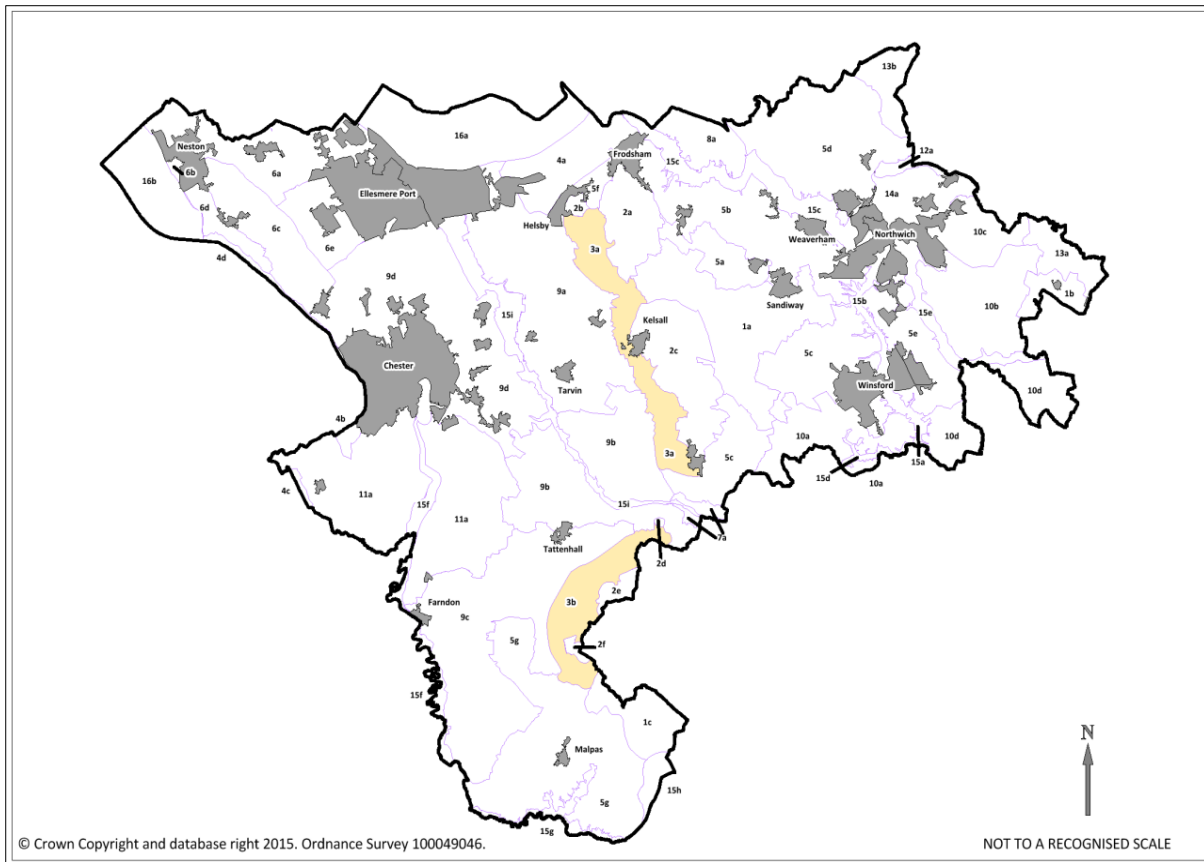


LCT 3: SANDSTONE FRINGE



General Description

This is an intermediate landscape type that delineates the eastern margin of the *Cheshire Plain West*, while above it rises the *Sandstone Ridge* to the east. To the north and south are patches of the *Undulating Enclosed Farmland* landscape type.

Visual Character

This is a landscape of strong contrasts. At many locations landform, high hedges and blocks of woodland provide effective enclosure and ensure only immediate, short distance views. Where the high vegetation combines with narrow, sunken, winding lanes the landscape has a small scale, verdant character. This is in contrast to those elevated and open viewpoints enjoying extensive and panoramic views across the adjacent low lying Cheshire Plain and the Mersey valley. Views to the west extend to the Clwydian hills in north Wales and to the Shropshire hills to the south on clear days.

At many open viewpoints on the lower slopes the eye is drawn to a number of distinctive landmarks along the high ground of the *Sandstone Ridge*. This includes strong visual elements such as the sandstone outcrop of *Beeston Crag* and Beeston Castle, and Peckforton Castle in Cheshire East.

Physical Influences

The *Sandstone Fringe* rises from the *Cheshire Plain West* at 50m AOD, with a maximum elevation of 155m. To the east and south of the *Sandstone Ridge* the landscape is more undulating and the break between character types is not so distinct.

The topography varies from gentle slopes and undulations to steep scarps. The underlying geology comprises Wilmslow Sandstone and Tarporley Siltstone, which is mostly overlain by glacial till and glacio-fluvial deposits, distinguishing the character are from the adjacent *Sandstone Ridge*. Soils are brown sands and earths, which support arable and grassland. The principal arable crop is potatoes. Fragments of acid grassland, which support flora such as fescue and sheep sorrel, are also found in this character type.

Overall woodland cover is lower than on the *Sandstone Ridge*. Small copses are dotted across this type, a number of which are Local Wildlife Sites. Areas of ancient woodland occur at sites such as Cats Rough in the valley of Ashton Brook and in part of the large Pennsylvania Wood to the west of Peckforton Castle. Fields are mainly enclosed with hawthorn hedgerows but there are also some dry sandstone walls.

Cultural Influences

Prehistoric finds of flint tools, metal work and burials suggest Bronze Age and earlier activity within the *Sandstone Fringe* area. Paleo-environmental work has also shown that significant soil erosion was occurring in the southern part of the *Sandstone Fringe* where it meets the *Sandstone Ridge* in the Bronze Age, which is also indicative of the clearance of woodland.

The northern areas of this landscape type lay within the boundary of the extensive former Royal Forest of Mara (Delamere), which 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. This part of the forest would have been interspersed with farmland and settlements.

There is a greater density of settlement than on the *Sandstone Ridge* and the *Cheshire Plain West*. The topography provides good aspect and a pleasing outlook above the poor draining land of the plain. There are a number of small nucleated villages and hamlets such as Burwardsley, Alvanley and Harthill, whilst some larger villages such as Tarporley and Kelsall straddle the boundary where the *Sandstone Fringe* meets the *Sandstone Ridge*. Buildings are constructed predominantly from red and brown brick, but there are also examples of thatch and 17th century timber framed buildings with white washed brick and brick infill. Fruit farms are found in this type, taking advantage of the free draining, light soils and the shelter afforded by the ridge.

Some settlements such as Alvanley are still surrounded by their enclosed medieval townfields. Areas of medieval and early post medieval enclosure are distributed throughout the character type and these areas often contain the remains of marl pits. The township commons, some of which survived into the nineteenth century were enclosed in the post medieval period creating more regular field patterns. In these areas of later enclosure settlement is largely dispersed and often associated with a complex pattern of roads.

This character type is defined by small to medium fields (up to 8ha) in an irregular and semi-regular pattern. Generally enclosure is likely to date back to the medieval period if not earlier following the assarting of heath and woodland.

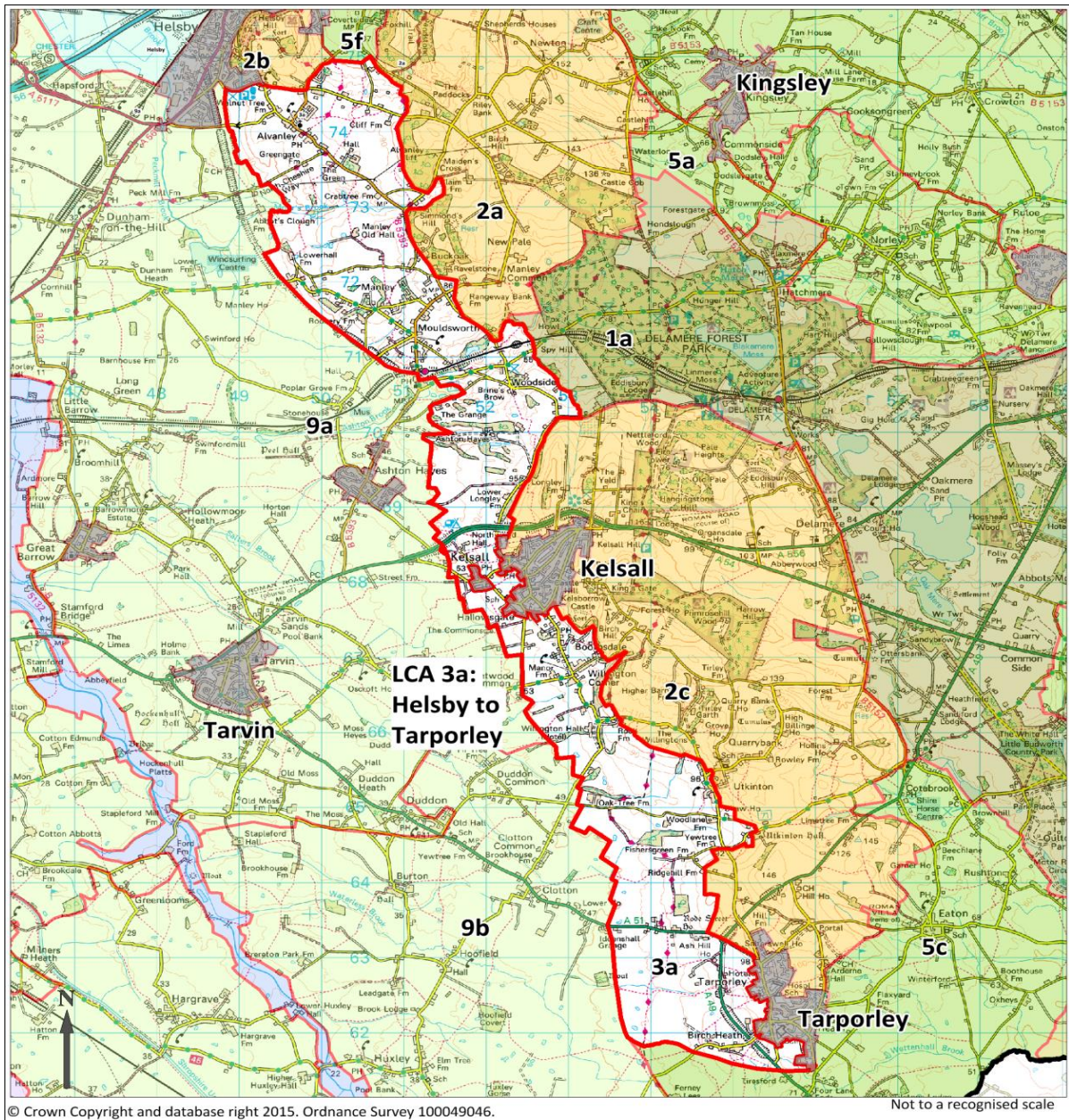
This landscape type has been favoured for the location of high status monuments and buildings, a characteristic it shares with the adjoining *Sandstone Ridge*. Late Bronze Age/Iron Age promontory hillforts are prominent in views of the adjacent *Sandstone Ridge*, whilst isolated halls with associated parkland are prominent features in the *Sandstone Fringe* e.g. Bolesworth Castle and Burwardsley Hall. Sections of the Sandstone Trail long distance footpath pass through the *Sandstone Fringe* as it descends off the ridge.

There are **two Landscape Character Areas** within LCT 3:

3a: *Helsby to Tarporley*

3b: *Beeston to Duckington*

LCA 3a: Helsby to Tarporley Sandstone Fringe



Location and Boundaries

The **Helsby to Tarporley Sandstone Fringe** wraps around the western edge of the *Sandstone Ridge* from Helsby in the north to Tarporley in the south, forming a transitional landscape between the *Sandstone Ridge* and the *Cheshire Plain West*. This *Sandstone Fringe* landscape is defined by its sandstone geology and intermediate topography and continues to the south.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 3a: Helsby to Tarporley Sandstone Fringe

- Transitional zone between the prominent *Sandstone Ridge* and the low lying *Cheshire Plain West* forming a gently undulating landscape of intermediate elevation (mostly between 35m and 90m AOD)
- Underlying bedrock geology of Helsby and Wilmslow Sandstone Formations and Tarporley Siltstone that has been weathered and overlain by glacio-fluvial sands and gravels and till (boulder clay) deposits except along the western edge;
- Steep, gorse-clad sandstone outcrops, for example overlooking the *Dunham to Tarvin Plain*, marked by disused quarries e.g. Manor Farm
- Other disused quarries mark places where the underlying geology is not obscured by glacial deposits, for example at Birch Heath Farm
- Geology gives rise to brown sands and earths which support a mixed agricultural landscape of arable and grassland, with pasture dominating in the south, and some small woodland and fragments of acid grassland
- Fruit farming towards the centre of the character area around Kelsall and Willington
- Predominantly late eighteenth and early nineteenth century planned enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act
- Fields are typically irregular, small to medium in size and enclosed by hawthorn hedges or low sandstone walls
- The clayey soils have a low permeability and give rise to a number of water bodies, including ponds, brooks and streams. Water filled marl pits are a reminder of the past use of the boulder clay to fertilise fields
- A generally low level of woodland cover but containing a number of small scattered woodland blocks, for example at Bentley Wood, Oxpasture Wood and Ash Wood, small copses and riparian woodland along the course of narrow streams e.g. Abbot's Clough Woodland along Moor's Brook is a Local Wildlife Site
- Mature hedgerow trees are important landscape elements, contributing to the overall tree cover
- Some areas are designated as an Area of Special County Value (ASCV) recognising their landscape and scenic quality and their historic, archaeological and ecological importance
- The settlement pattern is characterised by nucleated villages and scattered hamlets and farms, constructed from combinations of sandstone and red brick, or white washed sandstone walls and thatch are also a feature, linked by a network of historic lanes, some sunken
- Nucleated village at Alvanley surrounded by distinctive small medieval townfields
- Larger villages such as Tarporley and Kelsall straddle the boundary where the *Sandstone Fringe* meets the *Sandstone Ridge*
- Grand mansion houses, for example Manley Old Hall
- Although this area does not provide as many recreational opportunities as the adjacent *Sandstone Ridge* it contains a number of public footpaths, including the Longster Trail long distance recreational footpath and part of the Sandstone Trail as it descends off the ridge
- The adjacent *Sandstone Ridge* forms a backdrop to views across the *Sandstone Fringe*.

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- Gently undulating landscape, the majority of which has an extensive covering of more recent drift deposits of glacial till (boulder clay) and glacio-fluvial sands and gravels (unlike the neighbouring *Sandstone Ridge*);

- Western edges are free of drift deposits where quarries indicate the presence of sandstone bedrock;
- Some exposed Helsby Sandstone formations are designated RIGS for their geological interest;
- The network of hawthorn hedges and low sandstone walls that create a strong field pattern;
- The small to medium sized fields, particularly those dating to the medieval period or earlier which provide historic continuity in the landscape;
- Remnant fragments of acid grassland on the sandy soils that are of nature conservation value;
- The field ponds (previous marl pits), brooks and streams that are of importance for biodiversity as well as being landscape features in their own right and contributing to the diversity of the landscape;
- The mature hedgerow trees, small scattered woodland blocks, copses and riparian woodland that are valuable landscape features in a landscape with generally low woodland cover;
- Ancient woodland of nature conservation importance which is limited in number and extent, increasing its importance on the *Sandstone Fringe*.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- Distinctive landscape setting around the historic nucleated village of Alvanley formed by enclosed medieval townfields visible as small scale field divisions. Alvanley is a Conservation Area recognised for its historic and architectural value, with a number of listed buildings including Alvanley Hall;
- Predominantly late eighteenth and early nineteenth century planned enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act attest to the final enclosure of the small remaining fragments of township commons, which had survived enclosure in the preceding centuries;
- The mix of medieval and post medieval field patterns including ancient field systems which are defined by relatively small scale, irregular field units as seen around Crabtree Farm and alongside Chester Road, and larger fields such as those around Alvanley Hall and Manley Old Hall;
- Fruit farms growing apples and summer fruits located around Kelsall and Willington;
- The presence of the Longster Trail and the Sandstone Trail long distance recreational footpaths which bring recreational users to the area.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- The settlement pattern of nucleated villages and scattered hamlets and farmsteads, and a number of halls including Alvanley Hall and Manley Hall, linked by a network of rural lanes and minor roads which maintain the rural character of the landscape;
- Buildings are typically constructed from red brick, sandstone or a combination of the two, or are white washed. Sandstone/red brick barns and low sandstone walls are a particular feature;
- The rural settings of villages that straddle the boundary where the *Sandstone Fringe* meets the *Sandstone Ridge*, such as Tarporley, Utkinton and Kelsall;
- Kelsall has seen recent residential development;
- Some more modern residential dwellings are also scattered along the minor roads at low density;
- Absence of large scale visually intrusive built elements except for the row of pylons that descend Alvanley Cliff and cross the landscape.

Perceptual / Visual

- Generally quiet and rural character;
- Semi-enclosed landscape comprising a simple combination of farmland and woodland set against the backdrop of the *Sandstone Ridge*;
- The low sandstone walls associated with hedgerows or alongside roads contribute colour and texture to the landscape;

- The gently undulating topography within the transitional area between the *Sandstone Ridge* and the low lying *Cheshire Plain West* unifies the character area;
- A landscape of strong contrasts – some areas enclosed with a small scale, verdant character, and other open elevated areas with extensive panoramic views with rural views to the east across the fringe to the adjacent *Sandstone Ridge* and westwards across the Cheshire plain in particular from the Sandstone Trail, and views from the *Sandstone Ridge* over the fringe;
- The position of this landscape character area in the shadow of part of the *Sandstone Ridge* means it is not as visually prominent as the ridge itself. However, the undulating topography allows opportunities for views across the landscape of the *Helsby to Tarporley Sandstone Fringe*. There is some settlement in this landscape (indicating the presence of sensitive residential receptors) and, although recreational use of the landscape is relatively low, there are views from the *Sandstone Ridge* across this landscape character area. The LCA is also visible from the Cheshire Plain West, to the west;
- Although there is a relative absence of woodland cover, the presence of undulating topography and hedgerow trees means there is 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 *Helsby to Tarporley Sandstone Fringe* is in active agricultural use and is managed accordingly. 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 not being actively managed. Horse grazed pasture is also common in some areas.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 3a: *Helsby to Tarporley Sandstone Fringe*

- Green Belt (north of Kelsall off the A54);
- Countryside (south of Kelsall);
- Some areas are designated Area of Special County Value (ASCV) e.g. east of Helsby Hill and west of Utkinton;
- 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;
- Candidate Key Settlement Gap between Kelsall and Willington Corner

Forces for Landscape Change

Past change

- Limited boundary management and some evidence of decline and degradation in hedgerow boundaries as well as over-mature hedgerow trees;
- Sandstone walls, often forming part of hedgerow boundaries or alongside roads, are also in a declining state of repair;
- A shift from grassland to crops, fallow and set-aside and a general reduction in the number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Growth of potatoes and maize in traditionally pastoral areas resulting in soil erosion as a result of exposure of bare soil;
- Farm diversification and an increase in paddocks/horse grazing with accompanying ranch style fencing, decline in sward structure and introduction of ancillary buildings, clutter and hardstanding;
- Loss of orchards – in the past nearly all farms would have had an orchard;
- Decline in thatched buildings.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 3a: *Helsby to Tarporley*

- Pressure for residential development, particularly on the edges of the larger villages such as Kelsall and Tarporley, but also Utkinton and Mouldsworth;
- Pressure for holiday chalets;
- Likelihood of conversion of farm buildings for residential, business or industrial 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 screen planting;
- Pressure for communication masts and other tall structures such as wind turbines, given the elevated topography and wind speeds;
- Visitor pressure with 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 area's location in The Mersey Forest indicates that there is likely to be additional tree planting in this area. The Forest Plan is aiming for a woodland cover of 20-30% in this area.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 3a: Helsby to Tarporley Sandstone Fringe

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and **enhance** the pastoral character, strong field pattern and views to and from the *Sandstone Ridge* and the *Cheshire Plain West*.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Conserve ancient field patterns, particularly those dating to the medieval period or earlier which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
3. Seek to repair sandstone walls where they bound fields or align roads, to conserve these as a feature of the landscape.
4. Maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil (for example as a result of increased crop growing).
5. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
6. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
7. Conserve the remnant fragments of unimproved or semi-improved acid grassland on the sandy soils that are of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.
8. Conserve field ponds, brooks and streams that are of importance for biodiversity as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
9. Consider further opportunities for recreational use of the landscape as long as this does not result in ‘suburbanisation’ of the countryside.
10. Seek opportunities to extend woodland cover where it doesn’t impact upon other ecologically valuable habitats – small scattered broadleaved woodland blocks, copses and riparian woodland are the most appropriate forms of woodland in this area.
11. Seek opportunities to restore and create orchards at the farm scale – in the past nearly all farms would have had an orchard.

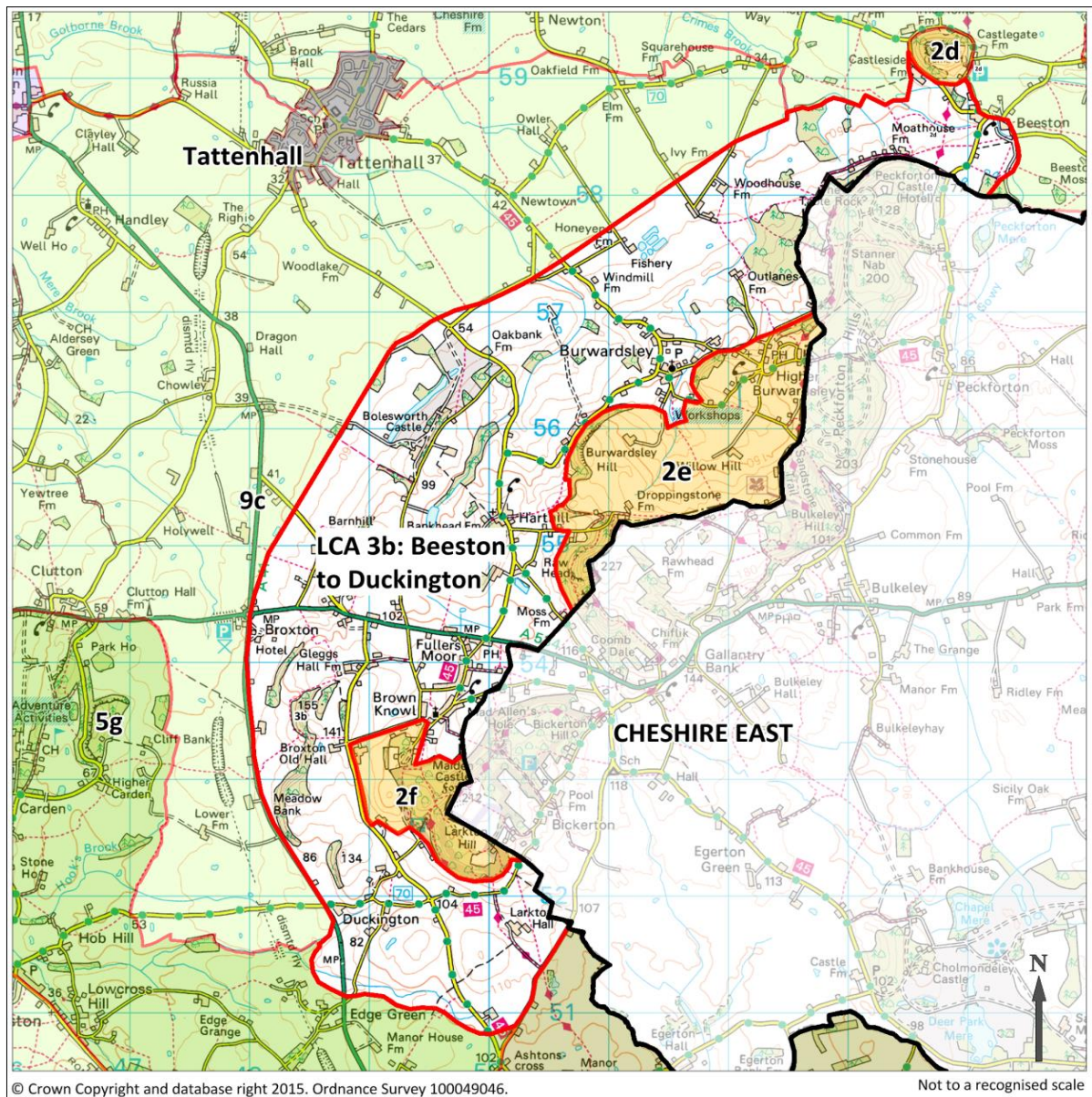
12. Manage existing woodlands to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
13. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and conserve the rural character of the lanes.
14. Conserve views to the east to the adjacent *Sandstone Ridge* and westwards across the *Cheshire Plain West* and consider opportunities to create additional viewpoints and increased opportunities for public views, for example across the Mersey Estuary. Consider key views when planning locations for new woodland associated with The Mersey Forest.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Respect dominant historic settlement patterns where they remain.
2. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of hamlets and farmsteads away from the main urban areas.
3. Avoid locating buildings in prominent locations.
4. Conserve the local vernacular built style - red brick/sandstone or white washed farmsteads and buildings, thatch, and sandstone walls. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
5. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
6. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
7. Conserve the historic nucleated village at Alvanley and its landscape setting formed by distinctive small medieval townfields.
8. Maintain the rural setting to villages.
9. Minimise impacts of the leisure industry.
10. Refer to local Village Design Statement (VDS) and Neighbourhood Plans when considering change.
11. Conserve the open undeveloped area between Kelsall and Willington Corner that has been identified as a Candidate Key Settlement Gap where development would lead to coalescence and the loss of identity of the two communities.



LCA 3b: Beeston to Duckington Sandstone Fringe



Location and Boundaries

The **Beeston to Duckington Sandstone Fringe** wraps around the western edge of the *Sandstone Ridge* from Beeston in the north to Duckington in the south, forming a transitional landscape between the *Sandstone Ridge* and the *Cheshire Plain West*. This *Sandstone Fringe* landscape is defined by its sandstone geology and intermediate topography.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 3b: Beeston to Duckington Sandstone Fringe

- Transitional zone between the prominent *Sandstone Ridge* and the low lying *Cheshire Plain West* forming an undulating, in parts complex landscape of intermediate elevation between 40m AOD in the north and rising to 155m in the south
- Underlying bedrock geology of Wilmslow Sandstone Formations and Tarporley Siltstone that has been weathered and overlain by glacio-fluvial sands and gravels and till (boulder clay) deposits except along the western edge
- Steep sandstone outcrops, for example overlooking the *Tattenhall to Shocklach Plain*, marked by disused quarries e.g. west of Harthill
- Other disused quarries mark places where the underlying geology is not obscured by glacial deposits, for example south of Broxton
- Geology gives rise to brown sands and earths which support a mixed agricultural landscape of arable and pasture
- Predominantly late eighteenth and early nineteenth century planned enclosure by private agreement and Parliamentary Act
- Fields are typically irregular, small to medium in size and enclosed by hawthorn hedges or low sandstone walls
- Larger fields with trimmed hedges on shallower land support an increasing amount of arable crops, with an increase in landscape scale
- A greater covering of woodland than in the *Helsby to Tarporley Sandstone Fringe*, on the west facing slopes with small and medium sized copses and plantations and larger woodland including ancient woodland such as Pennsylvania Wood
- Woodland blocks provide a very strong visual image
- Complex landform around the A534 which passes east-west through the area, with prominent ridges, hidden valleys and high hedges flanking a network of narrow sunken lanes
- Township commons and areas of open heath divided and interspersed with small holdings and a complex pattern of roads, for example at Brown Knowl and Fullers Moor
- The clayey soils have a low permeability and give rise to a number of water bodies, including ponds (some used for fishing), brooks and streams. Water filled marl pits are a reminder of the past use of the boulder clay to fertilise fields
- Designated as an Area of Special County Value (ASCV) recognising the landscape and scenic quality and the historic, archaeological and ecological importance
- The settlement pattern is characterised by nucleated villages and scattered hamlets, farms and cottages, constructed from combinations of sandstone and red brick, or white washed sandstone walls and some thatch and timber framed cottages are also a feature, linked by a network of historic lanes, some sunken
- Nucleated villages and hamlets at Burwardsley, Brown Knowl and Harthill, with smaller hamlets such as Harthill grand mansion houses, for example Bolesworth Hall, Grade II* listed
- Numerous archaeological and historic sites, including prehistoric barrows, Bolesworth Castle, Harthill Conservation Area and the remains of WWII searchlight batteries
- Although this area does not provide as many recreational opportunities as the adjacent *Sandstone Ridge* it contains a number of public footpaths, including the Eddisbury Way long distance recreational footpath which links to the Sandstone Trail as it ascends the ridge at Higher Burwardsley; and fishing ponds
- The adjacent *Sandstone Ridge*, including Beeston Castle and hillfort on the distinctive *Beeston Crag*, Peckforton Castle (in Cheshire East) and Maiden Castle, forms a backdrop to views across the *Sandstone Fringe*
- Extensive views from open elevated viewpoints to the hills of north Wales in the west and the Shropshire hills to the south.

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- Undulating, in part complex landscape, the majority of which has an extensive covering of more recent drift deposits of glacial till (boulder clay) and glacio-fluvial sands and gravels (unlike the neighbouring *Sandstone Ridge*);
- Western edges are free of drift deposits where quarries indicate the presence of sandstone bedrock;
- More gently undulating in the north around Beeston, rising to around 60m AOD, with steep, exposed Wilmslow Sandstone outcrops with hidden valleys and prominent ridges to the west and south rising to 155m;
- The typically irregular, medium sized fields, particularly those dating to the medieval period or earlier, with weak hawthorn hedges and mature hedgerow oaks provide historic continuity in the landscape;
- Mixed arable and pasture agricultural land use, where larger fields with trimmed hedges on shallower land support an increasing amount of arable crops, with an increase in landscape scale, for example in the north around Beeston and to the south around Duckington where Medieval and later field enclosures have undergone enlargement within the estates of Tollemache and Bolesworth;
- The greater covering of woodland than in the *Helsby to Tarporley Sandstone Fringe*, on the west facing slopes with small and medium sized copses and plantations and larger woodland including ancient woodland such as Pennsylvania Wood;
- The field ponds (some are previous marl pits), streams and brooks including Crimes Brook that are of importance for biodiversity as well as being landscape features in their own right and contributing to the diversity of the landscape.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- The historic nucleated villages at Burwardsley and Brown Knowl;
- The township commons and areas of open heath, some of which survived into the 19th century, were often encroached by landless labourers creating a pattern of small fields interspersed with small holdings and a complex pattern of roads, for example at Brown Knowl and Fullers Moor;
- The mix of medieval and post medieval field patterns including ancient field systems which are defined by relatively small scale, irregular field units towards the centre of the character area, and larger fields such as those around Cattleside Farm to the north and Bank Farm to the south of Duckington;
- Examples of ancient woodland, including Pennsylvania Wood, Broxton Wood, Barnhill Wood and Burwardsley Wood. Some woodland has been replanted and now comprises even-aged oak, beech, sycamore and larch over an understorey of bramble, bracken and bluebells;
- The numerous archaeological and historic sites, including prehistoric barrows, Bolesworth Castle, Harthill Conservation Area recognised for its historic and architectural value, with a number of listed buildings, and the remains of WWII searchlight batteries;
- The presence of the Eddisbury Way long distance recreational footpath which links to the Sandstone Trail as it ascends the ridge at Higher Burwardsley and which bring recreational users to the area;
- Enlarged ponds/lakes for fishing, such as at Honeyend Farm and Harthill Pool.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- The settlement pattern of nucleated villages and scattered hamlets including Harthill and Duckington, farmsteads, and a number of grand mansion houses/halls such as Bolesworth Hall (Grade II* listed) and Burwardsley Hall, linked by a network of rural lanes and minor roads which maintain the rural character of the landscape;

- Buildings are typically constructed from combinations of sandstone and red brick, or white washed sandstone walls and some thatch and timber framed cottages are also a feature, linked by a network of minor roads and historic lanes, some sunken;
- Some more modern residential dwellings are also scattered along the minor roads at low density;
- Absence of large scale visually intrusive built elements.

Perceptual / Visual

- Generally quiet and rural character;
- Semi-enclosed landscape comprising a simple combination of farmland and woodland set against the backdrop of the *Sandstone Ridge*;
- The low sandstone walls associated with hedgerows or alongside roads contribute colour and texture to the landscape;
- A landscape of strong contrasts - the open, gently undulating topography and larger arable fields in the north and south, and the more complex, enclosed, small scale verdant landscape of hidden valleys and prominent ridges to the west;
- Woodland blocks provide a strong visual image;
- The adjacent *Sandstone Ridge*, including Beeston Castle and hillfort on the distinctive *Beeston Crag* outcrop, Peckforton Castle (in Cheshire East) and Maiden Castle, forms a backdrop to views across the *Sandstone Fringe*;
- Extensive views from open elevated viewpoints to the hills of north Wales in the west and the Shropshire hills to the south;
- The position of this landscape character area in the shadow of part of the *Sandstone Ridge* means it is not as visually prominent as the ridge itself. However, the undulating topography allows opportunities for views across the landscape of the *Beeston to Duckington Sandstone Fringe*. There is some settlement in this landscape (indicating the presence of sensitive residential receptors) and, although recreational use of the landscape is relatively low, there are views from the *Sandstone Ridge* across this landscape character area. The LCA is also visible from the Cheshire Plain West, to the west;
- The presence of woodland cover, hedgerow trees and undulating topography means there is 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 *Beeston to Duckington Fringe* is in active agricultural use and is managed for these land uses. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network and some over-mature hedgerow trees. Some of the sandstone boundary walls are broken, particularly alongside roads, and some woodlands are not being actively managed. However, some woodland has been replanted and now comprises even-aged oak, beech, sycamore and larch.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 3b: *Beeston to Duckington Sandstone Fringe*

- 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

- Limited boundary management and some evidence of decline and degradation in hedgerow boundaries as well as over-mature hedgerow trees;
- Sandstone walls, often forming part of hedgerow boundaries or alongside roads, are also in a declining state of repair;
- A shift from grassland to arable crops and a general reduction in the number of farm units, accompanied by an increase in field size and in the proportion of larger holdings;
- Decline in thatched buildings.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA3b: *Beeston to Duckington*

- Pressure for residential development, particularly on the edges of the larger villages such as Burwardsley and Brown Knowl;
- Pressure for holiday chalets;
- Likelihood of conversion of farm buildings for residential, business or industrial 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 roads, including signage and screen planting;
- Pressure for communication masts and other tall structures such as wind turbines, given the elevated topography and wind speeds;
- Visitor pressure with small scale recreation-related development along the Eddisbury Way leading to/from the Sandstone Trail long distance footpath and other walks, with the possible erosion of the soft sandstone, fragmentation of habitats and loss of tranquillity;
- Increase in fishing bringing more visitors and associated signage, car parking etc.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 3b: Beeston to Duckington Sandstone Fringe

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** and continue to manage the strong, distinctive wooded character and **restore** the small – medium scale field pattern by strengthening hedgerows and planting new hedges and hedgerow trees where fields have been enlarged by agricultural practices.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Encourage the continued management of existing woodlands and replanting of woods to ensure a diverse age structure and ground flora.
2. Encourage restoration of ancient field patterns by strengthening hedgerows and planting new hedges and hedgerow trees where fields have been enlarged by agricultural practices.
3. Conserve ancient field patterns, particularly those dating to the medieval period or earlier which provide historic continuity in the landscape, by encouraging the management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
4. 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.
5. Seek to repair sandstone walls where they bound fields or align roads, to conserve these as a feature of the landscape.
6. Maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil (for example as a result of increased crop growing).
7. Conserve the surviving township commons and areas of open heath at Brown Knowl and Fullers Moor.
8. 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.
9. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.

10. Conserve field ponds, brooks and streams that are of importance for biodiversity as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
11. Consider further opportunities for recreational use of the landscape as long as this does not result in 'suburbanisation' of the countryside.
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. Maintain panoramic views – consider opportunities to create additional viewpoints and increased opportunities for public views.
14. Use ASCV designation to protect the landscape and scenic quality and the historic, archaeological and ecological importance of the character area from inappropriate development.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of nucleated villages, hamlets, farmsteads and cottages away from the main urban areas.
2. Conserve the local vernacular built style - red brick/sandstone or white washed farmsteads and buildings, thatch, and sandstone walls. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles.
3. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.
4. Conserve the historic nucleated villages/hamlets at Burwardsley, Brown Knowl and Harthill.
5. Maintain the rural setting to villages and avoid locating buildings in prominent locations.
6. Ensure views of and the settings of archaeological and historic sites and buildings are not affected by new development.
7. Maintain panoramic views out from the ridge— ensure new build within and out with the character area does not block these important views.
12. Minimise impacts of the leisure industry.
13. Refer to local Village Design Statement (VDS) and Neighbourhood Plans when considering change.

