

Land off Chapel Lane, Widnes

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Appendix B

Relevant extracts from the Halton Landscape Character Assessment

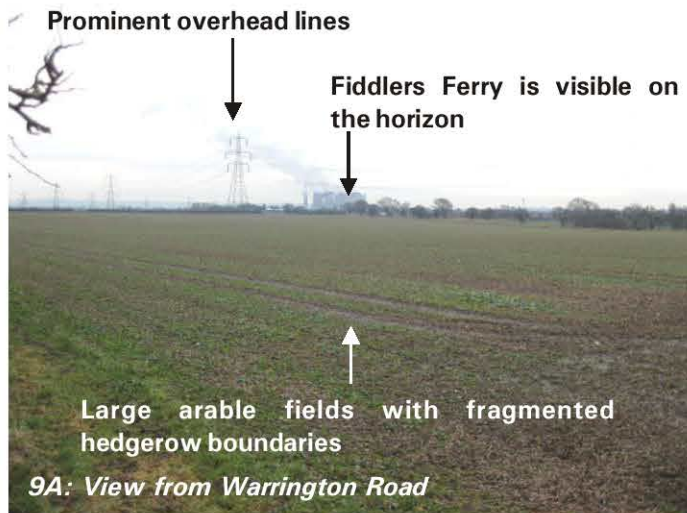
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Prepared for:

**Taylor
Wimpey**

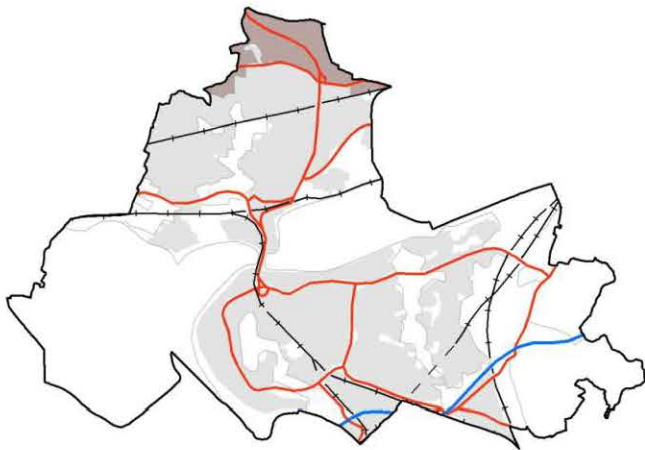


North Widnes Farmland



Key Characteristics

- Flat agricultural landscape falling subtly to the built edge of Widnes
- Large scale agricultural landscape with fields enclosed by hedgerows and drainage ditches
- Hedgerows are fragmented and often replaced by timber fencing around horse paddocks but are in better condition along the roads
- Heathland was a characteristic feature of this area but it has now mostly been replaced by agricultural land
- Woodland is sparse and where present is predominantly linear, isolated hedgerow trees or in clumps around field ponds
- Open character to the landscape created by low woodland cover and large field size
- Infrastructure routes such as roads and overhead lines are prominent landscape features. Roads often cross the landscape in straight alignments
- Urban fringe elements always visible
- Frequent isolated farms, large properties and small commercial units
- Fiddlers Ferry power station is a prominent feature on the horizon



Landscape Character

This character area is to the north of the borough of Widnes and includes the agricultural land between northern Widnes and the borough boundary. It is a narrow strip of land and stretches around the urban areas of Upton, Lunt's Heath and Shell Green. Cronton and Pex Hill lie just outside the boundary to the west. The M62 is to the north of the character area but is visible from within it. The land shares similar characteristics to the adjacent character area, Bold Heath, in St Helens.

It is a flat landscape with few streams or features which vary the landform. The land slopes subtly towards the River Mersey although this is not a discernable feature within the landscape. Pex Hill forms a local variation in the landform, although it is to the west of the character area, outside Halton Borough. Further west the landform can be seen becoming more undulating within Warrington Borough.

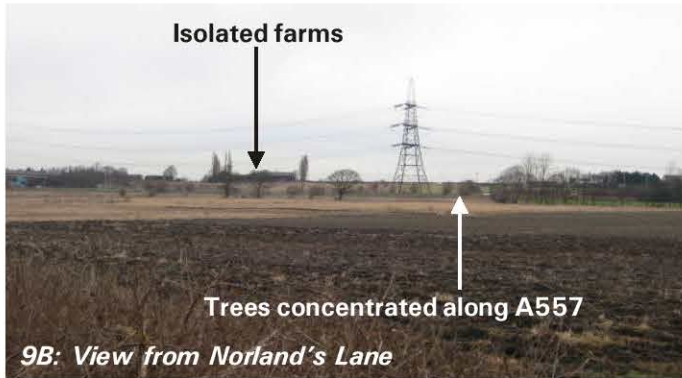
The land is predominantly used for agriculture, although in the past there were areas of heathland which were a notable feature in this character area. Farming is mainly

arable with some horse paddocks. Field sizes are large and irregular stretching between the roads which transect the character area. In the east they follow a very loose grid perpendicular to main roads. The field pattern is a mixture of mostly 20th Century fieldscape although pockets of post-medieval are present to the south of Mill Green Farm and around Cranshaw Hall. There are patches of rough grassland and set-a-side land within the field pattern.

Hydrology does not have a strong influence on this character area. There are numerous field ponds which are discernable in the landscape by surrounding clumps of woodland and trees. Several fields are bordered by drainage ditches which drain the flat land but are not prominent features of the landscape. A few small streams flow through the fields, each typically marked by a sinuous line of scrub vegetation.



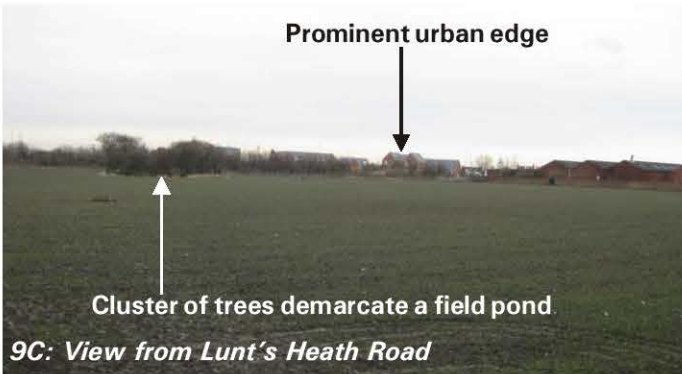
North Widnes Farmland



Woodland and Tree Cover

Woodland is sparse in this character area creating an open character. Where present it is predominantly in linear strips or copses and small blocks and there are no large areas of woodland. Linear strips along urban edges or around farms and clumps of mature trees around field ponds are common. The woodland which does exist is often mature and species include poplar, oak, ash and conifer trees close to industry and the urban fringe. Regenerating scrub is present along field margins and wetland scrub follows the lines of ditches and small brooks. There are linear woodlands along the lines of the disused railway and the A577. As this matures it will increase the woodland cover slightly.

Hedgerows are low and often thin. Many are closely clipped although fragmentation is common. Hedges become denser and more intact along the roads but are often fragmented within the fields, particularly the larger fields. Hedgerow trees are infrequent. In some places there are groups of hedgerow trees along the line of a former field boundary where the hedge has been removed or has fragmented.



Built form

The roofline is slightly varied and includes two and three storey residential buildings, large farm houses and the taller roofs of industrial buildings and chimneys. There are some large three storey new buildings along the urban edges and these are particularly prominent where they appear as a continuous visible built edge. The chimneys and the power station cooling towers are landmarks prominent above all other built form and rooflines.

The urban edge is prominent in the landscape but mostly contained within the northern fringe of Widnes. The flat landscape and lack of hedgerow and tree planting along some of the urban edges provide a sharp transition from the agricultural land to built areas, emphasising the continuous urban edge.

There are clusters of residential and farm buildings along the roads through the farmland which are not associated with an urban edge and appear as interspersed ribbon development in the landscape. These are also prominent in the landscape and reduce the rural character within the area.

In some areas hedgerows and trees soften these edges, especially where development is older. Shelter belts and linear woodlands screen views to some urban edges particularly around Rivendell Garden Centre and Cranshaw Hall.

There is no dominant style in the mix of building types in the area. Residential properties are predominantly

semi-detached buildings or large detached farm houses. There are also rows of terraced housing in the west of the area where much of the urban fringe is newly developed and includes town houses and apartments.

Larger buildings are interspersed with the residential estates and include a hotel, a college, industrial buildings and red brick warehouses. Scattered throughout the area are clusters of large farm properties with large out buildings. Detached houses are also present through the countryside. Rivendell Garden Centre forms a large complex of buildings in the countryside, separated from the urban edge by the A557.

Red brick is predominantly used in the residential buildings and older industrial buildings. Roofs include red tile, grey tile and some slate. The more recent industrial developments use metal sheet cladding as a building material. Recently built properties within the urban edge are prominent in the landscape due to their use of red brick and tiles, which have not yet been weathered to a duller shade. Properties with white painted render are occasionally visible amongst the red brick.

Boundary treatments are varied and there is no over-riding style. Red brick and sandstone walls border properties, particularly older buildings and low red brick walls border industrial buildings in some areas.



North Widnes Farmland

Views

The flat land and sparse woodland allow open views over the agricultural landscape to the urban fringes and infrastructure routes through the area. Hedgerows along the roads channel views and provide some foreshortening of views, however gaps in hedges reveal long channelled views over fields interspersed with large farm buildings or the urban fringe.

Overhead electricity lines are prominent in views as they pass through the character area. Industrial buildings and views to Fiddlers Ferry power station are prominent. The lack of natural tall elements such as trees and woodland in this flat land with low hedges means that any vertical feature is prominent and typically visible throughout the character area. The urban edge is often not softened or filtered by vegetation and gives a harder character to views.

The view from the northern end of Norlands Lane is typical of the character area as it includes major overhead line routes, flat, open farmland, woodland, horse paddocks, large farms and the urban fringe residential buildings.

Landmark features

- Cranshaw Hall.
- Pex Hill (although outside the Borough)
- The 'Dream' (South St Helens Forest Park)

Key viewpoints

There are no key view points in this landscape character area.

Zones of visual influence

The zone of visual influence of this character area is limited. It is only locally visible, mainly from within the character area itself. It is visible from higher points outside the Borough, such as Pex Hill and The 'Dream' at South St Helens Forest Park, from where it is seen as part of a much wider area of countryside with Widnes

Intact hedgerows along roads

Prominent overhead lines

Land subtly falls toward the built edge of Widnes

9D: View from Derby Road

Quality and condition of the landscape

Landscape Condition	Good	MODERATE <i>Enhance</i>	MODERATE - GOOD <i>Conserve and Enhance</i>	GOOD <i>Conserve/Enhance</i>
	Moderate	POOR - MODERATE <i>Enhance and Restore</i>	MODERATE <i>Enhance</i>	MODERATE - GOOD <i>Conserve and Enhance</i>
	Poor	POOR <i>Restore/Create</i>	POOR - MODERATE <i>Enhance and Restore</i>	MODERATE <i>Enhance</i>
		Weak	Moderate	Strong
		Landscape Strength		

The overall landscape strategy for the area is **ENHANCE**. Emphasis should be placed on improving the condition of the landscape through restoring field patterns and increased woodland/tree planting. This would create more features of interest and reinforce a sense of place throughout the area.

Landscape Strength

MODERATE-WEAK: There are few key features which contribute a strong 'sense of place' or define the character of the area. There are many elements in the landscape which interrupt and fragment the landscape pattern. Although the rural character is consistent across the area, infrastructure and urban fringe interrupt and fragment this rural character.

Landscape Condition

MODERATE: The field boundary hedges are fragmented and vegetation along the urban edges is limited with evidence of loss of some features. In places, trees have been planted along the urban edges and in these areas the landscape condition should improve over time.

North Widnes Farmland

Main trends or possible changes to the landscape

- Urban expansion of north Widnes
- Loss of hedgerows through lack of management
- Loss of field pattern
- Upgrading of the disused railway line



Capacity to accommodate change

The character of the area is heavily influenced by urban fringe developments and infrastructure routes. There are pockets of agricultural land which retain a more rural character in the northern part of this area. The key characteristics of the landscape are its flat landform; large-scale field pattern enclosed in places by hedgerows or ditches; sparse woodland concentrated around ditches and field ponds; and its open character.

Any new development along fringes should incorporate appropriate green infrastructure such as pockets of woodland and wooded field ponds to ensure that it reduces the prominence of built form. Built development should ensure that the scattered nature of the farm buildings and individual properties such as Cranshaw Hall is maintained. Where development is considered appropriate it should use materials similar to those currently used and be of an appropriate scale and form to the existing buildings. Ribbon development along the road network could increase built form prominence and weaken character if not carefully sited and combined with appropriate green infrastructure.

Positive change could reduce the prominence of the urban edge and provide more distinction to the character of the area through new green infrastructure to enhance and restore landscape features and reduce the prominence of roads and buildings in the area.

Landscape Guidelines

Landscape features

- Restore the field boundary hedges to reduce the gaps and strengthen the landscape pattern
- Conserve and enhance the mature trees around field ponds and enhance woodland through the area by planting around individual fields, along urban fringes and roads and by expanding existing woodland
- Create pockets of woodland on urban fringes using a 'wet woodland' mix of willow, alder, ash and birch along ditches
- Conserve pockets of post-medieval fields present in the area
- Enhance existing hedgerow field boundaries through planting of new native hedgerow species and by discouraging the use of timber fencing
- Enhance hedgerow tree stock through planting new hedgerow trees
- Conserve field ponds
- Conserve and enhance the diversity of wetland ditches, retaining a mix of open and wooded areas
- Enhance and incorporate new green infrastructure along urban fringes

Built form

- Create a softer urban edge in new development through planting in gardens, along verges and roads
- Ensure advanced planting of copses and trees along roads and urban fringes and within any new developments
- Ensure the use of muted red brick in any new development and ensure it is in keeping with the scale and form of existing buildings
- Enhance planting and create new linear woodland belts along urban fringes to soften the edges and filter views of the built form

Other development/structures in the landscape

- Create new areas of woodland to reduce the prominence of the infrastructure routes through the character area and in the wider landscape through dense planting along the major road such as the A557 and the M62
- Improve accessibility between the urban fringes and countryside through new green infrastructure



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