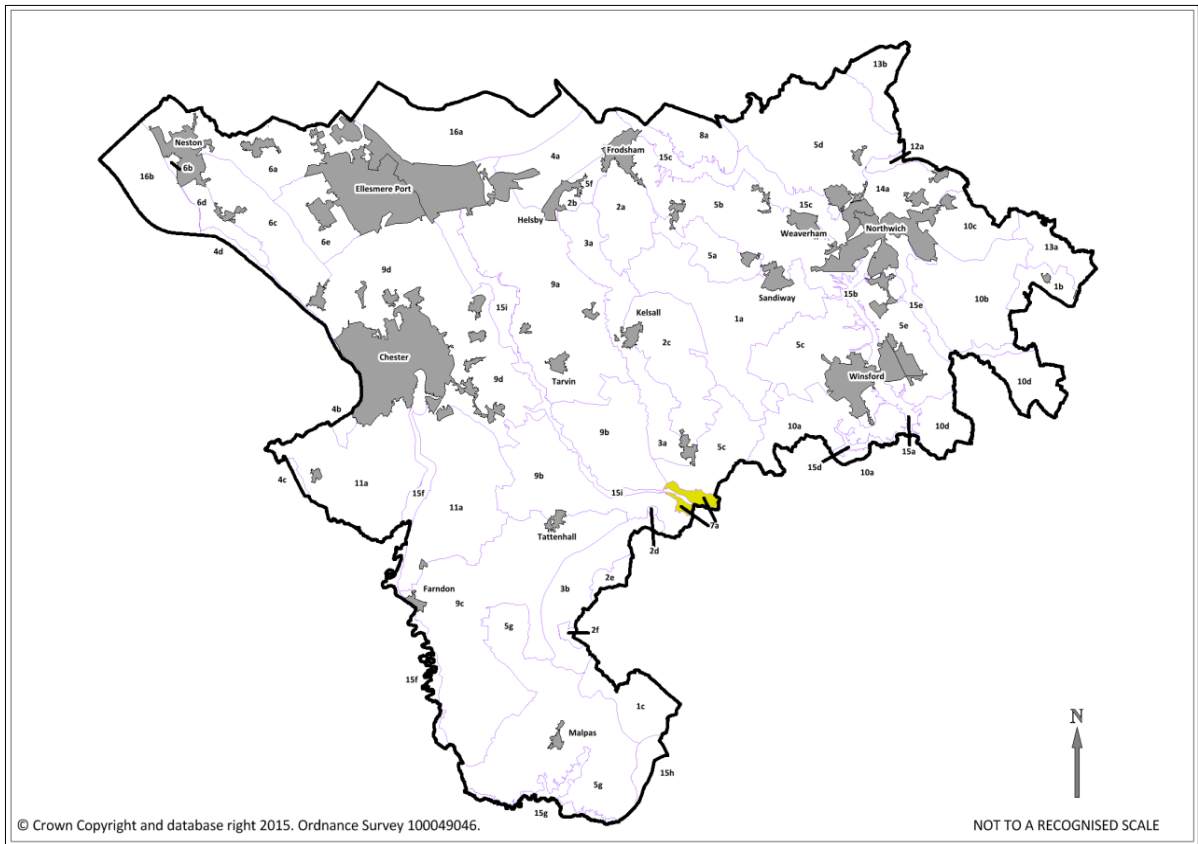


LCT 7: ROLLING FARMLAND



General Description

This landscape character type is unique within Cheshire West and Chester borough, defined by its complex rolling landform that falls steeply down to the River Gowy and the Shropshire Union Canal which pass east-west through the middle of the area. Sandstone outcrops in a series of escarpments and dip slopes create a distinctive locally hilly landscape occupying the gap between the *Sandstone Ridge* to the north and south. The topographic variations identify this as a separate character type from the surrounding more gently undulating farmland to the north and east, and the much flatter fields of the Cheshire plain to the south and west.

A railway runs through the same east-west corridor as the river and canal, utilising the low ground at the bottom of the steep hills and bridging over the A49 that runs north-south. Minor sunken lanes follow the rolling topography, offering a variety of views.

Settlement includes small villages at river bridging points, and scattered farms. The A49 river/canal crossing point has become a 'honey pot' attracting a number of different land uses taking advantage of the location near to the river, canal and railway.

The steeply rolling landform provides an intimate landscape of small to medium scale enclosure where views very much depend upon location. Occasional small to medium sized arable fields occupy some of the flatter land but grazing is the predominant land use on the steeply rolling grassland.

Visual Character

The steeply rolling landform provides an enclosed landscape where views are funnelled along the river and canal or terminate at the high ground at the edge of the character type, with no inter visibility with adjacent character areas. However, the steep ground to the north provides vantage points with views to the *Sandstone Ridge* to the south, where Beeston Castle and Peckforton Castle (within Cheshire East) are particularly prominent on the wooded hills.

Tall hedges with trees line the roads, adding to enclosure and reducing visibility. Hedgerows with trees are more intact in the west, whilst the landscape is noticeably more open with far fewer hedges and trees to the east. Wooden fencing around horse fields and gallops are noticeable boundary features in the landscape.

Physical Influences

The topography varies from 40m-70m AOD. Bedrock solid geology is Mercia Mudstones (Northwich Halite Formation) overlain by till and glacial drift deposits (mostly boulder clay with glacio-fluvial sands and gravels). Rocky Sandstone outcrops lie amongst the rolling topography; some areas have been quarried for the stone.

A number of field ponds remain from previous marl pits dug for spreading on the agricultural fields to improve its moisture holding capacity and fertility. These now provide a variety of plant and animal habitats of nature conservation importance.

Woodland is confined to a small copse of riparian ancient woodland on the banks of the River Gowy near Tiverton, a local wildlife site. Parts of the canal side are well vegetated. Tree cover is greater in the west, in contrast with the open plain, and noticeably sparser to the east in contrasting with the surrounding enclosed farmland. The area between the canal and railway, including the banks of the Gowy, are of ecological interest for the species-rich grasslands that have escaped agricultural improvement and remain undisturbed.

Cultural Influences

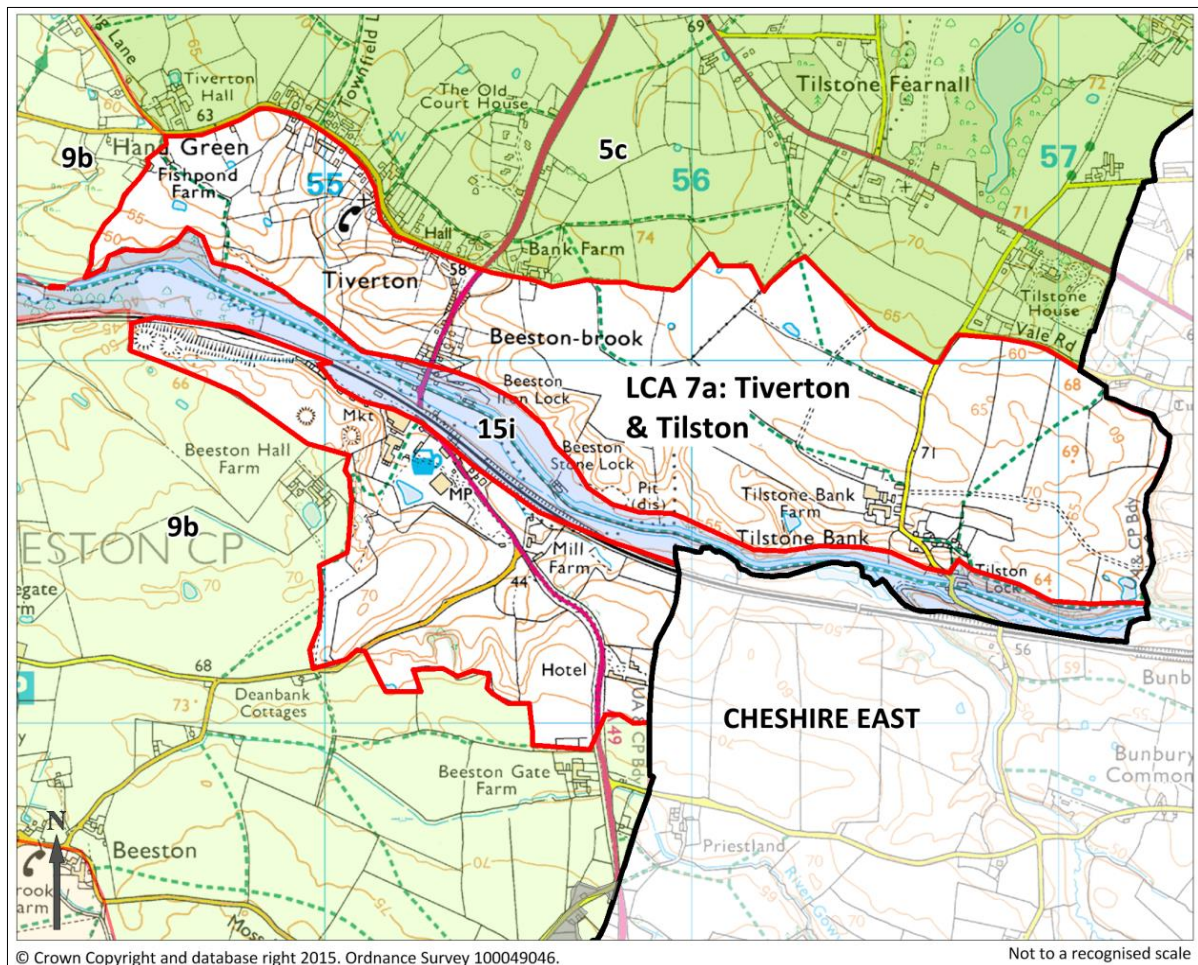
Small picturesque linear village and nucleated hamlet reflect the communications network that winds through the rolling landscape, and the amenity of the recreational facilities and features alongside the canal including a series of locks.

The villages are protected by Conservation Area status and include a number of listed buildings. There are scattered farmsteads and red brick dairy barns (with round windows) that represent examples of the red brick and timber framed 'black and white' local vernacular building style more usually associated with the Cheshire plain. The Wild Boar Hotel is another good example.

Construction of the Shropshire Union Canal (formerly The Chester Canal) in the late 18th century provided an important stopping off point to serve the local community. Some of the canal side structures such as Beeston Iron Lock and Beeston Stone Lock are also listed and are Scheduled Monuments. Two round Lengthman's Huts are also of heritage interest. Mill Farm lies close to the River Gowy (now largely silted up and inconspicuous through this character type) is one of four mills converted to private residences.

There is **one Landscape Character Area** within LCT 7:
7a: Tiverton & Tilston

LCA 7a: Tiverton & Tilston



Location and Boundaries

The ***Tiverton and Tilston Rolling Farmland*** character area is located between Tiverton to the north and west, and Beeston to the south. The character area extends eastwards and southwards beyond the Cheshire West and Chester borough boundary. The boundaries are defined primarily by geology and topography.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 7a: Tiverton & Tilston

- Complex rolling landform falling steeply down from 70m to 40m AOD
- Bedrock geology of Mercia Mudstones overlain by till and glacial drift deposits providing topographic variations
- Rocky sandstone outcrops create a distinctive locally hilly landscape
- Steeply rolling landform provides an intimate landscape of small to medium scale enclosure, fields to the west reflecting medieval enclosure around Tiverton, with larger more open fields around Tilstone Bank to the east
- A more intact hedgerow pattern and tree cover in the west, with noticeably fewer hedges and trees to the east where field boundaries have been lost; other boundaries include wooden fencing around horse fields and gallops
- Predominantly grazed pastureland but with some arable cropping on flatter larger fields
- Ancient riparian woodland
- Field ponds remain from previous marl pits dug for agricultural improvement, now providing wildlife interest
- Undisturbed area between the canal and railway is of ecological interest for the species rich grasslands
- Tiverton is a small picturesque linear village that has expanded along the A49 and Tilston Bank is a tiny nucleated hamlet; both are Conservation Areas with a number of listed buildings
- The village/hamlet and scattered farms include examples of red brick dairy barns (with round windows), thatched cottages and the red brick with timber framed 'black and white' local vernacular building style.
- The railway, River Gowry and Shropshire Union Canal run east-west within the same transport corridor on low ground at the base of the hills; the A49 passes north-south through the area
- Minor sunken lanes follow the rolling topography offering a variety of views
- Variable views depending on location; views are enclosed where they are funnelled along the river and canal and terminate at high ground at the edge of the character area, whereas the high ground provides vantage points with important views to Beeston Castle and Peckforton Castle on the wooded *Sandstone Ridge* to the south
- A series of locks on the canal, including Beeston Iron Lock, Beeston Stone Lock and Tilstone Lock, some of which are listed and Scheduled Monuments. Two round Lengthman's Huts are of heritage interest, as are the remaining mills (although these are now converted to private residences e.g. Mill Farm)
- The canal provides an important recreational facility and a stopping of point, with its locks, tow path, café, pub and a boat yard providing canal holidays
- Way marked footpaths through the fields provide links to the wider footpath network

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

- Complex rolling landform falling steeply down from 70m to 40m AOD to the River Gowry and the Shropshire Union Canal;
- Bedrock solid geology of Mercia Mudstones of the Northwich Halite Formation overlain by till and glacial drift deposits of boulder clay and glacio-fluvial sands and gravels providing topographic variations;
- Rocky sandstone outcrops in a series of escarpments and dip slopes create a distinctive locally hilly landscape occupying the gap between the *Sandstone Ridge* to the north and south;

- The topographic variations identify this as a separate character type from the surrounding more gently undulating farmland to the north and east, and the much flatter fields of the Cheshire plain to the south and west;
- Steeply rolling landform provides an intimate landscape of small to medium scale enclosure, fields to the west reflecting medieval enclosure around Tiverton, with larger more open fields around Tilstone Bank to the east;
- A more intact hedgerow pattern and tree cover in the west, with noticeably fewer hedges and trees to the east where field boundaries have been lost; other boundaries include wooden fencing around horse fields and gallops;
- Woodland confined to a small copse of riparian ancient woodland on the banks of the River Gowy near Tiverton, also a local wildlife site; parts of the canal side are also well vegetated;
- Land use is predominantly dairy pasture, with some sheep grazing on steeper slopes and horses around Tilstone Bank Farm. Some arable cropping on larger flatter fields in the east, also around Tilstone Bank Farm north of the river/canal;
- Undisturbed area between the canal and railway, including the banks of the Gowy, are of ecological interest for the species rich grasslands.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

- Nearby Tiverton Lodge was the seat of the Tollemache estate prior to the construction of Peckforton Castle (located in Cheshire East);
- Small regular field pattern to the west around Tiverton reflect the post medieval enclosures with strong hedgerow boundaries and trees; larger more open pattern to the east reflects later agricultural improvement;
- Field ponds remain from previous marl pits dug for spreading on the agricultural fields to improve its moisture holding capacity and fertility. These now provide a variety of plant and animal habitats of nature conservation importance;
- Construction of the Shropshire Union Canal (formerly The Chester Canal) in the late 18th century provided an important stopping off point to serve the local community;
- Some of the canal side structures such as Beeston Iron Lock and Beeston Stone Lock are also listed and are Scheduled Monuments. Two round Lengthman's Huts are also of heritage interest. Mill Farm lies close to the River Gowy (now largely silted up and inconspicuous through this character type) is one of four mills converted to private residences;
- A popular tourist / visitor area due to the attractions associated with the canal and the nearby attractions at Beeston Castle and Peckforton Castle (the A49 is on the brown signposted 'Leisure Drive' route);
- Good public access via the canal tow path and way marked footpaths through the fields provide links to the wider footpath network, including the nearby Sandstone Trail;
- Disused World War II fuel storage bunkers on railway sidings provide heritage interest and topographic variation (part of PLUTO; the system designed to supply petrol to the allied armies in France following D Day).

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

- Tiverton is a small picturesque linear village that has expanded along the A49 and Tilston Bank is a tiny nucleated hamlet close to the river/canal crossing; both are Conservation Areas with a number of listed buildings;
- Thatched cottages and scattered farms include examples of red brick dairy barns (with round windows), and the red brick with timber framed 'black and white' local vernacular building style. A good example is the Wild Boar Hotel on the A49;
- The railway, River Gowy and Shropshire Union Canal run east-west within the same transport corridor on low ground at the base of the hills; the A49 passes north-south through the area;
- Sunken lanes follow the rolling topography, offering a variety of views;

- A number of land uses are located along the A49 or on the railway sidings, including the site of Beeston Cattle Market/Auction (due to be developed for housing), a reclamation site, timber yard, animal health product supplier, motor repairs/sales. Residential development on the site of Beeston Castle pub (recently demolished).

Perceptual / Visual

- Generally a picturesque, tranquil, rural landscape;
- Views from low ground are enclosed where they are funnelled along the river and canal and terminate at high ground at the edge of the character area;
- High ground provides vantage points with important views to Beeston Castle and Peckforton Castle (in Cheshire East) on the wooded *Sandstone Ridge* to the south;
- Tourist facilities associated with the canal provide movement and noise;
- Traffic on the main A49, road side businesses and land uses on the railway sidings give the perception of a busy, noisy road corridor;
- Occasional woodland and canal side vegetation provide texture and interest;
- The presence of hilly and undulating topography, some woodland and hedgerow trees means that the ridges are visually prominent while the valleys are hidden. 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 *Tiverton & Tilston Rolling Farmland* is actively managed agricultural land, although some of the hedgerows have been lost or are in a declining condition. The undisturbed area between the canal and railway has the appearance of being overgrown and under managed. Some land uses associated with the busy A49 road corridor and railway sidings are not well integrated into the landscape.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of LCA 7a: *Tiverton & Tilston*

- Countryside;
- Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;
- Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets.

Forces for Landscape Change

Past change

- Decline in hedgerow field boundaries and hedgerow trees, due to agricultural improvement;
- Loss of permanent grassland and an increase in growth of arable crops on larger fields;
- Farm diversification including introduction of horse gallops with associated increase in use of timber fencing;
- Growth in visitor numbers and tourism facilities associated with the canal;
- Conversion of farm buildings;
- Conversion of mills to private residences;
- Demolition of Beeston Castle pub and residential new build;
- Increased traffic, signage etc. on the A49 has 'suburbanised' the road corridor.

Potential future change / key issues affecting LCA 7a: *Tiverton & Tilston*

- Closure and redevelopment of the cattle market (planning permission for 103 dwellings);
- Pressure from increased tourism associated with the canal, for example new moorings;
- Small infill or back land housing development could affect the setting of Tiverton and Tilston in the landscape, especially if this meant cutting into the hillside;
- Inappropriate management of undisturbed species-rich grassland between the canal and railway could reduce its attraction as a locally valued site of ecological interest;
- Road improvements to the A49 could lead to the further suburbanisation of the character area through kerbing, lighting, signage etc.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for LCA 7a: Tiverton & Tilston

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the pastoral character and local built vernacular of the landscape, and **enhance** the condition of the hedgerow and tree network.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges, gapping up incomplete 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. 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).
4. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.
5. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse gallops through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility timber fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.
6. Conserve unimproved or semi-improved species-rich grassland that is of nature conservation value, in particular in the area between the canal and railway which should be managed, and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.
7. Conserve field ponds, brooks and streams that are of importance for biodiversity as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.
8. Consider further opportunities for recreational use of the landscape as long as this does not result in ‘suburbanisation’ of the countryside.
9. Seek opportunities to extend woodland cover in areas currently of low ecological value and ensuring no detriment to historic assets – small scattered broadleaved woodland blocks, copses and riparian woodland are the most appropriate forms of woodland in this area.
10. Conserve and manage the existing area of ancient woodland along the banks of the River Gowy to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.

11. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main road, and conserve the rural character of the lanes by avoiding features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as close board fencing, kerbs, signage and lighting.
12. Conserve views to the south to the adjacent *Sandstone Ridge* and in particular the important views to Beeston Castle and Peckforton Castle.
13. Seek opportunities to screen unsightly land uses within the A49 road corridor, for example by woodland planting.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Maintain the low density settlement pattern of village, hamlet and scattered farmsteads.
2. Conserve the local vernacular built style - red brick with timber framed 'black and white' buildings, thatched cottages, red brick dairy barns with round windows. 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. Ensure horse gallops (and any future riding schools, stables and equestrian development) do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.
5. Conserve the historic nucleated hamlet at Tilston Bank and its landscape setting, ensuring that any new development does not involve cutting into the hillside, and that Tilston Bank Farm does not become over dominant.
6. Conserve the historic linear village of Tiverton and its landscape setting, ensuring that any new development occurs within the village boundary and does not involve cutting into the hillside, and will not close the gap on the A49 between the two separate parts of the village which would lead to coalescence.
7. Ensure new tourism development associated with the canal is of high quality design and responds to the built heritage features alongside the canal.
8. Soften built edges and views of land uses along the A49 road corridor and railway sidings by introducing planting schemes using native broadleaved species.

