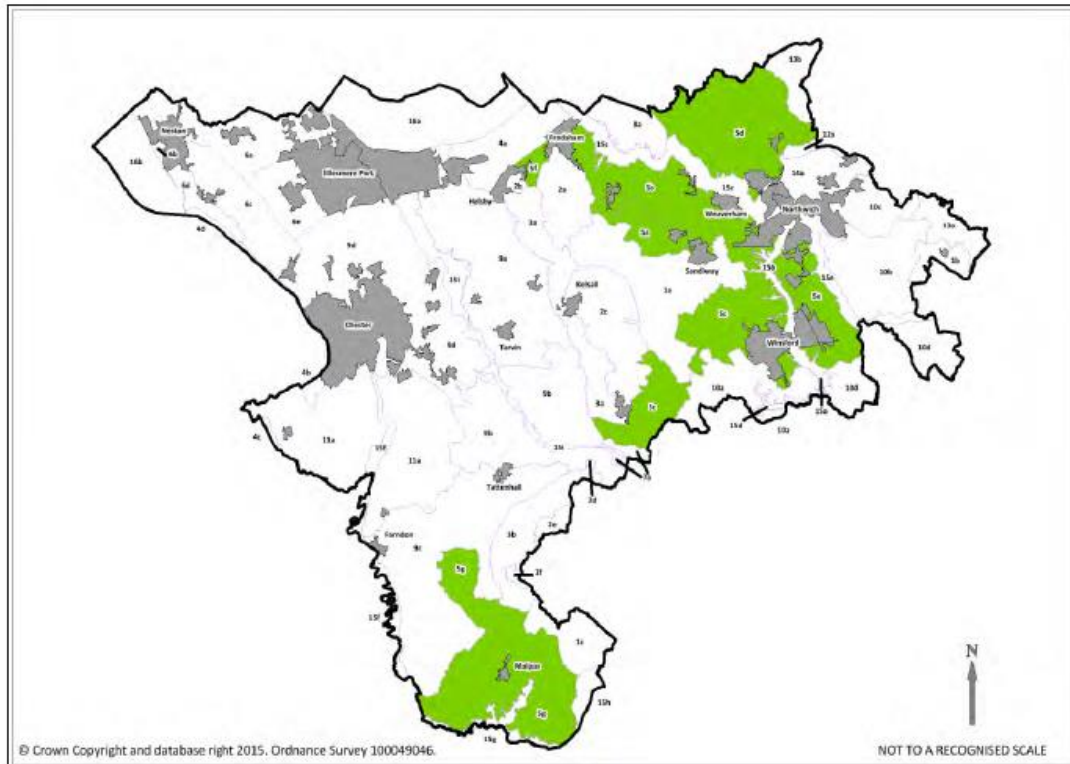


A LANDSCAPE STRATEGY FOR CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER BOROUGH

LCT 5: UNDULATING ENCLOSED FARMLAND



General Description

This character type is defined by undulating topography and the associated small to medium scale enclosure into which it is divided. Key characteristics are the generally cohesive and un-fragmented historic landscape in the south of the borough, small woodlands, ponds and streams, nucleated rural villages and scattered farmsteads. Land use is mainly pasture.

Away from main roads, railways and settlement the landscape is generally quiet and rural. Views within this type very much depend upon location and the nature of the immediate topography.

There is a range of monuments from Bronze Age barrows to post medieval canal locks. The character type is found across a large part of the Cheshire West and Chester borough; to the east between Northwich and the *Sandstone Ridge* and in the south of the borough.

Visual Character

The location of this landscape type is reflected in the prevailing views which extend to adjacent character areas, either out over the low-lying plain or up towards the often dominant *Sandstone Ridge*.

Roads typically follow the rolling topography, offering extensive views from high vantage points out over the immediate field pattern and extending to the high ground in the far distance such as the Pennines in the east.

Long distance views are sometimes affected by large scale industrial works in adjacent areas.

From low ground the landscape appears smaller in scale due to the increase in enclosure and the contained views where skylines are typically formed by hedgerow trees, woodland and farmsteads, with occasional electricity pylons and church spires.

At many locations tree cover appears to be high, an obvious departure from the adjacent Cheshire plain. This can be attributed to the intact hedgerow system, complemented by numerous small farm woodlands or coverts upon locally prominent areas of high ground.

In certain areas arable farming predominates, especially upon better-drained ground. Where this is associated with loss of hedgerows, post and wire fences and fewer hedgerow trees, the scale of the landscape increases considerably and views become more extensive.

Physical Influences

The topography of this type varies from around 10m-135m AOD. Solid geology is a bedrock of Mercia Mudstones, overlain by till and glacio-fluvial deposits. Soils comprise slowly permeable clay stagnogleys ideally suited to grass and were a major factor in the development of the Cheshire dairy farming industry.

In the south of the borough around Carden and Overton sandstone outcrops in a series of escarpments and dip slopes, creating a distinctive local landscape.

Secondary calcium carbonate deposits are common at a depth of 1-2m in the till, and prior to the 19th century was dug and spread for agricultural improvement. These marl pits led to the creation of field ponds which were colonised by a rich variety of plants and animals from other wetland habitats of greater antiquity, for example meres and mosses.

Vegetation succession has reduced many ponds to small, shallow features, over shaded with trees and with little open water.

Small, irregular ancient field enclosures and larger late post medieval enclosures are bounded by hedgerows with an abundance of hedgerow trees.

The area around Malpas contains a regionally significant late medieval landscape which preserves elements of the earlier medieval open fields. The historic landscape of this area is generally cohesive and un-fragmented and is considered to contain some of the best preserved late medieval field systems and ridge and furrow in Cheshire (together with LCA 9b: *Hargrave, Hoofield & Beeston Plain* and LCA 9c: *Tattenhall to Shocklach Plain*).

The majority of fields are grass leys for pasture, although increasing areas are cultivated for silage or feed crops including cereals and maize.

Woodland levels are higher than those of the neighbouring plain but still relatively low, concentrated mainly upon former estates such as Carden and along smaller stream sides like the Wych Valley in the south of the county where there are fragments of ancient woodland. Frequently they are associated with unimproved or semi-improved grassland habitats which have escaped modern farming practices such as the species-rich Carden meadows.

Small farm copses and coverts are mainly broadleaved and there are mixed woodlands on sandier soils.

The undulating landform supports a complex natural drainage system and in some areas every stream or open ditch supports a line of mature trees.

Cultural Influences

Settlement density is relatively high. Some nucleated villages, such as Acton Bridge, have seen 20th century expansion reflecting their location close to larger places of work and the communications network.

Elsewhere settlement comprises a mix of small picturesque villages such as Eaton, Little Budworth and Malpas, surrounded by a dispersed pattern of hamlets, farms and halls linked by a network of rural lanes, overlaid by main roads.

The character of the built environment includes timber framed buildings, some of which date back to the 17th century, and red and brown brick buildings. Large red brick dairy barns a particular feature of this type.

The area was divided amongst a number of estates and the holdings of major land owners are intermingled throughout the character type. Designed parkland landscapes and woodland associated with 19th century halls indicate the previous wealth of parts of the character type.

Some former large parkland areas are now degraded or converted to recreational use such as golf courses, for example at Carden.

The small to medium scale field pattern reflects irregular medieval fields created by the assarting of moss, heath and woodland and the regular fields reflecting post medieval improvement.

Parts of the type are also enclosed from former Royal Forest.

Associated with the early fields is a network of footpaths, some of which may be of some antiquity.

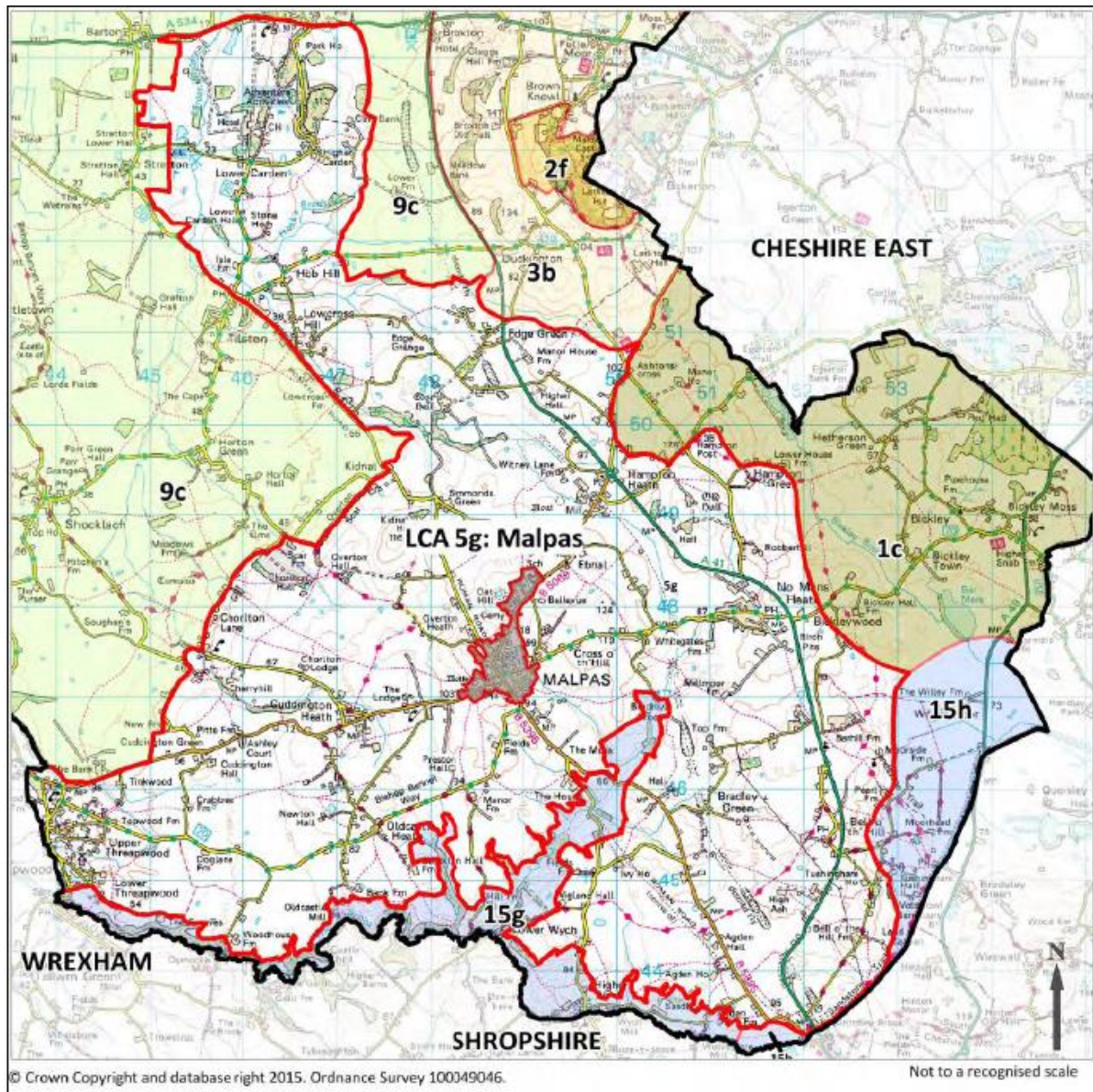
Evidence of past activity include Bronze Age (c2000 -700 BC) barrows, such as the round barrow at Gallowsclough Cob, an Iron Age (c700 BC – AD 50) promontory fort at Bradley above Beech Brook, numerous medieval moated sites such as Crowton and Peel, and a rare example of a Roman Villa at Eaton (the only one known in Cheshire).

The discovery of items such as flints, burnt stones, the tip of a Neolithic axe and Bronze Age pottery indicate that rock shelters and caves located in Carden Park were likely to have been occupied in the prehistoric period.

One cave was also deepened in the 18th century to house John Harris, an eccentric who lived on the estate for 20 years.

There are **seven Landscape Character Areas** within LCT 5, ***Malpas*** being one.

LCA 5g: Malpas



Location and Boundaries

The *Malpas Undulating Enclosed Farmland* lies in the south of CWaC borough, between Clutton to the north and the *Wych Valley* to the south.

Tattenhall to Shocklach Plain wraps round the character area to the north and west; the *Beeston to Duckington Sandstone Fringe* and *Bickley Woodland, Heaths, Meres and Mosses* lie to the north-east, with the *Gringley Valley* to the south-east.

The character area boundaries are generally defined by geology and topography, with the A534 forming the northern boundary.

Key Landscape Characteristics of LCA 5g: Malpas

Bedrock geology of Mudstones covered by a mantle of glacial drift deposits (boulder clays) that gives rise to an undulating landform of interlocking hills

In the north and west a series of escarpments and dip slopes create a locally distinctive landscape of sandstone outcrops identified as Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) and where disused quarries are found

The topography 'crowns' at Malpas towards the centre of the character area rising to a maximum height of 134m AOD, falling to join the plain northwards to around 20m AOD at Barton and westwards to 45m AOD at Threapwood

The north-south divide between drainage catchment areas: north of Malpas small brooks drain northwards and westwards towards the River Dee; south of Malpas small brooks drain southwards into the Wych Brook which then flows westwards into the Dee

Steep wooded valleys of high conservation value, with a rich mosaic of broadleaved semi-natural woodland including coppice with a diverse ground flora, unimproved grassland, that incise the hills and contain small brooks

Mixed broadleaf and coniferous woodland and copses are a feature on high ground in the north where they 'skyline' and give the impression of a well wooded landscape

Unimproved grassland and woodland on stream sides, steep banks, sandstone outcrops and other places where agricultural improvement has been limited

Varying sandy and clay soils, with agricultural land use predominantly arable cropping especially fodder crops such as maize, interspersed with some pasture, in contrast to dairying on the adjoining plain

Cohesive and un-fragmented regionally significant historic landscape with extremely well preserved late medieval field systems and extensive ridge and furrow; abundant hedgerows and hedgerow trees creating a characteristic patchwork with preserved elements of the earlier medieval open fields and common land (which is sometimes associated with dispersed settlement)

Dispersed settlement pattern with narrow sunken lanes weaving between high hedges and linear belts linking villages, hamlets, farmsteads and isolated cottages; roads radiate out from the main settlement of Malpas

Sandstone walls sometimes atop the hedges, with timber fences and 'Cheshire Railings' also found along fields and roadside boundaries

Field ponds (marl pits) are a feature of the lower lying areas; other water bodies include reservoirs on high ground and ornamental parkland lakes

Elongated, dispersed Parish of Threapwood with distinctive settlement pattern of minor lanes linking small cottages set amongst hedgerow-bound meadows

Built form is typically simple red/orange brick cottages with steeply pitching roofs and slate or clay pantiles, terminating in distinctive gable parapets; also timber-framed buildings; also decorative brick detailing at Carden Park

The Carden Park Estate in the north, with its remaining lodges and ice house, extensive woodland belts and boundary walls, now a hotel, spa, golf resort and outdoor adventure centre

The number of halls and small historic estates such as Chorlton, Overton and Cuddington; Chorlton Old Hall and Edge Hall have medieval moats

Wide range of archaeological sites, e.g. Castel Hill Motte at Malpas and Round Barrow at Carden

A rural, tranquil landscape away from the main A41 and A534

Bishop Bennet Way long distance route and numerous other public rights of way

Extensive views from high ground across the plain to the Clwydian hills to the west
The sandstone fringe and sandstone ridge form a very dominant skyline to the north. St. Oswald's Church in Malpas provides a significant landmark

Key Landscape Sensitivities, Qualities and Value

Natural / Physical

Steeply undulating topography of interlocking hills with locally distinctive wooded sandstone outcrops at Carden Park (Parkers Hill), Overton Scar and Edge Scar; the escarpment and caves at Carden Park are identified as a Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS);

An east-west drainage catchment that 'crowns' at Malpas, with small brooks draining northwards and southwards through the character area and westwards into the River Dee;

Solid bedrock geology of mudstones, overlain by glacio-fluvial drift deposits of boulder clay and stagnogley sandy and clay/loam soils that give rise to a predominantly arable land use, with some pasture;

The steep wooded valleys with a rich mosaic of broadleaved semi-natural woodland including coppice with a diverse ground flora, unimproved grassland, that drain northwards towards the River Dee, e.g. Upper Wood and Lower Wood at Edge, Randall's Rough and The Heir's Wood west of Duckington;

The incised hills that contain small brooks such as Bradley Brook, Carden Brook, Hooks Brook and their numerous tributaries that contain important concentrations of these habitats, some of which are local wildlife sites;

Ancient woodland on stream sides, steep banks, sandstone outcrops and other places where agricultural improvement has been limited, e.g. Overton Scar outcrop is a local wildlife site;

Unimproved grassland also on stream sides, steep banks, sandstone outcrops and other places where agricultural improvement has been limited, with notable areas around Carden, Duckington and Bradley;

Mixed broadleaf and coniferous woodland and copses are a feature on high ground in the north around Carden Park, e.g. at Parker's Hill and the conifer plantation at Round Hill.

Cultural / Heritage / Historic

The area contains a regionally significant late medieval landscape which preserves elements of the earlier medieval open fields. The historic landscape of this area is generally cohesive and un-fragmented and is considered to contain some of the best preserved late medieval field systems and ridge and furrow in Cheshire, providing historic continuity in the landscape;

The townfields that are located in the vicinity of historic settlements;

The landscape to the southwest, in Wales and known as the Maelor Saesneg, is included on the Countryside Council for Wales/CADW/International Council on Monuments and Sites (UK): Historic Landscapes Register; Part 2.2 Register of Landscapes of Special Historic Interest in Wales. England has no equivalent register, however this landscape is clearly of regional, if not national, importance;

Sandstone walls sometimes atop the hedges, with other boundaries of timber fencing and 'Cheshire Railings';

Examples of surviving common land as indicated by the place names Bradley Green, Edge Green, Overton Heath, Hampton Heath and Cuddington Heath;

Field ponds are a feature of the lower lying areas, indicating the extraction of marl (calcareous deposits) from the boulder clay for past agricultural improvement;

Other water bodies include reservoirs on high ground, ornamental parkland lakes and a mill pond at Stretton Water Mill;

Disused quarries indicate the previous winning of sandstone in the area, for example at Edge Green and Overton;

The historic Carden Park Estate in the north, previously the site of a 16th century timber framed hall (Carden Hall burnt down in 1912) and Deer Park. Today two lodges and an ice house remain, with other listed buildings/structures;

Halls and small historic estates are located in the west of the character area, at Chorlton (including Chorlton Hall, Chorlton Old Hall, Chorlton House and Chorlton Lodge), at Overton (Overton Hall and Overton Manor), at Cuddington (Cuddington Hall), Newton Hall, Preston Hall, and Edge Hall towards the north;

Chorlton Old Hall and Edge Hall are moated medieval sites;

Watling Street Roman Road runs north-south through Malpas between Chester and Whitchurch;

The A41 was originally an 18th century turnpike road;

Former Chester/Whitchurch railway line;

The nucleated historic settlement of Malpas is mentioned in the Domesday Book suggesting it was one of the more important settlements in Cheshire, with a castle and a market;

Wide range of archaeological sites, including Scheduled Monuments, e.g. Castle Hill Motte at Malpas; Bronze Age (c2200-1250BC) Round Barrow in Carden Park;

The discovery of items such as flints, burnt stones, the tip of a Neolithic axe and Bronze Age pottery indicate that rock shelters and caves located in Carden Park were likely to have been occupied in the prehistoric period. One cave was also deepened in the 18th century to house John Harris, an eccentric who lived on the estate for 20 years;

Conservation Areas at Edge, Higher Carden, Chorlton Lane and Malpas;

There has been much modern conversion of parkland to recreational use or farmland;

Recreational opportunities are provided at Carden Park where there is a hotel, spa, golf resort and outdoor activity centre;

Passive recreation provided by the Bishop Bennet Way long distance footpath and numerous other public rights of way.

Built Development and Settlement Pattern

The dispersed and relatively dense settlement pattern with narrow sunken green lanes weaving between high hedges and linear belts linking villages, hamlets, halls, farmsteads and isolated cottages. Roads radiate out from the main nucleated settlement of Malpas;

Linear development has occurred alongside roads, including the modern dormitory village of No Mans Heath and an industrial estate at Hampton Heath, both near junctions on the A41;

Built form is typically simple red/orange brick cottages with steeply pitching roofs and slate or clay pantiles, terminating in distinctive gable parapets; also timber-framed buildings;

The Carden Estate is notable for the use of decorative polychromatic brick detail in cottages and model farms;

The dispersed Parish of Threapwood has a particularly distinctive settlement pattern that comes from squatter settlement in the C18th, early C19th; small cottages alongside minor roads linking Upper Threapwood and Lower Threapwood and set amongst hedgerow-bound meadows.

Perceptual / Visual

Generally a deeply rural, tranquil landscape away from the main A41 that passes north-south through the eastern side of the character area, and the A534 defining the northern boundary;

The northern area around Carden Park appears to be heavily wooded due to the dominance of trees on the skyline;

The adjacent wooded *Beeston to Duckington Sandstone Fringe* and the *Higher Burwardsley Sandstone Ridge* form a very dominant skyline to the north of the character area;

Extensive views from high ground to the Clwydian hills;

The Wrexham Industrial Estate is also visible to the west and appears as a massive incongruous element within the agricultural plain;

St. Oswald's Church, Malpas provides a significant landmark, especially when approaching the settlement from the south;

The presence of undulating topography, woodland and hedgerow trees means there is some potential for mitigating visual impact without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect on the character of the landscape.

Landscape Condition

The *Malpas Undulating Enclosed Farmland* is in active agricultural use and is managed for these land uses. Although the hedgerow network is generally intact, there are some gaps in the network and some over-mature hedgerow trees.

Some of the sandstone boundary walls and 'Cheshire Fencing' is in need of repair, particularly alongside roads.

The areas of 20th century ribbon development at No Mans Heath off the A41 give the landscape a 'suburban' appearance.

CWaC Local Plan policies with an influence on the character of *Malpas*:

Countryside;

Natural heritage sites of international, national, regional and/or local significance;

Nationally designated heritage assets (on Historic England's National Heritage List for England) and locally significant heritage assets;

Flood risk and water management;

Candidate Key Settlement Gap between Malpas and Ebnal.

Forces for Landscape Change

Past change

Limited boundary management, with evidence of gappy hedges and walls and fencing ('Cheshire Railings') being neglected and in need of repair;

Agricultural intensification with enlargement of fields and loss of hedgerow boundaries (oak trees left 'in-field') with loss of historic field pattern;

Under management and deterioration of some farm woodlands;

A shift from pasture grazing with increasing areas being cultivated for arable cropping, silage or fodder crops including cereals and maize;

Significant change has occurred on the former Carden Park estate (but topography, dense woodland and boundary walls have limited its impact on the landscape);

Loss of historic parkland to recreational use (such as golf courses) or farmland;

Loss of heathland to recreational use or farmland or invasion by scrub and bracken;

Loss of unimproved grassland to farmland;

Loss of ridge and furrow resulting from increase in arable land use replacing pasture;

Limited management of field ponds has resulted in some silting up and drying out due to natural processes of vegetation succession and overshadowing from trees.

Potential future change / key issues affecting *Malpas*

Farm diversification including introduction of riding schools, stables and paddocks;

Pressure for (large scale) residential/employment development, in particular at Malpas and No Mans Heath;

Further loss of ridge and furrow which is a key historic landscape characteristic of the area;

Pressure for conversion of farm buildings for other uses including residential, business and industrial use, with erection of modern portal sheds to replace the lost space;

Pressure for Solar PV farms;

Pressure for built development associated with the main A41 that passes through the landscape, for example at road junctions at No Mans Heath and Hampton Heath;

Pressure for more golf courses.

Overall Landscape Management Strategy for Malpas

The overall management strategy for this landscape should be to **conserve** the regionally significant historic landscape comprising late medieval field systems and ridge and furrow, **restore** the historic field pattern of hawthorn hedgerows and hedgerow oak trees, and **enhance** the grassland and woodland network.

Landscape Management Guidelines

1. Maintain an intact hedgerow network through management of hedges and ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees.
2. Avoid over-intensive flail mowing or ploughing too close to hedgerow boundaries – protect saplings and encourage trees to grow up at intervals along the hedgerow.
3. Consider opportunities to replace hedgerows where they have been lost.
4. Manage existing woodlands to ensure a diverse canopy structure and rich ground flora.
5. Consider opportunities to plant simple pockets of trees and small blocks of woodland in field corners, on land of low ecological value and ensuring no detriment to historic assets, to ensure the continuation of these characteristic features.
6. Conserve the small to medium scale pattern of fields, particularly earlier field systems which provide historic continuity in the landscape.
7. Maintain the pastoral character of the landscape and reduce soil erosion by minimising exposure of bare soil (for example as a result of increased crop growing).

8. Increase the biodiversity of intensively managed grassland and arable land – create and link buffer strips along linear features such as hedgerows to create a continuous network of wildlife corridors.

9. Encourage sympathetic integration of horse paddocks through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries, rather than sub-division of fields and erection of high visibility fencing - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.

10. Encourage sympathetic integration of golf courses through maintenance of hedgerow field boundaries and existing woodland rather than planting of alien ornamental species - ensure the land use does not break up traditional field patterns.

11. Conserve the areas of unimproved grassland that is of nature conservation value and consider opportunities to extend / recreate this habitat.

Encourage the retention and management of field ponds and brooks that are of wildlife importance as well as contributing to the diversity of the landscape.

13. Conserve and manage large scale earthworks, such as ridge and furrow, promoting sensitive agricultural practices in their vicinity (i.e. grazing not ploughing).

14. Planting within Carden should retain the diversity and distinctive mix of tree species: Scots pine, birch and oak on the higher sandstone cliff; hawthorn, oak and lime in the lower parkland; and appropriate wetland species around Carden brook and the field ponds. Avoid planting in areas of ecological value.

15. Conserve and manage earthworks, such as the remnants of Castle Hill Motte at Malpas, and the Round Barrow at Carden, promoting sensitive agricultural practices in their vicinity (i.e. grazing not ploughing).

16. Seek to replace coniferous woodlands with broadleaved woodlands.

17. Conserve the sense of peace and quiet away from the main roads, and conserve the rural character of the lanes. Avoid features that 'suburbanise' the landscape such as kerbs and large scale signage.

18. Conserve views from high vantage points, including prominent views from within Carden, across the plain to the Clwydian hills to the west, and to St. Oswald's Church in Malpas. Consider opening up more views from new vantage points. Consider key views when planning locations for new woodland.

Built Development Guidelines

1. Maintain the low density, scattered settlement pattern of villages, hamlets, halls and farmsteads and isolated cottages, retaining Malpas and No Mans Heath (in that order) as the main focus for development.

2. Conserve the local vernacular built form – timber-framed or simple red/orange brick buildings with steeply pitching slate/pantile roofs with distinctive gable parapets. Ensure new built development is of high quality design and responds to local materials and styles. Resist suburban style fencing, garden boundaries, kerbs and lighting.

3. Ensure conversion of farm buildings is sensitive to the vernacular style of farmsteads in this area, by maintaining the existing structure of simple form and sandstone/red brick finish. Pay particular attention to the features which accompany the conversion such as driveways and gardens, ensuring that these features do not 'suburbanise' the landscape.

Soften built edges by introducing small scale planting schemes using native broadleaved species. Seek to integrate garden boundaries with the rural landscape through use of native hedgerows rather than close-board fencing.

5. Ensure riding schools, stables and equestrian development do not accumulate to detract from the rural character of the area – ensure sensitive integration of fencing, tracks, jumps and ancillary buildings.

6. Conserve rural views from Bishop Bennet Way long distance footpath and consider views to the Clwydian Hills and Malpas Church, which provides a significant landmark especially when approaching the settlement from the south, in relation to any change.

7. Maintain the rural setting to villages and farmsteads which are features of the landscape, with specific reference to Malpas.

8. Consider views northwards and eastwards to the skyline backdrop of the wooded sandstone fringe and sandstone ridge in relation to any change.

9. Protect views to and from St. Oswald's Church, Malpas.

10. Refer to local documents, Village Design Statement (VDS) and Neighbourhood Plans when considering change.

11. Conserve the openness of the landscape between Malpas and Ebnal where the Candidate Key Settlement Gap is identified through which settlement identity and separation can be secured.





