Landscape Character Type 9:

Estate, Woodland & Meres
LANDSCAPE TYPE 9: ESTATE, WOODLAND & MERE
Lowland estates, woodland and meres

Key Characteristics:

- Large historic houses and associated buildings including estate farms, lodges etc
- High densities of woodland – broadleaved and mixed
- Ornamental landscape features such as parkland and lakes
- Meres, mosses and ponds - some meres adapted for ornamental purposes
- Wildfowl habitats
- Flat to undulating relief
- Irregular, semi-regular and regular fields (up to 8ha).
- Dispersed settlement
- Leisure facilities – visitor attractions e.g. historic estates (house and land) and golf courses.

General Description

The defining characteristics of this type are: a concentration of historic estates, and their associated features, for example parkland and formal gardens; a high density of woodland; and mosses and meres, which have
formed as a result of glaciofluvial deposition, the latter have predominantly been utilised as ornamental lakes. The topography of the type is flat to undulating – ranging from flat ground, through broad undulations to occasional steeper slopes.

Enclosure is a mix of relict medieval fields and post medieval reorganisation. Settlement is mainly dispersed with a limited number of small nucleated villages. These are very desirable locations and have been for some time, not least the estates, some of which can be traced back several hundred years. Beyond the estate land, enclosure consists of semi-regular fields i.e. post medieval reorganisation and settlement is mainly dispersed with a limited number of small hamlets.

Visual Character

The most obvious visual characteristic of this type is the predominance of mature woodland blocks and individual parkland trees, resulting in a substantial degree of enclosure and creating a small to medium scale landscape. The high density of woodland provides a strong contrast with the surrounding, more open, agricultural landscapes. The meres constitute an essential defining element of this type but are not immediately apparent and are generally screened from any primary transport routes and many estate roads. Where meres are visible they can contribute to impressive ornamental landscapes, with classic vistas combining water bodies, historic houses and tree-lined drives in a mature parkland setting. Elsewhere meres can be found in a more naturalistic setting surrounded by farmland.

Physical Influences

The topography is flat to undulating - mainly a broad and gently rolling landscape c. 20-100m AOD, with open views of the surrounding area. In some sections slopes become steeper e.g. around Marbury and in particular on Alderley Edge, where slopes rise to 190m AOD.

The solid geology of this character type is predominantly made up of banded siltstone, Bollin Mudstone and Northwich Halite. The north section of the Capethorne character area also includes sandstone (Helsby and Wilmslow). This is overlain by glacial till (Devensian), interspersed with a mix of glaciofluvial deposits, river terrace deposits and alluvium. This deposition has led to the formation of a hummocky terrain, within which, pockets of peat have accumulated. Glacial meres sit within these deposits – a number of which are designated as SSSIs. Rostherne Mere is the largest of the Cheshire meres as well as the deepest and a National Nature Reserve providing a habitat for wintering wildfowl in particular pochard, mallard, teal, pintail and shoveler. Man-made ponds are also abundant.

The main soil types are typical sandy gley soils, argillic stagnogleys, stagnogleyic argillic brown earths and typical brown sands. The latter is commonly associated with glacio-fluvial sand and gravel deposits. Peaty soils – earthy oligo-fibrous soils are occasionally found in enclosed hollows.
The meres and mosses of Cheshire form part of a nationally important series of open water and peatland sites. They developed in the natural depressions in the glacial drift following the retreat of the ice sheets some 15,000 years ago. There are more than 30 meres or pools in Cheshire ranging in depth from 1-27m and 2-70ha in area. Meres are common features in this type, a number of which are designated as SSSIs. Associated fringing habitats such as reedswamp, fen and damp pasture add to the value of meres. The development of these habitats is associated with peat accumulation which in some cases leads to in-filling, becoming nutrient poor thus leading to the formation of bog or mossland.

Meres provide habitats for aquatic invertebrates as well as the wintering of wildfowl. The Cheshire meres are a significant breeding ground for the Great Crested Grebe a species that has fought its way back from near extinction in the nineteenth century. Typical vegetation includes the common reed, yellow iris and the greater and lesser pond sedges. Man-made ponds are abundant. Many of the former mosses in this area have been drained and survive as small peat blocks, some have been converted to agriculture, others colonised by woodland such as willow and birch.

Away from the ornamental estates, land use is typically arable or pastoral. There are isolated areas of neutral unimproved grassland which support a rich flora, including species such as wood anemone, field scabious and pignut. Acid unimproved grassland can include common bent and red fescue.

Compared with much of the County, the historic estates have a higher than average woodland cover. These range from conifer plantations (e.g. Moss Wood south of Cholmondeley) to expanses of ancient broadleaved woodland (Beech Wood, Nether Alderley). Woodland in this type has many functions – it acts as a screen, enhancing privacy and in turn restricting views into and out of an estate; it has ornamental value – e.g. following planting patterns and including varied species; biodiversity – providing valuable habitats, and in some cases is designated as an SBI such as Combermere Big Wood where oaks and sycamore dominate in an extensive, semi-natural, mature woodland. Where woodland doesn’t have an ornamental association it is mainly located on the slopes of streams, rivers or canals where it has survived through lack of competition for alternative land uses or has been planted as game cover.

**Cultural Influences**

This character type is dominated by historic estates, some of which are of considerable size and include mansion houses, ornamental parkland and formal gardens. These range from the extensive Tatton Park, which is possibly one of the finest examples of an historic estate in the country, to the smaller Marbury Park, where the hall has been demolished. Both are popular visitor locations for local families and dog walkers, whilst Tatton has a regional and national reputation. Estates such as Davenport and Cholmondeley are known to have existed for several hundreds of years and Combermere can be traced back to the foundation of a Cistercian monastery (Combermere Abbey).
in the 12th century. There has therefore been a great deal of continuity in land use, for example the medieval deer park at Nether Alderley had become ornamental parkland by the 17th century. Estate management has heavily influenced the form of the landscape. Where there has been such a long period of occupation it is usual for the mansion house to have been extensively renovated over time and in some cases entirely rebuilt e.g. Capesthone and Cholmondeley where partial remains of the original house survive in the grounds. Tabley Old Hall stands on Tabley Mere. Tatton has a particularly extensive and detailed archaeological record, which indicates that it has been a place of human activity since at least the Neolithic period (c400BC).

Tatton is listed grade II* on English Heritage’s Register of Parks and Gardens, whilst Tabley, Cholmondeley, Capesthone and Combermere are listed grade II. While most of the estates and their mansion houses and grounds remain in estate ownership, some have developed alternatives to the traditional uses. For example, in the grounds of Mottram Old Hall is the Mottram Hall Hotel and golf course, while a caravan site has been created at Capesthone.

Most of the estates of this character type have utilised the assets of the natural landscape, in particular meres. Many have been enhanced to form ornamental lakes in historic parks and gardens and the largest of these is Combermere, which measures 2.5km in length. Whilst most are glacial mere, Melchett Mere in Tatton Park is the result of subsidence caused by brine pumping.

There are small nucleated settlements such as Norbury and Marbury, but mostly settlement comprises a low density of dispersed farms and halls connected mainly by a pattern of minor roads. The exception is Alderley Edge which has been a popular residential area for Manchester commuters since the establishment of the railway.

Outside the designed landscapes, the remaining area is used mainly for pasture, and there are small – medium (up to 8ha) irregular and semi- regular fields, which are typical of a medieval field pattern and post medieval reorganisation and improvement associated with the estates. Boundaries consist of hawthorn hedges with standard oak trees. Estate farms and lodges are also typical features.

Communications vary from minor roads to A roads and one character area is crossed by the M6 motorway.

Issues affecting the Estate Wood and Mere landscape character type

1. Changes in farming including pressure to diversify and changing patterns of land ownership. The purchase of agricultural holdings by non-farmers is becoming a significant force for change, resulting in

Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment - November 2008
conversion of farm houses and farm buildings and changes in farm use.

2. **Changes in farm crops.** Increase in areas under arable or fodder crops and a trend towards silage production.

3. **On-going decline in traditional woodland management practices** in some areas, leading to under management of farm woodlands, coverts and copses leading to general deterioration. Many hedgerow trees over-mature and in decline.

4. **Reduction, fragmentation and deterioration of habitats:** Loss of ponds through drainage and in-fill plus nutrient run-off from surrounding farmland. Decline in species-rich hedgerows at some locations. Intensification of grassland management leading to loss of species-rich acid grassland.

5. **Loss of historic field pattern** due to decline in hedgerow management, with resulting increase in use of fencing.

6. **Loss of historic parkland** to agriculture and recreational use e.g. golf courses.

7. **Decline in veteran trees:** Loss of a valuable biodiversity resource and an essential component of historic parkland.

8. **Erosion of built environment character through incremental development:** This may lead to loss of historic buildings and vernacular character; the suburbanisation of rural properties and their curtilage; pressure for expansion of existing settlement, ribbon development and in-fill.

9. **Standardisation of roads:** Upgrading of lanes and minor roads leading to increasingly suburban character of the countryside.
EWM1: Cholmondeley Character Area.
Including Castle & Meres, Norbury, Marbury & Comber Mere.

The topography of this character area comprises broad, sweeping undulations c. 80-100m AOD. This has a more intimate scale, with shorter, steeper slopes in the south of the character area near Marbury and Quoisley (up to 150m AOD at Wirswall).

In the north of the character area the large blocks of woodland associated with the Cholmondeley estate are very conspicuous in views to the west from the busy A49. The very large conifer plantation to the south of the parkland is particularly noticeable as it fills the western horizon for a considerable distance. By contrast the landscape to the east is more representative of the Cheshire field system with low hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Points of higher ground provide views out, often framed by hedgerow trees, over the undulating fields of the East Lowland Plain to the north, with the occasional glimpse of one of the meres in the area. Elsewhere very narrow sunken lanes with high hedges, winding through a gently undulating landscape, contribute to the perception of a remote, small scale landscape.

There is a particular concentration of black and white timber framed cottages in this area. Around Norbury the field pattern opens out to present a larger scale landscape with low hedges and post and wire fences, allowing more extensive views. To the west of Cholmondeley Castle the distinctive profile of the Sandstone Ridge forms the northern skyline within a fairly open landscape. Views to the south are dominated by the high ground in the vicinity of Wirswall near the county boundary.

There are ten meres in this character type, many of which are incorporated into the ornamental landscapes of historic estates – for example at Combermere Park, Cholmondeley Castle, Marbury Hall and Quoisley Hall. The large mere in Combermere Park is completely hidden from public view but the surrounding woodlands are very conspicuous, blocking views northward from the A530 for quite a distance.

There are concentrations of woodland on the Combermere and Cholmondeley estates, portions of which are designated as SBIs. This is generally made up of a mix of broad leaves and coniferous trees, but with some areas of solely broad leaved woodland. To the south of the ornamental landscape at Cholmondeley is the large conifer plantation of Moss Wood (one of the largest in the county). Bickley Brook and the infant River Weaver are the most dominant among the various drainage features in the area and ponds are also typical features.

There are small nucleated settlements such as Norbury and Marbury, but mostly settlement comprises a low density of dispersed farms and halls connected mainly by a winding pattern of minor roads. The A49 runs north through the character area and the Llangollen branch of the Shropshire Union Canal utilises a flat area of topography as it crosses Willey Moor, and passes through Steer Bridge.

Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment - November 2008 188
Five of the meres are designated as SSSIs because of their high ecological value such as the large, nutrient rich Comber Mere with swamp and fen vegetation at its margins. There are substantial beds of algae and some horned pond weed, fan-leaved water crowfoot and lesser pondweed. It is an important site for wintering wildfowl and supports one of the largest heronries in the county. Other meres are Deer Park Mere, which is open to the public and fished, and Marbury Big and Little Meres. The latter is surrounded by dense wet willow and alder with marshy ground flora. Fishing is a common pursuit, given the high number of meres. Indeed, two partial skulls believed to be of Saxon date were found in Marbury Mere by an angler.

Bret’s Mere is a damp relic of a once extensive moss, which has been drained and planted with conifers. Pipehouse Farm Mire is an area of former bog, cut by old drains but still retaining extensive wet areas that support iris, greater tussock sedge and reed canary grass. Willows and mature birch have colonised part of the mire as has occurred at Bickley Moss where the wet woodland is well used by warblers, green and great spotted woodpeckers and buzzards. The whole area was identified as important for the enhancement of meres and mosses in the Cheshire Ecological Network (ECOnet) in 2003. Preservation of existing mere and peatland habitat and the restoration of damaged ones is thus a nature conservation priority in this area.

Comber Mere is overlooked by grade I listed Combermere Abbey, which was founded as a Cistercian monastery in 1133. The western range of the cloister is all that survives and this has since been modified into a splendid private country mansion. There is an extensive landscaped park that dates to the 18th century.

Cholmondeley is a grade II* 19th century castle built in gothic style. It was built to replace a much older house that stood nearby and reused material from this. There are formal gardens dating back to c 1700 AD and an 18th century landscaped park. Estate farms are located in the nearby vicinity.

A large portion of the Cholmondeley Estate was put to the plough in WWII. Formerly the landscaped grounds ran as far south as Norbury Common as indicated by Park Farm and Parkside Farm, whose context is now agricultural land.
EWM2: Capesthorne Character Area.
Including Alderley Edge, Mottram, Rednor Mere & Redes Mere.

The topography of this type is undulating – broad, open undulation in the south of the area around Capesthorne (c 80-100m AOD) becoming steeper further north, particularly around Alderley Edge where on the sandstone outcrop, which gave the Edge its name, a maximum elevation of 190m AOD is reached.

This character area is crowded with historic estates and their mansion houses, formal gardens, landscaped parklands, woodland and water features including two large glacial meres. The larger estates are Birtles, Capesthorne, Henbury, Hare Hill, Mottram Old Hall and Alderley Park at Nether Alderley and the collective landscape value of these ornamental estates cannot be understated. The high level of woodland cover is predominantly associated with the historic estates, in some cases providing visual screening from the wider area. Woodland also occurs on the steeper slopes e.g. the large Highlees Wood near Birtles Hall and of course on parts of Alderley Edge, overlaying relict heathland.

This is a small to medium scale landscape that appears to be well-wooded. Many views are curtailed by the strongly undulating landform with local ridge and valley features. There are many areas of a smaller scale where narrow sunken lanes lie between steep tree-lined banks and linear woodlands follow watercourses. This leads to a high degree of enclosure, with glimpsed views framed by trees and high hedges.

The north of the area is more elevated and areas of open ground enjoy extensive and panoramic views in many directions. To the west the northern end of the mid-Cheshire ridge is visible upon the skyline. To the south distant views extend to the Mow Cop area of the Cheshire/Staffordshire ridge whilst in the east the Peak District moors are visible upon the skyline. The views north from Alderley edge are particularly striking and extend beyond the Bollin Valley to encompass the Manchester-Stockport conurbation and the Pennine Hills beyond. A very intrusive overhead power line traverses the area in the vicinity of Henbury Hall. Towards the area’s southern boundary near Redes Mere the ground is less undulating. The more subtle landform and lower elevation means that the views are less impressive and more easily curtailed by roadside trees.

Water bodies are a common feature of this area – from glacial meres at Redes Mere and Radnor Mere (both SBLs) to ornamental lakes at many of the estates e.g. Henbury and Birtles, and numerous ponds. There are also a number of streams such as Snape Brook, and the River Bollin provides part of the northern boundary of the character type.

Mature woodland lines the banks of Radnor Mere except for the south which is part of the Capesthorne parkland. To the east is a large area of ancient woodland which supports uncommon plant and fungi species. The mere has high ornithological value for waders and wildfowl. Also in the grounds of
Capesthorne are a series of artificial lakes that are fished and also designated as an SBI.

There are two small villages in the character area, Siddington at the southern end and in the north Mottram St Andrew. Elsewhere settlement comprises dispersed hamlets, farms and halls. To the west is the larger settlement of Alderley Edge. There are timber framed houses in the character area such as the late medieval moated Mottram Old Hall, which has a timber framed upper storey. There is also a moat at Alderley Old Hall, formed by the two arms of a mill pond.

Alderley Edge is managed by the National Trust as an open access area and is a popular visitor destination. The National Trust also manages the 16th century water mill at Nether Alderley. Alderley Park, a former deer park, is now largely given over to the Astra Zeneca research laboratories, while the grounds of Mottram Old Hall include an hotel and golf course. There is a caravan park at Capethystorne Park.

In the vicinity of The Edge and Mottram St Andrew are pockets of Ancient Enclosure – small, irregular fields of medieval date. Elsewhere enclosure comprises medium sized, semi-regular fields associated with post-medieval reorganisation. Hedgerow boundaries are typical: Alderley Edge was enclosed by Act of Parliament. Some of the main arterial routes in this part of the county pass through the area – including the A538 Wilmslow to Prestbury road, the A537, which runs west from Macclesfield and the A34 that connects Alderley Edge with Congleton.

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**One of the first plantations in Cheshire** was made by Sir Thomas Stanley who planted beech at the Mere, Alderley around 1650. This survives as Beech Wood, an area of old but not ancient woodland.

The Edge comprises dense woodland of pine, beech, oak and birch. Scots Pine was planted on Alderley Edge by the Stanleys in the mid 18th century, and the oldest of the beech were planted in 1799. Like many of the surrounding estates The Edge is also in some respects an ornamental landscape – deliberately planted and subsequently managed for the enjoyment of private individuals initially and now for the general public. Ornamental features include the crude carving of a Wizard’s face into the rock face above a well, and the druid’s stone circle, which were set up on behalf of the Stanleys. The north-eastern part of the Edge is ancient woodland.

The settlement of Alderley Edge developed after 1842 when the Birmingham and Manchester Railway Company opened a station called Chorley for Alderley Edge. Large villas were built along the Edge by wealthy cotton mill owners. Buildings include red brick and black and white timber framed structures.

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Flint tools and waste flakes dating back to the Mesolithic (c 8000 -4000 BC) and Neolithic (c 4000-2000 BC) periods show that the Edge has been a site of activity for thousands of years. There is also evidence of copper and cobalt mining on the Edge that dates from the early 20th century back to at least the Bronze Age – old shafts, drifts and levels, and areas of open workings. Engine Vein and Wood Mine, both Scheduled Monuments, developed during Alderley Edge’s most active period of mining in the 19th century. Alderley Edge is designated a SSSI due to a range of non ferrous ores including lead, cobalt, vanadium and arsenic in sedimentary Triassic rock. It is the only site in Britain where such ore deposits and their host rocks remain accessible for study in the extensive mine workings.

The woodland along Snape Brook comprises ash, alder and sycamore supporting a rich ground flora such as dog’s mercury, wood sorrel and bugle that indicate ancient woodland.

Capesthorpe Hall is listed grade II*. It was built in 1719 -32 to replace a medieval hall and restored in the mid 19th century by Salvin following a fire. There are two Bronze Age bowl barrows in the grounds of Capesthorpe Hall, as well as earthwork remains of the medieval hall, chapel and settlement. This was formerly the site of a medieval deer park.

Scattered throughout the southern part of the character area in particular are small pockets of peat that have accumulated in the hummocky glacio-fluvial deposits e.g. in the grounds of Henbury Hall and at Adders Moss. Massey’s Moss lies in a hollow near Siddington. Broad leaved birch woodland now covers the site, while the ground cover reflects the damp nature of the ground.
EWM 3: Budworth Character Area.
Including Budworth Mere Country Park & Pickmere

This character area is made up of Budworth and Marston Meres and Marbury Country Park. Marbury, which is managed by Cheshire County Council is open to the general public and is a popular visitor destination for families and dog walkers. There are large open grassy spaces and features such as lime avenues left over from the landscaped parkland of the former Marbury Hall, which was built in a French chateau style designed by Salvin, requisitioned as an army camp in 1940, then bought by ICI and finally demolished in 1968. Marbury Country Park is densely covered with broadleaved trees, of which a significant portion is ancient woodland.

This is a large scale, open landscape of medium to large fields, mainly under pasture but with areas of arable farming. The landform appears as a large basin or depression with slopes of varying gradient, with the bottom occupied by Budworth Mere and Pickmere. There is widespread evidence of hedgerow loss and replacement with post and wire fences. Much of the area appears to be intensively farmed and the low, over-maintained hedges and scarcity of hedgerow trees contribute to the open and expansive nature of the landscape. The western part around Marbury Mere appears well-wooded, especially on the mere’s southern margin near Big Wood. The visual character is quite different to that of the more open landscapes further east. There is little visual connectivity with adjacent character areas due to the basin-like topography and the difference in height between the highest and lowest points. Most views terminate at the tree-lined rim that forms the visual horizon.

The area is bisected by the A559, emphasising the topography as it falls down to a central low point and rises up the other side. Minor roads follow the area’s boundary, providing extensive views over the field system filling the lower ground and across the area to the opposite boundary. The two large bodies of open water visually dominate the character area due to the general scarcity of screening elements such as high hedges or woodland.

Settlement includes the village of Higher Marston and occasional farms and individual houses. Enclosure is mainly regular small-medium fields with hedgerow boundaries that are typical of post medieval agricultural improvement. There is a small area south of Great Budworth, where fields of medieval date have been identified and there is an area of common land to the west of Pickmere.
Both Budworth Mere and Pickmere are SBIs. Budworth Mere is the third largest in the county, and best known as a habitat for breeding birds and a refuge for migrating wildfowl. An extensive area of reed bed at the western end with associated woodland is managed as a nature reserve by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust. Pickmere is a large natural mere with good marginal vegetation including reedbed, scrub and broadleaved woodland. The lake is used for boating activities.

There is a large area of broadleaved woodland in the valley of Cogshall Brook. At the south of the site is a disused mill pool with diverse marginal vegetation. The wood has a diverse ground flora and provides habitats for many invertebrates, birds and mammals. The canopy is dominated by oak with frequent sycamore.
EWM 4: Tatton Character Area.
Including Hall, Deer Park & National Nature Reserve

This character area is dominated by the extensive and splendid Tatton Park, which is listed grade II* on the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens. Tatton’s designers are amongst some of the finest in the history of English parks and gardens – Humphrey Repton, John Webb, Lewis Wyatt and Joseph Paxton. At the heart of the 400ha of landscaped parkland are Tatton’s gardens, which reflect many styles of English garden design since they were laid out in 1715 – an Italianate garden, fine herbaceous borders, walled gardens, a fernery, rose garden and Japanese garden with Shinto temple laid out by Japanese workmen in the early 20th century for Lord Egerton. The Hall is surrounded by a wide range of formal gardens and the extensive parkland displays all the elements of the English Landscape Style on a grand scale.

There are a number of individual farms, some of which are estate tenancies, located on the outer edges of this character type associated with small-medium (up to 8ha) regular shaped post medieval fields typical of agricultural improvement.

In general terms this is an area of medium scale, slightly undulating landscape. There is a slight variation in the north around Rostherne Mere where steeper slopes, blocks of woodland, and dense verdant hedges combine to increase the sense of enclosure. The mere is not readily apparent from distant viewpoints and it can appear as an unexpected vista along the surrounding narrow lanes. Within the park a number of large scale elements are particularly impressive; the length of Tatton Mere as it extends into the distance, the extent of several of the grazing enclosures and the length and sweep of the two principal approaches.

Within the park are many clumps of trees and coverts as well as solitary trees that are part of the designed parkland. Dog Wood and Tatton Mere Covert are both ancient broadleaved woodlands with a rich and varied ground flora. Shawheath Plantation is a mature plantation woodland with a number of introduced species.

The linear nature of many of the woodlands tends to exaggerate their importance even further within the landscape. From locations around the area’s boundary most inward views towards the heart of the estate are completely blocked by solid woodland and plantations. From many viewpoints blocks of woodland appear to rise abruptly out of the flat open farmland. The extensive peripheral woodlands prevent both inwards and outward views and there is little visual connectivity between the parkland and the surrounding farmland. The woodlands are a mix of broadleaves and coniferous species and some areas are designated as SBIs.

Throughout the estate a number of isolated farmsteads and lodges share a similar building style and lend cohesion to the landholding. The parkland rises and falls quite dramatically in parts and the high points provide views out to
the east. The Pennine Hills feature prominently, filling the eastern skyline, with the extensive buildings of Manchester Airport occupying the middle ground. This close proximity ensures that moving aircraft, either descending or ascending, are a constant factor in any elevated view. The associated noise can be very intrusive.

The attractive village of Rotherne appears as a tranquil and remote location despite the proximity of a number of major highways that bound the area. Within the character area roads are few and tend to respect the perimeter of Tatton Park, e.g. the A5034 to the west of the park, which is one the main roads through the area.

Permission for a deer park at Tatton was granted as far back as 1290, and today deer still roam the 18th century landscaped parkland with its majestic oaks and unimproved acid grassland. Tatton Old Hall dates from the late 15th century but was replaced by the new hall in 1807.

Melchett Mere, named after the Chairman of the company responsible for the brine extraction that caused subsidence and formation of the body of water, was created in 1922. Both are designated as biological SSSIs. Both have a rich and well developed aquatic flora e.g. fennel and horned pondweed while Melchett Mere is also a breeding site for the brown hawker dragonfly. The site also includes one of the largest areas of fen and reedswamp in the county at Knutsford Moor, which is dominated by common reed. This is important for breeding sedge and reed warblers, sand martins and for wintering and breeding wildfowl. Flushed acidic grassland contains species such as blinks, small sweet-grass and greater birds-foot-trefoil. A variety of woodland types border the mere – alder, willow, birch and oak.

Excavation at Tatton has revealed hearths of a Neolithic date (c 4000-2000 BC) and the remains of a deserted Saxon and medieval village made up of cottages, crofts and fields located on the east side of the Old Hall. There is a 1930s working farm on the estate and during WWII Tatton housed a dispersal airfield and a parachute training school, features surviving from this period include barrage balloon mooring rings.

Much of the Tatton estate is open access land and it is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the North West. Owned by the National Trust since 1958, it is managed by Cheshire County Council. Also of interest in this character area is Rotherne Mere to the north of Tatton, which has been a National Nature Reserve since 1961 and is designated as a SSSI. It was formed by subsidence resulting from the removal of salt deposits and is the largest and deepest (30m) mere in Cheshire, rarely freezing in winter and therefore supporting large numbers of wintering wildfowl, particularly pochard and pintail. Over 10,000 gulls regularly roost on the water and up to 90 cormorants roost in the trees along the edge. The mere is fringed by a narrow band of reed swamp and to the north and west is a small peat bog overgrown with birch. There is woodland in close proximity to the mere, and
most of this is broadleaved and ancient as indicated by wood sorrel and early-purple orchid. The reserve also supports a number of butterfly species, most notably white-letter hairstreak, purple hairstreak and common blue.

The Old Deer Enclosure at Tatton is designated a Grade A SBI as it contains one of the most extensive areas of acid unimproved grassland in lowland Cheshire. Small wet hollows, ponds, brooks, mixed plantations and scattered parkland trees contribute to the habitat diversity. Typical grasses are common bent grass and red fescue.

To the west of Tatton is the small settlement of Mere, where The Mere, which is located alongside a golf course, is designated as a SSSI due to the presence of twelve species of submerged water plants including the nationally rare autumnal water-starwort.
EWM 5: Tabley Character Area.
Including Tabley Mere, Booths Mere & Moseley Hall.

This character area is defined by the features of the estates associated with Tabley House, Toft Hall and Booths Hall. The largest of these is Tabley House, which is of the Palladian style, built in the late 18th century to replace the Old Hall, which was erected c.1380 AD on an island in Nether Tabley Mere. The Old Hall has subsequently collapsed and is now a ruin, the chapel which stood alongside it has been relocated next to the present hall. It is screened from view by mixed belts of broadleaves and coniferous trees that delineate the estate boundaries, part of which is ancient woodland. It was formerly a medieval deer park.

This is a medium scale landscape possessing many features of the surrounding areas. The land is generally slightly undulating but there are several flatter areas. The area is mainly pastoral farmland where the hedgerow system is relatively intact with numerous hedgerow trees and these can screen and filter many views across the landscape. However, there are a number of locations where agriculture appears much more intensive. Here larger and flatter arable fields and low trimmed hedges combine to create a larger scale landscape with panoramic views. Such open locations enjoy distant views east towards the Pennine Hills, whilst in all other directions the low horizon beyond the immediate field system appears full of trees. Urban Knutsford bounds the area to the north and its close proximity has an important localised influence on the landscape where residential development is visible across flat farmland with low hedges.

Patches of higher woodland density are characteristic of this landscape type, and this occurs in the vicinity of the three estates. These locations are characterised by parkland landscapes and extensive tracts of woodland of varying type. The local dominance of massed mature trees reduces the scale of the landscape quite significantly, screening or framing many views and contributing to a landscape that feels much more insular. From most directions the general location of Tabley Hall appears as a solid block of woodland, with no indication of the classic parkland setting surrounding the main buildings. Two highly prominent gatehouse lodges, on the A5033 and the A556, feature as landmarks along these busy highways and provide the only clue to the motorist of the nature of the landscape behind the perimeter woodland screen. The parkland surrounding the hall is representative of the classic “landscaped” country estate. The Hall with its ornamental planting is approached along a number of sweeping tree-lined drives, past ornamental water bodies, veteran specimen trees and strategically located woodland blocks.

In the middle of the character area near Toft Hall a number of large woodland blocks assume greater prominence due to the contrast with the surrounding flat and open fields, many defined by ditches. Woodland comprise a mix of broadleaved and coniferous trees, some of which were associated with the former landscaped grounds of Toft Hall, and survive in a much reduced form e.g. Windmill Wood, originally an approach to the hall.
Settlement comprises a low density scatter of dispersed farms and halls. Fields in this area are predominantly small – medium (up to 8ha) in size and regular in shape, and are typical of post medieval reorganisation. To the east of Tabley is an area of surviving medieval enclosure with irregular shaped fields. Boundaries associated with this type are hedgerows with standard trees. There are a number of individual farms located throughout the area.

This area is adversely affected by a number of incongruous elements within the landscape. The M6 forms a very intrusive element as it crosses the area along a north-south axis. Its visual influence is particularly extensive in the centre of the character area where traffic is highly visible as it passes through flat and open fields.

Further south an electrified rail line crosses over the motorway and the overhead gantries are widely visible. The railway in turn is crossed by an overhead power line, providing another disruptive element within the surrounding open field system. Other major roads include the A50 and A537.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nether Tabley Mere and the larger Tabley Mere are included in a SSSI. Tabley Mere contains extensive strands of submerged plants – autumnal starwort and pondweed, and stands of lesser reedmace and common reed. Along the north shore is an area of acidic marshy grassland. Nether Tabley Mere has extensive cover of yellow and white water lily. A large heronry is present in the nearby woodland (alder, birch and oak) and both undisturbed meres attract wildfowl.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rinks Wood follows the Waterless Brook – it has a canopy of mainly oak and sycamore and a diverse ground flora.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The park and garden associated with Booths Hall to the east of Knutsford includes the large Booths Mere, which has been utilised as an ornamental lake and relict Victorian gardens. To the south of the college buildings is the moated site of Norbury Booths, which is where the medieval hall once stood. To the east of this site are extensive areas of broadleaved woodland, a large proportion of which is ancient and includes water bodies – streams and ponds</td>
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