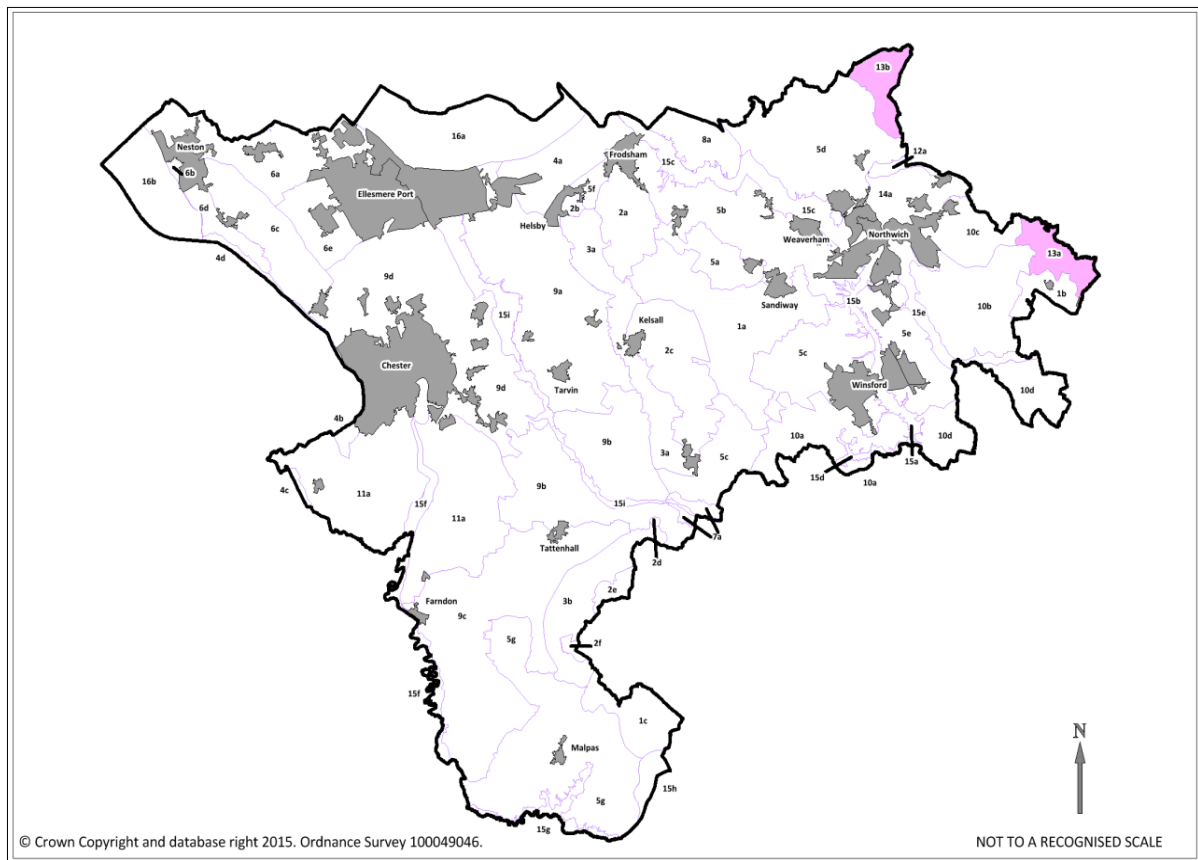


## LCT 13: LOWLAND FARMLAND AND MOSSES



### General Description

This character type is found in two localities within CWaC; at its north-eastern tip to the east of Antrobus, and to the far eastern fringe of the borough between Peover and Allostock. Both areas extend beyond the CWaC boundary into Cheshire East. The *Lowland Farmland and Mosses* landscape type is a flat or gently undulating farmland landscape, of intermediate to low elevation. This landscape type is characterised by its strong field patterns, seasonally waterlogged soils, presence of peat mosses and wetland habitats.

This very gently undulating landscape type has many similarities with the *Cheshire Plain West*, yet it has a greater concentration of woodland and a slightly higher settlement density with a greater occurrence of nucleated hamlets and villages. Land use is a mix of arable and pasture, while settlement largely retains a dispersed pattern. Intensive reorganisation during the post-medieval period saw the break up of medieval field patterns. Small surviving mosses are typical in most areas, as are ponds.

### Visual Character

This landscape type is characterised by a medium scale landscape, with local variations in enclosure and views dependent upon the presence of woodland and the condition of hedgerows. Local increases in vegetation density are often riparian associated with larger brooks or minor watercourses. The better drained areas tend to favour arable farming. There is a great variety in the range of available views but these are often limited in extent due to the lack of elevated vantage points or blocked or filtered by high hedgerows or woodland. To the west there are no obvious landmarks but where views are available to the east the Peak District hills are visible in the distance.

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

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

### ***Physical Influences***

The flat or gently undulating landscape is formed above bedrock geology of Mercia Mudstones. Quaternary deposits mask the underlying solid geology – comprising glacial till (boulder clay) with pockets of glacio-fluvial sand and gravels, alluvium and peat. Surface deposits give rise to complex soils patterns including clay and sandy soils with pockets of peat.

Peat supports mosslands, some of which have been colonised by birch. Ditches and books drain the landscape. Field ponds are also a feature of the seasonally waterlogged soils. Major watercourses are not found within this landscape character type.

### ***Cultural Influences***

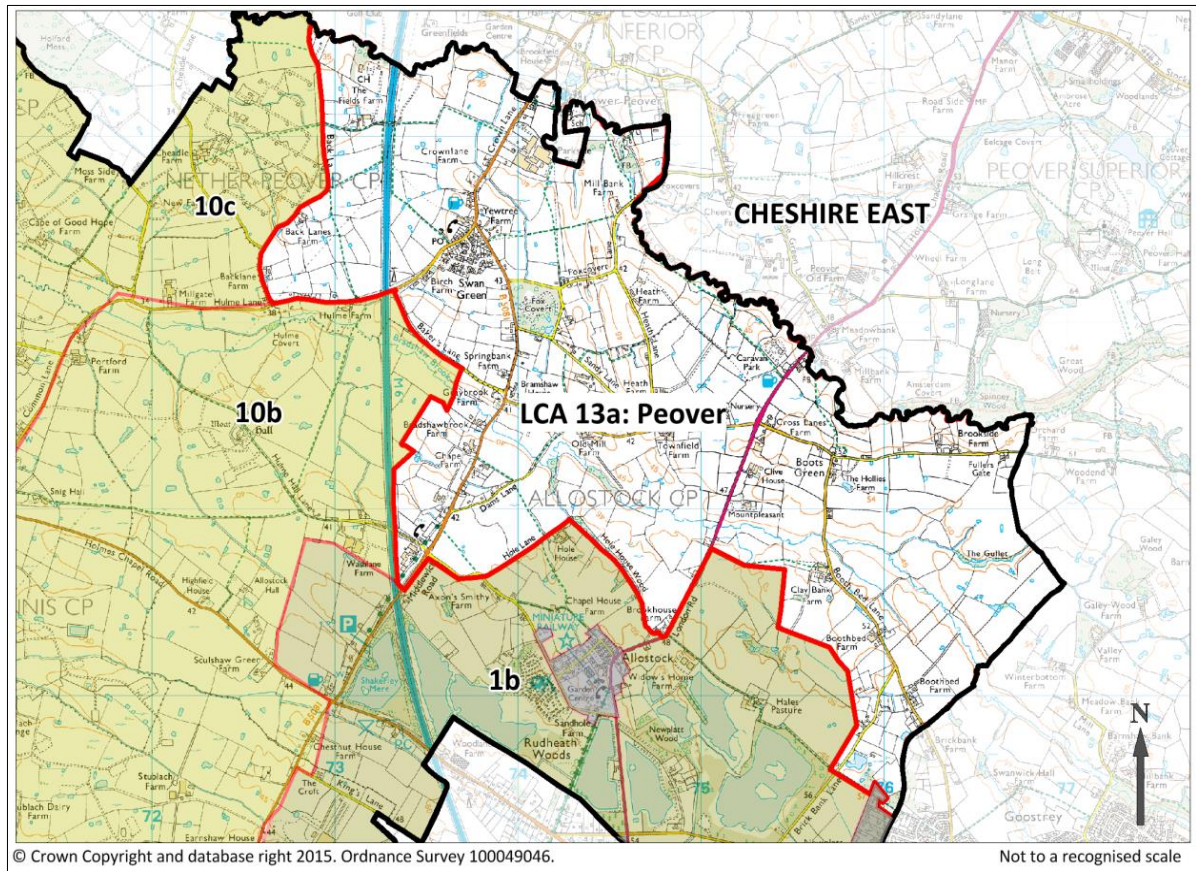
A variety of field sizes and shapes are found across the landscape, relating to different periods of enclosure and reflecting the complex underlying soil types. Public rights of way typically provide passive recreational opportunities with some mosses providing additional access.

There are **two Landscape Character Areas** within LCT 13:

**13a: Peover**

**13b: Arley West**

## LCA 13a: Peover



### Location and Boundaries

The **Peover Lowland Farmland and Mosses** character area represents an area of undulating farmland located mainly to the east of the M6, on the north-eastern boundary of CWaC. To the south-west it forms a transition to the distinctive sandy landscape of *Allstock* while to north-eastwards the character area continues beyond the borough boundary into Cheshire East.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 13a: Peover***

- Bedrock geology of the soft salt-bearing strata of the Northwich Halite Formation (forming part of the Mercia Mudstone Group) gives rise to a landscape of intermediate to low elevation, ranging mostly between 35m and 50m AOD
- Glacial till (boulder clay) deposits and pockets of glacio-fluvial sand and gravels produce a locally undulating topography, including distinct NW-SE ridges
- The area is drained by numerous streams and brooks, including Bradshaw Brook, which produces further undulations in the surface. The courses of the brooks are often wooded
- The combination of slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged soils deep, permeable sandy and coarse loamy soils support a mixture of fertile pasture and arable farmland. Ditches drain areas of heavier clay soil
- Medieval and early post medieval enclosure of small irregular/semi-irregular assarts bounded by tall hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees which produce a strong field pattern and time depth
- Contrasting 20<sup>th</sup> century fragmentation of landscapes through field enlargement and industrial land use
- Small farm woodlands and coverts are important features of the landscape
- Dispersed settlement pattern characterised by a network of rural winding lanes linking significant nucleated communities at Swan Green and along the Middlewich Road with scattered farms, hamlets and cottages
- The small scale undulating topography, high enclosing hedgerows, narrow lanes, small irregular fields and small scale built development combine to form an intimate character
- Generally quiet and rural in character, although 'suburban' style development, nurseries, the M6 and A50 ensure that the area does not feel 'remote'
- The skyline is generally formed by hedgerow trees. The church tower at Lower Peover is a landmark feature on the skyline.

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

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The distinct NW-SE ridges which mark the location of glacio-fluvial sand and gravel deposits;
- The numerous streams and brooks, and their sandstone bridges, which support wetland and woodland habitats and provide diversity in the landscape;
- The tall, species rich hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees which produce a strong field pattern;
- The small farm woodlands and coverts that provide variety and cover in a landscape with relatively low woodland cover.

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

- The quite tightly enclosed landscape of small irregular/semi regular assarts of the medieval and early post medieval periods arranged around Swan Green, an area of common/waste (probably heathland) which persisted into the late eighteenth, early nineteenth century, and which provide a sense of time depth;
- The pattern of enclosure has become increasingly fragmented in the twentieth century through field enlargement and industrial use;
- Listed farmhouses and agricultural buildings, such as Boothbed Farm and Townfield Farm;
- Part of Lower Peover Conservation Area falls within this character area;

- Limited passive recreational opportunities on a sparse public rights of way network.

#### **Built Development and Settlement Pattern**

- The dispersed settlement pattern of scattered farms, hamlets and cottages, of a relatively high density, which is common in landscapes of this type, but significant nucleated communities at Swan Green and along the Middlewich Road that have developed in the latter half of the twentieth century;
- Redbrick and sandstone bridges.

#### **Perceptual / Visual**

- The network of narrow, rural winding lanes that respond to topography and give the sense of a small scale, intimate landscape;
- Uniformity in its topography, land use, views and built form giving a marked commonality in the combination of these features;
- The church tower at Lower Peover that forms a landmark feature on the skyline;
- The quiet and rural in character despite the presence of ‘suburban’ style development, nurseries, the M6 and the A50;
- Since this is a comparatively low lying landscape it doesn’t have a strong skyline from a distance and is not greatly inter-visible with other landscapes;
- The undulating nature of the landscape means the low lying areas are hidden and the presence of high hedgerows and wooded water courses provides further visual screening and enclosure;
- Residential settlement is scattered throughout the area indicating the presence of sensitive residential receptors, but the relatively low recreational use of the landscape means few recreational receptors;
- The presence of undulating topography, woodland and hedgerow trees means there is some potential for mitigating visual impact of low lying elements without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

#### **Landscape Condition**

This area is in active agricultural use and is managed for these land uses. Although hedgerows are generally intact there are some gaps in the network. Some woodlands are not being actively managed. There is also some horse grazed pasture and associated equestrian clutter.

#### **CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 13a: *Peover*:**

- Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of 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.



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

#### **Past change**

- Limited boundary management and evidence of decline in hedgerow boundaries;
- Decline in hedgerow trees due to old age and/or inappropriate management resulting in loss of diversity and suppression of emerging saplings;
- Increase in the number of fences to replace hedgerow boundaries;
- Increase in horse paddocks surrounded by ranch style fencing;
- A shift from grassland to crops, fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Steady intensification of grassland management has resulted in the loss of species rich grassland;
- Presence of nurseries and stables indicating diversification of farming;
- Presence of 'lifestyle farms' including development of tennis courts and swimming pools.

#### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 13a: *Peover***

- Pressure for built development including large house extensions, redevelopment of existing dwellings and new build dwellings in the countryside which may result in ornamental gardens and suburban style boundaries in the rural landscape;
- On going change of use from agriculture to 'hobby-farming' and equestrian land use with associated pressure for field structures and paraphernalia;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings as a result of continued agricultural diversification in this area of small scale farming, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- The M6 runs through this area – expansion of the motorway would affect this area;
- Planting of new woodland and hedgerow trees (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan) as a buffer to ancient semi-natural woodland and to screen views of large scale industry (but without obstructing long distance views of the Sandstone Ridge and Peak District);
- Part of Cheshire's area of search for sand and gravel falls within this area.

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 13a: Peover***

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** the rural and intimate character of the landscape and to **enhance** the condition of woodland.

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

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensure a young stock of hedgerow trees is present.
2. Conserve the strong field pattern, particularly ancient field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
3. Conserve the drainage ditches, brooks and field ponds that provide wetland habitats and visual diversity in the landscape.
4. Protect trees by maintaining a buffer around the field margin.
5. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors. Seek opportunities to re-create species rich grasslands, particularly alongside brooks.
6. 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.
7. Support the management of all existing woodlands. Promote traditional woodland management techniques to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
8. Seek to enhance woodland cover, including restoring and creating streamside woodlands and copses/small woodlands within the existing field pattern. Respect the scale of the landscape pattern when designing new woodland and avoid planting on areas of existing ecological value, ensuring no detriment to historic assets.
9. Consider views when designing new woodland - conserve views to the church tower at Lower Peover from key public viewpoints.
10. Conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that ‘suburbanise’ the landscape such as kerbs, lighting and large scale signage.

## ***Built Development Guidelines***

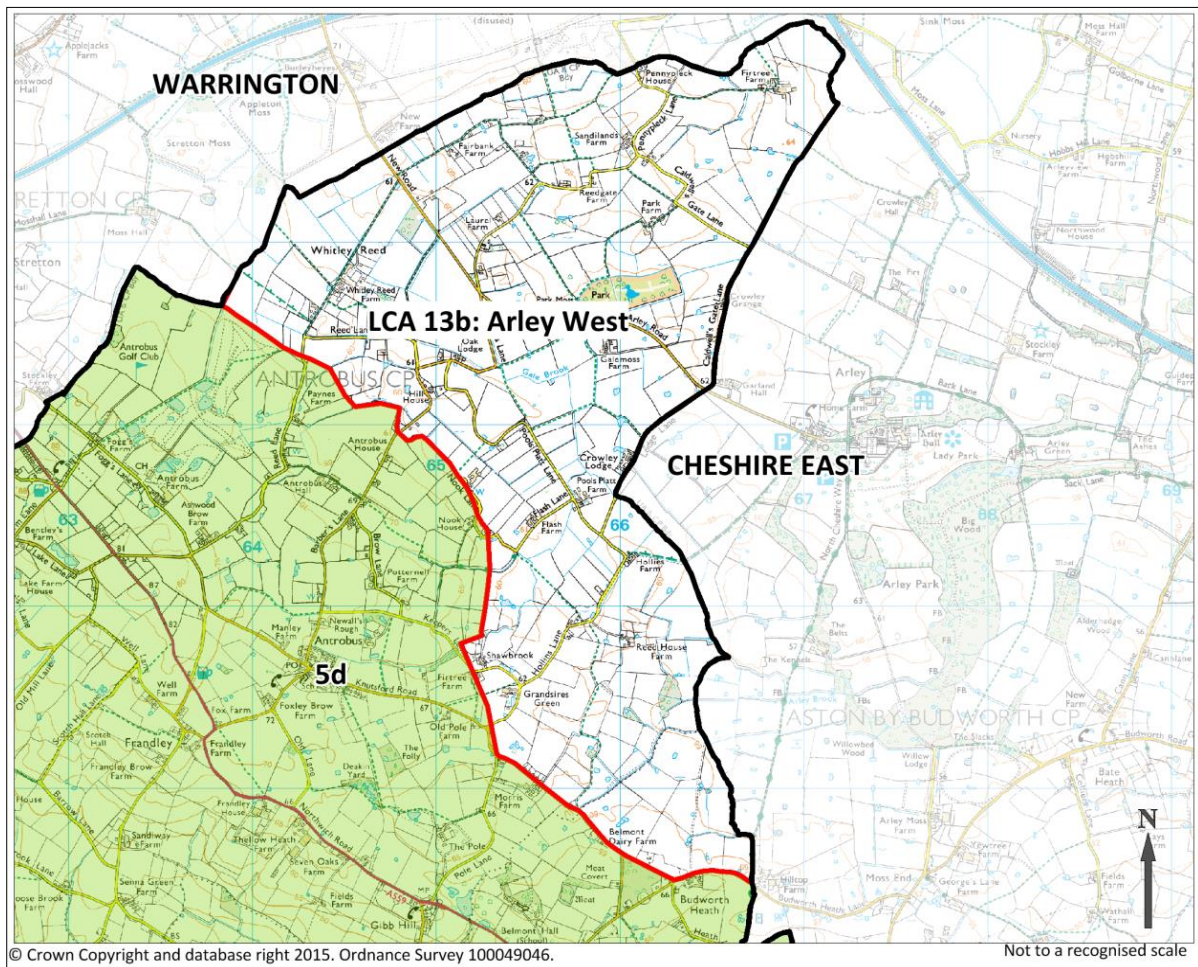
- 1.** Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of farms, hamlets and cottages – conserve the rural settings of villages and views to landmark features such as the church tower at Lower Peover.
- 2.** Ensure redevelopment of existing buildings and large house extensions do not obscure the local vernacular.
- 3.** Monitor the cumulative effect of piecemeal change in this area – ensure new built single dwellings and their gardens, drives, gates etc. do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area.
- 4.** Conserve the local building vernacular including local red brick and white wash materials/finishes - ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting outside the main settlements. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows.
- 5.** Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the rural landscape - pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways, gateways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not ‘suburbanise’ the landscape.
- 6.** 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.
- 7.** Soften built edges and views of infrastructure by introducing small scale planting schemes using native broadleaved species. Use similar planting schemes to integrate new development into the landscape.
- 8.** Screen neighbouring LCA quarrying activity using broadleaved species. Consider the long-term restoration of sand and gravel quarries for the benefit of wildlife, creating new wetland habitats and recreational access where possible.







## LCA 13b: Arley West



### Location and Boundaries

The **Arley West Lowland Farmland and Mosses** landscape character area represents an area of undulating farmland located between the M56 and M6, on the north-eastern boundary of CWaC. To the south-west it forms a transition to the distinctive sandy landscape of *Allstock* while to the north-east the character area continues beyond the borough boundary into Cheshire East.

### ***Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 13b: Arley West***

- Surface deposits give rise to complex soils patterns including a large extent of sandy soils with a peaty surface horizon which supports peaty mosslands at Park Moss and sheep grazed pasture
- Ditches and brooks drain the area. Field ponds are also a feature of this seasonally waterlogged landscape
- Distinctive small irregular/semi regular assarts of the medieval and early post medieval periods, followed by the regular enclosure patterns of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century
- The influence of the Arley Estate is evident in the large areas of reorganised fields, which replaced the earlier small irregular/semi regular assarts
- A landscape of colonisation by successive generations of sizable areas of common/waste (i.e Whitley Reed)
- Dispersed settlement pattern is characterised by low density, scattered farmsteads linked by a network of narrow, rural lanes
- Built materials include red brick and white wash finishes. Red brick barns are a feature of the landscape
- A sense of openness results from the flat topography, large fields, low cut hedgerows and low woodland cover
- However, the skyline appears to be wooded, formed by hedgerow trees and birch woodland at Park Moss
- Public rights of way create passive recreational opportunities and an area of open access land at the Woodland Trust's Park Moss provides trails through woodland
- Quiet and rural in character, with some areas having a sense of 'remoteness' due to the general absence of large scale visually intrusive built elements.

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

#### **Natural / Physical**

- The area is unified by its flat landform and open character;
- NW-SE ridges which mark the location of glacio-fluvial sand and gravel deposits;
- Bedrock geology of the soft Bollin Mudstones that form part of the Mercia Mudstone Group;
- A landscape of intermediate to low elevation at around 60m AOD;
- Quaternary deposits mask the underlying solid geology – comprising glacial till (boulder clay) with pockets of glacio-fluvial sand and gravels, alluvium and peat;
- Slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged soils that support a mixture of pasture and arable crops bounded by hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees;
- Complex soils patterns including a large extent of sandy soils with a peaty surface in the centre of the area. This supports peaty mosslands and sheep grazed pasture;
- The area is drained by numerous drainage channels and the natural meandering course of Gale Brook;
- Ditches surround fields and run alongside road verges;
- Woodland cover is generally low in this area, but the Woodland Trust's wooded mossland at Park Moss is an important feature of the landscape;
- Numerous streams and brooks, and their sandstone bridges, support wetland and woodland habitats and provide diversity in the landscape;
- The tall, species rich hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees which produce a strong field pattern;
- The small farm woodlands and coverts that provide variety and cover in a landscape with relatively low woodland cover.

### Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- The landscape is divided into a variety of field sizes and shapes with distinctive narrow fields relating to post-Medieval planned enclosure along Pools Platt Lane, and the Parliamentary enclosures around Fairbank Farm;
- Areas of ancient fields e.g. along Hollins Lane and areas of 20th century field re-organisation where much larger field dominate e.g. at Whitley Reed and around Firtree Farm;
- Scattered listed farmsteads provide some limited built heritage value;
- Passive recreational opportunity in the form of public rights of way and quiet lanes, and an area of open access land providing trails through the Woodland Trust's Park Moss.

### Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- Dispersed settlement pattern of low density is characterised by scattered farmsteads linked by a network of narrow, rural lanes;
- Built materials include red brick and white wash finishes and some are listed buildings;
- Redbrick barns are a feature of the landscape.

### Perceptual / Visual

- Comparatively low lying landscape which doesn't have a strong skyline from a distance and is not inter-visible with other landscapes;
- The skyline is generally formed by hedgerow trees and Park Moss which creates the perception of a wooded skyline;
- Residential settlement is at a low density indicating the presence of few sensitive residential receptors;
- There are relatively few recreational users of the landscape, although visitors to Park Moss may be considered to be sensitive visual receptors;
- The landscape is quiet and rural in character, with some areas having a sense of 'remoteness' due to the lack of large-scale visually intrusive built elements;
- Despite its remote character, it is clearly a settled landscape as a result of its agricultural land use resulting in a strong landscape pattern;
- The flat and open nature of the landscape means it is visually sensitive. However, the filtering provided by hedgerow trees and birch woodland provides some potential for mitigating visual impact of low lying elements without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

### Landscape Condition

This area is in active agricultural use and is managed for these land uses. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network. It is likely that drainage schemes have led to drying of wetland habitats, affecting their condition. Some pasture is horse grazed.

#### CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 13b: Arley West:

- Green Belt and Countryside;
- 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.

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

#### **Past change**

- Previous decline in hedgerow field boundaries and hedgerow trees due to flail mowing (which reduces diversity and kills emerging saplings) now reversed by programme of hedgerow tree planting led by Antrobus Heritage supported by The Mersey Forest;
- Farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;
- Off-road motorbike / trial bike areas;
- A shift from grassland to crops, fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Steady intensification of grassland management has resulted in the loss of species rich grassland;
- Past drainage schemes have resulted in the gradual drying out of wetland habitats and reduction in the size of mossland in the past.

#### **Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 13b: Arley West**

- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings as a result of agricultural diversification, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Pressure for built development in this area including new build dwellings in the countryside and extensions, which may result in ornamental gardens and suburban style boundaries in the rural landscape;
- Any future development on the disused Stretton airfield alongside the M56 (just beyond the LCA) could affect the northern edge of the LCA;
- Planting of new woodland on open agricultural land and hedgerow trees (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan).

## ***Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 13b: Arley West***

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** the remote and rural character of the landscape and to **enhance** the variety and condition of wetland and mossland habitats.

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

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensure a young stock of hedgerow trees is present.
2. Conserve the strong field pattern, particularly the distinctive areas of post-medieval planned and Parliamentary enclosures.
3. Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerow.
4. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
5. Conserve the drainage ditches, brooks and field ponds that provide wetland habitats and visual diversity in the landscape.
6. Seek opportunities to re-create species rich grasslands, particularly alongside brooks.
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. Support the management of existing woodland at Park Moss. Promote traditional woodland management techniques to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
9. Seek to re-create new, and manage existing, mosses on the peaty soils by ensuring wet conditions for the establishment of sphagnum moss, and removing invasive succession species such as silver birch from these sites.
10. Conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that ‘suburbanise’ the landscape such as kerbs, lighting and large scale signage.



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

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of farmsteads.
2. Monitor the cumulative effect of piecemeal change in this area – ensure new built single dwellings and their gardens, drives, gates etc. do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area.
3. Conserve the local building vernacular including local red brick and white wash materials/finishes - ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting outside the main settlements. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows.
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. Maintain red brick barns as features of the landscape. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the rural landscape - pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways, gateways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.

