

Windy Arbor Road, Whiston, Merseyside

Statement on the identification of land as ‘Ancient Wood Pasture’

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Introduction

Lanpro was commissioned by United Living to prepare a letter in relation to the identification of land off Windy Arbor Road, Whiston, Merseyside (centred at SJ 4717 9019) as Ancient Wood Pasture (MER-427), as recorded within the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI).

While the Site is recorded in the Ancient Woodland Inventory as ‘Ancient Wood Pasture’ (AWP), it is important to note that AWP is not a statutory designation like Ancient Woodland. Ancient Woodland is recognised in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as an irreplaceable habitat, with strong protection against development unless very exceptional circumstances exist and requires continuity of tree cover since at least c.1600. By contrast, ‘Ancient Wood Pasture’ is included in the AWI as a non-statutory, evidence-based dataset and is identified as a JNCC priority habitat, but its protection is policy-based rather than statutory. While AWP is a material consideration in planning, it carries less legal weight than Ancient Woodland and can be subject to development consent if impacts are considered acceptable.

The purpose of this statement is to review the evidential basis for that classification and to assess whether the Site demonstrates the continuity of management and characteristic features typically associated with AWP, including the persistence of a tree component within a grazed landscape over an extended period. In doing so, the assessment considers whether the available historic and landscape evidence supports the identification, or whether it instead indicates a history of land-use change, management, or disturbance, such that the classification may not be justified. The findings are intended to support informed engagement with the Local Planning Authority and other relevant consultees.

Ancient Wood Pasture Definition

The Site has been identified as containing AWP (MER-427) as recorded within the AWI. The AWI is a non-statutory dataset maintained by Natural England which identifies land considered to be of potential ancient woodland or wood-pasture origin, based on available historic and environmental evidence.

Wood-pasture and parkland is a priority habitat characterised by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) as areas managed by a long-established tradition of grazing, supporting the survival of multiple generations of trees, typically including veteran or historically managed specimens. The tree component may occur as scattered individuals, small groups, or open canopy cover, often forming a mosaic with grassland, scrub, or other semi-natural habitats.

This definition establishes that wood-pasture is not defined by grazing alone, but by the combination of long-term grazing management and a persistent tree or shrub component, resulting in a structurally diverse landscape.

Guidance set out in *A Handbook for Updating the Ancient Woodland Inventory for England* further clarifies that:

- Wood-pasture should be identified on the basis of discernible tree cover, whether as scattered individuals, groups, or open canopy structure;
- It is the wooded component of the landscape that is critical to its identification, rather than wider areas of pasture or grazing land-use; and
- Extensive pasture lacking a meaningful tree component, or where such a component has been substantially altered or removed, should not be characterised as wood-pasture.

The ‘ancient’ qualifier, as applied within the AWI, reflects an interpretation that the site may have long-term continuity of woodland or wood-pasture character, typically informed by evidence extending back to at least the early post-medieval period (c.1600), although this threshold is more directly applicable to ‘Ancient Woodland’. For AWP, which may exhibit more complex and dynamic land-use histories, the emphasis is on the enduring association between grazing and tree cover over time, rather than continuous woodland cover. Accordingly, land identified as ancient wood-pasture would be expected to demonstrate evidence of long-established wood-pasture structure and management, which may include historic mapping showing open or scattered tree cover, the survival of veteran or multi-generational trees, and/or landscape characteristics consistent with long-term grazing beneath a tree canopy.

Where such evidence is absent – particularly where there is indication of enclosure, plantation woodland, formal landscaping, agricultural improvement, or later clearance – the attribution of AWP may not be supported by the available evidence.

This framework provides a clear and proportionate basis against which the Site has been assessed.

Historic Cartographic Analysis

Mapping sources reviewed include Yates’ Map of 1787, the 1842 Tithe Plan of Whiston, and subsequent Ordnance Survey editions from 1892, 1907, 1937, 1959, and 1993. Mapping pre-dating Yates’ map of 1787 is available but does not provide sufficient detail regarding tree cover, canopy structure, or grazing management to establish the presence or absence of long-established AWP. In the absence of clear cartographic evidence from this period, there is no positive basis to support the assertion of early continuity of wood-pasture at the Site, and greater weight must therefore be given to the later, more detailed mapping evidence.

While the general area of the Site is depicted on Yates’ Map of 1787 (Plate A), the small scale of the map prevents an in-depth analysis of land use. Notwithstanding this, Yates’ mapping does depict areas of parkland and significant woodland elsewhere, and the absence of any such representation at the Site suggests that it was not characterised by notable woodland or parkland at this time.

The 1842 Tithe Plan of the Township of Whiston provides the first detailed representation of the area (Plate B). Much of the recorded AWP is recorded within Plot 462, associated with Prince’s House, and is described within the tithe apportionment as comprising ‘*plantation*’. Visually, it represents a managed woodland block, likely part of the estate’s structured landscape, rather than an open, grazed, veteran-tree environment. The south-western portion of the AWP, however, is situated within Plot 463

associated with Prince's House. This plot, in contrast, is recorded as comprising the '*garden*' of Prince's House within the tithe apportionment.

The 1892 Ordnance Survey mapping (Plate C) depicts evenly spaced broadleaved woodland symbol. The trees are drawn as tight, continuous clusters of individual broadleaved symbols, with no breaks, glades, or scattered-tree spacing. There is no symbology for scattered trees, no open brushwood, and no mosaic of rough pasture. The woodland is shown as a solid block, bounded by clear parcel lines, which is typical of managed estate woodland or long-established enclosed wood. The aforementioned Plot 463 depicted within the tithe map continuous to be best described as a garden area associated with Prince's House.

The 1907 (Plate D) mapping likewise depicts the south-western plot as a garden. Elsewhere, the wider enclosure continues to be shown as broadleaved woodland, using the same evenly spaced but somewhat sparser tree symbols characteristic of representation of closed-canopy wood. The woodland is again presented as a continuous block with no breaks, glades, or scattered-tree spacing, and the parcel boundaries remain clearly defined. The symbology shows no indication of mixed woodland, scrub, or transitional vegetation.

The Halsnead Estate Sale Catalogue of 1929 (Plate E; Archive Ref. GB1076.ESTA/1/1) identifies Prince's House Farm as a significant agricultural unit, described as a 'valuable and exceedingly fertile dairy stock and corn farm' in excellent condition. The area corresponding to the identified AWP encompasses Plots 95, 108, and 108a. Plot 95, previously recorded as garden within the 1842 tithe map, is again associated with the farmhouse and is not identified as woodland. In contrast, Plots 108 and 108a are described as '*woodland*', whereas the adjacent Plot 110, located to the west of the AWP area, is recorded as '*pasture*' and presents as sparsely wooded pasture, highlighting a clear distinction between enclosed woodland and open grazed land within the historic estate landscape.

The 1937 (Plate F) mapping continues to depict the wider enclosure as broadleaved woodland, using the same dense, evenly spaced tree symbols characteristic of closed-canopy wood on mapping of this period. The woodland remains shown as a continuous block with no breaks, glades, or scattered-tree spacing. The garden plot associated with Prince's House is still shown as an open, managed space, with the surrounding woodland forming a consistent backdrop.

The 1959 (Plate G) mapping shows a clear change in the character of the former woodland compartment. The dense, continuous broadleaved woodland symbology used on earlier editions is no longer present. Instead, the area is depicted as open ground with scattered individual tree symbols, spaced irregularly and without any canopy fill. This indicates a marked reduction in tree cover and a transition away from enclosed woodland toward a more open landscape with limited, dispersed trees. No symbols for scrub, furze, or regenerating woodland are shown, and the parcel reads as a consciously maintained open space with ornamental tree cover rather than a wooded enclosure. By 1993 (Plate H), the mapping shows the area as predominantly open ground, with only a small number of isolated tree symbols retained.

The 1842 Tithe Plan shows the Site largely comprising managed estate woodland ('plantation') and formal garden associated with Prince's House, rather than open grazed woodland. The woodland is depicted as dense, enclosed blocks, typical of structured estate planting, with no indication of scattered trees, glades, or mosaic habitats beneath the canopy – features expected in semi-natural wood-pasture. Subsequent Ordnance Survey mapping from 1892 to 1937, in addition to the Halsnead Estate Sale Catalogue of 1929, continues to depict the area as dense, continuous woodland, bounded by clear parcel lines, with no symbology for scattered trees or evidence of long-established grazing

under a woodland canopy. The garden plot associated with Prince's House remains clearly delineated throughout this period. These characteristics are inconsistent with the persistent tree and grazing mosaic required for Ancient Wood Pasture.

By the mid-20th century there appears to have been only a small number of trees present in the site (Plate G), and by the 1990s no trees or woodland are depicted on the Ordnance Survey mapping (Plate H). Aerial photographic imagery shows that the Site was largely open ground by 2000 (Plate I), with a number of dispersed trees at its centre and along its boundaries, and a comparison with recent aerial photography indicates that much of the existing tree cover has developed over the last 25 years (Plate J).

Conclusion

In summary, the historic mapping demonstrates that the Site does not meet the criteria for AWP.

The Site has experienced significant landscape change over the last two centuries, transitioning from managed woodland and garden to largely open ground. There is no evidence that characteristic features of AWP – long-established tree-grazing management or structural diversity – have persisted continuously, and the non-statutory classification is not supported by the available evidence.

There is no evidence that grazing and tree cover coexisted continuously across the period necessary to meet the definition of AWP, which, in line with AWI principles, is generally expected to show continuity from c.1600 or earlier. Indeed, by the middle of the 20th century, much of the tree cover within the site had been removed, none is shown on mapping from the 1990s, and few trees are present on aerial imagery dating to 2000. Therefore, even if there had been continual woodland present between 1600 and the 19th century, the woodland was largely removed in the latter half of the 20th century and this possible continuity lost. Much of the present tree cover within the Site is in part due to its reestablishment over the last 25 years.

Therefore, it is considered that, further to any other planning constraints, the Site's identification as AWP should not prevent future development.

References

Joint Nature Conservation Committee 2011, *UK Priority Habitat Descriptions: Wood-Pasture and Parkland*

Natural England 2022, *A Handbook for Updating the Ancient Woodland Inventory for England*. Natural England



Plate A. Excerpt of Yates' Map of 1787



Plate B. Excerpt of the 1842 Tithe Plan of the Township of Whiston

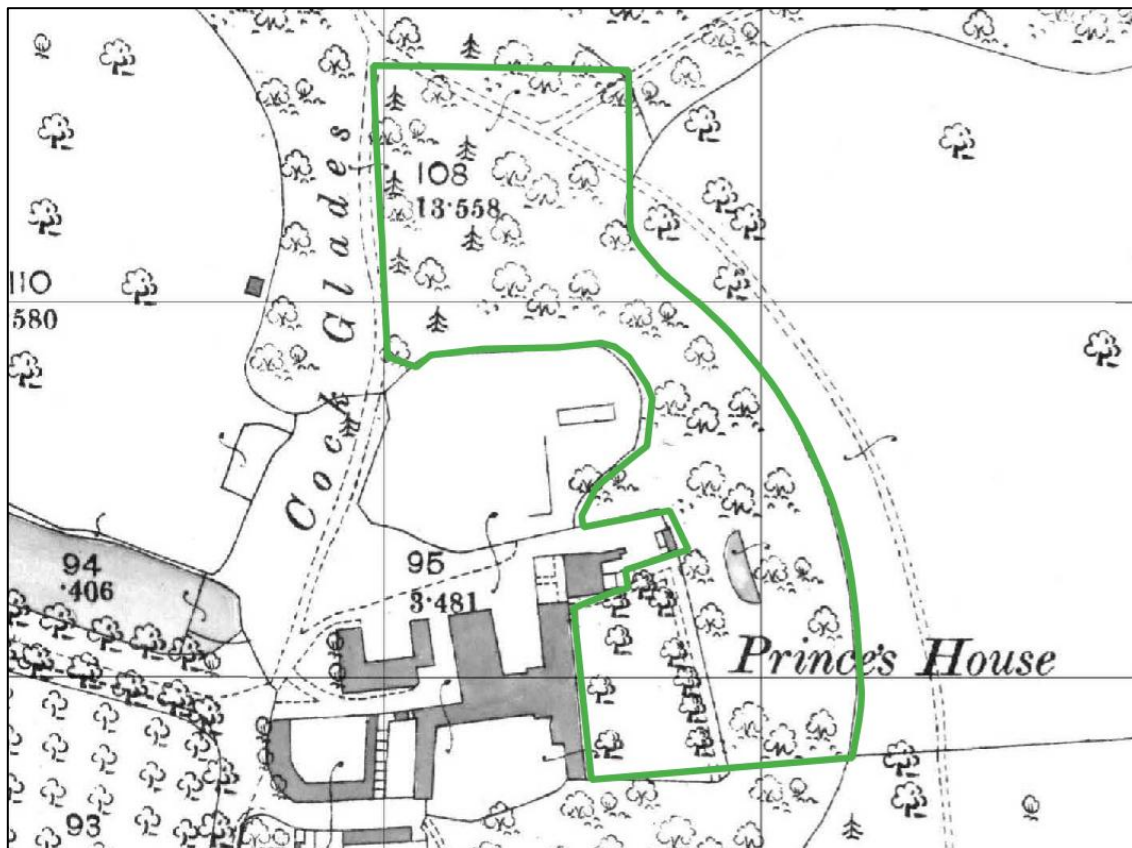


Plate C. Excerpt of the 1892 Ordnance Survey map

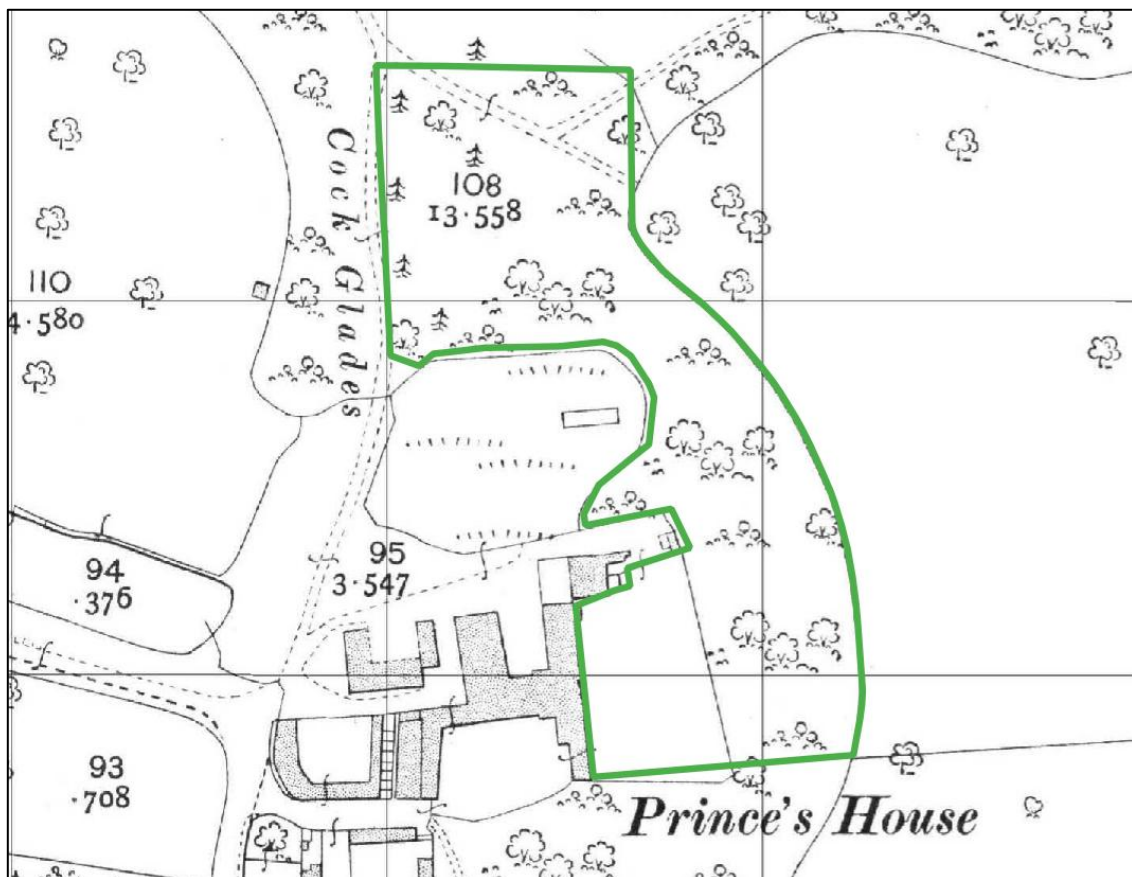


Plate D. Excerpt of the 1907 Ordnance Survey map

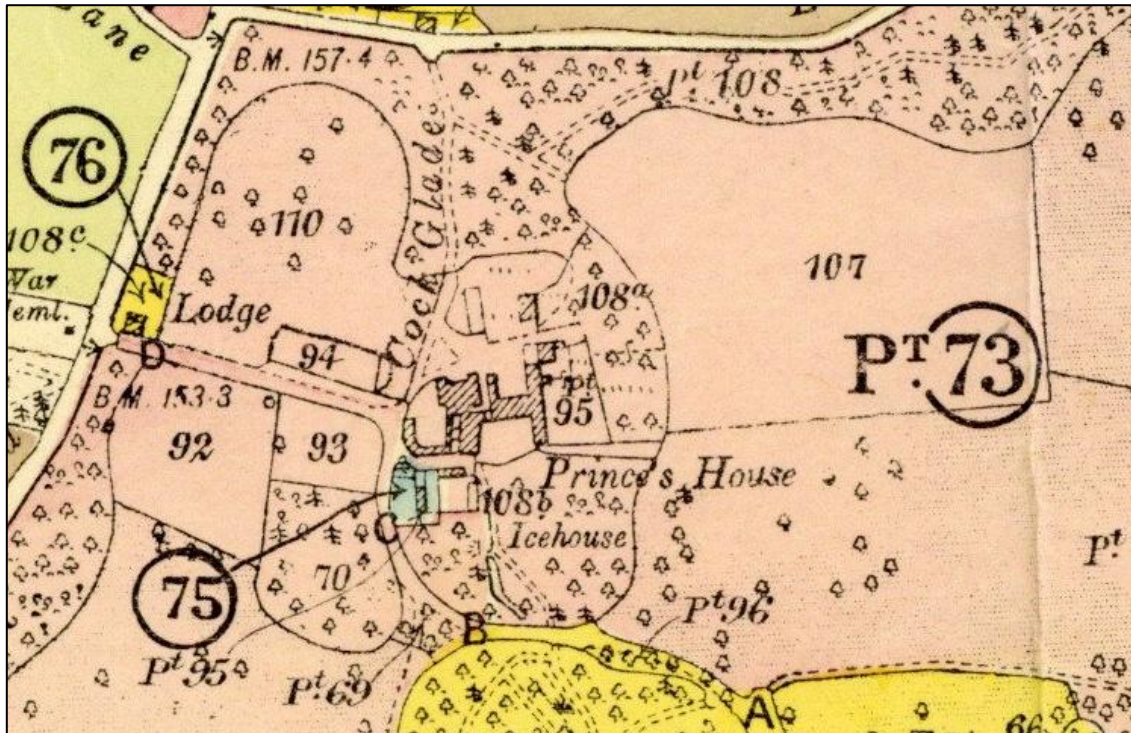


Plate E. Excerpt of the plan within the Halsnead Estate Sale Catalogue of 1929 (Archive Ref. GB1076.ESTA/1/1)



Plate F. Excerpt of the 1937 Ordnance Survey map

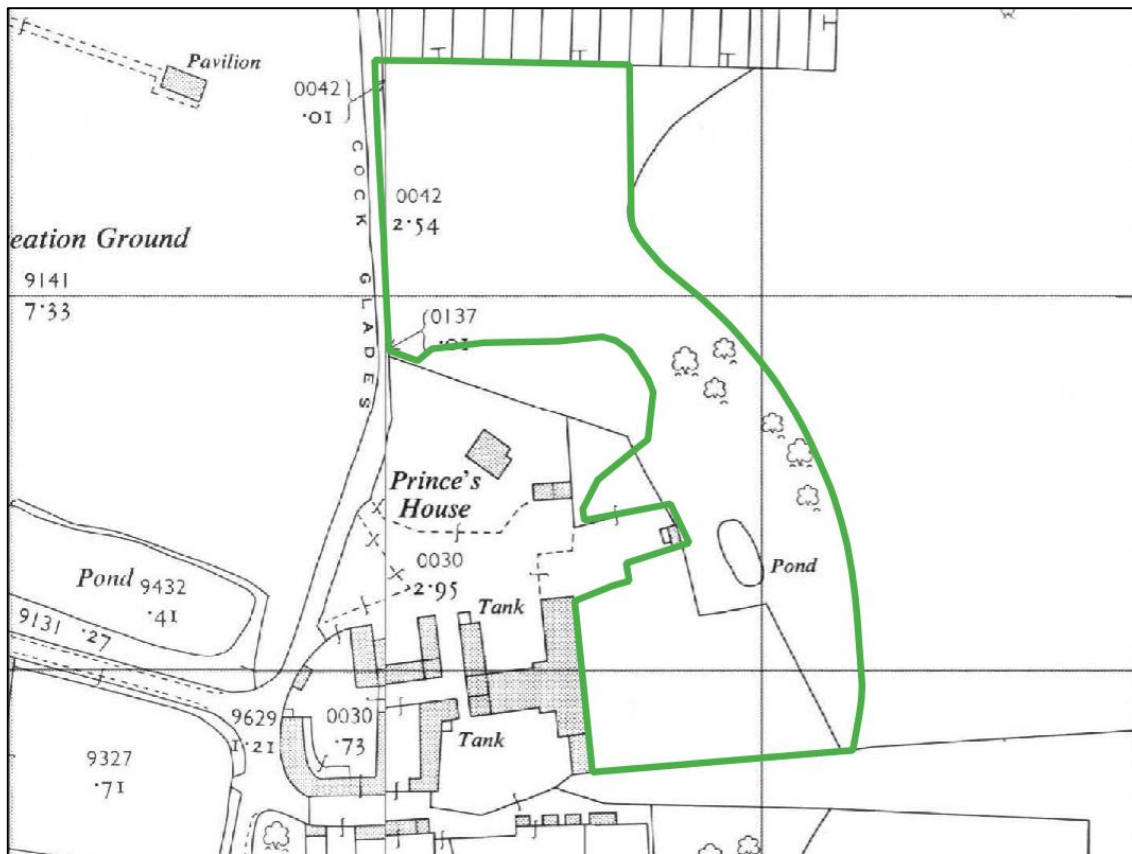


Plate G. Excerpt of the 1959 Ordnance Survey map



Plate H. Excerpt of the 1993 Ordnance Survey map



Plate I. 2000 Aerial Photography of the AWP



Plate J. 2024 Aerial Photography of the AWP