

3c: Irby and Pensby Sandstone Hills

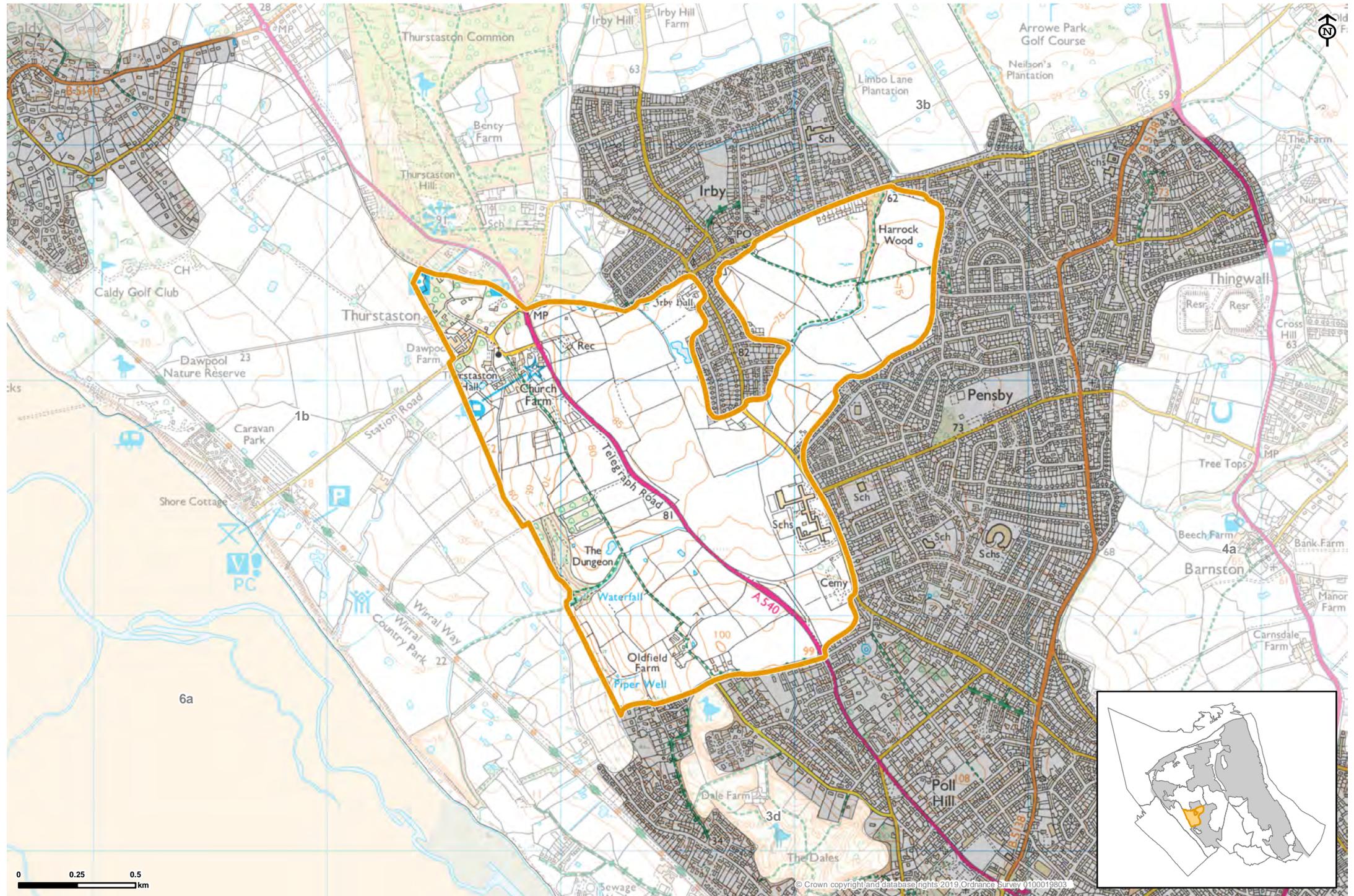
Summary

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



View west across the Dee Estuary from Oldfield Farm

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Key Characteristics

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

Natural Character

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



The Dungeon

Cultural Landscape

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Looking east from the A540 Telegraph Road towards Pensby High School

Perceptual Landscape

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

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

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

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



St Bartholomew, Thurstaston

Valued Landscape Attributes

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

Landscape Condition

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

Key Issues

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

Landscape Strategy

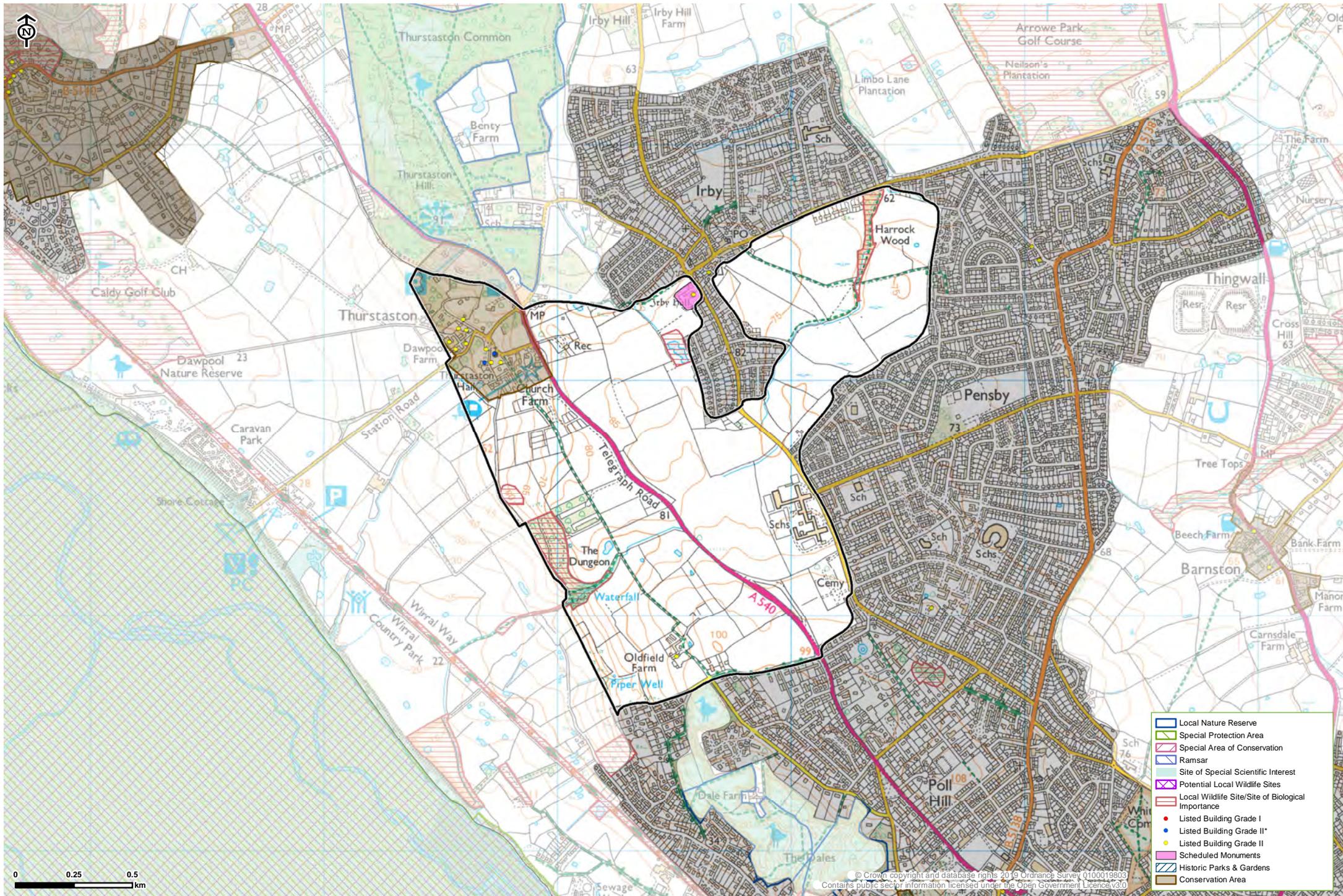
8.70 The overall strategy for Irby and Pensby Sandstone Hills is to conserve and enhance the existing historic field pattern, hedgerows and woodland areas.

Landscape Guidelines

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

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

3c: Irby and Pensby Sandstone Hills



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

3d: Heswall Dales Sandstone Hills

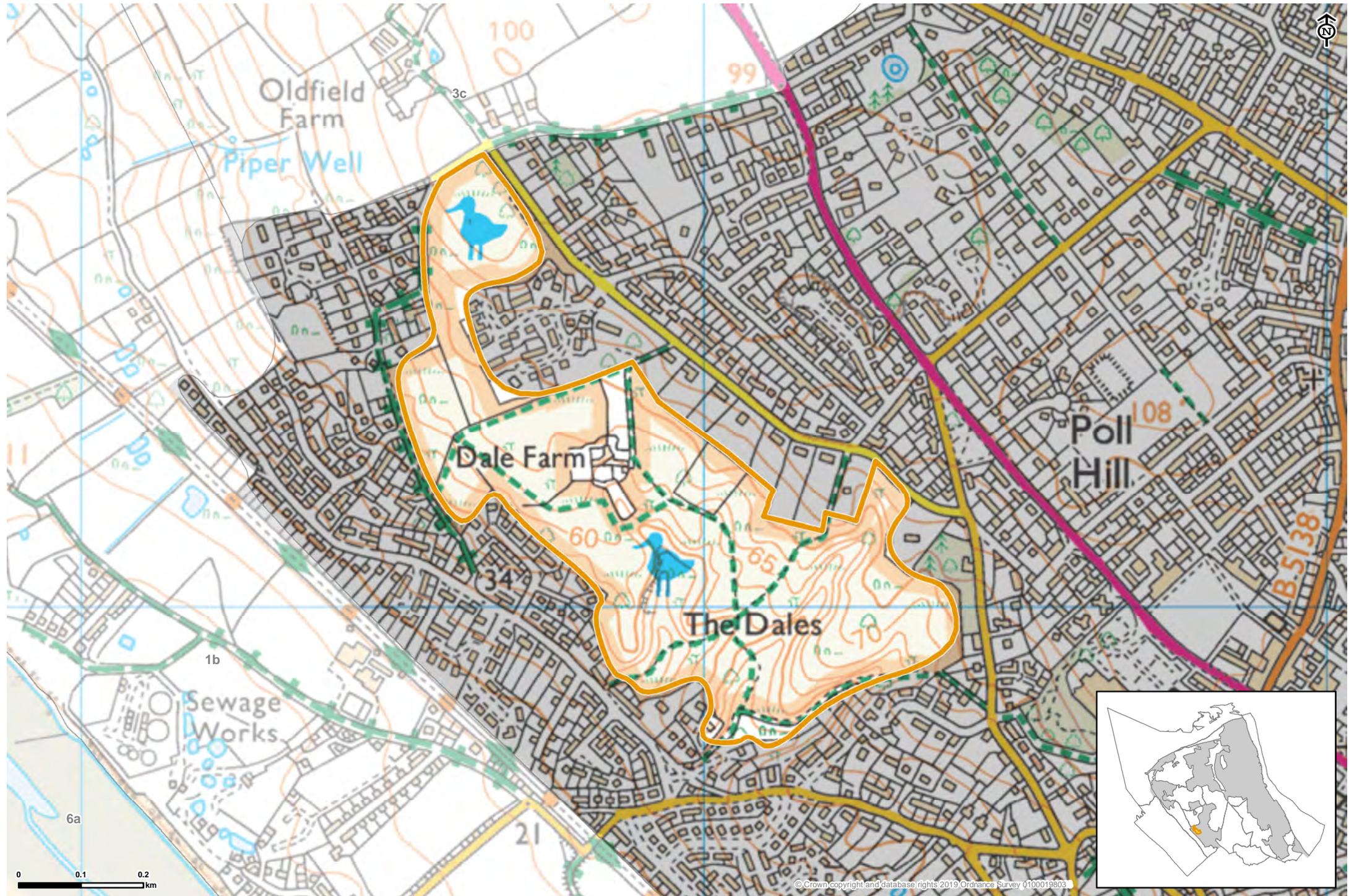
Summary

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



Heswall Dales looking west

3d: Heswall Dales Sandstone Hills



Key Characteristics

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



Heswall Dales

Natural Landscape

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cultural Landscape

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

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

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

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



Heswall Dales looking north-east

Perceptual Landscape

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

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

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

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

Valued Landscape Attributes

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



Heswall Dales looking west

Landscape Condition

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

Key Issues

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

Landscape Strategy

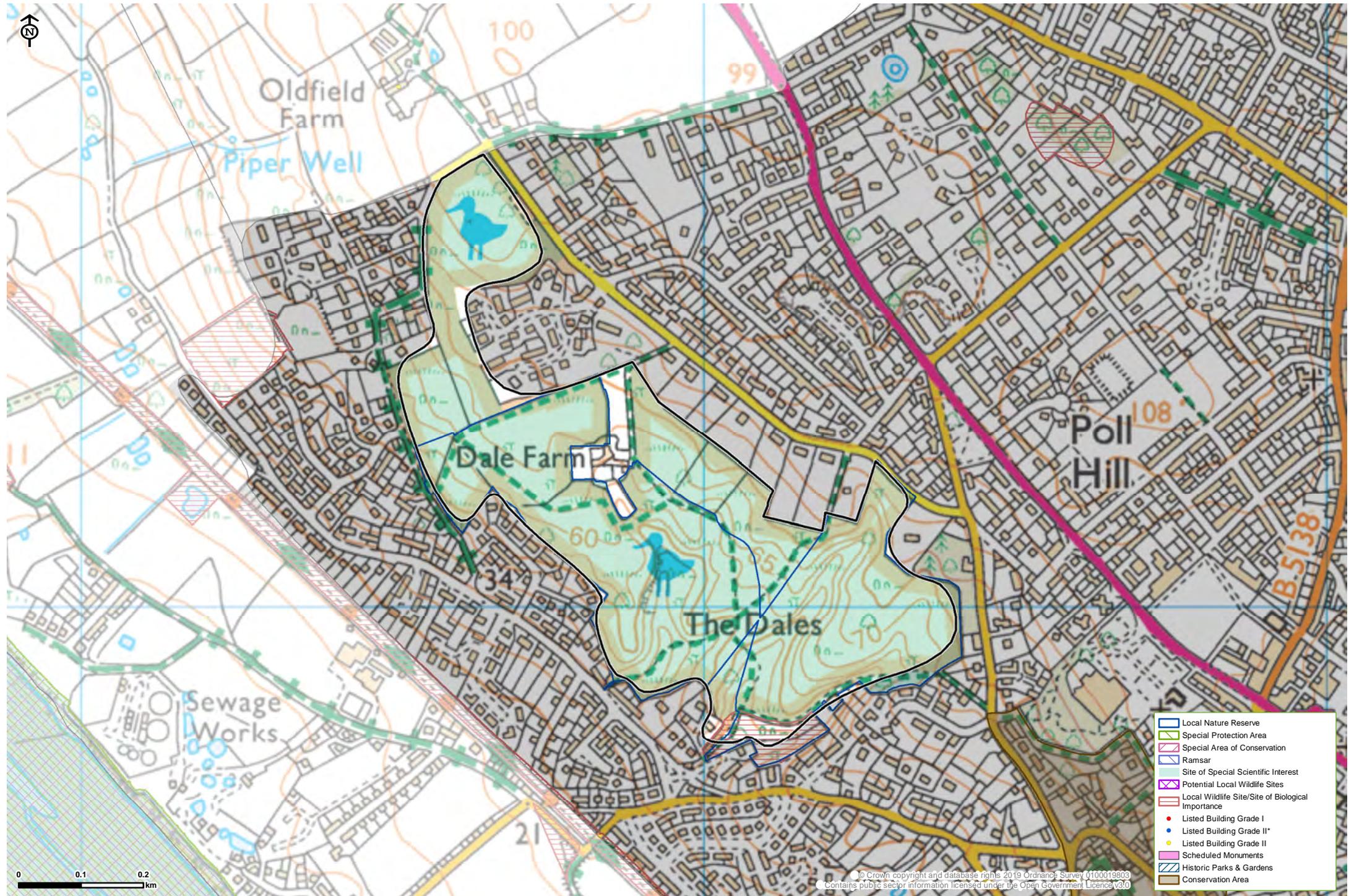
8.86 The overall strategy for the Heswall Wooded Sandstone Hills and Dales is to conserve and enhance key features including the heathland and woodland mix and expansive views to the west.

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

Landscape Guidelines

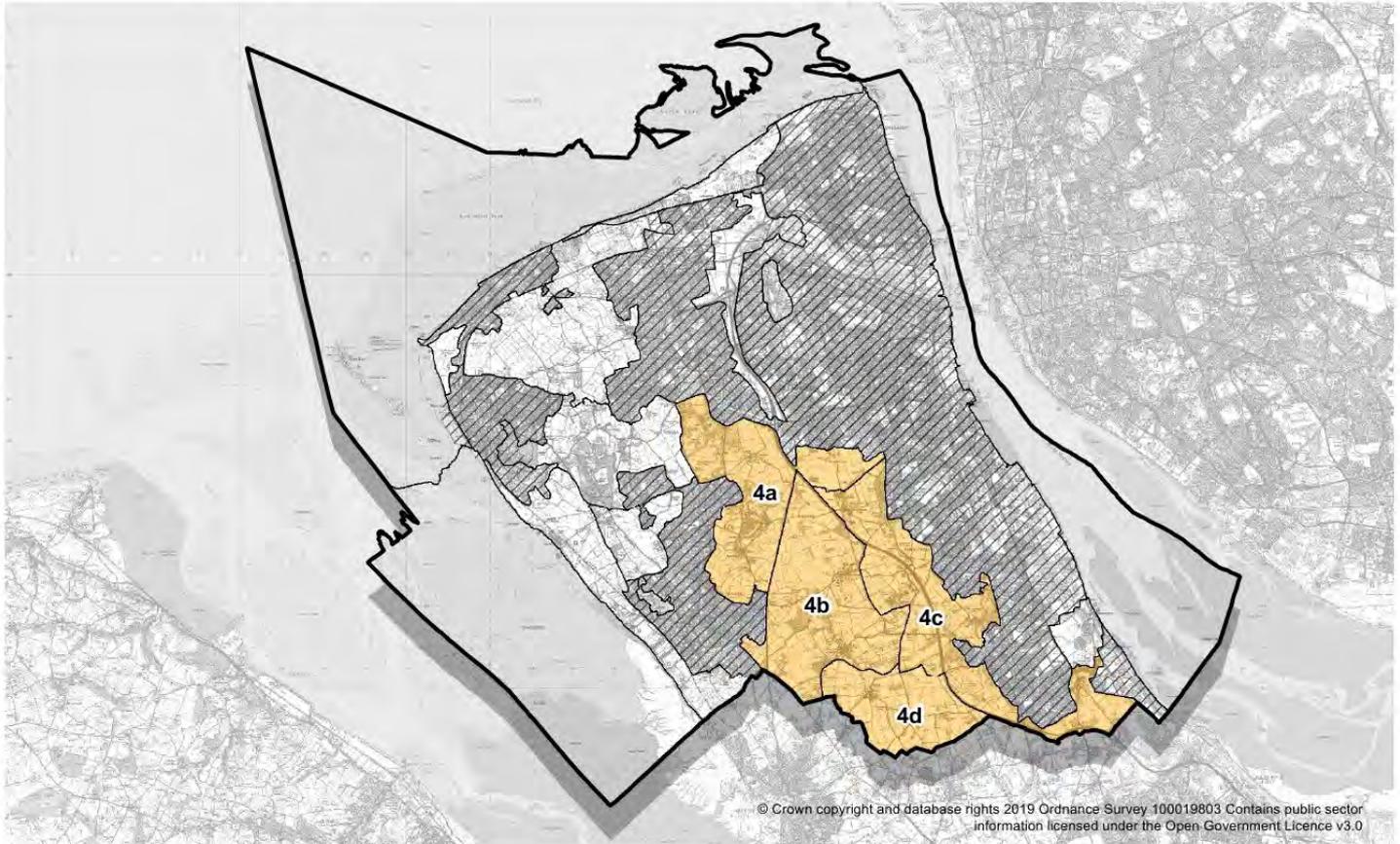
- Conserve the mosaic of open heathland and enclosed woodlands. Protect the heathland through vegetation management.
- Conserve, enhance and manage the valued heathland, grassland and woodland habitats. Implement habitat creation and management, as part of the West Wirral Heathlands and Arrowe Park Nature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

3d: Heswall Dales Sandstone Hills



Chapter 9

LCT 4: Lowland Farmland and Estates



Description

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

Landscape Character Areas

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

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

4a: Landican and Thingwall Lowland Farmland and Estates

Summary

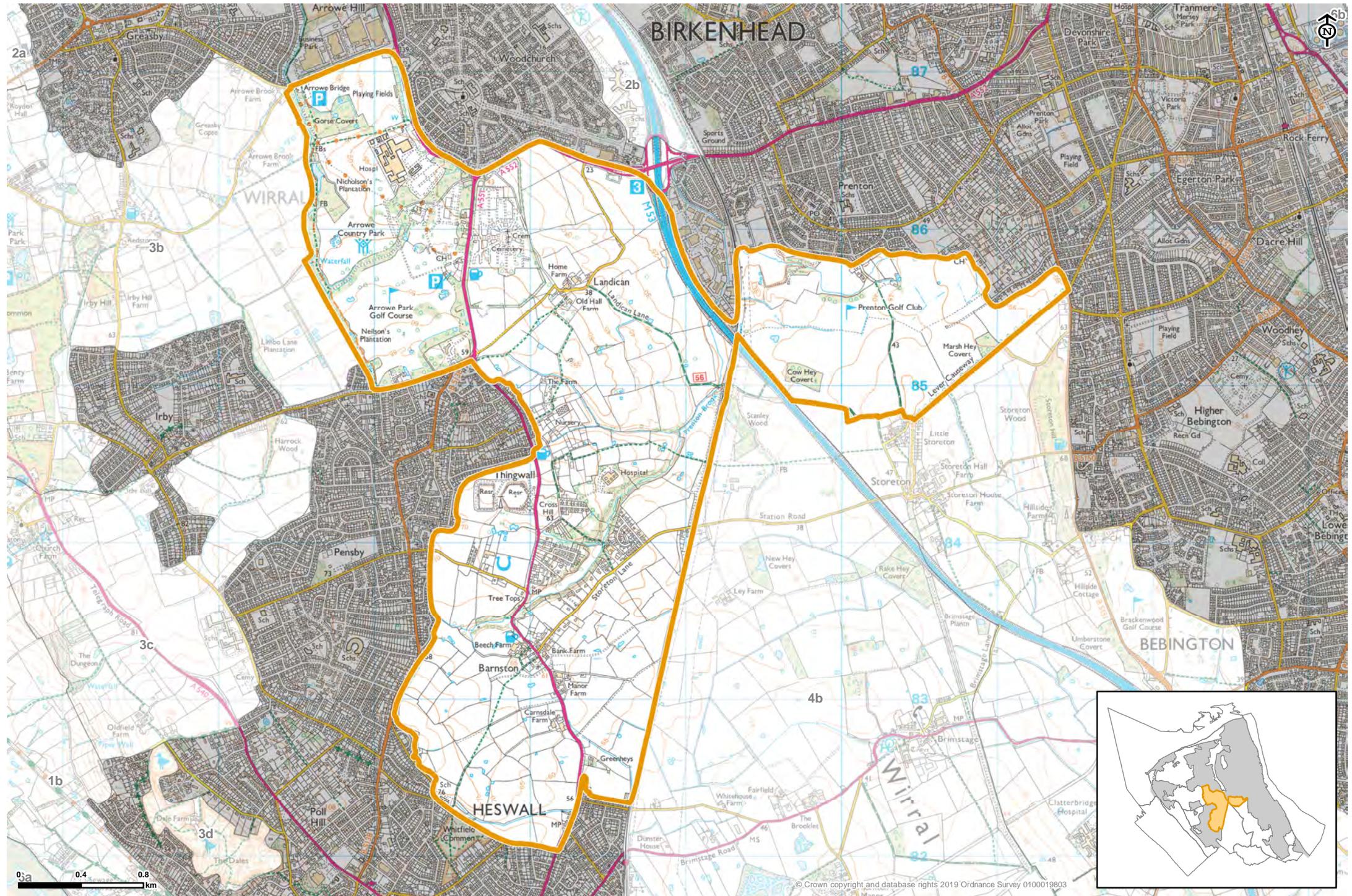
The Landican and Thingwall Lowland Farmland and Estates LCA lies in the centre of the borough. It is an undulating landscape of mixed farmland interspersed with recreational parkland at Arrowe Country Park and the villages of Barnston and Landican. Views are enclosed by wooded horizons, although there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

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



Looking east from Storeton Lane

4a: Landican and Thingwall Lowland Farmland



Key Characteristics

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

Natural Landscape

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

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

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

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



Manor Farm, Barnston

Cultural Landscape

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Home Farm, Landican

Perceptual Landscape

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

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

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

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

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

Valued Landscape Attributes

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



Landican Lane looking east towards Prenton

Landscape Condition

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

Key Issues

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

Landscape Strategy

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

Landscape Guidelines

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

4b: Thornton Hough Lowland Farmland and Estates

Summary

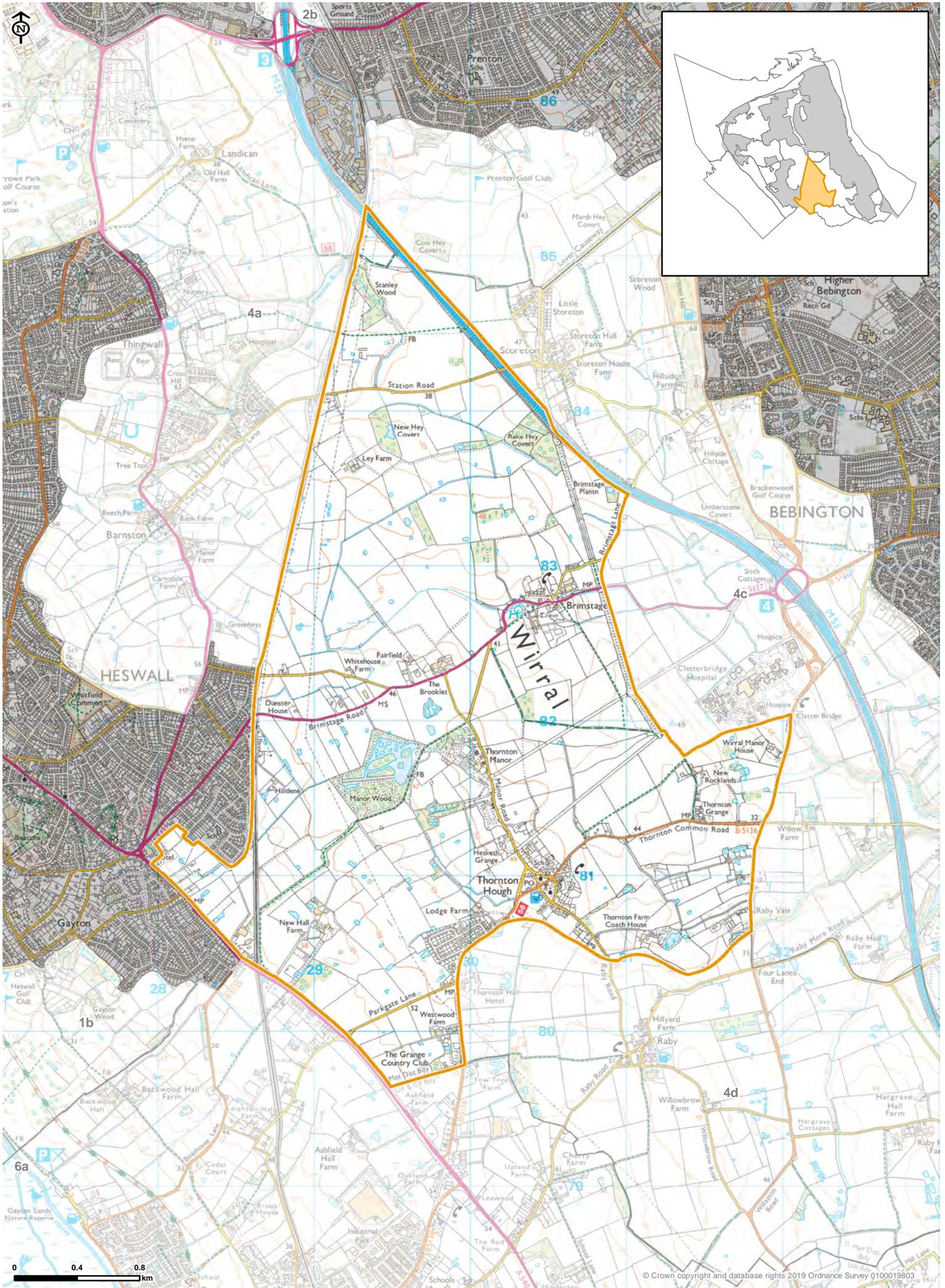
Thornton Hough Lowland Farmland and Estates LCA lies in the centre of Wirral. It is a largely flat agricultural landscape with a strong rural character and few urban detracting features. There is an estate character in the landscape connected to Thornton Manor. Buildings in the historic village of Thornton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

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



Manor Road looking north-east towards Storeton Wood

4b: Thornton Hough Lowland Farmland and Estates



Key Characteristics

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

Natural Landscape

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

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

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

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

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



Thornton Hough

Cultural Landscape

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Formal linear avenue opposite Thornton Manor

Perceptual Landscape

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

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

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

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

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

Valued Landscape Attributes

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



Brimstage Road looking south-west towards Thornton Hough

Landscape Condition

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

Key Issues

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

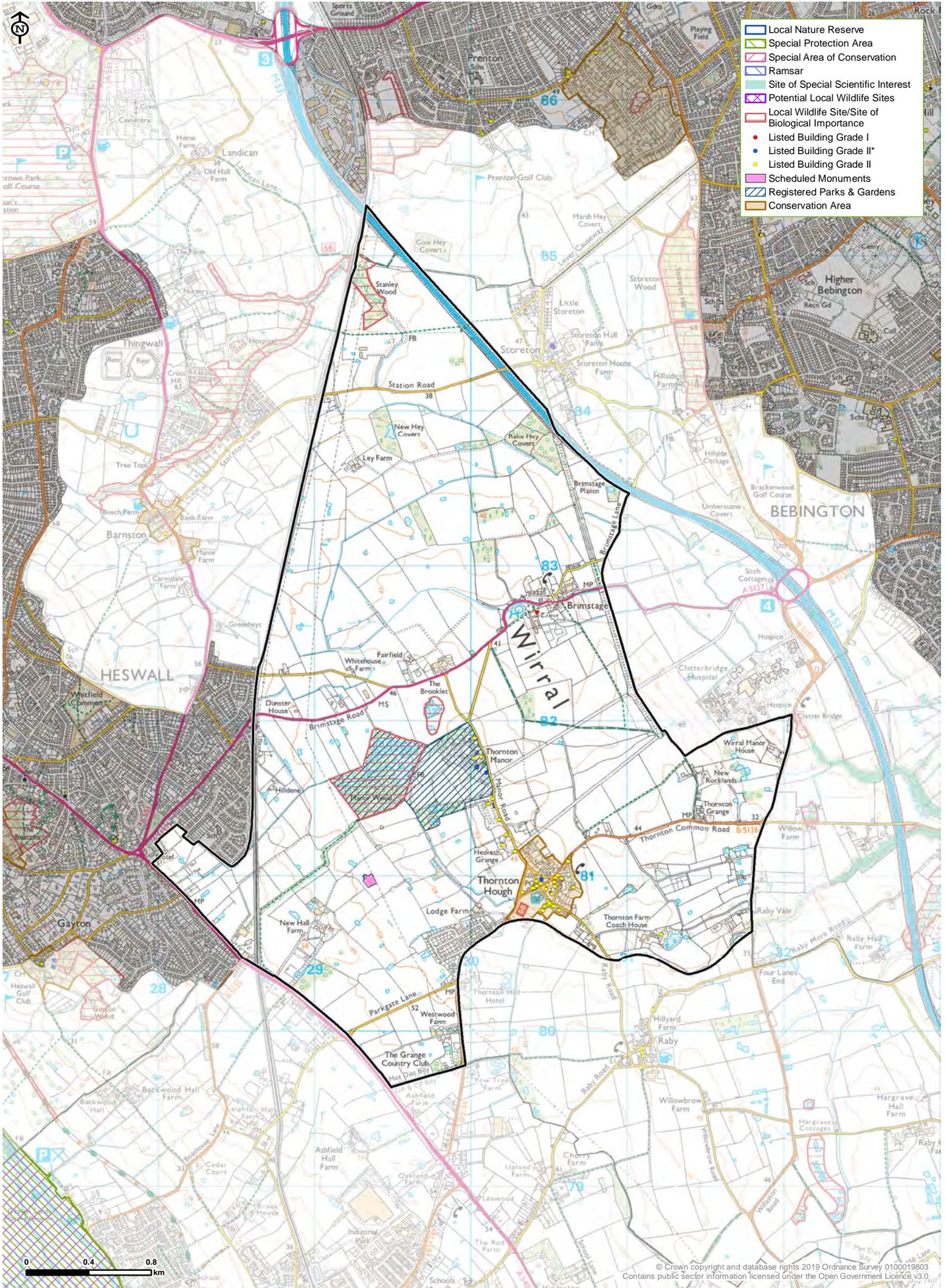
Landscape Strategy

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

Landscape Guidelines

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

4b: Thornton Hough Lowland Farmland and Estates



4c Clatterbrook and Dibbin Valley Lowland Farmland and Estates

Summary

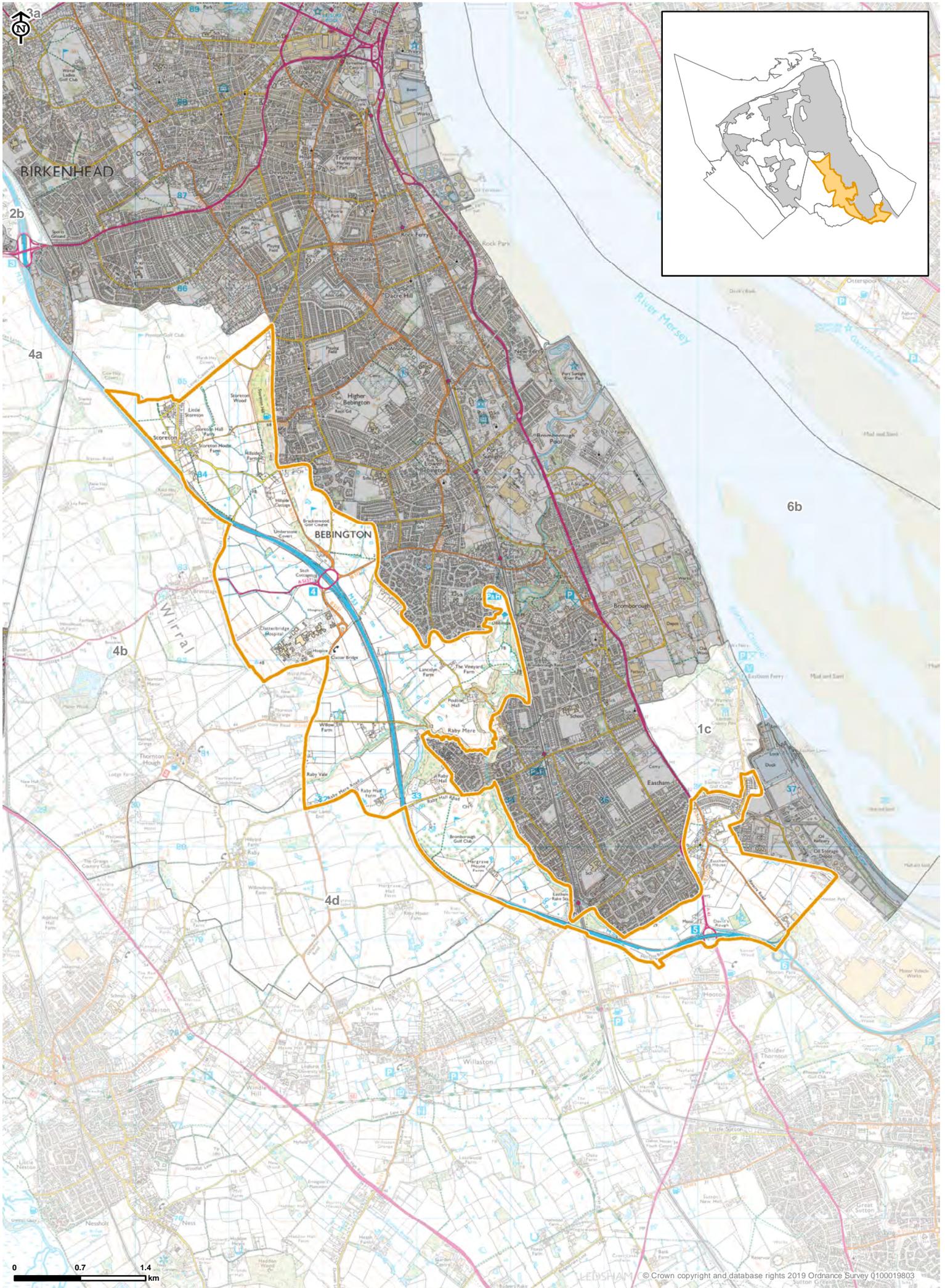
Clatterbrook and Dibbin Valley Lowland Farmland and Estates LCA lies in the south-east of the borough. It is a narrow agricultural area which follows river valleys and extends from the urban edge. It contains many important wetland habitats extending south from Levers Causeway along the well-wooded urban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

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



Looking south-east from Red Hill Road

4c: Clatterbrook and Dibben Valley Lowland



Key Characteristics

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

Natural Landscape

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Eastham Village Conservation Area

Cultural Landscape

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Perceptual Landscape

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Eastham Oil Refinery looking east from Rivacre Road

Valued Landscape Attributes

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

Landscape Condition

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

Key Issues

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

Landscape Strategy

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

Landscape Guidelines

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

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

4c: Clatterbrook and Dibben Valley Lowland

