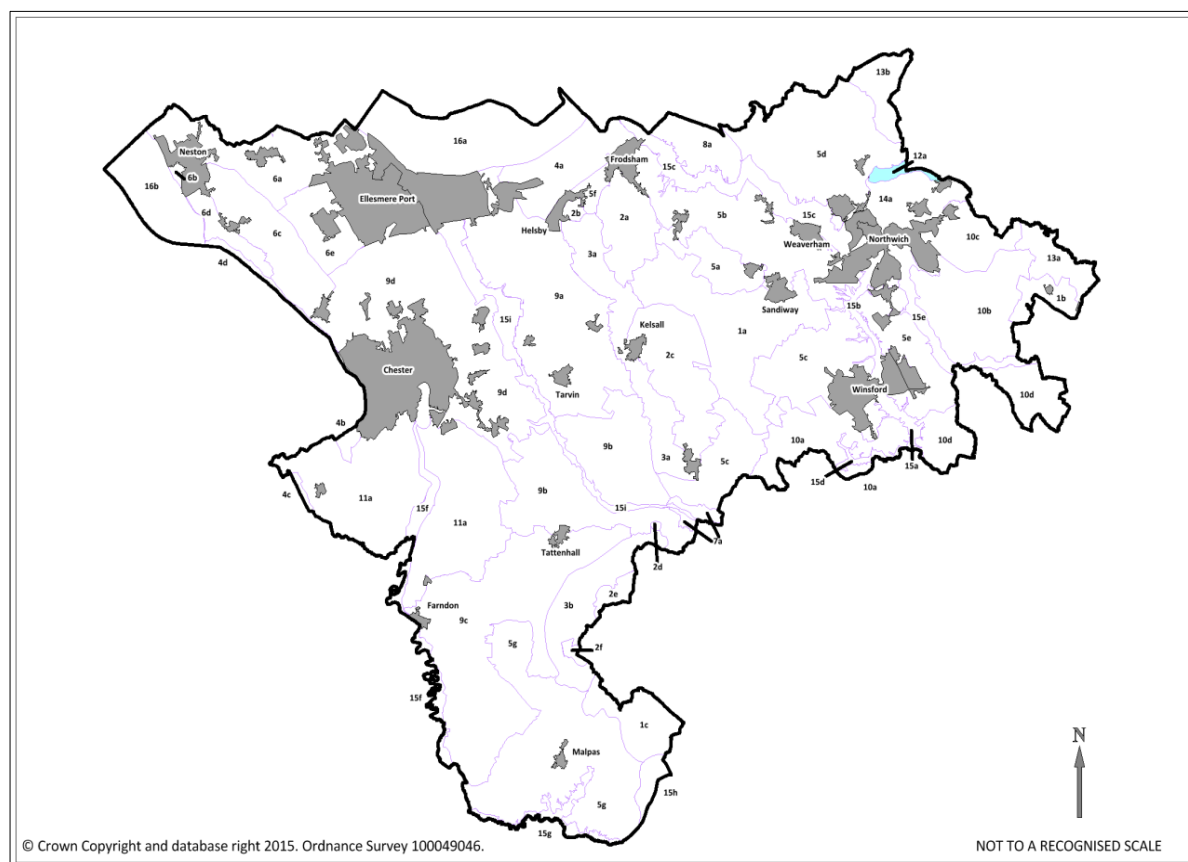


## LCT 12: MERE BASIN



### **General Description**

The LCT comprises part of a distinctive basin landform containing meres formed by natural salt subsidence, coinciding with a geological fault line on the eastern boundary of the borough. The character type extends into the neighbouring Cheshire East borough. Meres support a wide range of habitats including open water, reed beds and willow/alder woodland. Alluvial soils in the basin typically support pasture, woodland and some unimproved species rich grassland. Fields of arable and pasture typically occur on the basin slopes bounded by hedgerows.

The LCT is notable for the absence of settlement and a limited road network. Some buildings are associated with the meres e.g. boat houses, sailing club facilities, visitor facilities, but otherwise the LCT remains undeveloped.

The scale of the landscape is generally medium across its open pasture and pockets of arable farmland, but areas of intimate, self-contained landscape with relatively tranquil character can be found where the influence of trees and woodland predominate around the meres. Panoramic views from the basin edges over the meres can be experienced, although such vistas are usually from outside the LCT itself.

### **Visual Character**

The most obvious visual characteristic of this type is the influence of mature woodland blocks and individual parkland trees, resulting in some degree of enclosure in places. The influence of woodland blocks and tree lines, primarily around the meres provides a contrast with the surrounding, more open, gently undulating basin topography. The meres constitute an essential defining element of this type but are not always immediately apparent from within the LCT as they

are partially screened from the few primary transport routes within or around the LCT. Budworth Mere lies at the northern end of Northwich Woodlands, part of The Mersey Forest, and contributes to the localised but attractive parkland landscape of Marbury Country Park immediately to the south. Elsewhere meres can be found in simple settings within farmland.

### ***Physical Influences***

The basin-like topography is flat to undulating - mainly a broad and gently rolling landscape c. 20-100m AOD, with sometimes open views within it as a consequence of low clipped hedges and general absence of hedgerow trees. In some sections slopes become steeper, for example around Great Budworth and Pickmere to the east (partly within Cheshire East).

The solid geology of this character type is predominantly made up of banded siltstone, Bollin Mudstone and Northwich Halite. This is overlain by glacial till with river terrace deposits and alluvium. This deposition has led to the formation of a hummocky terrain. Meres sit within these deposits – a number of which are designated as local wildlife sites. Soil types are typical sandy gley soils, brown earths and typical brown sands. The latter is commonly associated with glacio-fluvial sand and gravel deposits. Peaty soils are occasionally found in enclosed hollows.

The meres within the LCA form part of a nationally important series of open water sites. Associated fringing habitats such as reedswamp, fen and damp pasture add to the value of meres. The development of these habitats often leads to in-filling, with the meres becoming nutrient poor leading to the formation of bog or mossland. Meres provide habitats for aquatic invertebrates as well as the wintering of wildfowl including the Great Crested Grebe (a species that has fought its way back from near extinction in the nineteenth century). Typical vegetation includes the common reed, yellow iris and the greater and lesser pond sedges.

Away from the ornamental estates, land use is typically arable or pastoral. There are isolated areas of neutral unimproved grassland which support a rich flora.

The remnant historic parkland at Marbury to the south has a higher than average woodland cover, enhanced by its location within Northwich Woodlands, part of The Mersey Forest, fringing the meres in designed blocks. Woodland in this type has many functions – it acts as a screen, enhancing privacy and in turn restricting views into and out of the former estate; it has ornamental value – e.g. following planting patterns and including varied species; biodiversity – providing valuable habitats. Where woodland doesn't have an ornamental association it is mainly located on the slopes of streams or rivers where it has survived through lack of competition for alternative land uses or has been planted as game cover.

### ***Cultural Influences***

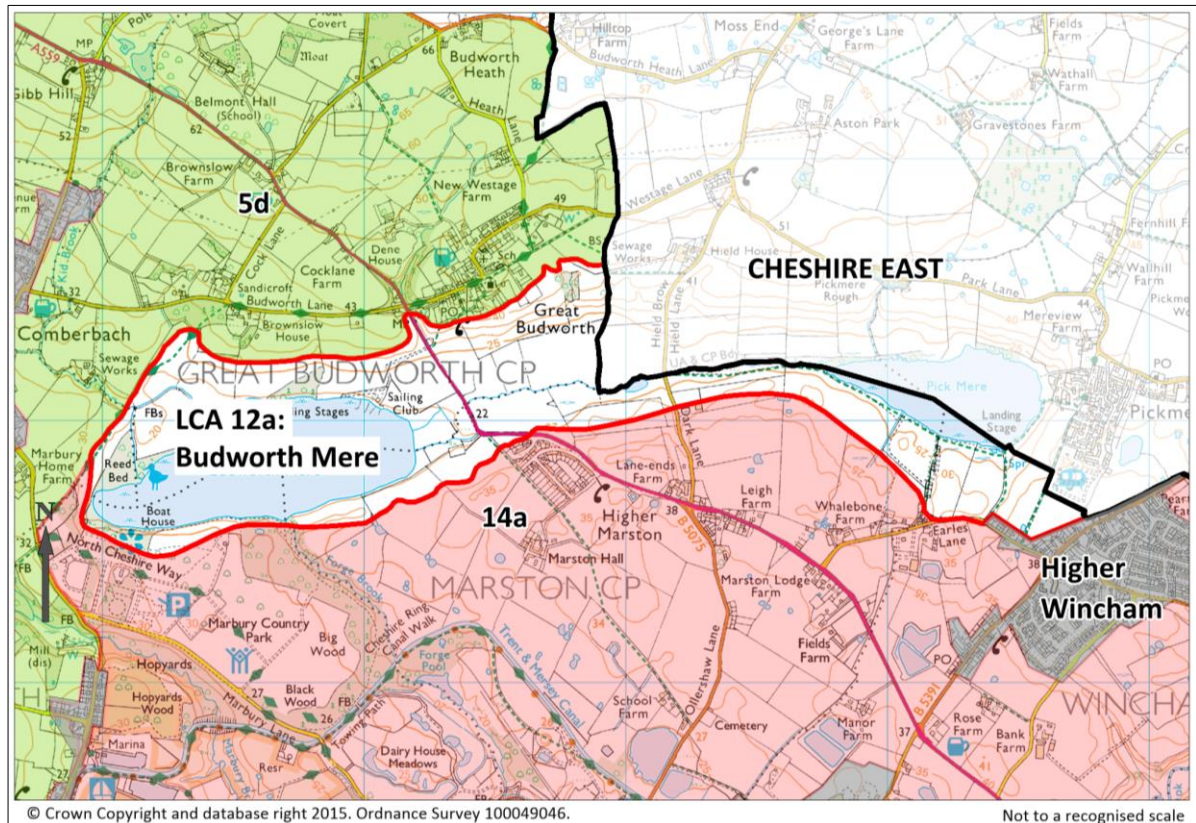
This character type is influenced, but not dominated by, the former historic Marbury estate, the formal grounds elements of which lie to the south within LCT14, but remain a visitor attraction and popular visitor location. The now demolished Marbury Hall utilised the assets of the natural landscape, in particular the mere. There has therefore been a great deal of continuity in land use with estate management heavily influencing the form of parts of the landscape.

Outside the designed landscapes, the remaining area is used mainly for pasture, and there are medium to large scale irregular and semi-regular fields, which are typical of a medieval field pattern and late post medieval reorganisation and improvement associated with the Marbury estate. Boundaries consist of low clipped hawthorn hedges with few hedgerow trees in the basin.

There is **one Landscape Character Area** within LCT 12:

**12a: Budworth Mere**

## LCA 12a: Budworth Mere



### Location and Boundaries

**Budworth Mere** is a linear, compact, basin-shaped landscape character area located along a geological fault line to the north of Northwich. The boundaries of the mere basin are defined predominantly by the basin-like landform with the top of the slopes meeting the adjacent post-industrial landscape of the *Northwich Salt Heritage Landscape* to the south (LCA14a) and *Whitley & Comberbach Undulating Enclosed Farmland* to the north-west (LCA5d).

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 12a: Budworth Mere***

- Located on a bedrock of Northwich Halite Formation, commonly known as rock salt, close to a geological fault which forms a steep slope along the northern boundary
- Budworth Mere and Pick Mere (that straddles the boundary with Cheshire East) are large water bodies formed by natural salt subsidence that support a wide range of habitats including reed beds and willow/alder woodland
- Alluvial soils in the basin support traditionally managed grassland e.g. Pickmere meadow
- Woodland and trees are generally absent, although small areas of peat deposits along the south side of Budworth Mere, in the adjoining character area (LCA 14a) support oak, birch, hawthorn and hazel
- Fields of arable and pasture on the basin slopes represent agricultural improvement of former medieval fields associated with Great Budworth
- Notable for the absence of settlement. Some buildings are associated with the mere e.g. boat house/sailing club
- Partly an intimate, hidden landscape with a tranquil character. Bird watching is a popular activity; however visitors to Marbury Country Park reduce tranquillity along the southern edge of Budworth Mere
- Sailing, boating, open water swimming and feeding the ducks provide recreational activity to this landscape
- Panoramic views from the northern edge of the basin across Budworth Mere with the industrial works of Northwich in the background
- Views to Budworth Church

### ***Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value***

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The basin-like topography which creates an intimate, hidden landscape;
- Budworth Mere and Pick Mere which support a wide range of important habitats including open water, reedbeds and willow/alder woodland;
- The two meres are designated local wildlife sites important for migrating wildfowl and resident species;
- Traditionally managed grassland e.g. Pickmere meadow;
- Oak-birch woodland with hawthorn and hazel on peat deposits;
- Pastoral fields on the slopes of the basin that provide a pastoral and green setting to the meres.

#### **Cultural / Heritage / Historic**

- The large scale fields on the slopes around Budworth Mere represent late post-medieval agricultural improvement and 20th Century improvement of medieval townfields around Great Budworth;
- Budworth Mere is used for fishing, open water swimming and sailing and is the home to Budworth Sailing Club;
- The entire Budworth Mere is navigable, although the south-western part has restricted access to protect the wildlife associated with the nature reserve;
- Bird watching, country walks and duck feeding are popular activities;
- The public footpaths and walks around the southern banks of Budworth Mere and further south within Marbury Country Park, part of the wider Northwich Woodlands, and Pick Mere to the east.

### Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- The absence of settlement that creates a tranquil character away from the popular Marbury Country Park;
- Scattered buildings associated with the mere e.g. a boat house and sailing club.

### Perceptual / Visual

- The 'intimate', hidden landscape character that is separated from the surrounding *Whitley & Comberbach Undulating Enclosed Farmland* by a change in topography;
- The presence of water and woodland contributes to a colourful scene and sailing brings colour and activity to the Mere Basin;
- There are panoramic views from the northern edge of the basin across Budworth Mere;
- There are also views to Budworth Church;
- The peaceful character and absence of settlement contribute to a sense of tranquillity. However, the presence of a sailing club and landing stages on Budworth Mere, as well as other forms of recreation, bring activity to the area;
- The industrial works at Northwich are visible from the northern edge of the basin;
- The northern 'crest' of the basin forms a skyline in views from within the basin. The basin is hidden from the adjacent *Whitley & Comberbach Undulating Enclosed Farmland* due to its low-lying basin topography. However, the landform of the basin means Budworth Mere is highly visible from the slopes enclosing the basin and, conversely, the slopes are highly visible from the mere.
- Where woodland is present (e.g. along the south side of Budworth Mere) it provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the basin slopes.

### Landscape Condition

While the elements that make up the basin (open water, reed beds, woodland, meadow, pastoral and arable farmland) are generally intact and the majority of the basin is in active agricultural use, some of the hedgerow boundaries on the basin slopes are gappy and some woodlands under-managed.

### CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 12a: *Budworth Mere*:

- Green Belt;
- Natural heritage sites of local importance;
- Flood risk and water management.

### ***Forces for Landscape Change***

#### **Past change**

- Budworth Mere lies at the northern end of Northwich Woodlands, part of The Mersey Forest, created from largely derelict land left over from the salt and brine industries and now a popular outdoor destination on the outskirts of Northwich;
- There has been spread of invasive species such as bracken, rhododendron and sycamore, for example in and around Budworth Mere. However, recent management work around the mere has attempted to reduce the spread of invasive species;
- Tree planting using British native trees has recently been undertaken around Budworth Mere Local Wildlife Site by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust;
- Arable land use has replaced pastoral uses on the basin slopes and some hedgerows have fallen into decline;
- The sailing club and club house was built in 1948 and is virtually the only built development within the LCA. Although there are other landing stages surrounding the mere, there has been no development at the sailing club for 50 years.

#### **Potential future change/ key issues affecting LCA 12a: *Budworth Mere***

- The area is located in The Mersey Forest although significant woodland creation (policies in the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan) is unlikely to occur within this LCA;
- Climate change may influence water tables and changes in woodland composition;
- Silting-up of the meres;
- Proposed Lostock-Carrington pylon route.



## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 12a: Budworth Mere***

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** the inherent sense of tranquillity of the landscape and diversity of natural habitats.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

1. Promote traditional woodland management techniques of the valuable woodland on the mere edge and basin slopes to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
2. Continue to control and reduce the spread of invasive species such as bracken, rhododendron and sycamore, Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed where they threaten native habitats.
3. Planting near waterbodies should consist of native species.
4. Seek opportunities to expand and link existing woodland through new tree planting in areas currently of low ecological value, ensuring no detriment to heritage assets.
5. Encourage reversion of arable back to pasture, particularly on the basin floor and seek to extend traditionally managed meadows.
6. Seek to improve management of hedgerows on the basin slopes to strengthen this feature of the basin.
7. Monitor potentially conflicting uses, such as water sports, nature conservation, bird watching and walking.
8. Monitor the effects of climate change, particularly changes in water table and changes in species composition.

### ***Built Development Guidelines***

1. Support recreational use of the landscape, ensuring any visitor facilities are integrated into their landscape context.
2. Maintain the unsettled character of this intimate 'hidden' landscape and ensure any facilities associated with recreation are integrated into their landscape setting.
3. The valley crests are particularly sensitive to large scale, or tall, built development.
4. Protect views to Budworth Church.

