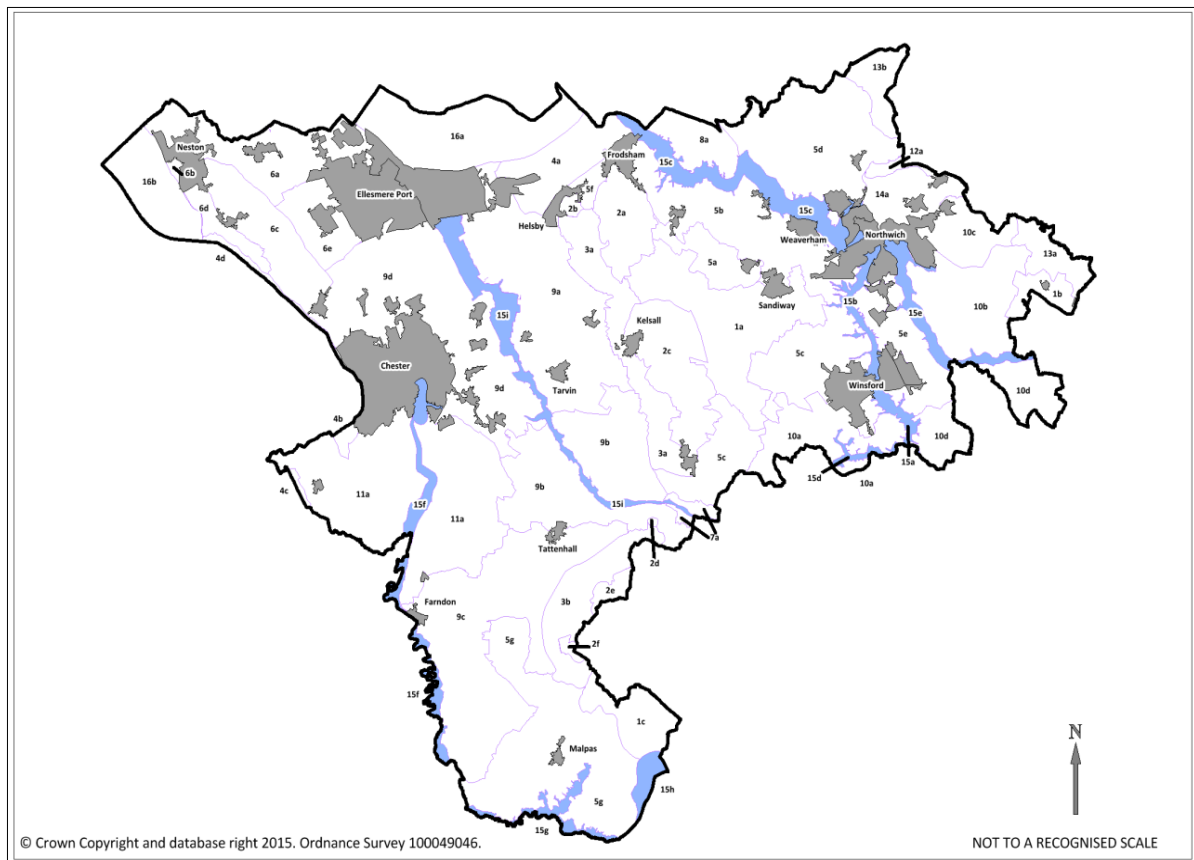


LCT 15: RIVER VALLEYS



General Description

Cheshire West and Chester borough 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 district. The River Weaver flows northwards into the Mersey and is an important main river originating within Cheshire East, with its tributary the River Dane which arises in the Derbyshire Peak District to the east. The Dane and the Gowy also flow northwards and are also important for draining large parts of the district. There are many smaller incised rivers and streams across the district but most of these are too small to constitute character areas and instead contribute to the character of other landscape types. However, the Ash Brook, flowing eastwards into the Weaver, and the Grindley Brook and Wych Brook flow westwards into the River Dee south of Chester, have distinctive valley contexts significant enough to be recognised as separate landscape character areas.

Visual Character

In most cases a steep slope, predominantly wooded, marks the transition between the Cheshire Plain and a narrow valley floor and meandering watercourse. 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 riverbed, 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 downstream, but in many locations even these are curtailed by bank-side trees or topography as they follow the acute meandering of the watercourse.

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

A number of highways cross the river valleys at historic and more recent bridging points. These small-scale structures, constructed 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 with resulting 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. CWaC has a number of 'tunnel valleys' including the Weaver and the Dane where the erosive power of glacial melt water has deepened the river channel into the bedrock. In the case of the River 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 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 administrative boundaries. The importance of the rivers within the CWaC area 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 including *The Lache Eyes*. The River Weaver was similarly canalised at the same time producing the Weaver Navigation with various side channels and ox-bow lake features.

There are **nine Landscape Character Areas** within LCT 15:

15a: Upper Weaver Valley

15b: Mid Weaver Valley

15c: Lower Weaver Valley

15d: Ash Brook Valley

15e: Dane Valley

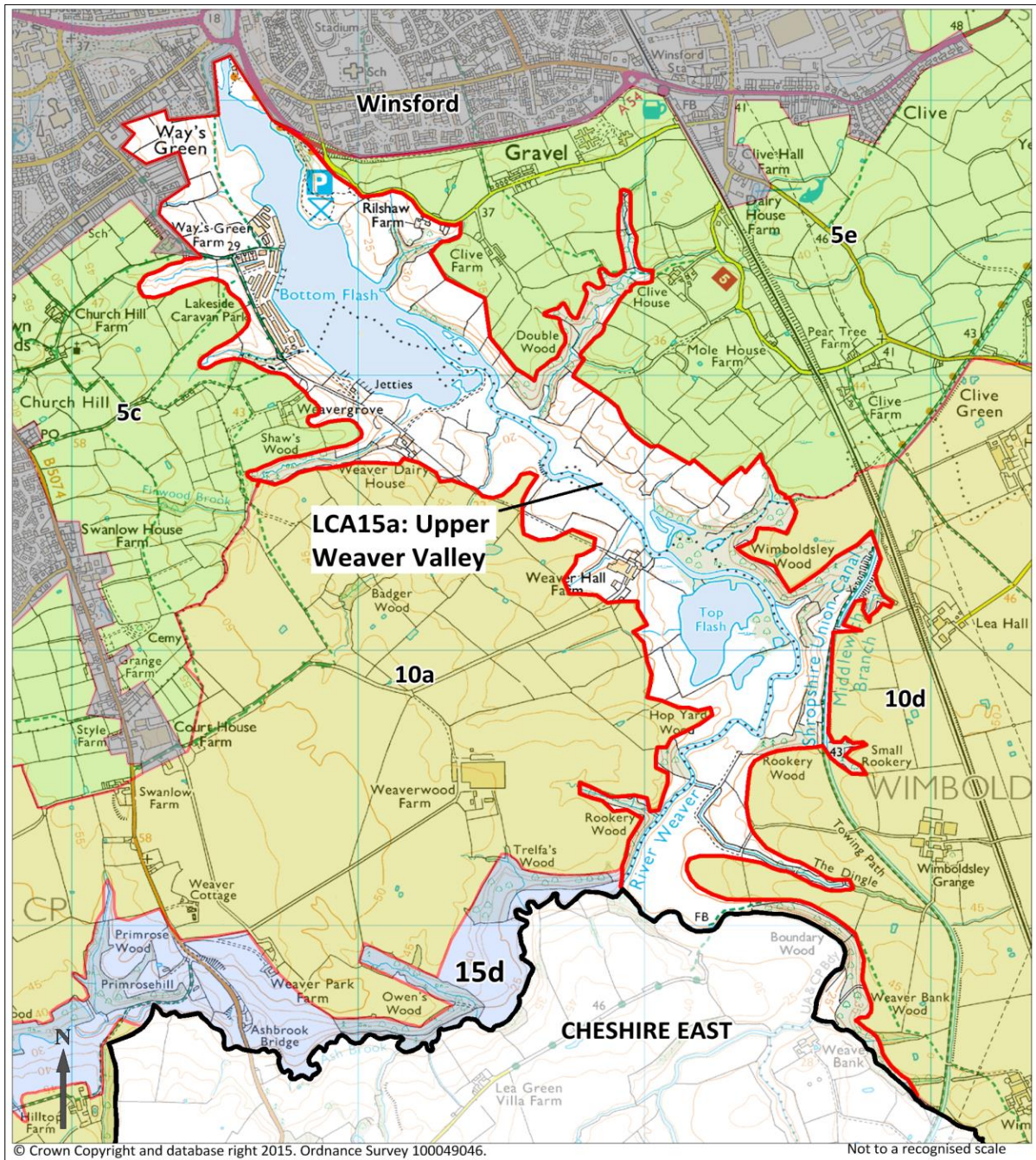
15f: Dee Valley

15g: Wych Valley

15h: Grindley Valley

15i: Gowy Valley

LCA 15a: Upper Weaver Valley



Location and Boundaries

The **Upper Weaver Valley** is a relatively shallow valley containing the upper reaches of the River Weaver. It includes the River Weaver from where it enters the borough (at Boundary Wood) to Winsford. The boundaries of the valley are defined predominantly by landform with the top of the slopes meeting the adjacent landscapes types of the *Undulating Enclosed Farmland* and *Cheshire Plain East*.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 15a: Upper Weaver Valley

- Relatively shallow valley containing the natural meandering course of upper reaches of the River Weaver
- Large flashes (formed by subsidence as a result of brine pumping) occupy the valley floor upstream of Winsford
- Steeper valley sides and series of steep sided tributary valleys support distinctive clough woodland, much of which is ancient e.g. Wimboldsley Wood SSSI
- Less steep valley sides support small/medium scale arable and pastoral fields, bounded by low gappy hedgerows
- Alluvium on the valley floor gives rise to waterlogged soils which generally support permanent pasture including unimproved and semi-improved species rich grassland
- The majority of the valley is inaccessible to the public, although there is some access on the edges of Winsford
- Views are typically restricted to within the valley, for example there are views across the valley from either side, and from floodplains to the valley sides. The top of the valley side forms a skyline
- Generally a quiet, tranquil landscape with a low settlement density

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- Semi-natural clough woodlands that provide change with the seasons and are of high biodiversity interest;
- A natural, meandering river course with its rich riparian vegetation and wetland habitats;
- The pastoral character of the floodplain and the survival of unimproved seasonally wet species rich grassland;
- The large flashes (formed by subsidence as a result of brine pumping) which contribute a sense of naturalness to the landscape, support important wetland habitats, and provide recreational opportunities;
- The permanent pasture including unimproved and semi-improved species rich grassland.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- The Shropshire Union Canal Middlewich Branch bounds a section of the eastern boundary;
- The Middlewich Branch Canal Bridge that is a listed structure;
- Area of archaeological potential of St Chad's (Winsford) Conservation Area;
- Listed Farmhouses;
- Country Park and boating facilities at Bottom Flash provide significant recreation opportunities on the edge of Winsford.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- General absence of settlement within the LCA although it closely bounds the southern parts of Winsford;
- Large farmsteads are scattered along the valley sides above the flood plain, such as Weaver Hall and Weaver Dairy House Farms;
- Caravan and holiday chalet parks characterise the north-western fringe at Bottom Flash;
- Boating facilities on Bottom Flash with associated jetty, parking and clubhouse infrastructure.

Perceptual / Visual

- A low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length;
- The landform of the valley means the floodplain is highly visible from the valley sides and, conversely, the valley sides are highly visible from the valley bottom;
- The crests of the valley sides form a skyline from within the LCA;
- The low settlement density means there are relatively few residential receptors for visual impacts – although the recreational opportunities presented by the valley mean there are likely to be a number of recreational receptors, particularly in the north of the valley;
- Where clough woodland is present, it provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the valley sides. However, the floodplain is open and provides extremely few opportunities for mitigating visual impacts;
- The valley side crests that form skylines from within the valley and are visually sensitive;
- Boating activity on the Flash can introduced movement and colour to the open water and waterside environment.

Landscape Condition

The elements that make up the river valley (open water, woodland, pastoral and arable farmland) are generally intact and the majority of the valley is in active agricultural use. However, some of the hedgerow boundaries are gappy and some woodlands under-managed.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 15a: *Upper Weaver Valley*:

- Countryside;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV) across most of the LCA;
- River corridor;
- 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;
- Minerals supply and safeguarding;
- Flood risk and water management.

Forces for Landscape Change

Past change

- Under-management and/or inappropriate management of some of the clough and wet woodland;
- Built development encroaching down the valley sides, particularly chalet housing on the southern edge of Winsford at Bottom Flash;
- Visual prominence of farmstead expansion and diversification;
- Evidence of arable land use replacing some pastoral uses on the valley floor;
- Limited management has caused decline in hedgerow boundaries in the past;
- River bank erosion is an issue in some areas;
- Erosion of tranquillity through visitor pressure at Bottom Flash.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 15a: *Upper Weaver Valley*

- Erosion of built environment character through incremental development;
- Built development encroaching further down the valley sides, particularly on the south-eastern edge of Winsford where significant urban expansion is planned;
- Decline of important ancient and semi-natural woodland habitats through reduction, fragmentation and deterioration of clough and wet woodlands;
- Increased river levels as a result of climate change could affect established vegetation/water environment balance;
- Extension of the wooded nature of the valley by more planting on valley shoulders, sides and, where appropriate, the valley floor buffering and connecting ancient semi-natural woodland (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan);
- Further river bank erosion;
- Localised deterioration of wetland habitats, wet grassland etc. through drainage and in-fill plus nutrient run-off from surrounding farmland.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 15a: Upper Weaver Valley

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** the ancient clough woodlands, unimproved grassland and wetland habitats of the Weaver Valley, seeking to **extend** and **enhance** these features where possible, and to **restore** the traditional field systems.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Use ASCV designation to protect the area from inappropriate development and enhance when possible.
2. Support the management of all existing woodlands and pay special regard to the ancient woodland sites. Promote traditional woodland management techniques of the valuable clough woodland on the valley sides to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
3. Support plans to extend woodland cover by planting on the valley shoulders and valley sides, avoiding planting on areas of existing ecological value. Where possible, new woodlands should be established adjacent to ancient woodland or to connect to separate wooded blocks, ensuring no detriment to historic assets.
4. While wet woodland may be appropriate alongside the river on the valley floor care should be taken to conserve the pastoral and open character of the valley floor. Care should be taken not to block the line of the valley floor by extensive planting.
5. Encourage reversion of arable back to pasture on the floodplain. Encourage seasonal grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the floodplain.
6. Seek to improve boundary management e.g. of hedgerow boundaries, to strengthen this feature of the valley sides that are significant heritage assets in their own right.
7. Conserve and extend characteristic floodplain habitats such as unimproved grassland, traditionally managed meadows, reedbeds and riverside trees which contribute to the natural character of the floodplain.
8. Support recreational use of the landscape, particularly passive recreation, and ensure that any visitor facilities are integrated into their landscape context. Seek to improve access to and along the river in this part of the Weaver valley, but manage recreational use to maintain the tranquil quality of the valley.
9. Conserve the Middlewich Branch Canal Bridge and its setting.

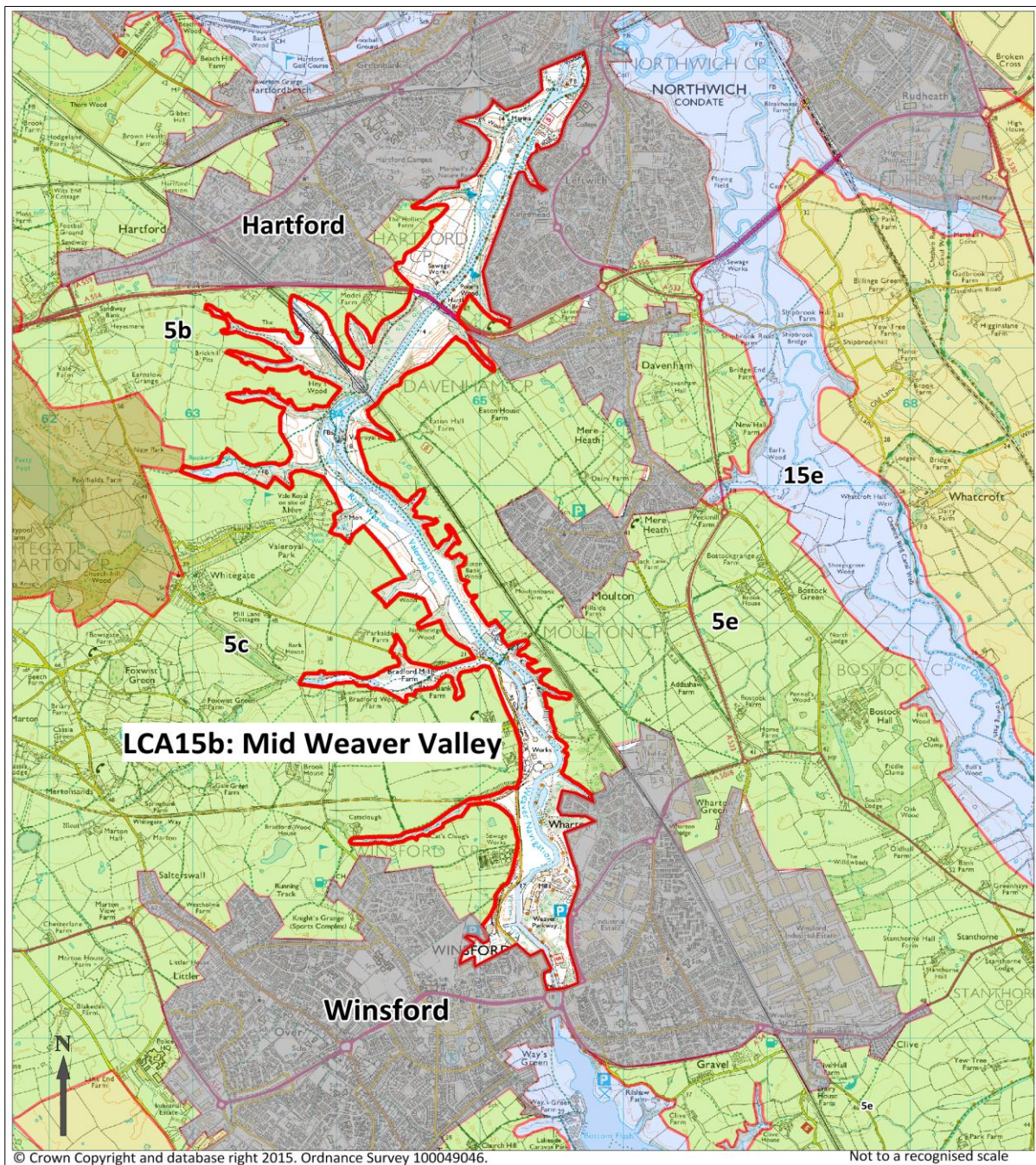
10. Support proposals for the Bottom Flash as part of the Weaver Valley Regional Park.
11. Monitor water levels and manage water abstraction to prevent drying out wetland habitats.
12. Support research into physical improvements to Bottom Flash to prevent continued siltation of this feature (including dredging of the Top Flash).
13. Planting near watercourses should consist of native species.
14. Control spread of invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Minimise the visual impact of existing built development on the character of the valley sides using native planting where appropriate.
2. Protect the valley 'crests' from large scale built development that would detract from the 'intimate', hidden character of the valley.
3. Conserve the low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length.
4. Conserve the undeveloped character of the floodplain.
5. Conserve and maintain the mills that are typical of tributaries of the Weaver and provide an indication of the former use of the river.
6. Invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, should be eradicated prior to any development taking place, and where species are present a method statement should be produced on how to deal with them.



LCA 15b: Mid Weaver Valley



Location and Boundaries

The **Mid Weaver Valley** has fairly low, but steep valley sides. It flows between Winsford and Northwich and contains the course of the Weaver Navigation as well as the Winsford Salt Works. The floodplain is narrow, the valley sides rising steeply to the *East Winsford Undulating Enclosed Farmland* to the east, and to the *Eaton, Marton & Over Undulating Enclosed Farmland* to the west.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 15b: Mid Weaver Valley

- Distinct valley with a relatively narrow, flat floodplain and steep, wooded, valley sides
- Containing the course of the Weaver Navigation with many artificial channels ('cuts'), locks and bridges, including Vale Royal Locks
- The steep valley sides and series of steep sided tributary valleys support distinctive clough woodland, much of which is ancient
- Alluvium on the valley floor gives rise to waterlogged soils which generally support permanent pasture including unimproved seasonally wet species rich grassland
- Recreational opportunities are provided by public footpaths alongside the river/navigation, and the river itself which supports boat traffic
- Views are typically restricted to within the valley, for example there are views across the valley from either side, and from floodplains to the valley sides. The top of the valley side forms a skyline
- Generally a quiet, tranquil landscape with a low settlement density. However, industrial elements have a defining visual influence on parts of the valley – particularly close to Northwich and Winsford
- Steel road bridges, such as in the centre of Northwich and at Hartford Bridge, and two huge sandstone arched railway viaducts contribute to the industrial character of the valley
- Settlement is generally absent from the floodplain, except at locks and in the centre of Northwich. Scattered farms are typical of the less steep valley sides
- Industry has had a great influence on the valley with old works sites now supporting a wide range of habitats, for example at Weaver Parkway
- Large scale industrial works have a defining visual influence on the valley between Winsford and Meadowbank (the Winsford Salt Works)

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- Semi-natural clough woodlands of high biodiversity interest, much of it ancient (e.g. Heys Wood and the Riddings, Bradford Mill Wood and woodland on the eastern slopes of the valley;
- The river course with its rich riparian vegetation and wetland habitats (e.g. Marshall's Arm Local Nature Reserve);
- The pastoral character of the floodplain and the survival of unimproved seasonally wet and dry species rich grassland (e.g. the extensive area of grassland and other vegetation of biological importance between Meadowbank and Hunt's Lock);
- The rich wildlife habitats including grassland and heaths that have developed on old industrial land;
- The naturalistic meandering course of the River Weaver including a series of oxbows;
- Mid Weaver Valley Area of Special County Value (ASCV) between Hartford Bridge and Bradford Mill.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- Recreational opportunities along the river corridor, including Sustrans NCN 5, River Weaver Canoe Trail, and car parks, picnic facilities and walks at the Weaver Parkway greenspace on former industrial land on the edge of Winsford;
- The industrial archaeology formed by the Weaver Navigation with its 'cuts', locks, sluices and accompanying built heritage, much of which is listed;

- Steel bridges and arched railway viaducts are features of the valley and provide historical interest;
- Northwich Conservation Area includes many listed buildings.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- The presence of infrastructure and industry and the proximity to built development influences the character of the northern and southern ends of the LCA around Northwich and Winsford; the area south of New Bridge is more industrial in character particularly the west bank area where industrial degradation remains;
- Low settlement density, being generally absent from the floodplain but with a scattering of modern buildings and car parks at Northwich and industrial buildings in the floodplain on the outskirts of Winsford;
- Low density scattered farms are typically found on the shallow valley sides, but development is more concentrated where the River Weaver passes through Northwich.

Perceptual / Visual

- Visibility is confined to the floodplain and valley sides; clough woodland provides some screening on valley sides but the floodplain is open with few opportunities to mitigate visual impacts;
- Low settlement density results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length (particularly between Meadowbank and Hartford Bridge);
- In places an 'intimate' hidden valley with a great sense of enclosure due to the steep valley sides and clough woodland;
- Distinctive clough woodland on steep valley sides and within a series of steep sided tributary valleys provide change with the seasons;
- Meadowbanks Saltworks (now the Salt Union salt mine) forms a landmark building within the valley;
- The landform of the valley means the floodplain is highly visible from the valley sides and, conversely, the valley sides are highly visible from the valley bottom. The crests of the valley sides form a skyline and are visually sensitive;
- The low settlement density means there are relatively few residential receptors for visual impacts – although the recreational opportunities presented by the valley mean there are likely to be some recreational receptors;
- Where clough woodland is present, it provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the valley sides. However, the floodplain is open and provides extremely few opportunities for mitigating visual impacts.

Landscape Condition

Generally good, with key characteristic elements that make up the river valley generally intact. However, some woodlands are under-managed and some old industrial land lies derelict particularly on the edges of Winsford and Northwich. Some areas of former industrial land have been brought back into positive use e.g. in connection with The Mersey Forest at Weaver Parkway greenspace.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 15b: *Mid Weaver Valley*:

- Countryside;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV) between Hartford Bridge and Bradford Mill;
- River Weaver corridor;
- Green network / wedges;
- 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

- Under-management and/or inappropriate management of some of the clough woodland;
- Built development encroaching down the valley sides, particularly housing on the edges of Winsford and Northwich, and the development of car parks and light industrial units alongside the river. For example, the 'Winsford Gateway' residential-led development on the edge of Winsford; large scale industry occupying the valley floor on the outskirts of Winsford;
- Past industrial use of the valley has resulted in the presence of derelict and unmanaged land. However, more recent creation of greenspace, managed for public access as a Country Park within the Mersey Forest, and biodiversity on former derelict land has been a positive change;
- Evidence of arable land use replacing some pastoral uses on the valley floor;
- Limited management has caused decline in hedgerow boundaries in the past;
- River bank erosion is an issue in some areas.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 15b: *Mid Weaver Valley*

- Erosion of built environment character through incremental development;
- Built development encroaching further down the valley sides, particularly on the edges of Winsford, Northwich and Hartford. For example, an approved development for 350 dwellings off School Lane which will reduce the open land between Hartford and Leftwich Grange/Kingsmead (a former ASLEV). ASCV designation should protect the central area of the LCA from inappropriate development;
- Decline of important ancient and semi-natural woodland habitats through reduction, fragmentation and deterioration of clough woodlands;
- Drought could lead to loss of trees, particularly on the steeper slopes;
- Extension of the wooded nature of the valley by more planting on valley shoulders, sides and, where appropriate, the valley floor buffering and connecting ancient semi-natural woodland (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan);
- Further river bank erosion;
- Localise deterioration of wetland habitats, wet grassland etc. through drainage and in-fill plus nutrient run-off from surrounding farmland.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 15b: Mid Weaver Valley

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the ancient clough woodlands, unimproved grassland and wetland habitats, and to **restore** / regenerate industrial sites whilst preserving the industrial interest of the Weaver Valley and its links with the salt industry.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Support the management of all existing woodlands and pay special regard to the ancient woodland sites. Promote traditional woodland management techniques of the valuable clough woodland on the valley sides to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
2. Support plans to extend woodland cover by planting on the valley shoulders and valley sides, avoiding planting on areas of existing ecological value. Where possible, new woodlands should be established adjacent to ancient woodland, or to connect separate wooded blocks, ensuring no detriment to historic assets.
3. While wet woodland may be appropriate alongside the river on the valley floor care should be taken to also conserve the pastoral and open character of the valley floor. Care should be taken not to block the line of the valley floor by extensive planting.
4. Encourage reversion of arable back to pasture on the floodplain. Encourage seasonal grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the floodplain.
5. Conserve and extend characteristic floodplain habitats such as unimproved grassland, traditionally managed meadows, reed beds and riverside trees which contribute to the natural character of the floodplain.
6. Support recreational use of the landscape, particularly passive recreation, and ensure that any visitor facilities are integrated into their landscape context.
7. Seek to improve boundary management e.g. of hedgerow boundaries.
8. Support creative use of derelict and neglected land to improve the area's image – conserve existing industrial and heritage features associated with the salt industry and extend the wooded character of the valley.
9. Minimise the impact of built development on the valley sides using native planting of locally appropriate species to create a landscape buffer where appropriate.

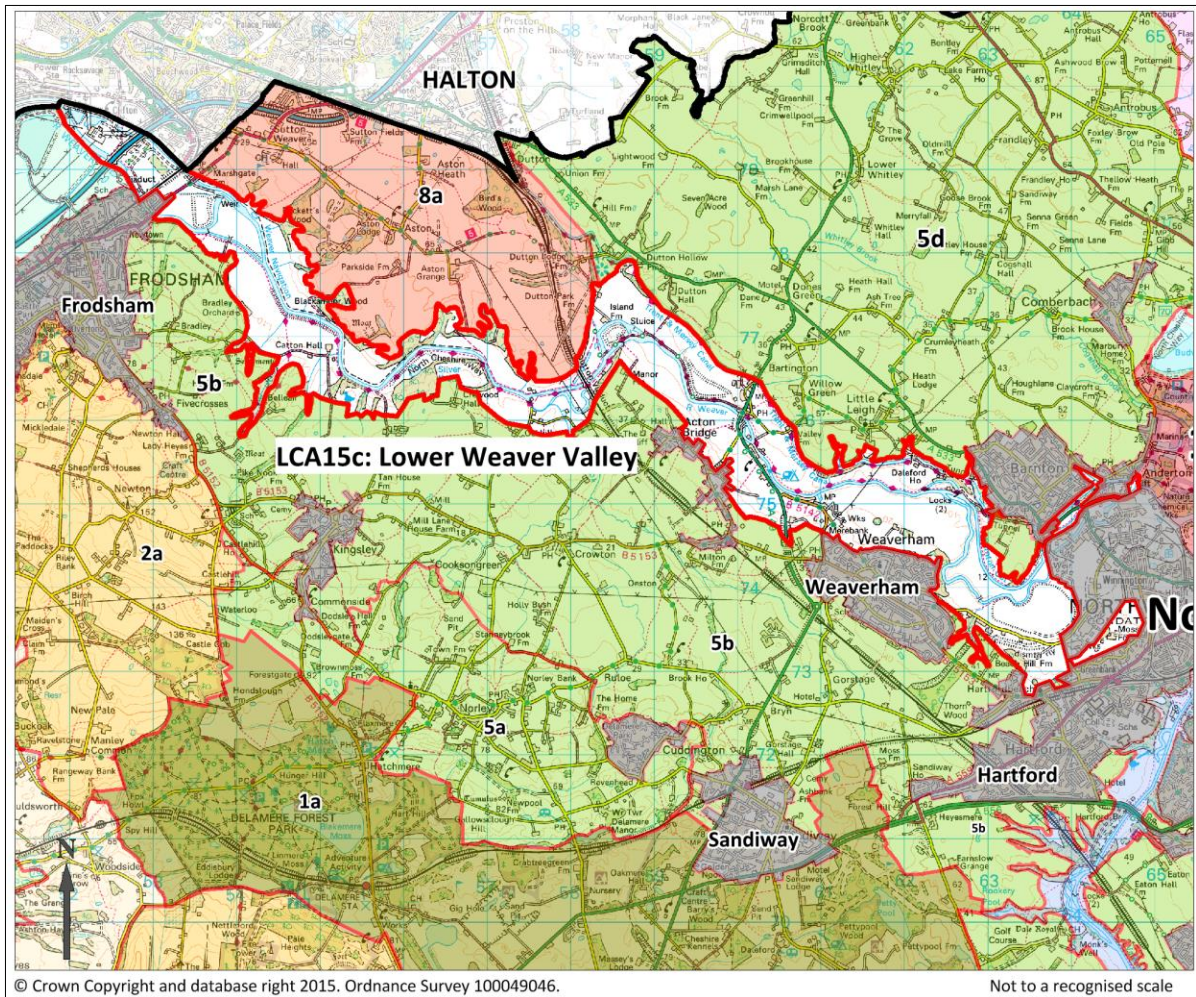
10. Use ASCV designation to protect the central area of the LCA from inappropriate development.
11. Monitor water levels and manage water abstraction to prevent drying out of wetland habitats.
12. Seek to increase opportunities for views into the valley.
13. Planting near watercourses should consist of native species.
14. Control spread of invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Support river and canal-side regeneration that provides opportunities to preserve river structures integral to its function as a navigation.
2. Protect the valley 'crests' from conspicuous built development that would detract from the 'intimate', hidden character of the valley.
3. Conserve the low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length, particularly between Meadowbank and Hartford Bridge.
4. Conserve the undeveloped character of the floodplain – this part of the valley is generally unsuitable for built development and would be a risk from flooding. Avoid the use of the floodplain for car parks and light industrial units.
5. Invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, should be eradicated prior to any development taking place, and where species are present a method statement should be produced on how to deal with them in accordance with best practice guidance.



LCA 15c: Lower Weaver Valley



Location and Boundaries

The **Lower Weaver Valley** has fairly low, but steep valley sides rising to an elevation of approximately 30m AOD. It flows from Northwich to the Mersey Estuary. The boundaries of the valley are defined predominantly by landform with the top of the slopes meeting the adjacent landscapes types of the *Undulating Enclosed Farmland* and *Cheshire Plain East*.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 15c: Lower Weaver Valley

- Distinct valley with a flat open floodplain and steep, wooded, valley sides
- Containing the course of the River Weaver and Weaver Navigation with many artificial channels ('cuts'), remnant meanders, locks at Dutton and sluices/weirs
- The steep valley sides and series of steep sided tributary valleys support distinctive clough woodland, much of which is ancient - some have extensive displays of bluebells
- The LCA includes Beechmill Wood and Pasture SSSI and Warburton's Wood and Well Wood SSSI
- Valley sides also support small/medium scale arable and pastoral fields, bounded by low gappy hedgerows
- Alluvium on the valley floor gives rise to waterlogged soils which generally support permanent pasture including seasonally wet species rich grassland
- Recreational opportunities are provided by public footpaths alongside the river/navigation, including Delamere Way and the Cheshire Ring Canal Walk long distance recreational footpaths
- The locks and 'boat graveyard' at Dutton, and the Anderton Boat Lift are visitor attractions
- Views are typically restricted to within the valley, for example there are views across the valley from either side, and from floodplains to the valley sides. The top of the valley side forms a skyline
- Generally a quiet, tranquil landscape with a low settlement density. However, industrial elements have a defining visual influence on parts of the valley
- The Trent and Mersey Canal (a Conservation Area) follows the northern bank of the valley – contributing associated structures and artefacts of industrial archaeology, many of which are listed
- Marker stones at the meadows at Frodsham are listed
- Steel road bridges, such as at Frodsham (A56), Acton (A49), and Northwich Swing Bridge (A533) and two huge sandstone arched railway viaducts (Frodsham and Dutton viaducts) contribute to the industrial character of the valley
- Settlement is generally absent from floodplain, except at locks and alongside the A49. Scattered farms are typical of the less steep valley sides
- Industry has had a great influence on the valley with old tipping lagoons, dredging lagoons and deposit grounds now forming rich wildlife habitats including open water, reed beds and unimproved grassland
- Large scale industrial works have a defining visual influence on the valley at Winnington (Northwich) and Rocksavage (Runcorn)

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- The River Weaver is the key feature of the valley. Although the river has been canalised and made navigable through a series of 'cuts', the naturalistic meandering course of the river is still evident particularly adjacent to Barnton Cut;
- The steep valley sides and series of steep sided tributary valleys support distinctive clough woodland, much of which is ancient and ecologically diverse;
- Fields on the valley sides are small/medium in size and separated by low, gappy hedgerows, whereas on the valley floor they are much larger in scale and bounded by low hedgerows or post and wire fences which maintain the open character of the alluvial plain;

- Woodland is some of the highest wildlife value woodland in the borough, for example Hatton's Hey Wood, Beechmill Wood and Pasture SSSI, Warburton's Wood and Well Wood SSSI, Whittles Corner and Bank Rough SSSIs;
- The river course with its rich riparian vegetation and wetland habitats;
- The pastoral character of the floodplain and the survival of unimproved seasonally wet species rich grassland;
- The rich wildlife habitats including open water, reed beds and unimproved grassland that have resulted from past industrial use including old tipping lagoons, dredging lagoons and deposit grounds.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- The steel road bridges and arched sandstone railway viaducts that are features of the valley and provide historical interest;
- The Trent and Mersey Canal (a Conservation Area) that contributes structures and artefacts of industrial archaeology as well as recreational opportunities and wetland habitats;
- The dramatic engineering of the Anderton Boat Lift, Scheduled Monument;
- Winnington Hall (a listed building) and park (of local significance);
- The industrial archaeology formed by the Weaver Navigation with its 'cuts', locks, sluices/weirs, accompanying built heritage much of which is listed;
- Recreational opportunities along the river corridor, including Sustrans NCN 5, North Cheshire Way, and car parks, picnic facilities and walks;
- River Weaver Canoe Trail runs between Northwich and Acton Bridge and caravan and camping facilities are found by the river at Acton Bridge.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- The presence of infrastructure and industry (past and present) and the proximity to built development influences the character of the eastern and western ends of the LCA around Northwich and Frodsham;
- M56 flyover at Frodsham Bridge is a dominant visual feature to the west of the LCA;
- The area east of Barnton is more industrial in character particularly the south bank area where industrial degradation remains;
- Within the valley low density, scattered farms are typically found on the shallow valley sides, but development is more concentrated where the River Weaver passes through Northwich.

Perceptual / Visual

- Landscape is generally quiet and contains a low density of settlement;
- The presence of major river crossing points, infrastructure and industry, and proximity to built development, all contribute to the incidence of human influences and lighting at night detract locally from the overall perception of tranquillity at the eastern and western edges of the LCA;
- The valley side crests that form skylines from within the valley and are visually sensitive;
- Visibility is confined to the floodplain and valley sides; clough woodland provides some screening on valley sides but the floodplain is open with few opportunities to mitigate visual impacts;
- In places an 'intimate' hidden valley with a great sense of enclosure due to the steep valley sides and clough woodland which provide change with the seasons;
- The valley is hidden from the adjacent landscapes (*Undulating Enclosed Farmland* and *Cheshire Plain East*) due to its steep sides resulting in little inter-visibility between it and adjacent landscapes;
- Where clough woodland is present, it provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the valley sides. However, the floodplain is open and provides extremely few opportunities for mitigating visual impacts.

Landscape Condition

The condition of the valley varies along its length. While the elements that make up the river valley (woodland, pastoral and arable farmland) are generally intact and the majority of the valley is in active agricultural use, some of the hedgerow boundaries are gappy and some woodlands under-managed. Land surrounding the chemical works close to Northwich is generally in poor condition with presence of invasive species in the grassland and hard standing/waste ground.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 15c: *Lower Weaver Valley*:

- Green Belt and Countryside;
- Extensive parts of the LCA are Area of Special County Value (ASCV) between the A56 in the west and Weaverham in the east;
- Flood risk and water management;
- River Weaver corridor;
- 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.

Forces for Landscape Change

Past change

- Under-management and/or inappropriate management of some of the clough woodland;
- Past industrial use of the valley has resulted in the presence of derelict and unmanaged land.
- Evidence of arable land use replacing some pastoral uses on the valley floor;
- Limited management has caused decline in hedgerow boundaries in the past;
- River bank erosion is an issue in some areas;
- Loss of riparian habitat for navigation maintenance.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 15c: *Lower Weaver Valley*

- Decline of important ancient and semi-natural woodland habitats through reduction, fragmentation and deterioration of clough and wet woodlands;
- Climate could affect established vegetation balance and water environment;
- Extension of the wooded nature of the valley by more planting on valley shoulders, sides and, where appropriate, the valley floor buffering and connecting ancient semi-natural woodland (planting policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan);
- Further river bank erosion.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 15c: Lower Weaver Valley

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the ancient clough woodlands, unimproved grassland and wetland habitats, and to preserve designated and undesignated heritage assets associated with the Weaver Navigation and past agricultural activity and links with the salt industry.

Landscape Management Guidelines

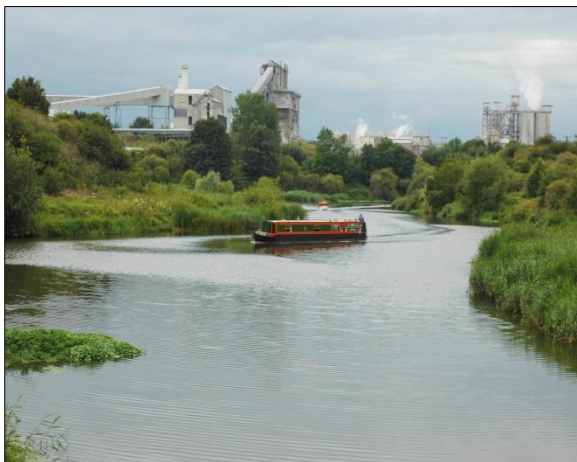
1. Use ASCV designation to protect the LCA from inappropriate development and enhance when possible.
2. Support the management of all existing woodlands and pay special regard to the ancient woodland sites. Promote traditional woodland management techniques of the valuable clough woodland on the valley sides to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
3. Support plans to extend woodland cover by planting on the valley shoulders and valley sides, avoiding planting on areas of existing ecological value. Where possible, new woodlands should be established adjacent to ancient woodland, or to connect to separate wooded blocks, ensuring no detriment to historic assets.
4. While wet woodland may be appropriate alongside the river on the valley floor care should be taken to also conserve the pastoral and open character of the valley floor. Care should be taken not to block the line of the valley floor by extensive planting.
5. Encourage reversion of arable back to pasture on the floodplain. Encourage seasonal grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the floodplain.
6. Conserve and extend characteristic floodplain habitats such as unimproved grassland, traditionally managed meadows, reedbeds and riverside trees which contribute to the natural character of the floodplain.
7. Support recreational use of the landscape, particularly passive recreation. However, ensure that any visitor facilities are integrated into their landscape context and that recreational pressure is managed, including boat traffic.
8. Seek to improve boundary management e.g. of hedgerow boundaries to strengthen this feature of the valley sides.
9. Support creative use of derelict and neglected land to improve the area's image.
10. Minimise the impact of roads, signage and associated development on the valley sides

using native planting where appropriate.

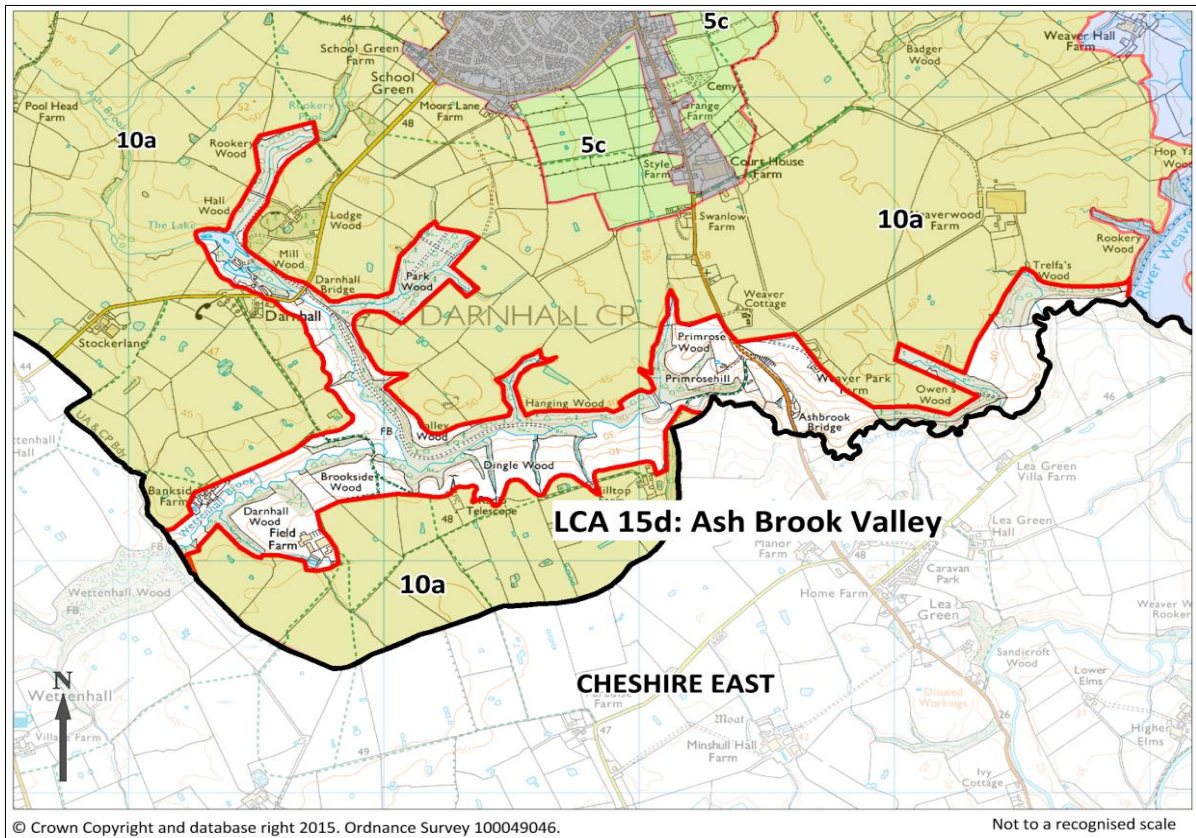
11. Monitor water levels and manage water abstraction to prevent drying out wetland habitats.
12. Seek to increase opportunities for views into the valley.
13. Planting near watercourses should consist of native species.
14. Control spread of invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Avoid ribbon development along main roads which could obstruct views across the valley and erode the sense of tranquillity of the valley.
2. Support Weaver Navigation and canal-side regeneration that provides opportunities to preserve river structures integral to its function as a navigation.
3. Preserve the industrial aesthetic of the Trent and Mersey Canal and its setting, including associated structures and artefacts of industrial archaeology. Consider views from the canal in planning new built development.
4. Preserve the character of the bridges across the Weaver.
5. Protect the valley 'crests' from large scale built development that would detract from the 'intimate', hidden character of the valley.
6. Conserve the low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length.
7. Conserve the undeveloped character of the floodplain away from the industrial works at Winnington.
8. Invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, should be eradicated prior to any development taking place, and where species are present a method statement should be produced on how to deal with them.



LCA 15d: Ash Brook Valley



Location and Boundaries

The **Ash Brook Valley** is a narrow, steep and wooded valley containing tributaries of the River Weaver. It includes Ash Brook between Darnhall and its confluence with the Weaver, and Wettenhall Brook between Wettenhall Wood and its confluence with Ash Brook. The boundaries of the valley are defined predominantly by landform with the top of the slopes meeting the adjacent *Cheshire Plain East*.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 15d: Ash Brook Valley

- Steep, wooded valley containing the Ash Brook and Wettenhall Brook, tributaries of the River Weaver
- The steep valley sides support distinctive clough woodland, much of which is ancient semi-natural woodland of oak, ash hazel and elm – the main east-west valley includes Wettenhall and Darnhall Woods, both SSSI
- A narrow band of alluvium on the valley floor gives rise to waterlogged soils that support some unimproved species rich grassland
- The majority of the valley is inaccessible to the public, although a public footpath crosses the valley at Brookside Wood
- Views are typically restricted to within the valley, for example there are views across the valley from either side, and from the valley floor to the valley sides. The top of the valley side forms a skyline
- Generally a quiet, tranquil landscape with a low settlement density
- Mills and stone bridges are a feature e.g. Darnhall Mill and Darnhall Bridge
- Darnhall radio telescope dish is a feature in the local landscape at the top of the valley to the south

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- Ash Brook Valley has been carved from the soft Eldersfield Mudstone to form a relatively steep sided Valley;
- Semi-natural woodlands of high biodiversity interest;
- The natural courses of the tributary streams with rich riparian vegetation and wetland habitats;
- The natural courses of Ash and Wettenhall Brooks are a key feature of the valley;
- The survival of unimproved seasonally wet species rich grassland;
- Narrow alluvial deposits occur at the bottom of the valley which support unimproved and semi-improved species rich grassland along much of the valley bottom;
- Woodland clings to the steep valley sides of these tributary streams much of which is ancient, for example Park Wood, Wettenhall and Darnhall Woods;
- The Wettenhall and Darnhall Woods complex is recognised as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- Fields on the valley sides are small/medium in size and separated by hedgerows remnants of ancient field systems;
- Settlement is generally absent from these tributary valleys, except for a small hamlet at Darnhall, on the fringe of the Ash Brook LCA, where Darnhall Mill, a listed building, is located;
- The mills that are typical of tributaries of the Weaver and provide an indication of the former use of the river;
- There are a number of listed structures within the hamlet of Darnhall, including Darnhall Bridge and associated water management features such as sluice/weir structures.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- Very low settlement density;
- Field Farm and Bankside Farm are the main built components of the area beyond the hamlet of Darnhall.

Perceptual / Visual

- Semi-natural woodlands that provide change with the seasons;
- An 'intimate', hidden valley that has a sense of enclosure resulting from the steep valley sides and extensive woodland that clings to the valley sides;
- A quiet and tranquil landscape – the presence of woodland, unimproved grassland and water contribute to the perception of a 'natural' landscape with an extremely low density of settlement;
- The top of the valley sides form a skyline in views from within the valley. This is partly wooded and partly open. The valley is hidden from the adjacent *Cheshire Plain East* due to its valley sides resulting in limited inter-visibility between it and adjacent landscapes;
- The majority of the valley is inaccessible to the public, although a public footpath crosses the valley at Brookside Wood;
- Where clough woodland is present it provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the valley sides.

Landscape Condition

The elements that make up the valley (woodland, water, unimproved grassland and farmland) are generally intact and the majority of the valley is either managed for nature conservation or in agricultural use. However, some of the hedgerow boundaries are gappy and some woodlands under-managed.

CWac Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 15d: *Ash Brook Valley*:

- Countryside;
- Flood risk and water management areas in the valley floor;
- 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.

Forces for Landscape Change

Past change

- Under-management and/or inappropriate management of some of the clough woodland and species-rich grassland;
- Limited boundary management has caused decline in hedgerow boundaries in the past;
- River bank erosion is an issue in some areas;
- Large agricultural buildings on the valley's crest and fringe.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 15d: *Ash Brook Valley*

- Climate change could affect established vegetation balance and water environment;
- Some of the woodland on the valley sides is currently under-managed;
- Drought could lead to loss of trees and wet woodland, particularly on the steeper slopes;
- The location of the area within The Mersey Forest means that the valley may see further tree planting to extend the wooded nature of the valley (particularly on valley shoulders and valley sides, and to connect separate woodland blocks);
- Agricultural intensification and large scale buildings.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 15d: Ash Brook Valley

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the ancient woodlands, unimproved grassland and wetland habitats of this tributary valley.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Support the management of all existing woodlands and pay special regard to the ancient woodland sites. Promote traditional woodland management techniques to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
2. Support plans to extend woodland cover by planting on the valley shoulders and valley sides, avoiding planting on areas of existing ecological value and ensuring no detriment to historic assets. Where possible, new woodlands should be established adjacent to ancient woodland, or to connect separate wooded blocks.
3. Wet woodland may be appropriate alongside the tributary streams on the valley floor, but this should not be at the expense of botanically rich grasslands.
4. Conserve and extend characteristic floodplain habitats such as unimproved grassland, traditionally managed meadows, reedbeds and riverside trees which contribute to the natural character of the valley floor.
5. Support recreational use of the landscape, particularly informal passive recreation, but ensure the tranquil character of the valley is maintained.
6. Monitor water levels and manage water abstraction to prevent drying out wetland habitats.
7. Planting near watercourses should consist of native species.
8. Control spread of invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

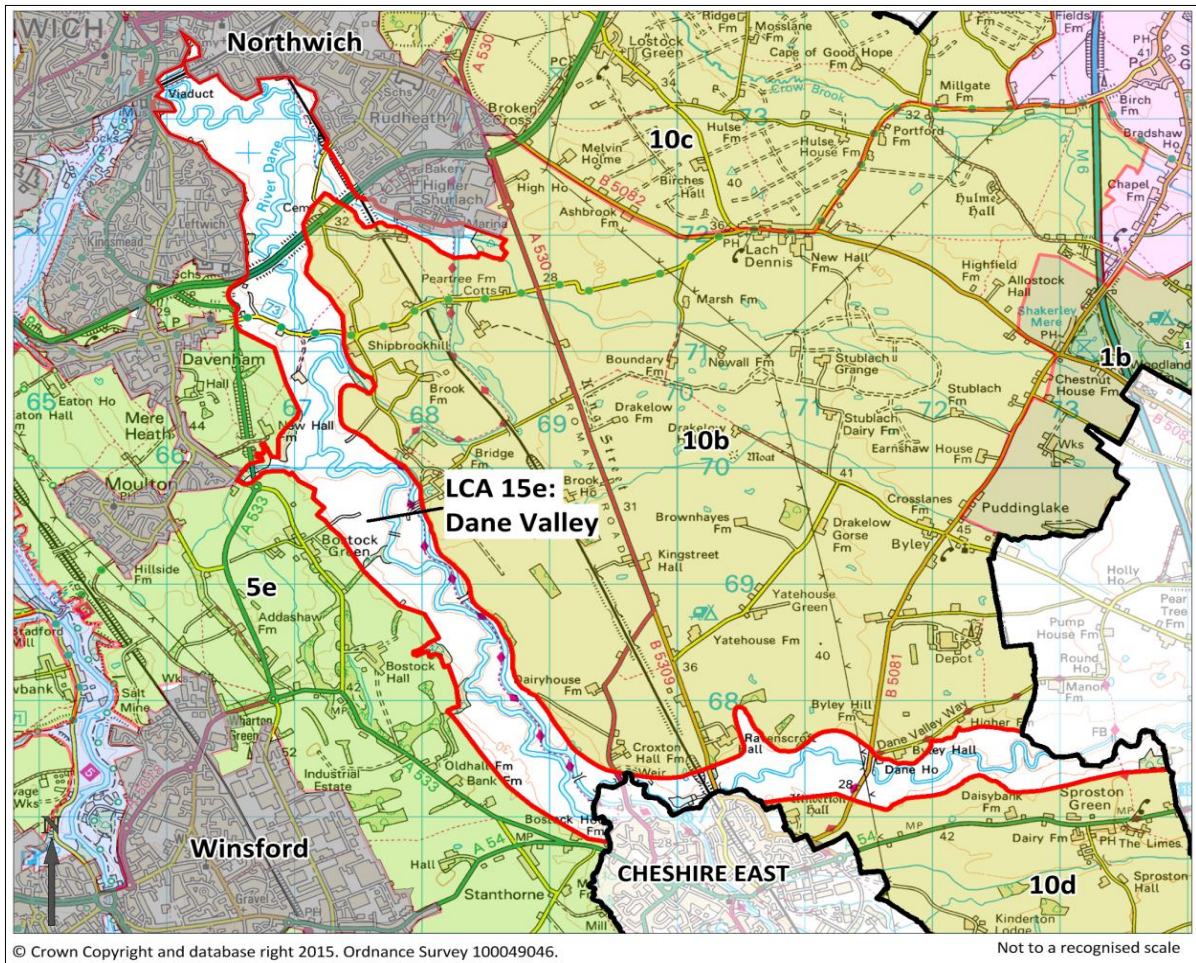
Built Development Guidelines

1. Protect the valley 'crests' from built development that would detract from the 'intimate', hidden character of the valley.
2. Conserve the low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape.
3. Conserve and maintain the mills that are typical of tributaries of the Weaver and provide an indication of the former use of the river.

4. Invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, should be eradicated prior to any development taking place, and where species are present a method statement should be produced on how to deal with them.



LCA 15e: Dane Valley



Location and Boundaries

The **Dane Valley** is a relatively shallow valley containing the course of the River Dane. It runs from Sproston Wood (where it enters the borough) to its confluence with the River Weaver in the centre of Northwich. The boundaries of the valley are defined predominantly by landform with the top of the slopes meeting the adjacent landscapes types of the *Undulating Enclosed Farmland* and *Cheshire Plain East*.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 15e: Dane Valley

- Shallow valley with low, steep sides containing the natural meandering course of the River Dane and part of the Trent and Mersey Canal
- The valley sides support small remnants of ancient woodland, e.g. Sproston Wood and Peck Mill Valley
- Alluvium on the valley floor gives rise to waterlogged soils which generally support pasture, but also some arable farmland. Only small remnants of unimproved or semi-improved grassland
- Fields tend to be relatively large in size on the floodplain with smaller fields on the valley sides
- Willows and riverine vegetation border the river, marking its meandering course across the landscape
- Part of the Trent and Mersey Canal, constructed in 1777 by James Brindley to link the navigable River Trent to the River Mersey, contributes associated structures and artefacts of industrial archaeology, including a listed milepost
- Recreational opportunities are provided by the towpath alongside the Trent and Mersey Canal (forming part of the Cheshire Ring Canal Walk) and the Dane Valley Way
- Sandstone bridges are distinctive features of the valley, located at historic listed crossing points of the River e.g. Shipbrook Bridge and Ravenscroft Bridge
- A notable absence of settlement/development – forms a ‘green lung’ entering Northwich
- A highly tranquil landscape due to lack of settlement, natural meandering river course, presence of woodland, pasture and riverside vegetation
- Views are generally restricted to within the valley, although St Wilfred’s Church spire in Davenham is prominent on the skyline

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- The *Dane Valley* has been carved from soft mudstone formations to form a relatively shallow valley with a wide, flat floodplain;
- Alluvial soils support a pastoral landscape grazed by cattle and sheep, interspersed by some arable farmland;
- The valley sides support some unimproved grassland and scrub and small remnants of once much larger woodlands that clothed the valley sides;
- Oak and sycamore woodland occupies the valley of tributary Peck Mill Brook and is recognised as local wildlife sites;
- The River Dane is a key feature of the valley with a naturalistic meandering course across the wide, open floodplain;
- Willows and riverine vegetation border the river, marking its meandering course across the landscape;
- Fields tend to be relatively large in size on the floodplain with smaller fields on the valley sides;
- A group of ponds stand in the lower reaches of the valley at Rudheath.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- The floodplain includes a mixture of ancient fields (e.g. between Shipbrook Bridge and Whatcroft Hall) as well as post medieval and fields enlarged in the 20th century (e.g. on the floodplain between Leftwich and Rudheath);

- The Trent and Mersey Canal (Conservation Area) passes along the eastern edge of the Dane Valley between Middlewich and Whatcroft and links the navigable River Trent to the River Mersey;
- Some listed features include Bridge End Farmhouse, on the on the western bank;
- Sandstone Bridges are distinctive features of the rural valley, located at historic crossing points of the River e.g. Shipbrook Bridge (listed) and Ravenscroft Bridge;
- The eastern fringe of Bostock Hall Conservation Area falls within the LCA;
- Recreational opportunities are provided by the towpath alongside the Trent and Mersey Canal (forming part of the Cheshire Ring Canal Walk) the Dane Valley Way;
- Angling in ponds at Rudheath.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- Settlement is typically absent from valley, although there is some development both in the floodplain and on the valley sides as the Dane passes through Northwich;
- Residential development to the north of the area at Leftwich has been permitted within the valley which will significantly alter this balance of landscape features;
- The A556 is a dominant feature on the edge of Northwich.

Perceptual / Visual

- The landscape is quiet away from road crossings and contains no settlement;
- The sense of perceived naturalness (due to the natural river course, presence of woodland, pasture and riverside vegetation), contributes to a highly tranquil landscape;
- The area is unified by the meandering course of the River Dane;
- This valley has a partial sense of enclosure resulting from the steep valley sides that separate the valley from the surrounding farmland;
- Valley sides are steep but shallow and allows *some* inter-visibility between the valley and its urban fringes surrounds e.g. views of built development on the edge of Middlewich from Byley Bridge, and views of built development at Leftwich and Northwich;
- The low levels of woodland on the valley sides further emphasises its open character;
- The landform of the valley means the floodplain is highly visible from the valley sides and, conversely, the valley sides are highly visible from the valley bottom. The crests of the valley sides form a skyline in views from within the valley, punctuated by trees, woodland and farmsteads that typically sit at the crest of the valley;
- The valley is hidden from the adjacent landscapes (*Undulating Enclosed Farmland* and *Cheshire Plain East*) due to its steep, but low, valley sides resulting in little inter-visibility between it and adjacent landscapes;
- There are good views from the residential properties on the edge of Northwich over the undeveloped valley and Leftwich Meadow;
- Views are generally restricted to within the valley although St Wilfred's Church spire in Davenham is prominent on the skyline;
- The lack of settlement means the only residential receptors for visual impacts are located on the crests of the valley. Recreational receptors are located along the Trent and Mersey Canal and along the Dane Valley Way;
- Where woodland is present, it provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the valley sides, but this is rare. The floodplain is open and therefore particularly visually sensitive.

Landscape Condition

The condition of the valley is good – the area is managed as agricultural land and its hedgerows network is generally intact. There has been some replacement of pasture by arable land.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 15e: *Dane Valley*:

- Countryside;
- Flood risk and water management;
- 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;
- The northern part of the Dane Valley between Rudheath and Leftwich (Northwich) is identified as a Candidate Key Settlement Gap.

Forces for Landscape Change

Past change

- Some of the clough woodland on the valley sides is currently under-managed;
- There is evidence of some arable land use replacing pastoral land uses on the valley floor, as well as 20th century field re-organisation;
- The area of ancient woodland and unimproved/ semi-improved grassland indicates that these habitats have been lost during the 20th century;
- Limited boundary management has caused decline in hedgerow boundaries.

Potential future change/ key issues affecting LCA 15e: *Dane Valley*

- There is no existing settlement in the valley and but significant pressure for built development south of Northwich continues;
- Proximity to built development brings with it pressures from recreational uses e.g. unauthorised use of motorbikes;
- Although the valley lies within The Mersey Forest there are no particular plans to enhance woodland within the Dane valley;
- Climate change could lead to loss of trees, particularly on the steeper slopes;
- Decline of important ancient and semi-natural woodland habitats through reduction, fragmentation and deterioration of clough woodlands;
- Part of Cheshire's area of search for rock salt extraction is located in the Upper Dane Valley;
- High Speed Phase 2 (HS2) route will potentially pass north-south through the valley.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA15e: Dane Valley

The overall management objective for this landscape should be to **conserve** the rural, pastoral character of the valley, and to **extend/enhance** woodland, unimproved grassland and wetland habitats where possible.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Seek to maintain the openness of the lower, enclosed valley landscape at Rudheath, Leftwich and Northwich where the potential Key Settlement Gap is identified through which settlement identity and separation can be secured.
2. Support the management of all existing woodlands and pay special regard to the ancient woodland sites. Promote traditional woodland management techniques of the valuable clough woodland on the valley sides to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
3. Seek to extend woodland cover by planting on the valley shoulders and valley sides, avoiding planting on areas of existing ecological value and ensuring no detriment to historic assets. Where possible, new woodlands should be established adjacent to ancient woodland, or to connect separate wooded blocks.
4. While wet woodland may be appropriate alongside the river on the valley floor care should be taken to also conserve the pastoral and open character of the valley floor. Care should be taken not to block the line of the valley floor by extensive planting.
5. Encourage reversion of arable back to pasture on the floodplain. Encourage seasonal grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the floodplain.
6. Conserve and extend characteristic floodplain habitats such as unimproved grassland, traditionally managed meadows, reedbeds and riverside trees which contribute to the natural character of the floodplain.
7. Support and provide additional opportunities for recreational use of the landscape, particularly passive recreation, and ensure that any visitor facilities are integrated into their landscape context.
8. Seek to improve boundary management e.g. of hedgerow boundaries.
9. Minimise the impact of existing built development using native planting where appropriate.

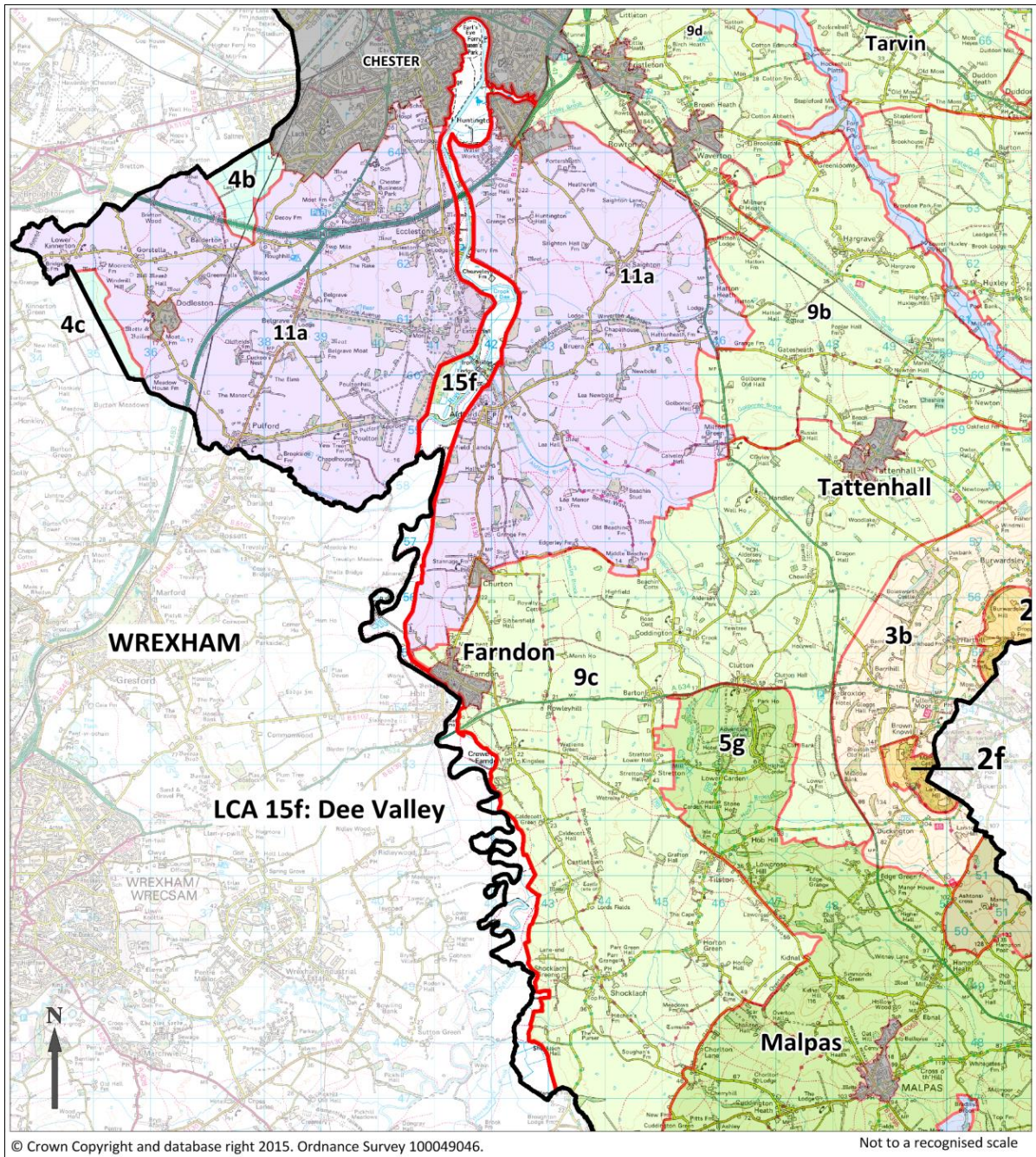
10. Manage recreational use of the vulnerable floodplain, monitoring effects of activities such as off-road motorcycling and providing restrictions where necessary.
11. Monitor water levels and manage water abstraction to prevent drying out wetland habitats.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Conserve the undeveloped character of the floodplain and maintain the low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape.
2. Protect the valley 'crests' from large scale built development that would detract from the 'intimate', hidden character of the valley.
3. Conserve the sandstone bridges that are distinctive feature of the valley, reflect the local geology and mark historic crossing points of the river.
4. Preserve the industrial aesthetic of the Trent and Mersey Canal and its setting, including associated structures and artefacts of industrial archaeology. Consider views from the canal in planning new built development in adjacent areas.
5. Ensure rock salt extraction does not threaten the floodplain habitats such as unimproved grassland, traditionally managed meadows, reedbeds and riverside trees which contribute to the natural character of the floodplain.
6. Conserve the open undeveloped area between Rudheath and Leftwich (Northwich) identified as a Candidate Key Settlement Gap where development could lead to coalescence and the loss of the separate identity of the communities.
7. Protect views to St Wilfred's Church spire in Davenham.



LCA 15f: Dee Valley



Location and Boundaries

The **Dee Valley** extends as a narrow and sinuous landscape area reflecting the course of the River Dee and administrative boundaries from Chester through Aldford and Farndon, south as far as the borough boundary north of Worthenbury. It defines a significant length of the western boundary of Cheshire West and Chester borough area.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 15f: Dee Valley

- Sinuous valley corridor dominated by the River Dee within a shallow valley setting with pronounced meander loops
- Seasonal flooding particularly at Chester Meadows and south of Farndon
- In parts defines the border between England and Wales
- Characterised by low lying, shallow valley sides of arable farmland and pasture on rich alluvial soils punctuated by pocket woodland and estate plantation
- For most parts the narrow valley lies within a wider context of the *Cheshire Plain West* and low topography limits elevated views to the river itself, although the valley widens in places e.g. Chester Meadows
- Dense riparian vegetation often presents the main indication of the river's course
- Remnant historic ridge and furrow along the valley sides
- The north of the LCA is dominated by the historic City of Chester, presenting a green corridor into the city and elevated views into it
- South of Chester the area passes through the extensive and managed landscape of the *Estate Farmlands*
- Fine residential estate properties of Eaton Hall and other parts of the Grosvenor Estate punctuate the central part of the area
- Strong hedgerows and significant hedgerow trees limit views along much of the LCA across low lying land
- Views to the west dominated by the Welsh hills
- Internationally significant ecological and nationally important geomorphological features
- Few (although strategic) river crossings within the area over a long stretch of the watercourse
- Sandstone arched Farndon Bridge is a listed building crossing the River Dee and the England-Wales border
- Located directly adjacent to the Maelor Saesneg historic designated landscape in Wales

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- Sinuous meandering river course defines the character of the LCA;
- River becomes a significant scale navigable further watercourse downstream towards Chester;
- The river presents rich riparian vegetation, water and wetland habitats (e.g. Special Area of Conservation and SSSI);
- Rich ecological community value of the river and its riparian environs, including migratory salmon and otter habitat;
- Between Farndon and Worthenbury some of the most spectacular and intricately developed river bends or meanders to be found anywhere in Britain. The area is of national importance for studies of fluvial geomorphology; Localised exposed sandstone cliffs e.g. Dee Cliffs, Farndon SSSI;
- Rich hedgerow field boundaries with increasing levels of hedgerow tree cover to the south of the LCA;
- Generally large rectilinear field pattern of mixed arable and pasture use;
- Estate landscape setting of the river through the mid-section of the LCA presents rich tree-lined river course and small estate woodlands.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- Nationally significant historic sites from the Roman Road, Holt Castle (Farndon) to the Eaton and Eccleston Estate landscapes and villages;
- Grade II* Registered Historic Park and Garden at Eaton Hall;
- Farndon Bridge listed building crossing the River Dee and the England-Wales border;
- Important remaining areas of ridge and furrow indicating historic agricultural land use on the shallower valley sides;
- Chester, Eccleston and Farndon Conservation Areas overlap the LCA;
- Recreational opportunities along the river corridor, including riverside footpaths, angling, boating and river cruises to the northern parts of the area;
- Located directly adjacent to the Maelor Saesneg historic landscape designated in the Register of Landscapes of Special Historic Interest in Wales.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- Outside Chester, extremely limited settlement exists, being absent from the floodplain but with a scattering of estate buildings at Eaton and Eccleston and estate farm on the valley side at Cheaveleyhall Farm;
- Few, but strategic river crossings where south of Chester (A55) and Farndon (A534) modern structures are found, with the historic Farndon/Holt bridge remaining in use between the two settlements on the national border;
- Private estate bridge at Aldford is a public right of way but not to traffic;
- Limited road network within the LCA.

Perceptual / Visual

- The shallow valley side merges gradually with the *Cheshire Plain East* LCA to the east;
- Visibility is confined to the floodplain and valley sides, foreshortened by the meandering and dense riparian vegetation; the valley sides form a skyline which is visually sensitive;
- Occasional views to the Clwydian hills to the west offer limited longer distant views;
- In some locations land within the meander loops of the river afford a sense of localised enclosure, whilst in other locations the flat landscape gives a perception of open countryside;
- Absence of settlement and few river crossings results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length, but with movement provided by the river's flow;
- Rich and managed treescape (estate woodlands and bankside vegetation) affords change with the seasons;
- Dramatic and attractive views out of Queens Park and Earl's Eye to the semi-enclosing Chester historic riverside neighbourhoods;
- The low settlement density outside Chester means there are relatively few residential receptors for visual impacts, however several recreational receptors along the river path;
- Where woodland is present, it provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the valley sides.

Landscape Condition

Generally good, with key characteristic elements that make up the river valley generally intact, particularly in the estate areas. However, some hedgerows have been lost or are gappy particularly in the south of the LCA.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 15f: *Dee Valley*:

- Green Belt;
- Countryside;
- Green network / wedges (Chester);

- 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

- Modern transport Infrastructure (road bridges) at Farndon and Chester ring road introducing functional structures to an undeveloped area;
- Under-management and/or inappropriate management of some of some field boundaries to the south and north of the area;
- Settling lagoons at Huntington;
- Sporadic bankside chalets downstream of Farndon;
- Fish farm ponds and infrastructure at Townfield Lane, Farndon;
- Some water management infrastructure adjacent to the A55;
- Urban development encroaching down the valley sides, particularly housing at Chester;
- Evidence of arable land use replacing some pastoral uses on the valley floor;
- Limited management has caused decline in hedgerow boundaries in the past;
- River bank erosion by livestock is an issue in some areas (natural erosion by the river is generally to be encouraged).

Potential future change/ key issues affecting LCA 15f: *Dee Valley*

- Built development encroaching further down the valley sides, particularly at Farndon and Chester;
- Consolidation of sporadic chalet development north of Farndon;
- Location within The Mersey Forest is likely to result in further tree planting north of the A55 around Chester (although presence of existing habitats, archaeology etc. likely to limit new planting);
- Further river bank erosion by livestock;
- Localised deterioration of wetland habitats, wet grassland etc. through drainage and in-fill plus nutrient run-off from surrounding farmland;
- Use of farmland for arable and maize production could lead to soil erosion;
- Further hedgerow loss across the southern farmland elements of the area;
- Impact of non-native invasive species, in particular Himalayan balsam.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 15f: Dee Valley

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the riverside environs, particularly its tree and riparian vegetation cover, and the special ecological community.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Support the management of all existing riparian trees and vegetation.
2. While wet woodland may be appropriate alongside the river on the valley floor care should be taken to also conserve the pastoral and open character of the valley floor.
3. Encourage reversion of arable back to pasture on the floodplain. Encourage seasonal grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the floodplain.
4. Conserve and extend characteristic floodplain habitats such as unimproved grassland, traditionally managed meadows, reed beds and riverside trees which contribute to the natural character of the floodplain.
5. Support recreational use of the landscape, particularly passive recreation, and ensure that any visitor facilities are integrated into their landscape context.
6. Seek to improve boundary management e.g. of hedgerow boundaries.
7. Minimise the impact of built development on the valley sides using native planting of locally appropriate species to create a landscape buffer where appropriate.
8. Monitor water levels and manage water abstraction to prevent impact on water and wetland ecosystems.
9. Control spread of invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

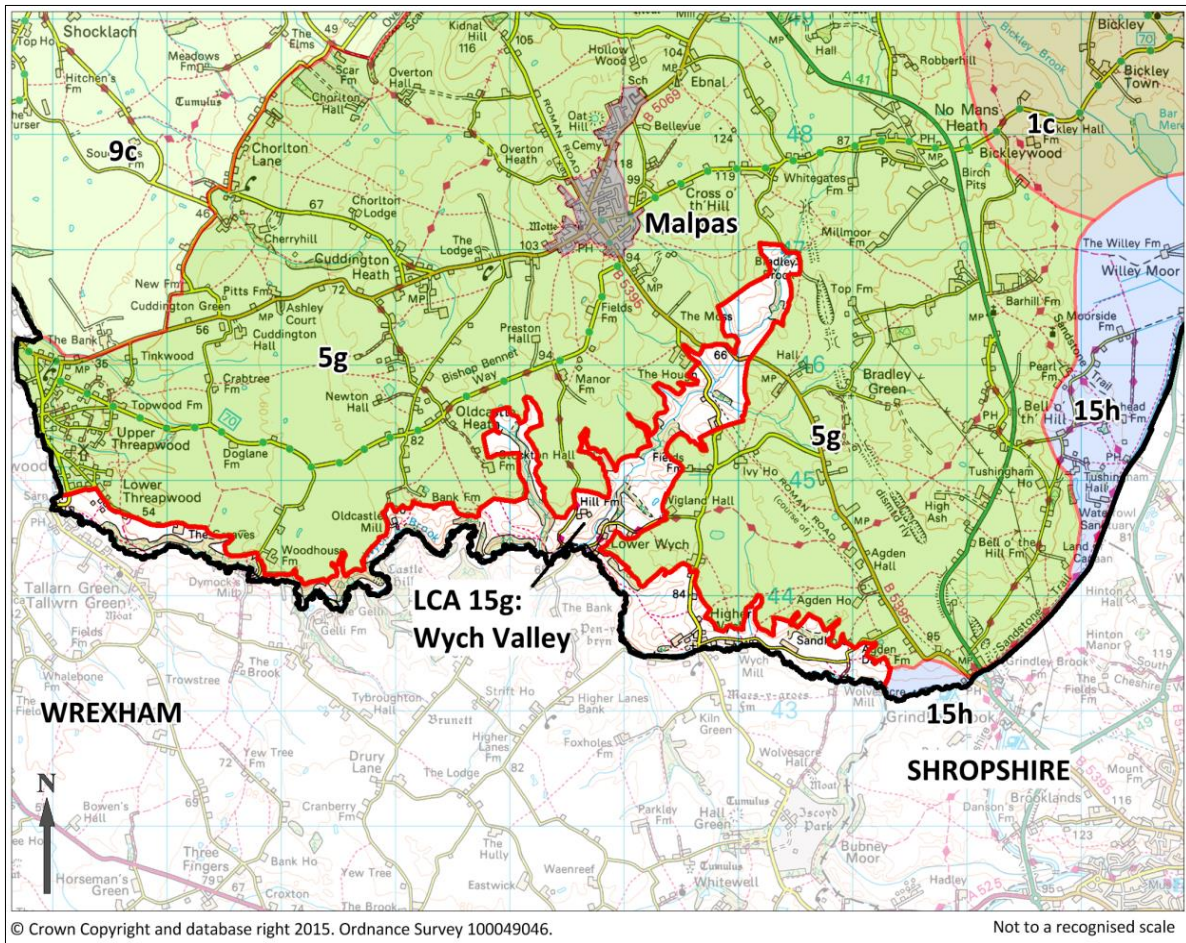
Built Development Guidelines

1. Strictly control built development to that necessary for appropriate water management to reflect the undeveloped character of the area, protect special habitats and geomorphological sites and historic features.
2. Avoid development, such a communication or renewable energy infrastructure in the LCA (or adjoining areas) which would visually challenge the prominence and architectural value of the clock tower at Eaton Hall.

3. Where new development is appropriate reflect the distinctive and high value brickwork and roofing materials of estate buildings.
4. Protect the valley 'crests' from conspicuous built development that would detract from the 'intimate', hidden character of the valley.
5. Conserve the low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length.
6. Conserve the undeveloped character of the floodplain –the valley is generally unsuitable for built development and would be a risk from flooding. Avoid the use of the floodplain for car parks and or agricultural development.
7. Invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, should be eradicated prior to any development taking place, and where species are present a method statement should be produced on how to deal with them in accordance with best practice guidance.



LCA 15g: Wych Valley



Location and Boundaries

The **Wych Valley** is a steep sided and tightly defined rural valley which forms part of the southern borough boundary between Threapwood and Grindley Brook. The LCA takes on an irregular 'inverted T' shape with the Grindley and Bradley Brooks forming the Wych Brook where they meet at the hamlet of Lower Wych. Topography within the steep-sided valleys varies from 50-80m at the crest and the brook is c 30-40m AOD. The main crossings are located at Higher and Lower Wych and Sarn Bridge.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 15g: Wych Valley

- Fast flowing shallow watercourse within steep, partly wooded valley sides
- Intimate, small scale landscape
- Highly limited inter-visibility within the valley to other adjacent LCAs
- The landscape has a coarse grain and texture of a mosaic of woodland, scrub, high hedges and small field size
- Complex topography is found as a result of several minor watercourses flowing into the valley from the *Malpas* LCA to the north through steep woodlands
- Deep rural character and resultant tranquillity
- Mix of woodland types, including semi-natural ancient oak woodland, with willow and elder dominant at lower levels - Taylor's Rough & Wellmeadow Wood are SSSI
- Important woodland ecosystems with national and local designation
- Settlement limited to small hamlets at Higher and Lower Wych and several scattered farmsteads and former mills of attractive vernacular character
- Heritage interest includes medieval salting sites and corn mills e.g. Dymocks Mill, one of several former mills and associated watercourse infrastructure, and historic river crossings
- (Old) Castle Hill is the site of a Norman motte earthwork and timber castle Scheduled Monument dating from the 11th/12th century
- Located directly adjacent to the Maelor Saesneg historic designated landscape in Wales

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- Well-defined, incised valley sides resultant of soft boulder clay erosion;
- Semi-natural valley side woodlands of high biodiversity interest, much of it ancient (such as Stockton Dingle and Greaves Wood);
- Small but sinuous, fast flowing, shallow watercourses of Wych Brook and Grindley Brook with several minor tributary streams;
- Valley profile becomes more defined to the west as the brook's size and flow increases;
- High ecological importance of woodland, flushes and unimproved grassland mosaic, notably Well Rough SSSI along the Wych Brook and Taylor's Rough SSSI and Wellmeadow Wood SSSI within the Bradley Brook valley. Most of the valley is designated as a Local Wildlife Site. The area is particularly important for lichen communities;
- Pastoral land use outside the wooded areas in small-scale fields.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- Long history of small-scale settlement from Saxon times based upon salt extraction, with later mills utilising the brooks' flow;
- Old Castle Hill is the site of a Norman motte earthwork castle and is a Scheduled Monument;
- Scattered small farmsteads include listed farmhouses at Bank Farm and Hill Farm;
- Rights of way network is extensive to the east of the area but more restricted in the more wooded western parts;
- Located directly adjacent to the Maelor Saesneg historic landscape designated in the Register of Landscapes of Special Historic Interest in Wales.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- Small-scale groups of buildings and hamlets sit into the landscape and are rarely prominent;

- Upper and Lower Wych are the two areas of slightly more concentrated settlement but here buildings are loosely scattered around bridging points;
- Building vernacular of local stone and brickwork emphasises local distinctiveness.

Perceptual / Visual

- The valley side crests that form skylines from within the valley and are open pasture or wooded and visually sensitive and create a significant sense of enclosure;
- Topography and dense valley side woodlands confines visibility to short vistas within the valley with little inter-visibility between the area and neighbouring landscape types;
- Low settlement density results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length;
- In places is an 'intimate' hidden valley with a great sense of enclosure due to the steep valley sides and woodland, particularly from the public footpath network;
- Distinctive broadleaved, mixed species woodland on steep valley sides and within a series of steep sided tributary valleys provide change with the seasons;
- Where clough woodland is present, it provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the valley sides.

Landscape Condition

Generally good, with key characteristic elements that make up the river valley generally intact. However, some woodlands are under-managed and some built development has diluted the local vernacular value.

CWac Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 15g: Wych Valley:

- Countryside;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV) across most of the Wych and Grindley Brook valleys;
- 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

- Under-management and/or inappropriate management of some of the woodland;
- Sporadic built development within the valley sides and valley shoulder has left some prominent, sky-lining buildings;
- Conversion of mills to residential property has resulted in some vernacular and character loss;
- Limited management has caused decline in hedgerow boundaries in the past.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 15g: Wych Valley

- Decline of important ancient and semi-natural woodland and grassland habitats through under / inappropriate management;
- Climate change could lead to change in ecological community mix;
- Increased incidence of significant rainfall events may have implications for valley floor flooding and riparian erosion.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 15g: Wych Valley

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the valley woodlands, unimproved grassland and wetland habitats, and to **restore** field boundaries.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Support the management of all existing woodlands and pay special regard to the ancient woodland sites and special mosaic communities.
2. Promote traditional woodland management techniques of the valuable valley side woodland to ensure a diverse (indigenous) species and age structure.
3. Support plans to extend woodland cover by planting in woodland blocks, particularly where tree loss has occurred. Where possible, new woodlands should be established adjacent to ancient woodland, or to connect separate wooded blocks, avoiding areas of existing ecological value and ensuring no detriment to historic assets.
4. While wet woodland may be appropriate alongside the river on the valley floor care should be taken to also conserve the mix with pastoral and broken open character of the valley floor.
5. Encourage seasonal grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the floodplain.
6. Conserve and extend characteristic habitats such as unimproved grassland, traditionally managed meadows and riverside trees which contribute to the natural character of the valley.
7. Support recreational use of the landscape, particularly passive recreation, and ensure that any visitor facilities are integrated into their landscape context.
8. Seek to improve boundary management e.g. of hedgerow boundaries.
9. Minimise the impact of built development on the valley sides using native planting of locally appropriate species to create a landscape buffer where appropriate.
10. Use ASCV designation to protect the area of the LCA from inappropriate development.
11. Monitor water levels and manage water abstraction to prevent drying out of wetland habitats.

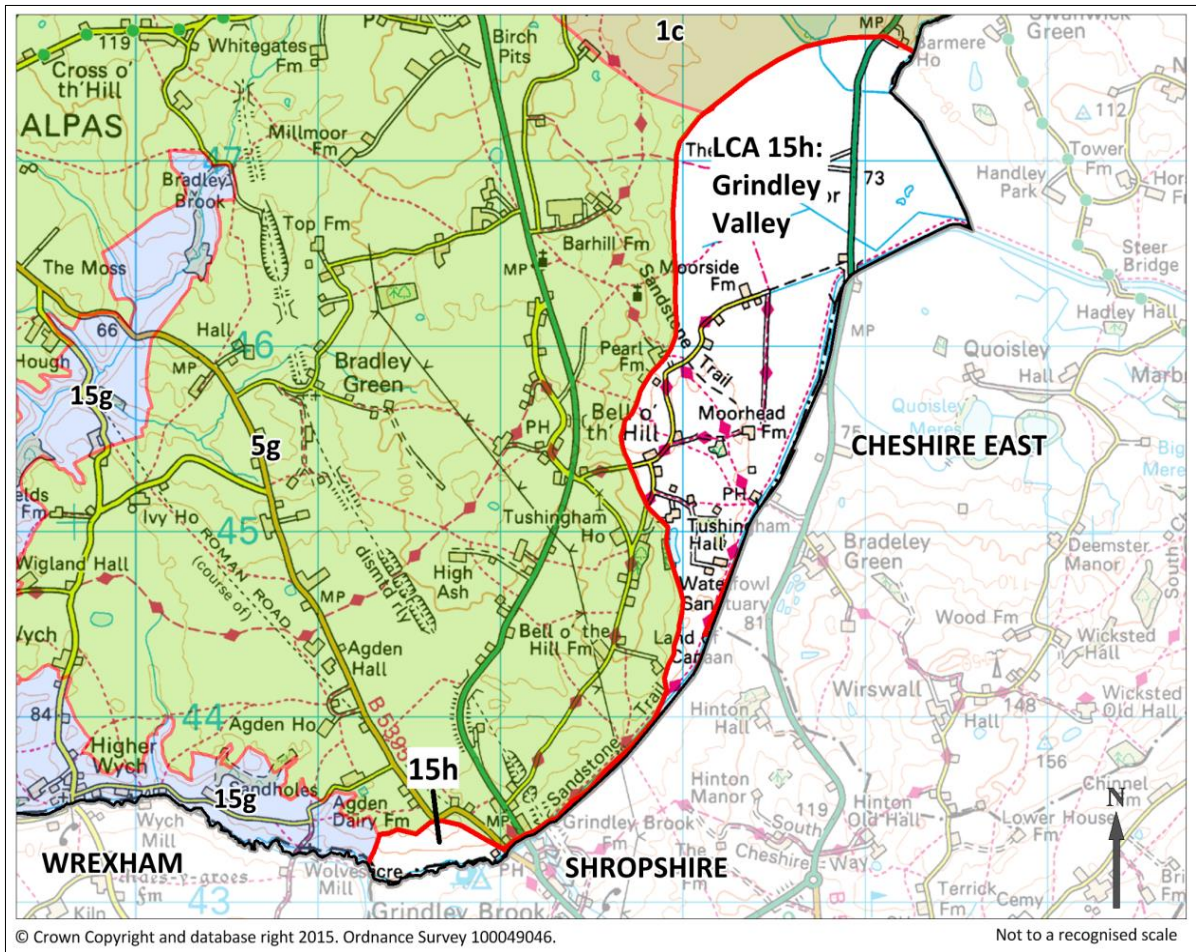
12. Seek to increase opportunities for views into the valley.
13. Planting near watercourses should consist of native species.
14. Control spread of invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Ensure new buildings respect the density and scale of existing settlement, reflecting local vernacular character with appropriate planting to break ridgelines over time.
2. Support river and canal side regeneration that provides opportunities to preserve the industrial archaeology of its small-scale water mills and salt industry and accompanying built heritage.
3. Protect the valley 'crests' from conspicuous built development that would detract from the 'intimate', hidden character of the valley.
4. Conserve the low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length.
5. Invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, should be eradicated prior to any development taking place, and where species are present a method statement should be produced on how to deal with them in accordance with best practice guidance.



LCA 15h: Grindley Valley



Location and Boundaries

The **Grindley Valley** is a low-lying, level valley floor and canal corridor which abuts a significant part of the south-eastern boundary of CWaC as it extends into Cheshire East. The southern section of the area is very narrow, effectively restricted to the immediate corridor of the Llangollen Canal where it follows the Grindley Brook watercourse, before it merges into the *Wych Valley* character area to the west. The floodplain is wide and open to the eastern parts of the character area but elsewhere occasionally enclosed due to vegetation and minimal change in relief.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 15h: Grindley Valley

- Distinct valley floor and floodplain area with a relatively narrow flat pastoral character falling between shallow but steeper and sometimes valley sides
- Alluvium on the valley floor gives rise to waterlogged soils dissected by drainage ditches which generally support permanent pasture including localised unimproved seasonally wet species rich grassland
- Species-rich ditches at Bickley Hall Farm are a local wildlife site
- Recreational opportunities are provided by the towpath alongside the canal and the Bishop Bennet Way and Llwyllor Maelor Way marked trails, but the public rights of way network is otherwise limited
- Views are typically restricted to within the valley, for example there are views across the valley from either side, and from the floodplain to the valley sides. The shoulder of the neighbouring valley sides can form a middle distance skyline where longer vistas are possible over hedges and through tree groups
- Generally a quiet, tranquil landscape with a low settlement density. However, the A49 is a main road with noise and movement disturbing the tranquillity
- Settlement is virtually absent from the floodplain; scattered farms are typical of the less steep valley sides
- The canal is the main feature of visual and historical interest and provides some habitat value

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- Mainly large, open, low lying and level pastoral fields defined by tightly clipped low hedges;
- The Llangollen Canal provides a focal corridor of the area but is often inconspicuous because of its low relief and lack of contrast with other field boundaries in short views;
- Localised important linear wildlife habitats along the canal corridor;
- Ditches at Bickley Hall Farm are species-rich and local wildlife site;
- Sporadic concentrations of hedgerow trees across the central areas provide contrasting areas of openness and localised enclosure.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- Recreational opportunities along the canal corridor, including Bishop Bennet Way, the southern part of the Sandstone Way and Llwyllor Maelor Way trails, but elsewhere limited;
- The industrial archaeology formed by the canal with locks and bridges and accompanying built heritage, much of which is listed (such as Willey and Pavey Locks);
- Listed country house at Tushingham Hall;
- Evidence of lost hedgerows across the north of the area;
- Drainage ditches without hedgerows are characteristic across the northern parts of the area;
- Wetlands have high palaeo-environmental potential;
- Some introduction of arable farming across the mainly pastoral plain.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- Particularly low settlement density, being generally absent from the floodplain with a scattering of farm houses and agricultural buildings concentrated on slightly raised land towards the area's edges, such as The Willey Farm;

- Limited canal-side buildings including public house and former lock-keeper's cottages at Willey Moor Lock;
- The A49 road provides a linear significant transport corridor from south to north;
- The narrow central section of the area passes through the scattered settlement of *Grindley Brook* caravan site, but is atypical of the character area.

Perceptual / Visual

- The low valley side crests that form skylines from within the valley are visually sensitive with very limited visible built development;
- Visibility is confined to within the floodplain and middle distance valley sides, often through gaps between hedgerow trees;
- Where groups of hedgerow trees are found, visibility across and out of the area can be significantly restricted in the absence of any variation in relief;
- Where groups of hedgerow trees are present they provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the low valley sides;
- Low settlement density results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length, although interrupted by road noise from the A49.

Landscape Condition

Partly eroded, with key characteristic elements that make up the river valley generally in mixed condition, such as lost or gappy hedges with drainage ditches retained.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 15h: *Grindley Valley*:

- Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of regional and / or 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

- Loss of hedgerows across the floodplain with increase in field size;
- Some iterative erosion of vernacular character of the limited built stock in the area, such as at Willey Moor Lock Tavern;
- Evidence of arable land use replacing some pastoral uses on the flood plain.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 15h: *Grindley Valley*

- Limited settlement suggests that future built change is unlikely;
- Large modern agricultural buildings can be prominent where vistas are possible;
- Climate change could lead to loss change from pastoral to arable predominance, or changes to the canal corridor habitats;
- Canal bank erosion through on-going barge and leisure craft traffic;
- Deterioration of wetland habitats.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 15h: Grindley Valley

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the canal corridor and vegetation and unimproved grassland with wetland habitats, and to **restore** hedgerows and replace lost hedgerow trees.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Support the management of all existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Promote traditional hedgerow management on the flood plain.
2. Support plans to extend hedgerow tree planting, particularly to the north of the area.
3. Care should be taken not to block the line of the valley floor by extensive planting.
4. Encourage reversion of arable back to pasture on the floodplain. Encourage seasonal grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the floodplain.
5. Restore and extend characteristic floodplain habitats such as unimproved grassland, traditionally managed meadows, and riverside/canal side trees which would contribute to a more natural character of the floodplain.
6. Support recreational use of the landscape, particularly passive recreation, and ensure that any visitor facilities are integrated into their landscape context.
7. Conserve existing industrial and heritage features associated with the canal corridor.
8. Monitor water levels and manage water abstraction to prevent drying out of wetland habitats.
9. Planting near watercourses should consist of native species.
10. Control spread of invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Support localised, sensitive river and canal side regeneration that provides opportunities to preserve the industrial archaeology formed by the canal with its, locks, sluices, and accompanying built heritage.
2. Protect the valley 'crests' from conspicuous built development that would detract from the tranquil and deep rural character of the valley.

3. Where feasible, manage new agricultural built development to restrict prominence on the flood plain.
4. Conserve the low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape.
5. Conserve the undeveloped character of the floodplain – this part of the valley is generally unsuitable for built development and would be a risk from flooding.
6. Invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, should be eradicated prior to any development taking place, and where species are present a method statement should be produced on how to deal with them in accordance with best practice guidance.



LCA 15i: Gowy Valley



Location and Boundaries

The **Gowy Valley** is a narrow, linear and elongated river corridor landscape which extends over 20km from the CWaC boundary with Cheshire East near Tilston Lock to the urban fringe of Ellesmere Port to the north-west. The southern parts of the character area which initially run on an east-west orientation are characterised by steep and semi-enclosed shallow valley sides within which the Shropshire Union Canal and Chester to Crewe railway line runs, whilst to the north, as the area takes a south-east to north-west direction, the valley loses most of its incision and is weakly defined by topographical features, with subtle drainage and field patterns defining extent.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 15i: Gowy Valley

- A transitional river corridor landscape where the small watercourse evolves from distinct valley profile to a weak visual feature within a wider *Cheshire Plain West* landscape
- In places across its northern extent the river becomes almost indiscernible in the landscape as it is managed, embanked and dispersed across a network of drains and cuts, particularly around Stamford Bridge and Plemstall
- Mixed low hedge and drainage ditch field boundaries, with evidence of boundary loss, resulting in generally large, poorly delineated field pattern
- Ridge and furrow remains in some areas, often associated with late medieval field systems
- Contains the Shropshire Union Canal and railway for its southern parts between Tilston Lock and the aqueduct near Newton-by-Tattenhall
- Shallow but pronounced and rolling valley sides characterise the passage of the river through the Beeston Hills with the canal and railway slightly elevated on the valley sides above the river
- The northern reaches of the area are characterised by open, very low lying pasture and some arable land use, with embanked river channel and an extensive drainage ditch network
- Valley peat on the valley floor gives rise to waterlogged soils which generally support permanent pasture
- Locally important riparian vegetation and wetland habitats
- Trees and woodland is sparse in the area, although more prevalent around small settlements and buildings and along limited stretches of the river as riparian habitat
- Stands of *Black Poplar* trees, one of Britain's rarest native tree species
- Public footpaths alongside the canal and riverside in places provide recreational opportunities
- To the south of the area views are typically restricted to within the river valley, for example there are views across the valley from either side, and from the transport corridors on the valley sides. The top of the valley side generally forms a skyline between Tilston and Huxley
- To the northern reaches open vistas in all directions become possible over open and sometimes bleak drained landscape
- To the northern elements of the area the M56 motorway and the oil refinery complex at Stanlow dominate views out of the area with few screening elements in the landscape to mitigate the visual impact
- Minerals extraction and landfill at Wimbolds Trafford
- Away from its northern parts, it is generally a quiet, tranquil landscape with a low settlement density. However, railway and canal infrastructure provides built features and movement as well as industrial heritage value
- Water management features associated with mills and drainage are significant heritage assets in their own right
- Historic bridges punctuate the valley, such as at Huckenhull Bridge and Bridge Trafford
- Significant settlement is generally absent from the area, except at locks across the south and farmsteads to the northern reaches

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- Extensive drained farmland with complex drainage network;
- River course as a subtle or inconspicuous feature in the landscape over much of its length due to absence of riparian trees and low changes in relief;
- Wide open, windswept and flat landscape from Huxley northwards;

- Noticeable scarcity of trees and hedgerows across the wider character area, particularly to the northern parts;
- Locally important riparian vegetation and wetland habitats (e.g. Gowy Meadows and Ditches, Stapleford Meadows and Brook Hole local wildlife sites); Gowy Meadows have high palaeo-environmental potential;
- Extensive Cheshire Wildlife Trust managed nature reserve at Thornton-le-Moors;
- Stands of *Black Poplar* trees, one of Britain's rarest native tree species;
- A strongly pastoral character of the floodplain with grazing cattle common;
- The transition from a naturalistic, intricate meandering course of the River Gowy in the south to an engineered and managed river course north from Huxley;
- Complex rolling slopes of the valley sides across the southern reaches of the area, where trees and hedges marginally more prevalent.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- Recreational opportunities along the public rights of way within the river and canal corridor, including parts of Bishop Bennett's trail, and fishing ponds at Trafford Bridge;
- Leisure craft navigation along the canal;
- The industrial archaeology formed by the Shropshire Union Canal in the south, with its locks, sluices and accompanying built heritage, much of which is listed, such as Wharton's Lock and Dale's Bridge;
- Drainage and water management features such as sluices and weirs across the northern reaches of the river's course;
- Roman and medieval historic features including the twin packhorse bridges at Hockenhull Platts and the Scheduled Monuments of the moated sites at Foulk Stapleford and Lower Huxley;
- Ridge and furrow remains in some areas, often associated with late medieval field systems;
- Former waterside mills such as the listed Mill Farm;
- St Peters Church, Plemstall, stands alone as one of the few buildings on an island of higher land in the flood plain.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- Very low density of scattered farms and former mills reflect the flood plain influence;
- Buildings occasionally found on the shallow valley sides such as farms and former mills, and at historic crossing points such as Stamford Bridge;
- Increasing influence of infrastructure and industrial facilities to the northern reaches of the area including overhead pylons and power lines, the M56 and Stanlow Refinery;
- Important and historic infrastructure and buildings associated with the canal corridor, including the aqueduct west of Williamson's Bridge;
- Absence of transport infrastructure running within the valley from north to south.

Perceptual / Visual

- The valley side crests that form skylines from within the valley and are visually sensitive at the southern reaches of the area as it ruins east to west;
- Visibility across the floodplain in the northern and central parts of the area is generally unrestricted as a consequence of an absence of significant hedgerows or vegetation, but restricted by an absence of elevated viewpoints across it from within the area;
- Low settlement density results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length (particularly south of the A56);
- In places an open and melancholic landscape with a sense of remoteness and exposure due to absence of enclosing features or vegetation;

- Dramatic views from the southern reaches of the area to the twin castles and sandstone ridge at Beeston and Peckforton (in Cheshire East);
- Northern parts of the area are significantly influenced by the movement, lighting and noise generated by major transport infrastructure including the M56 M53 and railways;
- Open landscape to the north provides limited opportunities to accept change;
- Where woodland is present, it provides some visual screening and scope to mitigate visual impacts on the lower valley sides.

Landscape Condition

Generally intact, although the character is of an open, altered and relatively feature-free landscape where some industrial elements dominate. Key characteristic elements that make up the river valley itself are however generally intact.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 15i: Gowy Valley:

- Countryside;
- Green Belt (northern areas);
- 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

- Historic river channel management and extensive drainage of former estuarine marsh;
- Significant transport infrastructure cross the valley to the north and running within it to the south;
- Visually and perceptually dominant influence of industry and traffic noise across the northern areas;
- Past minerals and subsequent landfill use in northern parts of the valley has resulted in the artificial raising of land in places;
- Evidence of pastoral land use replacing some arable across the north of the valley.

Potential future change/ key issues affecting LCA 15i: Gowy Valley

- Encroachment of industrial infrastructure into the area from the northern urban areas;
- Extension and alteration to major transport corridors;
- Climate change could lead to changes to water flows, hydrological sensitivity and habitats of the drained valley;
- Location within The Mersey community Forest is may result in pressure for further tree planting which might not be appropriate in landscape terms;
- Changes to river bank management and rewetting land under agri-environmental schemes;
- Localised deterioration of wetland habitats, wet grassland etc. through drainage and in-fill plus nutrient run-off from surrounding farmland;
- Loss of distinctive openness.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 15i: Gowy Valley

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the drained farmland, semi-improved grassland and wetland habitats, and to **restore** degraded landscape areas of former minerals sites whilst preserving the unique character of the valley.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Support the management of existing semi-improved species rich grassland habitats.
2. Ensure any proposals to extend woodland under Mersey Community Forest programme respond appropriately to the open character of the Gowy valley landscape character by planting on the northern boundary where screening of Stanlow Refinery will be facilitated, or is restricted to the necessary management and restoration of the limited but existing woodland, such as at Foxey Wood. Woodland creation should ensure no detriment to historic assets, should avoid planting on areas of existing ecological value and should be distant from habitat important for ground nesting birds due to the risk of encouraging predation of chicks.
3. Avoid inappropriate enclosure of fields by non-characteristic hedges.
4. Encourage reversion of arable back to pasture on the floodplain. Encourage seasonal grazing to maintain the pastoral character of the floodplain and encourage grassland habitats.
5. Conserve, extend and seek to reconnect characteristic floodplain habitats such as semi-improved grassland, traditionally managed meadows, riverside trees (particularly Black Poplar) that contribute to the distinctive and natural character of the floodplain.
6. Support recreational use of the landscape, particularly passive recreation on the Public Rights of Way network, and ensure that any visitor facilities are low key, unobtrusive and integrated into their landscape context.
7. Conserve existing industrial and heritage features associated with the canal and railways.
8. Monitor water levels and manage water abstraction to prevent drying out of wetland habitats. Refrain from further drainage of grasslands.
9. Planting near watercourses should consist of native species.

10. Control spread of invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

Built Development Guidelines

1. In southern reaches, support canal side regeneration that provides opportunities to preserve the industrial archaeology formed by the Shropshire Union Canal with its locks, bridges, aqueduct and accompanying built heritage.
2. Protect the valley from conspicuous built development that would detract from the open and undeveloped character of the valley.
3. Where small scale new build development is appropriate, soften the visual impact by limited planting of native species such as Black Poplar, Alder and Willow.
4. Conserve the low settlement density that results in a quiet, tranquil landscape along much of its length, particularly between Huxley and Bridge Trafford.
5. Conserve the undeveloped character of the floodplain – this part of the valley is generally unsuitable for built development and would be a risk from flooding. Avoid the use of the floodplain for urban expansion from neighbouring settlements.
6. Seek the undergrounding of major power lines across the north of the area which present significant visual intrusion across the open and empty landscape.
7. Invasive species, e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, should be eradicated prior to any development taking place, and where species are present a method statement should be produced on how to deal with them in accordance with best practice guidance.

