Landscape Character Type 4:

Drained Marsh
LANDSCAPE TYPE 4: DRAINED MARSH
Reclaimed coastal marsh

DM1: Frodsham Marsh
DM2: The Lache Eyes

Key Characteristics

- Extremely flat, low-lying topography
- Drained estuary farmland
- Complex pattern of drainage ditches which delineates the field pattern
- Post and wire boundaries
- Open, expansive views of the surrounding landscape
- Over head power lines

General Description

This character type is located on former marshland adjacent to the Dee and Mersey estuaries. It is drained by inter-connecting networks of drainage channels arranged in a regular, often linear pattern, and this gives the impression of an open unenclosed landscape. This landscape character type is significantly reduced in size; it formerly covered a much greater area. Today it is mainly used as grazing land, with some crops.
The flat, open nature of this character type provides expansive views of the surrounding area including the Dee and Mersey estuaries, which are intrinsic to its existence. The close proximity to industrial sites and the open views of these areas also has a significant impact.

**Visual Character**

This landscape type appears as a very flat, open and large scale landscape. The combination of flat topography and low field boundaries such as drainage ditches or post and wire fences allows extensive panoramic views out to the surrounding character areas. Within this type the general absence of development or higher ground means that visually dominant elements, such as upland areas or large structures, are located in the surrounding character areas and this exerts a strong influence upon landscape character.

Major highways traverse these former marshlands on embankments. This slight elevation combined with the scarcity of high hedges or hedgerow trees can lead to a high level of visual disruption from moving traffic.

**Physical Influences**

This character type occurs on very low-lying flat topography with an elevation of between 0-10 m AOD. The former marsh resulted from the marine and alluvial deposits of clay, salt and silt deposited under tidal and estuarine influence. This overlies Kinnerton Sandstone, Chester Pebble Beds and Wilmslow Sandstone. Soils comprise humic and alluvial gleys on the improved reclaimed coastal floodplain.

There are small patches of scrub and a few trees. Where there are hedgerows they are grown out and in poor condition. Reeds and other water-loving plants are mainly restricted to ditches. The drained marsh has ornithological interest as a wintering ground for wading birds and wildfowl as well as birds of prey.

**Cultural Influences**

This is marginal land that has been created through reclaiming former estuarine marshland and manually digging drainage ditches and installing pumps in more recent periods. This was undertaken to increase the available land for agriculture and to improve food production e.g. Frodsham marshes were extensively drained in the Second World War. With careful drainage the reclaimed sediments are amongst the best in the county and potentially very fertile, able to sustain crops of barley, winter wheat and potatoes.

Marshland is an unappealing location for settlement and as such these areas have remained largely undeveloped. However, industry has utilised similar reclaimed marshland e.g. west of the Frodsham and Ince Marshes is the extensive Stanlow oil refinery, while the drained marsh of the Dee Estuary has been used for steel works, paper mill and Hawarden Airport.
Issues affecting the Drained Marsh landscape character type

1. **Evidence around peripheral areas of increase in horse grazing**
   with associated changes to field boundaries and use of informal animal shelters, sheds etc.

2. **Loss of open character of field system** due to inappropriate planting of hedgerows and trees restricting distant views. Areas of tree planting can deter characteristic bird species such as waders and wildfowl.

3. **Loss and under management of historic drainage systems** threatens the historic character of the area.

4. **Reduction and fragmentation of wetland habitats**: Eutrophication as a result of nutrient run-off from farmland can lead to changes in plant communities in drainage ditches. Improved drainage measures can lead to local modification to hydrological characteristics of field system and may threaten paleo-environmental remains

5. **Encroachment by industrial development and infrastructure**: traditional attitudes to these areas as marginal land available for development, detached from residential areas, has led to an established use for large scale industrial development with substantial visual impact. Much of the industrial land is not actively managed.
DM1: Frodsham Marsh Character Area
Including Frodsham, Helsby & Ince Marches & Manchester Ship Canal Lagoons

Frodsham Marsh is located between the M56 and the Manchester Ship Canal. Settlement is restricted to a few isolated farms. A system of surfaced tracks and bridleways serve the area, including National Cycle Route (NCR) 5.

The character of the drained marsh is one of large and regular shaped fields with sparse vegetation and expansive views across a flat, open landscape. Many hawthorn hedges are in poor condition where they occur, although overgrown hedges and scrub of elder and hawthorn are prominent locally on the Ince marshes.

The perceived character of much of this area is strongly influenced by industrial development in adjacent character areas. In the west much of the area is dominated by the massive monolithic steel structure of Quinn Glass. This building is surrounded by flat pasture land characterised by small-scale features such as reed beds, ponds and small copses which provide negligible visual screening. Similarly the high chimneys and industrial structures of the Norsk Hydra site, slightly to the east, are very conspicuous. Structures of this scale in peripheral areas totally overwhelm the agricultural land use of the character area and contribute to the urban fringe atmosphere of this part of the character area.

Overhead power lines run parallel to the motorway near the area’s south east boundary. Running parallel to the M56 are a number of over head power lines from the 400kV national transmission grid to the 132kv and 33kv distribution network. This combines with the heavy motorway traffic to create a major visual intrusion along this axis. The buildings of Ince village, lying outside the character area, are visible upon slightly elevated ground to the West. The storage tanks at Elton are also visible in this direction. To the north the earth embankment of the Manchester Ship canal forms a low horizon. The impressive Helsby and Frodsham Hills are very dominant in all views to the south, with the village development visible on the lower slopes and dense woodland on the higher ground and skyline.

Much of the northern part of the area is used as a deposit ground for dredgings from the Ship Canal. High bunds or earth embankments, 10-12 m above sea level, define the dredging grounds and occupy much of the northern boundary. From many locations these features provide total visual containment to ground level views in this direction. By contrast the bunds themselves provide elevated vantage points with extensive panoramic views. These extend to the large-scale industrial complex of Runcorn and Rock Savage, Liverpool Airport across the River Mersey and Liverpool City to the northwest on the distant skyline.

The marsh was formally contiguous with the saltmarsh and mudflats of the Mersey Estuary, but was embanked, ditched and reclaimed following the opening of the Manchester Ship Canal in 1894. Further intensification of the
reclaimed farmland occurred during the Second World War with installation of pumps and construction of new ditches. While almost all of the wet grassland communities have disappeared, an interesting aquatic flora survives in some ditches due to the mixture of saline seepages. The area is good for birds, mainly as a wintering ground for wading birds and wildfowl and birds of prey.

Traces of human activity are indicated by the discovery of Bronze Age (c 2000 BC) spearheads on Frodsham and Ince Marshes. More recently, this marginal area was used as a WWII bomb decoy.
Frodsham Marsh
DM2: The Lache Eyes (Chester) Character Area
Including reclaimed fields, ditches and duck decoys

This is a very small character area based upon the Lache Eyes area to the southwest of Chester, formerly part of the larger Saltney Marsh in the Dee Estuary. This was embanked and reclaimed for farmland in the 18th and 19th centuries. Subsequent drainage and industrial development has reduced the extent of this marsh. There is no habitation in this area. Several large and visually dominant farmsteads are located upon the boundary of the area.

This is a flat landscape of medium to large fields with a variety of boundaries, including trimmed low hedges, post and wire fences and thin grown-out hedges. There is a marked absence of hedgerow trees in some areas, a noticeable departure from the surrounding agricultural areas of the West Lowland Plain type. The general scarcity of high vegetation creates a perception of a large-scale, empty landscape with panoramic views from many locations out to the surrounding character areas. The area is dissected by a number of drainage channels but these are not generally apparent due to the complete absence of elevated viewpoints.

The slightly raised A55 traverses the southern point of this character area and heavy traffic is highly visible when viewed against the woodland backdrop of the adjacent Eaton estate beyond the area boundary. The traffic has a disruptive effect upon an extensive area in the south of the character area. The railway line between Chester and Wrexham also crosses the character area.

The Clwydian Hills are visible to the west, rising above the woodland blocks on the edge of the adjacent Eaton Character Area. To the north-west the massive sheds and hangers of the Broughton aircraft factory are visible, once again viewed above the crowns of trees in the intervening farmland. To the south east the distinctive horizon of the Sandstone Ridge can be recognised in the far distance. The Chester suburbs bound the character area to the north east but they are not visually intrusive, being largely screened from view by taller hedges or garden trees.

An interesting feature of the area is the presence of two duck decoys, used to trap wildfowl, close to Decoy Farm although both are now only faint depressions in the ground. The one to the immediate north of the pond (known as the 'Mermaid's Purse Decoy') is of unknown age but the main decoy to the west was known to have been constructed in 1634 and a map dated 1733 shows it located on the coastline.