Landscape Character Type 13:

River Valleys
LANDSCAPE TYPE 13: RIVER VALLEY
Incised river valley

R1 Lower Weaver
R2 Mid Weaver
R3 Upper Weaver
R4 Lower Dane
R5 Upper Dane
R6 Wych Brook
R7 River Dee
R8 Lower Bollin
R9 Upper Bollin

Key Characteristics

- Steep sided river valleys
- Meandering river courses
- High levels of woodland along the river and tributary valleys, of which a significant proportion is ancient woodland
- Tributaries in wooded cloughs
- Grassy banks – including acid grassland
- Bridges and viaducts
- Isolated halls and farms
General Description:

Cheshire is partly bounded by the Mersey estuary to the north and the River Dee to the west, both of which largely drain areas outside the county. Of the rivers originating within Cheshire, by far the most important is the Weaver and its tributary the Dane which arises just over the border in Derbyshire. The Bollin and the Gowy are also important for draining large parts of the county. There are many smaller scale incised rivers and streams across the county – Cheshire is very well covered – but most of these are too small to stand as character areas and instead contribute to the character of other landscape types.

Visual Character:

In most cases a steep slope, predominantly wooded, marks the transition between the Cheshire Plain and a narrow valley floor and meandering river bed. The existence or extent of a flood plain varies greatly within the different character areas, as does the depth of incision of the river within its wider environs. The great contrast with the surrounding areas, the steep ground of the valley sides compared to the surrounding flat plain and the dense tree cover within the valleys compared to the scarcity of woodland upon the plain, strongly influences the character and perception of this landscape type. Views are generally restricted within the valley due to the physical enclosure provided by the deep incision of the river bed, the steep topography and the dense vegetation. Where the vegetation is less enclosing the visual horizon may extend to the valley shoulder. Any longer distance views tend to be along the watercourse, i.e. up and down stream, but in many locations even these are curtailed by bank-side trees as they follow the acute meandering of the watercourse.

A number of substantial properties, often of architectural merit, have been established upon the valley shoulders or upper slopes to exploit the scenic value of the river. These provide attractive and imposing landmarks when viewed from the lower ground or riverside footpaths, and are often surrounded by mature amenity planting which complements the building and make a positive contribution to the riparian landscape.

A number of highways cross the river valleys at historic bridging points. These small scale structures, in local materials, are easily integrated into the landscape and contribute to the perceived picturesque character of these locations. Elsewhere, modern bridging structures of steel and concrete can appear incongruous and out of scale, especially if associated with large earthwork embankments. Where a major highway traverses the valley the visual intrusion of the engineered structure and moving vehicles is often accompanied by the noise of busy traffic and a loss of tranquillity.

Physical Influences:
At the height of the last glaciation, the Devensian, the whole of Cheshire was covered by a continuous ice sheet. Cheshire has a number of 'tunnel valleys' including the Weaver and the Gowy where the erosive power of glacial melt water has deepened the river channel into the bedrock. In the case of the Weaver the melt water drained in the opposite direction from the current river - south to the River Severn. When the ice retreated it left 90% of the county covered with glacial sediments known as the Stockport Formation and the present day rivers have cut through these sediments down to the bedrock in most places. As this process developed progressive abandonment of floodplains left a series of descending river terraces with fluvial deposits lying parallel to the river channels.

Cultural Influences:

Rivers are distinctive features within the landscape which are frequently used to identify geographical and political boundaries. The importance of the Cheshire rivers as a means of transport has led to some major changes in the landscape. The River Dee downstream from Chester was canalised in 1735 producing much reclaimed land at Sealand and the Lache Eyes. The River Weaver was similarly canalised at the same time producing the Weaver Navigation with various side channels and ox-bows.

Issues affecting the River Valley landscape character type

1. Decline of important ancient and semi-natural woodland habitats through reduction, fragmentation and deterioration of clough woodlands. Some woodland areas affected by encroachment from development and farming activities. Ancient and semi-natural woodlands are often inappropriately managed. Mismanagement can prevent natural regeneration, e.g. stock grazing. Some sites have had inappropriate species introduced, such as rhododendron.

2. Reduction, fragmentation and deterioration of wetland habitats, wet grassland etc: Loss of wetland through drainage and in-fill plus nutrient run-off from surrounding farmland.

3. Visitor pressure at some locations leading to loss of tranquillity, loss and fragmentation of habitats, and demand for additional facilities. Development of improved public access networks exploiting potential of waterway corridor.

4. Changes to established pattern of industrial development due to reduction and rationalisation of industrial sector. Potential new uses for established sites and deterioration or dereliction of redundant sites.

5. Demand for waterside locations for new residential developments due to changes to public attitudes as former industrial sites become desirable locations.
6. **On-going decline in traditional woodland management practices**
   leading to under management of farm woodlands, leading to general deterioration. Many hedgerow trees over-mature and in decline.

7. **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.
**R1: Lower Weaver Character Area.**
**Including floodplains & woodland**

This river valley character area extends from Frodsham in the north, southwards as far as Anderton in Northwich.

For most of its length this is an intimate valley with a strong sense of enclosure, due to steeply sloping, wooded valley sides that separate it from the surrounding agricultural plain. There is little inter-visibility with adjacent character areas. The top of the valley side slopes form the skyline, which is predominantly tree-lined.

Where the River Weaver was improved, it is known as the Weaver Navigation, and in some sections the original course of the River Weaver flows parallel to this. This canalisation has also led to the occurrence of occasional pools and features such as the man-made Pickering’s Ox-Bow which was formed when the course of the river was straightened. The Weaver Navigation is broad and slow moving, while the surviving sections of the River Weaver are more sinuous. Steep-sided-clough tributaries feed into the Weaver Valley, which itself has valley sides with varying degrees of steepness ranging from 10 -30m AOD. The Navigation is at its widest just north of Frodsham where it intersects the Manchester Ship Canal, which was completed in 1894.

In the north the area is characterised by a wide and shallow flood plain between gentle slopes under medium-large arable fields. The Weaver Navigation and the River Weaver diverge in this character area and a number of conspicuous raised bunds lie adjacent to the waterways, indicating a number of dredging grounds found along this length of the valley where a local widening of the flood plain allows their construction.

A high, red brick viaduct conveys the west coast main-line railway across the valley just down-stream of Dutton Locks and forms a very impressive landmark within an enclosed and wooded length of the valley. The nearby lock complex provides an attractive point of interest, with small scale buildings and canal artefacts, within an otherwise intimate and insular wooded valley.

South of Acton Bridge a residential caravan park is very prominent upon the west bank of the Weaver.

In the south of the character area the valley floor opens out to accommodate a wide, open floodplain, with low hedges defining large-medium sized arable fields. Dense woodland fills the steep eastern valley slopes and terminates all views in this direction. The western slopes are gentler and draw the eye to an elevated skyline with prominent farmsteads and isolated woodland blocks in the vicinity of Weaverham village.

On the southern edge of the character area the valley skyline is dominated by urban and industrial elements in the vicinity of Weaverham and Northwich. The very high bund of Wallerscote lime beds, with the high chimneys of the Winnington chemical works beyond, are particularly noticeable. This urban
fringe character contrasts greatly with the rural tranquillity prevailing throughout most of the character area. Settlement comprises part of the village of Acton Bridge, where the A49 crosses the Weaver by means of a steel girder swing-bridge, and a handful of isolated halls.

The northern section of the River Weaver underwent improvement as far south as Winsford in the 1730s because of the need to transport salt from Northwich to the Mersey at Frodsham for export. The overland journey by cart to Frodsham Bridge, from where salt could be shipped to Merseyside was cumbersome, slow and expensive. The deepening of the channel and construction of locks opened the Weaver to traffic. It underwent widening and deepening in the mid-19th century, which was integral to the development of Winsford as a pre-eminent salt producing centre.

The opening of the Trent and Mersey Canal in 1777 resulted in a decrease in trade as the Weaver was bypassed. It was therefore decided to seek a connection with the canal at the point where river and canal run parallel and so in 1799 an inclined plane was constructed. In 1875 this was replaced by the first boat lift in the world, built at Anderton. This unique structure lifts boats 15m from the Navigation to the canal. It has recently been restored and now has a visitor centre located nearby.

The Weaver Valley is particularly rich in ancient woodland with the larger blocks e.g. Blackamoor Wood and Coppice supporting ground flora that includes many ancient woodland indicator species. This is an area of old mixed woodlands located in steep cloughs on the north bank of the Weaver. Here sycamore dominates the canopy and elder the understorey. Oak with a bracken understorey occurs in the flat area between the two cloughs. Hatton’s Hey Wood, Whittles Corner and Bank Rough together form one of the largest blocks of semi-natural clough woodland in the county. Of particular importance in this SSSI are the nationally rare stands of ash and small-leaved lime. Much of the site supports oak, wych elm, birch, wild cherry and sycamore. Ground flora includes giant bellflower and toothwort lower down the slopes, both of which are uncommon in Cheshire. In the valley bottom the canopy is dominated by alder with tall fen species e.g. yellow flag iris. Warburton’s Wood and Well Wood on the south bank of the Weaver are also a SSSI and are ancient semi-natural clough woodland with similar characteristics. This also includes a small area of unimproved grassland which has a variety of uncommon grassland species in Cheshire e.g. pignut and lousewort. This group of woodlands is a core area for the Cheshire Ecological Network.

At Sutton Bridge a lagoon was created for use as a dredging tip, but never used. It is now a species rich habitat with aquatic and marginal vegetation. Unimproved meadows at Acton Bridge and in the floodplain have a diverse flora and in the wetter parts there are small areas of reed swamp. Middleton Grange is the scheduled site of a medieval moated hall and chapel near Aston-by-Sutton
R2: Mid Weaver Character Area.
Ancient woodland, brine springs & salt mine

This river valley character area extends from Northwich in the north, southwards as far as Winsford. The construction of the Weaver Navigation resulted in some sections of the original sinuous course of the River Weaver being isolated from the main channel and left as occasional pools.

For most of its length this is an intimate valley with a strong sense of enclosure, due to steeply sloping, wooded valley sides that separate the valley from the surrounding agricultural plain. There is little inter-visibility with adjacent character areas. The top of the valley side slopes form the skyline, which is predominantly tree-lined. Woodland aligns sections of both the Weaver and its tributaries, which typically occur on the west bank. Much of this is ancient woodland and designated as SBLs. This group of woodlands is also a core area for the Cheshire Ecological Network.

South of Northwich the Weaver Valley opens out to encompass riverside meadows on the west bank and the water body of Marshal’s Arm. The high tree cover at this location effectively screens the adjoining urban development but a number of properties are visible along the elevated skyline.

The busy A556 trunk road passes high over the river on a utilitarian steel girder bridge, with the associated intrusion of traffic. Upstream of the A556 the valley can be divided into two distinct and different parts: north of New Bridge/south of New Bridge. North of New Bridge the valley is verdant and tranquil and industrial activity is restricted to the operation of the Weaver Navigation. In this section the valley is narrow in places, defined by steep wooded slopes. There are many secondary water bodies, often narrow ribbons of water surrounded by dense marginal vegetation and running parallel to the main navigation. The picturesque and tranquil Vale Royal Locks lie amongst woodland at the junction of a number of minor side valleys. Just to the north an impressive railway viaduct traverses the valley at high level. The noise of trains can be intrusive at peak times.

The southern part of the character area is more industrial in character, and the entire west bank remains visually degraded by industrial activities. To the north of Winsford were a large number of salt-works on both the west and east banks of the Weaver. The Salt Union salt mine which operates today was opened in 1844 as the Meadow Bank Salt works. The high structure housing the winding gear forms a dominant landmark along this part of the waterway and the high mounds of rock salt are very conspicuous. Few surface remains of this once industrial area survive. Various brownfield sites, industrial buildings, hard standings and security fences all contribute to the character of the west bank area.

A prolonged local authority reclamation programme, extending over 25 years, has largely erased the former industrial nature of the east bank. Large tracts of land have been reclaimed with new water bodies and areas of new planting, managed as a country park within the Mersey Forest. The sloping
ground forming the eastern skyline is well vegetated, a combination of birch scrub arising from natural re-colonisation and newly planted woodland areas. The former Kay’s Work Site on the east bank of the Weaver displays a remarkable mosaic of habitats developed on former industrial land of varying chemistry and drainage. Acid grassland merges with both wet and dry heath.

There are few built structures within this area that are not of industrial function. Vale Royal Abbey is located within this predominantly industrial area – on the west bank of the Weaver, north-west of the village of Whitegate. It was founded in 1281 following the re-location of the Cistercian Abbey from nearby Darnhall. Parts of this scheduled monument include the below ground remains of the abbey, ancillary buildings and a cross. Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536, the western range of the abbey cloister was modified into a country house, much of which is 19th century in date and is listed Grade II*. The grade II listed Hartford Hall Hotel, which is a former manor house dating back to the late 16th century/early 17th century with a timber frame and brick construction and welsh slate roof.

A large section of the Weaver, from Hunt’s Lock in the north to the restored lime beds at Meadowbank is designated as an SBI. This site includes ancient woodland on the east bank with large areas of wet and dry grassland on the flat valley bottom. The whole site is important for flora, birds, insects and mammals. Just south of Hunt’s Lock on the west bank is a double meander, cut off by the formation of the Weaver Navigation and partly silted, now designated as the Marshall’s Arm Local Nature Reserve. There is also a natural brine spring with characteristic saltmarsh plants on the east bank at Meadowbank.
R3: Upper Weaver Character Area.
Including Winsford Flashes, ancient woodland & Nantwich

This character area extends from the south of Winsford as far as Worleston where the river becomes a less dominant feature in the landscape.

In the north of this character area the water bodies of Top flash and Bottom Flash form distinctive features in the bottom of the valley. These and a number of other smaller water bodies created by the subsidence that occurred following extensive brine pumping in the 19th century. Both have a high value for flora and provide valuable habitats for birds. For example, at Top Flash there are areas of swamp and fen at the edge, while the flora includes flowering rush and tubular dropwort. The flashes are important for recreation e.g. angling and sailing and a waterside caravan park is very conspicuous.

While Top Flash is connected to the River Weaver by a drain, the river flows through the eastern side of the Bottom flash. This has resulted in sediment build up and schemes are currently being explored to overcome this problem.

The character of the valley changes subtly as one progresses upstream and the valley becomes shallower. The locally complex topography in the north, with relatively steep slopes and incised river meanders, becomes flatter and more uniform towards the south. Where medium and long distance views are available the meandering form of the Weaver is emphasised by sinuous blocks of bank-side trees in contrast to the surrounding framework of medium-sized regular shaped fields. Woodland is mainly restricted to the steeper slopes, in particular the steep-sided cloughs of tributary streams, where there is a high proportion of ancient woodland.

This area has a very rural character with an absence of any large settlements apart from Church Minshull, a small nucleated village on the western bank of the Weaver. Settlement is low density and the area is characterised by dispersed hamlets and farms, often very substantial farmsteads with associated outbuildings and barns which punctuate the skyline on both sides of the valley. Isolated halls are also noted such as Lee Hall - a Grade II listed brick building dating to 1566 with later modifications and a 19th century wing. Much of this area comprises medieval enclosure, with hedgerow boundaries.

The Shropshire Union Canal defines part of the eastern boundary and emphasises the transition between the Lowland Plain to the east and the more complex topography and slightly steeper gradients of the Weaver Valley. It crosses the Weaver near Hoole Grave Manor. To the west and east of the Bottom Flash are former land-fill sites. There is a sewage works south of Brayne Hall, in the south of the area on the west bank of the river but this is not readily apparent due to the lack of accessible viewpoints.
Shaws Wood is a typical wooded clough on the sides of Firwood Brook. Sycamore, alder and occasional birch dominate the canopy with evidence of hazel coppice in the understorey. The ground flora is indicative of ancient woodland and includes bluebell, dog’s mercury and wood anemone. There are two large biological SSSIs – Wimboldsley Wood to the north of Top Flash and Wettenhall and Darnhall Woods on the banks of the Wettenhall and Ash Brooks – both of which are dominated by pedunculate oak and ash. This group of woodlands is also a core area for the Cheshire Ecological Network and forms conspicuous features when viewed against the surrounding *East Lowland Plain* with the typical pattern of hedgerow and hedgerow trees.

Nothing remains on the surface of Darnhall Abbey – a former Cistercian abbey founded in 1274 by Prince Edward after his survival of a ship wreck in 1263. This location proved to be unsuitable and the abbey was moved to Vale Royal in 1281.

There were a number of small mills located on the tributaries of the Weaver e.g. a medieval mill was thought to have been located at Buckley, while Darnhall Mill a Grade II four storey white-washed brick and slate building with an impressive pool and weir with sluice is thought to have replaced an earlier medieval mill.
R4: Lower Dane Character Area.
River meanders & floodplain, canal and subsidence flashes.

This area extends from Northwich to Holmes Chapel. Within this character area the River Dane meanders through the East Lowland Plain - a very gently rolling, low-lying, open agricultural landscape of medium sized fields, many under arable crops. It has steep but low, tree-lined river banks. The topography is very shallow, with little variation in elevation between the river bank and the valley’s outer margins. The River Dane is an actively eroding river valley displaying all the classic geomorphological features: floodplain, oxbow lakes, meanders, river cliffs, beaches, rapids, pools. When viewed from peripheral areas the presence of the watercourse is indicated only by a thin line of trees within the wider field system. There are no significant crossing points or developments and the character can appear to be remote and tranquil.

In the north the character area is bounded by development at Northwich and Rudheath but still retains a rural character as the urban edge is considerably softened by woodland. The roofs of the large buildings at the Rudheath Storage depot are visible above the tree tops. Davenham Church lies outside the character area but the spire provides a conspicuous local landmark.

Within this part of the character area the Trent and Mersey canal has a strong visual presence as it passes through a number of subsidence water bodies in a relatively open, medium scale landscape at Billing Green. The canal enters the character area at Middlewich, from where it runs north, following the course of the River Dane for a considerable distance.

Southward beyond Whatcroft Hall the repeated meandering of the river creates a constantly changing relationship between the two waterways which contributes to the valley’s distinctive character until they diverge on the northern margin of Middlewich. In places the two appear to be separated only by a steep, tree covered slope whilst elsewhere a field of arable crops fills the intervening flat ground. In all directions the skyline appears full of trees, often an illusion created by the surrounding field pattern with its abundant hedgerow trees, but locally there are a number of obvious woodland blocks. The woodland in the vicinity of Bostock Hall is very conspicuous on the western boundary as it lies upon the slightly elevated horizon. The roof and chimneys of the Hall remain visible above the tree tops.

Between Middlewich and Holmes Chapel the river passes through a very shallow valley, where large to medium arable fields slope gently towards the watercourse. The landscape is quite open in aspect and settlement has very low density with a number of isolated but substantial farmsteads that provide local landmarks. A number of woodland blocks are prominent in this large scale, open landscape but tree cover overall is relatively low.

There are a large number of crossing points including: railway viaducts in Northwich and Twemlow viaduct to the north of Holmes Chapel (listed Grade II); the M6 to the west of Holmes Chapel; and other key road crossings including the A556 south of Northwich, the A50 to the north of Holmes Chapel.
and the A53 at Middlewich. There are a number of footpaths in the character area, most notably the Dane Valley Way, which runs along sections of both the River Dane and the Trent and Mersey Canal.

A large pool either side of Davenham Road is an SBI, formed by land subsidence caused by brine pumping. The pool has thriving bird, butterfly and insect populations.

It has been suggested that the place name Shipbrook Castle is indicative of a Norman castle, but nothing survives on the ground to support this. The Roman road of King Street is thought to have crossed the River Dane somewhere to the north of Middlewich i.e. not on the line of the modern route. There are a number of listed bridges e.g. Havannah Bridge, which is listed Grade II and Crossley Bridge, which is a Scheduled Monument.
R5: Upper Dane Character Area.
River meanders within a steep-sided, wooded valley.

This character area extends from Holmes Chapel to Congleton as the River Dane meanders tortuously along a steep sided valley with a wide and generally flat floor. Much of the steeper ground is wooded, whilst the valley floor is devoted to pasture. Field boundaries are generally defined by post and wire fences and much of the valley floor appears as a wide, open expanse of grassland. The course of the river is marked by an intermittent line of vegetation, typified by willows leaning over the watercourse. The high, steep valley side slopes and the frequency of woodland ensure there is little inter-visibility between this area and adjoining character areas. Within the body of the character area there is a single crossing point in the form of a small road bridge. Consequently much of the river is inaccessible to all but the most determined walker.

The brick-built railway viaduct at the western end of the valley is a very impressive structure which emphasises the broad width of the valley floor at this location. At this point the southern slope is steep and wooded whilst the northern slopes are gentler and under pasture. Between the two slopes the valley floor is filled with a flat, agricultural landscape with medium sized fields. There are many post and wire fences, free-standing mature oak trees and the occasional farm building.

At Radnor Bridge a minor road follows a curving line across the broad valley floor. Linear woodlands follow the contours on both sides of the valley, with a number of individual properties visible amongst the trees. The riverside vegetation is very dense in parts and in places merges into the wooded slopes. Where the slope is shallower the pastureland extends up from the valley floor to the surrounding higher ground. This open landform allows some partial outward views and the Cloud is visible to the east.

A large proportion of the course of the River Dane is wooded of which a significant part is ancient woodland – principally on the steeper slopes and following the tributary valleys e.g. near Somerford and Swettenham. There is scrub and mature woodland as well as some unimproved neutral pastures. From Holmes Chapel through Congleton to the Peak Park boundary the river valley is designated as an SBI, by far the longest SBI in Cheshire. It has high ornithological interest and is important for insects and mammals. Settlement includes the dispersed settlement of Swettenham and a low density, dispersed pattern of halls and farms. Along the length of the Dane are a number of works such as sewage works and reservoirs. To the west of Congleton are the Congleton business park and a large superstore.

The character area terminates in the east at the Congleton Business Park on the western edge of Congleton. This development occupies the entire valley floor and the very large buildings and hard standings abruptly terminate the rural character of the valley. Both sides of the valley are steep and wooded and the high ground dominates the river below. A number of substantial
properties constructed on the valley shoulders are visible amongst the trees at the highest level.

The earthworks of a medieval moat and house platform survive at Crossley. There have been a number of watermills in operation along the length of the Dane at various points in time – today mill buildings survive at Swettenham Mill (listed Grade II) and Cranage Mill. Forge Mill near Congleton was used for silk production and a number of flour mills were located at the eastern end of the character area near Bosley.

A section of the Dane Valley east of Holmes Chapel is a large geomorphological SSSI designated for its meanders and terraces.
R6: Wych Brook Character Area.
Ancient woodland, grassland & dormice

The Wych Brook forms part of the southern county boundary between Threapwood and Grindley Brook. Topography within the steep-sided valleys varies from 50-80m at the crest; the brook is c 30-40m AOD. This is a fast moving, shallow water course. The main crossings are located at Higher and Lower Wych and Sarn. It is joined to the east by the Grindley Brook.

This is an intimate small-scale landscape. The deeply incised valley with very steep, predominantly wooded slopes prevents inter-visibility with adjacent character areas. The valley is filled with a combination of dense woodland, scrub, high hedges and very small field enclosures. A number of narrow tributary valleys flow into the meandering Wych Brook from the northern (Cheshire) side and the resulting complex topography contributes to the strong sense of enclosure. The area has a tranquil and remote rural character.

The steep slopes are dominated by ancient oak woodland with a diverse ground flora. Willow and alder occur at the lower elevations. The western section of the character area is heavily wooded with broad leaves and mixed woodland.

A number of minor bridging points are emphasised by attractive but discrete vernacular buildings in local stone and brick. There are a number of former mill buildings along the Wych Brook e.g. the restored Dymock’s Mill, now a private residence, with mill pond and sluice gates. Brine Pits Farm near Lower Wych is indicative of a former use in this area.

Greaves Wood is an SBI, located on the steep south facing slope of Wych Brook. Oak, ash, sycamore and beech are typical, with a diverse understorey including historic coppice and rich ground flora that is indicative of ancient woodland.

The Wych Brook valley and woods is a large SBI with a linear mosaic of habitats extending from Well Rough SSSI on the bank of the brook to Stockton Dingle in the east. This includes species-rich grass and species-rich flushes, marshy grassland and ancient woodland with coppiced hazel and rare and uncommon species in Cheshire such as agrimony and spotted/marsh orchid, devil’s bit scabious and betony. The woods in this area have been the site of a successful scheme to re-introduce the dormouse to Cheshire.
R7: River Dee Character Area.
Chester Meadows, meanders & wet woods

This character area extends from Chester through Aldford and Farndon south as far as Shocklach Green. In part it defines the western county boundary. For much of its length the river itself cannot be seen from surrounding locations due to the absence of elevated viewpoints in the surrounding West Lowland Plain. However the course of the river can often be discerned by the dense tree growth or marginal vegetation which lines the banks for most of its course. Much of this character area is used for angling and boating and footpaths provide access along much of the River Dee. Pleasure cruises and boat tours of the Dee are common in the Chester area.

In the north of the character area the Earl’s Eye is a large flat expanse of unimproved and semi-improved grassland and fen located on the west bank, within sight of residential properties in Chester. These low lying damp fields are divided by species rich drains. Over 200 plant species have been recorded here and the area supports a large number of amphibians and birds.

At Heron Bridge the river passes through constricting higher ground, marked by a small red sandstone cliff, before the valley opens out again to accommodate low lying pastoral land. The substantial residential property enjoys views south along the course of the river and is a significant landmark when approached from this direction. The Dee Banks from Eccleston Lodge to Iron Bridge have a diverse marginal vegetation and woodland which is rich in bird life and amphibians. Much is tree-lined and overhanging the water course.

Further south the river is dominated by the busy A55 Trunk Road as it conveys traffic noisily across the valley on a high embankment, with a large concrete deck bridging the river. The Eaton estate within the Lowland Estate landscape type, straddles the river for a number of miles. The parkland surrounding Eaton Hall and the estate farms and villages, although often strictly outside the Dee Valley character area, exerts a strong influence. A number of substantial properties, built to a consistently high standard in a characteristic estate style, occupy riverside locations to exploit the river’s scenic character whilst providing a series of distinct and picturesque landmarks. The Victorian Clock Tower of Eaton Hall is a highly visible and distinctive landmark. The estate buildings and associated amenity planting contribute to the attraction of a popular riverside pathway that follows the west bank of the river along much of its course.

Between Eccleston ferry and the A55 the valley extends to incorporate an area of pasture that has traditionally flooded and is marked by rushes and standing water. The spire of Eccleston Church is a conspicuous landmark. The village sits upon the higher ground forming the western boundary which rises up to meet the high embankments required for the A55 and terminates all views to the west. Ferry Farm on the east bank at Eccleston is a noteworthy example of the estate building style with a picturesque riverside location.
The Crook of Dee is a sharp meander in the river’s course between Eccleston and Iron Bridge, identified from a distance by the distinctive line of tall poplars planted close together along the west bank of the river. Well maintained parkland and other features such as deer fences, stone walls and terraces associated with Eaton Hall, are visible from the riverside path. On the opposite side of the valley the Victorian model farm of Cheaveley Hall Farm, in typical estate style, dominates the eastern skyline.

Further south, low lying fields form a flood plain between the east bank of the river and the B5130 Aldford Road located on the boundary of the character area on rising ground. Similarly a low lying area to the south of Eaton Hall, partially mass planted with poplars but also occupied by large permanent water bodies, traditionally formed the core of an extensive flood plain area where inundation at times extended towards Aldford and fields further south. Near Aldford the well known landmark of Iron Bridge arches gracefully over the river, carrying an estate road and a public right of way.

The river has few permanent crossing points but where these occur the bridge structures dominate the valley. The 14th century Holt-Farndon Bridge is built in local red sandstone where the valley is constricted by high ground to both east and west. It is listed Grade I. Residential properties and gardens define the character area boundaries at this point. On the eastern bank the high red sandstone cliff provides a distinctive local feature. Immediately south of Farndon the busy A534 Holt-Farndon Bypass crosses the valley at elevation, maintaining a constant level across the relatively wide flood plain. The road embankment, well planted with trees, curtails any north-south views along the course of the river.

South of the bridge the valley changes, as the river is neatly incised into the wide agricultural plain with cultivated arable fields extending to the top of both banks. There are fewer trees and the banks are deep and steep with a noticeable lack of natural vegetation. This area has traditionally experienced seasonal inundation. Further south a distinctive line of planted mature poplars along the west bank follows the course of a sharp meander. Crewe Hall, situated 1 km south of the bridge on rising ground on the eastern edge of the valley, enjoys views down to the river over sloping ground. The white painted hall, with a backdrop of mature trees, is highly visible from public footpaths on the east bank of the river.

At the southern end of the character area the valley assumes a less distinct form. A flood plain can only be identified along the eastern bank, where a number of medium-sized fields extend to the foot of sloping ground rising up to the Shocklach Road. This rising ground, marking the boundary of the character area, curtails views to the east. To the west the Welsh hills are visible in the far distance over fields of predominantly arable crops.
The whole length of the river is now designated as a SSSI. The southern section from Holt to Worthenbury has a geomorphological designation due to its unique meanders. The entire length also has a biological designation due to its value for salmon, otter and the club-tailed dragonfly in addition to a rich flora and fauna.

Huntington water settlement lagoons have also been designated as an SBI. Reservoirs and a main drain support a variety of species. One dry reservoir is dominated by greater reedmace, reed canary-grass and willow. This is exceptionally good for birds. Duckwood Herony is a Grade A SBI with a complex ditch drainage system set back from the river on the edge of the parkland.
R8: Lower Bollin Character Area.
Including Styal Country Park & Quarry Bank Mill

This character area extends from Wilmslow, north to the County boundary. The Bollin is a steep sided, incised river valley, the eastern end of which possesses a very urban character, with public facilities such as areas of well-maintained grassland, seats, play equipment and tennis courts, all served by a network of surfaced footpaths. Mature woodland occupies the steep valley slopes and this prevents the encroaching urban development from impinging upon this attractive amenity area. Views downstream follow the river as it meanders along the flat valley floor. The combination of picturesque watercourse and mature trees, including numerous free-standing specimens within open grassland, conveys a parkland atmosphere. Dense wooded slopes form a solid backdrop in all directions and the character is surprisingly rural for a location on the urban fringe.

The width of the valley floor increases noticeably at the point where the Bollin and Dean watercourses converge. The steep banks of the River Dean are species rich with flushed areas. The north side of the valley is densely wooded, with semi-improved grassland to the east. The flat, poorly-drained ground in the Deane valley is used for pasture, divided by thin hedges and fences into a number of medium sized fields. This open landscape is viewed against a solid backdrop of steep, wooded slopes. In both valleys the tree-lined skyline is very dominant.

Downstream beyond Twinnies Bridge the steep valley sides converge and the valley floor almost disappears. The character is much more enclosed, with dense woodland and steep slopes preventing all but the closest views along the river. There is no inter-visibility with the surrounding character areas and the valley feels insular and almost remote. Between this point and the A538 further west the character of the area is exclusively that of a small river flowing between high, steep, densely wooded side slopes. A number of footpaths follow the river and as they rise and fall over the steep ground there are short distance and restricted views along and down into the valley. The appearance of the woodland varies, with areas of ancient woodland contrasting with tall stands of exotic conifers. At a number of points along the footpaths there are outward views over areas of pasture which slope down towards the river. These fields offer relief from the constrained views of the narrow valley but the topography prevents any visual connection with the surrounding landscape type.

In contrast the western end of the character area has been highly influenced by massive man-made structures. The character area terminates where the river passes under the runway at Manchester airport, at a location dominated by a large tunnel portal with security fencing lining the skyline. Aircraft can be seen from the valley floor as they begin their ascent or taxi along the runway. Nearby the very busy A538 emerges in duel carriageway from a tunnel beneath the runway, before passing over the river near a large hotel on the south bank. Between these two points the valley remains densely vegetated.
and remarkably unaffected. This is due to a combination of very high steep
slopes clothed with solid growth, and pronounced river meanders, closing
down all views and providing effective screening even in close proximity to
such massive engineering structures.

Wilmslow Carrs near Twinnies Bridge includes marsh, ponds, semi-
improved grassland, woodland flushes, woodland streams and secondary
hanging woodland on the valley slopes. There is an exceptional population
of the common frog. Further east the woodland cover diminishes and
instead a large portion of the Bollin to the east of Wilmslow is designated as
an SBI for its grassland habitats (Bollin Valley, Wilmslow Park to Mottram).
The grassland here is species rich and include Black Knapweed, Common
Cat’s ear and in places Devil’s–bit Scabious. Intermingled with old and new
oxbows are areas of scrub and tall herb. There are marl pits that are now
wooded, which are frequented by little owl and kingfisher. There is an
amphibian relocation pond.

The northern section of the river largely comprises Styal Country Park where
the Grade II* Quarry Bank Mill is located amongst a wooded and grassy
setting. Quarry Bank Mill and its associated buildings provide a striking
landmark. This impressive complex on the river’s northern bank is almost
hidden from view and hardly intrudes upon the river’s lush verdant
character. It was built in 1784 for Samuel Greg as a rural cotton spinning
mill development to counter the lowering of living standards and accordingly
to try to maintain the moral standards of the mill workers. It is five storeys
high and there is a four storey weaving shed. Also listed Grade II* is the
associated Apprentice’s House which was built in 1790 to house 80 pauper
apprentices cared for by husband and wife superintendents. Children were
brought from across England – from London to Liverpool. The country park
is managed by the National Trust and the Mill and its building complex are
now an industrial museum.

Styal includes a large complex of woodlands, which are designated as an
SBI. Around Norcliffe Hall there is semi-ornamental woodland, while to the
south there is well-structured and diverse broadleaved woodland. Burned
Hey Wood is particularly interesting with wet carr woodland near the river
and by Piginshaw Brook, with an excellent lichen population. The site is
very good for fungi and is of ornithological interest.
R9: Upper Bollin Character Area.

This character area extends from Prestbury, north to Wilmslow, where the character of the valley changes significantly as the river flows downstream towards the west. There is very little settlement within the Bollin river valley with the exception of occasional farms. There are some crossing points located in the area including that of the A5102. At the eastern end of the character area the River Bollin flows through Prestbury as a relatively minor watercourse in a shallow incision, before passing into a shallow valley of small fields under pasture. Trees and shrubs line both river banks whilst the river itself is largely hidden from view. A number of large woodlands are prominent on the higher ground forming the southern edge of the valley.

In the centre of the character area the river is crossed by the Adlington Road on a small stone bridge. This forms a local landmark within a wide, shallow valley where the river follows an obvious line. This is an expansive, open landscape where the river meanders through a pastoral scene of large flat fields with low hedges and wire fences and relatively few hedgerow trees. Panoramic views extend to the wooded high ground of Alderley Edge to the south, and to the distant Pennine Hills in the east. A number of farmsteads are prominent on the higher ground that defines the valley on all sides. These contours are generally marked by trees and woodland which appear to fill the immediate skyline, creating a strong contrast with the open grassland in the valley.

As the river flows westward the valley sides become noticeably higher and steeper. On the outskirts of Wilmslow at Varden Farm the valley sides close in completely where the river is bridged by a local highway. The steep northern bank is filled with mature woodland, with the occasional property visible through the trees. The much shallower southern slope lies under pasture, rising up to the private gardens on the edge of the urban development. This boundary appears more obviously suburban than the opposite bank, with substantial properties surrounded by mature ornamental planting. The Pennines hills remain visible to the east but the dense riverside woodland blocks any views westward along the valley.

The western end of the character area takes the form of a very narrow, steep-sided valley, with the river flowing through a narrow strip of flat grassland managed as a public amenity. The surrounding dense woodland effectively screens much of the surrounding development which generally lies at a higher level on the edge of the valley. This public space is managed in a naturalistic style and provides a tranquil refuge from the surrounding urban setting.
There were a number of textile mills in operation on the Bollin in the 18th and 19th centuries, for example Folly Holes Mill and Carr Mill, neither of which survive today. However, the harnessing of water power on the Bollin is likely to date back to the medieval period and a possible site is suggested to the west of Wilmslow. Of particular interest to the north of Prestbury is Spittle House, which is a remarkable building that comprises the western range of a 14th century monastic leper hospital. It is timber framed on a sandstone plinth and listed Grade II.