

Wirral Site Specific Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

Final report

Prepared by LUC

September 2021



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Chapter 1

Introduction

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council commissioned LUC in February 2020 to produce an addendum to the Wirral Site Specific Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (2019) covering five additional land parcels identified as part of a further comprehensive Green Belt Review, which was published for public consultation in January 2020.

Purpose of the study

1.1 The purpose of this study is to provide an assessment of the extent to which the character and quality of the landscape of these sites would, in principle, be susceptible to change as a result of the introduction of built development.

1.2 This study forms part of the evidence base to support the New Local Plan, which is being prepared by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council for the period between 2020 and 2035.

1.3 The outputs of this work will be used by the Council to:

- Inform the evaluation of potential development locations;
- Identify land where development would be most appropriate to minimise impact on the landscape, such as by identifying areas of least sensitivity; and

- Provide a tool for informing mitigation for any future changes to the landscape.

Assessment scope

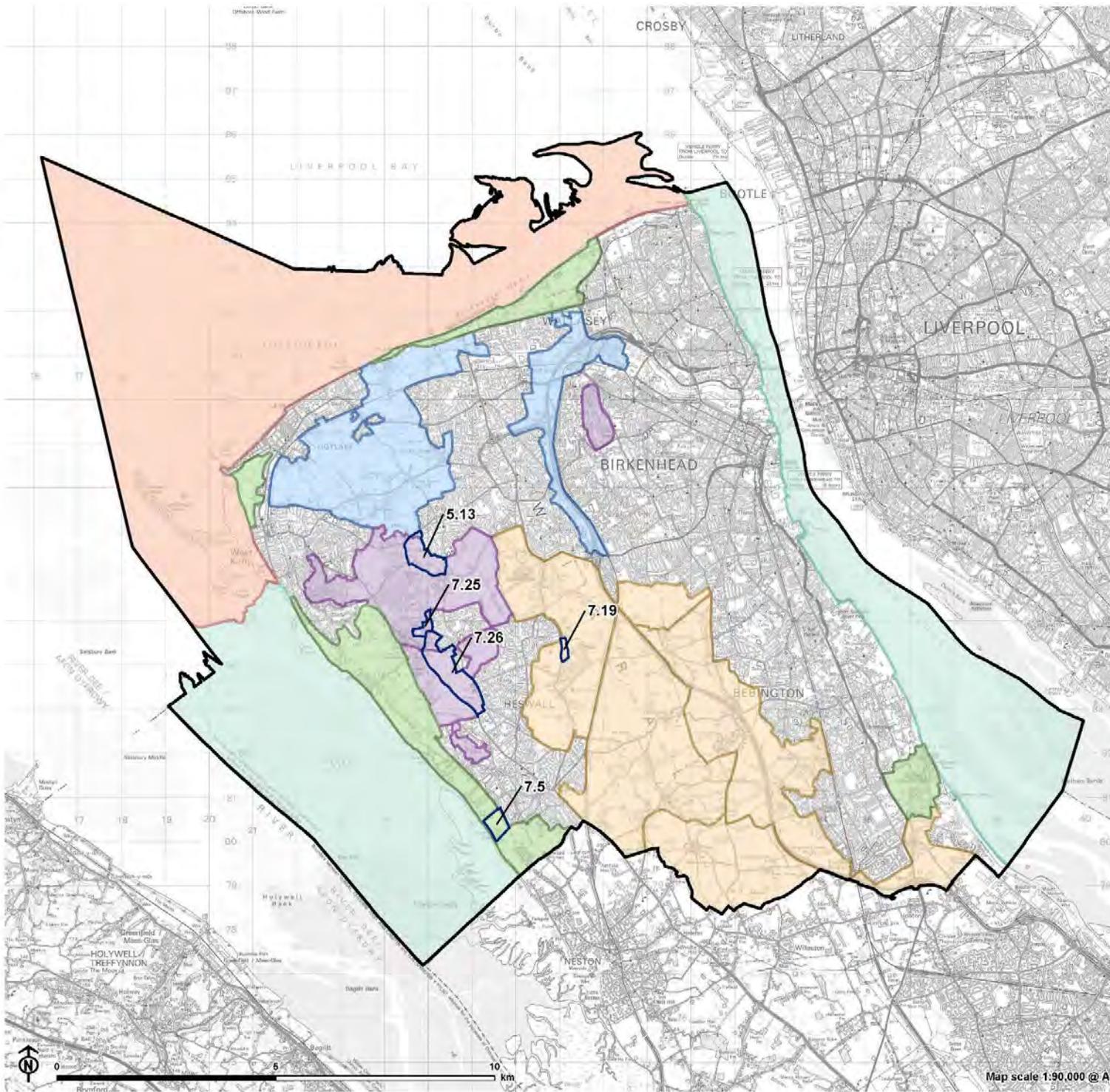
1.4 This study forms an addendum to the Wirral Site Specific Landscape Sensitivity Assessment prepared by LUC in November 2019. The 2019 Assessment paid specific attention to sites identified for further investigation by Wirral Council in an Initial Green Belt Review in September 2018. As part of the preparation for the new Local Plan, a further comprehensive review of the Green Belt was undertaken and published for public comment in January 2020. The Wirral Green Belt Review 2019, which replaced the Initial Green Belt Review, identified five additional land parcels that were assessed as making a weak overall contribution to the Green Belt.

1.5 Figure 1.1 below illustrates the additional sites that have now been assessed, grouped within their associated Landscape Character Type and Landscape Character Areas. Figure 1.2 illustrates the sites that have been assessed and the existing Areas of Special Landscape Value shown in the Wirral Unitary Development Plan [\[See reference 1\]](#).

Policy context and methodology

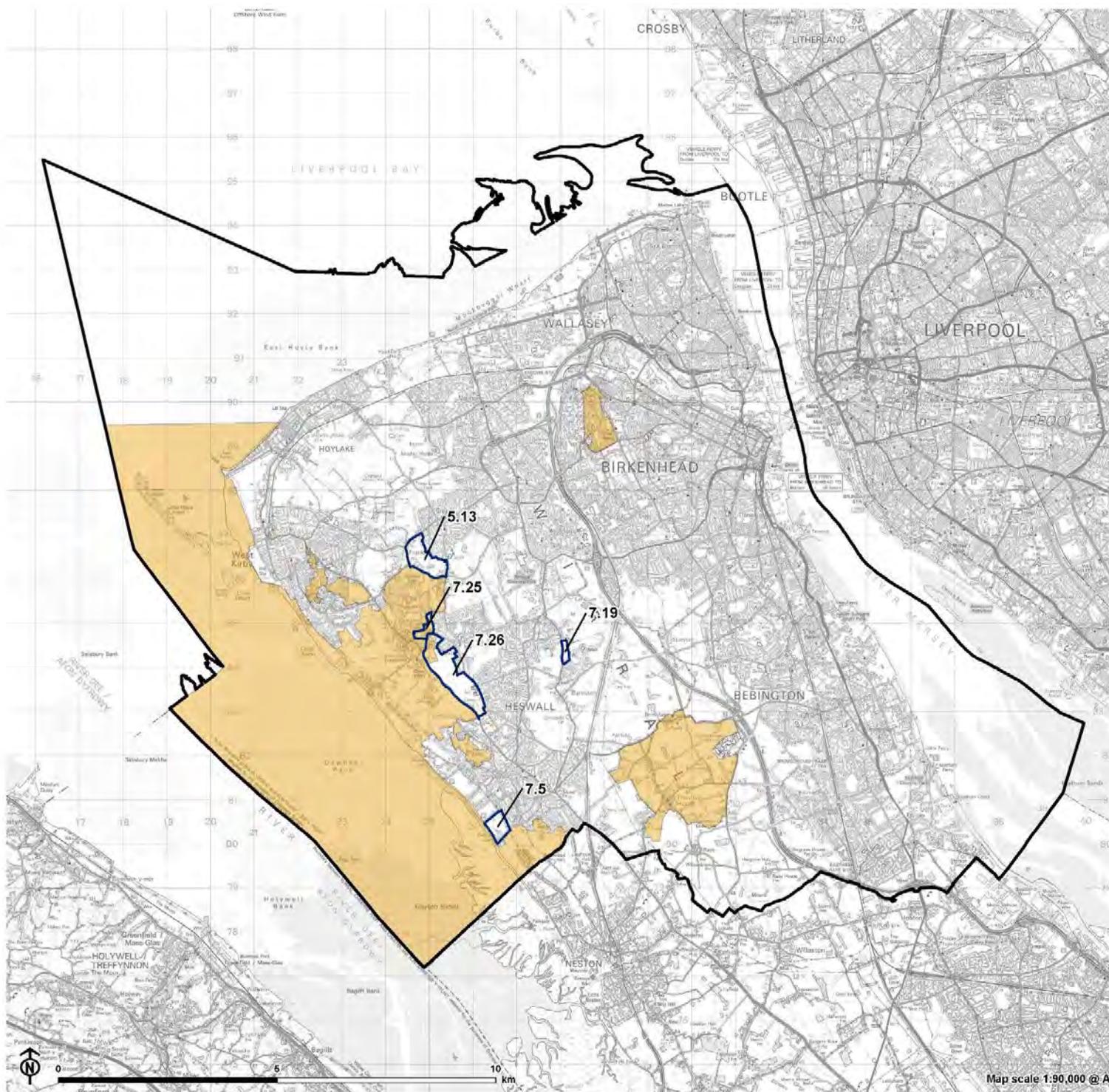
1.6 Details of the policy context and methodology used to assess sites for this addendum can be found within the Wirral Site Specific Landscape Sensitivity Assessment [\[See reference 2\]](#).

**Figure 1.1: Landscape Sensitivity
Parcels**



- Wirral Council boundary
- Landscape Sensitivity Parcels
- 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

Figure 1.2: Areas of Special Landscape Value



- Wirral Council boundary
- Area of Special Landscape Value
- Landscape Sensitivity Parcels

Chapter 2

Project findings

2.1 The methodology including the assessment criteria, five-point scale of landscape sensitivity and development types can be found in Chapter 2 of the Wirral Site Specific Landscape Sensitivity Assessment [See reference 3].

Overall landscape sensitivity assessment results

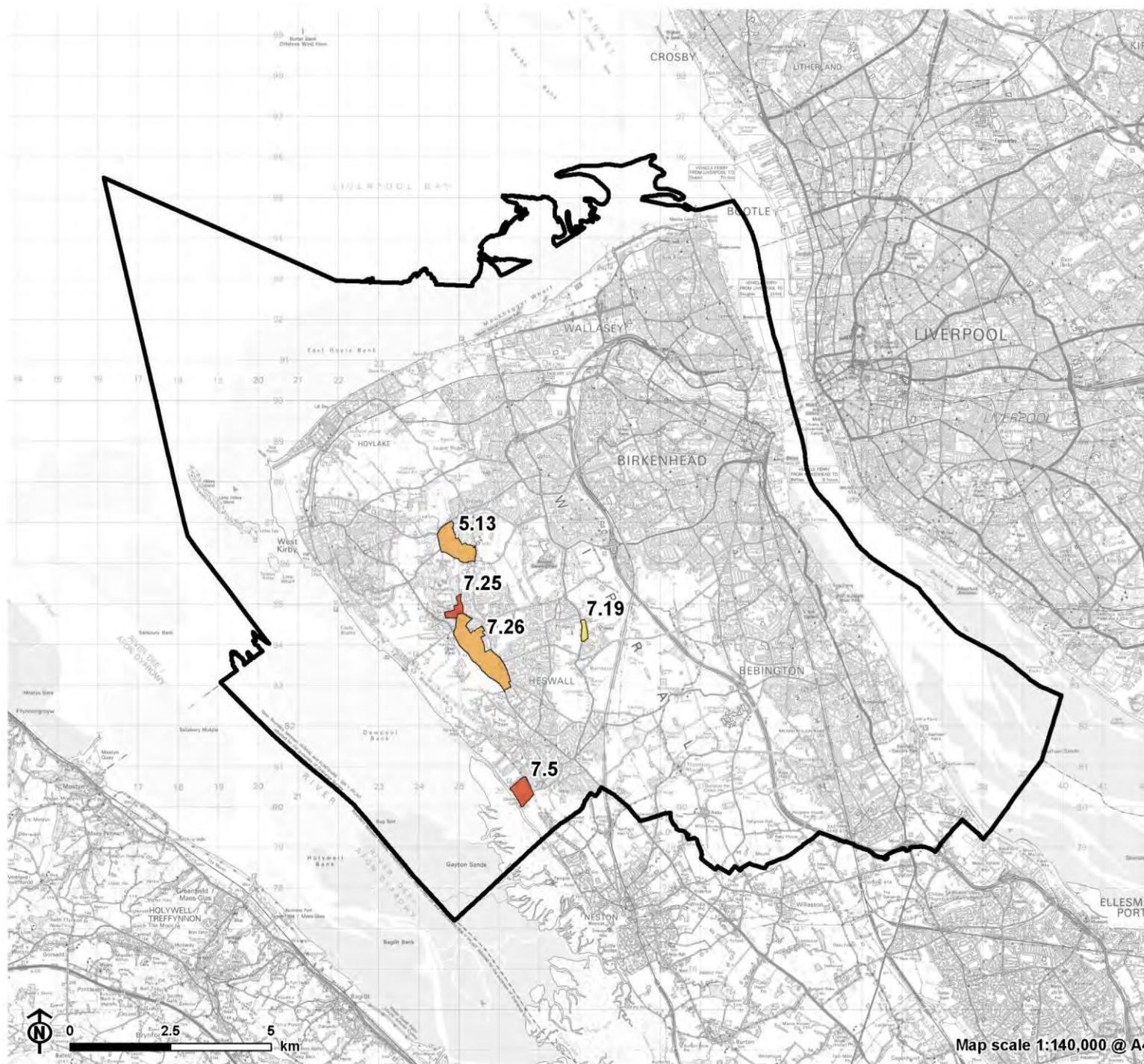
2.2 A summary of the overall landscape sensitivity ratings for each of the assessment areas is provided in Table 2.1. These ratings are also mapped in Figure 2.1.

2.3 Detailed findings for each landscape assessment area are presented in Appendix A. Please note that the overall judgement scores should always be interpreted in conjunction with the information contained in the detailed profiles.

Table 2.1: Summary of results

Landscape sensitivity area	Landscape sensitivity assessment
5.13	Moderate
7.5	Moderate-high
7.19	Low-moderate
7.25	Moderate-high
7.26	Moderate

Figure 2.1: Summary of Overall Sensitivities



Wirral boundary

Landscape Sensitivity Parcel

Parcel sensitivity

- High
- Moderate-high
- Moderate
- Low-moderate
- Low

Map scale 1:140,000 @ A4

Appendix A: Landscape Sensitivity Assessments



Appendix A

Landscape Sensitivity Assessments

Area reference: 5.13

Figure A.1: Map of the area with designations / constraints

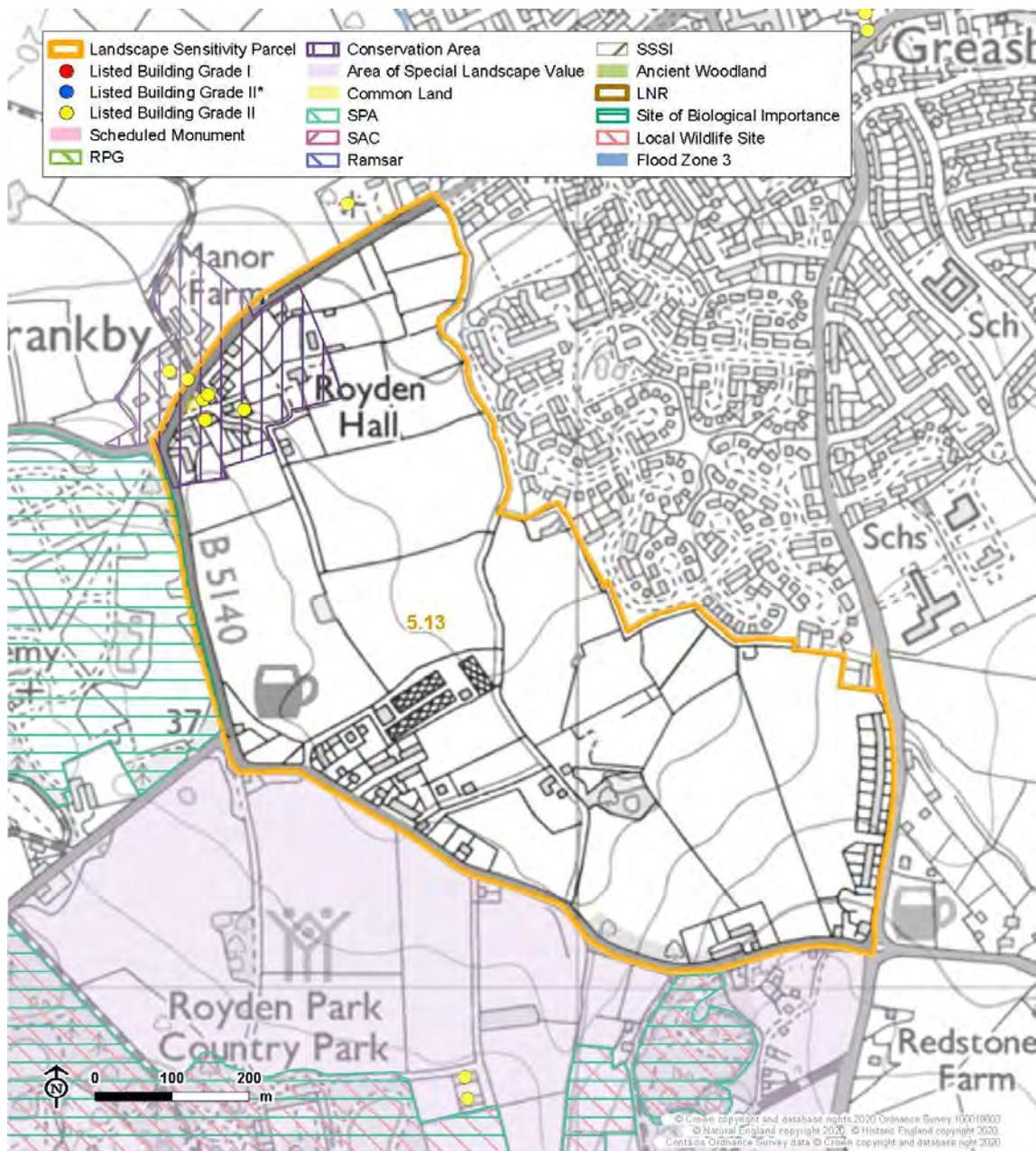


Figure A.2: Aerial photograph of the area



Pasture fields divided by horse tape. Greasby lies beyond the wooded course of the Greasy Brook



Pasture fields on the edge of the Frankby Conservation Area with views to Greasby



Location and landscape character context

The area is situated in the west of the borough and lies to the south-west of Greasby. The boundaries are defined by roads: Mill Lane to the east, B5140 Hillbark Road to the south and west and B5139 Frankby Road to the north-west. The settlement edge of Greasby forms the north-eastern boundary.

The majority of the area lies within the Thurstaston and Greasby Landscape Character Area, forming part of the Sandstone Hills Landscape Character Type. A section in the north-east is within the Birket Landscape Character Area, part of the River Floodplains Landscape Character Type. The area comprises low-lying arable and pasture farmland within fields of varied size. The historic village of Frankby is partially located within the area, and other residential and farm buildings are located along the roads.

Landscape value

This area is not subject to any landscape designations (national or local). However, part of the Frankby Conservation Area lies in the north-west, and there are a number of Archaeological Sites within the area, providing heritage value.

The area's use as working farmland for arable and grazing restricts public access and limits its recreational value.

The section below incorporates these indicators of value into the assessment of sensitivity.

5.13 Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Criterion

Physical Character (including topography and scale)

The gently undulating landform falls generally from south to the north, from 50m to 25m AOD, indicating lower sensitivity to residential development. The undulating landform along the Greasby Brook is a distinct feature and increases sensitivity.

The area is overlain by an irregular pattern of fields that are small to medium in size (partly due to the course of the Greasby Brook), bound by hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees and small scattered woodlands, providing a modest density of small-scale landscape features, resulting in a higher sensitivity to residential development.

Natural Character

The area consists of arable or pastoral farmland with some areas used for equestrian activities. The area accommodates some existing ribbon development including residential development on Irbyside Road, Ferndale Avenue, Mill Lane and at Frankby, resulting in lower sensitivity to residential development.

Pockets of higher sensitivity exist where there are valued semi-natural habitats and features including hedgerows and hedgerow trees and small woodland copses (Priority Habitat Lowland Mixed Broad-leaf Woodland), which are scattered across the farmland, particularly pockets of trees/scrubs around field ponds (marl pits) and along the course of the Greasby Brook and other tributary streams which cross this lowland area.

Historic Landscape Character

The Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation indicates strong time depth within the area which increases sensitivity to residential development. Ancient fieldscapes (pre-1600) including Medieval Townfields around the village of Frankby and semi-regular Ancient Fieldscape Systems in the centre of the area, as well as Post Medieval Planned Enclosure in the east, form part of a pattern of historic fieldscapes that extend across the area.

Sensitivity to residential development decreases in the south west of the area, due to existing development along Irbyside Road and Ferndale Road (categorised as 20th century Settlement) set within 20th century fieldscapes (categorised by the Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation as Agri-Industrial although commercial glasshouses are no longer present). In the south-east there are two areas of archaeological importance, indicating a higher level of sensitivity.

The area encompasses much of the historic village of Frankby which is designated as a Conservation Area and an area of archaeological importance and contains a number of historic buildings (all Grade II listed) indicating a high level of sensitivity to residential development.

Character and setting of existing settlement

Much of the area provides a rural setting to the village of Frankby indicating higher levels of sensitivity to residential development. Fields immediately surrounding the village lie within the Conservation Area and are recognised in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan: "The open fields act as a frame around the village and help maintain the agricultural setting of the historic village".

The area also contributes to the perception of a gap between Frankby and Greasby to the east, indicating a higher sensitivity to residential development. As stated in the Conservation Area Appraisal, "The open land around the Conservation Area is a key feature in the character of a traditional rural village, which maintains Frankby's individuality. These fields in agricultural production

separate Frankby from its near neighbours...it is crucial that this feature is preserved."

Due to rising ground, the settlement of Greasby is visible across the wider landscape, however in general the settlement edge, particularly to the north, is well integrated by woodland cover and the wooded course of the Greasby Brook, indicating higher levels sensitivity.

Views and visual character including skylines

The area is partially enclosed by its wooded character, hedgerows and trees along the surrounding roads and vegetated boundaries around built development, indicating a lower sensitivity to residential development.

Where there are gaps in these boundaries there are occasional views across the area to woodland at Thurstaston Hill to the south-west, which indicates higher sensitivity to residential development.

Perceptual and experiential qualities

Although largely a rural agricultural landscape, the area is influenced by existing residential development, equestrian uses, especially in the west around Irby Road reducing sensitivity. Surrounding development at Greasby and road noise from traffic on the surrounding roads, disrupt its scenic value and limit dark night skies through existing light sources, which decreases the sensitivity to residential development.

Overall assessment of landscape sensitivity to future change from residential development

Moderate

Localised natural habitats and features, particularly along the tributary streams, semi-natural habitats (including the wooded copse), the small-medium scale irregular historic field pattern that extends across the area, the rural setting the area provides to the Frankby Conservation Area and its contribution towards a perceived gap between settlements, increase sensitivity. However, the presence of existing development, the surrounding human influences including equestrian uses (which are typical of the urban fringe) and the visibility of Greasby due to rising ground, and the visual enclosure by woodland and trees lower sensitivity across the area. Overall, the area is considered to have moderate sensitivity to any potential future change from residential development.

There is a higher sensitivity in the north of the area around the village of Frankby where development could affect the setting of the historic village, surrounding medieval field pattern and its separation from Greasby.

Guidance

Given the overall assessment of landscape sensitivity outlined above the following general guidance applies to any development on this area:

- Preserve the natural meandering character of the Greasby Brook, avoiding development that will change the course or introduce artificial banks.
- Conserve and reinforce the network of native hedgerows and seek to create a stronger landscape structure to integrate development by increasing the presence of hedgerow trees and providing additional native woodland planting.

- Retain and manage areas of deciduous woodland within the area. Pursue opportunities to extend native woodland, new hedgerows and tree lines across undeveloped parts of the area as part of an integrated green infrastructure network to enhance the stream corridors and connect to the surrounding landscape consistent with the River Birket Corridor Nature Improvement Area ecological and habitat management priorities.
- Conserve the mix of wooded and open field ponds (marl pits) which are characteristic features of the area.
- Conserve the rural character and small to medium scale intact historic field pattern, particularly ancient fieldscapes, which contribute towards the setting of Frankby.
- Conserve the special character and qualities of Frankby Conservation Area by retaining the existing settlement pattern of the village and its isolated rural character.
- Ensure the function of the area as a perceived gap is maintained by providing a clear physical and visual separation between Frankby and Greasby.
- Promote opportunities to increase access and enjoyment of the landscape in association with any new development, particularly along the brook corridor.

The guidance provided should not be interpreted to the effect that residential development of the scale assessed would be considered acceptable in principle in landscape terms.

Figure A.4: Aerial photograph of the area



The Wirral Way with views across the Dee Estuary – residential development on Riverbank Road is visible to the west



Open pasture fields with deciduous woodland along the shoreline and long views across the Dee Estuary to Wales



Location and landscape character context

The area is situated in the south west of the borough, south west of Gayton and adjacent to the Dee Estuary. The Wirral Way which runs along the settlement edge of Gayton forms the eastern boundary. Riverbank Road and Cottage Lane form the northern and southern boundaries respectively, while the estuarine edge of the Dee forms the western boundary.

The area lies within the Dee Estuarine Edge Landscape Character Area, which forms part of the Coastal/Estuarine Edge Landscape Character Type. The area slopes gently from the settlement edge towards the Dee and comprises pastoral fields, woodland and low-rise residential development.

Landscape value

This area is not subject to any landscape designations (national or local) although it lies adjacent to the Dee Coast Area of Special Landscape Value which runs along the coast and immediately south of the area at the Heswall Golf Club.

The Wirral Way, which runs along the settlement edge of Gayton, is locally designated as a Local Wildlife Site/ Site of Biological Importance.

The Wirral Way and Wirral Circular Trail, which form part of the Wirral Country Park, run parallel to the Dee Estuary providing access to the area and recreational value. A car park on the opposite side of Riverbank Road, which lies just outside the area, provides direct access to the estuary shore. There are long views across the estuary towards Wales and along the coastline. The section below incorporates these indicators of value into the assessment of sensitivity.

7.5 Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Criterion

Physical Character (including topography and scale)

The landform slopes gently from east to west, from 25m AOD along the Wirral Way to 7m AOD at the edge of the Dee Estuary, indicating lower sensitivity to residential development.

The medium-scale field pattern bound by hedgerows and woodland, provides a modest density of small-scale landscape features, indicating higher sensitivity to residential development.

Natural Character

Areas of higher sensitivity to residential development exist where there are semi-natural habitats and valued landscape features, including hedgerows enhanced with mature hedgerow trees and deciduous woodland (recorded as Priority Habitat Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland) which extends along the estuary to the west and around field ponds. The Wirral Way along the eastern boundary is locally designated as a Local Wildlife Site/ Site of Biological Importance.

Lower sensitivity to residential development exists in the parts of the area where semi-natural habitats are limited, particularly those parts of the area characterised by built form along Cottage Lane and Riverbank Road and in the south where fields are managed for horse pasture. In some places, hedgerows are fragmented, such as those along Riverbank Road

Historic Landscape Character

The Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation indicates that the area contains a sense of time depth which increases sensitivity to residential development. The agricultural fields in the centre and south-east of the area are characterised by post medieval fieldscapes (both planned enclosure and

agricultural improvement). Sensitivity to residential development decreases where fields in the north along Riverbank Road are categorised as 20th century agricultural improvement.

There are no recorded heritage assets within the area, indicating lower sensitivity to residential development. The stone harbour wall and jetty at the bottom of Cottage Lane were historically used as a landing site for a ferry service which operated across the Dee.

Character and setting of existing settlement

The wooded route of the Wirral Way provides a strong boundary feature along the settlement edge of Gayton, although there are views across the area and to the estuary from houses in Gayton and along Cottage Lane and Riverbank Road. The area plays a role as a rural setting to the adjacent urban area indicating higher sensitivity to residential development.

Residential development along Cottage Lane and Riverbank Road consisting of 20th century detached, and semidetached houses, lowers sensitivity to further residential development, although these houses are often screened by vegetation.

Views and visual character including skylines

The sloping landform and generally undeveloped character of the area affords uninterrupted views and intervisibility to and across the Dee Estuary and towards North Wales from the Wirral Way and local roads, indicating higher sensitivity to residential development.

Tall hedgerow boundaries along Cottage Lane and the topography and vegetation along parts of the Wirral Way in the south create some visual enclosure, lowering sensitivity locally.

Perceptual and experiential qualities

Despite proximity to the existing urban area at Gayton, the area has a rural character and an increasing sense of remoteness and tranquillity along the Dee Estuary, indicating higher sensitivity to residential development.

Sensitivity is lowered where urban elements intrude into the area, including small areas of equestrian use north of Cottage Lane and modern residential development and street lighting along Riverbank Road and the lower end of Cottage Lane, disturbing its scenic value and limited dark night skies through existing light sources.

Overall assessment of landscape sensitivity to future change from residential development

Moderate - High

The rural and tranquil character of the coastal landscape which provides a rural setting to the existing settlements, valued natural habitats and features, the historic field pattern, extensive views over Dee Estuary and high recreational value of the Wirral Way indicate higher sensitivity to residential development. However, the presence of modern residential development, and equestrian land uses (which are typical of the urban fringe) lowers sensitivity to residential development.

Overall, the area is considered to have a moderate-high sensitivity to any potential future change from residential development.

Guidance

Given the overall assessment of landscape sensitivity outlined above the following general guidance applies to any development on this area:

- Conserve and reinforce the network of native hedgerows and seek to create a stronger landscape structure to integrate development by increasing the presence of hedgerow trees and providing additional native woodland planting.
- Restore hedgerow boundaries where these are fragmented, using native hedgerow species.
- Retain and manage areas of deciduous woodland within the area. Pursue opportunities to extend native woodland across undeveloped parts of the area as part of an integrated green infrastructure network connected to the surrounding landscape, to protect visual amenity and to help integrate potential development into the landscape.
- Conserve the rural character and small scale intact historic field pattern.
- Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries and careful siting of stables.
- Retain and enhance the recreational value of the Wirral Way, retaining existing views to the Dee Estuary from the recreational route and picnic benches.
- Retain and enhance views towards the Dee Estuary and take account of views from adjacent landscape in relation to any change.

The guidance provided should not be interpreted to the effect that residential development of the scale assessed would be considered acceptable in principle in landscape terms.

Area reference: 7.19

Figure A.5: Map of the area with designations / constraints

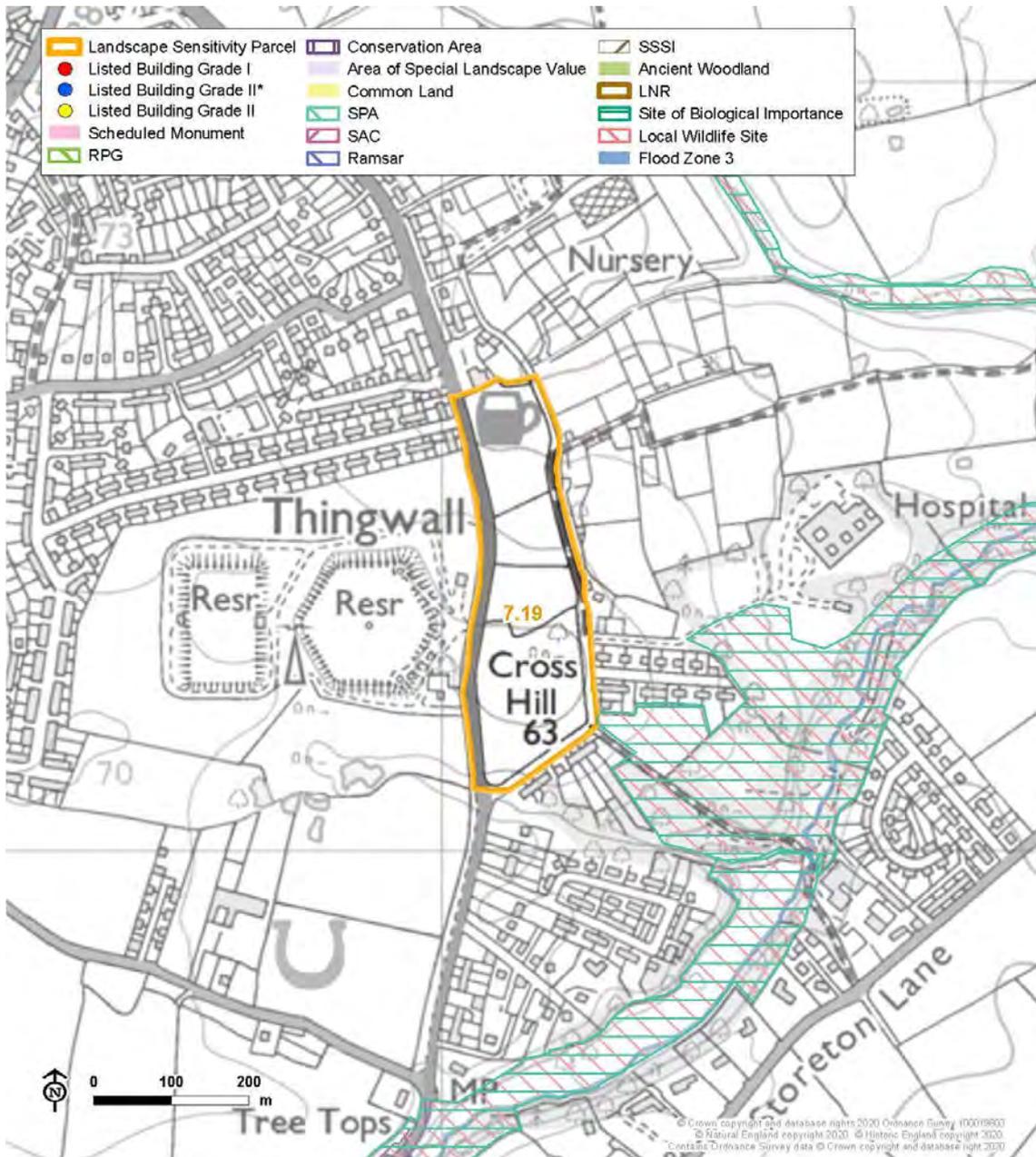


Figure A.6: Aerial photograph of the area



Gently sloping landform with large hedgerow trees and Thingwall in the background



Cross Hill in the south of the site



Location and landscape character context

The area is situated in the centre of the borough at Thingwall, to the north-east of Pensby and north of Barnston. The A551 Barnston Road forms the western boundary, Holmwood Drive the southern boundary and Lower Thingwall Lane the eastern boundary. The northern boundary of the area is formed by the settlement edge of Thingwall including the Basset Hound pub.

The area lies within the Landican and Thingwall Landscape Character Area, forming part of the Lowland Farmland and Estates Landscape Character Type. It is a gently sloping area of small-scale pasture fields with a small woodland copse at Cross Hill.

Landscape value

This area is not subject to any landscape designations (national or local).

The deciduous woodland just outside the site boundary at Murrayfield Hospital Local Wildlife Site/ Site of Biological Importance is valued for its contribution to biodiversity. There are Archaeological Sites in the south around Cross Hill and along the bridleway on the eastern boundary.

The area's use as working farmland limits its recreational value, although there is a public right of way along Lower Thingwall Lane on the eastern boundary.

The section below incorporates these indicators of value into the assessment of sensitivity.

7.19 Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Criterion

Physical Character (including topography and scale)

The distinct mounded landform of Cross Hill, in the southern part of the site, contributes positively to landscape character. The more gently sloping landform in the north of the site, which falls from 63m to 50m AOD on the edge of Thingwall, indicates lower levels of sensitivity to residential development.

The small-scale field pattern formed by hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees and a small woodland copse at Cross Hill, provides a modest density of small-scale landscape features, resulting in a higher level of sensitivity to residential development.

Natural Character

The area's use as pastoral farmland, with limited coverage of semi-natural habitats, results in lower sensitivity to residential development. Valued natural features include a small woodland copse at Cross Hill and mature hedgerows characterised by hedgerow trees, gorse and bracken, particularly along Lower Thingwall Lane and Holmwood Drive.

The encroachment of grazed paddocks divided by horse tape dilute traditional land uses and in some places hedgerows are fragmented and post and wire fencing occurs, which lowers sensitivity to residential development.

Historic Landscape Character

The Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation indicates that the area is characterised by ancient fieldscapes (pre-1600), of a semi-regular pattern, which increases sensitivity to residential development.

There are no recorded heritage assets within the area, however the south of the area and Lower Thingwall Lane are of archaeological importance and the area has associations with the Viking occupation of Wirral due to the probable location of the Viking assembly (or Thing) on Cross Hill. This time depth increases sensitivity to residential development.

Character and setting of existing settlement

The area plays a role in the separation between Thingwall to the north and Barnston to the south, and the rising landform to the south at Cross Hill restricts intervisibility between these settlements. This indicates an increased sensitivity to residential development.

Views and visual character including skylines

Much of the area is visually enclosed by high hedgerows and hedgerow trees indicating a lower sensitivity to residential development.

However, Cross Hill is more sensitive to development due to its visual prominence and intervisibility with adjacent areas.

Perceptual and experiential qualities

A largely rural agricultural landscape although influenced by its proximity to Thingwall and Barnston, fragmented land uses such as horsiculture and aural intrusion from the busy A551 Barnston Road along the western boundary, which disturb the scenic value and limit dark night skies due to existing light sources. This indicates lower sensitivity to residential development.

Overall assessment of landscape sensitivity to future change from residential development

Low - Moderate

The gently sloping landform, surrounding human influences, equestrian land uses (which are typical of the urban fringe), limited coverage of semi-natural habitats and enclosed character reduce sensitivity to residential development. However, sensitivity is increased by the small scale semi-regular historic field pattern, and the role the area plays in contributing towards a perceived gap between Thingwall and Barnston. Overall there is low-moderate sensitivity to future change from residential development.

The southern part of the site at Cross Hill is of higher sensitivity due to its archaeological importance, and historic associations with the Viking occupation of Wirral and higher concentration of valued natural features. Cross Hill also is more sensitive to development due to its visual prominence.

Guidance

Given the overall assessment of landscape sensitivity outlined above the following general guidance applies to any development on this area:

- Conserve and reinforce the network of native hedgerows and seek to create a stronger landscape structure to integrate development by increasing the presence of hedgerow trees and providing additional native woodland planting.
- Restore hedgerow boundaries where these are fragmented and replace post and wire fencing with native hedgerow species.

- Retain and manage areas of deciduous woodland within the area. Pursue opportunities to extend native woodland across undeveloped parts of the area as part of an integrated green infrastructure network connected to the surrounding landscape, to protect visual amenity and to help integrate potential development into the landscape.
- Conserve the rural character and small scale intact historic field pattern, particularly ancient fieldscapes.
- Ensure the function of the area as a perceived gap is maintained by providing a clear physical and visual separation between adjacent settlements.
- Protect and enhance the public right of way along Lower Thingwall Lane and promote further opportunities to increase access and enjoyment of the landscape.

The guidance provided should not be interpreted to the effect that residential development of the scale assessed would be considered acceptable in principle in landscape terms.

Area reference: 7.25

Figure A.7: Map of the area with designations / constraints

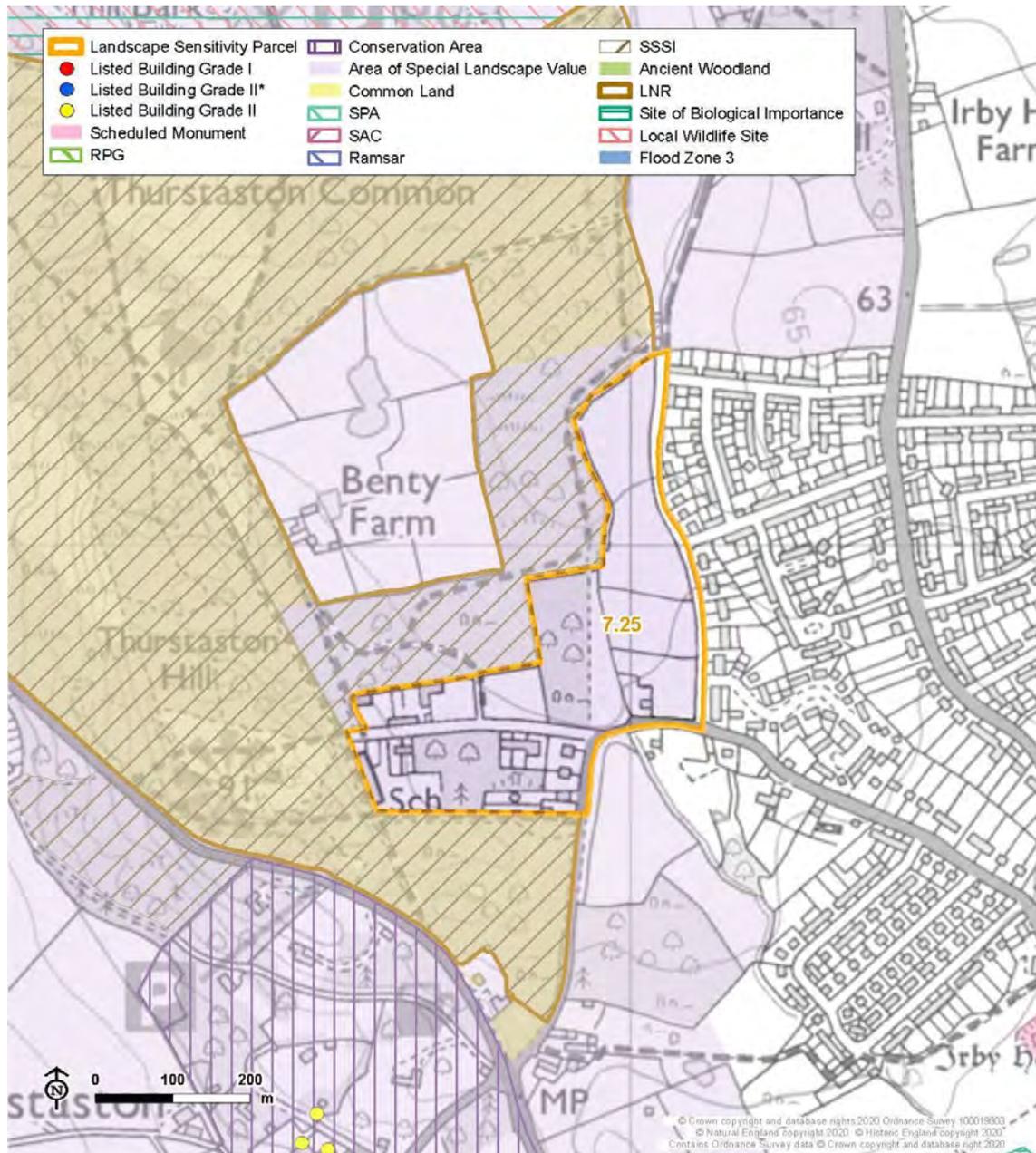


Figure A.8: Aerial photograph of the area



A small orchard and horse field with gorse hedgerows with the wooded course of Greasby Brook in the background



Traditional pasture field with deciduous woodland in the background



Location and landscape character context

The area is situated in the west of the borough, to the west of Irby. Sandy Lane forms the eastern boundary and Thurstaston Road forms the south-eastern boundary. The western, south-western and north-western boundaries are formed by the edge of Thurstaston Common.

The area lies within the Thurstaston and Greasby Landscape Character Area, forming part of the Sandstone Hills Landscape Character Type. The area comprises pasture, predominantly used for horse grazing, in fields surrounded by high hedgerows with an area of residential development and Dawpool Primary School on School Lane in the south west.

Landscape value

This area is locally designated as part of the Dee Coast, including Heswall Dales, Thurstaston Common and Royden Park Area of Special Landscape Value.

It lies adjacent to the Thurstaston Common Site of Special Scientific Interest and Local Nature Reserve, which is valued nationally as the largest and best remaining example of lowland heathland in Merseyside.

Public rights of way cross the area linking Irby and Thurstaston to Thurstaston Common and Royden Park, providing recreational value.

The section below incorporates these indicators of value into the assessment of sensitivity.

7.25 Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

Criterion

Physical Character (including topography and scale)

A flat landform, around 65m – 70m AOD, indicating lower sensitivity to residential development.

The small-scale field pattern across the area, bound by gorse hedgerows and woodland create a moderate density of small-scale landscape features, indicating higher sensitivity.

Natural Character

Semi-natural habitats include two small areas of Priority Habitat Traditional Orchard in the north and woodlands around Dawpool Primary School, south of Benty Farm and along the course of the Greasby Brook (recorded as Priority Habitat Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland). This woodland extends from Thurstaston Common and is related to the succession from open heathland to birch-oak woodland, which indicates a higher sensitivity to residential development. Pastoral fields are bound by mature hedgerows with gorse and bracken contributing to the heathland feel. Hedgerow trees are valued features and also indicate a higher sensitivity to residential development.

The area forms part of the West Wirral Heathland and Arrowe Park Nature Improvement Area.

Areas characterised by existing residential development along Sandy Lane and School Lane and the encroachment of ménages and grazed paddocks divided by horse tape dilute traditional land uses and lower sensitivity to residential development.

Historic Landscape Character

The Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation indicates that the area contains a sense of time depth which increases sensitivity to residential development.

The fields along the edge of Irby are identified as Post Medieval Enclosures and woodland between the fields and properties on School Lane as Unimproved Land (land including heathland and moorland). There are no recorded heritage assets within the area, although there is an Archaeological Site to the north-east of the area, indicating some sensitivity.

Character and setting of existing settlement

Existing residential development in the south west of the area, consisting of low-rise detached bungalows set back from the road, lowers sensitivity to further development in the south and to the west of the area. However, the area provides some contribution as a rural setting to the edge of Irby (along Sandy Lane) which indicates higher sensitivity to residential development.

Views and visual character including skylines

The area is largely visually enclosed by surrounding mature hedgerow boundaries and woodland, indicating a lower sensitivity to residential development.

However, the area is visible from the marked viewpoint on the summit of Thurstaston Hill and reads as part of the wider wooded landscape, indicating higher sensitivity.

Perceptual and experiential qualities

A largely rural area although influenced by existing development, road noise from Telegraph Road and human influences including fragmented land uses such as horiculture and associated horse tape and paraphernalia. These factors indicate lower sensitivity to residential development.

Overall assessment of landscape sensitivity to future change from residential development

Moderate - High

Sensitivity is increased by the area's designation as part of an Area of Special Landscape Value, its visibility from Thurstaston Hill, the prevalence of semi-natural habitats including traditional orchards and heathy woodland, which connect the site to Thurstaston Common, and traditional orchards, the sense of time depth, the area's contribution to the rural setting of Irby and its recreational value. However, existing development within the area, human influences and the generally enclosed wooded character of the surrounding landscape lower sensitivity.

Overall the area is considered to have a moderate-high sensitivity to any potential future change from residential development.

Guidance

Given the overall assessment of landscape sensitivity outlined above the following general guidance applies to any development on this area:

- Conserve and reinforce the network of native hedgerows and seek to create a strong landscape structure to integrate development by increasing the presence of hedgerow trees and providing additional native woodland planting.
- Retain and manage areas of deciduous woodland within the area. Pursue opportunities to extend native woodland as part of an integrated green infrastructure network connected to the surrounding landscape, to protect visual amenity and to help integrate potential development into the landscape.

- Conserve, enhance and manage other valued habitats within the area, particularly those that connect to the adjacent Thurstaston Common Site of Special Scientific Interest and Local Nature Reserve.
- Maintain the extent and increase species diversity of existing grassland to support surrounding heathland (consistent with the priorities of the West Wirral Heathlands and Arrowe Park Nature Improvement Area).
- Conserve the rural character and small scale intact historic field pattern on the edge of Irby.
- Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries and careful siting of stables.
- Take account of views from adjacent landscapes, especially Thurstaston Hill and Common, in relation to any change.

The guidance provided should not be interpreted to the effect that residential development of the scale assessed would be considered acceptable in principle in landscape terms.

Area reference: 7.26

Figure A.9: Map of the area with designations / constraints

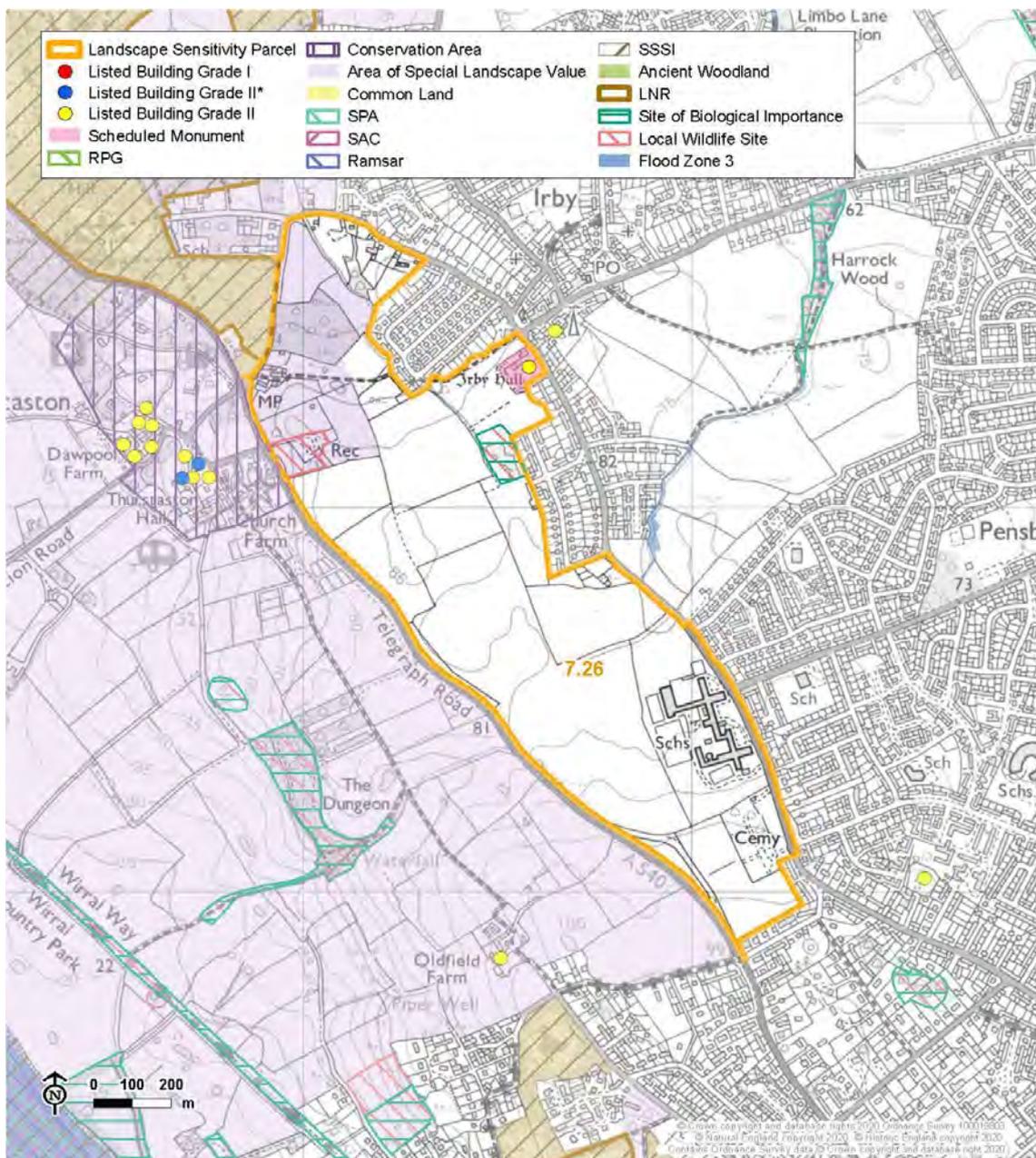


Figure A.10: Aerial photograph of the area



Arable land north of Penrhyd Road with fragmented hedgerows and long views across the Dee Estuary to North Wales



Pasture field on the ridge overlooking Thurstaston church tower, the Dee Estuary and North Wales



Location and landscape character context

The area is situated in the west of the borough and lies to the west of Irby and Pensby. Thurstaston Road forms the northern and north-western boundary, and the settlement edge of Irby and Irby Road the eastern boundary. The short southern boundary is formed by the settlement edge of Pensby and the western boundary is formed by A540 Telegraph Road, which is the main route between Heswall and West Kirby.

The area lies within the Sandstone Hills Landscape Character Type and is split between the Irby and Pensby Landscape Character Area which forms the majority of the area, and a small area in the north within the Thurstaston and Greasby Landscape Character Area. The area comprises a predominantly arable landscape which slopes gently to the south. There is little development within the area with the exception of a large secondary school and small cemetery in the south-east and some scattered small-scale residential housing in the north.

Landscape value

The north of the area, outside of the main area of arable farmland, is locally designated as an Area of Special Landscape Value (part of the Dee Coast Area of Special Landscape Value, including Heswall Dales, Thurstaston Common and Royden Park) and has a more wooded character.

The Rectory Local Wildlife Site and the Backford Road Pond Local Wildlife Site / Site of Biological Importance are valued for their contribution to biodiversity.

The area's main use as working arable farmland limits its recreational value, although there is a public right of way which links Irby and Thurstaston.

The section below incorporates these indicators of value into the assessment of sensitivity.

7.26 Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Criterion

Physical Character (including topography and scale)

An elevated landform which varies with gentle undulations between 65m and 95m AOD, indicating lower sensitivity.

In the north there is a small-medium scale field pattern and small-scale landscape features including hedgerows and deciduous woodland, indicating a higher sensitivity. In the south, large open arable fields indicate a lower sensitivity to residential development.

Natural Character

The north of the area between Thurstaston Common and Irby has higher sensitivity to residential development due to a concentration of valued natural habitats and features including several mixed woodlands extending from Thurstaston Common (Priority Habitat Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland), including The Rectory Local Wildlife Site. The wooded course of the Greasby Brook and wetland vegetation around the pond at the Backford Road Pond Local Wildlife Site / Site of Biological Importance are also valued for their contribution towards biodiversity. Most of the fields within this wooded area consist of pasture with small areas relating to equestrian activities, along the settlement edge.

Intensively farmed arable fields in the centre and south of the area have limited coverage of semi-natural habitats resulting in lower sensitivity to residential development. Hedgerows are often fragmented, and reinforced with post and wire fencing, which also lowers sensitivity to residential development.

Historic Landscape Character

The northern half of the area has significant time depth which increases sensitivity to residential development. The Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation indicates a concentration of historic field patterns including ancient fieldscapes (pre-1600) of semiregular pattern and post medieval enclosures. The Grade II listed Irby Hall is a moated site which is designated as a Scheduled Monument for its archaeological importance. The historic field pattern around the Hall also contributes to its setting.

In the south the lack of heritage assets and large-scale arable fields with fewer field boundaries categorised as 20th century field systems, indicate lower sensitivity to residential development.

Character and setting of existing settlement

In the north the area plays a role in the separation of the historic village of Thurstaston from Irby which residential development would adversely affect. The undeveloped ridge running east of Telegraph Road near Thurstaston increases this sense of separation. The area also provides separation between Irby and Pensby, along Irby Road.

However, development could provide the opportunity to improve the harsh settlement edge of Irby where it extends beyond Irby Road (e.g. Penrhyd Road and Townshend Avenue).

In the south, existing development including the Pensby High School, community sports complex and Heswall Cemetery lowers sensitivity to residential development.

Views and visual character including skylines

Woodland in the north of the area and the undulating topography creates visual enclosure and restricts any views north to south within the site, which locally reduces sensitivity to development. However, the ridge of higher ground along Telegraph Road in the west allows for a high degree of visibility from surrounding landscapes.

In the south and along Irby Road low field boundaries and larger open fields also increase the sense of openness, which indicate higher sensitivity to residential development. There are views from the promoted viewpoint at Thurstaston Hill to the open fields around Pensby High School, which also increase the sensitivity of this part of the area.

Perceptual and experiential qualities

The north of the area has a sense of separation from the urban edge and perceived naturalness provided by the small-scale field pattern and wooded character extending from Thurstaston Common, resulting in higher sensitivity to residential development. Views from higher ground across the Dee Estuary to North Wales increases the sense of remoteness. However, in parts the proximity of surrounding development at Irby disturbs scenic value and limits dark night skies.

The open character of the agricultural landscape to the south of the area is influenced by surrounding development at Pensby and the intrusion of the large scale modern buildings of Pensby High School, disturbing its scenic value and limiting dark night skies through existing light sources including floodlit sports facilities, therefore decreasing the sensitivity to residential development. The A540 Telegraph Road to the west is a relatively busy road resulting in aural intrusion.

Overall assessment of landscape sensitivity to future change from residential development

Moderate

The large-scale intensively farmed landscape in the centre and south of the area, surrounding human influences, including the intrusion of large-scale development at Pensby High School and road noise from the A540 Telegraph Road decrease sensitivity to residential development.

However, sensitivity is increased to the north of the area, where the wooded character of Thurstaston Common extends into the area and there is a concentration of valued semi-natural habitats and small-scale historic field patterns. The role of the area in providing a sense of separation between the village of Thurstaston and Irby, and between Irby and Pensby, also raises sensitivity. Views from higher ground to the west of the area increases the sense of remoteness.

Overall, the area is considered to have a moderate sensitivity to change from residential development.

There are areas of higher sensitivity in the north, where the area is designated as part of the Dee Coast Area of Special Landscape Value, including Heswall Dales, Thurstaston Common and Royden Park, and along the open ridge in the west.

Guidance

Given the overall assessment of landscape sensitivity outlined above the following general guidance applies to any development on this area:

- Conserve and reinforce the network of native hedgerows and seek to create a stronger landscape structure to integrate development by increasing the presence of hedgerow trees and providing additional native woodland planting.

- Restore hedgerow boundaries where these are fragmented and replace post and wire fencing with native hedgerow species.
- Retain and manage areas of deciduous woodland within the area. Pursue opportunities to extend native woodland across undeveloped parts of the area as part of an integrated green infrastructure network connected to the surrounding landscape, to protect visual amenity and to help integrate potential development into the landscape.
- Revert areas to grassland in order to increase species diversity (consistent with the priorities of the West Wirral Heathlands and Arrowe Park Nature Improvement Area).
- Preserve the biodiversity value of the Backford Road Pond and The Rectory Local Wildlife Site / Site of Biological Importance.
- Ensure the function of the area as a rural setting to Thurstaston is maintained by providing a clear physical and visual separation between the village and the adjacent settlement at Irby.
- Conserve the rural character and intact historic field pattern, particularly in proximity to Irby Hall where the area contributes towards the setting of the Scheduled Monument and listed building.
- Preserve open long-distance views to the west across the Dee Estuary towards the hills in North Wales.
- Protect and enhance the public right of way connecting Irby to Thurstaston and promote further opportunities to increase access and enjoyment of the landscape in association with any new development.
- Consider additional planting to reduce the visual impact of Pensby High School.
- Consider views from Thurstaston Hill in relation to any development changes in the south of the area.

The guidance provided should not be interpreted to the effect that residential development of the scale assessed would be considered acceptable in principle in landscape terms.

References

- 1 Wirral Council, Unitary Development Plan (2000). Available here: <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/local-plans/unitary-development-plan/written>
- 2 LUC, Wirral Site Specific Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (2019). Available here: <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/local-planning-evidence-and-research-report-36>
- 3 LUC, Wirral Site Specific Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (2019). Available here: <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/local-planning-evidence-and-research-report-36>

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