Landscape Character Type 10:

Lower Farms and Woods
LANDSCAPE TYPE 10: LOWER FARMS AND WOODS
Lower undulating farms and woodland

Key Characteristics:

- Low lying gently rolling topography
- Hedgerow boundaries and standard trees in a mix of medieval and post-medieval reorganised fields (irregular, semi-regular and regular up to 8ha) but with a loss of boundaries leading to formation of large fields and a large proportion of fences adding to this impression.
- Horseculture – fenced horse paddocks.
- High density of woodland – blocks, coverts and riparian
- Medium settlement density - mix of dispersed farms and nucleated hamlets/ villages
- Mosses and some meres resulting from glacial deposits
- Large number of water bodies
General Description:

This character type extends from High Leigh and Arley in the north, east to Poynton and Congleton and as far south as Audlem. It has been divided into seven character areas.

This very gently rolling landscape type has many similarities with the Lowland Plain, yet it has a greater concentration of woodland and a slightly higher settlement density with a greater occurrence of nucleated hamlets and villages.

Land use is a mix of arable and pasture, while settlement largely retains its dispersed pattern but with an increase from low to medium density. Intensive reorganisation during the post-medieval period saw the break up of medieval field patterns. Small surviving mosses are typical for most areas as are ponds.

Visual Character:

This type is characterised by a medium scale landscape, with local variations dependant upon the presence of woodland and the condition of the hedgerows. Local increases in vegetation are often associated with larger brooks or minor watercourses. The better drained parts tend to favour arable farming. Many areas appear to be well wooded, with an intact hedgerow system and frequent woodland blocks, some of a relatively large size compared to the rest of the county. There is a great variety in the range of available views but these are often limited in extent due to the lack of elevated vantage points. Many views are partly blocked or filtered by high hedgerows or woodland. To the west there are no obvious landmarks but where views are available to the east the Pennine Hills are visible in the distance.

Many locations have a very rural character with small, winding country lanes and traditional farm buildings still in active use.

In a limited number of localities there is evidence of field boundary rationalization. The removal of hedgerows has created a larger-scale landscape with more extensive views. In such areas the larger blocks of woodland can appear as prominent features in an open, low lying landscape.

Physical Influences:

This character type has gently undulating topography, in some areas appearing to be almost flat e.g. Brereton Heath. Overall elevation ranges from c 10 – 130 m AOD.

The underlying geology of this type is predominantly made up of one or more forms of halite (rock salt) and mudstone e.g. Bollin Mudstone and Northwich Halite. This is overlain by till, interspersed with glacio-fluvial sand and gravel,
river terrace sand and gravel, alluvium and pockets of peat that have
accumulated in depressions in the drift deposits.

Soils are predominantly typical argillic stagnogleys, and in the Marthall and
Brereton Heath areas this is combined with typical brown sands and typical
humo-ferric podzols.

There is a light scatter of meres and mosses across this type, albeit reduced
in scale due to drainage in the modern period. 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.
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. Cheshire was formerly
dotted with small scale mosses and mires, in some cases only a few metres
across but each individually named and known to local inhabitants. Many of
these have been lost and drained and surviving examples are increasingly
valuable and many are designated as SSSIs for example at Brookhouse Moss
where nationally rare species such as bog rosemary, sundew and crowberry
are present. Mosses are explored in greater detail in the Mossland character
type.

Secondary calcium carbonate deposits are common at a depth of 1-2m in the
till, and before cheap lime was made available in the 19th century this was
dug and spread on the surrounding fields to reduce acidity. On sandy soils
this practice of marling also increases fertility and moisture holding capacity.
The digging of these marl pits led to the creation of ponds as the pits filled
with water and were colonised by a rich variety of plants and animals from
other wetland habitats of greater antiquity, for example, meres and mosses.
Clay pits were also dug for use in daub in the construction of vernacular
structures and later to make bricks.

The natural processes of vegetation succession have reduced many ponds to
small, shallow features, over shaded with trees and with little open water.
Nevertheless, it is estimated that Cheshire’s 16,000 ponds represent some
10% of all farm ponds in England and Wales, and still provide an important
wildlife resource. Characteristic plant species include bur marigold, water
plantain, tubular water-dropwort, reedmace, branched bur-reed, water
horsetail, common spike-rush, purple loosestrife, water milfoil, various water
lilies and pondweeds. A wide range of invertebrates are associated with marl
pits as well as all five species of amphibian found in Cheshire, including the
European protected great crested newt.

There are scattered small patches of semi-improved and unimproved
grassland, which provide valuable habitats for other botanical species. Acid
grassland is rare in lowland Cheshire.
Much like the *Rolling Farmland* and *Sandy Woods* types this was once an area where heath was common – in the 18th century there was a large heath at West Heath to the west of Congleton, which is now a suburb of the town; Swettenham and Peover Heaths survive as place names only; while just a small fragment of the former Brereton Heath survives.

While small wooded copses and coverts are relatively common, there are larger blocks of broad leaves and conifer plantations, as well as riparian woodland on steep slopes alongside streams and in the grounds of estates e.g. shelter belts and visual screens. A small proportion of this is ancient woodland – for example Bongs Wood on the slopes of Arley Brook where the ground flora includes ancient woodland indicator species such as dog’s mercury and wood anemone. Woodland also occurs in association with moss areas – alder and willow are typical of the damper areas, progressing to oak and sycamore where the ground becomes better drained.

**Cultural Influences:**

Overall settlement has a medium density – predominantly this is dispersed but with some small nucleated hamlets and villages and very occasionally larger villages. This is to be expected given the proximity of this type to some large urban areas as well as some of the highly desirable residential settlements in Cheshire e.g. Knutsford and Alderley Edge and the motorway infrastructure which makes commuting possible.

Field patterns are a mix of medieval enclosure with post medieval improvements and modern adaptation. The overall pattern is therefore a combination of regular, irregular and semi-regular form, varying from small to medium (up to 8ha) in size, with some larger fields. The survival of medieval field systems is fragmentary, resulting from the extensive post medieval agricultural changes and programmes of enhancement that occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Heathland and mosses were also enclosed and drained at this time to maximise productivity. Today the land is used for arable as well as pastoral farming.

Boundaries are a mix of patchy hawthorn hedges with standard trees and fences. There has been substantial boundary loss, which has led to the formation of larger fields and the fencing exacerbates impression of larger fields. Horsiculture also has made an impact on this area e.g. stables and modern fenced horse paddocks.

Typical architectural materials used are red brick, some cottages and houses with a white render. There are also some black and white timber framed cottages as well as examples with brick noggin.

Human activity in this type can be traced back to prehistory, with a number of Bronze Age barrows e.g. the Jodrell Bank barrow cemetery. A possible Roman army camp is located at Bent Farm. Moats are typical features in this type and are indicative of affluence in the medieval period, when they were constructed to provide ornamentation and to declare a certain level of status.
rather than to act as defensive features. Fishponds are often associated with moats, which provided a valuable source of food. Moats are found at Hough Hall and in the grounds of Belmont Hall. There are some historic estates e.g. Arley and Peover but far fewer than in the Estate Wood and Mere landscape type, which otherwise shares a small number of background characteristics with this type.

Key arterial routes such as the M6 and M56 pass through the character areas but more typical are the network of minor roads. A major landmark located in this type is the Jodrell Bank Observatory.

**Issues affecting the Lower Farms and Woods landscape character type**

1. **Increase in demand for equestrian facilities** riding schools etc. including enclosed exercise areas and associated large-scale buildings.

2. **Continued pressure for mineral extraction:** current and future operations can present a threat to habitats but also provide opportunities for habitat creation

3. **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 conversion of farm houses and farm buildings and changes in farm use.

4. **Changes in farm crops.** Increase in areas under arable or fodder crops and a trend towards silage production. Possible move towards bio-energy crops such as miscanthus

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

6. **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. Loss of ancient woodland through inappropriate management, grazing, encroachment and erosion through informal recreation.

7. **Loss of historic field pattern** due to decline in hedgerow management, with resulting increase in use of fencing.
8. **Loss of historic parkland** to agriculture and recreational use e.g. golf courses.

9. **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.

10. **Standardisation of roads:** Upgrading of lanes and minor roads leading to increasingly suburban character of the countryside.
LFW1: Marthall Character Area.
Including Peover Eye, Jodrell Bank & Swettenham heath

This low undulating (c 40-90m AOD) character area extends from Lower Peover, northwest as far as Alderley Edge. The southern boundary is provided by the valley of the River Dane.

This is a medium scale landscape of mixed arable and pastoral farmland which shares many of the characteristics of the *West Lowland Plain*. There are localised areas of more undulating ground but the land is generally flat. In the north many fields have been enlarged and there is evidence of hedgerow removal with increased reliance upon post and wire fences. This has produced a more open, larger scale landscape with more extensive views, although even here many views are curtailed in the middle distance by solid blocks of woodland. The estate woodlands associated with Toft Hall and Peover Hall have a strong visual presence and feature in many views. In the north of the character area the landscape is strongly influenced by the close proximity of urban Knutsford, Wilmslow and Alderley Edge. A number of major highways, including the A50 and A537, traverse the area with the associated intrusion of heavy traffic, but many tranquil rural locations remain in the inter-land between these strategic routes.

The area is drained by a number of small rivers including Peover Eye, Marthall Brook and Pedley Brook and these are often associated with linear woodlands or lines of mature trees, forming conspicuous features in the landscape.

In the northern part of the character area the high ground of Alderley Edge with its wooded slopes forms an important visual feature on the horizon. In the south the Jodrell Bank radio telescope provides a local landmark as it is visible over a wide expanse.

Settlement has a medium density comprising clusters of dispersed settlement e.g. the Warford Hall and Blackden Heath areas; linear settlement that has developed along roadways e.g. Stocks Lane, Over Peover; small nucleations at Swan Green and Twemlow Green and larger nucleated villages that have undergone modern expansion such as Chelford and Goostrey. The railway connecting Alderley Edge and Holmes Chapel runs across the area.

There is a substantial concentration of small-medium (up to 8ha) medieval fields with semi-regular pattern in the Lower Peover/Peover Hall area. Much of the remaining area comprises regular small-medium post medieval enclosure with some medieval and large modern fields (over 8ha). Boundaries are a mix of patchy hawthorn hedges with standard trees and fences. Horsiculture also has made an impact on this area e.g. stables and modern fenced horse paddocks. Red brick buildings, some with white wash are typical and there are also a number of half timbered, brick nogged cottages.
This Character Area has a number of place names that indicate former heath and mossland. Today small areas of peat occur at the Lower Moss Wood Nature Reserve and Gleads Moss. The latter is a SSSI for its fen and alder carr. A small area of bog remains on the western edge of the site and a narrow fringe of acidic marshy grassland is included along the northern edge of the woodland, most of which is wet and dominated by alder, birch and willow. The rich ground flora contains many fen species including sedges and meadowsweet, soft rush and bogbean. The bog vegetation is dominated by bog mosses (Sphagnum species)

A range of woodland types occur across the character area from riparian ancient woodland, birch colonised mossland, to planted blocks of broad leaves and conifers, for example at Lower Withington. Several woodlands are SBIs such as at Sossmoss Wood. Stockin Moss and Lower Moss Wood. Woodlands include birch, oak and sycamore with planted conifers. The understorey is rowan with holly and buckthorn while the ground flora is locally dominated by buckler fern with areas of bracken. Diversity in these woodlands is provided by open heath areas, ponds and remnant bogs.

Peover Eye river valley with steep-sided banks, permanent pasture and woodland with ancient woodland indicators, has a diversity of species rich habitats. The underlying geology supports a mosaic of grassland types – acid, neutral with species rich flushes. The valley is designated as an SBI, as are sections of Marthall and Pedley Brooks, where the latter's banks are predominantly wooded with alder and neutral semi-improved and unimproved grassland.

Human activity can be traced back four thousand years with a Bronze Age barrow cemetery at Jodrell Bank, although this has been badly damaged by excavation and ploughing. Two further possible barrows are located near Twemlow Hall, which is a Grade II, formerly moated late 17th century mansion house of red brick.

Peover Hall has a Grade II park and garden listed on the English Heritage Register. The Hall itself is a Grade II* 16th century manor house, with a moat to the south west that indicates the location of an earlier medieval house. Broadleaved shelter belts surround the grounds.
LFW2: Brereton Heath Character Area.
Including Brereton & Astbury Mere Country Park

This gently undulating and almost flat character area (70-120m AOD) is located south of the River Dane. It extends from Holmes Chapel down to Sandbach and across to Congleton.

The landscape is predominantly of a medium scale but with wide variations in enclosure. Although primarily an agricultural landscape, woodlands provide an important visual characteristic throughout the character area, often out of proportion to their actual size. The woodland type varies greatly, ranging from conifer plantations to dense birch woods on former mosses or heathland. This has an obvious effect upon landscape character and provides visual diversity throughout.

Sand extraction has lead to the creation of a number of water bodies and some, such as that at Arclid form important features in the landscape. Others are well screened by vegetation and cannot be seen from public highways.

Views across the landscape are variable. To the east the high ground of the Pennine Hills form an important feature and Mow Cop and the Cloud within the Upland Footslopes landscape type are clearly visible across a large part of the character area. To the west the much flatter landscape of the East Lowland Plain type provides no obvious landmarks.

In the vicinity of Brookhouse Green is a concentration of small (up to 4ha), irregular shaped medieval fields. This is also an area with a number of small, narrow minor roads. Elsewhere the field type is mainly post-medieval in date and more regular in form (up to 8ha). Across the area there are a number of large (over 8ha), regular, modern fields. Boundaries are a mix of patchy hawthorn hedges with standard trees and fences. Typical building materials include red brick and white render.

A small area of heath is located at Brereton Heath Country Park, which is a popular visitor attraction. This is a reclaimed sand quarry part of which is now a lake. There is an expanse of broadleaved woodland, and to the east, in the vicinity of the village of Somerford there is a mix of broad leaves and conifers. Much of this site is designated an SBI. Other large broadleaved woodland blocks include Blackberry Covert and Brookhouse Moss.

There are a number of small villages and hamlets in this character area such as Brereton Heath, Brereton Green, Brookhouse Green and Arclid. Elsewhere settlement is generally dispersed. Brereton Hall is a 16th century building in origin with subsequent alterations. It is listed grade II. The site of a former mill lies to the west of the Hall, the mill pond of which survives albeit heavily silted.

There are large working sand pits at Arclid to the north of Sandbach and due west of Congleton. At Dumber Bank there is a waste disposal site. The M6
passes through the western edge of the area and includes the Sandbach Services. Three main roads in the area are the A50, A54 and A534.

Small peat patches are located at Brookhouse Moss and at Bagmere, both of which are biological SSSIs. Bagmere is the bed of a former mere, which has now almost completely in-filled with peat apart from one small area of open water. The range of habitats includes rich fen, the vegetation of which is dominated by lesser pond-sedge. Notable species include purple small reed and greater pond sedge; marshy grassland with species such as meadowsweet and wild angelica; and carr woodland dominated by grey willow and downy birch. The site supports the only colony of small pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly in Cheshire.

Brookhouse Moss is an outstanding example of a moss at an advanced stage of development. Several areas of open bog vegetation are present in which bog mosses, cross leaved heath and cotton grass are dominant. Nationally rare species such as bog rosemary, sundew and crowberry are also present. The scarce alder buckthorn occurs in the fen woodland along with birch, alder and goat willow. The Carr woodland grades into drier oak with rowan and purple moor–grass.

A large swamp and marsh lie to the south of Brookhouse Moss and Bagmere where breeding birds include reed bunting and whitethroat; both are designated as SBIs.

There is one glacial mere located at Taxmere north of Sandbach. This is an SBI and the southern and western edges have unimproved semi-natural grassland. At the north and east lie wet grassland. The lake is surrounded by lush marginal vegetation and wet woodland - mostly alder and hazel with pond sedges. There are numerous ponds located across the area.

In Brereton Plantation is a large lake formed by sand working and now managed for recreational purposes. Drains and dried out ponds add to the diversity as do patches of acid unimproved and semi-unimproved grassland. The site supports birch woodland with occasional oak and pine is regenerating well.

Historic features within this area are varied. At Somerford Bridge there is a potential Neolithic (4000-2000BC) long barrow, although it has been suggested that this was the site of a mass cattle grave following an outbreak of murraine. Yet the discovery of two inurned cremations indicates that there has been activity in the area since at least the Bronze Age. At Bent Farm there are the earthwork remains of a possible temporary Roman camp.
LFW 3: Arley Character Area.
Including Park Moss, Holford Moss & Plumley Lime Beds.

Arley is a low rolling character area (c 40-70m AOD). It extends from the northern boundary south to the gas storage fields at Holford Moss. To the east lies the Estate Woodland and Mere types of Tatton and Tabley and to the west is the East Lowland Plain.

This is a medium to large scale landscape with obvious and strong contrasts in landscape character arising from a significant variation in the distribution of hedgerow trees. There is a very localised concentration of woodland, broad-leaved and mixed, including a small element of ancient woodland. Although in many parts the field system remains intact there are signs of hedgerow decline across large parts of this character area. Where more intensive arable farming is practiced there are conspicuous lines of isolated oaks and post and wire fences. Where woodland is present it can appear as a solid block within this expansive and open landscape. Elsewhere there are sufficient hedgerow trees to filter views across the landscape. Big Wood near Arley Hall is typical of a number of large woodlands which have a significant local effect upon landscape character.

The M56 runs east-west along the area’s northern boundary and the complex multi-level M6-M56 interchange in the west is especially intrusive. The close proximity of a number of urban areas including Knutsford and High Leigh has an important localised influence upon landscape character and land use. There are no obvious views to the west despite the many patches of open ground and significant landmarks are scarce. Views to the east extend to the very distant Pennine Hills.

Settlement includes the nucleated village of High Legh, small hamlets at Moss End and Bate Heath. It is mainly made up of dispersed farms and houses, with a medium density.

Fields are largely post-medieval in date and reflect improvements at this time. They are small – medium (up to 8ha), with some large fields (over 8ha) in a regular and semi-regular pattern. There are a few medieval fields that have survived this reorganisation. Boundaries consist of a mix of patchy hawthorn hedges with standard trees and fences. Horsiculture has also made an impact on this area e.g. modern fenced horse paddocks.

Fundamentally this is a rural character area, with a network of minor roads and settlement. However, the M6 bisects the centre of the type and the M56 cuts across the northern portion. The visual impact increases locally where the motorway is raised upon embankment or where over-bridges allow a number of minor roads to cross over the motorway.
Arley Hall was built in c1833-41 and is listed grade II*. It stands on the site of an earlier moated house. Arley’s park and garden is also listed Grade II* on the English Heritage Register. Arley Green is a picturesque small settlement at the gates to Arley Hall and includes a timber framed school that is listed Grade II. There are a large number of moated sites in this character area, indicating the status of the dwellings in the medieval period. Moats were status symbols and ornamental features, not designed for defensive purposes. Examples include: Belmont, Hough Hall, Alderhedge Wood and Swineyard Hall.

Areas of ancient woodland include Park Covert and Winnington Wood. There are a number of wooded SBIs including wooded streams e.g. Wincham Brook and the Arley and Waterless Brook. Others include blocks of wood such as on Holford Moss and shelter belts in the grounds of Arley Hall. Mill Wood, Big Wood and Willowbed Wood comprise a large woodland complex in Arley Park. All are rich in plant and bird species. Mill Wood is a narrow strip of wet broad leaved woodland in the valley of Arley Brook with a marshy ground flora and was a large pool in the nineteenth century. Big Wood is an oak wood traversed with many drains and Willowbed Wood is on flat land traversed by drains with several ponds.

Bongs Wood is an ancient woodland on Arley Brook. It lies on land which slopes steeply with a flood plain planted with hybrid black poplars. The canopy is dominated by mature oaks with some sweet chestnut, downy birch, cherry and sycamore. The understorey includes coppiced hazel. The ground flora contains ancient woodland indicator species.

In the south of the character area Plumley Lime Beds SSSI is an old industrial waste tip that now provides a rare example of a calcareous habitat in a county where there are few outcrops of limestone and areas of calcareous soils. Lime has washed from the lime beds into the surrounding soil creating a variable soil condition. The site is rich in willow species and a number of interesting hybrids occur while the ground flora includes yellow-wort, common centaury and hawkweeds. Orchids are abundant and there is hybridisation between the northern and southern marsh orchids, which is unusual as both are at the limits of their distribution. A moderately herb rich grassland has developed on the soil overlying the lime beds and a number of moss species have been recorded on the site including the rare flamingo moss. Woodland, scrub and reed beds provide a nesting habitat for a number of warbler species. The open water attracts waders and wildfowl.

There are three large areas of moorland in the character area, Sink Moss, Whitley Reed and Holford Moss. Holford Moss Wood is an area of mixed woodland on old moorland dominated by oak, birch and Scots pine with signs of former peat cutting. As a result of local brine pumping an area of saltmarsh has developed around the old pump reservoir. Inland salt marsh is a rare habitat in Cheshire and this site includes several species normally only found on the coast: sea aster, lesser sea spurrey and reflexed saltmarsh grass. A large area of neutral unimproved grassland survives in Wincham Brook Valley, designated as an SBI.
LFW4: Audlem Character Area.
Including Dodington Hall, Checkley Wood & Blakenhall Moss

This character area lies south of Wyburnbury and runs south to the county boundary. The western boundary is defined by the River Duckow. This is a broadly undulating character area (c. 40-130m AOD), with steeper wooded slopes along watercourses e.g. the Duckow and the Checkley Brook. Some aspects of these riparian slopes are ancient woodland and are also designated as SBIs.

Settlement is of low density and mainly consists of dispersed hamlets and farms and small settlements such as Buerton and Chorlton. Fields are a mix of medieval, post-medieval and modern enclosures i.e. small to large (up to 8ha), regular, semi-regular and irregular fields with boundaries of hedgerows and standard trees. In the north of the area a number of roads radiate out of Nantwich towards the county boundary. A number of substantial properties located along these highways contribute to a more settled and urban character. Over most of the area however the low density of small settlements, linked by a network of narrow country roads, creates a quiet rural, almost isolated, atmosphere.

A number of large woodland blocks are visible from major highways and in many locations hedgerow trees are abundant. In areas of more intensive arable farming there are signs of field boundary rationalisation. Where this is combined with low trimmed, intermittent hedges with fewer trees, the scale of the landscape increases and such areas are characterised by extensive views in all directions. In the east the Staffordshire Hills, with visible urban development, are prominent above the massed tree canopies of the Cheshire farmland.

The parkland and mere associated with Dodington Hall are very noticeable from the A51 and the scale of much of the surrounding area seems to be larger and more expansive. Further south the highway follows the undulations of the topography and the high points provide extensive views out over the landscape and the intact field system.

Around Audlem the topography is more undulating, with tree-lined streams and field drains, small woodlands and copses. This area appears more verdant and enclosed, with a smaller scale. As one progresses further north along the area’s western margins the topography appears similar to parts of the Lowland Plain, with views over a flat expanse of large fields with low hedges, towards the high ground forming the southern end of the Sandstone Ridge.

Roads include the A525, A529 and the A51, the remainder being minor routes. The main line of the Shropshire Union Canal passes through the area as does a railway line to Crewe.
Checkley Wood is a particularly large woodland with ancient woodland flora indicators. It is part broad leaved and part coniferous and also an SBI. According to an 18th century description, Checkley Wood was managed as coppice with standards, which was thought to have been used for charcoal production – namely the tops of trees and underwood. Until the use of coal and coke, charcoal was an important source of fuel, particularly in the iron industry. Lea Forge, which stood on Checkley Brook from the 17th to 19th centuries, is likely to have used charcoal from this wood.

There are a small number of riparian wooded areas, good examples being Threepers Drumble where there is a rich ground flora indicative of ancient woodland and an understorey that includes coppiced hazel and alder; and Long Wood where a diverse clough woodland with a canopy dominated by oak with willow and alder by the stream. The ground flora is lush and diverse and includes abundant wood melick as well as ramsons, moschatel, sweet woodruff, wood sorrel, bluebells and dog’s mercury.

Hatherton Flush SSSI is the largest flush of its type in Cheshire and contains an excellent assemblage of wetland plants such as marsh valerian, great horsetail and bog pimpernel. Several species of orchid grow profusely on the site including marsh helleborine which are rare in Cheshire as is marsh lousewort which is also present. It is surrounded by acidic grassland, which is characteristically species poor and contains plants such as crested dog’s tail and heath grass. A small part of the Betley Mere SSSI is included in this character area – the rest of which lies over the county border in Shropshire.

Within the low rolling hills of this area are numerous small hollows, filled with peat but still occasionally retaining open water. Examples include the SBI Blackenhall Moss, which is an almost circular area of woodland on the site of an old moss, the eastern end of which has a rich ground flora. There are small isolated patches of unimproved grassland, for example in Jericho Wood and Pasture where neutral grassland and neutral flushed grassland occur.

Doddington Hall is a Grade I listed building, combining an 18th century hall with a late 14th/early 15th-century tower house. The latter is an unusual example of a building style that is found further north in the Border Reiver territory of the English/Scottish border. Its park and garden is listed grade II. Associated with the Hall was once a deer park, which was used as the site of a prisoner of war camp in WWII.

Early indications of activity in this area are known from the Bridgemere hoard, which included early Bronze Age axes and a long dagger. A pillbox stands in Buerton and a bomb decoy site was located at Chorlton. Industrial sites in the area include brine pits north of Audlem, of which little surface evidence survives. There is a former sand quarry at Hough Mill.
LFW5: Chonar Character Area.
Area of farmland separating Wilmslow and Alderley Edge

This is a small area of gently undulating farmland (68-94m AOD) partially bound by the settlements of Wilmslow and Alderley Edge in the west and the Upper Bollin Valley Character Area to the north east.

Although the location is essentially urban-fringe the character of much of the area is surprisingly rural, due to the absence of industry and the suburban character of the settlement edges, with large mature gardens and abundant trees. Within the character area a number of dispersed farmsteads are located along narrow but well-used country roads.

Fields are almost exclusively under pasture, generally medium-sized and irregular in shape, defined by hedgerows with abundant hedgerow trees. They comprise a combination of medieval, post medieval and modern enclosures. At several locations there is evidence of field boundary rationalisation with lines of squat hedgerow oaks identifying former hedgerows. There are numerous field ponds.

The high escarpment of Alderley Edge to the south, in the adjacent Capesthorne Character Area, forms a very prominent wooded feature and dominates all view in this direction.

In the west the area is by traversed by the Manchester-Crewe railway and the busy Handforth-Wilmslow Bypass and urban influences are much stronger. The noise generated by both road and railway can be intrusive and the roofs of residential properties can be glimpsed amongst mature trees. The highway planting scheme is beginning to mature and screen much of the traffic but the electrified rail line on embankment is more evident. The Alderley Edge Golf Course occupies the western extent of the character area in the vicinity of Whitehall Brook. This small watercourse meanders through an ornamental landscape of mown grass and younger trees with a backdrop of more steeply rolling ground and mature copses.

Prior to the construction of the Wilmslow-Handforth Bypass (opened 1995) a major project was undertaken to mitigate the impact of the construction programme upon amphibians in 15 field ponds lost to highway construction and a further 10 affected by associated development. This included the excavation of replacement ponds and the capture and translocation of 11,000 amphibians, including all 5 of the widespread native species (common frog, common toad, smooth newt, palmate newt and great crested newt)
LFW6: Ashley Character Area.
Including Ashley, Styal, and Manchester Airport’s second runway

This gently undulating character area is located along the northern boundary of Cheshire, stretching from the intersection of the A556 and M56 in the west to Styal in the east. It lies c 20-60m AOD. This is a medium-scale landscape of relatively flat topography with minor variations in slope. The area is characterised by a combination of typical rural elements, such as high hedges, narrow country lanes and tree-lined streams, and very intrusive man-made features such as motorways and the sprawling complex of Manchester Airport. Development over the county boundary in Greater Manchester is on a far greater urban scale than in Cheshire and in many ways despite the impact this has had, this character area can still in part be described as rural.

Much of the area consists of post medieval fields, but with a small patch of surviving medieval enclosure to the east of Tatton. Field size is small – medium (up to 8ha) and mainly regular with some semi-regular fields. There are a small number of broadleaved and mixed wooded areas – copses and along watercourses. Burleyhurst and Brickhill Woods are examples of ancient woodland and there are numerous ponds

This character area, by virtue of its proximity to Manchester has undergone significant changes in the past decades. This is a prime catchment area for commuters who work in Manchester and also contains a complex concentration of transport infrastructure. The M56 is the most important highway traversing the area and visually dominates a corridor of agricultural land along an east-west axis. The visual impact increases locally where the motorway is raised upon embankment or where over-bridges allow a number of minor roads to cross over the motorway. There are also railway lines – a substantial cutting runs north-south to Manchester from Wilmslow. These all have a visual impact upon the area as well as noise implications.

Manchester Airport has a massive intrusive presence within this character area in terms of buildings, structures and aircraft. At peak times moving aircraft are a constant element within the landscape and provide a major visual intrusion within the surrounding agricultural landscape. One of the runways lies on the area’s northern boundary and when viewed from the south this runway appears upon a raised formation that is elevated above the surrounding, slightly elevated, farmland. The obvious artificial element of the extensive level runway and perimeter fence is evident even when aircraft are absent.

Views across the landscape are variable. On the more elevated sections of the A556 there are extensive views north to the industrial areas of Carrington and Partington which extend to the Pennines on the distant skyline. Tatton Park borders this area and the extensive estate woodlands provide a very conspicuous feature in views to the south.

The settlement pattern, which was dispersed in origin, has undergone creeping linear expansion along the roads e.g. at Mobberley and Knolls
Green. There is now a medium settlement density and red brick buildings are typical. Recent developments include Her Majesty’s Prison, Styal. There are golf courses at Hollingee and to the north of Styal.

There are a number of sites that represent the activity that this area has witnessed in the past - a Bronze Age cremation burial excavated at Fairy Brow, Agden Roman coin hoard, the crossing of the River Bollin by a Roman road and a medieval moat at Hollingee.
LFW7: Barthomley Character Area.
Including Crewe Hall, Slaughter Hill & Wheelock Heath

This gently undulating character area is located south of Sandbach and runs as far west as Nantwich and east as far as Alsager. It lies c 40 -110m AOD. Fields are small-large in size and regular-irregular in pattern. This reflects the re-use and adaptation of medieval and post-medieval fields in the modern period. Loss of boundaries and the introduction of fences in the landscape are more recent events.

This is a landscape of strong contrasts with many local variations, and in places the relatively dense settlement pattern is very obvious. The area around Crewe Hall is small scale and verdant due to the presence of large blocks of woodland which curtail many views. Elsewhere around the edge of Crewe the landscape is relatively open due to the combination of flat topography and low field boundaries and is especially susceptible to the visual intrusion of large man-made structures. Large warehouses and industrial buildings, highway over-bridges, tall lighting columns associated with both road and rail infrastructure and built development in general all dominate the surrounding landscape. The topography becomes more undulating towards the county boundary in the south, where there is a strong sense of rural tranquillity due to enclosing landforms and abundant trees and hedgerows.

The area is heavily influenced by its close proximity to Crewe and the development of this railway town, in particular the rapid expansion that it underwent in the 20th century. Accordingly the nucleated settlements on the fringes of Crewe - Haslington, Hough, Shavington, Weston and Wheelock have also undergone modern growth, as has Sandbach to the north. In recent years this area has experienced significant change to landscape character arising from the development of extensive new residential areas upon former agricultural land. The development at Wychwood Park near Weston which includes a hotel and housing is particularly noticeable, where a new road system serves substantial properties constructed adjacent to a new golf course and is surrounded by extensive landscaped areas. Another golf course is located to the north-east of Crewe Hall. There is a background pattern of dispersed settlement, which is typical of the area before the development of Crewe.

The communications network has had a massive impact on the character of this area – beginning with the introduction of railway lines (the first in 1837) and the subsequent development of the massive railway junction at Crewe. Numerous important highways traversing this area have a substantial impact upon landscape character. The A500 is particularly high where it bridges the main north-south rail line and moving traffic is visible over an extensive area. Elsewhere major highways pass through deep cuttings and the roadside planting schemes are very conspicuous within the original field pattern. The M6 in a very significant visual feature in the east as it traverses the gently undulating landform, progressing between cuttings and embankments with moving vehicles particularly noticeable upon the latter.
There are a number of industrial sites including a vast landfill site at Maw Green to the northeast of Crewe and a Royal Ordnance factory at Radway Green to the south of Alsager. Also in south-east Crewe at Crewe Gates Farm there is a large industrial estate, which has a visual impact upon the surrounding area.

A concentration of woodland occurs at Crewe Hall (listed Grade I) in the park and garden (listed on the English Heritage register as Grade II). Here woodland comprises broadleaves, conifers and a mix of both. Elsewhere woodland cover is limited. Broadleaves follow stretches of water courses such as Engelsea Brook, and Deans Rough and Riders Wood are two small areas of ancient woodland. The Henbury Lee and Monneley Mere areas are also mosslands, characterised in part by drainage ditches. SBIs include Haymoor Green Farm Meadow, Basford Brook and Townhouse Wood.

Finds such as a Neolithic (4000-2000 BC) hand axe and a possible Roman lead salt pan indicate early activity. Much more recent are the remains of a WWII Prisoner of War Camp at Snape Farm where Italian and German POWs were confined. There are a number of high status halls in the area – Willaston, Hough and Weston – all of which are Grade II* and Haslington, which is Grade I.