

Description

These areas originally covered much more extensive tracts of low lying land to the centre, east and south of the Borough. They now form broken and fragmented parcels of land of varying size, often enclosed by surrounding development. Mining and extractive industries, together with residential, industrial and commercial use, have increased their fragmentation,

Specific areas of agricultural land have been taken for mining and open-cast extraction and later restored to agriculture. These areas are often characterised by their poor quality reinstatement, thin soils, poor drainage, lost hedgerows and altered ground levels.

There are a large number of ponds within the landscape, frequently identified by their fringes of willow and alder.

The undulating enclosed farmland mainly comprises of grazed pastureland, although cereal crops are frequently found, particularly around the areas of the Haigh and Haydock estates.

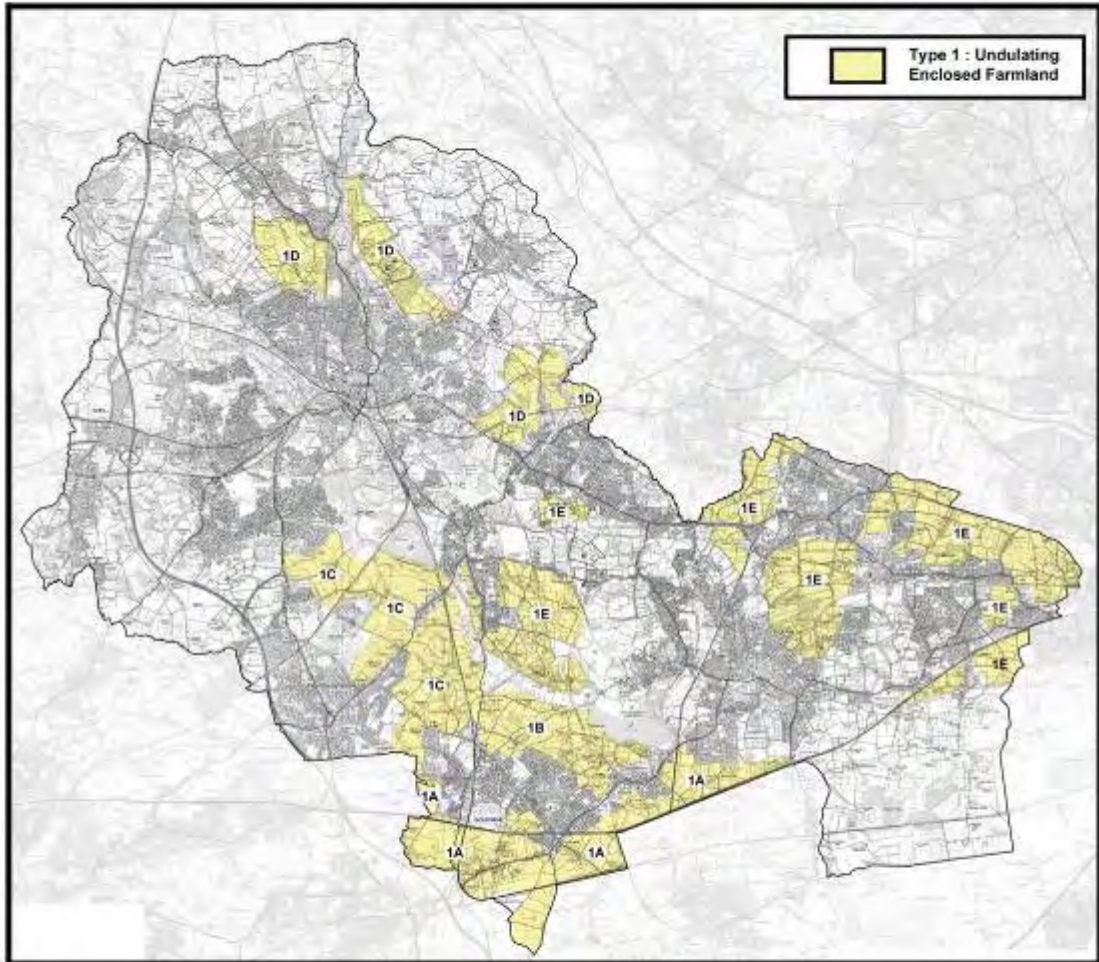


Photo. 95 View north from Critchley House, Golborne (Area B).

The arable areas are subject to high input farming, requiring large amounts of manure or organic fertiliser. The viability of the farming methods is clearly under pressure from the urban fringe and, in some locations, land has been sold or leased for horse grazing or other leisure activities.

Key Characteristics:

- Undulating enclosed farmland
- Hedgerow field boundaries, often gapped, with few hedgerow trees
- Fragmented areas of land mainly enveloped by urban, suburban and industrial development
- Mainly medium-sized fields comprising a mixture of both pasture and cereal crops
- Presence of small ponds
- Lack of woodlands, except where associated with former halls and parkland estates



Cultural History

Undulating enclosed farmland surrounds many of the villages and townships in the south, centre and east of the Borough. These areas were formerly far larger, but during the Industrial Revolution the villages and townships grew to a point where many began to link together. In addition, the widespread extraction of coal in the area subsumed large tracts of the agricultural landscape.

The Corn Laws of the early C19th protected English grain production and encouraged large-scale production. At the same time, many of the smaller fields were amalgamated to produce larger, still more efficient fields and many hedges and hedgerow trees were removed. Large-scale grain production was encouraged by the brewing industries, such as the Poolstock Brewery, Wigan and the nearby Burtonwood Brewery in Warrington. By 1724, when Defoe visited the area, Warrington was a significant agricultural centre, producing flax for the local linen industry and the local sail cloth industry. The areas of production extended north from Warrington into the south and east of Wigan.

During the C20th, grain production had been significantly reduced, but the two World Wars stimulated food production again and much of this farmland continued to be cultivated. After WW2, productivity began to decline until the UK joined the European Union and grain prices were subsidised. Arable farmers in this area still produce predominantly grain crops but tend to rotate with potatoes and to diversify into oil seed rape, turnips etc. Climate change is becoming more problematic with time and cultivation on some of the heavier soils is beginning to be reduced.

The advent of the larger populations associated with the industrialisation of the Wigan area appears to have stimulated some areas of agriculture. For instance, there are several dairy farms around this area of Wigan who clearly supply the local market. Farms around Leigh have a dairying tradition from at least early Victorian times, producing cheese and butter as well as milk. In these farms, hedgerows would have been preserved and strengthened to retain cattle.

Throughout this landscape type there are many old halls and houses, many of which were originally with moats. Some have been subsumed by urban growth, whilst others have been ruined or demolished as a result of changes to ground levels following mining.

Large-scale mining in this landscape type commenced a little later, historically, than in the Makerfield basin. The proximity of the canals or railways was a critical factor in the movement of bulk materials, but the topography and underlying geology was also a factor. It was the advent of efficient pumping which enabled collieries to operate in these areas. For example, Chanters Colliery, near Hindsford Brook, was sunk in the 1850s, commencing operations around 1864 and eventually accessing coal seams 1,832 feet down. Cleworth Hall Colliery was opened in 1870 and survived until 1961. Considerable numbers of miners and their dependants were based around these pits and the local populations soared.

Clay pits were common on areas of heavier clay soils and utilised local coal as well as supplying the collieries with brick. Almost all of these clay pits have now been infilled or ceased to function.

This landscape type is crossed by several major communication routes running north-south or east-west. The A573 Wigan / Warrington Road runs roughly north-south through the area, from just south of Golborne to Platt Bridge and through to Wigan town centre. In the south of the Borough, the somewhat convoluted east-west route, the A572 Newton Road / Manchester Road was replaced by the A580 East Lancashire Road (and this in turn by the M62 motorway, running east-west a little further south).

The Bridgewater Canal was extended through the area from Worsley to Leigh in 1795 and joined with a branch of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal which was extended from Wigan in 1819, the two canals meeting at King Street Bridge, Leigh.

The main rail routes around the town also tend to be on a north/south – east/west axis. Stephenson's Manchester to Liverpool railway line runs east-west across the south of the town. The main West Coast line was built in the 1840s running north-south and creating Wallgate Station. The original Manchester – Liverpool line built by Stephenson runs through the south of this landscape type, while the Manchester – Wigan line runs to the north.

A very large number of relatively short-lived mineral railway lines were linked to the main railway lines and the canals, most of these have now disappeared, leaving little trace.

The undulating enclosed farmland merges with large areas of similar landscape to the south in the Warrington Borough. It differs however in one small but significant respect, containing many place names with 'heath' or 'common'. The 'heath' name, with examples such as Ashton Heath and Lowton Heath, presumably refers to a period when the land in question was covered with heather and was probably poor, infertile, sandy ground not worth cultivating. The 'common', with examples such as Lowton Common and Aspull Common, is a survival from medieval times when common lands were held by the local community who had commoner's rights over the land. In surrounding Boroughs most of these commons were enclosed by the local lords of the manor and they survive in name only.

There are also a number of greens and commons throughout the landscape type, usually associated with villages and small towns. These are of considerable antiquity. They were the only areas of open space in what was historically 'close country' with many hedges and deep-set lanes.

Key cultural elements in the landscape:

- Numerous halls and historic buildings
- Colliery sites and related relicts in the form of spoil heaps, mineral lines etc.
- Main railway lines
- The Bridgewater and Leeds and Liverpool Canals

AREA 1.A EAST LANCASHIRE ROAD CORRIDOR LOWTON HEATH TO LATELY COMMON

Description

These areas form an agricultural landscape buffer to the densely developed residential areas of Golborne and Leigh to the north. Views within the area are limited due to the low-lying and relatively flat nature of the land and due to surrounding development and high hedgerows, particularly to the East Lancashire Road (A580). The East Lancashire Road is visually dominant throughout much of the area, particularly where it runs on embankments. Most of the land is closely associated with the East Lancashire Road and merges into larger areas of similar character to the south within Warrington Borough. The areas are typified by a medium to large-scale field pattern consisting of mainly arable land with poorly maintained remnant hedgerows with few hedgerow trees.



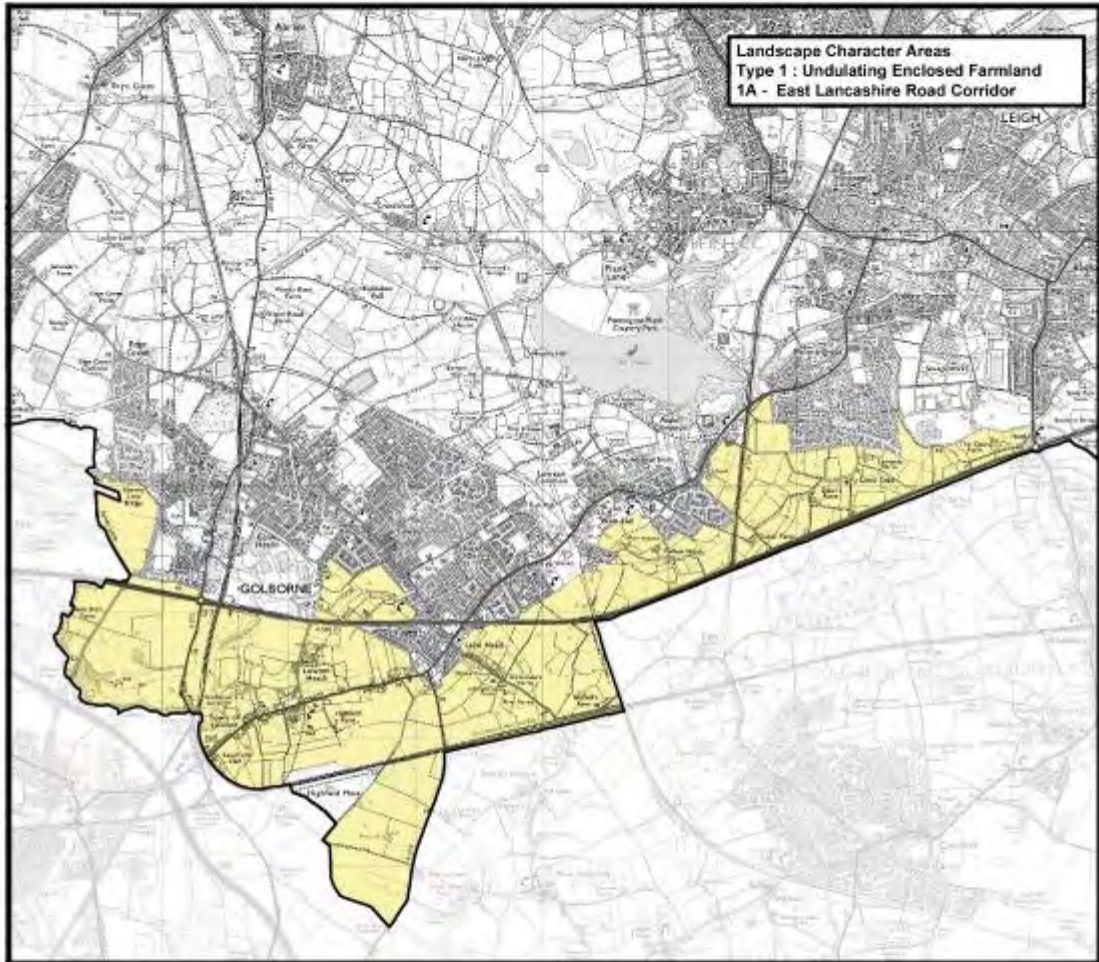
Photo. 12 View east from Warrington Road.

Small deciduous woodlands form backdrops to views within the landscape, mainly to the south at Haydock Park and along the course of Newton Brook. The land is relatively flat and low-lying to the east with more strongly undulating ground to the west. Along the western boundary the land drops steeply into the discrete valleys of Newton Brook to the west and its tributary Millingford Brook to the east. To the east of Golborne's Dale Bridge, Millingford Brook flows through a much more shallow valley profile. Carr Brook and Pennington Brook are located to the east of the area, forming minor stream tributaries to the River Glaze. The latter flow through low-lying areas of marshy ground and rough pasture.

The area is traversed by a large number of footpaths, including part of the Glazebrook Trail.

Key Characteristics:

- Medium to often large-scale fields, mainly cereal crops
- Lack of hedgerow trees
- Hedgerows between fields often gapped
- Deciduous wooded backdrops to the south and west
- Limited internal views
- The A580 road and its embankments
- Views of residential urban edge to the north
- Mainly flat land particularly to the east associated with Carr Brook and Pennington Brook
- Undulating ground to the west associated with Newton Brook and Millingford Brook



Cultural History

The East Lancashire road corridor contains a number of historic routes. The A572 Newton Road formed the early east/west route from Newton le Willows through to Leigh, in a north-east to south-west general direction via Lane Head, Lowton St Marys, Lowton Common and Pennington. The latter settlements were probably agricultural hamlets before the Industrial Revolution. The A573 Warrington / Wigan Road runs north-south through the area via Golborne.

It is probable that much of this area was concerned with textile production in the C17th and C18th, possibly producing flax and linen. By the C19th, with the repeal of the Corn Laws and the increasing amount of coal and associated industrial enterprises in the area, a local demand was created for wheat production. Increasing mechanisation in the C20th meant that farmers could dispense with many hedgerows and these were removed to produce the far larger fields present today.

The A580 trunk road was opened by King George V in 1934 and was England's first intercity highway, linking Manchester and Liverpool. The name East Lancashire Road refers to the original and unattained objective of ultimately extending the road into East Lancashire. A section of the road forms the boundary of Wigan Borough with Warrington Borough between Lately Common and Lowton St Marys. This section of the road was built on an embankment to overcome the marshy ground problems of Culcheth Carrs on the Warrington side of the road. Old Carr House, north of the road, is sited on the same marshy ground.

The Manchester – Liverpool railway line, now operated as a secondary line, was opened in 1830, its creator being the great engineer George Stephenson. It crosses the area running east west just south of Lowton Heath, having passed through Glazebury to the east on an embankment. Stephenson had great difficulties in crossing Chat Moss to the east with the railway. Originally designed as a cable railway i.e. with static engines at each end and cables between, it had particularly easy gradients of up to 1:2,000. When the 'Rocket' won the Rainhill Trials in 1829, it was assigned to this line, becoming the first locomotive powered railway in the world.

The main west coast railway line runs through the area just east of the A575 Warrington Road.

To the west of the area is Haydock Park. The racecourse at Haydock is within St Helens Borough. The racecourse was founded in 1752 at Newton-le-Willows on Golborne Heath and transferred to its current location in 1898. Haydock Park Golf Course occupies the site of Golborne Park, a site of some antiquity. Golborne Hall at the centre has substantially been demolished, but there are entrance lodges on the Golborne Road and the Warrington Road entrances. The parkland was designed on the north side of Millingford Brook and Ellam's Brook and like Haigh Hall appears to be mainly C19th plantation overlaid on semi-natural woodland in the river valley. South of the former Hall and in Newton-le-Willows is Castle Hill, a motte which may be related.

There are a number of colliery shafts in this area, although all mining activity has now ceased and all evidence of mining within the area is minimal. The Golborne Pit disaster of March 1979, when 10 miners lost their lives, is still very much in the memories of local people.

Key cultural elements in the landscape:

- Historic local roads
- Golborne Hall and Golborne Golf Course.
- The A580 East Lancashire Road.
- Stephenson's Manchester – Liverpool Railway line

Landscape Sensitivity and Change

The landscape at Lowton Heath to Lately Common has already illustrated its sensitivity to incremental development such as local housing expansion and golf course construction to the development of industrial and commercial estates and the construction of new roads such as the recently constructed Lowton St Marys by-pass (A579). These developments have all served to divide and fragment the agricultural land, reducing agricultural viability and leaving the area prone to further infill development, particularly to the north of the A580.

Arable land to the south of the A580 has had little need for hedgerows and hedgerow trees and these are consequently in a poor condition. Hedgerows are similarly in decline to the north of the A580 due to the increase in horse grazing, with barbed wire fencing relied upon for functioning field boundaries.

The area is particularly sensitive to views from the A580 and A573 (Warrington Road).

Key elements of landscape sensitivity:

- Subject to development pressure, further fragmenting the area
- Prone to pressure from the urban fringe, reducing agricultural viability
- Restricted views (mainly from A580)
- Continuing loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees

Key elements of landscape change:

- Loss of agricultural land to development
- Decline of hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Increase of barbed wire fences
- Increase of marginal land under urban pressure
- Enlargement of field sizes

Recommended Management and Landscape Objectives

Although much of the area's original small-scale field patterns have been lost, a strong outline of medium to large field boundaries are still present and form a major part of the landscape's character. In order to retain this character, it is imperative to encourage the retention, enhancement and better management of the remaining hedgerows, together with the re-introduction of new hedgerow trees. Mechanical cutting of existing hedgerows should not be at the expense of young hedgerow trees, which farmers should be encouraged to plant. Where possible, new hedgerows should be introduced, preferably along the line of former hedges, but in particular around the perimeter of the area adjacent to new development. Equestrian uses should not be encouraged at the expense of traditional farming and in particular the destructive effects of horses browsing and frequently de-barking trees should be monitored.

Woodlands are scarce in the area although they form a prominent and important part of the landscape character within the adjoining landscape to the south. Woodlands should be seen not only as important visual elements in an otherwise open landscape, but also as important recreational assets. They are also valuable in softening the often stark effects of new development abutting agricultural land, particularly where this has been rendered less viable by development. However, no large scale woodland planting should be undertaken within close proximity to the ecologically important wetlands of the Hey Brook Corridor and the Abram Flashes in Area 4C to the north. Therefore careful consideration of additional woodland planting should be encouraged only where biodiversity issues are fully explored. In particular, woodland 'edge' planting to existing woodland should be carried out using native species. Connectivity of hedgerows to small ponds, woodlands and other habitats should be an objective of both management and any proposed planting.

New development can be seen to have a major impact on the landscape, particularly where structures of mass and high elevations are concerned. The design, siting and size of such structures should therefore be carefully considered through visual impact studies and potential landscape mitigation. Views of new development from the East Lancashire Road (A580) are particularly important in this regard.

Management of the Landscape:

- Restore and enhance remaining field patterns by additional hedgerow planting
- Reintroduce new hedgerow trees.
- Encourage the rapid removal of eyesores such as derelict steel barns, tipped materials, refuse etc. particularly when these are easily viewed from major routes.
- Conserve and manage remaining hedgerows
- Conserve and manage existing woodlands to encourage habitat diversity
- Consider additional native woodland planting particularly in relation to the urban fringe.
- Consider the use of new or enhanced existing native woodland planting to soften and screen new development.

- Discourage horse grazing unless hedgerows and hedgerow trees have ensured protection and good management.
- Encourage maintenance and enhancement of visually prominent structures in and around the landscape area, such as old cotton mills, etc
- Encourage and monitor public access routes through the area, preferably along field boundaries rather than across open fields. Create, where possible, circular routes and ensure adequate waymarking. Use derelict railway lines where possible and link to similar routes outside the Borough.
- Discourage development to the south of the A580. Consider any desired development north of the A580 in association with landscape open space and woodland planting.
- No large scale woodland planting should be undertaken within close proximity to the ecologically important wetlands of the Hey Brook Corridor.

AREA 1.B ASPULL COMMON, LEIGH TO BAMFURLONG

Description

The Aspull Common, Leigh to Bamfurlong area is located between Pennington Flash/Hey Brook and the residential areas of Golborne and Lowton. It largely consists of an old landscape of distinctively small to medium scale fields supporting a variety of farming types including cereal and hay crops, stock grazing and riding schools. Hedgerows are locally gapped and wire fenced.

The land slopes gently to the north-east towards Hey Brook and Pennington Flash and contains a number of small knolls and plateau-like areas. Also present are a number of flashes and other smaller ponds associated with mining activity in the area.

Woodland areas are mainly located to the east of the area at Aspull Common, around the southern edge of Pennington Flash. Elsewhere trees are limited to small isolated clumps and as individual trees within hedgerows. The area is crossed by 3 dismantled railway lines, which remain derelict. Also lying within the area is a section of open access land partly planted with woodland to the south of Abram. This is the Forestry Commission's Viridor Community Woodland, a part of the Red Rose Forest.

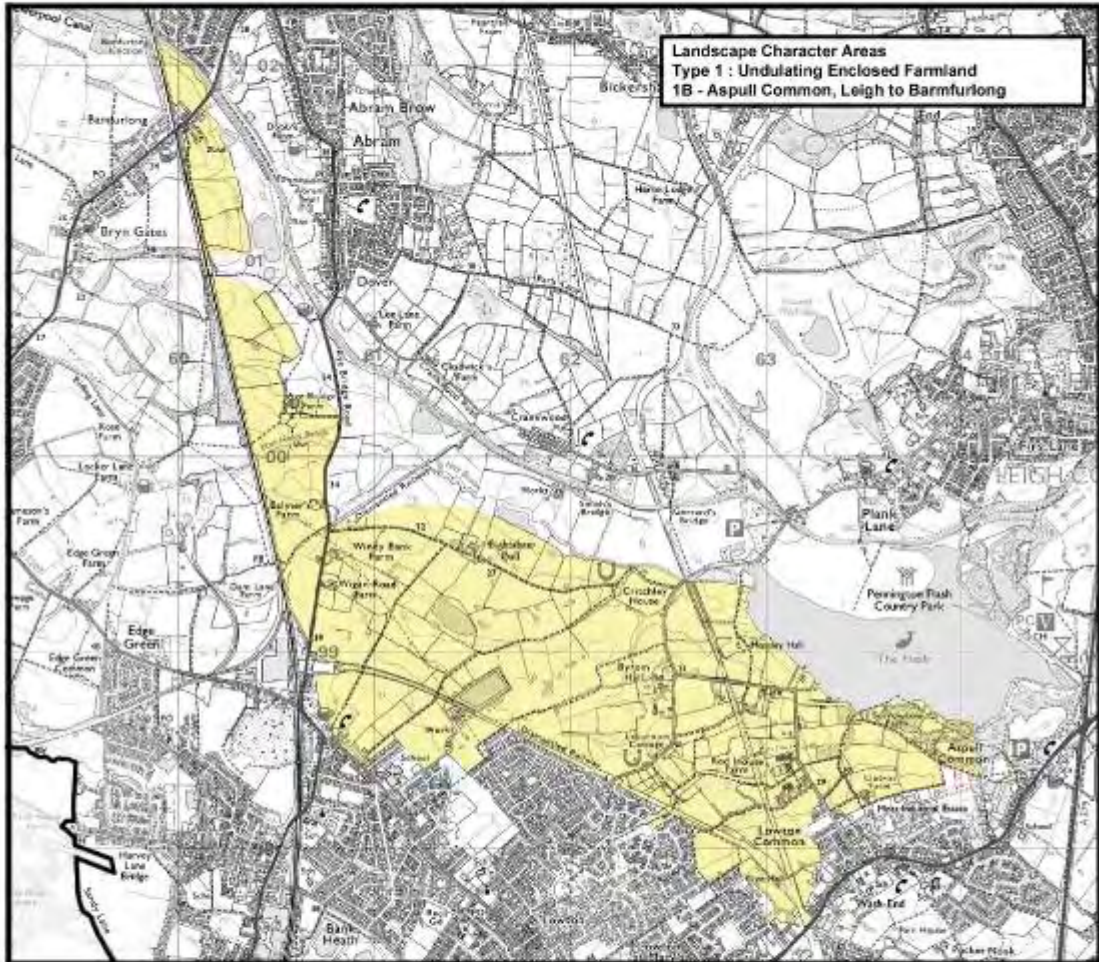


Photo. 92 View of the Lightshaw SSSI towards Lightshaw Lane and the Hey Brook Corridor.

Footpath routes are numerous, particularly to the east, with a number of historic routes and sunken ways. There are also several farms and halls of historic interest, often characteristically situated on locally elevated land. Views of the Pennines and Rivington Pike to the north are particularly notable.

Key Characteristics:

- Old landscape retaining small to medium-scale field pattern
- Locally gapped hedgerows
- Undulating ground with small knolls and plateaux
- Mixed farming types – cereal and hay crops, stock grazing and horse paddocks
- Woodland around Pennington Flash
- Numerous footpath routes, including sunken ways
- Excellent views towards the Pennines
- Old farms and halls of historic interest
- Presence of subsidence flashes and small ponds
- Open access land/Viridor Wood
- Regional ecologically important wetlands



Cultural History

This area contains a number of historic buildings such as Mossley Hall, Lightshaw Hall and Byrom Hall. The former two were originally moated. Lightshaw Hall dates from the C16th, whilst Byrom Hall was the ancestral seat of the Byroms, a noted local family. Bamfurlong Hall at the extreme north west of the area is now a farm, but stands on a moated site of similar age to the other sites in the area. This Hall belonged to the Ashton family, but in the C17th a branch of the Gerrard family of Bryn Hall, was in occupation.

A number of sunken routes through the area are of some antiquity, including Lightshaw Lane, now used as a footpath and farm track. The A573, a road of high strategic value until the construction of the M6 motorway, runs north-south through the west of the area. Part of the main West Coast line, originally built in 1832, and which forms the boundary with 1C, was expanded to four tracks when the London and North Western Railway took over the line in 1888. Many of the fields, particularly to the east of the area, remain unchanged from Victorian times.



Photo. 96 Sunken lane near Critchley House, Lightshaw.

The area was also noteworthy during the Civil War when on 27th November 1642, a small Royalist force under the Earl of Derby was moving along Newton Road on its way to Bolton when it was halted by a hastily raised levy of some 3,000 puritan locals near Atherton (locally known as Chowbent) and routed. The mounted troops of the levy (the Chowbenters) pursued Derby's troops and were badly cut up by the Royalists who managed to regroup at Lowton Common, however the arrival of the rest of the levies saw off the Royalists. The Royalists left some 200 prisoners and several dead and wounded.

This event is of interest because it clearly shows how disparate the villages around Wigan were. The Earl of Derby's headquarters for north-west England were in Wigan and yet within the Borough only two or three miles to the east were large hostile forces. The Wigan garrison on at least two occasions even set out to attack the Parliamentary held town of Bolton to the north-east. This skirmish also is of interest in that Lowton Common was almost certainly the only area of open space along Newton Road in which the Earl of Derby could draw up his troops in a battle formation.

The area has a history of non-conformity as evidenced by the skirmish referred to above. In the 1700s many non-conformists met in local cottages and Methodism took a strong hold in the area.

Mining activities with associated flashes and mineral lines all took place during the later C19th or early C20th. This disturbance appears to have substantially reduced the opportunities for agricultural improvements, badly affecting the nature and extent of holdings. In some parts of the area small fields representing a pre-industrial landscape can still be seen.

A small part of Viridor Wood, a Community Woodland, planted by the Forestry Commission through the Red Rose Forest initiative is located to the west of this area and continues on into in Character Area 1C.

Key cultural elements in the landscape:

- 'Sunken' lanes of historic interest
- Historic Halls
- Locally small, pre-industrial / agrarian revolution fields
- Reclaimed spoil heaps and flashes from colliery workings

Landscape Sensitivity and Change

The Aspull Common, Leigh to Bamfurlong area has a very distinctive character representing a surviving remnant of an old agricultural landscape, comprising of small, hedged fields punctuated by old farms, halls and historic routes. These features however are very susceptible to the encroachment of development from the urban fringe of Lowton and also to unsympathetic restoration of the older individual buildings set notably within the agricultural landscape.

The distinctive character of this area can also be easily degraded by the enlargement of field boundaries and by further decline in the quality of the hedgerows and hedgerow trees through horse-grazing.

Flashes and small ponds are present within the farmland but do not appear to be utilised by the public. The smaller ponds in particular are prone to silting up and to being infilled by farm debris. These small bodies of wetland are important wildlife resources and are sensitive to changes in size, water level and pollution.

Key elements of landscape sensitivity:

- Subject to recreational and development pressure from the urban fringe to the south
- Gradual decline in hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Sensitive to unsympathetic restoration/development to older, isolated and more historic buildings in the landscape
- The survival of farm ponds and small flashes
- The survival of a number of sunken lanes and ancient routes.

Key elements of landscape change:

- Loss of agricultural land to housing/industrial development
- Decline of hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Increase in number of barbed wire fences
- Incidence of ponds and subsidence flashes from previous mining activity
- Routes of disused railway lines remain imposed on the landscape
- Mining activity with associated flashes and mineral lines originating from 19th/early 20th century.

Recommended Management and Landscape Objectives

The small scale field patterns found within the area are unique within Wigan and reflect a much older and more historic agricultural landscape worthy of protection, conservation and where appropriate enhancement. Further to the west, this landscape has already been modified by previous mining activity with much larger field patterns developing associated with woodland/open space. Field boundaries generally should be respected discouraging any further losses of hedgerow removal/ enlargement of field sizes. Remaining hedgerows should be encouraged to receive better management, restoration and the reintroduction of hedgerow trees. The use of agricultural land for horse grazing should be discouraged unless the protection of existing trees and hedgerows can be ensured.

New/additional woodland planting and open space should be considered:-

- 1) to create greenway links between existing open space areas (eg: The Three Sisters Recreation Area and Viridor Wood with links to Pennington Flash Country Park)
- 2) to create a buffer to the urban fringe between Golborne and Edge Green.
- 3) to create greenways utilising the network of disused railway lines, thus connecting local communities with their surrounding countryside.
- 4) to encourage sensitive management practices and encourage tree planting only where it is complementary with the biodiversity objectives for the ecological enhancement of the Hey Brook corridor.

The presence of small ponds and flashes in the area is an asset both aesthetically and for wildlife although many of these features are neglected and occasionally abused. Their retention and management should be actively encouraged.

A number of historic buildings are located in prominent locations. Some of these have architectural merit and should be carefully conserved, but most importantly, their landscape setting should also be conserved and enhanced. Views both out from and into these buildings will have been a material consideration when they were built and should be taken into consideration in the landscape setting.

This area includes the Forestry Commission's Byrom Hall Community Woodland, an area of Open Access south of Lightshaw Hall and west of Byrom Hall. While welcome in principle, open access land should be subject to careful monitoring to ensure that public access does not conflict with the wildlife importance of the area.

The area has a great wealth of existing footpaths along sunken ways, former railway lines and farmland through interesting and varied countryside - often with a great deal of agricultural and industrial history. The area has considerable potential for passive recreation and heritage interpretation, with links northwards to Pennington Flash Country Park and the Ruses Activity Park.

Management of the Landscape:

- Restore and enhance remaining field patterns by additional hedgerow planting, particularly retaining the small field patterns to the east
- Introduce new hedgerow trees
- Conserve and manage remaining hedgerows
- Conserve and manage existing woodlands, ponds and flashes to encourage habitat diversity, compatible with the sensitive management of the Hey Brook Corridor to the north
- Consider additional native woodland planting and footpaths creating structured open space and pedestrian/bridleway links to surrounding areas
- Consider the use of native planting to soften and screen the urban edge to the south and any new development
- Discourage horse grazing unless hedgerows and hedgerow trees have ensured protection and good management
- Encourage the restoration and conservation of small ponds and flashes
- Consider an expansion of the footpath/bridleway system particularly along disused railway lines routes and explore the potential for improved area and landscape interpretation. Create, where possible, circular routes and ensure adequate waymarking.
- Conserve and enhance the settings of historic buildings.

- Encourage the removal of eyesores such as derelict steel barns, tipped materials, refuse etc. particularly when these are easily viewed from major routes.

AREA 1.C EDGE GREEN TO LAND GATE

Description

The area is characterised by a sparsity of field boundaries, creating a series of medium to very large fields. This contrasts markedly with the adjoining area (Aspull Common, Leigh to Bamfurlong). The land is divided by the Wigan/St Helens railway line and the A58 Bolton Road running north-east/south-west across the area. Between the A58 and the railway, field boundaries are mainly formed by ditches creating a large-scale and open landscape with sweeping views to the north-east. To the west of the railway line and south of the A58, fields are defined by both ditches and hedgerows, creating a more medium-scale field pattern. Farming to both sides of the railway comprises a mixture of both cereal crops and pasture. Pasture land tends to be defined by hedgerows.



Photo. 141 Locker Lane Farm, Edge Green Lane

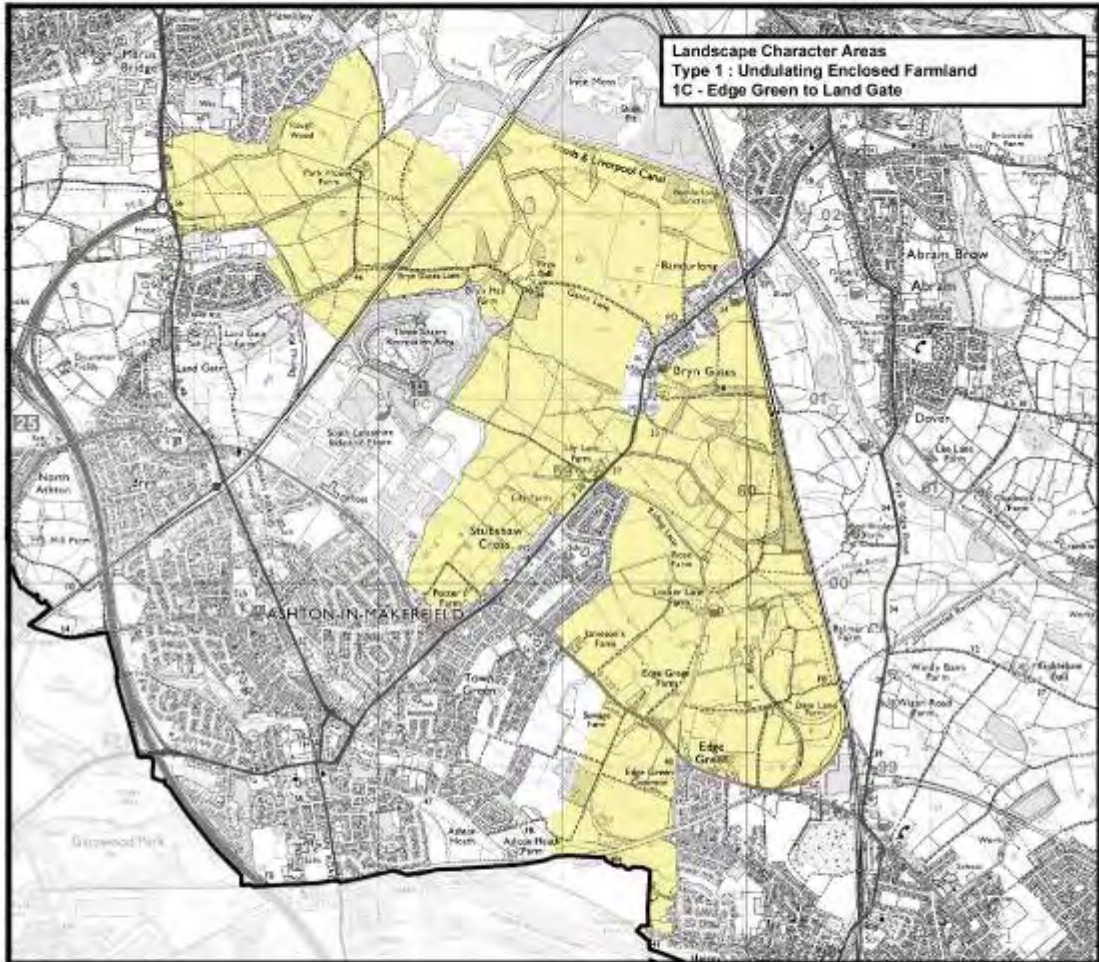
The land gently falls to the north-east towards the Leeds and Liverpool Canal with slightly steeper gradients to the west of the St Helens/Wigan railway. To the south of the A58, land is more disturbed and undulating, rising to a low ridgeline to the west followed by Golborne Road (B5207). The ridgeline also affords excellent views to the east and south.

Woodlands are scattered and mainly associated with Haydock Park, Three Sisters Recreation Area, Viridor Wood and with former reclamation schemes adjoining the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. Viridor Wood was planted by the Forestry Commission as a community woodland on previously reclaimed colliery spoil.

A major footpath link and access route follows Bryn Green Lane from Bryn Gates to Land Gate as a stone track.

Key Characteristics:

- Open landscape of reclaimed former colliery workings and now consisting of medium to very large fields
- Sparse hedgerows associated with pasture and roadsides
- Sweeping views to the north-east
- Generally north-east sloping land including ridgeline to the south
- Scattered woodlands including Three Sisters Recreation Area and Viridor Wood



Cultural History

Golborne Road, the B5207, is possibly of some antiquity as it runs along the top of a ridge ascending towards the junction with Bolton Road.

The railway which forms the eastern boundary of this area was the Wigan Branch Railway, which ran from its junction with the Liverpool to Manchester Railway line at Parkside into Wigan and was opened in 1832. When the London and North Western Railway took over the line in 1888 it was expanded to four tracks, reflecting the quantities of coal being moved along it. This is now part of the main West Coast line. To the west of the area, another railway line, opened in 1869 by the Lancashire Union Railways. This was operated by London and North Western Railway and eventually taken over by them. It connected Wigan to Liverpool and was expanded to four tracks in 1892.

A number of smaller mineral railway lines ran between these two main lines, paid for by colliery owners and connecting a number of collieries together.

Bryn Hall, located between Bryn Gates and Land Gate, was held by the Gerrard family and remained their principal seat from approximately 1250. The Gerrards held land elsewhere in Lancashire and attained high rank in the C16th. Bryn Hall was a large quadrangular building set in a moated site. The Gerrard family were staunch Catholics and suffered as a result. Charles II stayed at the Hall on his way south with a Scottish Royalist army to his defeat at Worcester in 1651.

The large fields indicated on the 1849 OS maps around Bryn Hall hint at a parkland area between Bryn Hall and Bryn Gates, perhaps later divided into fields. This would have incorporated the woodland of Bryn Wood and Coffin Wood as well as Gorse Covert.

There are various mines in the area. Mains Colliery, south-east of Bryn Gates, was sunk in the 1840s and was a large employer of miners. It closed in 1960. Lilly Lane Colliery south-west of Bryn Gates was sunk in the late 1860s and closed in 1919.

To the east of the area, south of Abram and just west of the main West Coast Railway line, is a substantial area of reclaimed land known as Viridor Wood – encapsulating some of Hey Brook and a small flash. Viridor Wood has been planted on an area of colliery waste and stretches from the Three Sisters Recreation Area in the west to Hey Brook Corridor in the east. It is a Community Woodland, planted by the Forestry Commission through the Red Rose Forest initiative. Planting over this area is immature, but there are many clearings and a network of public footpaths creating a pleasant environment for walkers.

Key cultural elements in the landscape:

- Bryn Hall
- Various former collieries and reclaimed spoil heaps throughout the area
- Viridor Wood Community Woodland

Landscape Sensitivity and Change

The area appears to have lost much of its former agricultural character and is now being represented by a much larger field pattern with large-scale open areas undefined by hedgerows. The open views created leave any new features in the landscape exposed and difficult to relate to existing or natural features. The landscape has already lost much of its

former sensitivity and original character, although still serves an important role in providing a continuous broad belt of agricultural land reaching towards the outskirts of Wigan. Any further development along Bolton Road would serve to break up and fragment this 'open space' agricultural corridor.

Recent changes in the landscape have taken place by the restoration of colliery workings adjacent to Edge Green Lane. This area had previously lost all its hedgerows and field patterns and has now been planted as a Community Woodland, part of the Forestry Commission's Viridor Wood.

Key elements of landscape sensitivity:

- Agriculture is subject to recreational and development pressure from the urban fringe to the south and to further development in association with Bolton Road
- Continual decline of residual hedgerows
- Sensitive to development within the open farmland

Key elements of landscape change:

- Loss of agricultural land to housing/industrial development
- Decline and substantial loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees, resulting in very large fields
- Restoration following on from mining activity, resulting in a reduction of agricultural quality and necessity for open ditch drainage
- Incidence of ponds and flashes from previous mining activities with associated improvements in biodiversity
- Viridor Community Woodland

Recommended Management and Landscape Objectives

A large number of field boundaries and hedgerows have been lost in this area creating a somewhat bleak and 'industrial scale' landscape. Any opportunity to reinstate a more traditional agricultural landscape should be encouraged either by hedgerow replanting and/or by native woodland planting which would be particularly suitable on less viable agricultural land around the urban fringe of both Wigan and Ashton in Makerfield. This would both create a more human scale and welcoming landscape and provide a greater diversity of habitats for wildlife.

The agricultural land forms an important 'green' buffer between the town of Wigan to the north and Ashton in Makerfield to the south. Any intrusion into this land by development would weaken this separation.

In association with the previous Area 1B, a more structured and interlinked open space and footpath/bridleway system could be considered connecting the Three Sisters Recreation Area with Viridor Wood thus creating a potential link back to the urban areas to the south. Also notably absent in the area is a direct footpath link to the north onto the Leeds and Liverpool Canal towpath and the Wigan Flashes.

This area includes a woodland planted using Forestry Commission grants and has been designated as an area of Open Access. While welcome in principle, open access land should be subject to careful monitoring to ensure that public access does not result in disturbance of wildlife habitats.

Bryn Gates Lane (a hardcore track) also provides a strategic footpath link across agricultural land between Land Gate and Bryn Gates. This provides excellent long distant views towards the Pennines but the route itself is open, exposed, relatively featureless and an unattractive. Consideration could be given to improving this route by hedgerow and tree planting to create a more attractive footpath route.

The presence of small ponds and flashes in the area is an asset both aesthetically and for wildlife although many of these features are neglected and occasionally abused. Their retention and management should be actively encouraged.

Management of the Landscape:

- Recreate strategically important hedgerows defining perimeter boundaries e.g: along Bryn Gates Lane.
- Reintroduce new hedgerow trees to remaining and new hedgerows
- Conserve and manage remaining hedgerows
- Conserve and manage existing woodlands, ponds and flashes to encourage habitat diversity
- Consider additional native woodland planting and footpaths creating structured open space and pedestrian/bridleway links to surrounding areas. eg: reinforcing the linking the Three Sisters Recreation Area to Viridor Wood and creating new footpath links to the Leeds and Liverpool canal towpath.
- Consider the use of native planting to soften and screen the urban edge to the south and any new development
- Encourage the restoration and conservation of small ponds and flashes
- Encourage the removal of eyesores such as derelict steel barns, tipped materials, refuse etc. particularly when these are easily viewed from major routes.
- Discourage any further development and erosion of the open space/green buffer between Wigan and Ashton in Makerfield.

AREA 1.D BOARS HEAD, LOWER HAIGH AND HINDLEY HALL

Description

Area 1.D comprises 3 closely related, but separated, parcels of land to the north and north-east of Wigan. These areas occupy the lower slopes to rising ground and form gently sloping and undulating land, falling towards the centre of Wigan

The Boars Head area forms the base of a large spur leading up to the village of Standish and mainly comprises of large fields of cereal crops with managed hedges in reasonable condition. Hedgerow trees are sparse. The area is closely related to housing areas to the south and north, with a large cemetery to the east. These areas are all connected by public footpaths running through the farmland. The landscape has an enclosed feel with views limited to internal areas.



Photo 153 Boars Head

The Lower Haigh area again occupies more gently sloping lower slopes, slightly below the Leeds and Liverpool Canal which contours the Aspull Ridge. The farmland is used for cereal crops and grazing, particularly for horses. Fields are of a large to medium size. Hedgerows tend to be of a gapped nature and in moderate to poor condition with few hedgerow trees. Large woodlands are present to the west, forming a visual screen along the valley of the River Douglas, together with large woodlands associated with Haigh Lower Plantation. Views are long distance to the south and south-west across Wigan and the Billinge/Orrell Ridge.



Photo 131 View towards Borsdane Wood from Hall Lane.

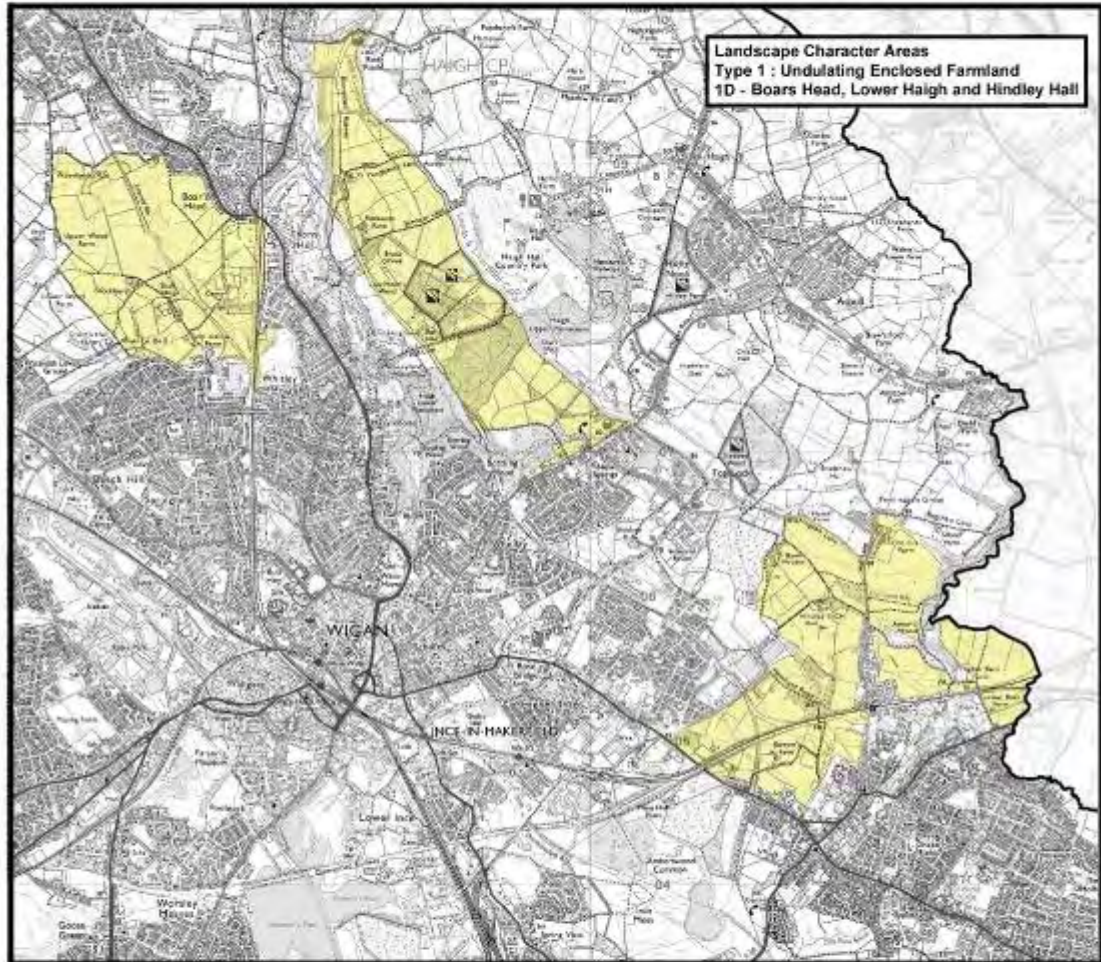
The agricultural and open space areas of Hindley Hall are separated from the Lower Haigh farmland by the housing and industrial areas of New Springs, Top Lock and Kirkless. Agricultural land is mainly situated to the east of Hall Lane. Field sizes are medium to large and mainly used for cereal crops. Hedgerows are largely absent. To the east, the farmland is dissected by the heavily wooded and steeply sloping valley of Borsdane Brook. Long distance views are again afforded to the west and south. The core of the area, to the west of Hall Lane, has been heavily influenced by former mining activity, including partially restored and planted spoil heaps adjacent to Top Lock and by the former 'parkland' of Hindley Hall. Large areas to the south are now occupied by Hindley Hall Golf Course.

All three areas bear evidence of disturbed ground from mining activity and/or associated, now disused, railway lines.

Key Characteristics:

- Occupy lower slopes to rising ground
- Associated mature 'parkland'/plantation woodlands
- Medium to large fields, mainly cereal crops
- Hedgerows gapped and absent in former parkland areas
- Localised areas affected by former mining activity

- Former railway lines now disused
- Long-distance views to the south and south-west



Cultural History

The A49 runs to the north of this area, ascending from the Douglas valley up to Standish. This is an ancient route and probably a Roman road. The Boars Head area is named from the Boar's Head Inn, built on the orders of the Standish family c.1450. The area has remained as farmland for a considerable period, but was affected by a mineral railway line running from the present West Coast Main Line towards, Giant's Hall Colliery to the west. A further branch ran to Gidlow pit a little further north. Evidence of these lines has now largely disappeared.

Gidlow Cemetery, to the east of the Boars Head area, is a relatively new development within the landscape.

The Lower Haigh Area was traversed by the 'Whelley Loop' of the Lancashire Union Railways Co. which was set up in the 1860s with the support of the owner of Haigh Hall, the Earl of Balcarres and Crawford. The line was removed in the 1970s. Sections of the line have recently been upgraded to provide a surfaced multi-user route and strategic greenway. To the extreme south of this area were the sites of Alexandra Pit and the nearby Lindsey Pit. Alexandra Pit was sunk in the 1870s and linked to Lindsey Pit, which acted as a ventilation shaft. Both pits were deepened in the 1890s. Lindsey Pit was abandoned in 1932 and Alexandra Pit was closed in 1955. The pithead areas were later subjected to opencast mining although little now remains of the mines. The Lower Haigh Plantation was planted by the Earl of Balcarres in the early C19th and is designated a Site of Biological Interest (SBI).



Photo. 132 Hindley Hall Lake.

Hindley Hall was built around 1767 and accessed via a long drive from Hall Lane. It was surrounded by parkland containing lake features which appear to have been developed in three areas. South of the Hall there is a large open area with thick woodlands to the boundary, including Icehouse Wood in which an icehouse was situated. There are no field

boundaries in this area. To the north of the Hall are two lakes, connected by a waterfall in turn crossed by a footbridge. Around the lakes, field boundaries are still evident, indicating that the area was made into parkland later than the area to the south. To the east and encompassing part of the valley of Borsdane Brook, the park is evidently still more recent. Woodland in the valley was reinforced with plantation plantings and America Wood was planted in a tributary valley to the south. By the later C19th, the parkland area was restricted to an area to the western side of Ladies Lane and a number of mineral railway lines cut through the estate. Hindley Hall Golf Course now occupies most of the parkland core.

Key cultural elements in the landscape:

- Former collieries, spoil heaps and associated mineral railway lines
- Former railway line – the ‘Whelley Loop’
- Plantation woodlands associated with historic hall
- Hindley Hall Golf Course and associated C19th lakes

Landscape Sensitivity and Change

The landscape of the Boars Head area is inter-related with and forms part of the Standish Spur. This is a significant landform and area of agricultural space running from the Standish Crest towards the centre of Wigan. It is also a visually important landmark and would be extremely sensitive to encroachment by development from the south and east.

Lower Haigh is a similarly dominant area of agricultural land forming slightly elevated land to the eastern side of Wigan. The farmland and associated large plantations of woodland also have historic links to the Haigh Hall Estate and would again be sensitive to inappropriate development.

The Hindley Hall area has, in certain places, been more adversely affected by former mining activity and elements of its landscape to the west of Hall Lane may be less sensitive to change than the more pristine farmland between Hall Lane and Borsdane Wood. However this area as a whole forms a visually important open space and ‘farmland’ edge to the centre of Wigan and further development within the area should be considered carefully.

Key elements of landscape sensitivity:

- Subject to development and recreation pressure from urban edges
- Visually important areas of farmland/open space
- Historically significant landscape areas
- Hedgerows and hedgerow trees subject to continued decline

Key elements of landscape change:

- Loss of agricultural land to housing/industrial development, notably in the Top Lock and Hindley areas
- Increase in field sizes resulting in loss of hedgerows

- General decline in hedgerows and hedgerow trees (excluding Boars Head area)
- Leeds and Liverpool Canal
- Parkland landscape and woodland plantations
- Introduction of railway lines and areas of coal extraction

Recommended Management and Landscape Objectives

A large proportion of the hedgerows in these areas are gapped and often neglected. They mainly divide cereal crop fields acting as agricultural boundaries rather than functioning stock barriers, whilst many of the fields have historically been enlarged removing hedgerow field sub-divisions. The resulting medium to large field pattern however now forms a major part of the area's landscape character. In order to retain this character, it is imperative to encourage the retention, enhancement and better management of the remaining hedgerows, together with the re-introduction of new hedgerow trees. In the Hindley Hall area between Hall Lane and Borsdane Wood, hedgerows have been removed on a much larger scale creating a vast featureless landscape alien to the area's heritage. Hedgerows in this location have previously provided important wildlife corridors to and from the Borsdane valley and woodland. This function however has now largely been lost. The removal of hedgerows on this scale should be discouraged and where possible new hedge planting in the area reinstated.

Large areas of woodland are present in the Lower Haigh and Hindley Hall areas contributing to a major part of the landscape's character. These form important recreational assets and are well linked by footpath systems. Continuous woodland along the valley of the River Douglas is noticeably absent which is out of character compared with the all the other steep sided valleys in the Wigan area. Additional woodland planting could therefore be considered between the river and the dismantled Whelley Loop railway line running between the Lower Haigh Plantations and Red Rock Lane. New woodland planting has already been undertaken to a spoil tip adjacent to Top Lock. Consideration should be given to extending the planting to soften the industrial development to the south and west and also to reinforcing the Woodland Trust's woodland, north of the canal, to establish a corridor link with Woodshaw Ruck towards the Aspall Ridge in the north.

The Lower Haigh and Hindley Hall areas are traversed by the former Whelley Loop Line, a disused railway running from the developed areas of Ince in Makerfield through to the open countryside to the north east of the Worthington Reservoirs. This has tremendous potential for use as a strategic multi-user greenway route with continuing links to Amberswood Common and further south to Pennington Flash Country Park. As a strategic route across Greenheart, the regional park, it facilitates the interpretation of the history of the landscape and industrial sites en-route .

Pressure for development affecting viable agricultural land should be resisted in favour of brown field development associated with the existing urban fringe.

Management of the Landscape:

- Restore and enhance remaining field patterns by additional hedgerow planting
- Reintroduce hedgerow trees

- Conserve and manage remaining hedgerows
- Replant/reinstate major field hedgerows in the Hindley Hall area.
- Conserve and manage existing woodlands to encourage habitat diversity
- Consider additional native woodland planting particularly in relation to the urban fringe and along the River Douglas valley.
- Continue with the development of further phases of Whelley Loop Line multi-user route to create a strategic greenway and related interpretation through the Lower Haigh and Hindley Hall areas.
- Restrict further development to brown field sites in association with the existing urban fringe.
- Encourage the removal of eyesores such as derelict steel barns, tipped materials, refuse etc. particularly when these are easily viewed from major routes.

AREA 1.E FRAGMENTED AREAS INCLUDING ALDER FARM (HINDLEY), BICKERSHAW/CRANKWOOD, GIBFIELD, HOWE BRIDGE/ATHERTON HALL, SHAKERLEY/MOSLEY COMMON, GARRETT HALL AND HIGHER GREEN (ASTLEY)

Description

Area 1.E comprises a number of separated blocks of generally low lying land to the east of Wigan, including Alder Farm, south of Hindley; land east of Abram, north of Crankwood and west of the former Bickershaw Colliery; Gibfield west of Hag Fold; Atherton and Howe Bridge; open land contained by the towns of Leigh, Atherton and Hindsford; the Shakerley and Mosley Common area north of Tyldesley; Garrett Hall and Higher Green, Astley, all of which are surrounded or fringed by residential and/or industrial land. Their landscape character however is similar and prior to industrial and residential expansion, these areas would have been connected. They retain a form of agricultural character, although all have been adversely affected by urban/suburban pressure and disturbance, resulting in generally low-grade farmland. Many of the areas have also been affected directly by previous mining activities, followed by reinstatement. This has returned the land to agricultural use but often in a degraded form. Many of the pre-industrial field boundaries however still remain and are represented by small to medium fields.

The land is mainly used as pasture, although often poorly drained with numerous ponds resulting from mining subsidence. Ditches are frequent. Occasional fields of cereal crops are also present, although these are often stony and with subsoil contamination. Hedgerows are generally in a poor condition and badly gapped with few hedgerow trees, again often in a poor condition also. Woodlands are either absent or represented by small scale copses or recently planted small woods. Views are mainly internal with surrounding development often forming a backdrop.

The Alder Farm area is a very small enclosed parcel of land containing rough pasture to the immediate south of Hindley and north of the Forestry Commission's Barlow's Farm Community Woodland, Bickershaw. The land is under heavy pressure from the residential area to the north and is largely grazed by horses.

The Abram east, Crankwood and west Bickershaw area forms a large parcel of land ranging from pasture fields and hedgerows in reasonable condition to the south, to areas of more disturbed rough grazing affected by mining subsidence in the north-east. Remnant hedges are present, supplemented by barbed wire fences. Many parts of the area are used for horse grazing. The area generally is affected by a number of disused railway lines now naturally regenerated with trees and scrub. Hedgerow trees are sparse.



Photo 116. Crankwood.

The Gibfield area occupies pasture land between Atherton Way (A579) and Hall Lea Brook. The land is heavily grazed by horses with very poor quality gapped hedgerows and barbed wire fencing.

The Howe Bridge/Atherton Hall area is dominated by a knoll on which Atherton Hall stands, together with its associated mature woodland (Atherton Wood and Lilford Park). The area contains former pasture parkland to the south and more heavily disturbed and reclaimed land to the north, including the planting of new hedgerows and strip woodlands at field boundaries. The quality of former agricultural reinstatement appears to be higher than normal and the agricultural land appears more viable. Land directly associated with Atherton Hall does not appear to have been affected by previous mining activities. Running through the area from east to west is the Hindsford Brook, notably confined by its straightened course between levees with adjoining fields of cereal crops and rape seed. Disused railway lines and embankments also cross the area.



Photo. 88 Langley Platt Lane.



Photo. 82 Combermere Lane, Tyldesley.

The Shakerley/Mossley Common area is surrounded by housing to the south-east and west and defined by the Borough boundary and railway line to the north. The land falls gently to the south and includes the reclaimed and regraded former colliery spoil heap to the west of Cleworth Hall. This is a steeply sided hill and dominant feature in the landscape, partially grazed by livestock and partially planted as woodland. The bulk of the area however continues to be farmed and ranges between well-managed mixed pasture and arable crops to the west/centre of the area, towards poorer rough grassland and horse-grazing around New Manchester.



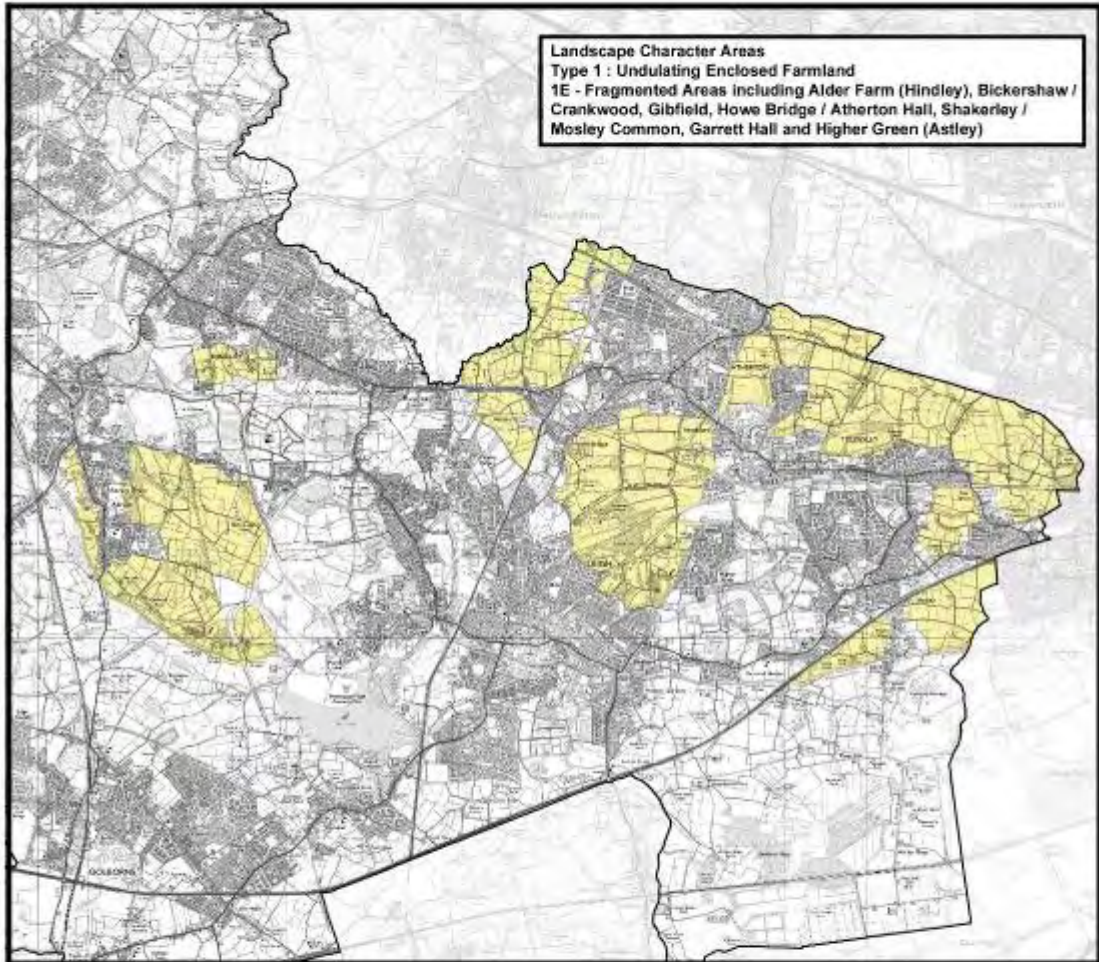
Photo. 85 Garrett Lane.

The Garrett Hall area is completely surrounded by residential and industrial land, and by a cemetery on the north/west boundary. Honksford Brook passes through the area from east to west and occupies a section of a short but attractive valley with mature woodland and trees found associated with the cemetery and along the Brook. The land is mainly used as pasture for dairy farming with hedgerows retained and managed in a reasonable condition. The area is also crossed from east to west by a track/footpath known as Garnett Lane. The track is adversely affected by urban pressures and subject to substantial areas of fly tipping and general rubbish.

The Higher Green area occupies a triangular area of land between the Bridgewater Canal and the East Lancashire Road (A580) and has been extensively affected by open-cast working between the existing field boundaries. This is evidenced by sunken fields with poor drainage and subsidence hollows with raised field boundaries. Hedgerows are vestigial and gapped and contain occasional hedgerow trees in a generally poor condition. The fields are used for mainly pasture with some cereal crops on exposed soil contaminated with subsoil and stone.

Key Characteristics:

- Surrounded or fringed by residential and/or industrial land
- Often reinstated poorly and returned to agricultural use following mining activity
- Urban/suburban pressure (fly-tipping, horse grazing)
- Low grade farmland (mainly pasture)
- Often poorly drained (flashes, ponds and ditches)
- Often retaining pre-industrial field patterns
- Hedgerows in poor condition with few hedgerow trees
- General lack of mature woodlands (excluding Atherton Hall)
- Internal views



Cultural History

The Bickershaw/Crankwood area comprised of farmland in 1849, containing a multitude of small hedged fields with hedgerow trees and many small ponds. This is indicative of small scale dairy farming on clay soils. Throughout the C19th, mining activities took place both adjacent to this area (Bickershaw Colliery) and under it. The northern end of the area appears to have suffered from subsidence as a result of the mining. The GCR Wigan Junction Branch, a mineral railway line, ran across the area from north to south but was later removed. Where this line crossed Park Lane, there was a mine on the northwest side and the remains of this still exist. In 1906, the Victoria County History said of this area;-

'distinctly unpicturesque, dingy grassfields alternating with collieries, pit banks and railway lines... The soil is a stiff clay which holds a quantity of water on its surface, for besides occasional 'flashes' caused by mining, the fields appear to be slightly flooded at most seasons of the year.'

The area still has some of this appearance, although the colliery activity has ceased and many of the spoil heaps and railway lines have overgrown with scrub.

The Gibfield area centres on the hamlet of Four Lane Ends, two components of which are the imposing farm buildings of Hindley's Farm and Smith's Farm opposite. The size of Hindley's Farm is indicative of fairly prosperous farming in the early to mid C19th and has a substantial threshing barn. Atherleigh Way (A579) was constructed on the route of the former Bolton and Leigh Railway. This was a branch of Stephenson's Liverpool and Manchester Railway, which opened for goods traffic in 1828. In the early C20th, small brick and pottery works stood to the north of Wigan Road (A577) close to its crossing of Small Brook. At the extreme north-east corner of this area, close to the Borough boundary is Langley Hall Farm, built on a medieval moated platform.

Atherton Hall was built around 1723 by William Wakefield, replacing an earlier hall, the ruins of which are located on a terrace above Atherton Lake Brook. Around the later Atherton Hall, (demolished in 1823) was the core of a parkland which included Atherton Wood and Bedford or Hough Wood. The latter was presented to Leigh by Lord Lilford in 1914 and became the present Lilford Park. The Lions Bridge stood as the main entrance feature to the Atherton Hall Estate and was built around 1724 with six stone lions guarding the entrances and on either side of the centre of the bridge. It spanned a large ornamental lake which was located to the south-west of the Hall. This was a famous landmark in the area, but was demolished in 1905. The lake dried out around the same time the bridge was demolished.

The area around Leigh was famous for cheese production until late Victorian times, the best known cheese being the 'Leigh Toaster'. This implies that the surrounding areas were used for pasture and that there would originally have been many hedges, probably with some hedgerow trees. In 1795 J. Aiken wrote:-

'The banks of Tildesley... are about one and a half miles in length, and command a beautiful prospect into seven counties;: the springs are remarkably clear and most excellently adapted to the purposes of bleaching. The land is rich, but mostly in meadows and pastures, for milk butter, and the noted Leigh cheese'

The Bridgewater Canal runs through the south of the area from the east, meeting the Leeds and Liverpool Canal at Leigh. The two canals functioned from 1819. The canals form the southern boundary to this landscape type at Crankwood in the west and Higher Green in the east.

Part of the Shakerley/Mossley Common area (mainly to the south), belonged to the powerful local Tyldesley family, who disputed some of the land with the Shakerley family of Shakerley Hall. The C17th remains of Shakerley Hall are incorporated within a farm off Common Lane. Cleworth Hall, originally another Tyldesley seat, given by them to Cockersand Abbey, was later the home of the Starkie family and had a lurid story of demoniacal possession and witchcraft in the period 1594 – 1606 with several deaths attributed to supernatural forces. Even the infamous Dr John Dee, the Elizabethan astrologer was consulted on the matter. It would seem that the witchcraft accusations had more to do with Protestant – Catholic rivalry in the area than merely an unusual local occurrence. The famous ‘Lancashire Witch Trials’ followed a year or so later.

In Victorian times the western part of this area was subjected to intensive mine workings. Chanters Colliery, sunk in the 1850s and its associated clay pit was closed in 1966. It operated at great depth and was connected by tunnel to other collieries. It is now largely covered by housing. A mine was operating at Shakerley by the late C18th. In the C19th the Shakerley estate passed through marriage to Robert Wellington, 3rd Viscount Cumbermere after whom the Shakerley Colliery (Wellington Pit) was named when it was sunk in the 1866. The colliery was so remote that a road had to be built to it at the owner’s cost, but as this also formed a direct route towards Bolton, a toll gate was set up which survived into the C20th. Shakerley Colliery (Nelson Pit) was sunk in 1869. Both the Shakerley pits were closed in 1935.

As a result of the mining, the Shakerley/Mossley Common area was criss-crossed with mineral railway lines, many linking to the existing main line to the north and others between this line and the L&NWR Bedford Leigh Line. All these mineral lines and the Bedford Leigh Line have now closed, but the scars of many of them still run across the landscape.

Garrett Hall, now Garrett Hall Farm, was the principal seat of the Tyldesley family in the C15th and included meadow pasture and heath. The field pattern of 1849 appears to be little changed. In the Higher Green area Peel Hall was another Tyldesley seat, granted to Cockersand Abbey between 1190 and 1221. It was then held by the Gillibrand family until 1666.

The A580 trunk road was opened by King George V in 1934 and was England’s first intercity highway, linking Manchester and Liverpool.

Key cultural elements in the landscape:

- Former collieries and associated mineral railway lines.
- Atherton Hall and associated parkland and woods.
- Shakerley Hall, Cleworth Hall and Peel Hall.
- Astley Green Colliery Museum
- The Bridgewater Canal.
- The A580 East Lancashire Road.
- The L&NWR Bedford Leigh Railway Line.
- The Leigh ‘Toaster’ cheese!

Landscape Sensitivity and Change

All the land within this landscape character area would appear to be marginally viable in agricultural terms and with local exceptions (in the Atherton Hall area) is either in decline or experiencing problems from the urban fringe.

Each area should be considered on its merits in terms of its sensitivity to change or development, although in general terms most of these areas could be considered as the least sensitive of all the Borough's landscapes. Positive change to many of these areas should be considered either in terms of a change of use to recreational open space or to achieving a higher quality of agricultural reinstatement to achieve more viable farmland.

Many of these areas however do form an important function in breaking up large and dense areas of housing to form green areas within a largely urban landscape. Their decline leaves them particularly sensitive to encroachment from new development, which should generally be resisted.

Key elements of landscape sensitivity:

- Prone to recreational misuse and pressure from the urban fringe
- Under pressure for development
- Hedgerows often in serious decline
- Sensitive as residual areas of open space with a dense urban area

Key elements of landscape change:

- Loss of agricultural land to development
- Decline of hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Increase of barbed wire fences
- Increase of marginal land under urban pressure
- Enlargement of field sizes
- Increasingly less viable as agricultural land

Recommended Management and Landscape Objectives

Each area must be treated individually on its condition, needs and merits. Most areas however appear to be struggling to maintain a viable agricultural future and alternative land uses should be considered. In considering their future it should be remembered that many of these areas still perform an important role in breaking up continuous areas of urban and sub-urban development. Future uses could include a balance of recreational open space, horse grazing, woodland planting and limited development.

Intrusion of further development into most of these areas could critically affect the viability of the remaining area. Any such intrusion should therefore be extremely carefully considered.

More viable agricultural land occurs in parts of the Bickershaw/Crankwood and Howe Bridge/Atherton Hall areas and where possible agricultural land use should continue to be encouraged.

The Higher Green area to the south of the A580 is less affected by urban pressure but could continue in agricultural use with improvements to agricultural land management and with hedgerow restoration. This would ensure a consistent agricultural land use buffer to the south of the A580.

Management of the Landscape:

- Consider future alternatives to agricultural use including public open space, woodland and limited development
- Encourage agricultural improvements to the Higher Green area including hedgerow restoration and management.
- Encourage continued agricultural land use where viable.
- Explore farming diversification where this can be accommodated without significant damage to the existing quality of the landscape.