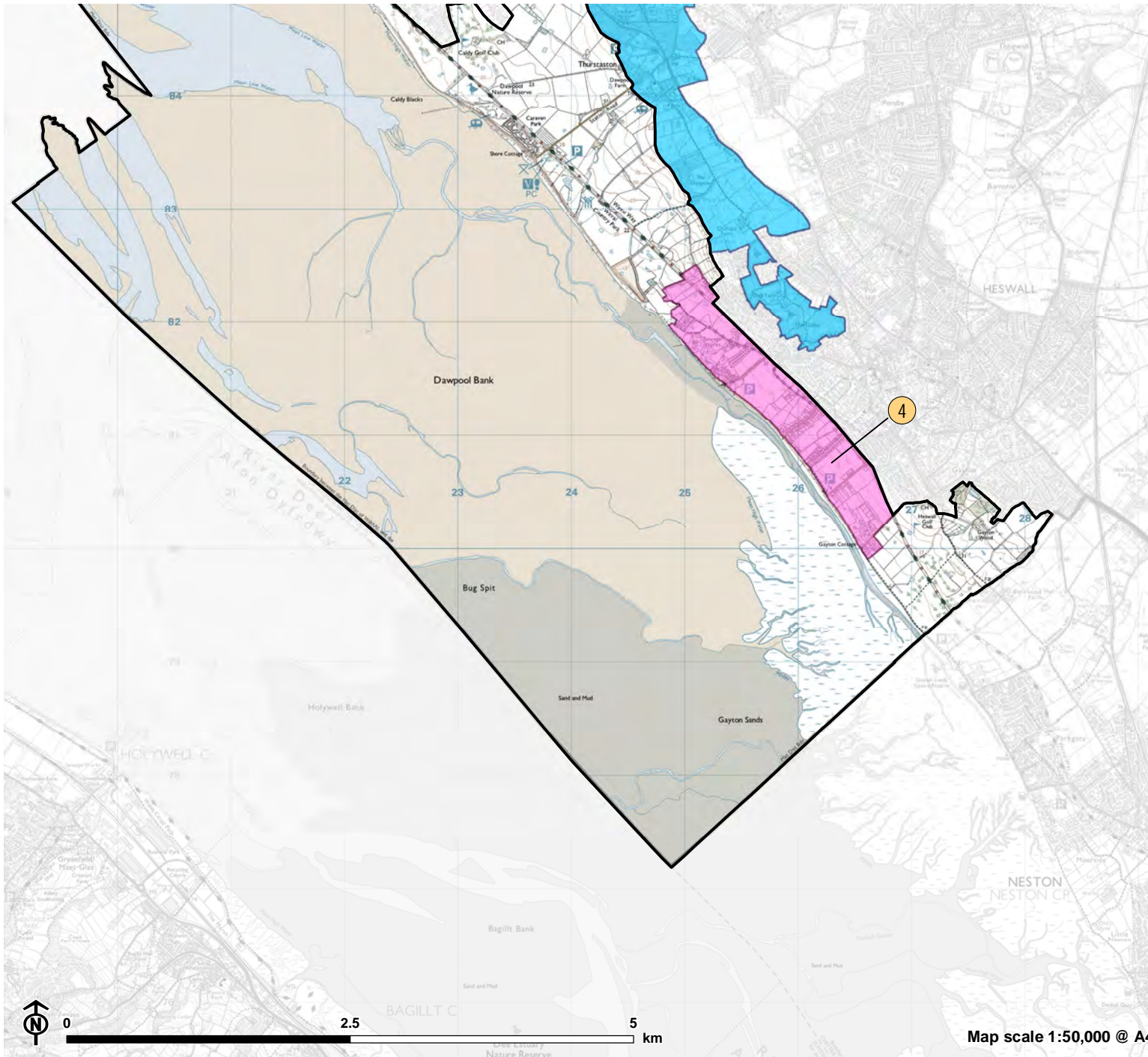


- Wirral boundary
- Candidate Local Landscape Designation**
- Dee Estuary
- Changes to Area of Special Landscape Value**
- Addition
- Remove
- 1** Boundary redrawn at the mouth of the Dee Estuary
- 2** Extend to include natural shoreline of the Royal Liverpool Golf Course
- 3** Boundary drawn to exclude the higher elevation farmland (proposed as part of the Central Wirral Sandstone Hills candidate LLD)



Map scale 1:50,000 @ A4

Figure 6b: Dee Estuary Candidate Local Landscape Designation (South)



- Wirral boundary
- Candidate Local Landscape Designation**
- Dee Estuary
- Changes to Area of Special Landscape Value**
- Addition
- Remove
- 4 Extend to include coastal farmland



Map scale 1:50,000 @ A4



Thornton Hough Estates

Candidate LLD name	Thornton Hough Estates		
Summary Information			
Relationship to existing local landscape designation	Thornton Hough ASLV, designated in the Merseyside Structure Plan (1980) and retained in the Wirral UDP (2000).		
Extent of area	The candidate LLD is located in the centre of Wirral between the M53 in the east and the settlement edge of Heswall/Gayton in the west. It covers the villages of Thornton Hough, Brimstage and Raby and the surrounding gently rolling estate-influenced farmland.		
Landscape character context (% coverage by the existing ASLV)	<p>4b Thornton Hough Lowland Farmland and Estates (38%)</p> <p>4c Clatterbrook and Dibbin Valley Lowland Farmland and Estates (6%)</p> <p>4d Raby Lowland Rural Farmland and Estates (4%)</p>		
Evaluation of Area of Search			
Desk review (see Table 3.1)	LCA	Take forward	Notes
	4b	Yes	<p>Much of the LCA, centred on Thornton Hough and Thornton Manor, fully meets the criteria. The area forms a coherent intact agricultural landscape with a strong sense of place deriving from its distinctive estate character, historic villages and farmsteads.</p> <p>Further survey is required to assess farmland to the north of Brimstage which is currently outside the ASLV. This is included within the Area of Search.</p> <p>Review area to the south of the Clatterbridge Hospital.</p>
	4c	Part	<p>Most of the LCA does not meet the criteria due to disruption from the M53 and the proximity of the urban conurbation.</p> <p>Review the boundary of the ASLV around Clatterbridge Hospital. These agricultural fields are currently within the ASLV but have been impacted by further development at the hospital and their proximity to the M53 and the motorway junction.</p> <p>Field survey is required to assess the rural valley around Storeton which is currently outside the ASLV. Despite its proximity to the M53 this area has a rural secluded character and a discernible estate character due to the Lever Causeway and traditional estate cottages and agricultural buildings within the village.</p>
	4d	Part	<p>The LCA currently lies outside the ASLV but meets the criteria due to its coherent rural character and lack of human influence.</p> <p>Field survey is required to assess Raby village and the surrounding farmland and its connection to the Leverhulme Estate.</p>
Boundary commentary	<p>See Figure 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The northern boundary along A5137 Brimstage Road/Brimstage Lane is considered to be correct. This excludes landscape to the north of the village which includes coniferous plantations and is disrupted by auditory intrusion from the M53 and the railway and influenced by the proximity of overhead powerlines. It also excludes areas to the east of the M53 between the village of Storeton and Storeton Hill which were reviewed as part of the Area of Search but considered to be a lower quality landscape and influenced by the proximity of the M53. 		

- Extend the boundary to the north to include the formal avenue of mature trees extending across the motorway to Storeton, as a valued historical feature related to the Leverhulme Estate and a valued green corridor with potential recreational opportunities (**Fig 7: point 1**).
- The eastern boundary along B5151 Clatterbridge Road /Willaston Road is considered correct as landscape to the east of this boundary is of lower quality and more disrupted by the M53.
- Retain the formal avenue extending north of Clatterbridge Hospital to A5137 Brimstage Road within the LLD (**Fig 7: point 2**).
- Pull back the boundary to the east around Clatterbridge Hospital / M53 Junction 4 where the landscape is significantly influenced by human activity (including street lighting along the B5151 Mount Road and the junction with the M53 and traffic noise). Exclude fields north of the hospital currently under arable use but under-managed and with fragmented hedgerows. Draw the new LLD boundary to include agricultural fields on the rising landform to the west of the hospital. The landform and the wooded causeway along the ridgeline provide enclosure to the estate landscape around Thornton Hough and screens views to the motorway corridor to the east. This also aligns the candidate LLD boundary closer to the boundary of the Thornton Hough Lowland Farmland and Estates LCA (**Fig 7: point 3**).
- Extend the LLD to the south from its current location along the Raby Brook to include the historic settlement of Raby and the tranquil rural farmland around the village. Extend the boundary south to Willow Lane and Willowbrow Road and along footpath 49 towards Yew Tree Farm. This area has similar characteristics to the landscape immediately north of Thornton Hough, with an intact historic field pattern and winding rural lanes lined by Cheshire rail fencing or mature hedgerows and scattered sandstone farmsteads. Mature hedgerow oaks and wooded field ponds create the sense of a wooded landscape and the area retains a sense of separation from larger settlements due to woodland on higher ground to the east. The extension to the LLD results in coverage of the wider setting of Thornton Hough village to the south where there are clear views across the undulating farmland to the All Saints church spire and Thornton Hall Hotel (**Fig 7: point 4**).
- The western boundary along the B5136 Liverpool Road which includes Thornton Hall Hotel but excludes the housing development on the edge of Thornton Hough is considered to be correct. Further north, the LLD boundary includes fields which provide a setting to the Thornton Hough Conservation Area and the Thornton Manor Registered Park and Garden at Manor Wood.

Recommendations

- Retain the majority of the existing ASLV as an LLD, with modifications to the boundaries as noted above.
- Extend the LLD to the north to include the formal avenue of trees into Storeton. The formal avenue meets the local distinctiveness, landscape quality and condition, and natural/cultural qualities criteria:
 - Local distinctiveness: continuation of formal avenues of ornamental trees which create distinctive linear features across the landscape. The avenue is broken by the M53 and Storeton roundabout.
 - Landscape quality / condition: the ornamental tree line is in good condition.
 - Scenic qualities: Classic vistas along the formal avenue. Noise from the M53 disrupts tranquillity.
 - Natural / cultural qualities: The formal avenue is recorded as priority habitat deciduous woodland and wood pasture. Avenues are part of the estate character created by Lord Leverhulme.
 - Recreation qualities: There is no public access to the formal avenues.
- Extend the LLD to the south to include the village of Raby and surrounding farmland. The area meets all the criteria except for recreation quality.
 - Local distinctiveness: Cheshire rail estate fencing and red sandstone walling give a recognisable estate character to Raby.
 - Landscape quality / condition: Well-managed rural landscape in good condition with strong historic field pattern. Some subdivision of fields with timber and wire fencing.

- Scenic qualities: Views from Raby to Thornton Hough across farmland, including views to the distinctive spire of All Saints. Rural views channelled and framed by woodland blocks and hedgerows.
- Natural / cultural qualities: Intact historic field patterns around Raby correspond to estate organisation in the 18th and 19th centuries. Raby contains a number of Grade II listed historic agricultural buildings and estate cottages.
- Recreation qualities: There is one right of way in the area.
- The aim should be to retain and enhance the estate character of the area, including the use of native hedgerows and Cheshire rail fencing for field boundaries and sandstone walling along roads. Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the landscape, particularly the oak trees that are characteristic of this area and promote the use of native woodland boundaries to provide visual screening in relation to the urban fringes and transport routes outside the LLD. Promote additional recreational routes within the area and seek opportunities to open up the linear causeways for public access and recreation.

Full Evaluation – Thornton Hough Estates	
Local distinctiveness and sense of place	<p>This LLD has a strong sense of place derived from the recognisable estate character of the landscape associated with Thornton Hough and Thornton Manor along with pockets of historic parkland around smaller halls (such as Stanacres and Rocklands). The landscape is characterised by Cheshire rail estate fencing, red sandstone walling and formal avenues of ornamental trees which create distinctive linear features extending across the landscape.</p> <p>The enclosed wooded character of the landscape and ridgelines in the west and east create the impression of the landscape being set within a wide 'bowl', forming a discrete rural area free of disruption from adjacent urban areas.</p>
Landscape quality	<p>Overall, a visually coherent estate landscape which is well-managed and in good condition, with a strong historic field pattern bound by well-managed hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees, often oaks. The area has a degree of ecological integrity due to its network of woodland blocks, avenues, trees, hedgerows and wooded field ponds.</p> <p>Some fields to the south of Clatterbridge Hospital and along Raby Road have been subdivided with timber or electric fences for horse paddocks which detracts from the rural character of the landscape. There is also some degradation of the parkland landscape associated with Thornton Manor, and the grounds of Thornton Manor are on the Heritage at Risk register. Overhead electricity wires and pylons outside of the LLD area are visually intrusive locally.</p>
Scenic qualities and perceptual aspects	<p>The area has a strong visual character, with rural views across the farmland channelled or framed by geometric woodland blocks and mature hedgerows with hedgerow trees, providing a wooded character and sense of enclosure to the landscape. Classic vistas can be experienced along the formal avenues extending from Thornton Manor through Brimstage to Storeton and east to A5137 Brimstage Road. The spire of All Saints, Thornton Hough is visible across much of the LLD, and is a distinctive feature in the landscape rising above the treeline. Rising ridgelines create a sense of seclusion and woodland screens development outside the LLD area. The strong rural and tranquil character is emphasised by the sparse settlement, confined to isolated sandstone farms and the small settlements of Thornton Hough, Brimstage and Raby.</p> <p>Occasional views of electricity pylons outside of the LLD area to the west are an incongruous feature but do not detract from the rural character of the landscape in this area. Noise from the adjacent M53 disrupts tranquillity particularly to the north of the LLD, but a narrow corridor has been retained to include the causeway into Storeton.</p>
Natural and cultural qualities	<p>Throughout the area there are many habitats that contribute to the value of the landscape. Small watercourses and field ponds are common, often set within priority habitat deciduous woodland and reedbeds - Thornton Hough Ponds are designated as LWS/ SBI for their wetland habitats. Priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland is found throughout the area, mostly in the form of geometric woodland blocks, with a mix of deciduous species, predominantly oak. Manor Wood is designated as LWS/SBI for its woodland habitats.</p> <p>The concentration of intact historic field patterns of predominantly late post-medieval agricultural improvement around the villages of Thornton Hough and Raby is noted in the Cheshire HLC. This relates to the reorganisation of medieval open field systems in the 18th and 19th century.</p> <p>Traditional buildings and locally distinct materials are a feature of the historic villages within the LLD. Thornton Hough, which was expanded as a model village in the 1880s by William Lever, is characterised by red roofs and black and white panelling above a red brick or sandstone base, with distinctive brickwork on chimneys. The village is designated as a Conservation Area and has a number of historic listed buildings, including the two churches - All Saints (Grade II listed) and St George (Grade II* listed) with their distinctive towers, and the Grade II* listed Thornton Manor (built in the 1840s and substantially altered in the 1890s by Viscount Leverhulme). The grounds and parkland of the Manor are designated as a Grade II* Registered Park and Garden.</p> <p>Historic agricultural buildings and estate cottages in Brimstage and Raby, many of which were built by the Leverhulme Estate, also contribute to the scenic quality of the area. These include several listed buildings</p>

Full Evaluation – Thornton Hough Estates	
	including the 12 th century Brimstage Hall and Tower (Grade I listed) and Grade II listed agricultural buildings and cottages in Raby.
Recreation value	A few public rights of way, including National Cycle Route 56, provide limited recreational access to the area.
Associations	William Hesketh Lever, later Viscount Leverhulme, was a Victorian entrepreneur and founder of Lever Brothers, originally a soap manufacturing business based in Port Sunlight, that is now part of Unilever. Lever moved to Thornton Manor, buying much of the surrounding farmland to establish what is now the Leverhulme Estate. He built estate cottages at Brimstage, Raby and Storeton and remodelled the village of Thornton Hough in line with his earlier work at Port Sunlight. The formal avenues lined by ornamental trees are a distinctive feature of the LLD area and were designed as private roads for Lever to travel between Thornton Manor and his business at Port Sunlight.

Representative photos of the landscape



Formal tree-lined avenue leading from Thornton Manor with red sandstone boundary



Pasture fields east of Raby with mature hedgerows and oaks, with the spire of All Saints, Thornton Hough in the distance

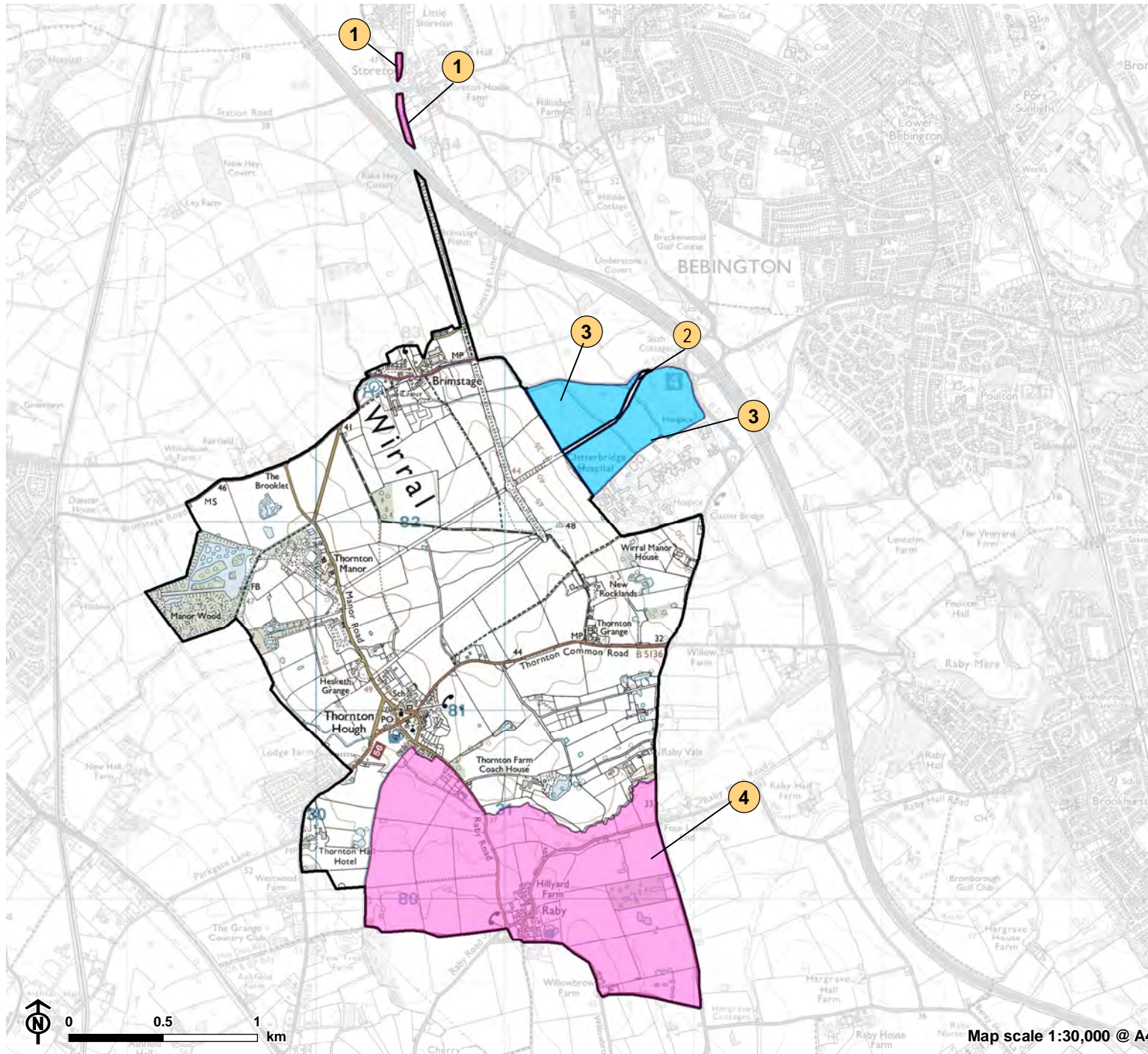


Historic buildings in Brimstage with red sandstone boundaries and working farms



Arable fields bound by red sandstone walls with wooded ridgeline in backdrop

Figure 7: Thornton Hough Estates Candidate Local Landscape Designation



- Wirral boundary
- Candidate Local Landscape Designation**
- Thornton Hough Estates
- Changes to Area of Special Landscape Value**
- Remove
- Addition

- 1** Extend to include continuation of formal linear avenue across M53 into Storeton
- 2** Retain continuation of formal linear avenue to A5137 Brimstage Road
- 3** Exclude under-managed fields north of Clatterbridge Hospital
- 4** Extend to include Raby and surrounding fields



Map scale 1:30,000 @ A4