

Lichfield District Council

Update of Landscape Character Assessment



Final report

September 2019



in association with

ASHMEAD·PRICE
LANDSCAPE PLANNING AND DESIGN CONSULTANTS

Steven Warnock

Contents

- 1 INTRODUCTION..... 1
- 1.1 Aim of the Study 1
- 2 APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY 2
- 2.1 Review of existing Landscape Character Assessment..... 2
- 2.2 Development of Strategies and Landscape Guidelines 3
- 2.3 Sensitivity analysis..... 5
- 2.4 Appraisal of Landscape Quality..... 5
- 2.5 Outputs of the study..... 6
- 2.6 Mapping 6
- 3 STUDY CONTEXT 7
- 3.1 The Study Area - a portrait of the District 7
- 3.2 Links to the County landscape framework 8
- 4 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES..... 12
- 4.1 CANKWOOD / CANNOCK CHASE NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA12
- 4.2 Ancient Settled Farmlands.....14
- 4.3 Lowland Village Farmlands17
- 4.4 Sandstone Estatelands.....20
- 4.5 Settled Heathlands23
- 4.6 Forest Heathlands.....26
- 4.7 Coalfield Farmlands29
- 4.8 Sandstone Hills and Heaths32
- 4.9 Wooded Hills and Farmlands36
- 4.10 TRENT VALLEY WASHLANDS NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA39

- 4.11 River Meadowlands40**
- 4.12 River Terrace Farmlands43**
- 4.13 Lowland Village Farmlands46**
- 4.14 Settled Heathlands49**
- 4.15 Wooded Estatelands.....52**
- 4.16 MEASE LOWLANDS NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA55**
- 4.17 Estate Farmlands56**
- 4.18 NEEDWOOD CLAYLANDS NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA.....59**
- 4.19 Ancient Settled Farmlands.....60**
- 4.20 Wooded Estatelands.....63**
- 4.21 River Meadowlands66**

- 5 VIEWS, DARK SKIES AND FORCES FOR CHANGE 69**
- 5.1 Key Views of the Lichfield City Skyline69**
- 5.2 Dark Skies71**
- 5.3 Forces for Change72**

- 6 APPENDIX 1 – COUNTY WIDE SENSITIVITY 75**

- 7 APPENDIX 2: LANDSCAPE RELATED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND DISCUSSION 78**
- 7.1 INTRODUCTION79**
- 7.2 NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK (NPPF) (February 2019)79**
- 7.3 PLANNING PRACTICE GUIDANCE81**
- 7.4 EXISTING POLICIES AND ISSUES IN LICHFIELD.....82**
- 7.5 NATURAL ENVIRONMENT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS83**
- 7.6 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS83**

Figures

Figure 1	Definition of strategy options	4
Figure 2	Landscape Character Types	10
Figure 3	Landscape Character Types with designations	11
Figure 4	Key views of Lichfield City's skyline	69
Figure 5	Dark Skies in Lichfield area	70

1 Introduction

1.1 Aim of the Study

- 1.1.1 The need to protect, manage and plan for change in the wider countryside is recognised through the European Landscape Convention and National Planning Policy and it is important to ensure that information to support decisions is current and robust. In the late 1990s Staffordshire County Council carried out a landscape character assessment for the whole county, published in *Planning for Landscape Change*¹. Over subsequent years further studies including the countywide Historic Landscape Characterisation have provided greater clarity on the cultural influences of the landscape and this was used in a study during 2014/15 to review the existing county landscape typology.
- 1.1.2 This review by Lichfield District Council (LDC), has come out of a need to adopt a new approach to guidance informed by current national guidance and data. The District Council have thus sought to update the evidence to inform their own landscape based policies and site selection for the review of the Lichfield District Local Plan. This study was prepared in accordance with the national guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) & Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) and will form an integral part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan for Lichfield District (2016-2040). The purpose of the study as expressed in the brief was as follows:
- (i) Prepare a standalone Landscape Character Assessment of Lichfield District, incorporating the recently completed Historic Landscape Characterisation;
 - (ii) Review landscape condition and management objectives for individual Landscape Character Types, drawing on the work already undertaken by Staffordshire County Council;
 - (iii) Review the sensitivity of the landscape based on the existing county wide analysis already undertaken by Staffordshire County Council;
 - (iv) Identify significant long distance views and seek positive opportunities for their conservation / enhancement.
- 1.1.3 The evidence provided in the updated Landscape Character Assessment will be used to ensure that the following key objectives are achieved where possible:
- The character of the landscape will be conserved by ensuring that development takes place in a manner that reflects, or enhances character and mitigates visual impact.
 - Valued landscapes including the Cannock Chase AONB and its setting along with other designated areas and key features will be protected and enhanced.
 - New proposals will take into account and avoid detrimental effects on key landscape characteristics, local distinctiveness, visual amenity, key views, tranquillity & dark skies.

¹ Staffordshire County Council (2001) Planning for Landscape Change – Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Structure Plan 1996-2011.

- The cumulative impact of development will be taken into account.
- Green Infrastructure and other Natural Environment policies will seek opportunities to enhance landscape character in the District.
- Complementary plans and strategies including those for transforming the Trent Valley; the Cannock Chase AONB, The National Forest and the Forest of Mercia will be used to inform District landscape policies.

2 Approach and methodology

2.1 Review of existing Landscape Character Assessment

- 2.1.1 The process of landscape characterisation involves a combination of desk study and field survey to systematically divide the countryside into discrete and relatively homogenous units of land, within which the constituent physical, biological and historical elements occur in repeating patterns and share certain aesthetic characteristics. These units of land, termed **Land description units (LDUs)**, are the building blocks of the landscape and they form the framework on which all subsequent evaluation and decision making is based. An LDU framework was created for Staffordshire in 1999/2000, several years after completion of the original landscape typology for the county. This framework which now covers all of the West Midlands, the Peak District and adjoining parts of the East Midlands, has been considerably enhanced by using Historic Landscape Character (HLC) maps to confirm cultural boundaries. Cultural patterns do not usually have clearly defined boundaries, but because there is often a strong correlation with the underlying natural dimension of the landscape, these patterns can often be effectively mapped using the physiographic/ground type units that emerge from the first phase of the LDU analysis. Where there is no obvious correlation, new divisions can be added to reflect variations in settlement pattern, tree cover, or farm type.
- 2.1.2 The revised LDU map for Staffordshire was used during 2014/15 to review the existing county landscape typology, in order to confirm that key cultural boundaries had been incorporated within the LDU framework. This has allowed the historic dimension of the landscape to be more fully integrated with the existing landscape typology, resulting in an update of the Landscape Character Type (LCT) boundaries and descriptions. This framework was used to review and update the existing LCT map for Lichfield District.
- 2.1.3 Fieldwork was carried out to check and refine the initial modifications to the LCTs identified during the desk study. The survey focussed on aspects which are difficult to achieve through desk-based studies, for example perceptual qualities (rural character, tranquillity and remoteness), setting and visual influences. We sought to identify the key characteristics that contribute to local distinctiveness and to gather information about the condition of the landscape, in particular the impact of recent change.
- 2.1.4 The **condition**, of a landscape, which should be clearly distinguished from its character, is a measure of how far removed that landscape is from an 'optimal' state where all the key characteristics are present and functional. Condition, therefore, has a **functional** as

well as a **visual** dimension. The latter reflects the degree to which the existing landscape pattern appears visually fragmented, due to the loss of existing features, or the imposition of new features which appear 'out of place'. The functional dimension embraces a range of issues related to the ecological health of the countryside and the extent to which present day land use respects the inherent ecological/cultural character of the land.

- 2.1.5 Having completed the field work, the next step was to bring together the findings of the desk study and the field survey. Any anomalies in the pattern/location of LDU/LCT boundaries were revised and the profiles for the Landscape Character Types generated in the 2014/15 countywide study were refined with District geographical references.

2.2 Development of Strategies and Landscape Guidelines

- 2.2.1 The key to effective decision making is to have a clear vision from the outset of what needs to be achieved. This provides a rational context within which to address the following questions:

- what needs to be done to retain pattern and diversity in the landscape?
- where should resources be targeted to achieve the greatest benefit?
- how can change be accommodated, with minimum impact on regional diversity and local distinctiveness?

- 2.2.2 In order to answer these questions effectively the landscape assessment and decision making process needs to make reasoned judgements, not only about the nature and pattern of key elements that contribute to the character of a particular landscape, but also about landscape condition and vulnerability to change. Such a process was developed initially by the Warwickshire landscapes Project, where a strategy was defined, setting out a vision for each of the landscape types in the county. These strategies were supported by a comprehensive set of management guidelines on how to achieve the landscape vision.

- 2.2.3 The first step in formulating a strategy is to carry out a review of existing information sources in order to understand how the landscape has changed over the last fifty years, or so. In particular, it was important to identify the drivers that are causing change, in order to gain an insight into the likely impact of future change.

- 2.2.4 The collated information of both desk and field studies will then be sorted using the GIS database, to produce an informed analysis of:

- the strength of character and condition of each landscape (i.e. how far removed it is from its optimum state);
- the forces that are driving change; and
- the key issues that need to be addressed in order to conserve/enhance landscape character.

- 2.2.5 Recognition of the distinction between the strength of character of a particular landscape and its condition helps to focus the decision making process by providing a basis on

which to assess the need and/or opportunities for enhancement. The aim of this is to distinguish between areas where the character of the landscape is particularly strong and where conservation, or restoration of the existing pattern should be a priority; and areas where the landscape is less distinct, or in poor condition, and where there are opportunities for creating new landscapes and/or accommodating change. These options are not rigid distinctions, but instead form part of a continuum of strategy options as shown in Figure 1.

Condition	Good	Strengthen	Conserve & strengthen	Conserve
	Declining	Strengthen & enhance	Conserve & enhance	Conserve & restore
	Poor	Create	Restore & enhance	Restore
		Weak	Moderate	Strong

Character

Figure 1: Definition of strategy options

2.2.6 In practice, most landscapes will fall somewhere between these two extremes. The strategy in such areas needs to strike a balance between conservation, restoration and positive enhancement. This balance will vary depending on the inherent character of a particular landscape and the reasons why it has become degraded.

2.2.7 Having defined the direction in which the strategy should be aimed, the next step is to translate the conclusions of this analysis into a practical vision for the future. The vision includes a short statement that encapsulates the essence of what the strategy is trying to achieve, supported by a firm set of guidelines that clearly establishes how the vision can be achieved in practice. The aim of the guidelines is to provide active management advice to help planners, land managers, and other stakeholders, tackle specific environmental and recreational issues which have been identified within the study area.

2.3 Sensitivity analysis

- 2.3.1 The analysis of sensitivity was based upon the assumption that a landscape with a clearly defined and strongly unified character will be more sensitive to change by virtue of the fact that such landscapes are less able to accommodate ‘alien’ features that do not conform to the existing pattern. Any analysis of sensitivity, therefore, needs to look separately at the ***inherent character of the landscape***, both ecological and cultural, and the possible ***visual impact***.
- 2.3.2 ***Ecological Sensitivity*** - most landscapes in the lowlands have been settled and improved for agricultural production and, as a result, any surviving semi-natural habitat is almost invariably associated with the cultural pattern (woodlands, field boundaries and other manmade features). The oldest (and by implication most sensitive) landscapes are those that still survive in a semi-natural state (i.e. heathland, moorland, etc.) and where such patches still survive, they will increase the overall sensitivity of a given landscape. The analysis is based on a set of critical assumptions:
- agriculturally marginal land (poor soil and steep slopes) is more likely to be of ecological interest than fertile land
 - pastoral land is more likely to support ecological interest as a result of less intensive use than on cultivated land
 - ancient wooded landscapes are more ecologically sensitive than those with more recent plantation woodlands
- 2.3.3 ***Cultural sensitivity*** - the inherent cultural sensitivity of a landscape is closely related to the nature and pattern of key elements that define the character of a particular landscape. Landscapes with ‘time depth’ (i.e. those that display a long and continuous history of evolution), together with those that are characterised by a clear and consistent pattern of key elements, tend to be more sensitive to change than landscapes of more recent origin, or those that have fewer distinguishing features.
- 2.3.4 ***Visual sensitivity*** - at a broad scale, visual sensitivity relates to the openness of a landscape in relation to the landform and tree cover – a sloping, treeless landscape may be more sensitive to the visual impact of new development compared to a flat, more wooded landscape. The extent and pattern of woodland cover and characteristic landform (valley, rolling, steeply sloping, upstanding etc) are both attributes contained with the LDU database and can be used to map visual sensitivity as part of the desk-study context.

2.4 Appraisal of Landscape Quality

- 2.4.1 The identification and mapping of landscape character types is the key to the assessment of landscape quality, from which landscape policy objectives can then be formulated. The brief asks for examples of policies which could be used to enhance landscape quality and we would seek to use the output from the revised character assessment to undertake a review of the original landscape quality analysis. There are three major contributors to the quality of a landscape:
- the **ecological** dimension and its contribution to the overall strength of character of the landscape;

- the **cultural** dimension and its contribution to the overall strength of character of the landscape;
- the **visual** appearance relating to the spatial distribution, pattern and condition of the elements from which it is composed.

2.4.2 Ecological aspects relate to the pattern and extent of survival of semi-natural vegetation / habitat, while cultural aspects are those determined by the history of human activity and are reflected in the consistency and time depth of settlement, land use and enclosure patterns. When combined, these last two aspects provide a measure of the landscape's functional integrity.

2.5 Outputs of the study

2.5.1 The methodology adopted for the characterisation exercise and subsequent sensitivity analysis are consistent with other assessments carried out in Staffordshire. The report includes the following sections:

- (i) A summary of the concepts and terminology that underpin the characterisation process, including an explanation of the hierarchical nature of the framework and its use for facilitating rural decision making at the county/district level; and an explanation of the steps involved in undertaking a sensitivity analysis;
- (ii) The creation of a profile for each Landscape Character Type including; a colour photograph; a written description and list of key characteristics; a map showing the location of the landscape; a proposed landscape strategy / management guidelines; a sensitivity analysis; and a landscape quality appraisal.
- (iii) Identification of key views to the Lichfield City skyline.
- (iv) A brief review of areas with Dark Skies in the District
- (v) Overview of forces for change

2.5.2 It should be noted that the overall Strength of Character, Condition and Sensitivity analyses represent an overview for each of the Landscape Types described in this report and that individual LDUs may have higher or lower values which may affect the planning/management outcomes within a given LDU. A more detailed analysis/further evidence and a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment will therefore be necessary in considering individual site proposals.

2.6 Mapping

2.6.1 The landscape character types are mapped in Figures 2 and 3 and are located after the study context in Section 2. Figures 4 and 5, showing the location of Dark Skies in the District and the key views to the Lichfield City skyline, can both be found in Section 4. The landscape character sensitivity maps, which were used to produce the landscape level summaries for the sensitivity of each Landscape Character Type in the District, are shown in Appendix 2. The existing sensitivity analysis, which was carried out at the LDU

level, was produced by Staffordshire County Council in 2013 as part of a county wide LCA update.

3 Study Context

3.1 The Study Area - a portrait of the District

- 3.1.1 The Historic City of Lichfield, situated in the centre of the District, is set within an area of rich farmland on good soils with a long and established cultural history. The City lies in a natural bowl containing three different types of landscape, the most extensive being the Ancient Settled Farmlands to the north and west of the city, merging into a more open Village Farmlands landscape to the east and an area of Sandstone Estatelands to the south. This bowl is surrounded by rising ground, within which the three spires of the Cathedral and two further spires at St Mary's (now the library) and St Michaels, have become known as the Ladies of the Vale. The edge of the bowl is marked by distinct changes in the character of the landscape - including the broad valleys of the River Trent to the north and River Tame to the east, the higher Sandstone Hills & Heaths to the south and the heavily urbanised / disturbed land associated with the Cannock coalfield to the west, rising to a high point at Gentleshaw Common on the fringe of Cannock Chase AONB.
- 3.1.2 At Burntwood and all along the western edge of the district, the landscape has been extensively disturbed and worked for coal. Since the closure of the mines in the last 30 years this has resulted in a post- industrial setting of restored scrubby heathlands within a Coalfield Farmlands landscape, which includes the surviving canal feeder reservoir at Chasewater. The urban villages which make up Burntwood are in stark contrast to the adjoining AONB and the local people make full use of the recreational opportunities around Chasewater and Cannock Chase.
- 3.1.3 In the southern part of the District the land rises to local vantage points around Stonnall, Little Aston and Little Hay where there is a fine prospect northwards over the whole District and the green belt which separates Lichfield from Walsall.
- 3.1.4 Older ancient woodlands occur at Hopwas Wood and Hints on the Sandstone Hills to the south east of Lichfield, through to scattered wooded remnants on the heathy farmland around Fradley, extending towards Armitage and Handsacre. This area of valued woodlands coincides in places with the proposed High Speed rail corridor and this will have a significant impact on landscape character. Ancient and veteran trees can also be found across the District in parkland/estates, hedgerows and the landscape around ancient wooded areas.
- 3.1.5 The pattern of major Trunk roads (A38, A5) has been established since Roman times in this area and together with more recent, but important turnpike roads such as the A51, A515, A513, A460, A461 and the recent motorway Toll Road, give a strong impression of activity throughout the central part of the District. The four track West Coast mainline from Tamworth through Lichfield and Rugeley and the electrified Birmingham Cross City line from Blake Street as far as Lichfield Trent Valley have also made an impact on the

landscape. Between these major transport corridors, however, there still survives an historic network of narrow country lanes, with hedges and hedgerow oaks, along with a functioning network of canals with a hub at Fradley junction, all of which enhance the rural character of the wider farmed landscape.

- 3.1.6 River Meadowlands and associated Terrace Farmlands have been exploited for their reserves of sand and gravel in this area, particularly along the River Tame as far as the edge of the District. The gravel extraction process has left a legacy of connected wetlands and restored farmland in and adjacent to the flood plains and this has often resulted in the development of a diverse habitat for birds and animals following restoration.
- 3.1.7 In the far eastern part of the district, the Estate Farmlands within the Mease lowlands mark a change to a much more rural, former estate landscape of distinctive nucleated villages with tall church spires, often sited on local high points within this area of gently rolling topography. Extending eastwards beyond the District boundary into Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Warwickshire, this landscape has a quiet undisturbed identity, providing a strong contrast to the busy landscapes found elsewhere in the District.
- 3.1.8 The northern part of the District also has a strong rural character, although the settlement in this area is more clustered and 'less organised' than in the Mease Lowlands. There is also a small area of former deer park to the east of the River Blithe that was formerly part of the old Needwood Royal Hunting Forest.

3.2 Links to the County landscape framework

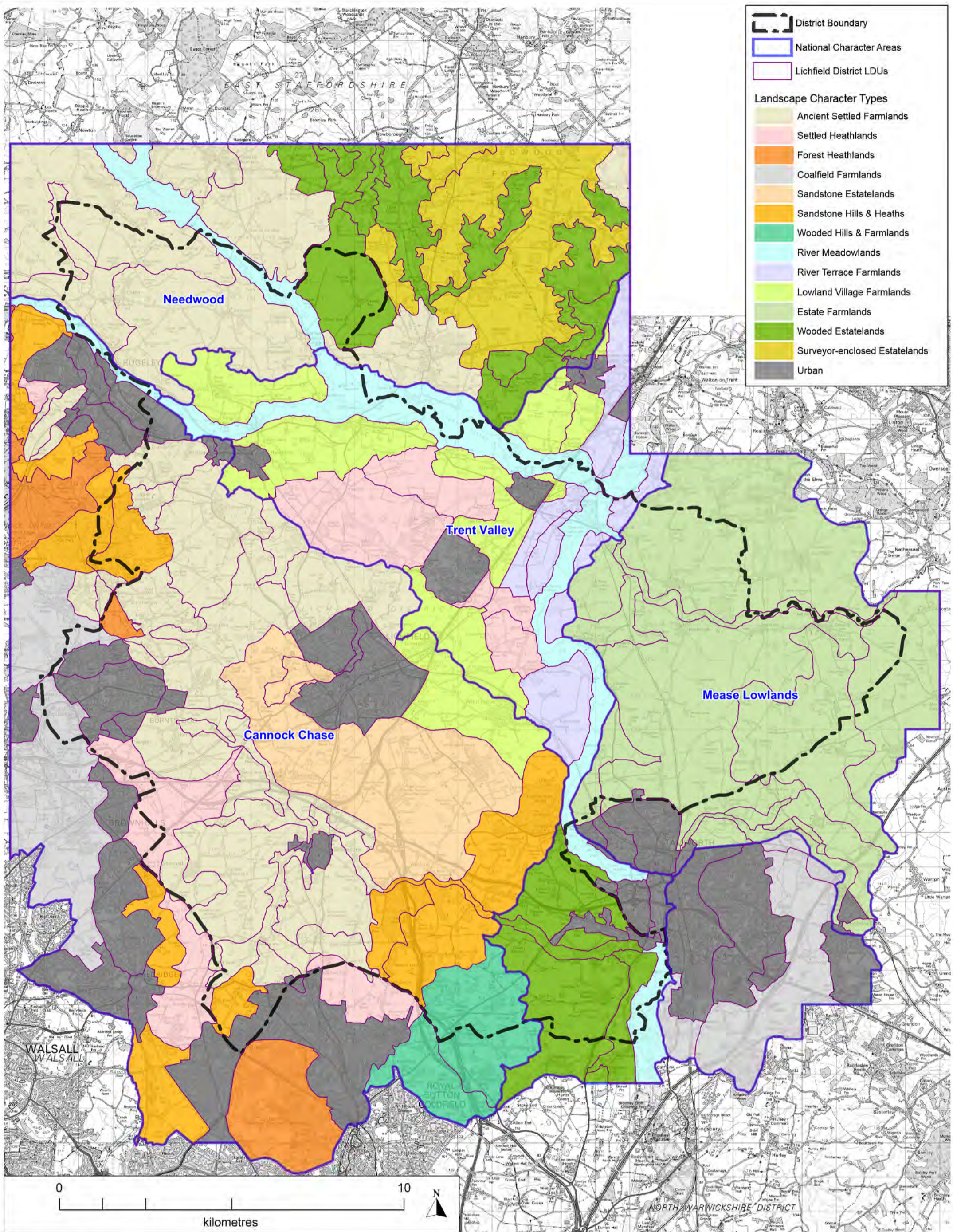
- 3.2.1 Four Regional Landscape Character areas occur within the Lichfield District area:

67	Cankwood / Cannock Chase
68	Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands
69	Trent Valley Washlands
72	Mease/ Sence Lowlands

- 3.2.2 Although largely a lowland county, Staffordshire contains a wide variety of distinctive landscapes ranging from the high moorlands and settled upland valleys in the Peak fringe, to the rolling farmlands and low lying pastoral river valleys elsewhere in the county. The adjoining heathland landscapes associated with Cannock Chase, along with the heavily settled former coalfields, provide a strong contrast to these well managed farmlands. Even the agricultural areas contain a variety of different landscapes, ranging from the large scale, planned Estatelands in the central and south-western parts of the county, to the pockets of smaller scale, more intimate pastoral and ancient wooded farmlands in the north and west.
- 3.2.3 The cultural pattern encountered in Staffordshire comprises some ancient landscapes, settled in prehistory, that have a strong present day character influenced by gradual piecemeal enclosure of both the wildwood and medieval open fields. In other areas where soils are less fertile, or because of higher altitude, the landscape reflects the later more organised enclosure of commons and heaths/moors which imposed a more regular field pattern and straight roads. Some areas show evidence of 18th and 19th century

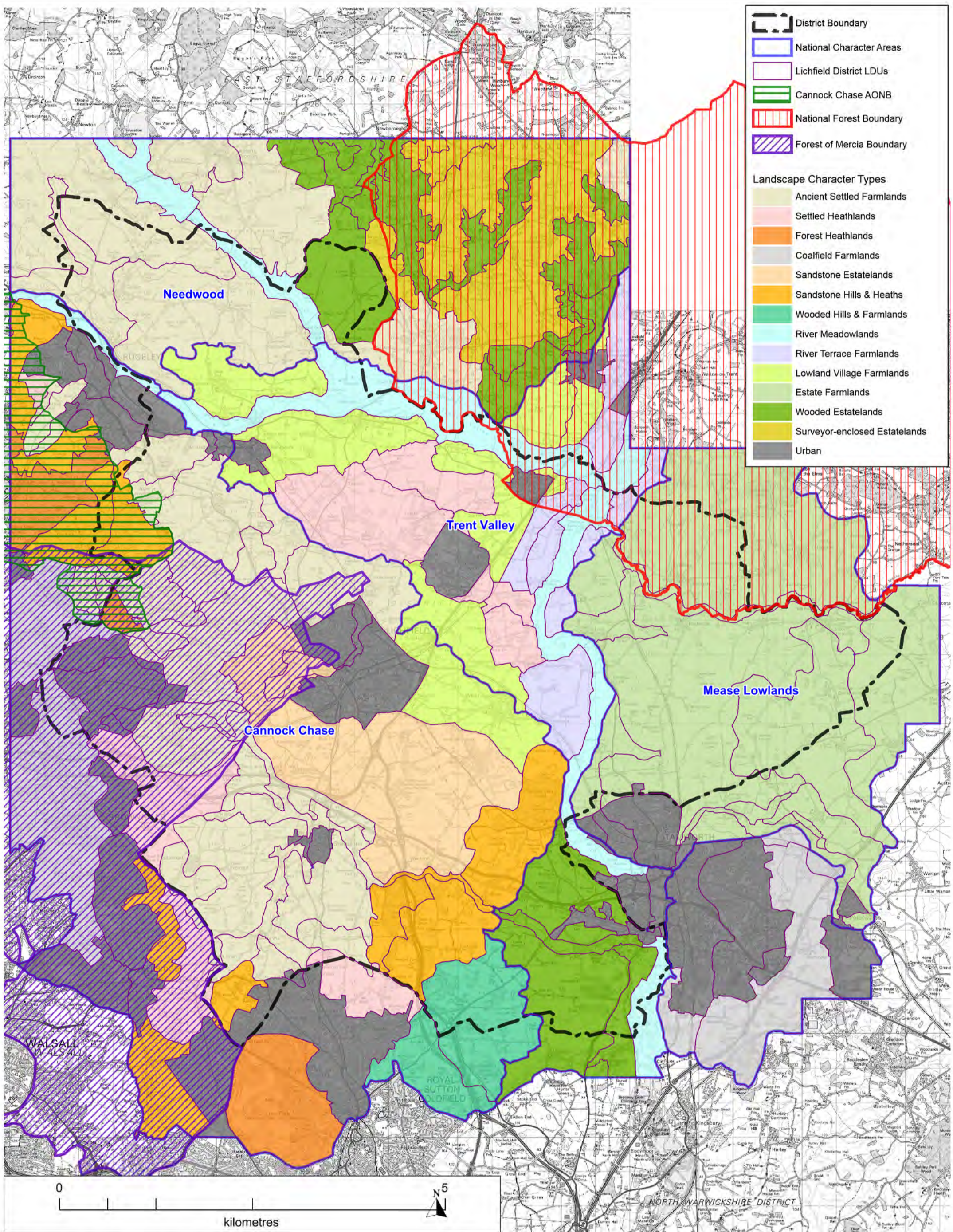
industrial operations, particularly in the Cannock coalfield, where minerals have been extracted and processed from the underlying rocks.

- 3.2.4 The importance of the Peak District National Park and Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, within Staffordshire, are recognised through designation for their strong character and scenic beauty. However, Staffordshire's diverse landscapes outside these designated areas form an integral part of the county's unique environment and the day to day lives of local people. The landscape is vital to the county's economy in terms of the farming it sustains and because of the tourists and investors it attracts. It forms the surroundings in which we live and work and makes a fundamental contribution to our quality of life, sense of place and wellbeing.



© Crown Copyright and database rights 2019.
Lichfield District Council. Licence Number: 100017765

Figure 2 - Landscape Character Types



© Crown Copyright and database rights 2019.
Lichfield District Council. Licence Number: 100017765

Figure 3 - Landscape Character Types with designations

4 Landscape Character Types

4.1 CANKWOOD / CANNOCK CHASE NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA

- 4.1.1 The Cankwood/Cannock Chase National Character Area (NCA) is associated with a region of higher ground that lies between the Staffordshire Plain to the west and the lowlands of the Trent Valley in the east. It is an area dominated by its history as a former Royal Hunting Forest and by the presence at its centre of the Cannock Coalfield. The region extends southwards into the Birmingham / Black Country conurbation and comprises a mixture of heathland, forest, farmland and urban areas. Cankwood Forest is thought to have been in existence by the reign of William the Conqueror and Cannock Chase formed the core of the Bishop of Lichfield's private hunting chase created out of Cannock Forest in the 13th century. Assarting continued around the Forest during the middle ages and today the landscape exhibits a range of enclosure patterns – patches of open heath within a matrix of bracken, birch woods and conifer plantations; planned 19th century enclosure associated with settled heathland/estate landscapes; and irregular, piecemeal enclosure in areas of ancient farmland.
- 4.1.2 The central part of the region is associated with an uplifted block of Carboniferous rocks that encompasses the exposed section of the Cannock Coalfield. A mantle of glacial till, of variable thickness, covers most of the coalfield, giving rise to areas of impoverished, poorly-drained soils, which were originally covered by heathland. Part of this once extensive heathland landscape still survives within the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which was designated in 1958. Whilst it is the smallest inland AONB in the UK and only a small part lies within Lichfield District, its influence stretches far beyond its boundary, connecting landscapes, habitats, history and local communities to it. The surviving heathland is designated as a Special Area for Conservation and the Chase also includes five sites of Special Scientific Interest, six Scheduled Monuments and three Local Nature Reserves.
- 4.1.3 The undulating land surrounding the coalfield is underlain by younger Permo-Triassic rocks, including the 'Bunter Pebble beds'. These beds form the heavily dissected high plateau of Cannock Chase, as well as the prominent ridge of hills that extend from Hopwas Hays to Barr Beacon along the south-eastern edge of the region. Around Lichfield, the 'Bunter Pebble beds' pass into softer red and buff coloured sandstones, which give way locally to Mercia Mudstone.
- 4.1.4 Industry, particularly glass and iron making, formed an important part of the local economy during and following, the medieval period because of the good supply of wood for fuel. From the 16th century onwards coal extraction became more important and has made a major contribution to the character of the landscape in the southern part of the region. The influence of mining and industry has been so significant in the Coalfield Farmlands that only remnants of farmland and heathland now remain in many places.
- 4.1.5 The pattern of agriculture in the region is diverse, including mixed farming and cropping, with potatoes and sugar beet on the higher quality land. Many of the estate landscapes support intensive cereal and vegetable cropping, while elsewhere pastoral farming is

more common, supporting dairying and other livestock enterprises. Around Chorley the farmland is mainly used for stock rearing in small/medium sized, irregular fields where mature hedgerow oaks are a characteristic feature. Horse pasture is also common, particularly within urban fringe areas.

4.1.6 The settlement pattern in the region is complex, ranging from a low density dispersed pattern within the rural estates, to a more mixed pattern characterised by clusters of roadside dwellings and occasional villages in the area around Lichfield. Larger urban areas, such as Brownhills, and Burntwood, contrast with the wildness and unsettled character of the adjoining Chase.

4.1.7 Eight Landscape Character Types occur in the region lying within Lichfield District:

- Ancient Settled Farmlands
- Lowland Village farmlands
- Sandstone Estatelands
- Settled Heathlands
- Forest Heathlands
- Coalfield Farmlands
- Sandstone Hills & Heaths
- Wooded Hills & Farmlands

4.2 Ancient Settled Farmlands

- 4.2.1 The Ancient Settled Farmlands are a well-defined historic landscape with a varied pattern of small to medium sized hedged fields, many of which are of medieval origin. These are set within an irregular pattern of ancient winding lanes that link a clustered settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads, clusters of roadside dwellings and occasional small villages. This is a well treed landscape with large numbers of hedgerow oaks and a scatter of small ancient woods and secondary plantations. The underlying Triassic mudstones have produced fertile Brown soils where dairying/mixed farming is the dominant land use. The rounded and rolling landform is characterised in places by a more undulating topography with occasional steeper slopes.



Key characteristics

- A varied rolling/undulating topography
- Many small streams in shallow valleys
- A well-defined irregular field pattern
- Arable and pastoral farming
- Network of narrow lanes, often with hedge banks
- Large numbers of hedgerow oak and ash
- Dispersed pattern of scattered farmsteads, roadside dwellings and settlement clusters
- Traditional red brick farmsteads and dwellings with clay tile roofs

Location of Landscape



4.2.2 This landscape lies on the eastern side of the Cannock plateau, where the underlying Permo-Triassic mudstones, give rise to a rounded and rolling, lowland topography dissected by numerous small valleys. In places, especially around the fringe of the adjoining higher land, the ground is often more undulating, with occasional steep sided stream valleys. The mudstones produce fertile, easily cultivated reddish Brown soils, which give rise to a productive agricultural landscape of dairying and mixed farming. Although not heavily wooded, the Ancient Settled Farmlands does appear relatively treed due to the large number of hedgerow trees (predominantly oak with some ash) and occasional small patches of ancient woodland. The heavily wooded edge of the Chase forms a prominent backdrop in places, while stream side willow and alder are also locally prominent. Areas of semi-natural grassland and small wetlands are a feature along stream valleys, especially in the Shenstone area, as well as on more steeply sloping ground along the edge of the Chase.

4.2.3 The Ancient Settled Farmlands has a dispersed pattern of settlement with clusters of roadside dwellings, occasional medieval villages and many scattered farmsteads. These are connected by a network of narrow, winding, in places sunken lanes, often enclosed by high hedge banks. Throughout this landscape there is a well-defined, irregular pattern of field hedgerows with large numbers of hedgerow trees. The intimate settled landscape around Brereton Cross, Chorley and Stonnall has a particularly strong rural character. Here the hedgerows remain intact and the landscape retains its small scale, well treed character, favoured for horse pasture due to its proximity to the adjoining urban edge.

4.2.4 **Strength of Character** - although the landform is relatively prominent, the natural dimension of this landscape is rather weak as there are only small patches of habitat survival, mainly along watercourses. The historic character, however, is prominent and often unified, contributing strongly to the strength of character of this landscape.

Natural: weak

Cultural: strong

Overall: strong

4.2.5 **Summary of Condition** - the scale and survival of the historic enclosure pattern defines the overall character and condition of this landscape and although some parts are disrupted by agricultural intensification, or the proximity to urban centres/busy roads, many areas retain a peaceful rural character with farmsteads and clusters of roadside cottages.

Overall: moderate

Vision Statement

4.2.6 Conserve and restore the structure and overall integrity of this ancient, rural landscape. In particular, encourage the conservation of field boundaries and look for opportunities to restore primary hedgelines and enhance hedgerow tree cover. Avoid any new development/change that would have a suburbanising impact on the countryside.

4.2.7 **Sensitivity** - the Ancient Settled Farmlands is an historic, mixed farming landscape with a deep time depth, associated with the medieval centre at Lichfield. The inherent

sensitivity of this area is thus relatively high, relating primarily to the cultural character of the landscape. Visual sensitivity is also fairly high due to the undulating nature of the landform/general lack of woodlands and any change in use, particularly new development, would be visible from the higher ground that surrounds much of this area.

Inherent: high (cultural)

Visual: moderate

Quality of the landscape

- 4.2.8 Between the major rail and road transport corridors, the historic network of narrow country lanes, hedgerows and hedgerow oaks still survives, along with a functioning network of canals around a hub at Fradley junction. This landscape is valued by local people and it contributes strongly to the quality of the green belt in the area around Lichfield City.

4.3 Lowland Village Farmlands

- 4.3.1 A well ordered agricultural landscape associated with productive Brown soils, characterised by nucleated villages and a scatter of farmsteads with occasional roadside dwellings. These occupy a rolling mixed farming landscape set within a semi-regular pattern of medium to large hedged fields lying on rising ground adjoining the Tame Valley. This landscape owes much of its present day character to the late enclosure of former medieval open fields.



Key characteristics

- Rolling landform
- Productive arable farming with pockets of pasture around villages
- A planned enclosure pattern of large hedged fields
- Discrete rural villages
- Narrow country lanes bounded by wide grass verges
- Tree lined stream corridors

Location of Landscape



- 4.3.2 The underlying geology of the Lowland Village Farmlands is dominated by Mercia Mudstones, which give rise to a gently rolling, lowland topography. These mudstones produce fertile, easily cultivated reddish Brown soils, which support a productive, intensively managed, mixed farming landscape, with pockets of pastoral farmland around the villages.
- 4.3.3 This is an open landscape of medium to large sized, mostly regular fields enclosed by thorn hedgerows. The overall character of this landscape is strongly related to the planned enclosure of open fields by Parliamentary Act. There are also a few areas with an older sub-regular field pattern, sometimes associated with surviving ridge and furrow. The Lowland Village Farmlands are largely unwooded and tree cover is restricted to stream corridors, or groups of trees around farmsteads and settlement edges.
- 4.3.4 Discrete nucleated villages, which have developed around a church, are a distinctive feature in this landscape. The majority of older buildings on farms and within settlements are of red brick, although timber framing can also be found, occasionally hidden by later facades.
- 4.3.5 **Strength of Character** – although the natural dimension is rather weak, the historic character of this rural, agricultural landscape is moderately strong and characterised by discrete villages and outlying farms that define the character for this landscape.

Natural: weak

Cultural: moderate

Overall: moderate

- 4.3.6 **Summary of Condition** - the scale and survival of the historic enclosure pattern defines the overall character and condition of this landscape and although some areas retain a peaceful rural character with farmsteads and occasional rural dwellings, other parts are disrupted by agricultural intensification, or the proximity to urban centres/busy roads, especially along the A38. Where this is the case, land use change has often caused a decline in the structure of the landscape, resulting in hedgerow deterioration and creating a fragmented/neglected appearance.

Overall: moderate

Vision Statement

- 4.3.7 Conserve and enhance the structure and overall integrity of this historic, rural landscape. In particular, encourage the conservation of field boundaries and look for opportunities to restore primary hedgelines and enhance hedgerow tree cover. Opportunities should also be sought to strengthen biodiversity throughout this landscape.
- 4.3.8 **Sensitivity** - one of the special features of the Lowland Village Farmlands is its rural, agricultural character. This is emphasised by the strongly nucleated settlement pattern and relatively few roads, giving this landscape a moderate inherent sensitivity, relating primarily to the cultural dimension of the landscape. Visual sensitivity is also moderately high due to the open rolling nature of the landform and the general lack of woodland cover.

Inherent: moderate

Visual: moderate

Quality of the landscape

- 4.3.9 The Lowland Village Farmlands between Lichfield and the Tame valley retain a distinctive rural character that is protected from urban expansion by the A38 corridor to the east of Lichfield. Whittington has an intact nucleated village identity, despite the expansion of housing estates in recent times. The Coventry canal, which follows a sinuous contour route through the adjoining varied scale farmed landscape, wraps around the northern and eastern edge of the village. The network of quiet lanes and public footpaths make this area popular with cyclists and walkers.

4.4 Sandstone Estatelands

- 4.4.1 An open, gently rolling, arable landscape associated with the light, sandy soils that overlie a belt of Permo-Triassic sandstones. The woodlands and parklands of traditional rural estates are a key feature that characterise this agricultural landscape. The major land use is now arable cropping within a regular pattern of large hedged fields, although remnants of the once more extensive areas of heathland survive in places. This historic land use pattern is reflected in the occurrence of large estate farms and clusters of wayside dwellings, interspersed with occasional small villages.



Key characteristics

- Smooth rolling landform
- Intensive arable farmland within a pattern of large, regular fields
- Remnant heathy vegetation and roadside bracken
- Broadleaved and mixed woodlands with silver birch
- Plantations and game coverts
- Parkland and large country houses
- Isolated red brick farmsteads and estate cottages

Location of Landscape



- 4.4.2 The Permo-Triassic rocks underlying the Sandstone Estatelands comprise a mix of fine-grained reddish-brown sandstones, giving rise to a rounded, rolling topography, mildly dissected by minor rivers and streams. Although locally podzolic, most of the soils are deeper loams, supporting a well ordered, intensively farmed estate landscape. Prominent woodlands on rising ground are a feature in places, along with coverts and belts of trees. Despite the limited amount of heathland, this landscape is almost everywhere distinguished by heathy woodland/scrub and patches of bracken and gorse.
- 4.4.3 For the most part the Sandstone Estatelands has a fairly strong planned field pattern, which is visually prominent due to the underlying rolling topography. Much of the field pattern is associated with the early 18th century enclosure of former open arable land and heath. Small fragments of heath survive in places and some ridge and furrow also exists, associated with the settlements. The planned character of this landscape has been influenced by a number of traditional rural estates and their associated parkland and woodland plantations.
- 4.4.4 Settlement is sparse and characterised by large estate farms and decorative estate cottages scattered throughout the area. Farmsteads, particularly those associated with estates, are predominantly large, regular courtyard brick built farms with extensive modern buildings. Wide, straight roads, often with grass verges, are a feature of this area with farms often accessed along narrow trackways.
- 4.4.5 Strength of Character** - an ordered estate landscape in which the regular field pattern, road network, plantation woodlands and belts of trees, create a unified landscape structure that provides a framework to views. When combined with parkland features and relic heathland associations, these all contribute to an overall moderately distinctive character.

Natural: moderate

Cultural: moderate

Overall: moderate

- 4.4.6 Summary of Condition** - an intensively farmed arable landscape in which hedgerows have largely lost their function and together with the deterioration and reduced size of parklands, this is a landscape that is in decline. Although it has distinctive inherent natural vegetation characterised by heathy/gorse communities, this is often suppressed by inappropriate management, especially in non-farmed locations such as roadside verges.

Overall: poor

Vision Statement

- 4.4.7 Restore and enhance the overall structure and wooded, former heathland character of the landscape.** Opportunities should be sought for new woodland planting and for promoting the positive management of existing woodlands / trees through

regeneration of oak/birch woodland, while looking for suitable sites to re-create heathland corridors to improve linkages and access through the landscape.

- 4.4.8 **Sensitivity** - the Sandstone Estatelands have a moderate inherent sensitivity relating to the reasonably strong heathland character and the relatively unified cultural pattern that defines the character of this landscape. Given the rolling landform and prominence/containment of the tree cover, visual sensitivity is generally low to moderate in this landscape.

Inherent: moderate

Visual: low-moderate

Quality of the landscape

- 4.4.9 Although a busy transport networks disturbs the otherwise relatively intact estate character of the Sandstone Estatelands, the woodlands and rolling nature of the landscape affords good medium distance framed views towards the Cathedral City of Lichfield and its spired churches.

4.5 Settled Heathlands

- 4.5.1 A planned, pastoral landscape associated with impoverished, sandy soils, where numerous heath names reflect the former extent of commons and heath. This is a gently rolling landscape, often on rising ground, with a regular pattern of small and larger hedged fields. Roads are straight with uniform verges and there is a high density of roadside dwellings. In places, hedgerow tree cover is a prominent feature, creating a strong sense of visual enclosure.



Key characteristics

- Gently rolling/rising topography
- Glacial till with sands and gravels creating poor soils with a relic heathy character
- Mixed farmland with extensive areas of grazing land and pony paddocks
- Regular pattern of small to medium sized, hedged fields.
- Dispersed settlement pattern with numerous roadside dwellings
- Planned highway network with uniform verges and relic heathy vegetation
- Numerous heath names reflecting presence of former heathland

Location of Landscape



- 4.5.2 This landscape is closely associated with areas of former heathland that used to cover most of the higher ground in the Chase. Here the underlying Permo-Triassic rocks are masked by deposits of glacial drift comprising impoverished fine and coarse loamy soils that reflect its former heathland origins. Although there is little remaining heathland and much of the land is used for stock rearing and cropping, this landscape still retains a distinctive heathy character, seen today in the recurring presence of bracken and birch in the woodlands and hedgerows.
- 4.5.3 The Settled Heathlands were shaped by the planned enclosure of what was seen as waste land in the early 19th century and the many place names referring to 'heath' reflect such areas, for example, 'Druids Heath' near Aldridge. There are also some areas of assarting, associated with farm names such as 'Woodside Farm' that occur in the area to the north of Sutton Coldfield. Late enclosure resulted in a planned layout of the existing network of generally straight roads with uniform verges and the creation of a regular pattern of small and larger hedged fields. Where hedgerows remain intact, the landscape remains small scale and relatively well treed.
- 4.5.4 This landscape includes a high density of roadside dwellings that may well have originated as common-edge settlement. The pattern typically comprises farmsteads and roadside cottages, often with associated horse paddocks. The proximity of the urban edge influences the general character of this area and for the most part this is an active environment with much development and many busy roads, all of which reduce the overall tranquillity of the landscape.
- 4.5.5 **Strength of Character** – since the landform is not particularly prominent and there is only relic habitat survival, the natural dimension of the Settled Heathlands is rather weak. The historic character is fairly unified, however and contributes to an overall moderate strength of character for this landscape

Natural: weak

Cultural: moderate

Overall: moderate

- 4.5.6 **Summary of Condition** - the proximity and general pattern of the settlement edge influences the overall character of this landscape and many areas are disturbed by busy roads and adjoining industrial/commercial development. Where this is associated with a decline in the maintenance of the landscape, in particular where hedgerows have deteriorated, becoming gappy or overgrown, or where they have been replaced by wire fencing, this often results in a rather neglected appearance.

Overall: moderate

Vision Statement

- 4.5.7 ***Conserve and enhance the overall structure and planned pattern of this late enclosure landscape***, by retaining hedgerow boundaries and encouraging traditional hedge laying, particularly in visually prominent locations along roadsides. Opportunities should also be sought to strengthen the heathy character of the landscape and conserve hedgerow tree cover.
- 4.5.8 Sensitivity - The Settled heathlands is a fairly unified pastoral landscape of small fields with a recent/historic time depth giving a moderate inherent sensitivity relating primarily

to the cultural character of the landscape. Visual sensitivity is moderate due to the gently rolling nature of the landform and the generally open character of the landscape, but this can be reduced significantly where tree cover is more prevalent.

Inherent: moderate

Visual: moderate

Quality of the landscape

- 4.5.9 Due to the fact that this landscape is associated with ribbon development that grew up along existing transport corridors, the Settled Heathlands often appears urbanised and along with the widespread horse grazing this leads to a rather run down and poorly managed appearance.

4.6 Forest Heathlands

- 4.6.1 An unenclosed tract of open heathland at Gentleshaw Common, with a varied dissected topography, occupying a small outlying part of the main Cannock heath. The association with heather and bracken, along with a scattering of semi-natural oak and birch trees, is a recurring visual and ecological theme throughout this area. The unsettled nature of the landscape creates a feeling of tranquillity, while the open character allows sweeping views through the heathland and beyond, particularly over the lower lying ground to the south and east of the common.



Key characteristics

- A varied upstanding, in places sloping, dissected plateau topography
- Unenclosed, former hunting Chase
- Large tracts of open heath with heather and bracken
- Scatter of semi-natural oak and birch trees
- Unsettled and surrounded by unfenced roads

Location of Landscape



- 4.6.2 The Forest Heathlands is very much associated with the high plateau of Cannock Chase, where the underlying Pebble beds have weathered to produce a deeply dissected topography characterised by flat summits, convex slopes and small incised valleys – known locally as ‘slades’. Most of these summits lie above 150 metres and rise to almost 250 metres at the nearby Castle Ring.
- 4.6.3 One of the distinguishing features of this landscape is the sandy, free draining soil derived from the underlying Pebble beds. Leaching is a problem on these shallow podzolic soils, which historically posed a major constraint to land use and even today this landscape continues to be dominated by woodland and heath with heather and bracken. Although commercial forestry plantations are a dominant feature within the core Forest Heathlands type, there is none on Gentleshaw Common. Semi-natural patches of birch occur in places, but it is the association with heathland that provides the recurring visual and ecological theme throughout this landscape. It is most dramatic in late summer and early autumn, when the purple blooms of the heather give way to the golds and oranges of the dying bracken.
- 4.6.4 Strength of Character** - the undulating topography and remnant heathy character both contribute to a relatively strong natural dimension of the Forest Heathlands landscape. The cultural pattern is more variable, but remains a strongly unified landscape with an underlying ancient, unsettled wildland character.

Natural: strong

Cultural: moderate

Overall: strong

- 4.6.5 Summary of Condition** - Gentleshaw Common is an area of managed, but currently ungrazed heathland with a low functional integrity due to the lack of a sustainable grazing regime to maintain this landscape and prevent the succession to woodland.

Overall: moderate

Vision Statement

- 4.6.6 Conserve and restore the open heathland character of the landscape and in particular seek to re-establish a functional grazing regime with cattle and sheep. Ideally this would entail the construction of cattle grids at each of the road junctions to the common.
- 4.6.7 **Sensitivity** - The Forest Heathlands has a high inherent sensitivity relating to the strong heathland character that defines the natural dimension of the landscape. Although more variable, the cultural pattern still imparts an ancient, unsettled wildland character with a strong sense of place. Given the sloping landform and relatively open nature of this landscape, visual sensitivity is also relatively high as any change within the area would be very visible from the surrounding Ancient Settled Farmlands.

Inherent: high

Visual: high

Quality of the landscape

- 4.6.8** Gentleshaw Common is an area of heathland bounded on all sides by roads. It is designated as a SSSI and is managed by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. The Common is one of the largest areas of lowland heath in Staffordshire, covering a total of 86

hectares. Habitats include heather, bilberry, cowberry and fine grasses supporting a wide range of insect and bird life. The site is one of a series of linked heathlands from Sutton Park to Cannock Chase. Informal paths criss-cross the Common and make it a popular place to walk.

4.7 Coalfield Farmlands

- 4.7.1 A varied industrial/urban fringe landscape of former mining villages, areas of disturbed ground and restored land, set within a matrix of planned farmland originally reclaimed from woodland and heath. The remaining farmland, which is used mainly for stock rearing with some cropping, comprises small to medium sized fields defined by a regular pattern of thorn hedges/fences. Pockets of agricultural land are often surrounded by urban settlement and/or land disturbed by extensive opencast coal mining and clay winning. The mixed rocks of the coal measures give rise to a rolling topography with heavy, in places impoverished soils, where the heathy origins of this landscape are still evident.



Key characteristics

- Low rolling plateau
- Restored opencast sites with immature landscape features
- Pockets of planned farmland enclosed by thorn hedges/fences
- Patches of secondary woodland on older restored sites
- Mining settlements with brick terrace houses along former rural lanes
- Large scale urban elements including pylons major roads and distribution warehouses
- Heathy origins strongly evident

Location of Landscape



- 4.7.2 This landscape occurs along the western edge of the District, between Burntwood and Brownhills. Although underlain by hard coal bearing rocks, the landform is strongly influenced by a covering of glacial drift. This forms a low plateau summit with a gently rolling 'upland' character, often allowing wide views over the adjoining lower lying land. Much of the land surface has been disturbed by long term coal mining and more recently, by the impact of open cast coal extraction. Little remains of the original heath/rural farmland character and a new restored/planned landscape has now taken its place. The presence of pylons, large distribution warehouses and landfill sites, in places emphasise the open, large scale industrial character of this landscape. In some places patches of heath have survived, or have been re-created and these provide a reminder of the extensive areas of unenclosed land that once dominated this landscape prior to enclosure and the development of the Cannock coalfield.
- 4.7.3 The land around Chasewater is more characterised by the presence of deep mine workings with re-shaped colliery spoil tips. Many of these sites, where the land has had time to re-vegetate, are now characterised by secondary birch and willow woodland/scrub. In other places, the land has been restored to intensive agriculture with a planned field pattern defined by hawthorn hedges and wire fences. These areas now reflect the planned character of the former agricultural landscape, which was originally reclaimed and enclosed from open heathland. The survival of the Brownhills commons continues to reinforce this heathy character.
- 4.7.4 **Strength of Character** - although landform in the Coalfield Farmlands is not particularly prominent, the patches of semi natural vegetation that are associated with the tip sites and the areas of subsidence contribute to a moderate strength of character for the natural dimension of the landscape. The cultural dimension of this recent, planned landscape, however, is weak giving an overall moderate strength of character related to the natural dimension.

Natural: moderate

Cultural: weak

Overall: moderate

- 4.7.5 **Summary of Condition** - overall, the landscape in this area is in poor condition as a result of the impact of coal mining and together with arable intensification this has created a more open landscape with wide views to surrounding urban edges. Other pressures for change include the development of the M6 toll road. This landscape still retains a wealth of secondary habitats, however, that are worthy of conserving and restoring.

Overall: poor

Vision Statement

- 4.7.6 ***Restore and enhance the character and overall structure of the landscape by encouraging more positive management of locally distinctive features.*** This should include maintenance of roadside hedgerows and the patches of heathy vegetation that often occur along roadside verges and areas of disturbed ground. The aim should be to seek opportunities for the creation of heathland corridors through the wider landscape, in order to link Cannock Chase with isolated sites in the Brownhills area and beyond to Sutton Coldfield. Where arable intensification has enlarged fields and created more

open views, tree and woodland planting should also be promoted to enhance the structure of the landscape.

- 4.7.7 **Sensitivity** - The Coalfield Farmlands in this area is a relatively recent landscape with a variable character and thus has a low inherent cultural sensitivity. It is associated with an area of marginal farmland, however, characterised by remnant patches of heathland, which still impart a heathy character and a moderate natural sensitivity to change. Visual sensitivity is also moderate due to the generally more open nature of this landscape.

Inherent: moderate

Visual: moderate

Quality of the landscape

- 4.7.8 Although more widespread in the adjoining District of Cannock Chase, the urban area of Burntwood is a significant feature within Lichfield District, where small scale landscape improvements / management through the Forest of Mercia Community Woodland project could make an important contribution to local communities affected by large scale landscape change.

4.8 Sandstone Hills and Heaths

- 4.8.1 A well wooded landscape with an upstanding, in places steep sided, undulating topography. The scattered distribution of this landscape reflects the fact that it is closely associated with areas of Triassic sandstones, not obscured by drift, where impoverished sandy soils predominate. Patches of heathland vegetation still remain in places on this ground type, but more often they have been planted with coniferous woodland. Much of the former heathland, however, has been converted to farmland used for intensive arable cultivation, or stock rearing. Fields are large, usually enclosed by hedgerows and often lie within a matrix of ancient woodlands and more recent conifer plantations. The settlement pattern is generally dispersed, with estate farms and scattered roadside dwellings.



Key characteristics

- Upstanding/undulating topography, with occasional steep sided valleys
- Discrete, large blocks of both ancient and secondary woodland
- Impoverished sandy soils with patches of bracken and gorse
- Intensive arable and pastoral farming
- A pattern of varied sized fields
- Scattered hedgerow trees, mainly oak
- Occasional narrow lanes and trackways
- Farms of traditional red brick and clay tiles

Location of Landscape



- 4.8.2 Like the Forest Heathlands, the Sandstone Hills and Heaths is very much associated with the underlying Permo-Triassic Pebble beds which have weathered to produce a deeply dissected topography providing many fine views over the adjoining rolling countryside. One of the distinguishing features of this landscape are the sandy, free draining soils, which range in character from shallow podzols to deeper loams developed on some of the sandstones. Leaching is a problem on all of these soils, which historically posed a major constraint to land use and until relatively recently this landscape continued to be dominated by woodland and heath. Heathland only survives as fragmented patches of heathy vegetation, while patches of semi-natural oak and birch woodland occur in places providing ecological diversity. It is the associated heathland indicators, however, including bracken and patches of heather that are an ever present reminder of the underlying free draining, acidic soils and which provide a recurring visual and ecological theme throughout this landscape.
- 4.8.3 The Sandstone Hills & Heaths has undergone several stages of development and today supports mixed arable and pastoral farming that is largely contained within a heavily wooded landscape framework. Large estate farms, set within a planned enclosure pattern of medium sized and larger hedged fields, are a feature of this landscape. Some of these estates were associated with earlier deer parks, such as that at Beaudesert, the former palace of the Bishop of Lichfield. The settlement pattern is generally dispersed, with clusters of dwellings linked by occasional minor roads that give access via private trackways to outlying farmsteads. There is a mixture of farmstead types including regular courtyard farmsteads associated with settlements. Vernacular buildings are generally of red brick and plain clay tiles.
- 4.8.4 **Strength of Character** - in the Sandstone Hills & Heaths both the natural and cultural dimensions of the landscape contribute to an overall moderate strength of character. The former reflects a relatively prominent landform with patches of semi-natural vegetation, whilst the cultural dimension, although fairly coherent, is relatively recent in origin and thus contributes less to the overall character of the landscape.

Natural: moderate

Cultural: weak

Overall: moderate

- 4.8.5 **Summary of Condition** - arable intensification has been a recent trend, resulting in the enlargement and in some places a loss of the field pattern. Where hedgerows remain they tend to be gappy, or redundant and in places they have been replaced by wire fences.

Overall: moderate

Vision Statement

- 4.8.6 ***Conserve and enhance the overall wooded and former heathland character of the landscape.*** Opportunities should be sought for new woodland planting and for promoting the positive management of existing woodlands/trees through regeneration of oak/birch woodland, while looking for suitable sites to re-create heathland corridors to improve linkages and access through the landscape.
- 4.8.7 **Sensitivity** - The Sandstone Hills & Heaths has a moderate inherent sensitivity relating to the relatively strong heathland character that defines the natural dimension of this

landscape. Despite being reasonably coherent, however, the cultural sensitivity of this relatively recent landscape is low. Despite the undulating landform, visual sensitivity is generally moderate to low due to the prominence and containment of the tree cover. Where tree cover is less prominent, however, visual sensitivity is higher and any change within the adjoining farmland would be more visible. Part of this LCT at Beaudesert lies within the Cannock Chase AONB.

Inherent: moderate

Visual: moderate

Quality of the landscape

- 4.8.8 The well wooded and heathy character of this landscape is highly valued, often forming distant views, contributing to the community perception of the rural nature of Lichfield District. To the east of Lichfield city, individual large hilltop woodlands coalesce to form a visually continuous arc of trees acting as a valuable buffer to the adjacent expanding town of Tamworth.

4.9 Wooded Hills and Farmlands

- 4.9.1 A small area of Wooded Hills and Farmlands occur on the Warwickshire / Staffordshire border at the south east corner of this NCA. This is a productive, agricultural landscape with an upstanding, in places undulating, landform and occasional steep sided valleys. It is characterised by significant clusters of ancient woodlands of varying sizes and intensive arable/pastoral farming in medium to large hedged fields. This landscape has a dispersed pattern of settlement with scattered farms and roadside dwellings, connected by a network of narrow, often sunken lanes.



Key characteristics

- Upstanding/undulating landform, with occasional steep sided valleys
- Discrete, large blocks of ancient woodland
- Intensive arable and pastoral farming
- A varied pattern of medium to large sized fields
- Scattered hedgerow trees, mainly oak
- Network of narrow, often sunken lanes
- Scattered field ponds
- Farms of traditional red brick and clay tiles

Location of Landscape



- 4.9.2 This is an upstanding landscape with an undulating landform, providing views out over the adjoining Tame Valley. It is associated with an area of Permo-Triassic mudstones which produce fertile, easily cultivated reddish brown soils, supporting a productive mixed farming landscape.
- 4.9.3 The landscape is dominated by a rectilinear field pattern, which was created, or re-organised in the late 18th-19th century. This is a wooded landscape, with a mix of large, ancient broadleaved woodlands, scattered coverts and in places, a dense coverage of mature hedgerow oaks. Stream corridors are lined with poplars and willows. Prior to the mid-18th century, this area of Wooded Hills and Farmland incorporated two large deer parks at Shirrall and Great Bangley, both of which had medieval origins.
- 4.9.4 This landscape is sparsely settled and characterised by widely scattered traditional regular courtyard farmsteads, along with a few more recent farms. Vernacular buildings tend to be of red brick construction with clay tile roofs.
- 4.9.5 Strength of Character** - the ancient wooded character of this landscape, reflected in the occurrence of large, irregularly shaped ancient woodlands, linked by wooded streamlines and primary hedge lines, imparts a strong strength of character, which is emphasised by the undulating topography.

Natural: moderate

Cultural: strong

Overall: strong

- 4.9.6 Summary of Condition** - this is a landscape where both the agricultural land and the woodlands are managed at a fairly high level of intensity. As a result, the overall structure and ecological diversity of the landscape are in relatively poor condition.

Overall: moderate

Vision Statement

- 4.9.7 ***Conserve the overall unity of this well wooded landscape and seek opportunities for promoting the positive management of existing woodlands/trees through regeneration of oak woodland.*** Opportunities should also be sought to strengthen biodiversity by restoring ecological corridors between woodland blocks.
- 4.9.8 **Sensitivity** - The Wooded Hills & Farmlands has a moderate-high inherent sensitivity relating to the widespread occurrence of large blocks of ancient woodland and the associated pattern of woodland assarting that defines the cultural dimension of this landscape. Despite the undulating landform, visual sensitivity is generally moderate to low due to the prominence and containment of the tree cover. Where tree cover is less prominent, however, visual sensitivity is higher and any change within the adjoining farmland would be more visible.

Inherent: high

Visual: low-moderate

Quality of the landscape

- 4.9.9 This landscape is closely associated with Canwell Hall and estate which has a unified and distinctive rural character. Although the farming is intensive arable in large fields,

the surviving historic planned character and the presence of ancient woodlands create a valued landscape on the edge of the District.

4.10 TRENT VALLEY WASHLANDS NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA

- 4.10.1 Lying around the edge of the old royal hunting Forests of Needwood and Cankwood, the Trent Valley Washlands is a linear shaped region defined by the broad valley of the River Trent and its tributaries the Tame and the Dove. The Trent Valley Washlands National Character Area (NCA) extends from Staffordshire and tributaries in Warwickshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire, into Nottinghamshire.
- 4.10.2 The region has a flat, low-lying landform characterised by alluvial soils overlying Triassic mudstones. From almost everywhere there are views to higher ground in the adjoining character areas, creating a broad sense of enclosure. The underlying geology comprises a broad alluvial floodplain, flanked along much of its length by fluvio-glacial and more recent river terraces. In a number of places the underlying Triassic mudstones form a series of low 'islands' in the alluvial drift, on which most of the settlements in the Trent Valley are located. The river terraces are a major source of sand and gravel, the extraction of which has created significant areas of open water that are of value as wetland habitats and used for recreational purposes.
- 4.10.3 The richness of the soils in the area has resulted in the creation of intensively cropped arable landscapes, with some limited dairying and sheep rearing, in large regular hedged fields. Tree cover is generally limited to a scatter of hedgerow trees, a few discrete blocks of ancient and secondary mixed woodland to the north of Lichfield and lines of willow, alder and poplar along the watercourses. Wet grasslands are a feature of the river floodplains and together with the areas of open water on the adjoining river terraces, are of particular value to breeding and over-wintering waders and wildfowl.
- 4.10.4 Settlement in the Trent Valley is dominated by a strongly nucleated pattern of discrete villages, surrounded by their associated arable farms, while the lower lying areas next to the rivers tend to be unsettled and mainly used for pasture. The richness of the region's long-standing agricultural economy is reflected in the size and age of its buildings. Timber framed buildings are found throughout the area, but clusters of such buildings can also be found in the older nucleated settlements, such as Kings Bromley. Brick noggin has now replaced traditional materials in many timber framed buildings and its strong red colour provides continuity where later cottages stand alongside them.
- 4.10.5 Five Landscape Character Types occur in that part of the district lying within the Trent Valley Washlands:
- River Meadowlands
 - River Terrace Farmlands
 - Lowland Village Farmlands
 - Settled Heathlands
 - Estate Farmlands

4.11 River Meadowlands

4.11.1 A narrow, meandering river corridor landscape associated with a flat, generally well-defined alluvial floodplain. Although normally defined by strong hedgelines along the edge of the floodplain, in places, the river corridor is framed by low, but often steeply rising ground. Overall, this is a secluded pastoral landscape, characterised by meandering, tree-lined rivers, flanked by alluvial meadows with grazing animals.



Key characteristics

- Flat, low-lying river corridor
- Seasonally flooded alluvial floodplain
- Meandering river channel
- Surviving 18th to 19th century water meadow earthworks and associated features
- Pastoral farming with grazing livestock
- Lines of poplar, willow and alder along watercourses
- Hedge and ditch field boundaries
- Unsettled with few roads

Location of Landscape



4.11.2 The low-lying alluvial floodplain of the River Trent and the River Tame form a distinctive River Meadowlands landscape that wraps around the northern and eastern edges of the Cankwood NCA. Historically the presence of extensive areas of waterside meadows, used for seasonal grazing, were key features of this landscape, providing a strong sense of visual and ecological unity. The effect of regular seasonal flooding was reflected in the pattern of land use, in particular the lack of settlement /other development, and the presence of species and habitats tolerant of waterlogged conditions. Tree cover, notably alder and willow, are a distinctive feature of this landscape, the latter often managed as pollards and occurring both in ditch lines and along the banks of the main river channels. Such habitats provide valuable nesting and feeding areas for wildlife and where associated with unimproved meadowland, they create a strong sense of place and feeling of naturalness. The sound and movement of water add to this feeling of tranquillity.

4.11.3 Strength of Character – meandering river channels, flanked by grazing meadows and riverside trees are the special features of this landscape, combining to create peaceful, undisturbed pastoral scenes. Where flooding still occurs, the presence of wet grassland and marsh evoke a strong sense of place and feeling of naturalness that is now rare in lowland English landscapes.

Natural: strong

Cultural: moderate

Overall: strong

4.11.4 Summary of Condition – in recent times the continuity and pastoral character of the river corridors along the Trent and Tame has become fragmented by the encroachment of arable land use and the impact of sand & gravel extraction. Even in those areas that have remained in pastoral use, the nature conservation interest has often been diminished due to the decline in the traditional practice of seasonal grazing and haymaking. Similarly, modification of the natural shape and profile of many water courses has reduce the wildlife value of these features and produced a functional, somewhat urban appearance.

Overall: moderate

Vision Statement

4.11.5 ***Conserve and restore the visual unity and distinctive pastoral character of river corridor landscapes.*** This can be achieved by conserving all remaining areas of pasture on river floodplains and seeking opportunities to convert arable areas back to pastoral use. Given the national scarcity of wetland habitats, restoration/re-creation schemes should be adopted in areas where property would not be at risk from flooding. This could be done as part of the current move by Water Authorities to control flooding in urban areas by slowing down water run off and letting it back onto river floodplains in rural areas.

4.11.6 Sensitivity - the River Meadowlands have a relatively high inherent sensitivity related in particular to the natural character of the riverside environment. The historic time depth of the cultural pattern is also of moderate sensitivity. Visual sensitivity is low due to the prominence of tree cover and the flat, low-lying nature of the topography.

Inherent: high

Visual: low

Quality of the landscape

- 4.11.7 The narrow river corridors within the Trent and Tame valleys are often hidden away and can have a surprisingly wild character with attractive locally enclosed views. Industrial uses, gravel extraction and the use of the river valleys as transport corridors, however, detract from these unspoilt scenes in many places.

4.12 River Terrace Farmlands

4.12.1 A flat, low-lying, predominantly arable landscape associated with the broad terraces of the Trent and Tame river valleys. This is a large scale, intensively farmed landscape defined by large rectilinear fields, although there are also pockets of older, semi-regular fields. Scattered hedgerow trees, small plantations and lines of willows and alders along streams and ditches often provide quite a strong sense of enclosure in this flat landscape.



Key characteristics

- Flat, low-lying landform
- Intensively managed arable farmland
- Large hedged fields and hedgerow trees
- Waterside tree species along ditches
- Small broadleaved woodlands
- Scattered farmsteads
- A few relatively straight minor lanes

Location of Landscape



- 4.12.2 This is a flat, low-lying landscape where the underlying Mercia Mudstones are overlain by a variety of fluvio-glacial and riverine drift, mostly comprising sands and gravels, which form a series of terraces flanking the alluvial floodplain. These terraces give rise to easily worked, coarse-textured sandy loams, which support intensive arable cropping. Streams and ditches, often with lines of willows and alders along their banks, create a sense of enclosure in places.
- 4.12.3 The character of the River Terrace Farmlands was largely shaped by planned enclosure in the 19th century, with a large scale, rectilinear field pattern. This landscape is sparsely settled with scattered farmsteads and a few other dwellings, accessed by occasional straight rural lanes, while the presence of larger settlements such as Tamworth, create a prominent urban edge in places. Farmsteads tend to be large and regular in form reflecting the planned enclosure of the landscape. Buildings are mostly of brick construction.
- 4.12.4 Where sand and gravel extraction has taken place, the resulting flooded gravel pits have often been developed into more natural wetlands, providing valuable habitats and feeding sites. These are characterised by alder carr, willow scrub and patches of wet grassland.
- 4.12.5 Strength of Character** – intensive arable and horticultural production is a dominant feature in the River Terrace Farmlands and together with widespread sand & gravel production, has resulted in a rather featureless landscape with few distinguishing features of interest. Tree cover is also sparse, but where well wooded streamlines cross the terrace they create a strong sense of enclosure and scale in this flat landscape.

Natural: weak

Cultural: weak

Overall: weak

- 4.12.6 Summary of Condition** – the River Terrace Farmlands are characterised by a large scale geometric field pattern, which for the most part has become fragmented and is in decline. Roadside and parish boundary hedgerows are generally thicker and more likely to have survived, although many of these hedges are gappy and poorly maintained.

Overall: poor

Vision Statement

- 4.12.7 ***Retain and enhance the structure and unity of the landscape by restoring and strengthening primary linear features.*** In an area where the fertile, free draining soils are well suited to intensive cropping, it is the network of primary linear features along streamlines, roads, trackways and parish boundaries that are the key to retaining and enhancing the structure and overall unity of the landscape. The introduction of more trees into this landscape structure would also help to frame distant views and soften the hard outlines of buildings and settlement edges.
- 4.12.8 **Sensitivity** – given the rather featureless character of the River Terrace Farmlands and the fact that much of any late enclosure pattern has been removed by sand & gravel extraction, this landscape has a relatively low inherent sensitivity. For the most part, the lack of woodland cover and low lying nature of the landform generally give this landscape a moderate visual sensitivity. However, given the visual containment caused

by the presence of streamside and other trees in this flat landscape, where these are present visual sensitivity is lower and any change within the adjoining farmland would be much less visible.

Inherent: low

Visual: low-moderate

Quality of the landscape

- 4.12.9 Gravel extraction followed by restoration to open water, or agricultural land, characterises much of the River Terrace Farmlands within the Tame and Trent Valleys, contributing to the poor quality of this landscape throughout the District. The landscape partnership initiative entitled 'Transforming the Trent Valley' will currently taking steps to enhance the River Terrace Farmlands and make them more accessible for wildlife and people.

4.13 Lowland Village Farmlands

4.13.1 A well ordered agricultural landscape associated with productive Brown soils, characterised by nucleated villages and a scatter of farmsteads with occasional roadside dwellings. These occupy a lowland mixed farming landscape set within a semi-regular pattern of medium to large hedged fields lying on slightly higher ground adjoining the River Trent. This landscape owes much of its present day character to the late enclosure of former medieval open fields.



Key characteristics

- Gently rolling landform
- Productive arable farming with pockets of pasture around villages
- A planned enclosure pattern of medium - large hedged fields
- Discrete rural villages
- Narrow country lanes bounded by wide grass verges
- Tree lined stream corridors

Location of Landscape



- 4.13.2 The underlying geology of the Lowland Village Farmlands is dominated by Mercia Mudstones, which give rise to a gently rolling, lowland topography. These mudstones produce fertile, easily cultivated reddish Brown soils, which support a productive, intensively managed, mixed farming landscape, with pockets of pastoral farmland around the villages. This is an open landscape of medium to large sized, mostly regular fields enclosed by thorn hedgerows. The overall character of this landscape is strongly related to the planned enclosure of open fields by Parliamentary Act. There are also a few areas with an older sub-regular field pattern, often associated with surviving ridge and furrow. This older field pattern tends to be set back from the roadside and the gently rolling landform does not allow it to register strongly in the landscape. The Lowland Village Farmlands are largely unwooded and tree cover is restricted to stream corridors, or groups of trees around farmsteads and settlement edges.
- 4.13.3 Discrete nucleated villages, which have developed around a church and manor house, are a distinctive feature in this landscape. The majority of older buildings on farms and within settlements are of red brick, although timber framing can also be found, occasionally hidden by later facades. Prehistoric settlement is evidenced by cropmarks showing enclosures and ditches, particularly around King's Bromley. This suggests several phases of prehistoric landscape development.
- 4.13.4 **Strength of Character** – although the natural dimension is rather weak, the historic character of this rural, agricultural landscape is moderately strong and characterised by discrete villages and outlying farms that define the character for this landscape.

Natural: weak

Cultural: moderate

Overall: moderate

- 4.13.5 **Summary of Condition** - the scale and survival of the historic enclosure pattern defines the overall character and condition of this landscape and although some areas retain a peaceful rural character with farmsteads and occasional rural dwellings, other parts are disrupted by agricultural intensification, or the proximity to urban centres/busy roads. Where this is the case, land use change has often caused a decline in the structure of the landscape, resulting in hedgerow deterioration and creating a fragmented/neglected appearance.

Overall: moderate

Vision Statement

- 4.13.6 ***Conserve and enhance the structure and overall integrity of this historic, rural landscape.*** In particular, encourage the conservation of field boundaries and look for opportunities to restore primary hedgelines and enhance hedgerow tree cover. Opportunities should also be sought to strengthen biodiversity throughout this landscape.
- 4.13.7 **Sensitivity** - one of the special features of the Lowland Village Farmlands is its rural, agricultural character. This is emphasised by the strongly nucleated settlement pattern and relatively few roads, giving this landscape a moderately high inherent sensitivity, relating primarily to the cultural dimension of the landscape. Visual sensitivity is also

moderately high due to the open nature of the landform and the general lack of woodland cover.

Inherent: moderate

Visual: moderate

Quality of the landscape

- 4.13.8 Although a busy transport network disturbs the rural character of the Lowland Village Farmlands, particularly in the area to the south of the River Trent. However, the more open nature of the landscape affords some long distance views towards the Cathedral City of Lichfield and its spired churches. To the north of the river the quality of the landscape is enhanced by the quieter, more rural character and network of narrow country lanes in this area.

4.14 Settled Heathlands

4.14.1 A flat, low-lying landscape associated with impoverished, sandy soils derived from an old river terrace. This is a planned, mixed farming landscape, where place names reflect the former extent of commons in the area. This is emphasised by the regular pattern of small and large hedged fields, straight roads with uniform verges and a planned settlement pattern of roadside dwellings. Much of this area is reasonably well wooded and together with the scattered hedgerow trees, this creates a strong sense of visual enclosure.



Key characteristics

- Flat, lowland topography
- River sands and gravels creating poor soils with a relic heathy character
- Mixed farmland with extensive areas of grazing land and pony paddocks
- Discrete blocks of both ancient and secondary mixed woodland
- Dispersed settlement pattern with scattered roadside dwellings
- Planned, late enclosure highway network of straight roads with uniform verges
- Numerous place names reflecting presence of former commons

Location of Landscape



4.14.2 This landscape is associated with deposits of fluvio-glacial drift, giving rise to impoverished fine and coarse loamy soils. Little heathland now remains, but the heathy character is still reflected in the recurring presence of bracken and birch in the woodlands and hedgerows. Much of the land is now used for stock rearing and cropping and in places blocks of woodland, some of ancient origin, create a more 'wooded' character. This is reinforced by the widespread occurrence of hedgerow oaks that are scattered throughout the area.

4.14.3 The Settled Heathlands were shaped by the planned enclosure of heathland in the early 19th century and they are characterised by a regular pattern of small and large hedged fields. Settlement comprises a scatter of roadside dwellings and small farms, linked by a network of generally straight lanes with uniform verges. Most farmsteads reflect the planned character of the landscape and are predominantly large, and regular in form. Older buildings are mostly red brick with clay tiled roofs. The relatively new developments at Fradley and around the former airfield have become a significant feature in the eastern part of this area.

4.14.4 Strength of Character - although the landform is not particularly prominent in the Settled Heathlands, there is enough relic habitat survival to characterise the natural dimension of the landscape. The historic character is fairly unified and also contributes strongly to an overall moderate strength of character for this landscape

Natural: moderate

Cultural: moderate

Overall: moderate

4.14.5 Summary of Condition - recent development on the old airfield at Fradley has had a major impact in this area, although the woodland around Fradley junction effectively screens this from the north and west. The structure of the landscape in the remainder of the area is still largely intact, but in some places, hedgerows have deteriorated and become gappy / overgrown, or replaced by wire fencing.

Overall: moderate

Vision Statement

4.14.6 ***Conserve and enhance the overall structure and planned pattern of this late enclosure landscape***, by retaining hedgerow boundaries and encouraging traditional hedge laying / tree planting, particularly in visually prominent locations along roadsides. Also need to seek opportunities to conserve hedgerow tree cover and strengthen biodiversity by restoring heathland habitats, particularly in the more wooded area around Fradley Junction.

4.14.7 **Sensitivity** - the Settled Heathlands is a fairly unified pastoral landscape with a strong heathy character. Together with the recent/historic pattern of small fields, trees and woodlands, this imparts a moderate inherent sensitivity relating to both the natural and cultural character of the landscape. Visual sensitivity is generally moderate to low due to the low lying, gently rolling nature of the landform and the presence of tree/woodland cover.

Inherent: moderate

Visual: low-moderate

Quality of the landscape

- 4.14.8 Although under pressure for commercial development; housing and the proposed HS2 rail line, this landscape has a moderate to high quality reflecting the surviving ancient woodlands, mature hedgerow oaks and heathy, rural character, which help to maintain a strong identity throughout the area.

4.15 Wooded Estatelands

4.15.1 A low lying, in places rolling agricultural landscape associated with heavy, productive soils and characterised by a strongly nucleated pattern of villages and large estate farms. Arable farming is dominant, set within a regular pattern of medium to large sized, hedged fields, created by the late enclosure of former open fields. This is a landscape with a strong sense of enclosure, where views are restricted by woodland edges, densely scattered hedgerow trees and the adjoining heavily wooded hills.



Key characteristics

- Gently rolling landform
- Productive arable farming with pockets of pasture around villages
- A planned enclosure pattern of medium to large, closely cropped hedged fields
- Densely scattered mature hedgerow trees
- Series of plantation woodlands along the Bourne Brook
- Large country houses set in mature grounds
- Strongly nucleated pattern of estate villages
- Narrow country lanes bounded by wide grass verges

Location of Landscape



4.15.2 The underlying Permo-Triassic rocks in this landscape are dominated by Mercia Mudstones which give rise to a gently rolling, lowland topography drained by a series of minor rivers. The Mercia Mudstones produce fertile, reddish brown soils, which support a productive, intensively managed, mixed farming landscape, with pockets of pastoral farmland around the villages and associated with stream corridors. Most of the medium to large sized fields are regular in shape and enclosed by closely cropped thorn hedgerows. Enclosure of this landscape dates from various periods, but is mainly dominated by planned enclosure under Parliamentary Acts in the 18th century. Patches of earlier piecemeal enclosure occur throughout, mostly adjacent to villages, such as Drayton Bassett and Middleton, where they are often associated with surviving ridge and furrow. Overall the area is not heavily wooded, but there is extensive tree cover associated with existing and former areas of parkland. Streamside and mature hedgerow trees along roadsides are also a significant feature, while the heavily wooded hills that define the entire western edge of this area greatly enhance the enclosed character of the landscape.

4.15.3 Discrete nucleated villages, which have developed around a church and manor house, are a distinctive feature of this landscape. Outlying farmsteads tend to be medium to large scale and are dominated by regular farm layouts. The majority of older buildings on farms and within settlements are of red brick, with some timber framing, often hidden by later facades. The villages and their surrounding estate farms are connected by narrow country lanes and trackways, many with wide grass verges. There are a number of extensive landscaped parks, in this area, including Drayton Manor Park, Middleton Hall and the former deer park at Great Bangley. Many of these, originated as moated manor houses in the medieval period.

4.15.4 **Strength of Character** – although the natural dimension of the Wooded Estatelands is rather weak and largely confined to watercourses, the historic character of this well ordered, rural, agricultural landscape is strong and characterised by country estates, discrete rural villages and extensive tree cover.

Natural: weak Cultural: strong Overall: strong

4.15.5 **Summary of Condition** - the scale and survival of the historic enclosure pattern defines the overall character and condition of this landscape and although many areas retain a peaceful, farmed character, other parts are disrupted by agricultural intensification and amenity activities. Where this is the case, land use change has in places caused a decline in the structure of the landscape, resulting in hedgerow deterioration and ‘clutter’ linked to amenity development.

Overall: moderate

Vision Statement

4.15.6 **Conserve and restore the structure and overall integrity of this historic, rural landscape.** In particular, encourage the conservation of field boundaries and look for opportunities to restore primary hedgelines and enhance hedgerow tree cover.

Opportunities should also be sought to strengthen biodiversity by restoring wetland habitats along stream/river corridors.

- 4.15.7 **Sensitivity** - one of the special features of the Estate Farmlands is its rural, agricultural character. This is emphasised by the strongly nucleated settlement pattern and relatively few roads, giving this landscape a moderately high inherent sensitivity, relating primarily to the cultural dimension of the landscape. Visual sensitivity is fairly low due to the low lying nature of this area and the extensive tree cover.

Inherent: moderate

Visual: low

Quality of the landscape

- 4.15.8 The Wooded Estatelands within the Tame Valley are an agricultural landscape of nucleated estate villages and associated country houses, set in areas of mature parkland. Although close to the urban area of Tamworth and dissected by several major road routes, this area is nevertheless defined by a strongly nucleated settlement pattern, which is reflected in the relatively strong rural character that distinguishes the landscape.

4.16 MEASE LOWLANDS NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA

- 4.16.1 The Mease Lowlands National Character Area (NCA) is a lowland agricultural region with a strong rural character, extending eastwards out of Staffordshire into the adjoining counties of north Warwickshire, south Derbyshire and Leicestershire. This area is drained by the River Sence and the River Mease (designated as a SAC), the former into the Anker Valley along the south-western boundary of the region and the latter into the Trent Valley to the north-west.
- 4.16.2 The Mease Lowlands are closely associated with an area of Triassic rocks known as the Mercia Mudstones, which are partially overlain by glacial till to the east. Together with localised outcrops of Triassic sandstones, which extend southwards and westwards from the edge of the South Derbyshire Coalfield, these rocks give rise to a gently rolling lowland topography of low clay hills and shallow valleys. Productive, clayey brown earths, with localised patches of more poorly drained loamy soils occur throughout the region, resulting in the land being classified as of reasonably high quality. The Mease Lowlands are thus largely dominated by arable cropping, with some grassland supporting dairying and sheep grazing.
- 4.16.3 Field pattern is generally characterised by medium to large sized hedged fields, with a mix of sub-regular and regular fields; the former were created by early piecemeal enclosure of former open field cultivation, while the latter reflect planned enclosure by parliamentary act in the 18th and 19th centuries. In some areas the fields have been enlarged during the 20th century, although the earlier pattern is usually still apparent in the surviving field boundaries. Hedgerows are typically close cropped, dominated by hawthorn, with a moderate cover of hedgerow trees, predominantly oak and ash. The English elms that formerly graced these hedgerows now only survive as shrubby sucker re-growth. The late enclosure of the land was often complemented by the planting of coverts and spinneys, which give some degree of visual enclosure in an otherwise well-ordered landscape of relatively open views and a quiet rural character.
- 4.16.4 The fertile agricultural land watered by the river Mease has resulted in the development of a series of prosperous villages, including Elford and Clifton Campville. In the medieval period, the surrounding farmland supported a lowland arable economy with nucleated villages based around a church and manor house. The strongly nucleated settlement pattern is a particularly distinctive feature in an area that has retained its rural character. Mid-Staffordshire mellow orange-red bricks tend to be the characteristic building material in this region.
- 4.16.5 One Landscape Character Type can be found in the Mease Lowlands:
- Estate Farmlands

4.17 Estate Farmlands

4.17.1 A well ordered agricultural landscape associated with productive Brown soils, characterised by small nucleated villages, estate farms and small game coverts. These occupy a lowland mixed farming landscape set within a semi-regular pattern of medium to large hedged fields. This landscape owes much of its present day character to the late enclosure of former open fields, mainly by Parliamentary Act.



Key characteristics

- Gently rolling landform
- Productive arable farming with pockets of pasture around villages
- A planned enclosure pattern of medium to large, closely cropped hedged fields
- Many small, regularly shaped game coverts
- Tree lined stream corridors
- Large country houses, often set in mature grounds
- Small rural villages often marked by a tall church spire
- Narrow country lanes bounded by wide grass verges

Location of Landscape



- 4.17.2 The underlying Permo-Triassic rocks in this landscape are dominated by Mercia Mudstones which give rise to a gently rolling, lowland topography drained by a series of minor rivers. The Mudstones produce fertile, easily cultivated reddish brown soils, which support a productive, intensively managed, mixed farming landscape, with pockets of pastoral farmland around the villages and associated with stream corridors. Overall the area is not heavily wooded and tree cover is mostly restricted to stream corridors, scattered hedgerow trees and small, regularly shaped game coverts. Hedgerow trees tend to be more frequent in pastoral areas.
- 4.17.3 This is a relatively open landscape of medium to large sized, mostly regular fields enclosed by closely cropped thorn hedgerows, dominated by planned enclosure under Parliamentary Acts in the 18th century. Patches of earlier piecemeal enclosure occur throughout, mostly adjacent to villages, such as Clifton Campville and Haunton, where they are often associated with surviving ridge and furrow.
- 4.17.4 Discrete nucleated villages, which have developed around a church and manor house, are a distinctive feature of this landscape. Many of these villages stand on rising land allowing churches, many of which have a tall spire, to become a clearly visible focal point across the wider landscape. Farmsteads tend to be medium to large in size, dominated by regular farm layouts. The majority of older buildings on farms and within settlements are of red brick, with some timber framing often hidden by later facades. The villages and surrounding estate farms are connected by narrow country lanes with wide grass verges. There is a scatter of country houses, dating from the 16th and 17th centuries, associated with small landscaped parks. Some of these originated as moated manor houses in the medieval period, when they were associated with the sites of former villages, whose remains often survive as earthworks.
- 4.17.5 **Strength of Character** – although the natural dimension of this Estate Farmlands is rather weak and largely confined to watercourses, the historic character of this well ordered, rural, agricultural landscape is strong and characterised by country estates, discrete rural villages and small regularly shaped game coverts.

Natural: weak

Cultural: strong

Overall: strong

- 4.17.6 **Summary of Condition** - the scale and survival of the historic enclosure pattern defines the overall character and condition of this landscape and although many areas retain a peaceful, pastoral character, other parts are disrupted by agricultural intensification. Where this is the case, land use change has often caused a decline in the structure of the landscape, resulting in hedgerow deterioration and creating a fragmented/neglected appearance.

Overall: moderate

Vision Statement

- 4.17.7 ***Conserve and restore the structure and overall integrity of this historic, rural landscape.*** In particular, encourage the conservation of field boundaries and look for opportunities to restore primary hedgelines and enhance hedgerow tree cover.

Opportunities should also be sought to strengthen biodiversity by restoring wetland habitats along stream/river corridors.

- 4.17.8 **Sensitivity** – one of the special features of the Estate Farmlands is its rural, agricultural character. This is emphasised by the strongly nucleated settlement pattern and relatively few roads, giving this landscape a moderately high inherent sensitivity, relating primarily to the cultural dimension of the landscape. Visual sensitivity is also moderately high due to the relatively open, rolling nature of the landform and the general lack of woodland cover.

Inherent: moderate

Visual: moderate

Quality of the landscape

- 4.17.9 The Estate Farmlands within the Mease lowlands is a farmed landscape of nucleated villages, many with tall church spires, often sited on higher ground. This landscape is defined by a strongly nucleated settlement pattern, which is reflected in the strong rural character that distinguishes the quiet, undisturbed nature of the Estate Farmlands. The long views, quiet lanes and gentle topography make this a valued landscape of high quality.

4.18 NEEDWOOD CLAYLANDS NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA

- 4.18.1 The Needwood region forms part of the Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands National Character Area (NCA), which is split into two roughly similar sized parts by the broad valley of the river Dove. The Dove also forms the county boundary between Staffordshire and Derbyshire. This region is entirely underlain by Permo-Triassic rocks, mainly comprising Mercia Mudstone, much of which is covered by a substantial layer of glacial drift. The drift forms a series of gently rolling, low plateaux, while the Mercia Mudstone tends to have a more dissected, rolling/undulating topography around the edges of the plateau. Two minor rivers, the Blithe and the Tean, form narrow alluvial corridors within the region.
- 4.18.2 As a whole, Needwood is a mixed farming region with a considerable area of grassland supporting dairying, with some beef and sheep farms. In places it is heavily wooded, especially in the south eastern part of the region, where frequent ancient woodlands remain as evidence of the once extensive Forest of Needwood. Here the influence of large estates is very evident, related to the substantial areas of planned enclosure of wood pasture within the Forest after 1801. The result of this late enclosure is a landscape characterised by a uniform pattern of well maintained hedged fields, straight roads, regular conifer plantations, and isolated, neat brick farms.
- 4.18.3 Elsewhere the landscape is defined by a more varied pattern of small to medium sized hedged fields, a network of narrow lanes and a number of moated sites which suggest medieval settlement. The settlement pattern of the regional character area is clustered, with a mix of scattered farmsteads, roadside dwellings and small villages / hamlets. The slopes and valleys surrounding the original Forest core contain many villages and hamlets with historic links to the Forest. To the south and west of the Forest core are valley settlements such as Yoxall and Abbots Bromley which have a variety of timber-framed buildings demonstrating their association with the former Forest. Throughout the wider area, however, older buildings are usually constructed from deep red-coloured bricks with clay tile roofs.
- 4.18.4 The wooded character of the region today is reinforced by hedgerow trees, predominantly oak and ash and frequent smaller patches of ancient woodland. Landscaped parks and gardens, created during the nineteenth century also have a considerable effect locally, where they increase the effect of tree cover.
- 4.18.5 Of the 5 Landscape Character Types found in Needwood, only three occur within Lichfield District:
- Ancient Settled Farmlands
 - Wooded Estatelands
 - River Meadowlands

4.19 Ancient Settled Farmlands

4.19.1 The Ancient Settled Farmlands is a well-defined cultural landscape with a varied pattern of small to medium sized hedged fields, many of which are of medieval origin. These are set within an irregular pattern of ancient winding lanes that link a clustered settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads, groups of roadside dwellings and occasional small villages. The underlying Triassic mudstones have produced fertile Brown soils where dairying/mixed farming is the dominant land use, with only a scatter of small ancient woods and secondary plantations. The rounded and rolling landform is characterised in places by a more undulating topography with occasional steeper slopes, especially around the northern and western fringes of the region.



Key characteristics

- A varied rolling/undulating topography
- Many small streams in shallow valleys
- A well-defined sub-regular field pattern
- Arable and pastoral farming
- Network of narrow lanes, often with hedge banks
- Large numbers of hedgerow oak and ash
- Dispersed pattern of scattered farmsteads, roadside dwellings and settlement clusters
- Traditional red brick farmsteads and dwellings with clay tile roofs

Location of Landscape



- 4.19.2 The underlying geology of the Ancient Settled Farmlands comprises Mercia mudstones, creating a well rounded rolling/undulating topography dissected by numerous small streams. The mudstones produce fertile, easily cultivated reddish Brown soils, which give rise to a productive agricultural landscape of dairying and mixed farming. Although not heavily wooded, the Ancient Settled Farmlands have a large number of hedgerow trees (oak with some ash) and locally prominent lines of streamside trees (willow and alder). There are also small patches of ancient woodland and together with patches of semi-natural grassland on more steeply sloping ground and small wetlands that survive in stream valleys, these provide important habitats in an otherwise productive agricultural landscape.
- 4.19.3 The landscape has a distinctive cultural character with a well-defined clustered settlement pattern that contributes substantially to the overall character of the landscape. This pattern is characterised by mix of medieval villages and hamlets, roadside dwellings, scattered small farmsteads and larger red brick estate farms. These are connected by a network of narrow, winding, often sunken lanes enclosed by hedge banks with large numbers of hedgerow trees. Farmsteads are generally set back from the road and accessed via trackways.
- 4.19.4 Relatively high concentrations of small farmsteads are dispersed throughout this landscape, particularly in areas of piecemeal enclosure, where ridge and furrow, often associated with villages, provides testimony to their medieval, or earlier, origins. Vernacular buildings are predominantly of traditional red brick with clay tiles, notably Staffordshire Blues.
- 4.19.5 Strength of Character** - although landform is relatively prominent, the natural dimension of this landscape is rather weak as there are only small patches of habitat survival. The historic character, however, is prominent and often unified, contributing strongly to the strength of character of this landscape.

Natural: weak

Cultural: strong

Overall: strong

- 4.19.6 Summary of Condition** - the scale and survival of the historic enclosure pattern defines the overall character and condition of this landscape and although many parts retain a peaceful rural character with farmsteads and clusters of roadside cottages, some areas are disrupted by agricultural intensification, causing a decline in the structure of the landscape and resulting in hedgerow deterioration/removal.

Overall: moderate

Vision Statement

- 4.19.7 ***Conserve and restore the structure and overall integrity of this historic, rural landscape.*** In particular, encourage the maintenance and conservation of field boundaries and look for opportunities to restore primary hedgelines and enhance hedgerow tree cover.
- 4.19.8 **Sensitivity** - the Ancient Settled Farmlands are an historic, mixed farming landscape with a deep time depth. The inherent sensitivity of this area is thus relatively high,

relating primarily to the cultural character of the landscape. Visual sensitivity is also fairly high due to the undulating nature of the landform / general lack of woodlands.

Inherent: moderate

Visual: moderate

Quality of the landscape

- 4.19.9 The tract of Ancient Settled Farmlands lying between the River Blithe and Trent Valley is part of a larger landscape unit extending northwards into the Needwood Claylands. There is a deep sense of history and continuity in this rural landscape which is in sharp contrast to the nearby industrial activities around Rugeley. The long views southwards towards the spires of Lichfield Cathedral, and also to Rugeley power Station, allow the visitor to appreciate the setting of this quiet landscape which will be impacted by the construction of HS2.

4.20 Wooded Estatelands

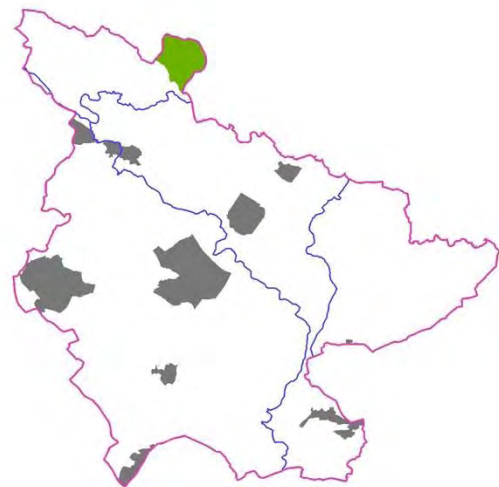
4.20.1 This is a heavily wooded estate landscape characterised by large ancient woodlands (outside Lichfield District), with evidence of early irregular assarts, set within medium to large sized fields bounded by ancient mixed hedgerows. This is a landscape with a strong sense of enclosure, where views are restricted by landform, woodland edges and in places densely scattered hedgerow trees. Arable farming is dominant with some smaller pockets of pastoral farming and settlement is dispersed with scattered red brick farmsteads and estate cottages.



Key characteristics

- Rolling/undulating, in places steeply sloping, topography
- Large blocks of irregularly shaped ancient woodland (outside Lichfield District)
- Well managed mixed farmland
- Scattered, mature hedgerow oaks
- Large country houses set in mature grounds
- Relic deer parks with mature parkland trees
- Scattered red brick farmsteads and estate cottages

Location of Landscape



4.20.2 The underlying Permo-Triassic rocks comprise Mercia mudstones, creating a rolling/undulating topography dissected by numerous small stream valleys. These mudstones produce fertile, easily cultivated reddish Brown soils, giving rise to a productive mixed farming landscape dominated by intensive arable farming, with some pockets of pastoral farmland. The Wooded Estatelands, as the name implies, are part of an estate landscape with a medium to large-scale, sub-regular field pattern indicative of piecemeal enclosure of woodland / wood pasture. This landscape is part of what was once the core of the old Needwood Forest where large ancient woodlands provide a visual reminder of the extensive area of wood pasture/forest that once existed in this area. No ancient woodlands survive within Lichfield District, but many still occur in the adjoining Newborough area. The many scattered mature hedgerow oaks and relic deer park, however, provide a visual link with the old Forest.

4.20.3 Apart from the adjoining village of Newborough, settlement is dispersed with scattered red brick and clay tiles farmsteads and estate cottages. Large, regular farmsteads are dominant and reflect the estate character of the landscape. Estate buildings tend to be more decorative, including painted woodwork and stone mullioned windows.

4.20.4 Strength of Character - although the landform is apparent, the natural dimension of this landscape is rather weak and restricted to small patches of habitat associated with the edge of the old deer park that now defines the Lichfield District boundary. The historic pattern, relating to the late enclosure and settlement of the old deer park is still apparent and continues to contribute to the strength of character of the landscape.

Natural: weak

Cultural: moderate

Overall: moderate

4.20.5 Summary of Condition - the scale and survival of the historic enclosure pattern defines the overall character and condition of this landscape and although the hedgerow boundaries within the former deer park are now in decline this allows the scale of the original parkland to become more apparent.

Overall: poor

Vision Statement

4.20.6 ***Restore and enhance the structure and unity of the landscape by conserving and strengthening primary linear features, especially those defining the outer boundary of the old deer park.*** Within this area where the fertile, free draining soils are well suited to intensive cropping, a plan should be devised to strengthen biodiversity by enhancing the historic wooded character of the area in a way that reflects the character of the old Forest.

4.20.7 Sensitivity - given the rather featureless character of the present day landscape and the fact that any former ecological interest has largely been removed by arable intensification, the Wooded Estatelands landscape within the Lichfield District has a relatively low inherent sensitivity. The large scale, sparsely settled nature of the landscape, however, does still reflect the former parkland character and the outer boundary of the old deer park, which now defines the district boundary, remains as an important feature of interest. For the most part, the lack of tree cover and the open

rolling nature of the landform generally give this landscape a relatively high visual sensitivity.

Inherent sensitivity: moderate

Visual sensitivity: high

Quality of the landscape

- 4.20.8 The origin of this landscape appears to be linked to a former medieval deer park and the distinctive curved boundary line, with few roads or lanes, makes this intensively farmed arable landscape of significant historic interest. Long views out towards the elevated plateau of Cannock Chase highlight this area as one to conserve for its inherent quality.

4.21 River Meadowlands

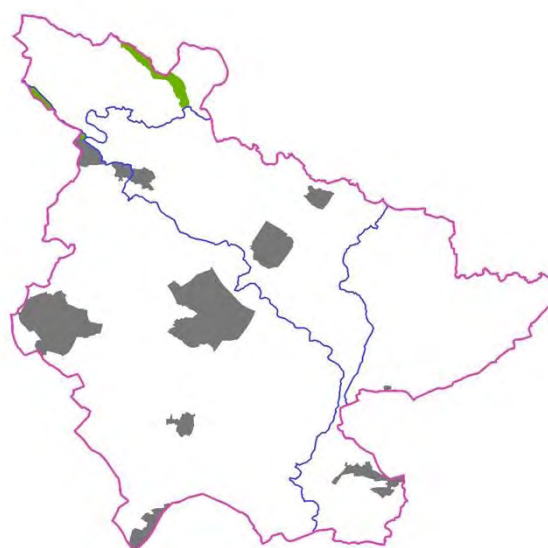
- 4.21.1 A narrow, meandering river corridor landscape associated with a flat, generally well-defined alluvial floodplain. Although normally defined by strong hedgelines along the edge of the floodplain, in places the river corridor is framed by low, but often steeply rising ground. Overall, this is a secluded pastoral landscape, characterised by meandering, tree-lined river channels, flanked by alluvial meadows with grazing animals.



Key characteristics

- Flat, low-lying river corridor
- Seasonally flooded alluvial floodplain
- Meandering river channel
- Surviving 18th to 19th century water meadow earthworks and associated features
- Pastoral farming with grazing livestock
- Lines of poplar, willow and alder along watercourses
- Hedge and ditch field boundaries
- Unsettled with few roads

Location of Landscape



4.21.2 The low-lying alluvial floodplain of the River Blithe forms a distinctive River Meadowlands landscape that extends from Blithfield Reservoir to Hamstall Ridware. Historically the presence of extensive areas of waterside meadows, used for seasonal grazing, were key features of this landscape, providing a strong sense of visual and ecological unity. The effect of regular seasonal flooding was reflected in the pattern of land use, in particular the lack of settlement /other development and the presence of species and habitats tolerant of waterlogged conditions. Tree cover, notably alder and willow, are a distinctive feature of this landscape, the latter often managed as pollards and occurring both in ditch lines and along the banks of the main river channels. Such habitats provide valuable nesting and feeding areas for wildlife and where associated with unimproved meadowland, they create a strong sense of place and feeling of naturalness. The sound and movement of water add to this feeling of tranquillity.

4.21.3 Strength of Character – meandering river channels, flanked by grazing meadows and riverside trees are the special features of this landscape, combining to create peaceful, undisturbed pastoral scenes. Where flooding still occurs, the presence of wet grassland and marsh evoke a strong sense of place and feeling of naturalness that is now rare in lowland English landscapes.

Natural: strong Cultural: moderate **Overall: strong**

4.21.4 Summary of Condition – the continuity and pastoral character of the River Meadowlands along the Blithe has become fragmented by the encroachment of arable land use onto the river floodplain. In the central part of the valley, however, the traditional practice of seasonal grazing and haymaking has remained and the landscape of small hedged fields and associated nature conservation interest is still intact. Elsewhere, only the river channel and associated tree cover is all that now remain. Along the River Trent at Rugeley the natural shape and profile of the water course has been modified, producing a functional, somewhat urban appearance and much of the floodplain is now managed as a golf course.

Overall: moderate

Vision Statement

4.21.5 **Conserve and restore the visual unity and distinctive pastoral character of river corridor landscapes.** This can be achieved by conserving all remaining areas of pasture on river floodplains and seeking opportunities to convert arable areas back to pastoral use.

4.21.6 Sensitivity - the River Meadowlands have a relatively high inherent sensitivity related in particular to the natural character of the riverside environment. The historic time depth of the cultural pattern is also of moderate sensitivity. Visual sensitivity is low due to the prominence of tree cover and the flat, low-lying nature of the topography.

Inherent: high Visual: low

Quality of the landscape

4.21.7 The narrow river corridor within the Blithe valley is often hidden away and can have a surprisingly wild character with attractive locally enclosed views. Industrial and urban fringe uses are more prevalent along the Trent Valley in the area adjacent to Rugeley, however, detracting from the character of the riverside landscape in many places.

5 Views, dark skies and forces for change

5.1 Key Views of the Lichfield City Skyline

- 5.1.1 The field study identified that Lichfield City has a distinctive skyline and distinguished eight key views towards the city. The views encompass the built environment and in particular the five spires of the City; namely the three Lichfield Cathedral spires, St Mary's Church spire in the market square and St Michael's church spire. Medium and long distance views towards Lichfield from surrounding landscapes are significant as they help the viewer to orientate towards the historic City at the centre of the District. They contribute towards a sense of belonging as well as helping to orientate the relative position of outlying settlements to the City. Typically, the north, west and south of Lichfield afford views towards the 'Ladies of the Vale' and where practical these views should be safeguarded in any new development on the fringes of the City. New buildings, or structures which compete, or detract from the historic City views should be discouraged.
- 5.1.2 Other views in the District such as long views of the rising ground of Cannock Chase AONB are less susceptible to significant disruption because of the large scale nature of the landscape. Other designated, or protected sites in the District are locally and regionally valued and any development in the vicinity of individual sites should safeguard views by means of a Landscape and visual impact assessment study for each proposal.
- 5.1.3 Figure 4 overleaf illustrates the key views and their location in relation to the City centre. Most are within 5km of the City, and we have included one distant view from above Stonnall, where the City is only a part of the horizon.
- 5.1.4 Further views towards the Cathedral can be glimpsed from other vantage points around the District, but these are less significant and less likely to be compromised by foreground development.

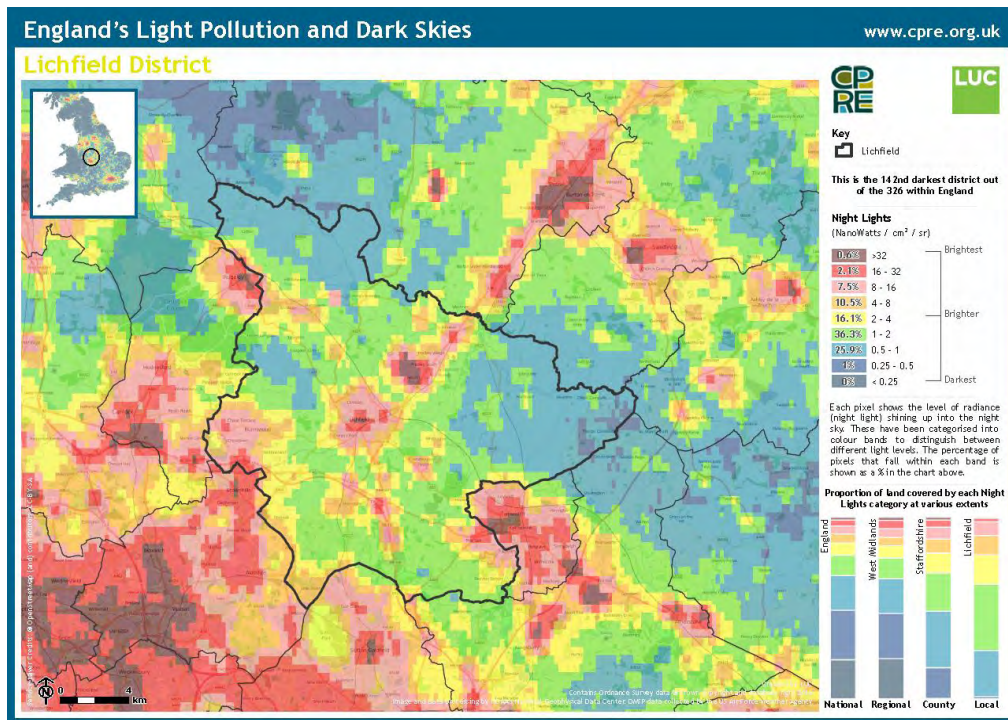


Figure 4 Key views of Lichfield City's skyline

5.2 Dark Skies

- 5.2.1 There are no designated Dark Sky Discovery Sites (ref. www.darkskydiscovery.org.uk) within Lichfield District. The nearest marked Orion Class site is at Barr Beacon to the south of Aldridge. Map 5 shows an extract covering Lichfield District from the CPRE website <https://www.nightblight.cpre.org.uk/> which addresses light pollution and dark skies in England.
- 5.2.2 The map confirms our field observations of the more remote parts of the District including the Mease Lowlands which is relatively un-developed apart from small nucleated villages and large farmed estates. Part of the area coincides with an area of search for wind turbines as these are selected partly by their minimum distance from communities; hence the lack of light pollution
- 5.2.3 The Ancient Settled Farmlands west of the A51 corridor between Lichfield and Rugeley also shows as an area of darker skies. The relatively remote countryside around Farewell and Chorley towards Longdon Green includes the fringes of the Cannock Chase AONB.
- 5.2.4 The Wooded Estatelands around Rough Park and Rowley Farms, north of the river Blithe, and the Settled Farmlands between Blithbury and Stockwell Heath are also within a relatively dark skies zone. Part of this area has historically been a large deer park with few roads and settlement; creating a remote rural character despite the proximity to the urban influences around Rugeley. The area will be affected by the HS2 rail corridor in the near future.

Figure 5: Dark Skies in Lichfield area



Natural England copyright 2016. Contains Ordnance Survey data: Crown copyright and database right 2016
 Earth Observation Group, NOAA National Geophysical Data Center. Developed by LUC

5.3 Forces for Change

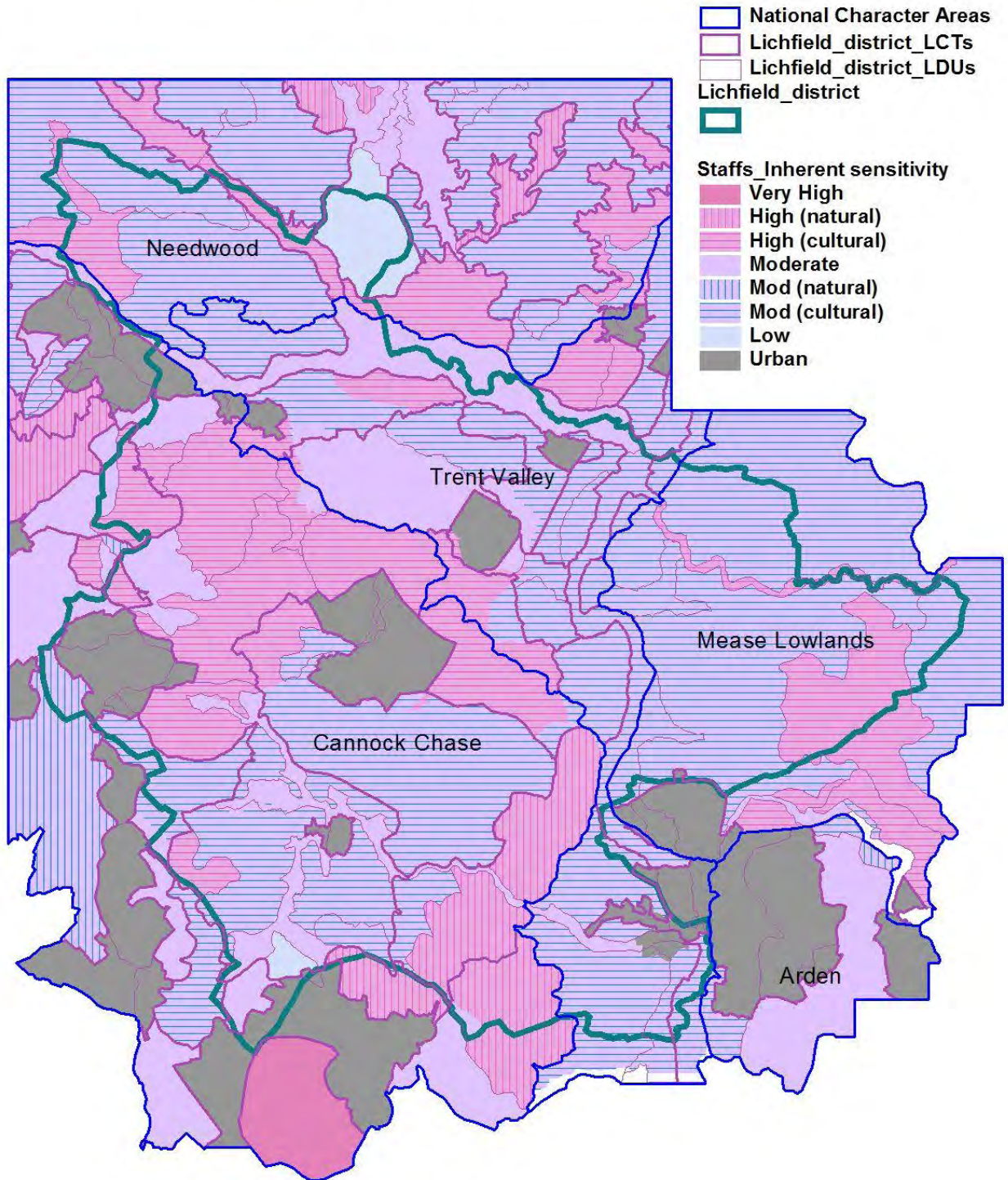
- 5.3.1 The landscape character of the district is undergoing change at a variety of scales. Some changes are likely to have a large scale impact (such as HS2), while some will be more moderate in scale (such as housing) and others are at a small scale (such as conversion of rural buildings and the introduction of kerbs and signs into rural lanes). Whilst some forces for change may be construed as negative, others are positive, such as various landscape initiatives. The landscape character assessment helps to guide change by identifying the key characteristics and sensitivities of each area so that these can be taken into consideration when assessing the impact of change. Recommendations for landscape related policies for the Local Plan are set out in Appendix 2.
- 5.3.2 Forces for change have been identified at the county level. Those that are relevant to the district include the following:
- Development along the urban edge affects the adjoining landscape due to the impact on rural character. There are significant pressures to accommodate large numbers of new homes in the District. The Council have been able to keep pace with the potential for housing allocation sites to date, but further sites will need to be considered carefully in the light of the landscape evidence and other factors.
 - The conversion of farm buildings is often associated with changes to the farming economy. Buildings are often altered for residential use which can lead to the introduction of features that can have a suburbanising impact, including parking, lighting and gardens with associated paraphernalia. These elements are often at odds with the agricultural character of the building. The boom in barn conversions has largely been satisfied in the District, and the emphasis for farm development is on sustainable agriculture practices rather than continued industrialisation of farming. The post-Brexit world of changes to farm subsidies has yet to be decided and the pressures on farm land may continue to change into the future.
 - Village expansion can alter the character of an existing settlement – often expansion creates a ribbon development along the main road of a village, or an uncharacteristic estate. New buildings can also impact upon the setting and rural character of a village. Each of the landscape character types have different key characteristics and the form of the village settlement is often a part of this characteristic. The District exhibits a diverse rural settlement pattern where large nucleated villages may accommodate a different scale of development to scattered dispersed settlement.
 - Infrastructure in the landscape such as roads, power lines and railways all impact on the rural character. When development in the landscape increases the fabric of infrastructure, particularly roads, may not alter but they may become busier and this also affects the rural character. Lichfield District is also faced with accommodating the HS2 rail infrastructure and associated accommodation works. The scale of the HS2 land take makes it difficult to assimilate in a traditional rural setting.
 - Habitat loss/alteration is often associated with new development, a change in land management, or indeed land abandonment. The biodiversity impact and loss of woodlands along the HS2 route is a particular concern through the District. At a smaller scale, more intensive land management, housing development and changes to the water table are also of concern. New development, however, can also provide opportunities for habitat creation, or other mitigation works.

- Hedgerows and hedgerow trees are a particular feature of the ancient settled farmlands around Lichfield. Lack of management of traditional field boundaries, however, or their replacement with wire fences, is often a problem. Old maps and tithe maps can be used to identify the most highly valued field boundaries for conservation, while Agri-environment schemes may give incentives to conserve and manage hedgerows and hedgerow trees appropriately.
- Extraction industries such as mineral quarrying or sand extraction have a significant impact on landscape and landscape character. The Transforming the Trent Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme has been successful in securing funding to conserve and restore land within the Trent and Tame valleys affected by gravel extraction. Recent examples of collaborative restoration between the gravel companies and the Wildlife Trust (e.g. Tuckleholme Quarry in East Staffordshire) can be used to promote good practice in sensitive restoration using landscape character principles.
- Alterations in the agricultural economy and recreational pressures are resulting in an increase in horse pasturing as a land use. This can alter landscape character through the introduction of field sub-divisions and incongruous features (e.g. field shelters). It can also be a cause of over grazing and poaching which can be a particular problem on wetter land. The fringes of Cannock Chase AONB are very prone to this land use due to poor soils, steep land and the opportunity to ride horses on the Chase. There are positive guidelines for horse grazing which can mitigate the adverse landscape impacts.
- Changes in cropping, such as a shift from dairy farming to arable farming, often associated with changing agricultural economics can alter the textures and patterns of a landscape. It can also lead to the introduction of new features into the landscape such as polytunnels. The soft fruit farms around Bromley Hayes and Hanch in the settled farmland and settled heathland landscapes can be locally intrusive. However, they represent a thriving local farming enterprise which attracts seasonal employment.
- Recreational development in the landscape is associated with a change of land use to golf courses. Golf courses tend to have intensively managed grasslands, appearing as a vibrant green in the landscape, as well as introducing new shapes, patterns and texture when viewed from a distance. Recent trends have moved away from the creation of new golf courses to one seeking a more naturalistic approach to golf course management, which can bring wildlife benefits to the countryside.
- Climate change is predicted to cause an increase in rainfall, periods of drought and more frequent storm events. These may all create changes in this landscape through issues such as: an increase in invasive species, pests and diseases coupled with alteration to existing ecology; fire risk to habitats such as heathland or woodlands; localised flooding; and changing crops and cropping patterns. This threat is of increasing importance to all aspects of urban and rural life; local government policies may help to mitigate the effects of climate change by promoting more sustainable development.
- Climate change and alterations to land management, such as increased woodland planting or flood risk management, can provide opportunity for the creation of new or relict habitats in a landscape. Examples include wetland creation or restoration, recreational woodland planting or replanting with native species as opposed to forestry species. The National Forest Company have been very successful in increasing woodland cover throughout the Forest area and they are prepared to work with landowners and other agencies to promote carbon capture and environmental land management schemes within their area.

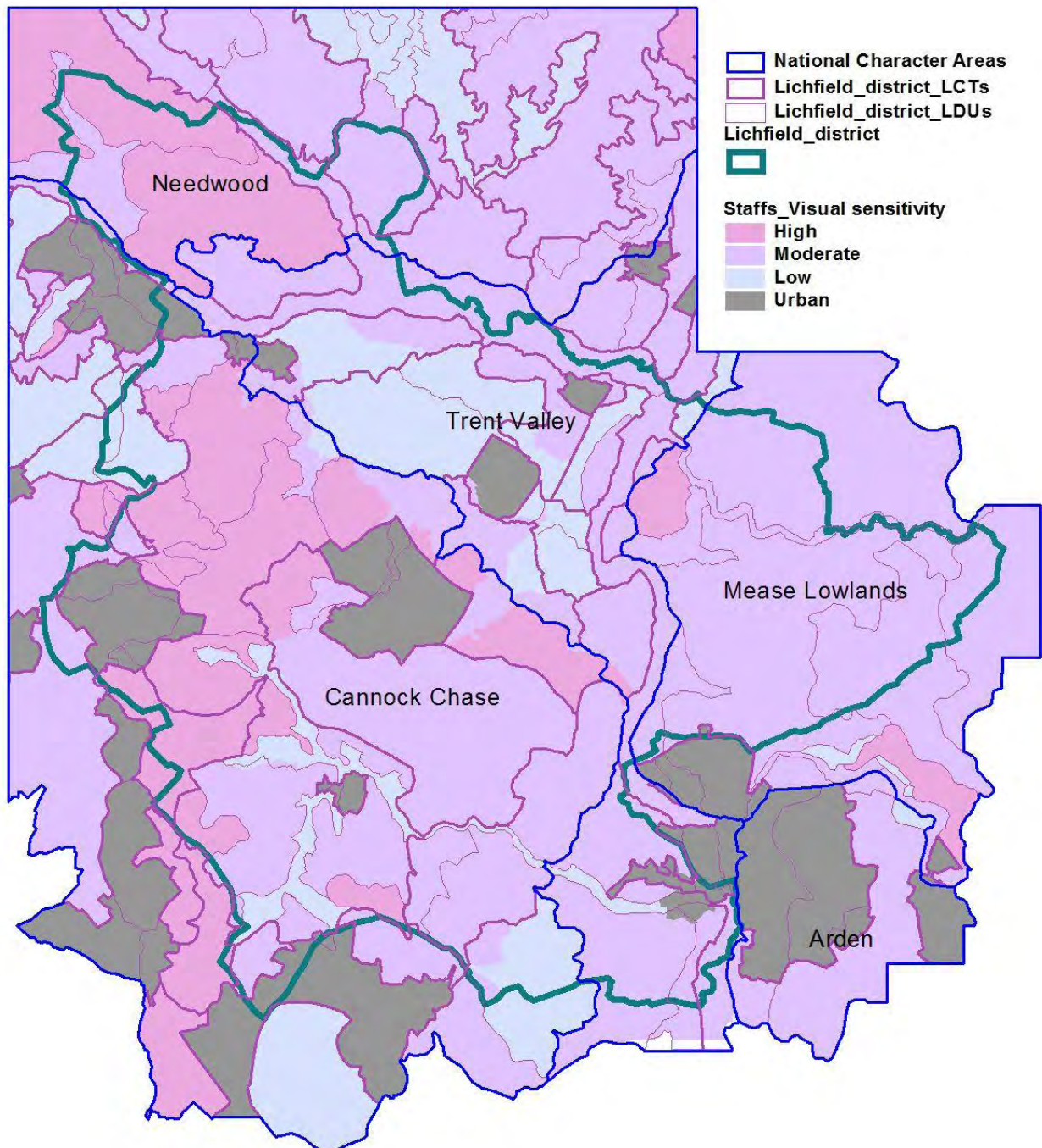
- Ash Die back, which is now present in the District, is likely to result in the loss of the majority (75 - 99%) of all ages of Ash. Several pests and diseases of Oak trees are also threatening to enter the County. The majority of mature standard field trees are Oak and Ash, while Ash forms a not insignificant proportion of trees in public open spaces, as well as in woodlands. The loss of Ash and Oak will have a significant effect on the ecology and character of landscapes in Lichfield District.
- Over abstraction of water from rivers for public use, or agricultural irrigation, can alter river ecology and this can be exacerbated by an increase in pesticides, or run off pollution, which exist at greater concentrations when over abstraction is occurring. The River Mease Partnership and the Transforming the Trent Valley programme, will also demonstrate positive river course management along the Tame and Trent in the District.

6 APPENDIX 1 – COUNTY WIDE SENSITIVITY

Lichfield - County wide - Inherent Sensitivity



Lichfield - County wide - Visual Sensitivity



7 APPENDIX 2: LANDSCAPE RELATED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND DISCUSSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

- 7.1.1 The brief asks for suggested policy directions and examples of policies which could be used to enhance landscape quality (Point 5). Since the last Local Plan Strategy, the National Planning Policy Framework has been revised and the LDC landscape-related evidence base has been updated. These are considered with a suggested landscape character policy in the context of the wider Natural Environment section.

7.2 NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK (NPPF) (February 2019)

- 7.2.1 The central thrust of the NPPF is presumption in favour of sustainable development. Whilst committing to the plan-led system, the Framework seeks to strengthen the facilitation of the rapid delivery of housing and other development through ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places. Land outside nationally designated areas is the target for the vast majority of development. Therefore, getting the landscape evidence base right to support policies and site allocations in these areas is crucial.

Sustainable development

- 7.2.2 The Framework states that strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for the assessed needs for housing and other uses unless the policies in the Framework that protect '*areas or assets of particular importance*' provide a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development. This is in addition to the test of adverse impacts of development which would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. The areas or assets of particular importance relevant to LDC are defined as Green Belt, Local Green Space, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, designated heritage assets and other heritage assets of archaeological interest which are demonstrably of equivalent significance.
- 7.2.3 Strategic policies in local plans should make sufficient provision for development and the conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation adaption (paragraph 20).
- 7.2.4 Thus, for plan-making, the protection of national designations and Green Belt is confirmed. Outside these areas sufficient land should be identified where the effects of development would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. This means that appropriate landscape and other evidence should look for opportunities to give adequate scope and flexibility to allocate potential sites whilst being robust in areas of constraint.

Landscape Character

- 7.2.5 The key section relating to the natural environment is Section 15. This states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan)
 - b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services including trees and woodland (paragraph 170)
- 7.2.6 'Valued landscapes' are still not defined as such but appear to be an overarching term which includes 'areas of particular importance'. The additional wording points towards these statutory designations and those areas or assets which are referred to in local plans. These may include local landscape designations.
- 7.2.7 Plans should distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites and take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure and plan enhancement of natural capital at catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries (paragraph 171).
- 7.2.8 Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The scale and extent of development within these areas should be limited (paragraph 172).
- 7.2.9 The creation of high quality places is now considered *fundamental* to the planning and development process (paragraph 124). This strengthens the wording from the previous wording of design being indivisible from good planning. In order to achieve well designed places, planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape *setting*, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (paragraph 127 c). Setting could be interpreted as the areas around designations such as AONBs, settlements or heritage features such as Lichfield Cathedral.

Evidence requirements

- 7.2.10 Relevant and up-to-date evidence should still be collected in the preparation and review of plans (paragraph 31). This should be adequate and proportionate (as previously stated) but also *focused tightly on supporting and justifying policies concerned*. The new Framework does not go into the same depth as the previous Framework on what evidence should be collected on the natural or historic environment. Landscape character and landscape sensitivity assessments (previously paragraph 170) are no longer specifically mentioned. However, the reference to landscape throughout the Framework, which needs to be considered as a whole, means that appropriate focused landscape evidence is needed, and indeed is possibly now more important to identify opportunities for site allocation as well as constraints.

Decision-making

- 7.2.11 LPAs should now approach decisions on proposed development not only in a positive but also a *creative* way (paragraph 38). As before, there is an emphasis on pre-application engagement to resolve issues as far as possible before planning applications

are made. The use of contextual landscape character evidence supports this approach, providing a common baseline.

Green Belts

7.2.12 Green Belts are not landscape designations. They are considered in paragraphs 143 to 147.

7.2.13 Once green belts have been defined LPA's should plan positively looking for opportunities to provide access and recreation and to retain and enhance landscapes and visual amenity (paragraph 141). The LCAs should inform strategies and proposals.

National Forest and Community Forests

7.2.14 The National Forest and Community Forests offer opportunities for improving the environment around towns and cities and upgrading the landscape (paragraph 142). The relevant strategies and plans should inform both development plans and development management in conjunction with the relevant LCAs.

Veteran Trees and Ancient Woodland

7.2.15 The protection of ancient and veteran trees has been strengthened. These are now all classed as irreplaceable habitats alongside ancient woodland. Now, development resulting in their loss or deterioration should be refused unless there are a wholly exceptional reasons (paragraph 175c) e.g. nationally significant infrastructure projects.

7.3 PLANNING PRACTICE GUIDANCE

7.3.1 The Natural Environment section including Landscape has not been updated to reflect changes in the Framework- presumably because it is not considered necessary. It is still dated 2 October 2014. The guidance refers to the NPPF core principles which have been removed as a block of text in the NPPF, albeit with some relevant text dispersed in other parts of the new document e.g. recognition of the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

7.3.2 The guidance still states that local plans should include strategic policies for the conservation and enhancement of the landscape in designated landscapes but also the wider countryside. Landscape character assessment is mentioned as a tool to help understand character and local distinctiveness with a link to Natural England guidance on landscape character assessments and seascape character assessments. This link also mentions that LCAs can be used to inform sensitivity and capacity studies, local council studies and green infrastructure assessments. Overall, therefore, LCA does have a hook in policy.

7.3.3 The guidance states that local planning authorities should have regard to AONB management plans which highlight the value and special qualities of the designations, although they do not form part of the statutory development plan. The Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan is a material consideration in determining planning applications.

THE COUNTRYSIDE AND RIGHTS OF WAY (CROW) ACT 2000

- 7.3.4 The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 states that local planning authorities (LPAs) have a statutory duty to have regard to the purpose of AONB designation in exercising or performing functions in relation to, *or so as to affect*, land in these areas (Section 85). This is intended to ensure that the purpose of the AONB designation is recognised as an essential consideration in any decisions that impact on the AONB, whether *inside or outside* the area, with the expectation that adverse impacts will be avoided or mitigated where possible.

7.4 EXISTING POLICIES AND ISSUES IN LICHFIELD

- 7.4.1 The current Lichfield District Local Plan Strategy 2015 describes the natural resources of the district and sets out related strategic, core and development management policies. The wording is dated in some respects and needs to be brought up-to-date to reflect the revised NPPF and the updated and proposed evidence base.
- 7.4.2 The Lichfield District Local Plan Review: Preferred Options and Policy Directions paper (January 2019) sets out the proposed strategic objectives and priorities including 12: Countryside Character and 13: Natural Resources. An overview of scoping consultation responses, evidence and preferred policy direction is set out in Section 17: Our Natural Resources expanding on both objectives. This is an appropriate approach and goes some way to set out how updated policy will deliver a consistent and cohesive approach with suggested policy headings.
- 7.4.3 The change in the emphasis and wording in the NPPF in relation to landscape and related natural resources will need to be reflected in detailed landscape policies, and there is also a need for additional important evidence to be taken into account to inform an holistic approach.
- 7.4.4 There is a clear need to take a range of approaches to landscapes of the district ranging from protection and conservation of the most valued landscapes and their settings including the AONB, the conservation of the majority of undesignated landscapes and the significant enhancement of degraded landscapes within area such as the National Forest and Forest of Mercia. This all needs to be informed by the relevant management plans and strategies as well as the up-to-date Landscape Character Assessments (LCAs).
- 7.4.5 Though the NPPF focuses on value rather than character, there is probably not a case for defining local landscape designations/special landscape areas within the district as there are already a number of landscape initiatives underway and new SLAs would put undue development pressure on those areas outside. The LCA considers character, condition/quality and sensitivity at a contextual level but does not consider value. More detailed landscape sensitivity studies could identify value as well as susceptibility at a finer grain around settlements where development is most likely to occur- thus underpinning the Framework's approach. All landscape evidence would need to be referred to in the policy supporting text and evidence base to be given due weight.

7.5 NATURAL ENVIRONMENT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

7.5.1 The following suggestions are made:

- Rename the title of the strategic objective 12 Countryside Character with 'Countryside and landscape character' to reflect the Natural England definition of landscape character and the LCA evidence base.
- Refer to landscape character both within its own policy as well as in other policies such as green infrastructure to ensure it is taken fully into consideration.
- Include part of the LCA landscape overview as an introduction to the natural resources section to complement the description of biodiversity interest, natural capital and designations.
- Include consideration of natural capital and related ecosystem services which is required in NPPF (171) as part of the foundation for a green infrastructure study and policy, as well as informing strategy and site allocations.
- Emphasise linkage between natural capital, biodiversity, landscape, heritage, access, recreation, health and wellbeing.
- Suggested detailed policies could be organised as follows:
 - Biodiversity (splitting into national designations and other habitats)
 - Landscape character (splitting into the landscape character of the district, the AONB and other initiatives)
 - Natural capital, ecosystem services and green infrastructure (incorporating trees, veteran trees, woodlands and hedgerows)
 - Green Belt and local green spaces
 - Water quality
- Reword existing Policy NR5: Natural and Historic Landscapes to reflect the updated landscape character evidence base- possibly rename it Landscape Character (see below).

7.6 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

7.6.1 The landscape character policy context should include:

Landscape character overview

- **A brief overview description** of the landscape character of the district (taken from the LCA overview).
- Relevant general landscape character assessments ie
 - Lichfield District Council Landscape Character Assessment, 2019.
 - Historic Environment Character Assessment for Lichfield District 2009 (Staffordshire County Council)
 - Planning for Landscape Change, 2000 (Staffordshire County Council) (superseded?)
 - Possible district landscape sensitivity assessment (further evidence informing site allocations)

- List of landscape character types (optional)
- Information available in each LCT description and expectation that development will be located and designed to conserve and/or enhance landscape character in line with the assessment.
- Note visual aspects including key views to Lichfield spires.
- Note dark skies and tranquillity and the need to avoid or minimise cumulative impacts in development.

Cannock Chase AONB

- Brief description and location and percentage of district within AONB.
- Refer to Management Plan 2019 – 2024 as a material consideration
- Note that great weight is attached to the designation and development is expected to be very limited.
- Refer to the setting of the AONB and the expectation that adverse impacts here will also be avoided or mitigated.
- Role in access and recreation.

National Forest

- Refer to relevant strategy as a consideration in management and approach to development.

Forest of Mercia

- Refer to relevant strategy as a consideration in management and approach to development.

Central Rivers Initiative

- Refer to relevant strategy as a consideration in management and approach to development.

7.6.2 The landscape character policy wording could read:

Landscape Character Policy

The landscape character of the District will be conserved by ensuring that development takes place in a manner that reflects or enhances character and that minimises and mitigates its impact. In particular, valued landscapes including the AONB and its setting, other designated areas and the setting of key features will be protected and enhanced.

Proposals will take into account, and avoid detrimental effects on, landscape and historic character including key characteristics, local distinctiveness, visual amenity, key views, tranquillity and dark skies. The cumulative impact of development proposals on landscape character will be taken into account. Opportunities will be taken to enhance landscape character where possible and this policy must be read in conjunction with the Green Infrastructure and other Natural Environment policies to achieve this.

Proposals will be informed by the County and District landscape character assessments, the Historic Environment Character Assessment, the AONB Management Plan, the National Forest and Forest of Mercia strategies, and the Central Rivers Initiative.