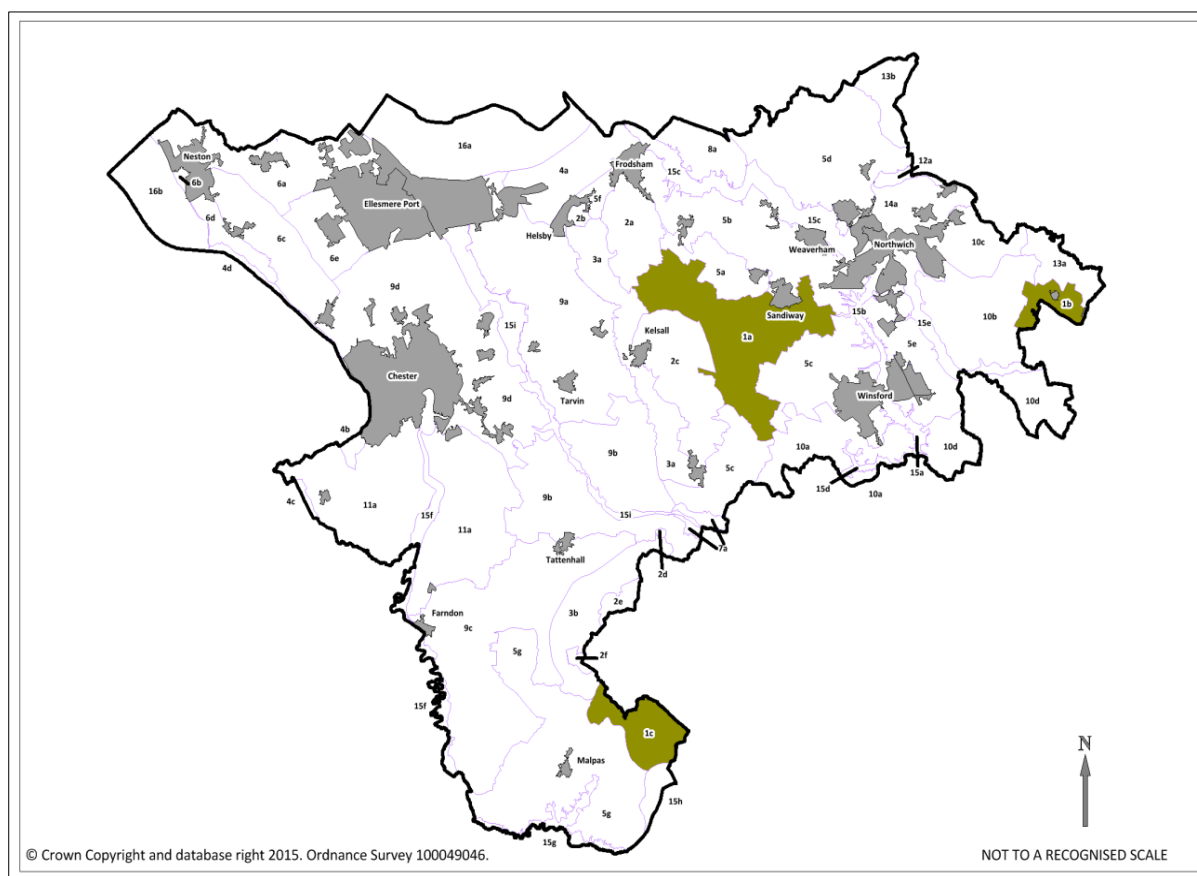


LCT 1: WOODLANDS, HEATHS, MERES & MOSSES



General Description

This character type is defined by extensive blocks of woodland (mainly planted coniferous but with some broadleaves), interspersed with relict heath, and meres and mosses formed in glacial hollows. More recent water bodies have been created through the extraction of sand and gravel or the quarrying of sandstone. This is also a partly enclosed character type with large fields (over 8ha) defined by regular, straight hedgerow boundaries which in many places are growing out and in poor condition.

The complex of meres, mosses and relict heathland is of internationally importance for nature conservation supporting species such as nightjar, common lizard, cross leaved heath and round-leaved sundew.

There is considerable evidence of human activity in the area since prehistoric times. In particular the palaeo-environmental record preserved in the areas mere's and mosses is regionally significant with the potential to make a significant contribution to our understanding of the prehistoric landscape and its exploitation. Furthermore, concentrations of prehistoric lithics in the vicinity of the areas mere's and mosses highlights the potential for archaeological sites, dating from the prehistoric period, at their margins. This is in addition to the more substantial settlement and funerary sites in the wider landscape.

This character type has a high level of recreational use and a large number of leisure facilities including golf courses and picnic sites as well as a major Forest Park that offers a visitor centre and open access areas.

Visual Character

This is a landscape of strong contrasts. The flat or gently rolling topography and large straight-sided fields combine with extensive woodland blocks and large water bodies to create a large scale landscape. In marked contrast, within the woodlands and mosses, there is a strong sense of enclosure. The large open water bodies are locally prominent and most views are restricted by trees and woodland blocks.

Colours are largely consistent year round with the dominance of conifers, seasonal variation provided by the pockets of broadleaved woodland, the yellows and reds of the mosslands, and purple flowering heathers on the remnant heathlands.

Physical Influences

This character type occurs at an intermediate elevation (c 40 – 120m AOD) with an underlying solid geology of mudstone and sandstone overlain by drift deposits of sand and gravel. The landform, soils and vegetation have been heavily influenced by glacial activity, with numerous meltwater channels and hollows occurring within the spread of deposited material, in which the meres and mosses subsequently developed.

The glacial meres and mosses of the character area comprise a series of wetlands that illustrate all stages of the process of natural succession developed over thousands of years from open water through swamp, fen and moss habitats to wet woodland – the vegetation types at each site varying according to the prevailing nutrient status and water level. This diversity is reflected in an extensive range of plants and animals, including many species specially adapted to the unusual wet and sometimes acid conditions. A number of the meres and the associated mosses are protected by national and European designations including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), for example at Black Lake, Oak Mere (also a Special Area of Conservation - SAC), Petty Pool, Hatch Mere and Bar Mere near Bickley. Oak Mere, Black Lake, Hatch Mere, Flax Mere and Abbots Moss (also a SAC) are also designated as Ramsar sites and include schwing moor characteristics.

The extraction of sandstone and gravel has led to the creation of distinctive water-bodies some of which have subsequently become valuable ecological habitats in their own right, for example, Shakerley Mere.

Cultural Influences

As mainly heath areas that were formerly open and only enclosed in recent centuries, historic settlement is not a key feature of this type. Where settlement does occur it tends to be much more recent such as at the village of Allostock, which has developed since the mid-19th century.

The natural drift geology of this landscape type which influenced the occurrence of heath and meres has also allowed exploitation of sand and gravels which in turn has had a major impact upon the landscape including the creation of new meres. Active quarries in the Delamere and Rudheath areas continue to work the local mineral deposits. However, these tend to be well screened from general view by tree belts.

Delamere was one of four large forests in Cheshire in the medieval period. The medieval Delamere Forest, formerly part of the Forest of Mara, covered a vast portion of CWaC, considerably larger than the coniferous plantations that the place name refers to today. Associated with the medieval Forest landscape and integral to it was woodland-pasture and wooded heath. This too covered large expanses of CWaC and survives today in small isolated pockets such as at Rudheath which was once a large grazed heathland providing valuable resources for the local population. Over time areas of sandy and wooded heath have been massively reduced through agricultural improvements after enclosure or through large scale commercial conifer plantations. The introduction from the

seventeenth century of new grasses which were better suited to sandy and acidic soils enabled the improvement of areas of sandy heath and its enclosure, resulting in the typical landscape of regular large scale enclosure. This pattern of change is seen at a national level and heathlands are now one of the rarest and most threatened habitats in Europe. Today, large-scale commercial conifer plantations mark the most recent stage in the development of these former forest and heathland landscapes. This is a particularly prominent influence as part of the managed and designed landscape features of the Cholmondeley Estate to the eastern flank of the area on the eastern fringe of the Bickley LCA.

The meres and mosses provide a considerable paleo-environmental resource. Meres are likely to have provided an early source of food going back into prehistory. The discovery of worked flint tools in this area indicates very early human activity – potentially temporary settlement. In later times meres continued to be important resources, for example, Vale Royal Abbey was granted permission to create a fishery at Oak Mere in the medieval period.

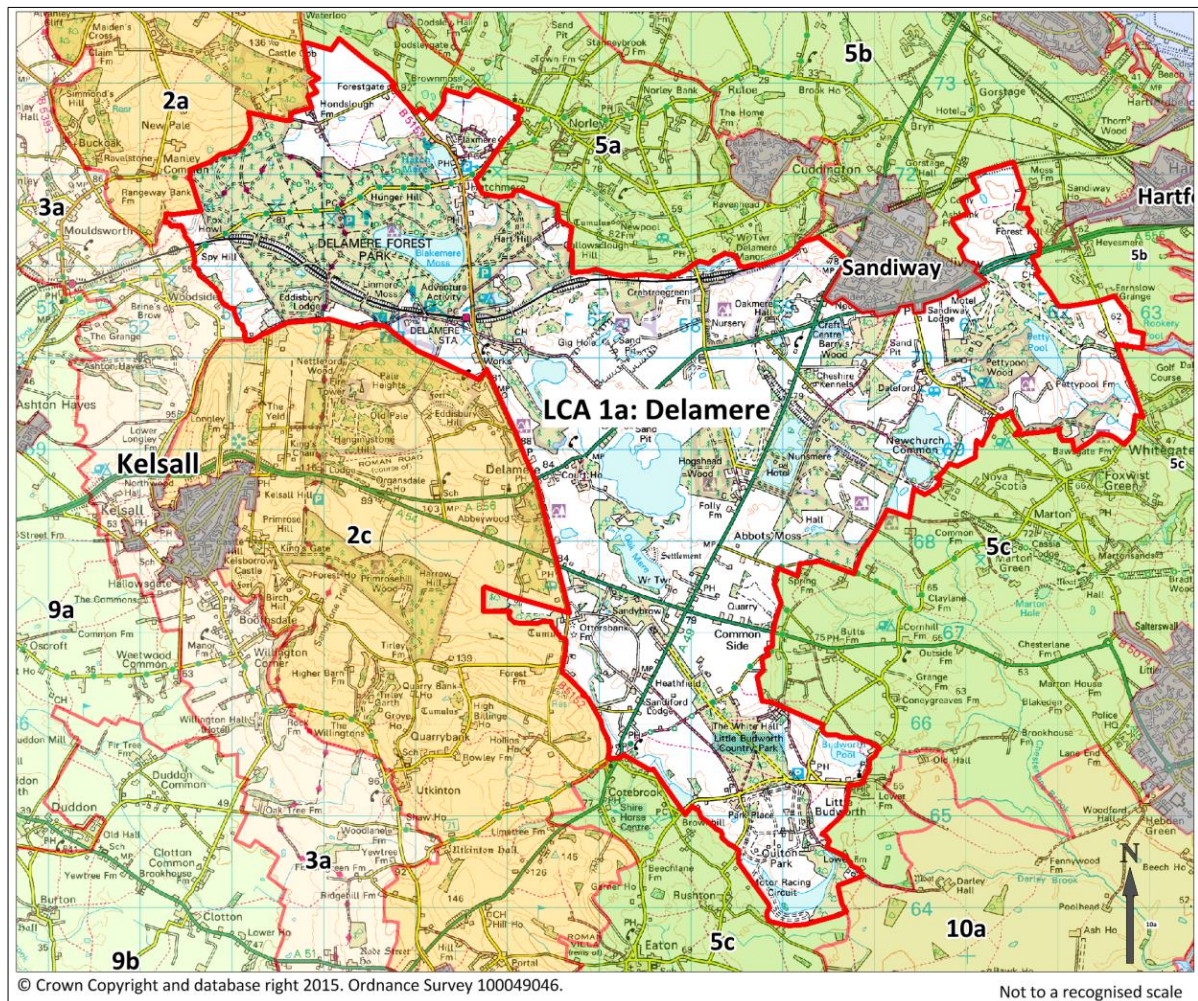
There are **three Landscape Character Areas** within LCT 1:

1a: Delamere

1b: Allostock

1c: Bickley

LCA 1a: Delamere



Location and Boundaries

The **Delamere** landscape character area occupies a hollow created during the last glaciation when meltwaters forced their way through the sandstone ridge at the 'Mouldsworth Gap' and deposited extensive glacial sand and gravel deposits in the area that is now Delamere Forest. This is an extensive area bounded to the north by the undulating clay farmland landscape surrounding Norley, to the south by the undulating clay farmland landscape surrounding Oulton, and to the west the prominent sandstone ridge. The extent of the *Delamere* LCA is marked by the extent of glacio-fluvial deposits and accompanying sandy soils which give rise to its distinctive character.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 1a: Delamere

- A gently undulating large scale landscape of woodland, farmland and heathland overlying sand and gravel glacio-fluvial drift material, deposited during the last glaciation, lying between 65m and 85m AOD
- An organic mosaic of meres, mosses, swamp, fen, woodland and heathland forming part of the ancient Forest of Mara and Mondrem, interspersed with conifer plantations, quarries and large, straight sided field
- A dynamic landscape with many areas showing different stages of peatland/ mossland development and vegetation succession
- Large open water bodies occupying kettle holes formed during the last glaciation, known as meres, are associated with fen, mire, acidic grassland and bog habitats and form part of the Meres and Mosses Ramsar site
- Peatland features include quaking bogs or ‘schwing moor’, where Sphagnum moss has formed over the water surface e.g. at Abbots Moss
- Large areas of plantation woodland on former heath and peatland, dominated by conifers, at Delamere Forest
- Sandy soils also support species rich acid grassland, oak-birch woodland and lowland heath – Little Budworth Common, one of best surviving examples of lowland heath in Cheshire
- Active and inactive sand and gravel and sandstone extraction sites
- Extensive glacio-fluvial drift deposits have created a resource of sand which is actively quarried to create large water bodies and lakes
- Around and between the woodland and water is pattern of planned 19th century enclosure representing relatively late enclosure of this landscape from waste heath
- Large areas managed for recreation including Delamere Forest, Little Budworth Country Park, parking and picnic sites, two golf courses and part of the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational path
- Low settlement density. Settlement form is relatively late in origin and comprises farmsteads of 18th-19th century origin, linked by turnpike roads, and set within areas of relatively recent enclosure together with scattered linear development
- Buildings are characteristically red brick or sandstone with clay or slate tiles. White washed buildings are also characteristic and prominent features within the landscape
- A great contrast between the openness of the heaths, clearings and meres, and the enclosed nature of the woodland
- The skyline is dominated by trees, most often the dark line of conifer plantations
- There is a great diversity of visual experiences - of particular significance are the open views across the Meres

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- The consistent topography of Delamere, albeit locally undulating, lying at an intermediate elevation of between 65m and 85m AOD;
- The complex soil structure, recognised by the Regionally Important Geological Site designation at Delamere Soil Trail;
- The organic mosaic of open water, mires, mosses, woodland and heathland;
- The visible stages of plant and habitat succession associated with fen, raised bog and mires dominated by Sphagnum moss, acidic grassland, and lowland heath habitats;
- A dynamic nature of the landscape – showing different stages of peatland / mossland development and vegetation succession;

- The meres and associated fen, mire, acidic grassland and bog habitats that are of great nature conservation importance and recognised by national, European and international designations (i.e. SSSI, SAC & Ramsar);
- The peatland features include mosses and quaking bogs or 'schwing moor', where Sphagnum moss has formed over the water surface;
- The species rich acid grassland, oak-birch woodland and remnant lowland heath that provide biological and visual diversity;
- The plantations of Scots pine that are distinctive features of the sandy landscape.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- The areas of remnant ancient woodland, e.g. at Petty Pool Wood that provide a sense of time depth;
- The historic parklands at Petty Pool and Oulton Park are of local significance;
- The planned 19th century enclosure patterns and 18th-19th century farmsteads and hamlets that provide evidence of the relatively late enclosure of this landscape from waste heath;
- Historic features such as the ancient highway of 'Peytefinsty' that links Weaverham and Tarporley, ancient milestones (listed structures), the Iron Age settlement site on the shores of Oak Mere, and the remnant glassworks at Glazier's Hollow;
- The 'Seven Lows' round barrows, early stone crosses and standing stones also indicate that this was valued as a ritual landscape – these features are now protected as Scheduled Monuments;
- The remnant Roman Road at Thieves Moss;
- The Conservation Area at Little Budworth;
- The recreational opportunities provided by Delamere Forest, Little Budworth Country Park, and the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational path.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- The local vernacular comprising red Cheshire brick buildings with slate or clay tile roofs and white-washed properties (some listed buildings) that stand out against the wooded backdrop;
- The area has historically been largely devoid of settlement, except for the occasional forest dwelling;
- The typical settlement form late in origin and comprises farmsteads of 18th-19th century origin set within areas of relatively recent enclosure together with scattered ribbon development alongside roads;
- Estate cottages line the A556 through Delamere;
- The straight ancient highway of 'Peytefinsty' passes through the area linking Weaverham and Tarporley, indicating that historically this was a landscape to pass through rather than settle;
- Principle strategic roads pass through the area forming a network of almost straight routes;
- A railway line passes east-west through the character area.

Perceptual / Visual

- The relatively consistent topography and presence of woodland gives rise to restricted visual prominence and tree-dominated skyline;
- In contrast the open views across the meres;
- The low settlement density and sense of tranquillity of this well-visited landscape;
- The general impression is one of a large-scale landscape due to the fairly consistent topography, large blocks of woodland, large bodies of water and large field sizes;
- The pockets of small scale fields that contribute to a sense of enclosure within this large-scale mosaic;
- Areas of farmland 'tamed' in contrast to the unenclosed areas of woodland, heath and meres.
- There is a great contrast between the openness of the heaths, clearings and meres, and the enclosed nature of the woodland;

- The repeated pattern of woodland, meres, mosses, heaths and recently enclosed farmland gives a sense of unity to this area;
- White washed buildings are also characteristic and can be prominent features within the landscape;
- Views to the hillfort at Eddisbury (also known as Castle Ditch) on the adjacent *Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge* landscape character area;
- The western extent of the *Delamere* character area is overlooked by the elevated landform of the *Frodsham and Eddisbury Sandstone Ridges*. However, as this section of the landscape is densely wooded, views into the character area are limited;
- The presence of woodland indicates that this landscape provides opportunities for some screening of low level elements without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on views;
- Although settlement density is low and dispersed, the landscape is used extensively for recreational purposes and a number of main transport routes run through the character area, meaning that visual sensitivity is high to a number of potential visual receptors.

Landscape Condition

This is generally a well-managed landscape. Delamere Forest is actively managed by the Forestry Commission, permission for minerals working are subject to conditions to restore the land for future use, and the large numbers of designated sites are managed for their nature conservation value. However, there are some issues concerning the current state of the landscape including the past replacement of heathland and peatland sites with conifer plantations, past loss of historic sites (such as some of the round barrows forming the 'Seven Lows'), and a declining hedgerow network around fields in areas of enclosure.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 1a: *Delamere*:

- Green Belt (north of the A556);
- Countryside (south of the A556);
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV) across the north of the LCA;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management (Sandyford Brook).

Forces for Landscape Change

Past Change

- Protection and active regeneration of peatland;
- Felling and clearance of many sites and replanting with non-native conifer species with implications for both biodiversity and the visual character of the woodland and setting;
- Heathland restoration as well as heathland construction as part of quarry restoration plans;
- Reduction in the number of farm units and the diversification of farming activity, including paddocks for horse grazing and ancillary buildings associated with equine development;
- Pressure for built development;
- Management and restoration of mosses to encourage the re-establishment of their wetland ecology e.g. at Blakemere Moss (Forestry Commission project);
- Mineral extraction (of construction sand) resulting in visual and noise impacts;
- Historic planting of conifers on ancient woodland sites ;
- Erosion of habitats and tranquillity resulting from heavy recreational use of the landscape;
- Lowering water tables are threatening habitats at Abbots Moss and Oakmere.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 1a: *Delamere*

- Planting of new woodland on agricultural land within and around Delamere Forest (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan);
- Further forest recreational use and promotion rather than commercial forestry – may see improvements in species mix and biodiversity through the Forest Management Plan;
- Deterioration of habitats at some locations, including ancient woodland, meres, mossland and heathland;
- Impact of non-native species such as *Crassula*, Himalayan balsam, and Rhododendron;
- Biodiversity and landscape enhancement through plantation thinning and recreation of a mosaic of broadleaved woodland, open heathland and scrub landscape interspersed with restored peatlands including basin mires, mosses, wetlands and meres;
- Lowering of the water table may be exacerbated by planting of conifers;
- Continued pressure for mineral extraction threatening habitat and the historic environment but could also provide opportunities for habitat creation;
- Recreational pressures leading to loss of tranquillity, loss or fragmentation of habitats, erosion of road verges, visual intrusion of car-parks or stationary vehicles and demand for additional facilities - recreation activities could be directed towards appropriate man-made sites i.e. former quarry sites, to alleviate continued pressure on existing designated and natural sites;
- Increased demand for water-based recreation in meres and flooded sandpits, leading to potential conflict with nature conservation objectives.
- Increased demand for visitor accommodation such as holiday cottages, caravan parks and holiday cabin developments.
- Loss of historic field pattern due to decline in hedgerow management and disrepair of sandstone walls, with resulting increase in use of fencing;
- Erosion of built environment character through incremental development and the suburbanisation of rural properties and their curtilage;
- Pressure for expansion of existing settlement, ribbon development and in-fill;
- Upgrading of lanes and minor roads leading to increasingly suburban character of the countryside.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA1a: Delamere

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** the mosaic of habitats and sense of tranquillity, and **restore** mineral sites, ensuring sensitive restoration.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Maintain the organic mosaic of open water, mires, mosses, woodland and heathland.
2. Support management of peatland habitats to maintain different stages of peatland/ mossland development and vegetation succession, including the quaking bogs or 'schwingmoor'.
3. Conserve areas of species rich acid grassland and seek opportunities to extend this habitat.
4. Support restoration and re-creation of lowland heath, including removal of conifers on heathland sites. Manage through grazing and aim to include heathland creation in mineral restoration plans.
5. Conserve the remaining areas of ancient woodland and encourage enhanced management of woodlands, including the replacement of non-native species by native broadleaved species and active management of existing woodlands to ensure a diverse age structure and ground flora.
6. Support plans to increase woodland cover in areas of farmland of low ecological value using native broadleaved species, including oak-birch woodland, ensuring no detriment to historic assets.
7. Ensure mineral extraction does not detract from the naturalistic and tranquil qualities of the area – use naturalistic planting to screen extraction activities.
8. Monitor existing sand and gravel extraction programmes, and undertake risk assessments of proposed wet working of sand, to ensure extraction does not result in lowering of the water levels or adversely affect wetland habitats. Avoid planting conifers in these areas which may exacerbate the lowering of the water table.
9. Seek positive restoration schemes for mineral extraction sites to heathland, and also restoration of wetland habitats, species rich grassland/acidic grassland, scrub and woodland. Aim to increase the diversity of habitats by creating different stages of peatland/ mossland development and vegetation succession.
10. Seek opportunities for recreational use of restored sites where this is compatible with nature conservation objectives.

11. Manage recreation to ensure heavy recreational use does not threaten naturalistic and tranquil qualities of the area.
12. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
13. Protect above ground archaeological features such as the ancient settlement site on the shores of Oak Mere, ancient glassworks at Glazier's Hollow, and round barrows at 'Seven Lows' and promote sustainable management practices in their vicinity to avoid damage by root growth or ploughing.
14. Conserve the historic character of, and settings to, the historic parks at Petty Pool and Oulton.
15. Maintain the great contrast provided by the openness of the heaths, clearings and meres, and the enclosed nature of the woodland.
16. Maintain the simple tree-dominated skyline and the open views across the Meres.
17. Maintain plantations of Scots pine as distinctive features of the sandy landscape where this does not conflict with nature conservation objectives.
18. Consider opportunities for replanting of hedgerows with trees in areas of enclosed farmland to maintain a continuous hedgerow network.

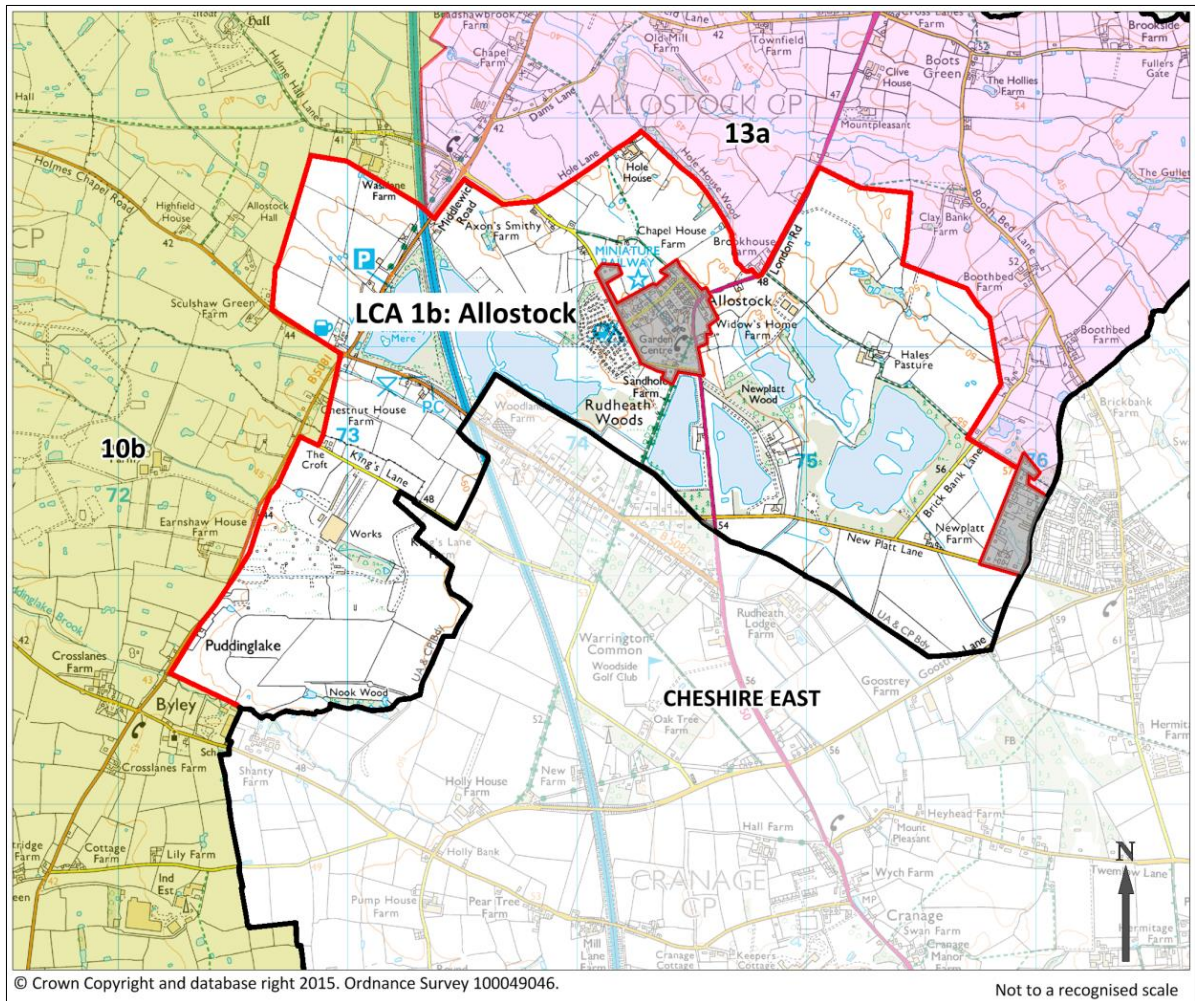
Built Development Guidelines

1. Conserve the 18th-19th century farmsteads and hamlets that provide evidence of the relatively late enclosure of this landscape from waste heath.
2. Conserve the low settlement density and sense of tranquillity of this well-visited landscape.
3. Monitor the cumulative effect of piecemeal change in this area – ensure new buildings and their gardens, drives, gates, etc. do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area through provision of appropriate guidance.
4. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
5. Conserve open areas along roads, particularly views across meres – seek to limit incremental linear development which could create a continuous built edge.

6. Using local materials such as red Cheshire brick and sandstone with slate or clay tile roofs, and white-washed finishes, will maintain the local vernacular and enhance sense of place.



LCA 1b: Allostock



Location and Boundaries

The **Allostock** LCA occupies an area of glacio-fluvial deposits on the eastern boundary of the borough. To the north lies the lowland landscape of the *Peover Lowland Farmland and Mosses* and to the west lies the flat clay *Stublach Plain*. This heathy landscape extends beyond the administrative boundary of the borough into Cheshire East to the east and south.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 1b: Allostock

- A flat landscape of woodland, farmland and heathland overlying sand and gravel glacio- fluvial drift material, deposited during the last glaciation, lying between 45m and 50m AOD
- Extensive glacio-fluvial drift deposits have created a resource of sand and gravel which is still actively quarried to create large water filled quarries
- Areas of plantation woodland on former heath and peatland, including conifers which form a dark skyline
- Sandy soils support species rich acid grassland, oak-birch woodland and lowland heath
- Open water, woodland and heathland resulting from sand and gravel extraction on former heathland
- Shakerley Mere Country Park provides recreational opportunities
- Around and between the woodland and water is a pattern of planned 19th century enclosure - relatively late enclosure of this landscape from waste heath
- Settlement form comprises farmsteads of 18th-19th century origin set within areas of relatively recent enclosure together with scattered ribbon development alongside roads and a village at Allostock
- Straight roads bordered by verges and punctuated by gorse reflecting the sandy character of the area
- Buildings are characteristically red brick with clay tiles or slate. White washed buildings are also characteristic and prominent features within the landscape
- Individual houses in large plots are characteristic
- Nurseries and polytunnels are familiar features
- There is a great diversity of visual experiences - of particular significance are the open views across the meres although from the roads the water bodies are hidden
- The skyline is dominated by trees.

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- The almost flat topography, lying at an intermediate elevation of between 45m and 50m AOD;
- Organic mosaic of open water, woodland and heathland – occupying the areas around former sand and gravel quarries;
- The soils that have developed on the glacio-fluvial drift are mostly deep permeable sandy and coarse loamy soils, with an isolated area of peat at Newplatt Wood;
- The remnant species rich acid grassland, oak-birch woodland and lowland heath habitats that provide biological and visual diversity;
- The deciduous woodland that forms a backdrop to views across the meres;
- The plantations of Scots pine and straight roads bordered by verges and punctuated by gorse that are distinctive features of the sandy landscape;
- The sandy soils support remnant acid grassland, semi-natural woodland, coniferous woodland, remnant heath and farmland;
- The broadleaved oak-birch woodland, although there are also coniferous plantations e.g. to the south of Newplatt Mere where a mature coniferous plantation is bounded by the original oak-birch woodland;
- The distinctive *heathy* character with gorse lining the roads, stands of Scots pine, and remnant areas of heath adjacent to Shakerley Mere and Newplatt Mere;

- The extensive resource of sand and gravel which has been quarried in the past to form a large number of water bodies which are now a key feature of the area, reminiscent of the natural meres around Delamere;
- The wet woodland and wet dwarf shrub heath of Shakerley Mere, designated as a local wildlife site.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- The planned 19th century enclosure patterns and 18th-19th century farmsteads and hamlets that provide evidence of the relatively late enclosure of this landscape from waste heath;
- The recreational opportunities provided by Shakerley Mere;
- The character area corresponds with a once extensive area of medieval heathland and forest. Today, only small fragments of heath survive. Significant change occurred in the 19th century with the planned enclosure of the landscape and creation of farmland, followed by sand and gravel extraction;
- Fields are relatively large compared to the ancient fields in adjacent landscapes;
- Shakerley Mere Nature Reserve provides opportunities for walking and fishing, and is the home to Lymm Angling Club;
- The typical settlement form is relatively late in origin and comprises farmsteads of 18th-19th century origin set within areas of relatively recent enclosure together with scattered ribbon development alongside roads;
- A paucity of designated historic structures or buildings;
- Remnant airfield hard surfaces from former RAF Cranage within the south-west corner of the area and designated as Scheduled Monuments.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- The area has *historically* been largely devoid of settlement;
- Allstock forms a small, fragmented settlement with no real centre, located close to Rudheath Woods, and is entirely surrounded by, but excluded from, the LCA;
- Local vernacular comprising red Cheshire brick with slate or clay tile roofs and white-washed properties that stand out against the wooded backdrop;
- The road pattern comprises a network of almost straight roads – these are often bordered by wide verges containing gorse;
- The M6 cuts through the area, forming a physical barrier to movement east-west;
- Prominent large works in the flat open landscape south of Shakerley Mere;
- Quarrying is currently no longer active (but permission sought for land south of New Platt Mere).

Perceptual / Visual

- The general impression is one of a large-scale landscape due to the flat landform, large scale fields and large water bodies. The simple tree-dominated skyline and the open views across the meres from close to them are of particular significance;
- There is a diversity of visual experiences, from open views across large fields and open meres, to enclosed views within woodland;
- The low settlement density and sense of tranquillity;
- The only vantage points are provided by the bridges constructed over the busy M6 motorway as it runs north-south through the area and these have a significant impact upon the surrounding landscape;
- Allstock is the only settlement of note and is surrounded by the LCA;
- Localised but significant perceptual and physical barrier of the M6, introducing noise and movement into the landscape;
- The area appears ‘tamed’ as a result of the straight-sided fields that dominate the area;

- Gorse adds texture and colour to the landscape;
- The man-made lakes appear natural and contribute to the sense of tranquillity associated with this landscape;
- Although this landscape is perceived to be a highly natural landscape due to the presence of woodland, open water and grassland, the presence of the M6 detracts from the overall sense of tranquillity;
- The relative inaccessibility of most the area;
- Since this is a flat landscape it is not visually prominent;
- The skyline is dominated by trees;
- Views out of the character area are generally limited by woodland planting, although there are views from the western edge of the character area across the *Stublach Plain*;
- The presence of woodland indicates that this landscape provides an opportunity for some screening of low level elements without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on views.

Landscape Condition

This is generally a well-managed landscape. Mineral extraction has now ceased, although not all sites have been restored and some areas are still used for industrial uses. There are some issues concerning the current state of the landscape including the historic loss of heathland sites, a gappy hedgerow network around fields in areas of enclosure, and lack of management of some woodland.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 1b: *Allstock*:

- Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of local importance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets (RAF Cranage - *parts of*).

Forces for Landscape Change

Past change

- Reduction in the number of farm units and the diversification of farming activity, including paddocks for horse grazing and an increase in fencing;
- Sand and gravel extraction leading to erosion of habitats and tranquillity;
- Increased industrial use of land leading to erosion of habitats and tranquillity;
- Lack of woodland management, and consequent invasive species e.g. Rhododendron within woodlands;
- Planting of coniferous species, particularly around industrial land uses;
- The M6 runs through this area.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 1b: *Allostock*

- Pressure for 'backland' housing development;
- Pressure for future mineral extraction - Allostock contains areas of search for sand and gravel extraction and the area is a preferred area for future controlled brine extraction which would result in impacts on the landscape. Mineral extraction may result in visual and noise impacts, and the wet working of sand that may result in the lowering of the water table affecting nearby habitats;
- Continued pressure for industrial use of land leading to further erosion of habitats and tranquillity;
- Lowering of the water table may be exacerbated by planting of conifers;
- Recreational pressure - use of water bodies for fishing, water skiing and other recreational activities including caravan parks, which may conflict with peaceful enjoyment and nature conservation objectives – recreation could be directed to certain areas such as the sandy Rudheath Woods (planting policy within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan);
- Potential infrastructure improvements to the M6 corridor.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 1b: Allostock

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** the diverse mosaic of heathy habitats and **restore** areas of heathland and woodland

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Conserve and manage areas of species rich acid grassland and seek opportunities to extend this habitat.
2. Support restoration and re-creation of lowland heath, including removal of conifers on heathland sites. Manage remnant heathland habitats e.g. around Rudheath Woods through grazing.
3. Encourage enhanced management of woodlands, including the replacement of non-native species by native broadleaved species, control of invasive species such as Rhododendron, and active management of existing woodlands to ensure a diverse age structure and ground flora.
4. Seek opportunities to increase woodland cover using native broadleaved species, including oak-birch woodland, where this does not compromise heathland or wetland habitats, and ensuring no detriment to historic assets.
5. Ensure mineral extraction does not detract from the naturalistic and tranquil qualities of the area – use naturalistic planting to screen extraction activities.
6. Seek positive restoration schemes for mineral extraction sites, including restoration of wetland habitats, grassland, heathland, scrub and woodland. Aim to increase the diversity of habitats by creating different stages of peatland /mossland development and vegetation succession.
7. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
8. Maintain the simple tree-dominated skyline and the open views across the Meres. Consider opportunities to create new views.
9. Maintain plantations of Scots pine and gorse scrub as distinctive features of the sandy landscape where this does not conflict with nature conservation objectives.
10. Consider opportunities for replanting hedgerows and hedgerow trees in areas of enclosed farmland to maintain a continuous hedgerow network.

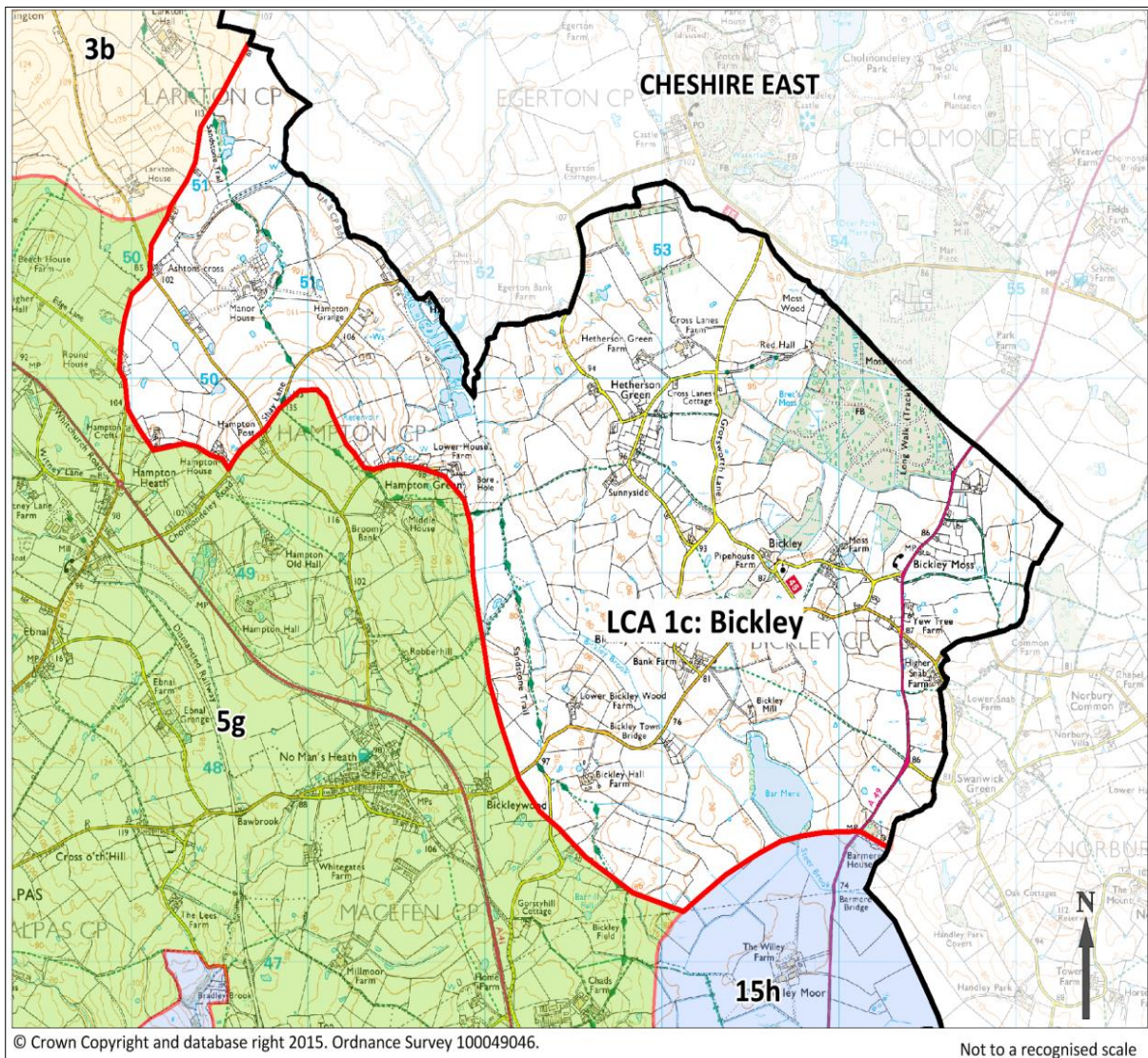
11. Ensure uses associated with the large non-designated water bodies (e.g. fishing, water skiing and other recreational activities) do not conflict with nature conservation objectives and the peaceful enjoyment of the meres.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Conserve the 18th-19th century farmsteads and hamlets that provide evidence of the relatively late enclosure of this landscape from waste heath.
2. Conserve open areas along local roads, particularly views across meres – seek to limit incremental linear development which could create a continuous built edge.
3. Screen views of the M6 using native vegetation, where possible.
4. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
5. Using local materials such as red Cheshire brick and sandstone with slate or clay tile roofs, and limited white-washed finishes, will maintain the local vernacular and enhance sense of place.
6. Respect exiting settlement pattern of individual properties built in their own grounds.
7. Use native and locally characteristic vegetation (oak-birch woodland, gorse, Scots pine) to integrate any built development into the landscape and to screen industrial land.



LCA 1c: Bickley



Location and Boundaries

The **Bickley** landscape character area falls across the south-eastern flank of CWaC and extends eastwards across the boundary into Cheshire East. The area is bounded to the west across most of its length by the *Maplas* LCA within the *Undulating Enclosed Farmland* LCT, with *Grindley Valley* to the south and for a short distance to the north *Beeston to Duckington Sandstone Fringe* LCA.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 1c: Bickley

- The topography is flat to the north-east but more undulating in the west
- Occasional steeper slopes found to the west of the Bickley Brook
- Elevation is c. 80-120m AOD
- Irregular and semi-irregular medium and large fields, primarily under pasture use
- An intermediate scale LCA
- Bar Mere provides a significant surface water feature to the southern edge of the area but is often inconspicuous because of waterside vegetation and limited elevated views
- A tight concentration of fishing lakes to the north of the area at Egerton Hall Farm
- In the east of the character area the large blocks of woodland associated with the Cholmondeley estate conspicuous in views from the west and from the busy A49
- Points of higher ground provide views out, often framed by hedgerow trees, over the undulating fields of the Malpas LCA, 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
- Settlement is mainly dispersed with a limited number of small, nucleated hamlets such as Bickley Town and Hetherson Green which are desirable residential locations
- A network of minor lanes, with only the A49 as a major road to the eastern fringe
- Concentration of black and white timber framed cottages in this area, some of which are 20th century pastiche of the vernacular
- Limited views to the south are dominated by the high ground in the vicinity of Wirswall near the CWaC boundary
- Bar Mere recognised as important wetland habitat and designated as a SSSI
- Willows and mature birch have colonised part of the mire at Bickley Moss where the wet woodland is well used by warblers, green and great spotted woodpeckers and buzzards and is locally designated as a Local Wildlife Site
- The skyline is dominated by hedgerow trees, or the dark line of conifer plantations
- There is a great diversity of visual experiences - of particular significance are the open views across Bar Mere.

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- The gently undulating topography with more pronounced slopes to the western fringe of the area above the Bickley Brook;
- The predominantly pastoral land use outside the managed conifer plantations of the Cholmondeley Estate to the east;
- Arable farming presents significant minority land use within a predominantly pastoral context;
- 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;
- Bar Mere and smaller mosses formed within natural depressions in the glacial drift following the retreat of the ice sheets some 15, 000 years ago;
- Bar Mere is the main water feature whilst there are many small field ponds with dense bankside vegetation;
- Bar Mere provides habitats for aquatic invertebrates as well as the wintering of wildfowl. It is designated as a SSSI and is an example of a nutrient rich mere having a very well developed

fringe of emergent vegetation. A narrow strip of woodland around part of the mere is included in the site;

- Treescape to the western fringe of the area limited to hedgerow oaks;
- Designed pocket woodlands and shelter belts are scattered to the north and east of the area.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- Significant influence of the managed and designed landscape features of the Cholmondeley Estate to the eastern flank of the area;
- Paucity of historic built heritage assets;
- Limited recreational opportunity across Public Rights of Way network, including parts of the Sandstone Trail and access within the Cholmondeley plantations;
- Small medieval field patterns survive in small areas around Bickley Moss and Hetherson Green;
- Paleo-environmental potential of Barr Mere and the area's wetlands.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- Dispersed settlement of small, loose-knit agricultural hamlets and scattered farmsteads;
- Significant equestrian complex and gallops dominate the open undulating landscape at Manor House Stables;
- Scattered farmsteads with large utilitarian agricultural sheds;
- Characteristic white wash and oak timber framed cottages found across the area.

Perceptual / Visual

- Visibility is often confined by high hedges and hedgerow trees, or the coniferous plantations of the eastern fringe, foreshortening views across the gently undulating topography;
- Low settlement density results in a quiet, tranquil landscape;
- In places an 'intimate' hidden character with a sense of enclosure due to the narrow lanes, hedges and sunken lanes;
- However, variations in field size and concentration of hedgerow trees affords a more open feeling to the north west around Manor House Stables;
- Despite its medium scale, Bar Mere is usually inconspicuous in the landscape;
- The block conifer plantations and shelter belts of the Cholmondeley Estate provide a strong structure and skyline to the east and year round consistency in colour to the pastoral landscape where oak trees alter with the season;
- The A49 presents an uncharacteristic element of movement and noise to the landscape;
- The presence of woodland indicates that this landscape provides opportunities for some screening of low level elements without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on views.

Landscape Condition

Generally good, with key characteristic elements that make up the area mainly intact across some parts but eroding elsewhere. Field size has increased to the eastern and northern parts where former hedgerow trees are now freestanding, particularly where arable land use has been established and where equestrian uses are prominent around Manor House Stables.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 1c: *Bickley*:

- Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of national and local importance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;
- Flood risk and water management.

Forces for Landscape Change

Past change

- Changes in farming from pastoral to arable and silage cropping with consequent seasonal changes to the landscape and loss of field hedges;
- Consequent erosion of historic field patterns;
- Separation from agriculture of farmhouses, leading to pressure for hobby farming and changes of use of the land;
- Under-management and/or inappropriate management of some of farm woodland;
- Over-mature hedgerow trees in decline;
- Loss of field ponds, exacerbating fragmentation of habitat networks;
- Erosion in built environment character through pastiche and suburban residential development and alteration;
- Prominence of modern agricultural buildings in the landscape;
- Large scale equine enterprise and infrastructure;
- Sub-urbanisation of the highway network.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 1c: *Bickley*

- On-going increase in arable land use;
- Decline of important woodland and wetland habitats through reduction, fragmentation and deterioration of farm woodlands;
- Reduction, fragmentation and deterioration of wetland habitats, through drainage and in-fill plus nutrient run-off from surrounding farmland;
- Climate change affecting the ecology and hydrology of the meres and mosses and flood risk on the Bickley Brook;
- Further sub division of remaining farm complexes.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA1c: Bickley

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** the quiet, remote rural character and enclosed field pattern, **restore** areas of hedgerow loss, former peat sites back to wetland, and broadleaved woodland.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Conserve and manage areas of species-rich meres and mosses and seek opportunities to extend this habitat.
2. Encourage restoration of former peat sites back to wetlands.
3. Encourage enhanced management of farm and estate woodlands, including the replacement of non-native species by native broadleaved species, control of invasive species such as Rhododendron, and active management of existing woodlands to ensure a diverse age structure and ground flora.
4. Seek opportunities to increase woodland cover using native broadleaved species, including oak-birch woodland, where this does not compromise ecologically valuable grassland, heathland or wetland habitats, and ensuring no detriment to historic assets.
5. Ensure farm intensification and diversification does not detract from the naturalistic and tranquil qualities of the area – use naturalistic planting to screen extraction activities.
6. Encourage sympathetic integration of equine development through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
7. Maintain the simple tree-dominated skyline and the open views across the meres. Consider opportunities to create new views.
8. Maintain estate plantations of conifers and gorse scrub as distinctive features of the sandy landscape where this does not conflict with nature conservation objectives.
9. Consider opportunities for replanting hedgerows and hedgerow trees in areas of enclosed farmland to maintain a continuous hedgerow network.
10. Consider opportunities for new footpaths.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Conserve the 18th-19th century farmsteads and hamlets that provide evidence of the relatively late enclosure of this landscape from waste heath.
2. Conserve open areas along local roads, particularly views across Bar Mere – seek to limit incremental linear development which could create a continuous built edge.
3. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development does not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
4. Using local materials such as red Cheshire brick and sandstone with slate or clay tile roofs, and white-washed finishes, will maintain the local vernacular and enhance sense of place.
5. Use native and locally characteristic vegetation (oak-birch woodland, gorse, Scots pine) to integrate any built development into the landscape and to screen industrial land.
6. Prevent suburban gentrification through construction of individual pastiche dwellings.

