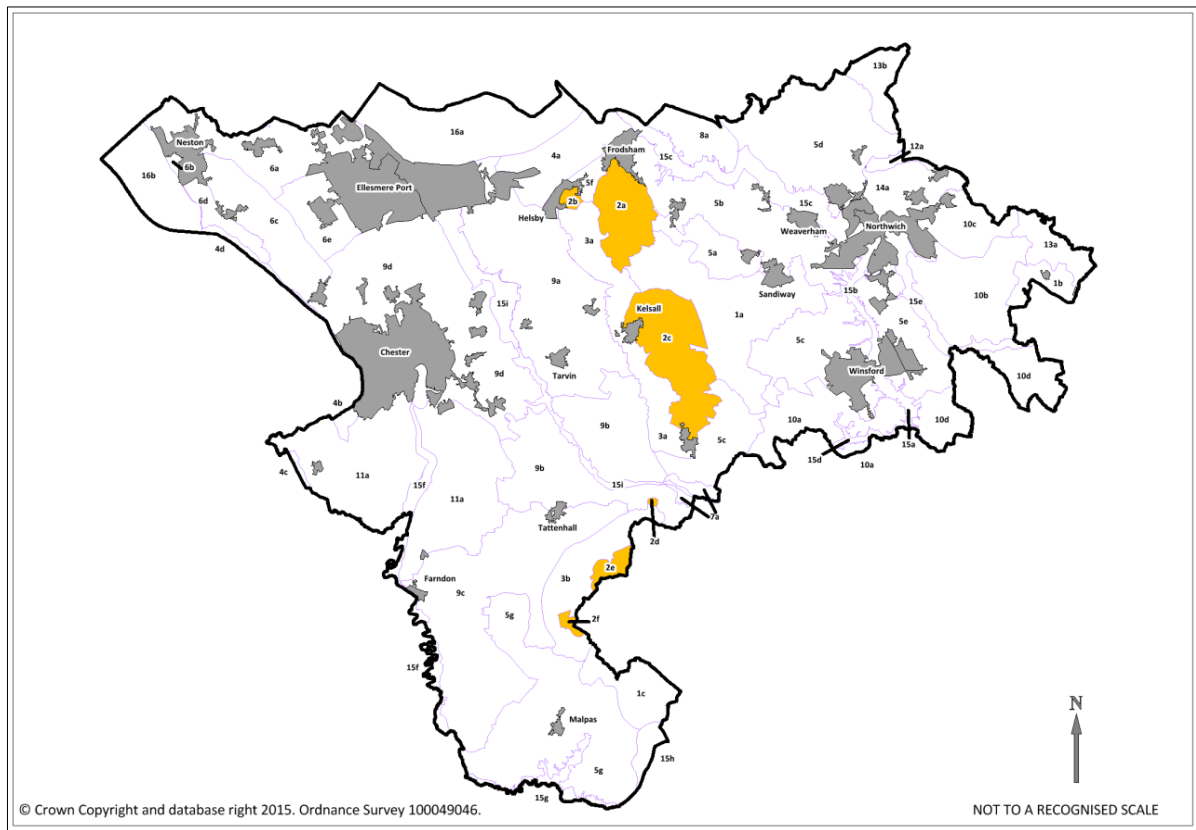


LCT 2: SANDSTONE RIDGE



General Description

The *Sandstone Ridge* stands prominently above the surrounding Plain and is visually one of the most distinctive landmarks in the Cheshire West and Chester landscape. It comprises a spine running roughly north-south from Helsby through Tarporley and on to Duckington for some 30 km, emerging and dropping back down into the plain as a series of scarps and sandstone outcrops. Helsby Hill and Beeston Crag are prominent isolated outliers. There are overlapping characteristics with the *Sandstone Fringe* character type, but the visual and topographic differences set it apart from this more intermediate landscape.

The ridge has a very strong cultural and natural character for example there is a concentration of prehistoric sites, woodland and heathland, sandstone quarries and exposures and sandstone buildings, walls and sunken lanes.

Visual Character

This landscape exhibits varying degrees of enclosure and contrasting scales, due to the localised ridge and valley features of the undulating topography and a wide variation in woodland cover. At many locations solid blocks of woodland (including conifers) and high hedgerows combine to provide strong enclosure, creating an impression of a small-scale verdant landscape. The sense of enclosure by lush, dense vegetation is further reinforced when travelling along sunken roads between high hedges or valley bottoms below wooded ridge lines. Elsewhere, reduced tree cover leads to a more open landscape with a dominant hedgerow pattern, particularly evident from many elevated positions available along the network of narrow lanes.

Expansive, long distance views provide an important element of this landscape type as they are widely available from the higher ground and contribute significantly to the distinctive character of the landscape. These vary between narrow views framed or filtered by high vegetation to spectacular panoramic views from open vantage points. Views extend over the surrounding plain as far as the Clwydian hills in the west and the Peak District in the east. Locations at the northern and southern ends of the ridge enjoy views of the Mersey Valley and the Shropshire Hills respectively.

Physical Influences

This elevated character type has a topography of between 100 and 212m AOD. The underlying bedrock comprises Helsby Sandstone and Tarporley Siltstone with a small amount of glacial till in occasional places. Outcrops of Triassic sandstone show cross bedding indicative of their formation from windblown sand dunes.

The *Sandstone Ridge* is generally overlain by free-draining brown earths and brown sands. The steep slopes and thin acid soils support concentrations of woodland, some ancient Oakwood, but much of more recent secondary origin or planted with conifers. Bird species are well represented, with several uncommon breeding species attracted to the elevated position, extensive woodlands and deadwood habitat, for example sparrow-hawk, raven and pied flycatcher.

Lowland heath, a habitat of international importance, was once a common sight in Cheshire but like other areas in the UK it has become increasingly reduced and fragmented; however, restoration work on Bickerton Hill SSSI has resulted in the local expansion of this important habitat. A number of woodlands are listed as Local Wildlife Sites and/or SSSIs, such as Dunsdale Hollow SSSI. A number of other geological and geomorphological features in the type are listed as of regional importance (RIGGS).

Pasture dominates the land use and is enclosed by hawthorn hedgerows and sandstone walls in the south. Arable cultivation of fodder crops and potatoes plus orchards and fruit farming are located on the better draining, gentler slopes of the ridge.

Cultural Influences

Settlement is mainly small scale and dispersed and comprises individual farms and houses. There are areas of modern development which has changed this settlement pattern such as at Utkinton and Quarry Bank, with the two largest urban settlements being Kelsall to the west, which grew from a dispersed pattern into a nucleated centre in the 20th century, and Tarporley to the south. Settlement is of a greater density in the adjoining *Sandstone Fringe* landscape type.

Prehistoric flint scatters and barrows indicate prehistoric activity (Bronze Age and earlier). This character type has been inhabited since at least the Iron Age period (c 700 BC) - six late Bronze Age/Iron Age hillforts provide evidence of this at Helsby, Woodhouse, Eddisbury, Kelsborrow, Beeston and Maiden Castle. These promontory forts (with the exception of Eddisbury and Beeston which were defended settlements) utilised the imposing natural topography and incorporated banks, ditches and palisades. They were imposing structures that were intended to be seen, making a statement about status as much as defence.

The northern areas of this landscape character type lay within the extensive former Royal Forest of Mara (Delamere) that covered a vast portion of Cheshire, considerably larger than the coniferous plantations that today are referred to as 'Delamere Forest'. The popular perception of a forest is that of an area densely covered with trees. In the medieval period, a forest was an area for hunting, especially deer; broad-leaved woodland was interspersed with farmland and even settlement in some areas. Forests were mainly owned by the Crown and they were subject to Forest Law which

imposed restrictions upon land use and severely punished poaching. The southern areas of this character type were largely woodland and heath, fringed by medieval fields, yet still important resources to the adjoining communities.

During the medieval period it became increasingly common for hunting to take place in deer parks and there are two former sites on the ridge which are identified by the place names Old Pale and New Pale. The enclosure of the forest was finally completed in 1819. Agricultural land was enclosed, creating the pattern of small to medium (up to 8ha) regular fields with straight hawthorn hedgerows. In the southern areas enclosure and forestry were also occurring, but on a significantly smaller scale. These areas were also subject to significant change by the activities of the local estates to improve their agricultural land.

Evidence of former industries is visible in the landscape, with numerous small sandstone quarries. Quarried sandstone from the ridge has been used extensively in the construction of local buildings and boundary walls, adding a distinctive architecture and colour to the area.

There are a number of high status residences on the ridge including the brick c 1700 Utkinton Hall and the pebble-dashed 20th century Tirley Garth.

Today the Sandstone Trail runs along the ridge, providing access to the length of this character type and a popular recreational facility for walkers. There are also open access areas such as the National Trust-owned Maiden Castle. Other leisure facilities include golf courses.

There are **six Landscape Character Areas** within LCT 2:

2a: Frodsham

2b: Helsby Hill

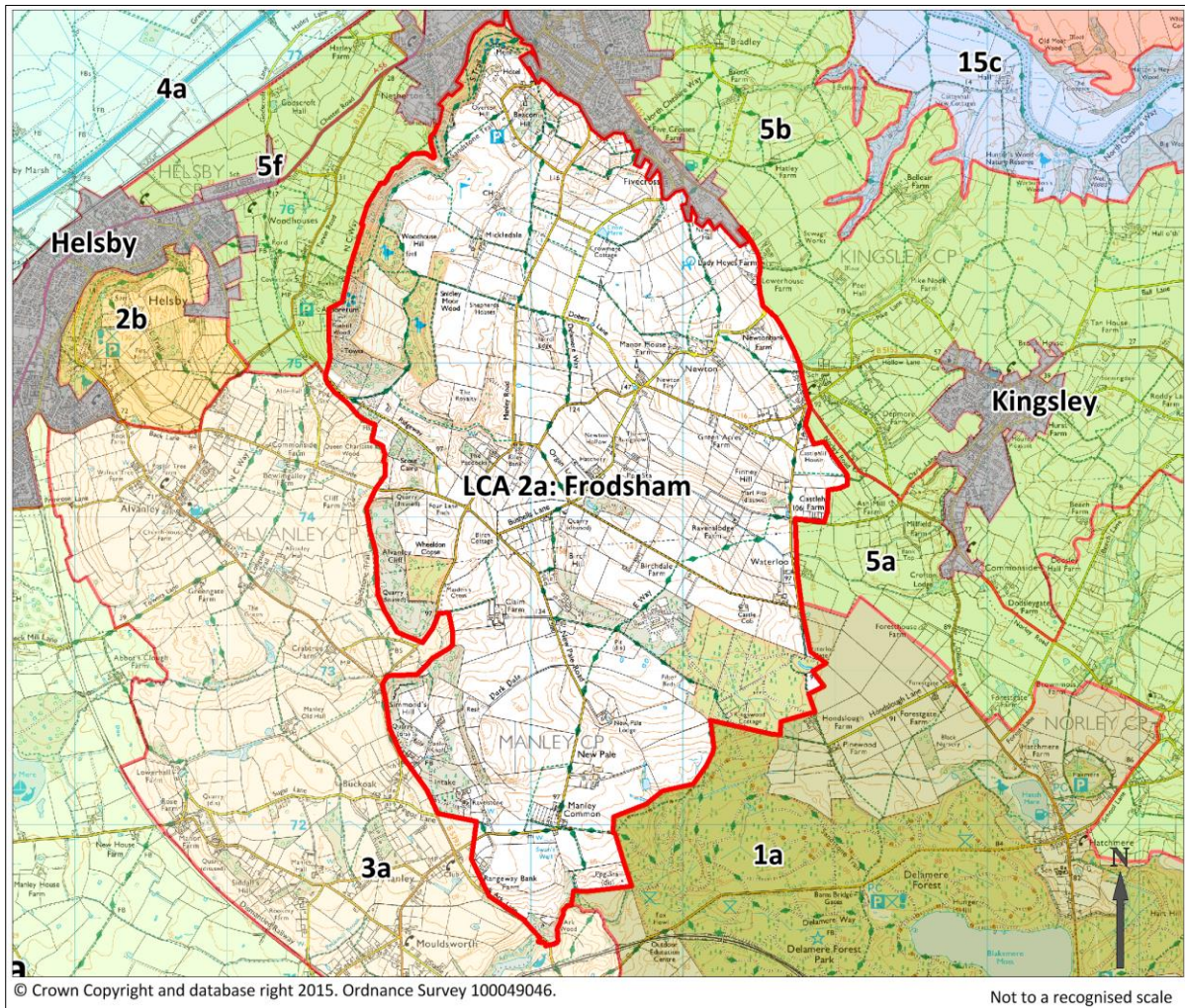
2c: Eddisbury

2d: Beeston Crag

2e: Higher Burwardsley

2f: Larkton Hill/Hether Wood

LCA 2a: Frodsham Sandstone Ridge



Location and Boundaries

The **Frodsham Sandstone Ridge** is a prominent ridge that extends from Frodsham in the north to Delamere Forest in the south. The boundaries are defined primarily by geology and topography.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 2a: Frodsham Sandstone Ridge

- Outcrops of Triassic sandstone form a prominent ridge reaching over 150m with hills forming features at Beacon Hill, Harrol Edge and Birch Hill
- Steep sandstone cliffs to the north and west of the ridge support dense woodland, including ancient oak woodland, for example at Alvanley Cliff Wood
- Dry gorges, created by glacial meltwater, are features of the northern and western edges of the ridge
- Brown sandy soils support permanent grassland, dwarf shrub heath, bracken and gorse scrub and woodland on steeper slopes, for example at Frodsham and Overton Woods
- Groups of Scots pines form distinctive skyline elements
- Quarries are features, particularly along the west-facing cliff
- Less steep slopes support arable farmland
- Regular geometric fields, resulting from late eighteenth and early nineteenth century enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act, dominate the ridge
- New Pale is a 17th century deer park with a distinctive boundary which is a feature in the landscape
- Low density of dispersed farms and hamlets – many farm buildings are constructed from sandstone (quarried from the ridge) with welsh slate roofs
- Sunken lanes provide access over the ridge, responding to landform – there are no main roads
- Late Bronze Age/Iron Age promontory hillfort at Woodhouse Hill on the western edge of the ridge, and a former Roman camp at Birch Hill, occupy prominent positions on the ridge (both Scheduled Monuments)
- The War Memorial on Frodsham Hill is a landscape feature, from where there are panoramic views over the Mersey Estuary
- Long distance footpaths run along the length of the ridge from where there are some spectacular panoramic views from the ridge as far as Wales to the west and the Peak District to the east
- Locally designated as an Area of Special County Value (ASCV) recognising its landscape and scenic quality and its historic, archaeological and ecological importance

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- The northern and western parts of the sandstone ridge are the highest and steepest;
- The steep scarp is mostly clothed in ancient oak/birch woodland including Frodsham and Overton Woods, Dunsdale Hollow, Queen Charlotte's Wood and Alvanley Cliff recognised for its nature conservation value, with an acid heathy ground flora;
- The less steep eastern siltstone formations support more arable farmland on coarse loamy soils;
- An intact hedgerow network (including ancient species rich hedgerows) with mature oak trees;
- Dry gorges created by glacial meltwater are features of geological interest on the northern and western edges of the ridge, for example to the west of Snidley Moor;
- Former sandstone quarries and outcrops that produce texture and interest and support some rare vegetation communities;
- The simple combination of farmland and woodland with variety provided by the presence of gorse thickets, bracken scrub and a number of water bodies (including a naturally occurring mere at Crow Mere, man-made field ponds and manmade reservoirs, some providing important wetland BAP priority habitats).

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- Late Bronze Age/Iron Age promontory hillfort at Woodhouse Hill and former Roman Camp at Birch Hill, both Scheduled Monuments, as well as other historic features e.g. Castle Cob and Maiden's Cross;
- The smaller and more irregular post medieval fieldscapes around Newton contrast with larger, more geometric enclosure field patterns which are distinctive;
- The distinctive historic boundaries of the former 17th century deer park at New Pale;
- Glacial meltwater channels that are of historical interest;
- Ancient sunken lanes bordered by hedges often planted on top of low sandstone walls;
- Recreational opportunities provided to a large number of visitors by open access land (at Woodhouse Hill, Wheeldon Copse, Delamere Forest Park, and on the sandstone cliff above Frodsham to the north of Beacon Hill) and three long distance recreational footpaths (Sandstone Trail, Delamere Way and Eddisbury Way), as well as other inter-connecting footpaths and a golf course;
- Mersey View (a former Victorian Pleasure Ground) and Manley Knoll (a formal Edwardian quarry garden) are historic parks and gardens of local significance;
- Frodsham Anti-Aircraft Operations Room (known as the 'Beacons' – a Grade II listed building).

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- Low density scattered farmsteads and hamlets, including Manley Common and Newton, with an absence of villages on the ridge;
- Local sandstone/red brick farmhouses and barns with Welsh slate roofs, some of which are listed;
- Crossley East Hospital is a distinctive cluster of buildings that was developed in 1905 as a tuberculosis sanatorium – many of its buildings are now listed;
- More recent development includes some scattered residential houses, Forest Hills Hotel overlooking Frodsham, and Frodsham golf club house, as well as a number of man-made reservoirs, communication masts and a wind turbine.

Perceptual / Visual

- Large scale, open landscape;
- The strong, prominent and simple skyline;
- Long distance panoramic views across the Mersey Estuary to Runcorn, Liverpool and north Wales (in particular from the War Memorial on Frodsham Hill), and across Delamere and to the east to the distant Peak District;
- The character area is visible from extensive areas of the borough and beyond making the ridge visually sensitive;
- Clusters and belts of Scots pine and communication masts form distinctive skyline features are highly visible from many parts of the borough on a clear day;
- Woodland helps to mitigate visual impacts, for example due to the large numbers of visitors to this landscape;
- The sense of peace and quiet away from the popular areas;
- Although population density is low, there are a large number of visitors to this landscape as a result of the recreational opportunities provided by the open access land and three long distance recreational footpaths. However, the presence of woodland as a key characteristic provides some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

Landscape Condition

The **Frodsham Sandstone Ridge** is in agricultural and woodland use and is actively managed for these land uses. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network and some over-mature hedgerow trees. Some of the sandstone boundary walls are derelict, particularly alongside roads.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 2a: *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge*:

- Green Belt;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV);
- 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

- Limited hedgerow management causing decline in traditional field boundaries – some hedgerows are discontinuous;
- The Woodland Trust manages a number of woodlands including Frodsham Wood, Woodhouse Hill, Snidley Moor and Wheeldon Copse, which is a positive change;
- Restoration of traditional sandstone walls and hedgerows has also been a positive change;
- A shift from grassland to crops, fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Relaxation of traditional grazing practices and resultant spread of scrub and trees and reduction and deterioration of heathland;
- The Crossley hospital site has been converted into 77 dwelling units;
- Gardens associated with built development have introduced some exotic and garden species into the landscape;
- Some footpaths are poorly drained.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 2a: *Frodsham*

- Pressure for small scale residential development and recreational provision including holiday homes/cabins and caravan parks;
- Pressure for farm extension and conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential and commercial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Erosion of built environment character and increased suburbanisation through incremental development and standardisation/upgrading of lanes and minor roads;
- Pressure for further communication masts and other tall structures such as wind turbines given the elevated topography and wind speeds;
- This is an area of search for sand and gravel extraction;
- Policies within the 2014 Mersey Forest Plan include establishing a woodland framework around Frodsham and Helsby linking the Sandstone Ridge (whilst avoiding the escarpment) with the Weaver Valley;
- Increased visitor pressure at some locations leading to fragmentation of habitats and loss of tranquillity as a result of increased recreational use of the landscape.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 2a: Frodsham Sandstone Ridge

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the strong, prominent and simple skyline and panoramic views from the ridge, and to **restore** and link former heathland sites.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Encourage enhanced management of woodlands, including the replacement of non-native species by native broadleaved species and active management of existing woodlands to ensure a diverse age structure and ground flora.
2. Support the vision to create a well-wooded landscape with links to Delamere whilst preserving ecologically important habitats, ensuring no detriment to historic assets and maintaining panoramic views from the ridgeline.
3. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
4. Conserve the post medieval fieldscapes around Newton and the historic boundaries of New Pale as features of the landscape.
5. Protect archaeological sites, such as the late Bronze Age/Iron Age promontory hillfort at Woodhouse Hill, and consider opportunities for encouraging the establishment of pasture on and around such sites.
6. Maintain sandstone outcrops as features of the landscape – consider opportunities to enhance views of and, where appropriate, access to, these features whilst maintaining their geological and ecological interest.
7. Conserve the glacial meltwater channels that are of geological and historical interest.
8. Encourage drainage of footpaths to prevent erosion.
9. Ensure any quarries are sensitively sited and ensure plans for their restoration have ecological interest, incorporating recreational uses and access where possible.
10. Use ASCV designation to protect the character area from inappropriate development.
11. Maintain the ancient sunken lanes, minimising small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or straightening of the road network which could change the character of these lanes. Encourage restoration of sandstone boundary walls alongside these lanes.

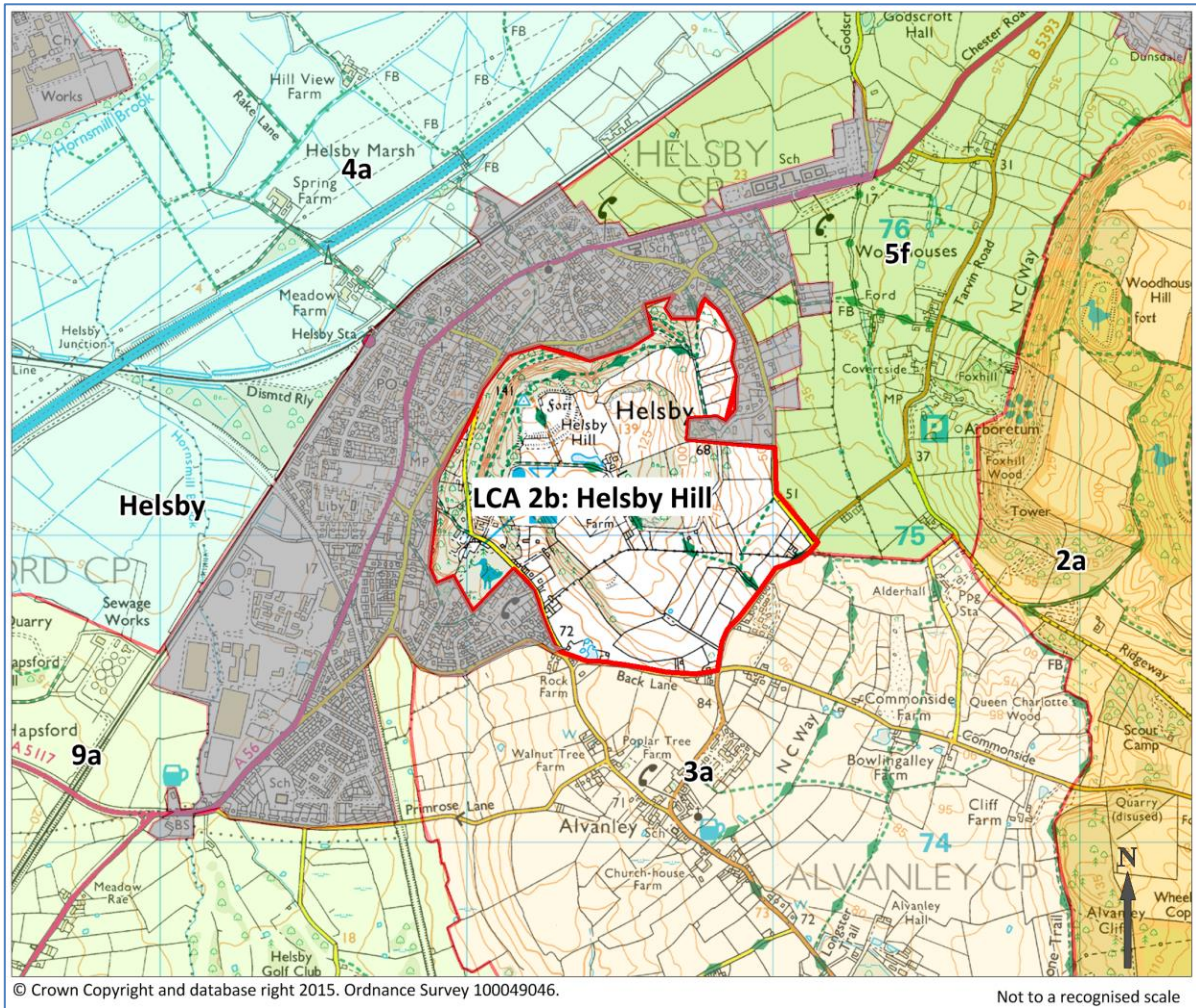
12. Maintain field ponds and meres as features of the landscape as well as the gorse thickets and bracken scrub that provide variety and texture.
13. Consider opportunities for re-creation of heathland in areas where this would have no detriment to anything else (e.g. archaeological sites) and seek opportunities to re-create species rich grassland.
14. Maintain groups and belts of Scots pine as distinctive skyline features of the ridge where this does not interfere with biodiversity objectives.
15. Support the diversification of farm activities that maintain the rural and peaceful character of the landscape.
16. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and maintain the sparse settlement and road network and limited visible development.
17. Conserve the strong, prominent and simple skyline – consider opportunities to mitigate the visual effect of existing communication masts on the skyline in the future.
18. Maintain panoramic views from the ridge – consider opportunities to create additional viewpoints and increased opportunities for public views. Consider views when planning locations for new woodland associated with The Mersey Forest.
19. Protect views to and from the War Memorial on Frodsham Hill, and hillforts.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern. Conserve the local vernacular - local sandstone and red brick farmsteads and barns with Welsh slate roofs. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
2. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
3. Retain or enhance existing boundary features as part of new built development.
4. The ridgeline is particularly sensitive to large scale, or tall, built development.



LCA 2b: Helsby Hill



Location and Boundaries

Helsby Hill is a prominent isolated outcrop of sandstone located above Helsby, forming an outlier to the west of the *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge*. The boundaries are defined primarily by geology and topography.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 2b: Helsby Hill

- Outcrop of Triassic sandstone forms a prominent hill (Helsby Hill reaching 141m) with distinctive cliff profile
- Steep sandstone cliffs to the north and west of the hill support dense woodland and are used for rock climbing
- A rich variety of habitats; brown sandy soils support sheep grazed pasture, semi-natural grassland, dwarf shrub heath, bracken and gorse scrub, with woodland on steeper slopes
- Sandstone outcrops, sandstone quarries (Helsby Quarry) and cliffs are features, including the 'Old Man of Helsby'
- Regular rectangular fields resulting from late eighteenth and early nineteenth century enclosure of the Forest of Mara by Parliamentary Act
- Low density of dispersed farms; farm buildings are typically constructed from sandstone (quarried from the ridge) with Welsh slate roofs
- Narrow sunken lanes provide access up to the hill – there are no main roads
- A promontory hillfort at Helsby Hill (a Scheduled Monument) occupies a prominent position on the north-western edge of the outcrop overlooking the Mersey Estuary
- The Longster Trail long distance footpath crosses the outcrop, from where there are some spectacular panoramic views over the Mersey Estuary to the north and towards the *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge* to the east
- Locally designated as an Area of Special County Value (ASCV) recognising its landscape and scenic quality and its historic, archaeological and ecological importance

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- The northern and western edges of the outcrop are the highest and steepest, mostly clothed in old birch woodland with a species-poor understorey of bracken;
- These Helsby Sandstone cliffs form a distinctive stepped profile when the outcrop is viewed from adjacent areas – the 'Old Man of Helsby' refers to the appearance of the cliff side above Helsby;
- The Helsby Sandstone gives rise to well drained sandy and coarse loamy soils (known as brown sands) that support a mixture of arable and pastoral farmland, bracken scrub, gorse thickets, heathland and woodland;
- Rising to 141m, much of the hill includes Local Wildlife Sites with woodland, semi-improved grassland and dwarf shrub heath habitats of nature conservation interest;
- A pocket of heathland to the north west of the hill is managed by the National Trust;
- The Tarporley Siltstones on the south side of the hill to the south of Fir's Farm are prominent but less steep, with coarse loamy soils that support a mixture of arable and pastoral fields;
- An intact hedgerow network (including ancient species rich hedgerows) with mature oak trees;
- Former sandstone quarries and outcrops that produce texture and interest and support some rare vegetation communities and many are enclosed by regenerating woodland, for example at Helsby Quarry Local Nature Reserve and Woodland Park, and Harmers Wood;
- A pond located to the south of the hill fort provides important wetland habitats, and many habitats in the LCA are habitats of principal importance.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- Late Bronze Age/Iron Age promontory hillfort and Scheduled Monument at Helsby Hill on the north-western edge overlooking the Mersey Estuary;
- The smaller and more irregular post medieval fieldscapes south of Fir's Farm contrast with the mostly straight-sided, rectangular enclosed fields elsewhere, the contrast being distinctive;
- Ancient sunken lanes bordered by hedges often planted on top of low sandstone walls;
- Recreational opportunities attract a relatively large number of visitors to the hill fort and recreational opportunities provided by footpaths including part of the Longster Trail long distance recreational footpath, National Trust owned land, and parking, picnic and walking facilities at Helsby Quarry Woodland Park;
- Royal Observer Corps Monitoring Post – underground rectangular compound with surface features including a metal dome remaining intact.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- Low density scattered farmsteads and hamlets with an absence of villages;
- Local sandstone/red brick farmhouses and barns with Welsh slate roofs, some of which are listed;
- More recent residential development along the foot of the ridge as well as properties scattered along the minor lanes that access the hill.

Perceptual / Visual

- Prominent, open landscape with a distinctive, simple skyline;
- Distinctive landform unifies the character area;
- Expansive 360 degree panoramic views from the top of the hill across the Mersey Estuary to Runcorn, Liverpool and north Wales and across Delamere and to the east to the distant Peak District, and southwards across the lower slopes of Helsby Hill;
- The character area is visible from extensive areas of the borough and beyond making the outcrop visually sensitive;
- The absence of communication masts and other prominent structures;
- Woodland helps to mitigate visual impacts, for example due to the large numbers of visitors to this landscape;
- The sense of peace and quiet away from the popular areas;
- Although population density is low, there are a relatively large number of visitors to this landscape as a result of the hill fort and the recreational opportunities provided by the public footpaths and woodland park. However, the presence of woodland as a key characteristic provides some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

Landscape Condition

Helsby Hill sandstone outcrop is partially in active agricultural use and partly managed by the National Trust. There are also some areas being managed for nature conservation, including management of acidic grassland/remnant heath. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the hedgerow network and some over-mature hedgerow trees. Some of the sandstone boundary walls are broken or in a declining condition.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 2b: *Helsby Hill*:

- Green Belt;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV);
- 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

- Limited woodland and hedgerow management causing decline in traditional field boundaries – some hedgerows are discontinuous, but there is also evidence of hedgerow gapping up with new planting;
- Restoration of traditional sandstone walls and hedgerows has been a positive change;
- Management by the National Trust including protection and restoration of acidic grassland/remnant heath on Helsby Hill is another example of positive change;
- Some evidence of 'horsiculture' resulting in a change in the landscape;
- Some evidence of erosion of the soft sandstone as a result of recreational use of the landscape;
- Gardens associated with built development have introduced some exotic and garden species into the landscape.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 2b: *Helsby Hill*

- Pressure for small scale residential development along the lanes, as well as additional residential development in the gardens of the larger properties along the hill;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings to other uses including residential and commercial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Erosion of built environment character and increased suburbanisation through incremental development and standardisation/upgrading of lanes and minor roads;
- Pressure for communication masts and other tall structures such as wind turbines, currently absent from the hill, given the elevated topography and wind speeds;
- The location within The Mersey Forest is likely to result in further tree planting and support for the management and extension of existing woodlands on steep hillsides – aiming for over 30% woodland cover over the majority of the hill;
- The likelihood of continued erosion of the soft sandstone, fragmentation of habitats and loss of tranquillity as a result of increased recreational use of the landscape.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 2b: Helsby Hill

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the strong, prominent and simple skyline and panoramic views from the hill, and to **restore** and link former heathland sites.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Encourage enhanced management of woodlands, including the replacement of non-native species by native broadleaved species and active management of existing woodlands to ensure a diverse age structure and ground flora.
2. Support plans to extend existing woodlands on steep hillsides where this does not conflict with heathland restoration proposals or compromise other ecologically important habitats or historic assets.
3. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and continuing to gap up existing hedges.
4. Seek to restore sandstone walls that are a feature of this landscape.
5. Protect archaeological sites, particularly those comprising earthworks such as the late Bronze Age/Iron Age promontory hillfort, and consider opportunities for encouraging the establishment of pasture on and around such sites.
6. Maintain former quarries and sandstone outcrops as features of the landscape – consider opportunities to enhance views of and, where appropriate, access to, these features whilst maintaining their geological and ecological interest.
7. Manage visitor access to minimise erosion of the soft sandstone.
8. Use ASCV designation to protect the character area from inappropriate development.
9. Maintain the ancient sunken lanes, minimising small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or straightening of the road network which could change the character of these lanes. Encourage restoration of sandstone boundary walls alongside these lanes.
10. Maintain the gorse thickets and bracken scrub that provide variety and texture, except in the vicinity of the hill fort where gorse and bracken are removed to prevent damage to the monument.

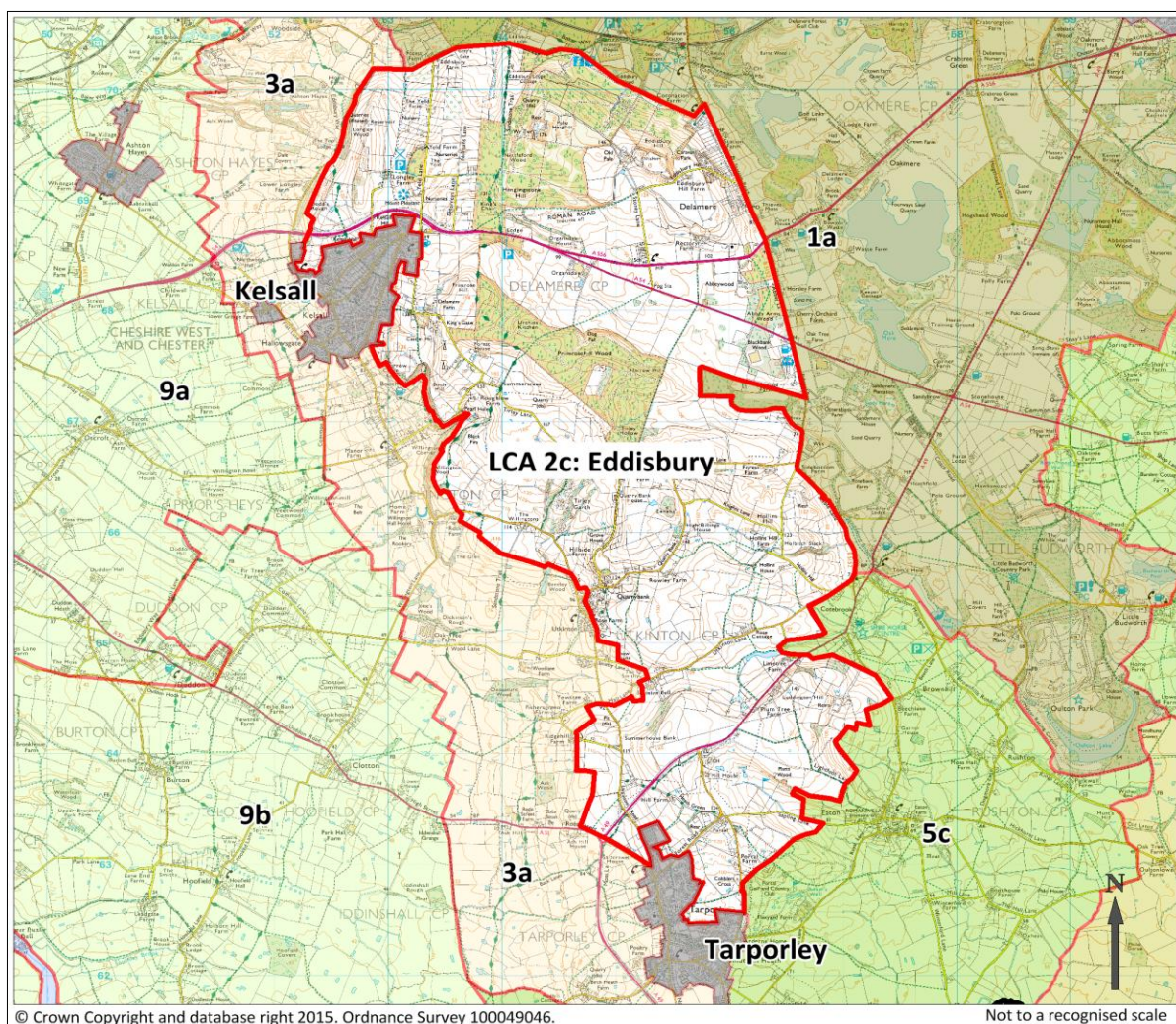
11. Conserve remnant areas of heathland and consider opportunities for re-creation of heathland in areas where this would have no detriment to anything else (e.g. archaeological sites).
12. Seek opportunities to re-create species rich grassland.
13. Support the diversification of farm activities that maintain the rural and peaceful character of the landscape.
14. Consider further opportunities for passive recreational use of the landscape avoiding activities that may have a detrimental impact on the landscape.
15. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and maintain the sparse settlement and road network and limited visible development.
16. Conserve the strong, prominent and simple skyline and the distinctive, natural slope profile of this outcrop.
17. Maintain panoramic views – consider opportunities to create additional viewpoints and increased opportunities for public views. Consider views from the outcrop when planning locations for new woodland associated with The Mersey Forest.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern. Conserve the local vernacular - local sandstone and red brick farmsteads and barns with Welsh slate roofs. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
2. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
3. The ridgeline is sensitive to built development and in particular communication masts, wind turbines and other tall structures on the skyline which should be avoided.



LCA 2c: Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge



Location and Boundaries

The **Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge** is a prominent ridge that extends from Eddisbury Lodge in the north to Tarporley in the south, as a continuation southwards of the *Frodsham Sandstone Ridge*. The boundaries are defined primarily by geology and topography.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 2c: Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge

- Outcrops of Triassic sandstone form a prominent, undulating ridge reaching 176m at Pale Heights, at its northern end
- Steep sandstone cliffs and dry gorges support dense woodland, including ancient oak woodland
- Brown sandy soils support permanent grassland and woodland on steeper slopes, including the plantation woodland at Primrosehill Wood
- Heavily influenced by the presence of, and enclosure of, the former Royal Forest of Mara into a regular geometric fieldscape bordered by straight sided thick hedgerows, some on top of low sandstone walls, and large plantations initially established at the beginning of the nineteenth century
- Old Pale is an enclosed medieval deer park which retains a distinctive boundary that is a feature in the landscape
- Belts of Scots pines form distinctive skyline elements
- Quarries are features, including King's Chair quarry
- Less steep slopes support cereals, potatoes and fruit farming. Orchards are features around Kelsall/Willington
- Low density of dispersed farms; farm buildings are typically local red brick or constructed from sandstone (quarried from the ridge) with Welsh slate roofs
- Sunken lanes provide access over the ridge, responding to landform while the A54 and A49 cross the ridge in cutting
- A49 is recognised as the ancient public highway of Peytefynsty (Roman road marking the boundary between the former Forest of Mara and Forest of Mondrem)
- Late Bronze Age/Iron Age defensive hillfort at Eddisbury Hill and 'Chamber in the Forest' hunting lodge, Scheduled Monuments within the former Royal Forest of Mara (Delamere)
- Promontory fort at Kelsborrow (Scheduled Monument) occupies a prominent positions along the ridge
- Tirley Garth Listed Building and Registered Park and Garden
- The 'Sandstone Trail' runs along part of the ridge from Eddisbury Lodge before descending the ridge at The Willingtons
- Spectacular panoramic views from the ridge across Delamere and beyond to the northeast, over the open plains to the south-east, to the Peckforton Hills to the south, and to north Wales to the west
- Locally designated as an Area of Special County Value (ASCV) recognising its landscape and scenic quality and its historic, archaeological and ecological importance

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- The northern and western sides of the ridge are the highest and steepest, with a steep scarp wrapping around the west side of the ridge, partially clothed in woodland;
- The ridge rises to 176m at Pale Heights, the highest point in the borough;
- Old Pale is a former deer park associated with the former Royal Forest of Mara which has retained a distinctive boundary and now supports a mosaic of woodland and grassland;
- The Helsby Sandstones underlying the northern part of the ridge produce well drained sandy and coarse loamy soils (known as brown sands) that support a mixture of arable and pastoral farmland, with woodland including ancient oaks on steep slopes;
- The Tarporley Siltstones on the southern half of the ridge give rise to coarse loamy soils that support a greater proportion of arable farmland;

- Orchards around Kelsall/Willington are a feature of the southern Tarporley Siltstones;
- Nurseries along Yeld Lane provide a variety of exotic plants which contrast with their naturalistic landscape setting;
- Dry gorges, created by glacial meltwater, are features of Primrose Hill, designated as Urchin's Kitchen Regionally Important Geological Site;
- A number of field ponds on the ridge provide important wetland habitats and are UK priority habitats;
- An intact hedgerow network (including ancient species rich hedgerows) with mature oak trees;
- Former sandstone quarries and outcrops that produce texture and nature conservation interest, for example the former quarry at the Yeld.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- The LCA is heavily influenced by the presence of the former Royal Forest of Mara – initially wooded, then an area of heath dotted with small mosses, and enclosed between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to provide allotments to compensate claims for common rights and Crown land for lease and forestry (to provide timber for the navy);
- The largest area enclosed by Parliamentary Act in Cheshire, it continues to be dominated by surveyed geometric field system of regular rectangular fields with straight quickset hedgerows and large plantations initially established at the beginning of the nineteenth century;
- Variety of small irregular medieval townfields on the edge of Tarporley and ancient field system around Utkinton, to straight-sided enclosure fields on the elevated land to the west of King's Chair and Primrosehill Wood (formerly part of the Royal Forest of Mara);
- Ancient sunken lanes bordered by hedges often planted on top of low sandstone walls;
- Late Bronze Age/Iron Age hillforts and Scheduled Monuments at Eddisbury and Kelsborrow Castle, as well as other historic features including bowl barrows and tumuli, 'Chamber in the Forest' hunting lodge;
- A49 is recognised as the ancient public highway of Peytefynsty (Roman road marking the boundary between the former Forest of Mara and Forest of Mondrem);
- Tirley Garth is an early twentieth century Arts and Crafts garden (the only complete one remaining in Cheshire), a Grade II* Registered park and garden and Grade II listed building;
- Portal House Garden is a twentieth century garden of local significance in the Elizabethan style by Walter Tower; the area around the house (a listed building) is also a Conservation Area and contains listed structures, including the lodge, gateposts and gates;
- Sandstone outcrops and quarries provide good building stone; stone for the Vale Royal Abbey was quarried from King's Chair quarry, on the edge of Hangingstone Hill;
- There are a relatively large number of visitors due to the recreational opportunities provided by footpaths including the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational footpath, and open access Forestry Commission land at Primrosehill Wood and Pale Heights.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- Low density scattered farmsteads and hamlets with a general absence of villages;
- Local sandstone/red brick farmhouses and barns with Welsh slate roofs, some of which are listed;
- Utkinton Hall on the western edge of the ridge is a listed historic manor house and the ancient seat of the Done family who were Master Foresters for protecting the game in the royal forest of Delamere;
- Some built development on the edge of villages located at the foot of the ridge has extended onto the ridge in places e.g. on the edges of Kelsall, Quarrybank and Tarporley.

Perceptual / Visual

- Prominent, distinctive, simple skyline;
- Clusters and belts of Scots pine that form distinctive skyline features;
- Distinctive landform unifies the character area;
- Panoramic views including views of the medieval castle at Beeston and commanding views from Old Pale;
- The character area is visible from extensive areas of the borough and beyond making the ridge visually sensitive;
- Woodland helps to mitigate visual impacts, for example due to the large numbers of visitors to this landscape;
- The sense of peace and quiet away from main roads and the popular areas;
- Although population density is low, there are a large number of visitors to this landscape as a result of the recreational opportunities provided by the Forestry Commission land and the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational route. However, the presence of woodland as a key characteristic provides some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

Landscape Condition

Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge is in active agricultural and forestry use and is managed for these land uses. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network and some over-mature hedgerow trees. Some of the sandstone boundary walls are derelict, particularly alongside roads, and some woodlands are in poor condition or are not being actively managed.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 2c: *Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge*:

- Green Belt (north of the A54/A556);
- Countryside (south of the A54/A556);
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV);
- 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

- Limited woodland and hedgerow management causing decline in traditional field boundaries – some hedgerows are discontinuous;
- Restoration of traditional sandstone walls and hedgerows has been a positive change;
- A shift from grassland to crops, fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Farm diversification and increase in equestrian facilities including stables, pastures and fencing;
- Expansion of aggregate extraction;
- Settlement expansion, with relatively recent built development on the edges of the ridge at Yeld Lane, Eddisbury Hill, Quarrybank and on the edges of Kelsall and Tarporley;
- Some of the footpaths are poorly drained;
- Nurseries and gardens associated with built development have introduced some exotic and garden species into the landscape;
- Tall hedgerows around the orchards have resulted in a reduction in the open character of the ridge.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 2c: *Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge*

- Continuing pressure for housing, particularly along main roads;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings to other uses including residential and commercial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Erosion of built environment character and increased suburbanisation through development and standardisation/upgrading of main roads, including signage and Leylandii screen planting;
- Pressure for communication masts and other tall structures such as wind turbines, given the elevated topography and wind speeds;
- Pressure for small scale recreation-related development along the Sandstone Trail and other walks, with the possible erosion of the soft sandstone, fragmentation of habitats and loss of tranquillity;
- The location within The Mersey Forest is likely to result in further tree planting including planting new woodlands, restoring hedgerows and hedgerow trees, and support for the management and extension of existing woodlands to link to Delamere – new planting on ridge (e.g. around Pale Heights) is already contributing to an increase in woodland cover.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 2c: Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the strong, prominent and simple skyline and panoramic views from the ridge, and to **restore** and link former heathland sites.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Encourage enhanced management of woodlands, including the replacement of non-native species by native broadleaved species and active management of existing woodlands to ensure a diverse age structure and ground flora.
2. Support the vision to create a well-wooded landscape with links to Delamere, whilst preserving ecologically important habitats, ensuring no detriment to historic assets and maintaining panoramic views from the ridgeline.
3. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
4. Protect archaeological sites, particularly those comprising earthworks such as the late Bronze Age/Iron Age hillforts at Eddisbury and Kelsborrow, and consider opportunities for encouraging the establishment of pasture on and around such sites.
5. Maintain sandstone outcrops as features of the landscape – consider opportunities to enhance views of and, where appropriate, access to, these features whilst maintaining their geological and ecological interest.
6. Use ASCV designation to protect the character area from inappropriate development.
7. Maintain the ancient sunken lanes, minimising small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or improvements to the road network which could change the character of these lanes. Encourage restoration of sandstone boundary walls alongside these lanes.
8. Maintain field ponds and glacial meltwater channels as features of the landscape.
9. Consider opportunities for re-creation of heathland in areas where this would have no detriment to anything else (e.g. archaeological sites) and seek opportunities to re-create unimproved or semi-improved species rich grassland.
10. Maintain groups and belts of Scots pine as distinctive skyline features of the ridge where this does not interfere with biodiversity objectives.

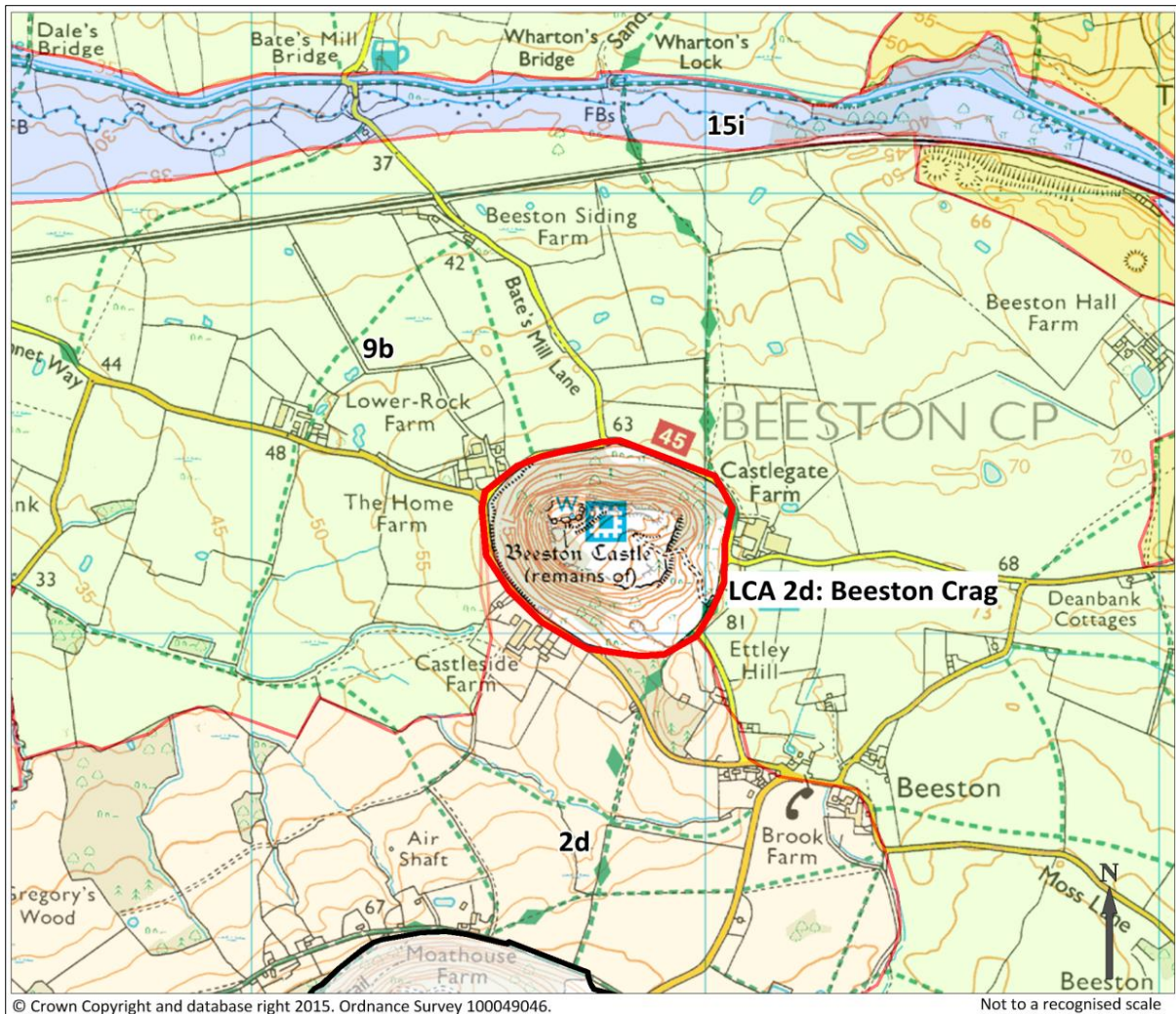
11. Ensure farm diversification activities maintain the rural and peaceful character of the landscape.
12. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and maintain the sparse settlement and road network and limited visible development.
13. Conserve the strong, prominent and simple skyline – consider opportunities to mitigate the visual effect of existing communication masts on the skyline in the future.
14. Maintain panoramic views from the ridge across adjacent landscapes – consider opportunities to create additional viewpoints and increased opportunities for public views. Consider views when planning locations for new woodland associated with The Mersey Forest.
15. Conserve existing panoramic views, for example views of the medieval castle at Beeston from the edge of Tarporley, and views across Delamere from Old Pale.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern. Conserve the local vernacular - local sandstone and red brick farmsteads and barns with Welsh slate roofs. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
2. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
3. Minimise the impact of road cuttings, signage and associated development using native planting.
4. Maintain panoramic views out of Tarporley – ensure new build does not block these views that connect the village with its landscape setting. Of particular importance are the views to Beeston Castle.
5. Refer to local Village Design Statements and Neighbourhood Plans when considering change.
6. The ridgeline is particularly sensitive to large scale, or tall, built development.



LCA 2d: Beeston Crag



Location and Boundaries

Beeston Crag is a prominent isolated outcrop of sandstone forming an outlier within the 'Beeston Gap' between the *Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge* to the north and the *Peckforton Sandstone Ridge* to the south. Although covering a small area, it is physically and visually distinct from the surrounding *Sandstone Fringe* and *Cheshire Plain* to justify its inclusion as a separate landscape character area. The boundaries are defined by geology and topography.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 2d: Beeston Crag

- Outcrop of Triassic sandstone forms a prominent hill reaching approximately 110m with distinctive cliff profile rising above the Cheshire Plain
- Steep sandstone cliffs on all sides produce a distinctive circular profile densely clothed by woodland
- Late Bronze Age promontory hillfort which was occupied into the Romano-British period is a Scheduled Monument
- The remains of the thirteenth century Beeston Castle, also a Scheduled Monument and Grade I listed building, occupies a prominent position on the rocky summit - its outer bailey utilises the fort's rampart for defensive purposes
- The castle and associated woodland park is a popular English Heritage visitor attraction
- Spectacular extensive views in all directions
- Farms encircle the base of the crag, linked by a minor road with impressive sandstone retaining walls – there are no roads on the crag which is now uninhabited
- A footpath winds around the crag and provides access up to the castle remains at the top of the hill
- there are no main roads
- The Sandstone Trail long distance footpath follows a route around the eastern side of the crag
- Locally designated as an Area of Special County Value (ASCV) recognising its landscape and scenic quality and its historic, archaeological and ecological importance

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- The steep sandstone cliffs support mostly dense deciduous woodland on all sides, although the woodland is more open on the eastern side;
- Rising to around 110m, much of the hill includes local wildlife sites with woodland, semi-improved and species-rich grassland habitats of nature conservation interest;
- Beeston Crag is of geological and ornithological interest with features of Wilmslow, Bulkeley and Helsby Sandstone Formations, and rare breeding birds;
- Stone was quarried from a ditch between the castle outer and inner walls and used to construct the castle, the rocky outcrops produce texture and interest and support some rare vegetation communities;

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- Beeston promontory hillfort, a Scheduled Monument, dates from the late Bronze Age and was occupied into the Romano-British period;
- The defences of the outer bailey of the C13th Beeston Castle, built in the 1220's by Ranulf de Blondville, 6th Earl of Chester on his return from the Crusades, utilises the fort's rampart for defensive purposes. It is a Scheduled Monument and Grade I listed building, and last saw hostilities in the English Civil War when it changed hands a number of times;
- The entire hill including the castle and woodland grounds is a Scheduled Monument and part of the Beeston Conservation Area, with several listed structures;
- Prehistoric finds suggest Bronze Age activity including the earliest remains of habitation in the area now occupied by the castle;
- The castle remains and woodland owned and maintained by English Heritage attract a large number of visitors, and other recreational opportunities provided by the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational footpath.

Perceptual / Visual

- Prominent, enclosed landscape with a distinctive profile isolated from the surrounding farmland;
- Distinctive landform unifies the character area;
- Extensive elevated views from in-between the trees across the Mersey Estuary to Runcorn, Liverpool and north Wales and across Delamere and to the east to the distant Peak District, and southwards across the Peckforton Hills;
- The character area is visible from extensive areas of the borough and beyond making the outcrop visually sensitive;
- The absence of any prominent structures apart from the remains of the castle's outer bailey on the rocky outcrop (down the hill from the summit);
- Woodland helps to mitigate visual impacts, for example due to the large numbers of visitors to this landscape;
- The sense of peace and quiet away from the popular areas.

Landscape Condition

Beeston Crag sandstone outcrop and Woodland Park is managed by English Heritage as an important visitor attraction. Consequently it is kept in good condition appropriate to maximising the experience gained from visiting an historic site such as this.

CWac Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 2d: *Beeston Crag*:

- Countryside;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV);
- 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

- English Heritage provides appropriate management of Beeston Castle and Woodland Park, including its trees, paths, sandstone walls etc., to ensure it remains an important visitor attraction and in accordance with its designation as a Scheduled Monument and Conservation Area with many listed buildings and other structures.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 2d: *Beeston Crag*

- Landscape change is unlikely whilst the landscape continues to be managed by English Heritage. A large increase in visitor numbers could, for example, result in the erosion of footpaths;
- Tall built structures within the adjoining landscape character areas would affect the setting of Beeston Crag rising above the flat Cheshire Plain.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 2d: Beeston Crag

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the strong, prominent, distinctive profile and extensive views from the hill, and to **conserve** and protect the setting of the Scheduled Monument.

Landscape Management Guidelines

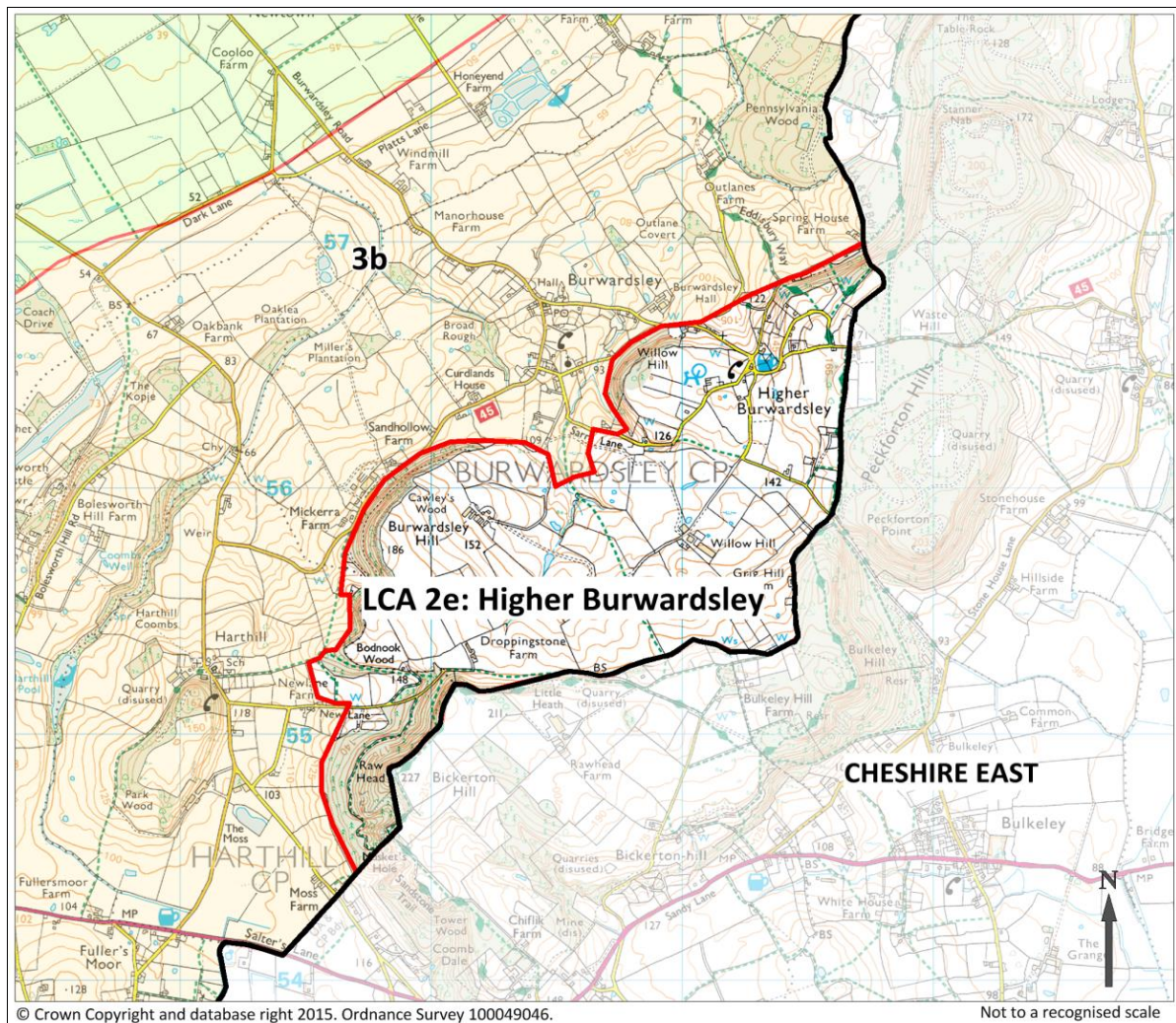
1. Encourage continued management by English Heritage, including appropriate woodland management and maintenance of paths, sandstone walls and other features of interest in the landscape. This should include management of visitor numbers to avoid erosion of sandstone footpaths.
2. Ensure the setting of the hillfort and castle is protected by encouraging appropriate management of the surrounding *Sandstone Fringe* and *Cheshire Plain*.
3. ASCV designation should further protect the character area from inappropriate development.
4. Maintain the adjacent lanes, minimising small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or straightening of the road network which could change the character of these lanes.
5. Maintain the contrast between enclosure amongst the trees and extensive views from the crag in-between trees and structures.

Built Development Guidelines

1. *Beeston Crag* is sensitive to any built development - encourage continued management by English Heritage to ensure no built development is allowed on *Beeston Crag*.
2. Avoid built development within the adjacent landscape that would affect the setting of *Beeston Crag* and the Scheduled Monument.
3. Avoid inappropriate built development that would be seen in key views out from the crag, in particular where views are filtered between trees and/or structures such that development would draw the eye and become the main focus in the view.



LCA 2e: Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge



Location and Boundaries

The **Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge** is a prominent ridge that straddles the borough boundary between Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East. It extends from Moathouse Farm at the northern foot of the ridge below Peckforton Castle (in Cheshire East) to the A534 in the south, as a continuation southwards of the *Eddisbury Sandstone Ridge*. The boundaries are defined primarily by geology and topography.

The following description applies to that part of the **Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge** lying within Cheshire West and Chester district.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 2e: Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge

- Outcrops of Triassic sandstone form a prominent, undulating ridge reaching 227m at Bickerton Hill at the top of the Raw Head escarpment, at the southern end of the ridge
- Steeper slopes and poorer brown sandy soils on the ridge support dense woodland, including ancient oak woodland and permanent grassland
- Scattered gorse scrub and remnant heath
- Regular blocks of coniferous and mixed woodland on some steeper slopes
- Raw Head escarpment is of national importance for its sandstone exposures and is a geological / geomorphological SSSI
- Small sandstone quarries, field ponds, wells and springs are features in the landscape
- Late (early nineteenth century) enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act gives a distinctive regular, geometric, small to medium scale fieldscape;
- Contrasting post medieval agricultural improvement with larger fields and loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees;
- Low density of settlement including Higher Burwardsley and dispersed farms; farm buildings are typically constructed from sandstone (quarried from the ridge) with Welsh slate roofs, with a number of timber framed buildings
- Sunken lanes provide access over the ridge, responding to landform
- The 'Sandstone Trail' runs along part of the ridge from north to south from Moathouse Farm at the northern foot of the ridge and along the Raw Head escarpment at its southern end, and a number of other rights of way and NCN Route 45 cross the ridge from east to west
- The Grade I listed Peckforton Castle is located at the northern end of the ridge within Cheshire East and is prominent in views from the west
- Spectacular panoramic views from the ridge to very distant horizons
- Locally designated as an Area of Special County Value (ASCV) recognising its landscape and scenic quality and its historic, archaeological and ecological importance

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- The southern end of the ridge at the Raw Head escarpment is the highest and steepest, rising to 227m at Bickerton Hill, partially clothed in woodland;
- The Helsby Sandstones produce well drained sandy and coarse loamy soils (known as brown sands) that support a mixture of arable and pastoral farmland, with woodland including ancient oaks on steep slopes;
- The Tarporley Siltstones give rise to coarse loamy soils that support a greater proportion of arable farmland;
- A number of field ponds on the ridge provide important wetland habitats and are UK priority habitats;
- Distinctive field pattern with intact hedgerow network (including ancient species rich hedgerows) with mature oak trees around Higher Burwardsley towards the western edge of the ridge, enclosed during the nineteenth century; some hedges have been removed but trees remain giving a parkland-like appearance;
- Medieval and later field systems survived eighteenth and nineteenth century improvements in the southern part of the area, but modern field enlargement has significantly changed their character with the complete loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees replaced with roadside post and wire fencing providing a distinctive, exposed, elevated landscape;

- Former sandstone quarries and outcrops that produce texture and nature conservation interest, for example at Raw Head;
- Scarp slopes around Higher Burwardsley and Raw Head are designated as Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS).

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- Late (early nineteenth century) enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act gives a distinctive regular, geometric, small to medium scale fieldscape;
- Post medieval agricultural improvement replaced areas of irregular enclosure or enclosed open field arable land, with larger fields and thus fewer hedgerows and hedgerow trees, probably related to the consolidation and improvement of landholdings belonging to the nearby Bolesworth and Peckforton Estates;
- Ancient sunken lanes bordered by hedges;
- There are a relatively large number of visitors due to the recreational opportunities provided by footpaths including the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational footpath;
- The Pheasant Inn at Higher Burwardsley and the nearby Candle Factory are popular visitor destinations.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- Low density scattered farmsteads and hamlets with a general absence of villages;
- Local sandstone/red brick farmhouses and barns with Welsh slate roofs, some of which are listed;
- A number of timber framed buildings such as the Grade II listed farm buildings at Grigg Hill Farm;

Perceptual / Visual

- Prominent, distinctive, simple skyline;
- Distinctive landform unifies the character area;
- Panoramic views from the ridge to very distant horizons, in particular across the Cheshire Plain to the hills of north Wales to the west;
- The character area is visible from extensive areas of the borough and beyond making the ridge visually sensitive;
- Woodland helps to mitigate visual impacts, for example due to walkers using the Sandstone Trail;
- The sense of peace and quiet away from main roads and the popular areas;
- Although population density is low, there are a large number of visitors to this landscape as a result of the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational route. However, the presence of woodland as a key characteristic provides some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

Landscape Condition

Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge is in active agricultural and woodland use and is managed for these land uses. Most woodlands are actively managed by the Bolesworth Estate using Forestry Commission grant schemes. Although the hedgerow network is intact in some areas, there are gaps in the network and some over-mature hedgerow trees. In other areas hedgerows have been removed and replaced with post and wire fences.

CWac Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 2d: *Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge*:

- Green Belt (north of the A54/A556);
- Countryside (south of the A54/A556);
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV);
- 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

- Evidence of decline in traditional field boundaries in some locations – some hedgerows are discontinuous and some have been removed, and others replaced by post and wire fences;
- Restoration of traditional sandstone walls and hedgerows in other locations has been a positive change;
- Active woodland management by the Bolesworth Estate using Forestry Commission grant schemes is also a positive change;
- A shift from grassland to crops (particularly maize), fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Farm diversification ;
- Some of the footpaths are affected by compaction and/or are poorly drained.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 2d: *Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge*

- Pressure for small scale residential development along the lanes, for example in the Burwardsley area;
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings to other uses including residential and commercial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;
- Erosion of built environment character and increased suburbanisation through incremental development and standardisation/upgrading of lanes and minor roads;
- Pressure for communication masts and other tall structures such as wind turbines, given the elevated topography and wind speeds;
- Pressure for small scale recreation-related development along the Sandstone Trail and other walks, with the possible erosion of the soft sandstone, fragmentation of habitats and loss of tranquillity.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 2e: Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the prominent, distinctive and simple skyline and panoramic views from the ridge, and to **restore** the traditional field pattern with hedgerow boundaries and hedgerow trees where these have been lost.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Encourage enhanced management of woodlands, including the replacement of non-native species by native broadleaved species and active management of existing woodlands to ensure a diverse age structure and ground flora.
2. Encourage restoration of an intact hedgerow network through management of existing hedges and replacement of hedges and hedgerow trees where these have been lost.
3. Maintain former quarries, sandstone outcrops and ponds as features of the landscape – consider opportunities to enhance views of and, where appropriate, access to, these features whilst maintaining their geological and ecological interest.
4. Manage visitor access to minimise erosion of the soft sandstone.
5. Use ASCV designation to protect the character area from inappropriate development.
6. Maintain the ancient sunken lanes, minimising small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or straightening of the road network which could change the character of these lanes. Encourage restoration of traditional hedgerow boundaries alongside these lanes.
7. Conserve remnant areas of heathland and consider opportunities for re-creation of heathland in areas where this would have no detriment to anything else (e.g. archaeological sites) and where topography is not a limiting factor.
8. Seek opportunities to re-create species rich grassland.
9. Support the diversification of farm activities that maintain the rural and peaceful character of the landscape.
10. Consider further opportunities for passive recreational use of the landscape avoiding activities that may have a detrimental impact on the landscape.
11. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the most popular areas, and maintain the sparse settlement and road network and limited visible development.

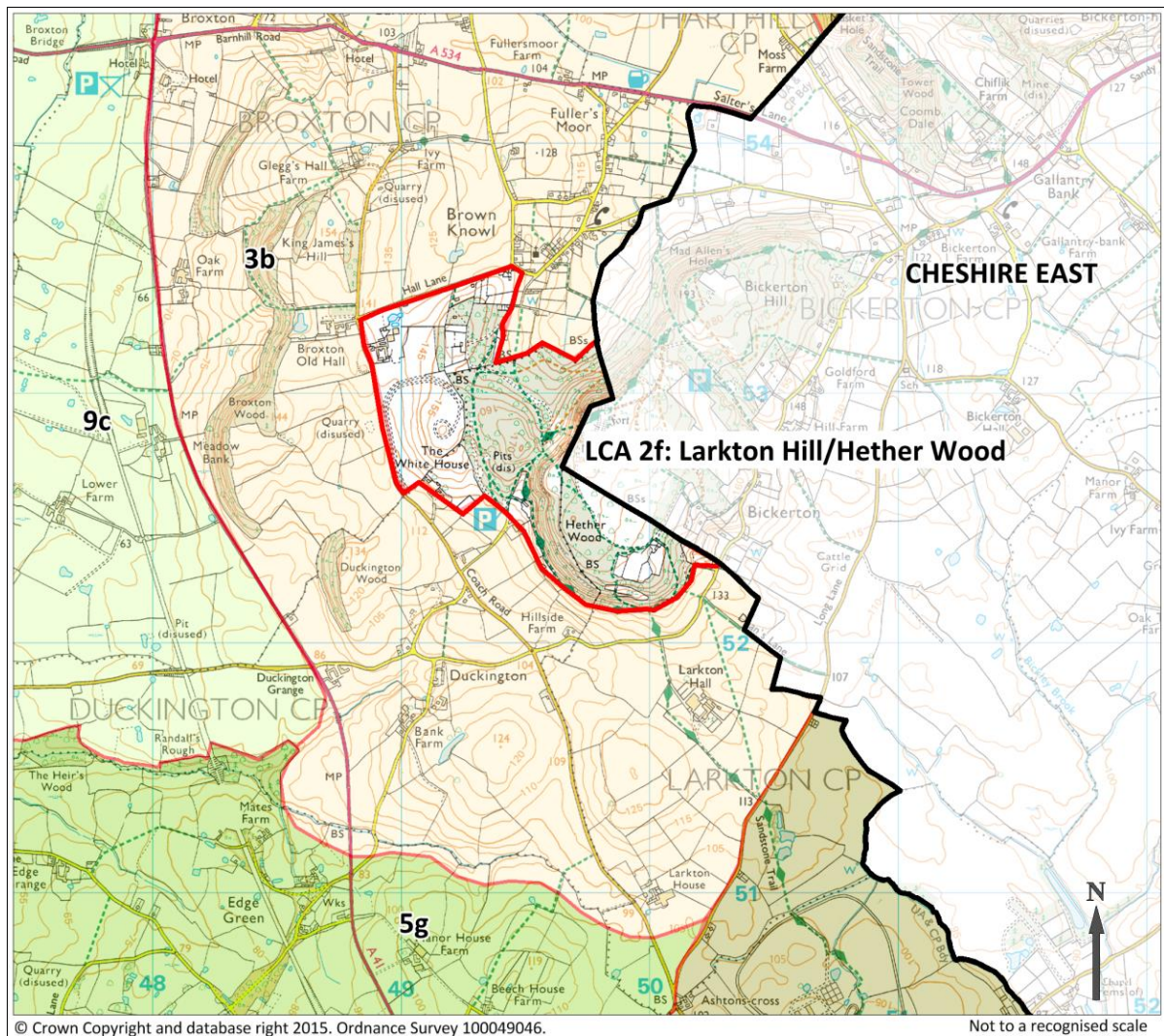
12. Conserve the strong, prominent and simple skyline and the distinctive, natural slope profile of this outcrop.
13. Maintain panoramic views – consider opportunities to create additional viewpoints and increased opportunities for public views. Consider views from the outcrop when planning locations for new woodland associated with The Mersey Forest.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern. Conserve the local vernacular - local sandstone and red brick farmsteads and barns with Welsh slate roofs, and timber framed buildings. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
2. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
3. Maintain panoramic views out from the ridge– ensure new build does not block these views.
4. The ridgeline is sensitive to built development and in particular communication masts, wind turbines and other tall structures on the skyline which should be avoided.



LCA 2f: Larkton Hill/Hether Wood Sandstone Ridge



Location and Boundaries

The **Larkton Hill/Hether Wood Sandstone Ridge** is the most southerly of the prominent sandstone ridge character areas, separated from the *Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge* by a narrow strip of lower sandstone fringe through which the A534 passes. The **Larkton Hill/Hether Wood Sandstone Ridge** straddles the borough boundary between Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East. It extends from Bickerton Hill in the north (in Cheshire East) to Hether Wood, north of Duckington, in the south. The boundaries are defined primarily by geology and topography.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 2f: Larkton Hill/Hether Wood Sandstone Ridge

- Outcrop of Triassic sandstone forming a prominent ridge reaching approximately 200m at Maiden Castle
- Steep west and south facing slopes support dense woodland, in particular birch woodland and heathland on the poorer brown sandy soils, such as Hether Wood
- Other woodland belts are much younger, having regenerated naturally on former heath or grassland
- Late (early nineteenth century) enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act gives a distinctive regular, geometric, small to medium scale fieldscape
- Contrasting post medieval agricultural improvement with larger fields and fewer hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Contrast in scale and enclosure from the totally enclosed woodland to the open heathland on the higher ground and ridges
- SSSI covers most of the character area for its heathland communities and assemblage of reptiles
- Small sandstone quarries are features, the stone being used in local buildings, field boundaries and alongside sunken lanes
- Low density of settlement limited to a small number of dispersed farms with large detached farmhouses and ranges of outbuildings on the lower slopes; farm buildings are typically constructed from red brick with Welsh slate roofs
- Sunken lanes provide access around the ridge, responding to landform
- The 'Sandstone Trail' runs along the top of the ridge from north to south, and a number of other public rights of way cross the ridge
- Late Bronze Age/Iron Age promontory hillfort and Scheduled Monument at Maiden Castle at the southern end of the ridge, owned by the National Trust
- Spectacular panoramic views from the ridge to very distant horizons, in particular to the hills of north Wales to the west and the Shropshire Hills to the south
- Locally designated as an Area of Special County Value (ASCV) recognising its landscape and scenic quality and its historic, archaeological and ecological importance

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- The western and south facing wooded slopes of the ridge are the steepest and most distinctive, rising to 193m at Bickerton Hill, partially clothed in woodland;
- The Helsby Sandstones produce well drained sandy soils (known as brown sands) that support a mixture of arable and pastoral farmland, with birch woodland and heathland;
- The Tarporley Siltstones give rise to coarse loamy soils that support a greater proportion of arable farmland on the lower slopes;
- Heathland on Bickerton Hill remains mostly intact from agricultural improvement largely due to army training and more recently National Trust management;
- Contrast in scale and enclosure from the totally enclosed woodland to the open heathland with ling, wavy hair-grass and gorse on the higher ground and ridges;
- Much of the open heathland habitat supports assemblages of reptiles and is designated SSSI;
- Former sandstone quarries and outcrops that produce texture and nature conservation interest;
- Southern scarp slope around Hether Wood is designated as a Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGGS).

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- Late(early nineteenth century) enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act gives a distinctive regular, geometric, small to medium scale fieldscape;
- Post medieval agricultural improvement replaced areas of irregular enclosure or enclosed open field arable land, with larger fields and thus fewer hedgerows and hedgerow trees, probably related to the consolidation and improvement of landholdings belonging to the nearby Cholmondley and Bolesworth Estates;
- Late Bronze Age/Iron Age promontory hillfort at Maiden Castle, owned by the National Trust, is a Scheduled Monument situated within bracken and heathland on the edge of a cliff with its outer edge protected by a double line of ramparts (bivallate);
- Ancient sunken lanes bordered by hedges;
- There are a relatively large number of visitors due to the recreational opportunities provided by footpaths including the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational footpath. There are two car parking areas within the character area.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- Low density of settlement limited to a small number of dispersed farms with large detached farmhouses and ranges of outbuildings on the lower slopes;
- Farm buildings are typically constructed from red brick with Welsh slate roofs.

Perceptual / Visual

- Prominent, distinctive, simple skyline;
- Distinctive ridgeline landform unifies the character area;
- Panoramic views from the ridge to very distant horizons, in particular across the Cheshire Plain to the hills of north Wales to the west and the Shropshire Hills to the south;
- The character area is visible from extensive areas of the borough and beyond making the ridge visually sensitive;
- Woodland helps to mitigate visual impacts, for example due to walkers using the Sandstone Trail;
- The sense of peace and quiet away from main roads and the popular areas;
- Although population density is low, there are a large number of visitors to this landscape as a result of the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational route. However, the presence of woodland as a key characteristic provides some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

Landscape Condition

Larkton Hill/Hether Wood Sandstone Ridge is in active agricultural and conservation use with heathland vegetation actively managed by the National Trust. Farmland including field boundaries and roadside hedges on the lower slopes appear to be well maintained and are in good condition.

CWac Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 2f: *Larkton Hill/Hether Wood Sandstone Ridge*:

- Countryside;
- Area of Special County Value (ASCV);
- 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

- Loss of heathland and open grasslands where woodland has been allowed to naturally regenerate;
- Active management of heathland by the National Trust is an example of positive change;
- Some of the footpaths are poorly drained;
- Gardens associated with built development have introduced some exotic and garden species into the landscape.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 2f: *Larkton Hill/Hether Wood Sandstone Ridge*

- Some pressure for incremental housing on the lower slopes;
- Erosion of built environment character and increased suburbanisation through development and standardisation/upgrading of lanes, including signage;
- Pressure for communication masts and other tall structures such as wind turbines, given the elevated topography and wind speeds;
- Pressure for small scale recreation-related development along the Sandstone Trail and other walks, with the possible erosion of the soft sandstone, fragmentation of habitats and loss of tranquillity.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 2f: Larkton Hill/Hether Wood Sandstone Ridge

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the prominent, distinctive and simple skyline and panoramic views from the ridge, and to continue to **enhance** heathland through continued active management and protection from agricultural practices.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Encourage active management of existing woodlands to ensure a diverse age structure and ground flora.
2. Encourage the continued enhancement of heathland on open areas through continued active management.
3. Maintain sandstone outcrops and caves as features of the landscape – consider opportunities to enhance views of and, where appropriate, access to, these features whilst maintaining their geological and ecological interest.
4. Manage visitor access to minimise erosion of the soft sandstone.
5. Use ASCV designation to protect the character area from inappropriate development.
6. Maintain the ancient sunken lanes, minimising small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or straightening of the road network which could change the character of these lanes. Encourage restoration of traditional hedgerow boundaries alongside these lanes.
7. Seek opportunities to re-create species rich grassland.
8. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the most popular areas, and maintain the sparse settlement and road network and limited visible development.
9. Conserve the strong, prominent and simple skyline and the distinctive, natural, wooded slope profile of this outcrop.
10. Maintain panoramic views – consider opportunities to create additional viewpoints and increased opportunities for public views.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern. Conserve the local vernacular - local sandstone and red brick farmsteads and barns with Welsh slate roofs. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
2. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
3. Maintain panoramic views out from the ridge— ensure new build within and out with the character area does not block these important views.
4. The ridgeline is sensitive to built development and in particular communication masts, wind turbines and other tall structures on the skyline which should be avoided.

