

A wide landscape photograph showing a green field in the foreground, a line of trees and a small building in the middle ground, and a cloudy sky. A light blue rectangular box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the text "LANCASHIRE COAL MEASURES".

LANCASHIRE COAL MEASURES

REGIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The Lancashire Coal Measures surround the towns of St Helens and Wigan and extend from the Mersey Valley in the south to the Lancashire and Amounderness Plain in the northwest. This is an elevated landscape rising to 170 metres at Billinge Hill and falling abruptly to the Lancashire Plain, Merseyside and the Mersey Valley including Knowsley. The area is dominated an industrial heritage associated with mining activities. It is the complex mosaic of degraded farmland, scattered urban centres, active mineral sites and derelict or reclaimed workings, and 'flashes', which gives this area a strong and distinctive identity.

The pattern of settlement and land use, together with a soft but varied topography, has created a very fragmented landscape. The urban form has created a physical barrier between many areas of open landscape. There tends to be a distinctive difference in the predominant land use and character of these landscape areas, which helps to further divide the area. The coal measures also tend to be a more undulating landform with a greater number of trees and woodland both of which reduce the scale of the landscape and create visual enclosure.

The distinctive local landscape to the south of Wigan is dominated by the effects of past and present mining activity. At Cronton the landscape has been scarred with spoil heaps, which are now being reclaimed.

The field pattern is predominantly rectangular and is defined by degraded hedgerows. There are some areas of arable farming but frequently the drainage has been severely disrupted by colliery subsidence and the land is little more than recreational open space, which is utilised in some instances for horticulture.

However, it is industrial influences which give this area a strong cultural identity. Coal mining and industrial activity intermixed with housing dominate the majority of the landscape, leaving behind a legacy of derelict land, spoil heaps, landfill sites and numerous subsidence flashes.

Physical Influences

The Lancashire Coal Measures are mantled by a patchy layer of glacial drift deposits. The Coal Measures extend west, out of the area towards Ormskirk and Huyton, and are buried there beneath a thick and continuous covering of drift.

Historical and Cultural Influences

The regional characteristics are derived from the human activity associated with the mining and working of coal from the extensive coal seams which run through the area. The area is now densely populated following the rapid expansion of a few small villages during the industrial revolution, with little evidence of the pre-18th century landscape remaining. The pre-industrial landscape would have formed an extension to the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain with 'magpie' architecture being commonplace.

The waste heaps on the Coal Measures are today's reminders of 19th century extraction methods, which replaced the hundreds of separate, shallow coal-pits with fewer, larger mines tapping the richer deep seams.

The coal seams in this area were principally mined to provide power for the local cotton industry, which has suffered almost complete extinction since the 1950s. The Lancashire coalfields, in common with the rest of the country, have experienced the demise of deep coalmining and its replacement by opencast operations.

This loss of deep coal mining has left a legacy of dereliction.

Buildings and Settlement

The Lancashire Coal Measures is a thickly settled industrial area, characterised by degraded agricultural land dissected by ribbons of development. The settlement pattern is based around the development of mines and industry, leading to a scattered pattern with a close intermingling of housing and industry.

There are very few examples of traditional vernacular architecture that remain. The area is dominated by brick-built 19th and 20th century housing estates. Further expansion is underway with new housing development reclaiming derelict land and replacing building stock, which is nearing the end of its life span.

Land Cover

This is mainly an area of industrial development with several large tracts of Grade 3 agricultural land and isolated pockets of former farmland within the urban fabric.

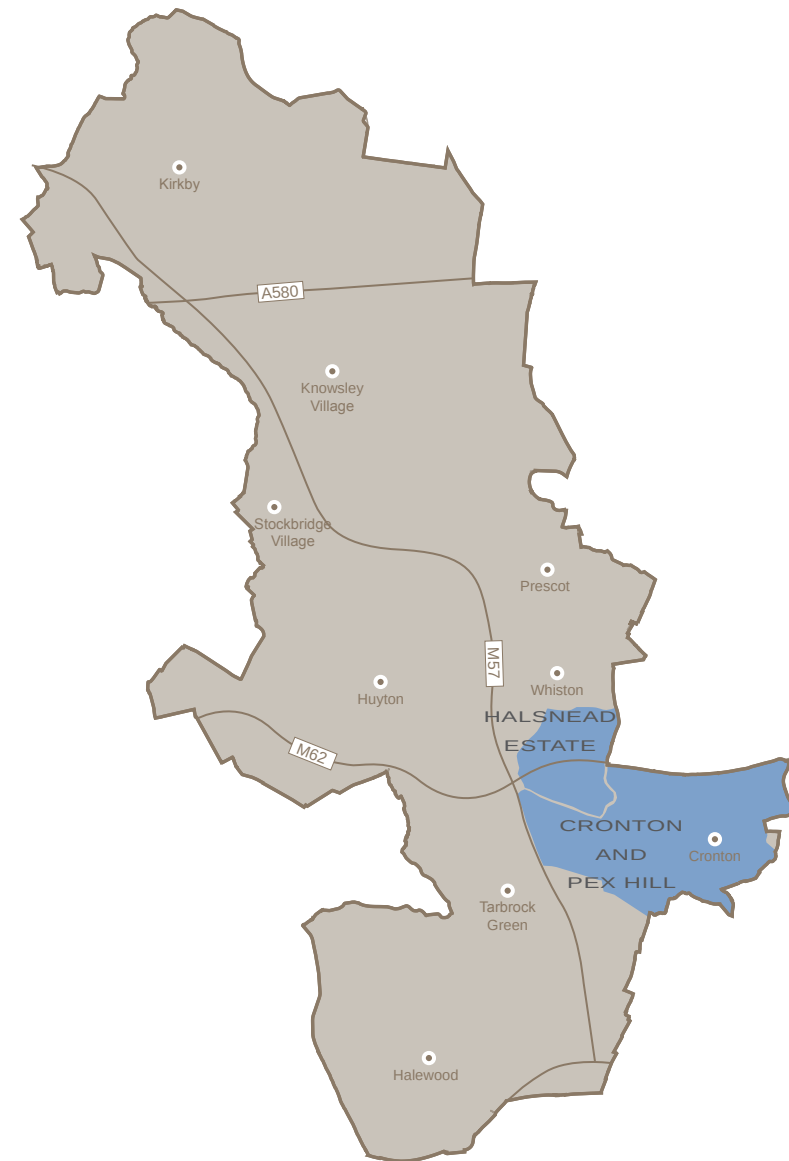
LOCAL AUTHORITY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

The above description defines the Lancashire Coal Measures as a regional landscape character area. In Knowsley two distinct local landscape character areas can be distinguished within this regional area. These are:

Halsnead Estate

Cronton and Pex Hill

These areas exhibit some of the expected characteristics of the Lancashire Coal Measures, but the human activity associated with the mining and working of coal is a less prevalent.



HALSNEAD ESTATE

The character of this area is strongly influenced by the former Halsnead Estate that existed to the south of Whiston. The character is defined by the existence of remnants of the former Estate, including long sections of the sandstone boundary wall, a gate house, and small woodland clumps. The M62 motorway dissects the former estate and has a negative influence on the character of the area. It is both a visual and physical intrusion, with noise pollution being a major distraction.

Coal mining activity occurred south of the M62 at the former Cronton Colliery. The spoil heap from this colliery still remains, but its presence and visual intrusion has been masked by reclamation and tree planting carried out in the 1990s.

The area is gently rolling lowland, rising gradually to Prescott and Rainhill in the North. Arable fields are medium sized with either degraded hedgerows or no defined field boundaries. Some enclosure occurs from the proximity of wooded shelter belts on field margins. Tree cover is restricted to small woodland clumps, isolated trees and shelterbelts, often located around dwellings and along roads and tracks. There is a dispersed pattern of farmsteads and wayside dwellings. These are predominately red brick with slate roofs, but there are also properties with either red sandstone or white render.

Key Summary

Topography	Rolling lowland
Geology	Glacial drift overlying sandstone (Carboniferous and Triassic) and undivided cyclic sedimentary rocks (Carboniferous)
Soil Types	Sandy Clay – well drained
Land Use	Mainly agricultural cereal cropping with some amenity use (caravan park, cemetery)
Tree Cover	Generally deciduous woodland in clumps or shelterbelts following dwelling boundaries or tracks. Some newly planted woodland planting on pockets of reclaimed land.
Settlement	Isolated farmsteads and residential dwelling with some in small clusters. Mainly red brick with pitched grey slate roofs, but also some red sandstone and white render.
Other Distinguishing Features	- Remnants of the old Halsnead Estate. - Urban influences such as the M62, residential dwellings and overhead power lines. - Liverpool is visible in the background to the west and to the east there is a golf course on the rising ground to the south of Rainhill.



Old Halsnead Estate looking west off Fox Bank Lane



South east view from Fox Bank Lane Cemetery



Simons Close looking east towards Halsnead Estate

CRONTON AND PEX HILL

The high ground at Pex Hill is the dominate feature within this area of rolling lowland topography. The lower ground is made up of medium sized fields with few field boundaries and barely any enclosure. Tree cover is restricted to isolated trees, small woodland clumps and tree planting along tracks and the boundaries of dwellings. A mixture of arable and pasture creates a strong texture in the landscape.

There is a dispersed pattern of farmsteads and residential dwellings some in small clusters linked by a network of narrow rural lanes. The buildings are mainly red brick with pitched grey slate roofs. Tall church spires are prominent in urban areas. The neighbouring urban settlements of Widnes and Liverpool have an impact on the area, with distant views from some locations of industrial installations such as the Fiddlers Ferry power station. The close proximity of the urban fringe to the boundaries of the area also has a negative impact from the pressures this brings to farmland, but generally the prevailing characteristic is rural.

Key Summary

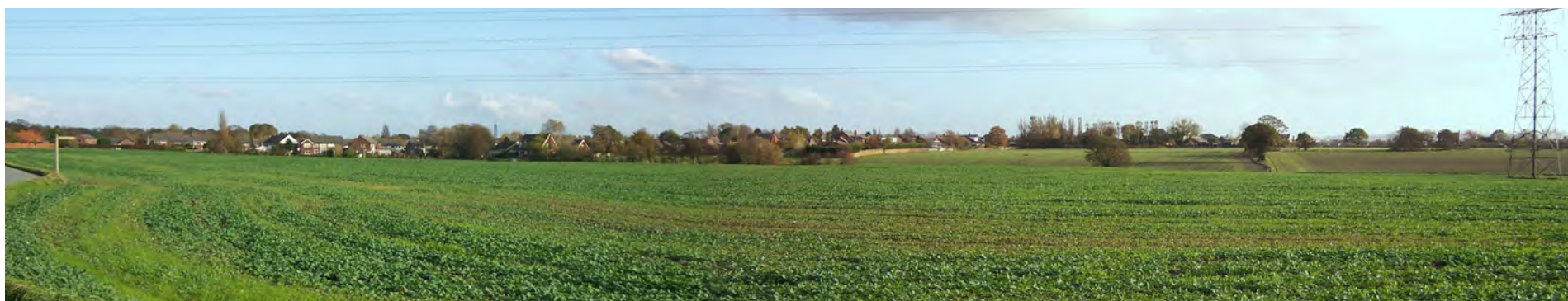
Topography	Rolling lowland
Geology	Glacial drift overlying sandstone (Carboniferous and Triassic) and undivided cyclic sedimentary rocks (Carboniferous)
Soil Types	Sandy Clay – well drained
Land Use	Mainly agricultural arable cropping with some pasture and buffer zones against the urban fringe
Tree Cover	Generally deciduous woodland in clumps or as isolated trees following dwelling boundaries, urban fringes or tracks
Settlement	Isolated farmsteads and residential dwelling with some in small clusters. Mainly red brick with pitched grey slate roofs.
Other Distinguishing Features	- Isolated trees and woodland clumps provide a solid tree line on the sky line in most directions - Landscape is generally well maintained with little intrusion from urban areas - Pex Hill is a dominant feature on the landscape with its profile and deciduous tree planting - Some drainage ditches and field ponds exist along field boundaries but they are not a dominant characteristic across this landscape - Urban fringe settlement visible along boundaries in Widnes and Cronton



North view from Alder Lane



Nort east view from Penny Lane



East - West view from Penny Lane towards Cronton