

# CHARACTER TYPE 2      ELEVATED ENCLOSED FARMLAND

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## Description

Areas of elevated enclosed farmland form a ‘horse shoe’ like rim of land of the west, north-west and northern edges of the Douglas Valley and create a partial feeling of enclosure to the urban centre of Wigan. The elevated farmland creates a stark contrast to the adjoining residential and industrial conurbations on the valley floor and forms a rural buffer to the Pennine foothills in the east and to the West Lancashire Coastal Plain to the west. These areas are represented by the Billinge and Up Holland Ridge to the west, the Shevington and Standish Spurs, together with the Standish Crest to the north and Aspull Ridge to the east.

The Elevated Enclosed Farmland blends subtly with the Undulating Enclosed Farmland occupying the lower slopes and plateau-like areas towards the Pennine Foothills to the north-east. In common with the Undulating Enclosed Farmland, the landscape contains many hedges, often gapped and with few hedgerow trees. However, it is characterised by steeper, often very steep, slopes and with a series of large, generally linear plateaux at various heights around the Douglas Valley. Around the higher edges of the rim, particularly along the Billinge and Up Holland Ridge, the land is exposed to westerly winds.



Photo 43 Mine shaft at Merrybone Farm, Shevington.

The Elevated Enclosed Farmland landscape is contiguous with the 'Farmed Ridges' Character Areas described in Lancashire County Council's Landscape Character Assessment.

The M6 Motorway has had a major influence on this landscape, traversing north-south and utilising the Billinge and Up Holland Ridge. From the south the motorway gains steadily in height to the north, crossing the Douglas valley on a high viaduct at Gathurst. The B5206 Gathurst Road, which considerably pre-dates the M6, runs along a generally parallel route. The M58 joins the M6 at Orrell, utilising a gap formed by the valley of Smithy Brook.

A number of extensive woodland areas are found in this landscape type, predominantly plantations of mid to late Victorian era, but often planted around a core of older woodland in deep cloughs on steep-sided stream valleys. Several of these deep wooded cloughs are classified as ancient woodland, particularly around Orrell and Shevington.

There are also a number of extensive parklands within this landscape. These are mainly C19th in origin, but often with a far older core area. These 'designed landscapes' have clearly been imposed upon a pre-existing landscape and in many cases utilise old natural woodlands as a backdrop. However, most of these areas have and continue to be used for farming, creating a hybrid landscape of extensive game covert planting interspersed with mainly arable fields with little or no hedging between them. Few isolated parkland trees remain, but there are a number of designed 'clumps' redolent of beech 'hangers' on the chalk downs.

Farm buildings within the landscape tend towards large farmsteads, almost all brick-built Victorian structures with a collection of barns and outhouses, the more modern of which are metal-clad portal framed structures.

Settlement was originally concentrated on road junctions, such as at Orrell and Shevington, but has historically developed into ribbon development, only slowing in the later C20th when many housing estates were constructed in areas behind the main roads, infilling substantial areas of land.

The relicts of mineral extraction, in the form of colliery spoil heaps and disturbed ground are frequently found in the area, together with a number of small, now disused, sandstone and sand quarries. A particularly large area of former sand extraction has previously taken place to the north of Standish. Many of these quarries have now been filled in or restored.

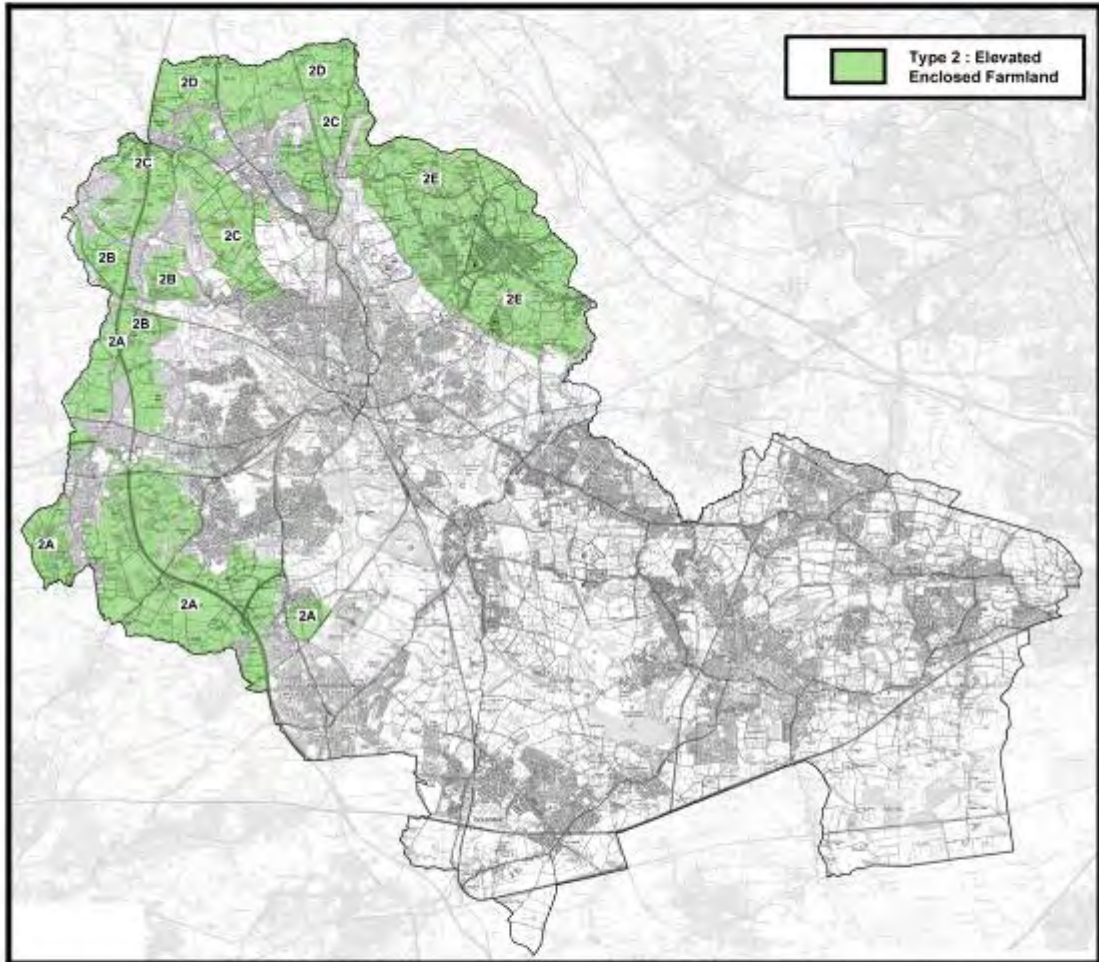
Throughout the area are elements of stone walling, from occasional field walls, usually adjacent to roads or as retaining walls and to older buildings in the farms and settlements.

Views are mainly over Wigan town centre, but include distant views south towards Fiddlers Ferry Power Station and the hills at Helsby, together with views of the Pennines to the east, notably at Rivington. Good views are also afforded to the west towards Ashursts Beacon.

### **Key Characteristics:**

- Steeply sloping, sometimes very steeply sloping, land with plateau-like ridges and terraces
- Dissected by deep, steep sided, wooded cloughs
- Extensive blocks of plantation woodland, planted as game covert

- Open and exposed landscapes on the crests
- 'Mixed' agriculture, with arable farming on the gentler slopes, but with some areas of dairy farming
- Ribbon development along many of the major road routes
- Important roads through the area, the M6, M58, A577, A571 and the B5206
- Ridges running generally along north/south or east/west alignment, with associated lower secondary ridges and plateaux
- Occasional gritstone field and boundary walls and buildings
- Presence of 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century parkland estates
- Presence of landmarks - natural and man-made
- Locally tranquil areas
- Hill top villages with gritstone cores
- Excellent views



## Cultural History

The elevated enclosed landscape has probably been farmed longer than many other parts of Wigan. The generally lighter, arinaceous soils of the area would have been relatively easily cultivated in prehistoric and historic times.

Little is known of the history of this area until medieval times, perhaps reflecting its strongly rural character. Almost certainly there would have been a Scandinavian influence in the early C10th, overlying the Saxon presence.

The area appears to have been very sparsely settled until the Industrial Revolution, when the population began to expand rapidly. For instance, in the Parish of Shevington there were eighty-six 'hearths' in 1666, but by 1901 there was a population of 1,753 <sup>(1)</sup>.

A number of manors are found throughout the area, several of which established parks around them. For instance, Bispham Hall, near Orrell, dates back to c. 1573 and still retains substantial wooded parkland areas. The major parks include Winstanley Park, Standish Park and Haigh Hall. Most of the extant parks have plantings dating from Victorian times, but these are in turn based on the woodland in steep-sided wooded valleys, much of which is ancient woodland. There is little evidence of landscaping prior to the C19th; indeed at Haigh Hall, the magnificent C18th parterre was swept away when the Hall was rebuilt, being completed in 1849. Winstanley Park contains a number of ancient sites within it, including a moated site. Standish Park contains the remains of medieval fishponds within it as well as the remains of Standish Hall; there are other, more faint indications of an older landscaped park, including some planting.

Throughout the landscape, where topography favours it, there are a number of moated sites, probably dating to the early medieval period. There is evidence of much smaller field patterns throughout the landscape type existing until the early C20th, after which they appear to have been progressively reduced in number as hedges were removed. To a certain extent this is due to modern farming techniques, but also, in one area, as a result of extensive sand quarrying.



Photo 143 Wall Hey Pit Ventilation Shaft, Haigh Road, Aspull.

Mining has taken place throughout the landscape type, but there is remarkably little evidence of it now present. Drift mines operated in the area until at least 1960, but mining in the area has a considerable history. Pits on Standish Moor were being worked in 1653 and there is record of coal being dug in the Standish area in 1350. There is also an account of three gentlemen losing their way amongst old pits near Standish Hall in 1635. This must have been in the area to the south of Standish Park.

Some untreated colliery spoil is still evident in the area, notably south of Talbot House Farm on the Standish Crest. A heavily planted spoil heap, Woodshaw Ruck, stands in a very prominent position just north of the Leeds to Liverpool Canal at Top Lock.

The A49, was the main north-south road through northwest England prior to the construction of the M6 and originally formed a Roman road. To the south of the town of Wigan, the road traverses lower land, but to the north it follows the Douglas valley up to Boar's Head at which point it runs through the centre of Standish and then out of the Borough towards Coppull. This section of road was of major strategic importance and would have been used by many armies, such as that of the Scots, closely pursued by Cromwell in 1649 and also by Bonnie Prince Charlie's Scots army invading England in 1745 as well by the Duke of Cumberland's forces moving up to invade Scotland.

The M6 motorway largely replaced the importance of the A49 but follows a generally more westerly route, utilising the higher ground to diminish gradient variations. It has a major visual impact to the area, particularly where it crosses the Douglas valley over the Gathurst Viaduct. The M6 was commenced in 1961 and is in cutting for a considerable part of its length within this landscape type. This produced material suitable for embankments elsewhere, but also cut into coal measures and old workings. Substantial amounts of coal were handed over to the NCB as a result. The route of the M6 was carefully chosen to take

an even gradient as it climbed the eastern side of the Billinge and Up Holland Ridge; in this respect it paralleled part of the B5206 Gathurst Road.

The M58 motorway was created as a result of the construction of the New Town at Skelmersdale and the need to connect the New Town to the M6 to the east. The junction at the Wigan end of the M6 motorway was completed in 1980.

The B5206 Gathurst Road follows a secondary ridgeline running approximately north-south parallel to and to the east of the Billinge – Upholland ridge. This road is almost certainly an ancient road.

The Leeds and Liverpool Canal reached Wigan in 1781 and was extended out to the west to meet the Bridgewater Canal at Leigh. Slightly later, the Lancaster Canal Company had begun construction of their canal to Wigan; as a result, the Leeds Liverpool Canal Company came to an agreement with the rival Lancaster Canal Company to connect the two at Top Lock.

**Key cultural elements in the landscape:**

- Medieval Halls and associated later period designed landscapes.
- Small areas of colliery spoil and mine workings.
- The Leeds and Liverpool Canal
- The motorways M6 and M58
- The A49 Wigan Lane and Gathurst Road (B5206).

## AREA 2.A BILLINGE AND ORRELL RIDGE

### Description

The Billinge and Orrell Ridge forms the eastern side of a distinct spur and elevated ridgeline rising to form a series of ridges, crests and plateaux up to 155m OAD, with strongly sloping and undulating ground falling to the east towards the urban areas of Wigan centre.

The area has a distinctive rural character with mainly arable farming, large fields and a sparsity of hedgerows. Hedgerow trees are also few in number and generally poor in quality. Views are often excellent towards the Pennines in the east.

The Borough boundary is mainly set back a little from the apex of the main crest line preventing views to the west – although excellent views are afforded in this direction from Crank Road at the Brownlow summit.

Deeply incised wooded stream valleys are characteristic features cutting through the area, such as Dean Brook to the north (ancient woodland), and Smithy Brook running to the east in association with the Winstanley Estate. These are fed from spring lines high upon the ridgeline. Plantation woodlands form a major element of the estate-designed landscapes and are often linked with the woodlands of the stream valleys.



Photo 23 View towards Billinge Beacon from Chair Wood.

The M6 motorway passes north/south through the area following rising ground from south to north. It is a dominant element imposed on the landscape, with extensive cuttings,



embankments, bridges and junctions at North Ashton and Orrell. The linking M58 motorway joins the M6 from the west at a point where the Smithy Brook breaches the Orrell Ridge, facilitating an underpass link to the A577 into Wigan. Associated planting is limited in nature, often leaving the motorway visually exposed and audible. Particularly expansive views are afforded from the motorway between Low Brook Farm and Wigan Road (A571) to the north.

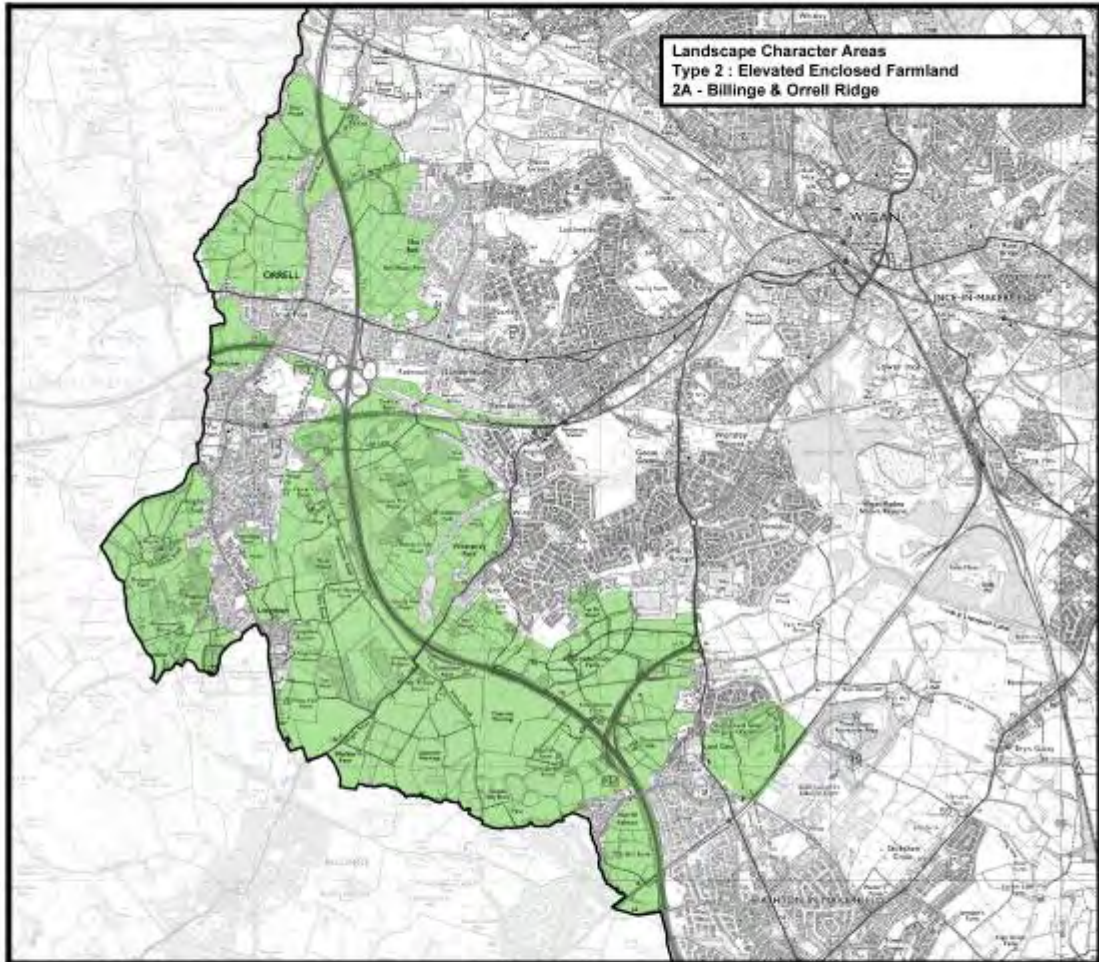
Farmsteads are well-dispersed and mainly isolated or separated from the urban fringe.

A large area of open-cast coal mining has historically been re-worked to the west of the M6 at Sandyforth Farm, just north of North Ashton. This is a visually prominent area of land currently undergoing re-grading and restoration to expansive and open areas of farmland and public open space.

Major landmarks on the Billinge/Orrell Ridge are situated just outside the Borough boundary to the west. These include Billinge Hill at 179m and Ashurst Beacon at 170m, both forming important summit landmarks, together with the communication masts at Beacon Farm, Crank Road. Large pylons also dominate the landscape of the ridgeline to the south at Bispham Hall. The higher areas along the ridge show signs of exposure to wind, with trees affected by prevailing winds from the west.

### **Key Characteristics:**

- Elevated land to the west of Wigan
- Strongly undulating rounded slopes to the east with ridges, crests, knolls and secondary plateaux to the west
- Springs leading to incised stream valleys
- M6 – associated cuttings and embankments
- Large arable fields
- Communication masts and pylons
- Mainly deciduous plantation woodlands
- Lack of hedgerow trees and sparsity of hedgerows
- Exposed areas. Hedgerow trees at high summit points are characteristically wind-swept in form
- Presence of Estate Landscapes with associated Halls, woodlands and gritstone wall enclosures, e.g. Winstanley and Bispham Halls
- Landmarks of Billinge Hill and Ashurst Beacon
- Good views, particularly to the east



## Cultural History

The Billinge and Orrell ridge was probably one of the earliest areas of Wigan to be settled and the present B5206 road, running north-south along the main ridge and a lower plateau to the east, probably follows the line of an ancient ridge road. Given the simple and technically poor qualities of the primitive Celtic 'ard' plough the lighter, sandy soils of the ridge would have been easier to plough than the heavier clay soils of lower ground in the Borough. It is likely that some of the earliest settlements in the Borough would therefore have been located in this area. Evidence of this however has been subsumed by later development.

The major settlement in the area is Orrell, sited in a gap in the escarpment near the valley of Smithy Brook. Orrell was originally named Orrell in Makerfield (to distinguish it from Orrell in Sefton) and was the north-western part of the manor of Newton in Makerfield. The manor was held by the Orrell family, then the Hollands of Upholland, followed by the Lovels and the Earls of Derby and a series of other families, including the Bisphams, lords of the manor of Billinge. Grants of land were made at various times to the Knights Hospitaller and especially to Cockersand Abbey.

The earliest maps of 1849 show the hilltop around Bispham as having patches of moorland and areas of 'furze' (gorse), which was probably the original vegetation of the area prior to more intensive farming.



Photo. 36 View of parkland at Winstanley Hall from Hall Lane.

The M6 motorway was built in this area in the early 1960s utilising a secondary ridge to the east of the Billinge-Orrell Ridge. Junction 25 at North Ashton links the M6 with the A49 – a direct link into Wigan town centre. The Upholland Road (B5206) runs along the upper part of the Billinge-Orrell Ridge, connecting the two villages just below the ridgeline. The Winstanley – Ashton Road runs parallel to the B5206 and close to the later M6, using the same secondary ridge referred to above.

Important historic buildings and parks in the area include Bispham Hall and Winstanley Hall. Bispham Hall is sited near the summit of the ridge in a small sheltered valley and was built c.1560 of local stone. It is Elizabethan in style, comprising of the characteristic 'E' shaped plan, brick built and with ashlar stone quoins, sourced locally. The Hall was set in a park, now much reduced in size, but originally including a small pond or lake and possibly a walled garden to the south with well-wooded grounds containing a monument to Wellington. In 1977, the Hall was gutted by fire, but since restored by the Vivat Trust. It now belongs to the Scout Association.

A second important hall and parkland estate belongs to Winstanley Hall (1590). The Hall was extended in 1818 and again in 1840. The park occupies a shelf like plateau part way down the eastern side of the Billinge – Orrell Ridge as well as sloping land both above and below it. The parkland was carefully planned to link together several of the characteristic deep wooded cloughs to create an extremely well-wooded perimeter with a clear use of the woodlands as game covert. This suggests that the bulk of the parkland planting is probably Victorian in origin. Within the park is an ancient moated site, as well as several fountains, including the listed Neptune Fountain. The moated site as well as five fish ponds are scheduled ancient monuments. There are also a number of subsidiary buildings within the park, including stables, barn, estate offices, gatehouses and farmhouses.

Winstanley Park forms a buffer to urban development to the east, but most of the wooded perimeter to the west has been cut through by the M6 motorway. The M6 is elevated above the park and has considerable visual impact upon parts of it. One of the most characteristic features of Winstanley Park is its extensive gritstone boundary wall, again probably Victorian, which was built with mortar and remains in a generally in good condition. The same wall detail features inside the park as well as around the north, east and southern boundaries. Winstanley Park is scheduled as a Conservation Area

In the 1830's, one Meyrick Bankes Jnr. started to mine coal under his Winstanley estate and in 1845 a horse-drawn railway was constructed. Later this track was used to supply the Worsley Mesnes Ironworks and it was upgraded to standard gauge in the 1880s. The Winstanley colliery closed in 1927-9 and the railway was abandoned in 1933.

The village of Orrell grew rapidly on completion of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal as entrepreneurs came into the area and set up various manufacturing businesses as well as sinking pits to dig coal. In 1787 there were five collieries in the manor of Orrell and some small traces of their presence still remain in the landscape. Industrial buildings are also present in the urban area of Orrell, including a cotton mill together with a chair making factory and nail making at Far Moor. These industries were responsible for the construction of various terraces of houses for the workforce. There were also a number of quarries in the area, producing worked stone and flags as well as rubble used locally in some walls and older buildings.

Orrell Water Park and Local Nature Reserve comprises of two former reservoirs on Smithy Brook, which now form a popular leisure area.

## **Key cultural elements in the landscape:**

- Bispham Hall and Winstanley Hall and associated designed landscapes.
- Small areas of colliery spoil and mine workings.
- The M6 motorway, the M58 motorway and their interchange.
- Orrell Water Park
- B5206 probably line of ancient ridgeway
- Gritstone used in older buildings and halls and for parkland boundary walls

## **Landscape Sensitivity and Change**

The majority of the Billinge and Orrell Ridge is elevated and distinctly visible from Wigan and to views from the east. It forms a green buffer of farmland and woodlands to a contrastingly dense urban fringe and contains a number of ridgeline landmarks. In addition, the area contains a number of attractive and reasonably intact historic 'parkland' landscapes. These qualities are all extremely sensitive to loss or degradation by further built development which should only be considered on a small scale and in visually secluded areas.

The ridgelines form the most sensitive areas. Development on these is particularly open to views from the east and Wigan itself. The area is also sensitive to exposure from the weather, particularly evidenced by wind damage to some existing trees and woodlands but this in part makes a positive contribution to the area's distinctive landscape character. Conversely with the removal of hedgerows to make larger arable fields, both crops and soil are increasingly exposed to weather damage.

In order to increase the profitability of the arable farmland, hedgerows have been lost and field sizes consequently have been enlarged. The landscape is therefore losing its previous more human scale to a much larger, more open, landscape. More positive change to the landscape occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the development of the parkland landscapes and notably large plantations at Winstanley and Bispham Halls, although conversely at this time mining, quarries and housing development were also expanding in the Orrell area – largely at the expense and loss of agricultural land.

More recent change of an equally dramatic nature has been the effect of the M6 motorway dividing the area into two, from north to south, and visually imposing cuttings, embankments and bridges on the landscape and increasing background traffic noise.

Much of the area up to the development of the motorway would have been relatively quiet and peaceful with a much stronger rural character.

### **Key elements of landscape sensitivity:**

- Highly visible from areas to the east
- Subject to development pressure from Orrell and urban fringe to the east
- Historically significant landscape areas
- Hedgerows and hedgerow trees subject to continued decline
- Sensitive to exposure

### **Key elements of landscape change:**

- Loss of agricultural land to housing/industrial development (particularly the Orrell area)
- Loss of small scale field patterns
- Decline in hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Increased woodland areas following development of parkland estates
- Visual imposition and reduction in tranquillity of the area due to M6 construction



Photo. 26 View from Windy Arbour Farm

## **Recommended Management and Landscape Objectives**

Agricultural fields in these areas are mainly arable and have been enlarged in the recent past to be more economically viable by removing hedgerow field sub-divisions. The ridgeline, however, is exposed to prevailing wind from the west and crops can be adversely affected by wind damage and soil erosion. A large proportion of the hedgerows in these critical areas are gapped and no longer function as a continuous barrier. The resulting medium to large field pattern now forms a major part of the area's landscape character. In order to prevent further deterioration of this character, it is imperative to encourage the retention, enhancement and better management of the remaining hedgerows, together with the re-introduction of new hedgerow trees and the planting of new hedges where previous hedges once stood. This in turn can reduce the effects of exposure from the elements and provide an improved wildlife habitat linking to wooded valleys such as those associated with Dean Brook and Smithy Brook.

The ridgeline creates a horizon to views of the area particularly from the east. The landscape character of the ridgeline view is of an attractive, largely rural, scene with the landmarks of Ashurst Beacon and Billinge Hill set further back to the west. It is therefore very important that the location, height and silhouette of any new development recognises this and is set back and prevented from breaking the skyline. The adverse effects of breaking the skyline view are seen by the unfortunate routing of pylons adjacent to Bispham Hall and the positioning of communications masts at Beacon Farm. In such sensitive areas the underground routing of cables is highly recommended. The siting of masts on the skyline, if essential, should be considered in association with existing woodland to soften their impact.

The presence of parkland landscapes at Bispham and Winstanley have introduced large blocks of woodland into the landscape, together with boundary gritstone walling and a characteristic absence or sparsity of hedgerows leading to large field patterns. In such areas it is important to recognise that these are essential elements to the 'parkland' landscape character and that altering their proportions or introducing new elements will radically affect their landscape character. This should therefore be avoided. The regular upkeep of walling and copings in the correct style and materials should be encouraged, together with regular woodland and hedgerow management.

The construction of the M6 motorway and its associated cuttings, embankments and bridges has and continues to have a large impact on the area both visually and audibly. This could be reduced by strategic woodland planting both within the motorway curtilage and immediately adjacent.

Pressure for development affecting viable agricultural land should be resisted with development restricted to limited infill or 'brownfield' sites. Open cast mining areas at North Ashton have been recently reclaimed and reinstated as agricultural land. It is intended that original field boundaries will also be recreated. If further agricultural areas are to be exploited then a similar reinstatement treatment would be recommended.

### **Management of the Landscape:**

- Restore and enhance remaining field patterns by additional hedgerow planting
- Reintroduce hedgerow trees
- Reintroduce hedgerows on the line of previous hedges
- Conserve and manage remaining hedgerows

- Conserve and manage existing woodlands to encourage habitat diversity
- Conserve and restore parkland boundary walls to the correct standard and style as existing
- Prevent skyline development
- Encourage underground routing of normally overhead cables in sensitive skyline locations
- Consider mitigation planting in association with the M6 motorway
- Restrict new development to limited 'infill' or 'brownfield' sites
- Encourage the removal of eyesores such as derelict steel barns, tipped materials, refuse etc. particularly when these are easily viewed from major routes.



**AREA 2.B THE DOUGLAS/GATHURST VALLEY**

**Description**

The Douglas/Gathurst Valley area comprises steeply sloping valley sides between the villages of Shevington Vale and Crooke. It is dominated by the M6 motorway viaduct, which forms a high level crossing of the valley, with Gathurst Road (B5206) forming a low level crossing adjacent. The steep valley sides restrict communications to the valley floor which contains the Wigan/Southport railway alongside the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.

Views are restricted within the valley towards the opposite valley sides and along the valley's axis (east/west). Brief, but very attractive elevated views, are afforded from the M6 Gathurst viaduct to both sides of the valley. Views of the Heinz factory at Marsh Green to the south are also seen as a major detracting feature.

The area contains both medium and large-scale fields of both arable and pasture land, with the Gathurst Golf Course dominating the northern side of the valley to the west of the M6 viaduct.



Photo 40. View of Ashurst's Beacon from Shevington

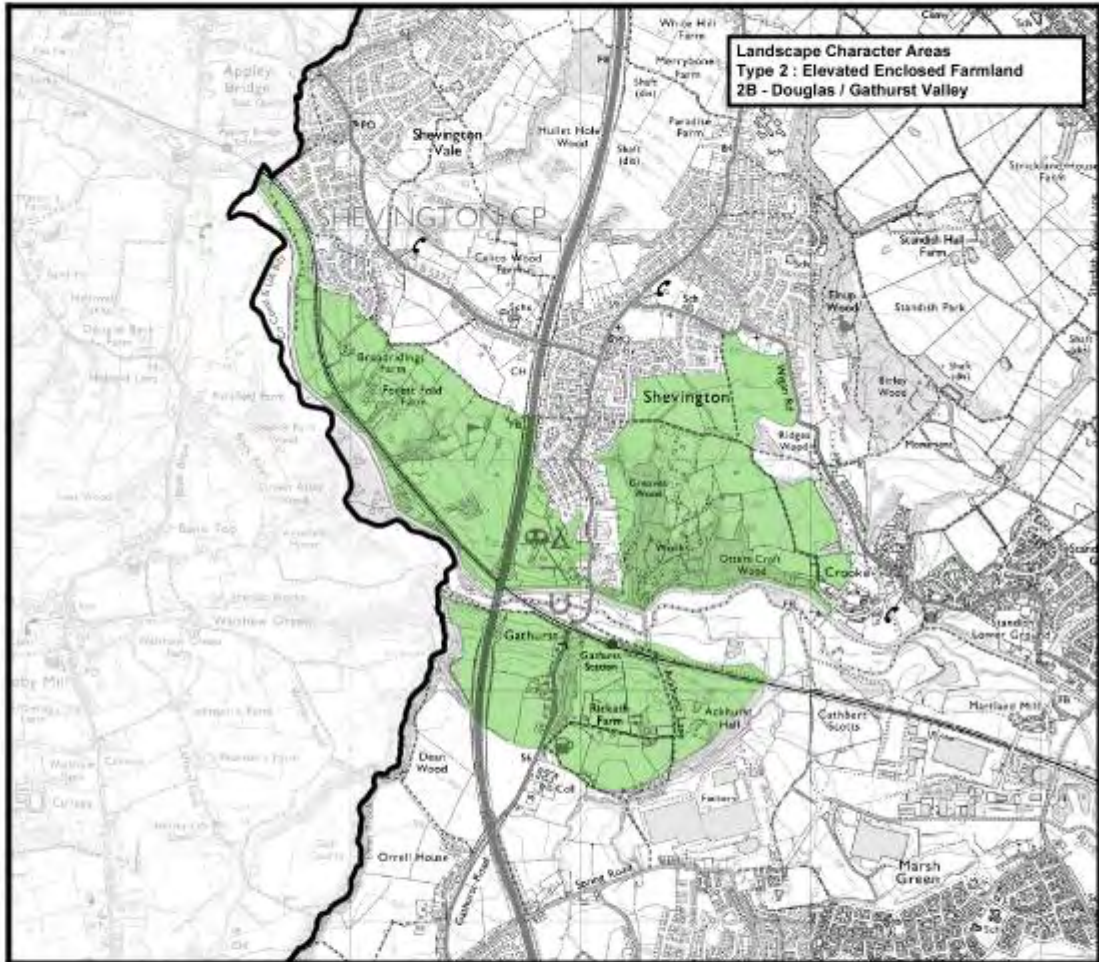
Deciduous woodlands are prominent, particularly at Greaves and Otters Croft Wood, with numerous small but deeply incised, wooded tributary stream valleys to the west of the M6 viaduct. The former Roburite Explosives Factory, with characteristically scattered workshops to prevent chain reaction explosions, now stands in a well-wooded area, adjacent to Greaves Wood. Otters Croft Wood is an area of dense woodland containing many fine oak trees and supporting a wide range of wildlife.

The valley as a whole retains a highly attractive rural/agricultural and well-wooded character complete with the sinuous course of the River Douglas and gently curving course of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal in the valley bottom.

The presence of the Heinz factory building has a major visual impact on this area to the east of the M6 crossing and particularly from the village of Crook. It is a building which is exceptionally large in both height and volume and dominates the landscape.

### **Key Characteristics:**

- Large areas of deciduous woodland
- Steep sided valleys
- Predominantly attractive rural character
- Industrial development along the valley floor
- Convergence of communication routes along the valley floor
- Enclosed and channelled views
- Dominance of Heinz factory building and M6 viaduct
- Feeder tributary streams, mainly wooded
- Medium to large field patterns
- Gathurst Golf Club
- Arable and pasture fields



## Cultural History

The east/west valley at Gathurst provides an outfall from the Wigan basin and is followed by the River Douglas which flows from north to south from the centre of Wigan. The valley at Gathurst is unusual in that it is pre-glacial in origin.

The Leeds and Liverpool Canal runs along the northern side of the valley and forms the boundary between the valley side and the valley floor. To the west of the M6 Gathurst viaduct, the railway and the canal run parallel, with a relatively narrow strip of land between them. Within this gap is Gathurst Wharves, a nature reserve managed by The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside. The reserve forms an area of relatively undisturbed ground, protected by the railway and the canal. The site has a range of interesting habitats, including Alder carr, saltmarsh, scrub, bracken, dry and marshy grasslands. Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage, Marsh Orchids, Twayblades and Black Spleenwort also occur in the area.

The Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway constructed a line through the area in 1855 and this runs a little higher up the eastern side of the valley than the canal, having crossed from the south-western side of the valley to the west of Gathurst.

The M6 motorway crosses the valley via the Gathurst Viaduct.



Photo. 121 A view of part of the Heinz Factory from fields just north of Crooke.

There was an explosives factory just east of Gathurst Road on the north side of the valley. This was the premises of the Roburite Explosive Company, established in 1887, principally supplying explosives to the mining industry. This factory straddled the Leeds and Liverpool Canal and had a special narrow gauge railway to transport workers around the site. In 1918 the company was taken over by ICI, eventually closing in 1981.

The Gathurst Golf Club is a major feature on the northern side of the valley landscape. Founded in 1913, the club has slowly expanded in area, finally achieving a full 18 hole course in the early 1990s. It is a spectacular course with superb views to the west and south and is very popular.

### **Key cultural elements in the landscape:**

- The Leeds and Liverpool Canal
- The Wigan – Southport railway line
- The M6 Gathurst Viaduct and approaches
- Gathurst Wharves nature reserve
- The Gathurst Golf Club

### **Landscape Change and Sensitivity**

The presence of relatively large areas of woodland in the valley both soften and screen most of the small-scale industrial/commercial buildings present and greatly aid the integration of the Gathurst Golf Course into the existing agricultural landscape. Apart from the visual and audible dominance of the M6 viaduct, the area has a tranquil and relaxed character. The main views of the area, however, are from the M6 viaduct and any new development or changes to agricultural practice would be highly visible.

The steep valley sides, particularly to the west of the viaduct, are naturally prone to stream erosion and would be sensitive to any removal of vegetation, especially existing tree cover. Additional planting in these areas may need to be considered. The valley floor, although reasonably quiet and rural in nature, continues to be prone to the spread of Himalayan Balsam and locally to Japanese Knotweed, generally following the disturbed courses of the river and canal.

The character of the Crooke village area is notably attractive and historic and situated within its own wooded valley floor setting. This area would be particularly sensitive to inappropriate development, landscaping or building style.

Apart from the presence of the M6 viaduct, the Heinz Factory and Gathurst Golf Course, the area appears to have changed little since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the introduction of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal and adjacent railway. Links with the area's industrial heritage can still be found in the sandstone spillways, bridges and locks along the valley floor and with the industry founded village of Crooke.

Agriculturally it would appear that a number of hedgerows have been lost to enlarge field boundaries, particularly to develop the golf course and to enlarge arable fields to the east of the viaduct. However the area still retains a reasonable vestige of hedgerow field boundaries with hedgerow trees notably to the west of the viaduct.

### **Key elements of landscape sensitivity:**

- Highly visible valley floor and sides to views from the M6 motorway
- Area sensitive to views and noise from the motorway
- Cohesive 19<sup>th</sup> century character of construction to valley floor – sensitive to inappropriate development
- Sensitive to any further loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Woodland areas reduce the area's sensitivity aiding screening to minor development
- Spread of Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed
- Stream erosion

### **Key elements of landscape change:**

- Construction of M6 viaduct and Heinz Factory
- 19<sup>th</sup> century communications and village development along valley floor
- Localised loss of hedgerow field boundaries
- Construction of Gathurst Golf Course

### **Recommended Management and Landscape Objectives**

The area's main character and attributes derive from its interesting topography, cultural history and relatively unspoilt rural nature and the management of it should seek to conserve and enhance these qualities.

The valley is viewed from its high valley sides and particularly from the M6 viaduct crossing. It would therefore be especially sensitive to views of development which should be avoided. The Heinz factory, in particular, has created a massive visual impact in the area due to its size, scale and aspect and lack of effective mitigation planting.

Hedgerows are relatively well managed and mature hedgerow trees are reasonably common. However occasional gaps to hedges are present and younger hedgerow trees are generally absent.

Woodlands form attractive features to the valley sides both in block form and following the minor stream tributaries. Woodland cover to the tributary streams is important to minimise soil erosion. Woodland management should be encouraged and new planting considered where appropriate to the sub-urban edges of Shevington and Shevington Vale.

### **Management of the Landscape:**

- Restrict development from highly visible areas to the valley bottom and sides
- Consider retrospective strategic woodland screening to soften the visual impacts of the Heinz factory

- Reintroduce new hedgerow trees
- Conserve and manage hedgerows
- Encourage the removal of eyesores such as derelict steel barns, tipped materials, refuse etc. particularly when these are easily viewed from major routes.
- Conserve and manage existing woodlands to encourage habitat diversity. Consider additional woodland planting to the edges of Shevington and Shevington Vale

## AREA 2.C SHEVINGTON AND STANDISH SPURS

### Description

Area 2.C comprises 3 separate spurs of high land to the north of the Borough projecting in a southerly direction, generally towards the urban areas of Wigan. From west to east these spurs are – the Shevington Spur, the Standish Hall Spur and the Rectory Farm/Bradley Brook Spur. All 3 spur areas have a strong agricultural character with an expansive open nature.

The Shevington Spur is divided into two halves by the M6 motorway between Shevington Vale and Shevington. The area displays an even gradient dissected by incised streams and associated areas of ribbon and plantation woodland. The area contains mainly large-scale arable fields with a lack of continuous hedgerows. Occasional mature oaks are present on the field boundaries.



Photo 48 View across Standish Park from Beech Walk.

The Standish Spur is characterised on the whole by a relict parkland landscape, comprising large blocks of deciduous plantation woodland interspersed with large-scale arable fields. The Spur has a sharply defined ridgeline followed by Standish Wood Lane. Hedgerows and hedgerow trees are notably absent.



The Rectory Farm/Bradley Brook Spur has a more broken, intricate, topography with the Douglas Valley falling to the south and east. Views are also channelled to the south and south-east. Field patterns are on a large-scale and include the Standish Court Golf Course. A small area of former parkland known as Kilhey Court is located to the east of Chorley Road and Worthington Reservoir.

Prominent landscape features in the area include Standish Church Spire.

**Key Characteristics:**

- Large-scale mainly arable fields
- Good elevated views of Wigan to the south and towards the Pennines to the east
- Strongly sloping spurs generally to the south
- Standish Hall Park
- Standish Court Golf Course
- Often bordered or dissected by steep-sided wooded valleys
- Visually dominant areas of elevated rural landscape viewed from the urban areas of Wigan.



## Cultural History

Standish Wood Lane is an ancient bridleway running between Wigan and Standish, directly up the edge of the spur. Three stone crosses (scheduled ancient monuments) are located to the side of the lane, believed to date to Medieval times. Cromwell is thought to have pursued the Duke of Hamilton's Scots Royalist army through Standish and down Standish Wood Lane into and through Wigan in 1648.

This area contains Standish Hall and its associated former Park to the south-west of Standish. Standish Hall was the home of the Standish family, who appear to have adopted the Standish surname from the adjacent village. They were staunch Catholics from the Reformation period. One of the family supported the Jacobite 1715 rebellion, lost his estates but was later pardoned and his estates restored. At some point in the C18th / C19th the parkland, which was based on the woodlands in the surrounding valleys, was improved, although many of the parkland trees have now disappeared. The Hall, built in 1574, appears to have had a number of large fishponds attached, entirely appropriate to a Catholic family of the time. There was also a Catholic Chapel.

The Hermitage in the grounds probably relates to works carried out in the C18th to the park, when pleasure grounds were added. The grounds included greenhouses and a kitchen garden. The entrance to the hall in the C19th was through the plantation of Beech Walk to the northeast of the park. The last Standish family member to use the Hall let it to the Mayor of Wigan in 1824 or 1825, which suggests that the parkland landscape would probably have been created before this date.

In 1920, the estate was broken up and sold. In 1923 the Tudor style wing and the Catholic Chapel were carefully demolished and rebuilt in America. Tradition has it that the American buyer had assumed he was buying the house of Miles Standish, one of the famous early settlers. In fact, Miles Standish came from a different branch of the family.

Cat l'th Window was a farmhouse in a prominent location off Almond Brook Road; it was thatched originally and is supposed to have gained its name through a stone cat being placed at the window to indicate that a Catholic Mass was being secretly held at Standish Hall. Strickland House, formerly 'New House' stands on Standish Wood Lane and pre-dates 1725. It has walled gardens and imposing gateposts onto the Lane.

Coal was worked in the Standish area in the C17th and possibly earlier, but landscape evidence of this has long since disappeared. Giant's Hall colliery at the bottom of the Standish spur at Standish Lower Ground was sunk in 1880 and was closed in 1961. Little remains of the colliery above ground, except for traces of the mineral railway which ran through the area. There are several other shafts in the area, now disused.



Photo. 66 View down Standish Wood Lane towards Wigan town centre.

In contrast to the Standish spur, the Shevington Spur has little of historic or cultural interest. A number of small collieries existed to the west of the M6, leaving small scale areas of disturbed ground and minor spoil heaps. A visually prominent stone-built ventilation shaft stands in the open fields just south of these.

The Rectory Farm/Bradley Brook spur is also of little historic or cultural interest. The Golf course which dominates the spur is an attractive and recently designed course set within a mature woodland structure.

Kilhey Court, located just west of the Worthington Reservoir, is a mid C19th house set in attractive wooded grounds with a walled garden. Worthington Hall, just north of Kilhey Court, dates back to 1577 and stands in a small area of grounds with a small orchard linking to Worthington Wood and the valley of the Douglas river just above the Worthington Reservoirs.

### **Key cultural elements in the landscape:**

- Standish Wood Lane (ancient bridleway) and associated features
- Standish Hall
- Standish Hall Park and its features

- Cat l'th Window farm
- Giant's Hall colliery
- Kilhey Court and Worthington Hall



Photo. 60 Worthington Hall.

## **Landscape Sensitivity and Change**

The main sensitivity of these areas is their exposure to views, particularly from the urban areas of Wigan. They currently form an overwhelmingly agricultural character, both softening and contrasting with the adjoining heavily developed areas of Wigan to the south.

If any development was to take place on the spurs, this attribute would be lost or reduced in terms of its present quality.

Many of the hedgerows have already been removed from the spurs to create the expansive parkland estate now associated with Standish Hall Farm and for the development of Standish Court Golf course. They have also been largely removed to facilitate larger fields for arable crop production on the Shevington Spurs. In some areas hedges may have been removed during opencast mining of former pit sites, such as around Giants Hall Colliery. The lack of hedgerows in these areas in part defines their character. Their loss, in terms of wildlife habitat, has partly been compensated for by the additional of plantation woodlands – both associated with adjoining stream valleys and as large but isolated game coverts.

### **Key elements of landscape sensitivity:**

- Exposure to views from the south
- Loss of hedgerows
- Visually sensitive to development

### **Key elements of landscape change:**

- Loss of hedgerows
- Development of 'Parkland' landscapes with associated woodland tree planting
- Golf Course development
- Enlargement of fields in association with arable crop production.

### **Recommended Management and Landscape Objectives**

Both these areas have a strong agricultural character and their topography leaves them highly exposed to views from the south and from lower ground. They also form large areas of green open space contrasting strongly with the adjoining dense urban areas of Wigan to the south. They are therefore considered as important areas to conserve as open farmland.

Hedgerows illustrate a notable lack of continuity and are often gapped. Large fields have been amalgamated to form undefined sweeping areas of cereal crops which now largely define the landscape character of the areas. Hedgerow restoration is therefore only recommended to boundary hedges and to remaining remnant hedge sections to create meaningful field divisions. Hedgerow trees in these areas largely comprise of oak and a programme of oak replanting within the hedgerows should be encouraged. Large scale fields, however, should be largely accepted as part of the area's character. To compensate for the sparsity of hedges and natural habitat, the woodlands in the area should be carefully managed to encourage wildlife. This may necessitate a full range of measures including thinning, rogue specie management, coppicing, understorey and especially edge planting.

The open parkland landscape of Standish Park on the Standish Spur with its blocks of isolated woodland should be respected and conserved. There should therefore be a presumption against the planting or replanting of hedges within the park area together with a presumption against any development which threatens the fishponds or other features of historic interest. If possible, the original copses, which are essential to the character of the park, should be reinforced or re-established in their original locations.

A number of footpaths in this area have been subjected to considerable pressure of use and have some localised deterioration. These paths need surface improvement and drainage provided where necessary. Standish Wood Lane, with its superb views to the southeast over the town of Wigan should be carefully conserved, together with its historic cross features. Erosion damage should be made good.

## **Management of the Landscape:**

- Prevent development from highly visible areas on the spurs
- Reintroduce new oak hedgerow trees
- Conserve and manage hedgerows
- Encourage the replanting and reinstatement of remnant hedgerows outside the parkland areas
- Encourage a major programme of woodland management and conservation
- Conserve and manage the parkland landscape of Standish Park
- Encourage the removal of eyesores such as derelict steel barns, tipped materials, refuse etc. particularly when these are easily viewed from major routes.

## AREA 2.D STANDISH CREST

### Description

The Standish Crest occupies the highest ground to the north of the Borough above the Standish Spurs with the highest point of Shevington Moor at 103m AOD to the west. The land falls gently back to the north, towards Stars Brook and Bucknow Brook, and with a more undulating character, to the east towards A5106 Chorley Road. The western boundary of the area is formed by the M6 motorway, which in this area forms the Borough boundary.

This crest is traversed, from north to south, by the A49 road, a strategically important route and the most important road in the area prior to the construction of the M6 to the west.

This area has a history of both sand and coal extraction, which has heavily influenced the landscape to the west, creating larger reinstated fields with a general absence of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. To the east, original field patterns remain characterised by reasonably intact hedgerows comprising mainly hawthorn and occasional hedgerow trees. The area remains largely agricultural, with residential and industrial uses bordering to the south.



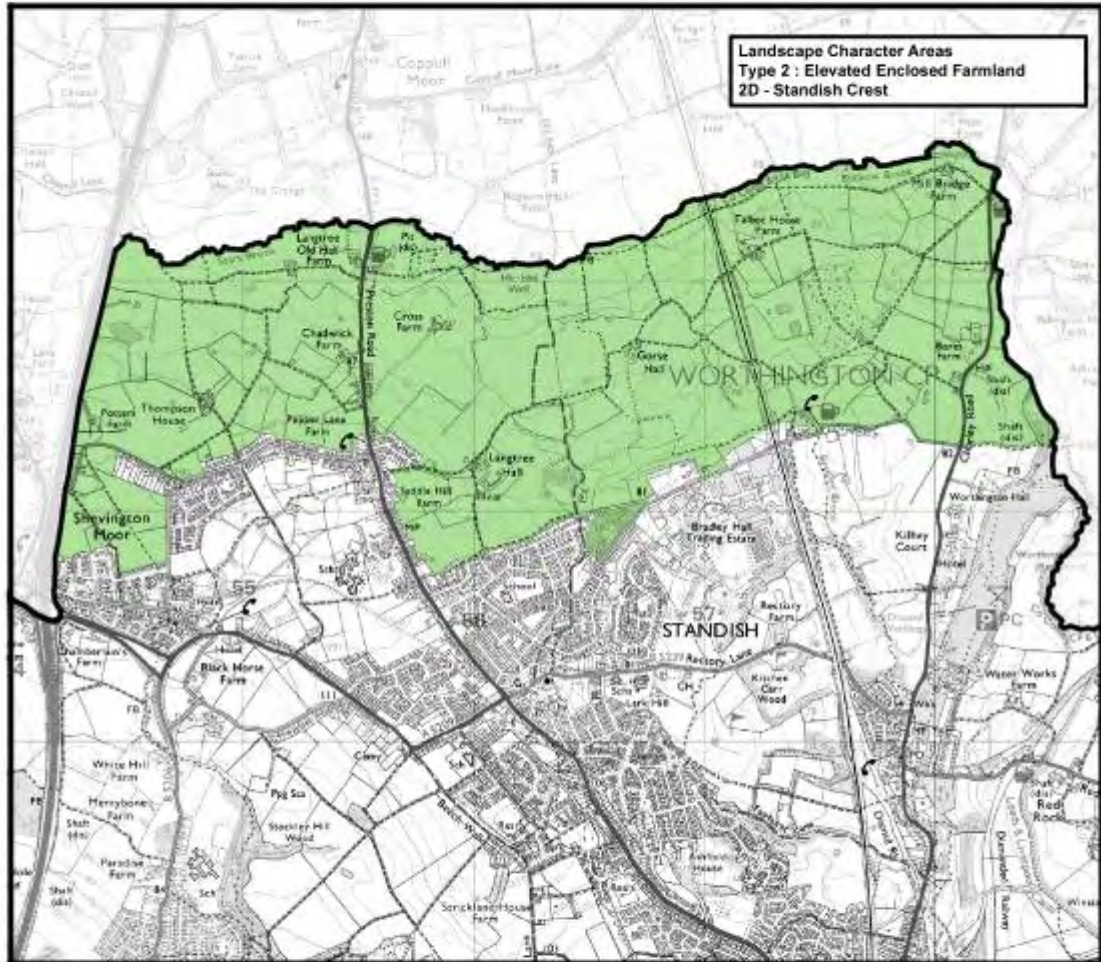
Photo 46 View east over colliery spoil from Gorse Hall Railway Bridge.

Views are generally to the north over gently undulating farmland and towards the Pennine Hills to the east. Farms and associated outbuildings are evenly dispersed through the landscape and are characteristically built in red brick with blue slate roofs.



**Key Characteristics:**

- Localised absence of hedgerows to the west with large-scale arable/pasture fields
- Predominance of smaller scale arable/pasture fields with hedgerows to the east of the railway.
- Good views to the north and east
- Regularly spaced farm buildings
- Influence of previous mining (ponds, flashes, disturbed and reclaimed ground, with associated absence of hedgerows).



## Cultural History

The Standish Crest is traversed by the A49 Preston Road, originally a Roman road of considerable strategic importance. To the west the M6 motorway has largely replaced the role of the A49.



Photo. 54 View north across Star Brook from near Thompson House.

In 1648 Cromwell travelled along this road in pursuit of an invading Scots Royalist army. The Scots considered making a stand on the crest but, according to one of their commanders, the area was *'environed with enclosures which commanded it'* which strongly suggests that there were considerably more fields at that date than there are today. The Scots, short of ammunition and exhausted, continued their retreat through Wigan to defeat at the Battle of the Red Bank, Warrington the following day.

The main West Coast line was built in the 1840s, passing through the area in a deep cutting from north to south.

A number of isolated farms and halls are found in the area, some of historic interest. Langtree Hall, now demolished, was the seat of the locally prominent Langtree family. All that now exists of the Hall are sections of the moat. Langtree New Hall replaced the original hall and was in occupation around 1650 - it has now been rebuilt as a farm.

Extractive industries have also been located here historically. A large colliery spoil heap stands to the east of the main railway line, whilst to the west of the railway line a substantial area of land has been quarried for sand and subsequently restored, although original hedgerows have not been replaced.



Photo. 55 View north towards the M6 from Thompson House Farm.

To the north-west of the area, adjacent to the M6, a small lake stands in a shallow depression probably caused by subsidence. This is considered to be a wildlife habitat of great value.

### **Key cultural elements in the landscape:**

- The A49 Roman road
- The M6 motorway
- The main West Coast Railway Line
- Isolated farms and halls of historic interest
- Colliery workings and sand quarry
- A small lake near the M6 caused by subsistence

### **Landscape Sensitivity and Change**

The high land to the north of Wigan forms the northern rim of the Makerfield basin. The highest parts of the crest are undeveloped and although once heavily mined for sand extraction, remain in agricultural use. These areas are situated on the skyline and are particularly exposed to views from the lower land to the south. They are therefore sensitive to the impact of high structures or development affecting the landscape character.

The quality and character of the agricultural land on the Standish Crest has been greatly affected by the previous extraction of sand and following restoration, fields have been significantly enlarged from their previous sizes. Hedgerows are only present in specific locations, whilst landform has been evenly graded removing undulating subtleties. Large areas of land are exposed to prevailing winds and weather.

The effect has been to create an open and exposed landscape contrasting markedly with smaller areas of unaffected farmland to the east of the area around Mill Bridge Farm. Here the landscape forms a much more interesting patchwork of small fields and undulating pasture, complete with hedgerows and hedgerow trees.

### **Key elements of landscape sensitivity:**

- Open exposed landscape on the skyline which is subject to high impact of development and high structures
- Exposed to wind and weather

### **Key elements of landscape change:**

- Large areas previously subject to sand extraction, resulting in minimal restoration, ie:
  - loss of hedgerows
  - enlarged field sizes
  - evenly graded landform
  - increased exposure to wind
  - a more open, expansive landscape

### **Recommended Management and Landscape Objectives**

The Standish crest area includes large open areas of farmland damaged by previous sand and coal extraction, together with much smaller remnant areas of small pasture fields to the east still enclosed with historic hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Hedgerow reinstatement following open cast mining does not appear to have formed part of the land restoration and field boundaries are now often formed by post and wire fences. This is unfortunate, as the area is known to have had a particularly large number of smaller hedged fields in historic times. New hedge planting should be encouraged in these areas to reinstate the original landscape structure and diversify wildlife habitat. New hedgerows would form important wildlife links to wetland areas associated with Star's Brook to the north and to the ponds adjacent to the M6 to the west. Existing hedgerows to the east should be subject to continued good practice management including the planting of additional/replacement hedgerow trees. A greater incidence of holly within the hawthorn hedges is found in the hedgerows on the north side of the Standish crest, possibly to provide additional shelter for grazing stock, but probably occurring naturally. This should be taken into account when formulating the species mixes for any new hedge planting.

The crest represents the summit of rising land from the south and forms a skyline vulnerable to development. New development should therefore be restricted to areas to the south of and below the crest line. Bradley Hall Trading Estate is particularly well situated, set back from the crest into the upper valley form of Bradley Brook.

The area contains generally very little woodland cover. This lack of woodland could be corrected by considering new woodlands in association with the Borough's boundary to the north along Star's Brook and Bucknow Brook. An existing footpath also follows this route.

Linear woodland planting could also be considered as a buffer to the northern boundary of the Bradley Hall Trading Estate and as a screen to exposed views of the M6 motorway. The landscape character of the crest line areas however is exposed and emphasised by its open nature. It is therefore not considered appropriate for large blocks of woodland planting in these areas.

### **Management of the Landscape:**

- Conserve and manage remaining field patterns and reintroduce new hedgerow trees
- Encourage the removal of eyesores such as derelict steel barns, tipped materials, refuse etc. particularly when these are easily viewed from major routes.
- Encourage replanting of hedgerows removed by previous open cast workings
- Consider additional woodland planting to encourage habitat diversity and as a screen/buffer to industrial development and the M6 motorway avoiding crest areas
- Prevent encroachment of development on the skyline

## AREA 2.E ASPULL RIDGE

### Description

The Aspull Ridge forms a distinctly elevated arc of land to the north-east of Wigan. The landform comprises of steeply sloping land of an even gradient to the west, containing the Haigh Hall Estate, the Leeds and Liverpool Canal and large-scale areas of arable farmland. Hedgerows are gapped with few hedgerow trees. The landscape has a distinctly rural character contrasting with the urban areas to the south-west.

To the east of Aspull and School Lane/Higher Lane/New Road, the landform is more 'plateau-like' and intricate containing a number of knolls and crests with gradients in all directions. The landscape character here relates more closely to the west Pennine foothills due to its visual proximity to the Pennines at Horwich, its exposure and character of agriculture. This is predominantly of small-scale pasture fields, with locally poor drainage.



Photo. 71 View from Barker's Cottage Lane, Aspull to the north.

To the northern part of the area are a small number of stone field walls, mainly associated with field / road boundaries or with collieries and their associated railways. A number of farmhouses and domestic dwellings in the area are built in stone, together with the centre of Aspull village.

Woodlands occur mainly in association with Haigh Country Park and as part of the continuous Haigh Upper and Lower Plantations, which form a large area of mature deciduous trees from almost the centre of Wigan up to Haigh Hall. Other large blocks of deciduous woodland are also found on the west-facing slopes including Arley Wood, Crawford Wood, Woodshaw, Kirkless Wood and Borsdane Wood. Smaller, more infrequent, areas of woodland occur within the more elevated areas to the east but these do not form a major constituent of the landscape.

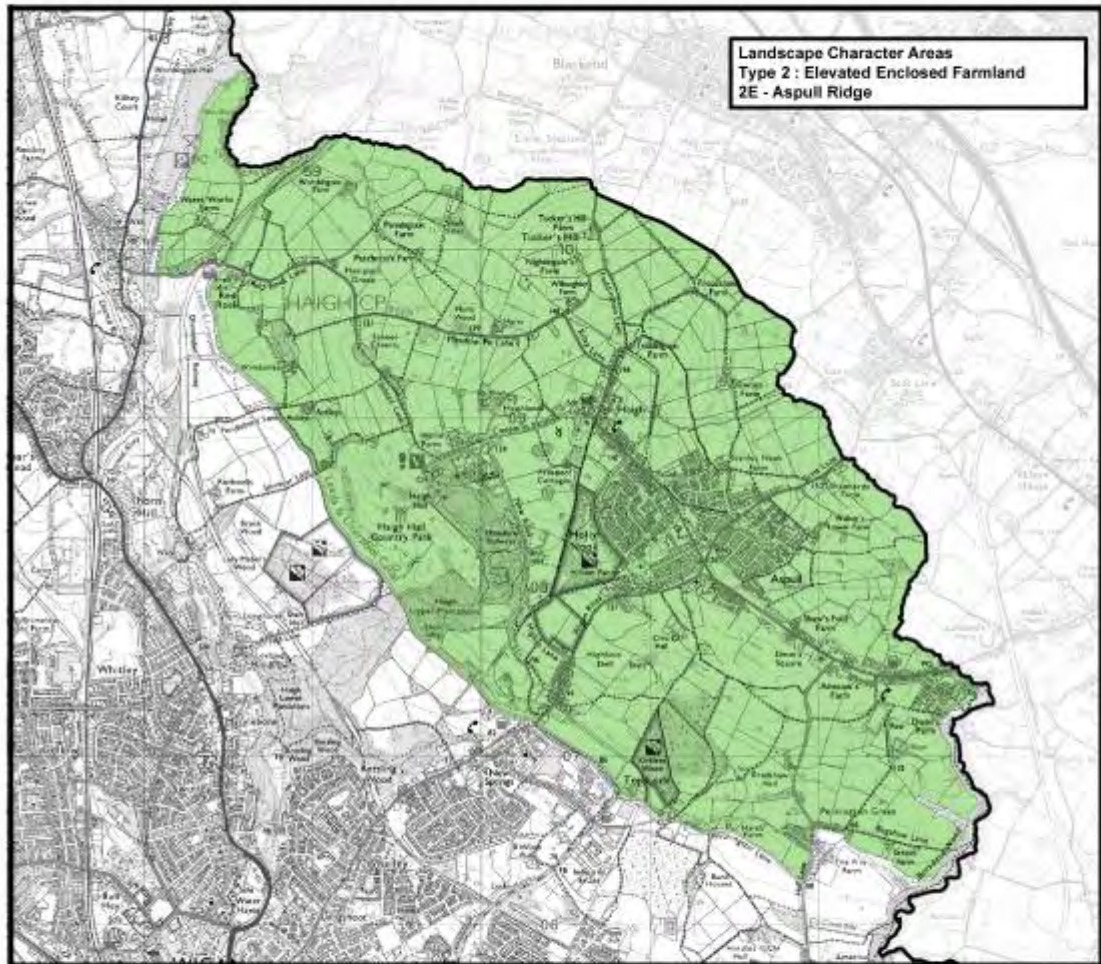
Prominent landscape features in the area include Haigh Hall and the Haigh Windmill Pump although these structures are all relatively well-secluded with woodland backdrops. The Wall Hey Pit Ventilation Shaft Chimney is more visually exposed, standing south-east of Aspull village.

Excellent views are afforded towards the Pennines and Ashurst Beacon to the west. Blackpool Tower and the coast are also clearly visible on a clear day.

### **Key Characteristics:**

- Haigh Hall and associated Country Park
- Excellent views to the west towards Wigan centre and the Billinge and Orrell Ridge, east to the Pennines and south towards Cheshire
- Hedgerows and hedgerow trees in decline.
- Sections of stone walling, rarely very extensive.
- Medium to large-scale arable fields on sloping ground to the west/south-west
- Exposed, small to medium-scale pasture fields to the higher ground to the east
- Distinctive 'Pennine foothill' character and poor drainage on the higher land to the east
- Excellent views both to the east and west
- Presence of deciduous woodland as large-scale blocks associated with Haigh Plantations, Lady Mabel's Wood, Crawford Wood, Woodshaw and as linear areas associated with the incised valley of Borsdane Wood





## Cultural History

The Leeds and Liverpool canal runs through the western edge of this area from Top Lock to Red Rock and forms the south-western boundary of this landscape character area. There are a number of bridges and other features associated with the canal along its length, most of which are original features of the construction.

Gidlow Hall at the eastern end of the Aspull ridge, is an ancient moated site with the moat still intact and functional.

The village of Aspull and the hamlet of Haigh dominate the Aspull Ridge. Haigh Hall dates back to 1188 and was the home of the Bradshaigh family until 1770 when it passed through inheritance to the Earl of Crawford. In the later C17th, Sir Roger Bradshaigh invested much of his resources into the construction of the 'Wigan Great Sough' a massive tunnel which drained the water from under the estate into the River Douglas in order to access cannel coal. This was so expensive that it appears to have almost bankrupted the family for nearly a century, with relatively little work being done to the estate. When Daniel Defoe visited the area, he found that:-

*'In the neighbourhood of this town, that is to say, between Wigan and Bolton, in the estate of Sir Roger Bradshaw, is found that kind of coal they call Canell or Candle Goal, which, tho' they are found here in great plenty, and are very cheap, are yet very singular; for there are none such to be seen in Britain, or perhaps in the world besides: They so soon take fire, that, by putting a lighted candle to them, they are presently in a flame,....'*

Defoe, Daniel 'A Tour Through The Whole Island of Great Britain' published in three volumes 1724 – 1726.



Photo 78 View north from Dodd's Farm Lane, Aspull.  
Character Type 2 – Elevated Enclosed Farmland

The Earl of Crawford, an able administrator, sold his Scottish holdings and concentrated on his Haigh Hall estate rapidly gaining the benefits from the construction of the Great Sough. The Great Sough is one of the country's greatest pre-industrial revolution engineering works. At 1,121 yards, it became operational in 1670 having taken 17 years to build. It was later extended to 2,864 yards and finally, in the late 1860's, to 4,600 yards, when it drained the Aspull Pumping Pit of the Wigan Coal and Iron Company.

The parkland associated with Haigh Hall largely covers the western face of the ridge. Haigh Hall was built by James, Earl of Crawford on the site of an earlier building, commencing around 1827 and contains a large stable block and a walled garden. Extensive terraced parterres to the south and west dating from the earlier hall were swept away by C19th landscaping commissioned by the Earl of Crawford. In the 1860s, during the 'Cotton Famine' created by the American Civil War, many unemployed cotton workers were employed to plant the extensive plantations to the south and west of Haigh Hall.

During WWI, Haigh Hall was used as a military hospital and the condition of the Hall began to decline. In 1947, the last of the Earls of Crawford was obliged to sell the estate because of death duties. Wigan Corporation bought the house and plantations in 1947, opening them to the public in 1948; the rest of the estate was sold to the tenant farmers. Haigh Hall is listed and Haigh Country Park is now registered as a Grade II Historic Park. Within the Haigh Hall Park is the locally prominent Haigh Windmill Pump. This was built in 1845 to supply water to the Haigh Brewery of John Sumner and Co. It appears to be a small tower windmill, but with a bullet shaped cone.

Wall Hey Pit Ventilation Shaft Chimney off Haigh Road, Aspull is also a prominent feature on the Aspull Ridge. This is a brick built 'tower' structure constructed in the 1840s to ventilate the pit, which was closed in the 1870s.



Photo. 137 View from Top Lock, Kirkless, to the north.

Immediately to the north of Top Lock is a large colliery spoil heap, Woodshaw Ruck, now heavily concealed with planting undertaken as an early land reclamation scheme by Lancashire County Council during the early 1950's but still a dominant feature of the eastern part of the Aspull ridge.

### **Key cultural elements in the landscape:**

- Haigh Hall and associated Country Park
- The Haigh Wind Pump
- The Wigan Great Sough
- Wall Hey Pit Ventilation Shaft Chimney
- Old colliery sites and shafts

### **Landscape Sensitivity and Change**

Although occupying slightly higher land than the Standish Crest to the east, the Aspull Ridge is backed by the much higher land of the Pennines and is therefore less sensitive to skyline views from the east. Its landscape character to the east of the area is, in part, derived from the influence of the Pennine areas and reflects some of the qualities of the Pennine landscape, with development centred closely on the nucleated settlement of Haigh/Aspull. The surrounding farmland is much more open, with scattered farmsteads, and would be very sensitive to any additional sporadic development.

The steep slopes to the west also form visually sensitive areas which are highly visible from the town of Wigan below and from the Billinge and Orrell Ridge to the west. The presence of large woodlands in these areas however greatly reduces the visual impact of structures and recreational uses.

The landscape to the east, on the higher plateau-like areas appears, to have changed little since Victorian times. Hedgerows and hedgerow trees however do appear to have steadily declined in terms of their quality and upkeep. The influence of the Haigh Hall Estate has greatly affected the area's landscape to the west, creating a parkland landscape containing large blocks of plantation woodlands, enlarging field sizes, improving soil fertility and farming arable crops. Hedgerows in these areas have also declined with many gapped or with sections missing.

More recent changes to the landscape have involved the introduction of the public to the landscape at Haigh Hall and the creation of a number of Woodland Trust woodlands in the mid 1990's including Lady Mabel's Wood, Crawford Wood and south of Woodshaw.

### **Key elements of landscape sensitivity:**

- Landscape sensitive to development outside existing settlements
- West-facing slopes visually sensitive to views from the west

## **Key elements of landscape change:**

- Decline of hedgerows and hedgerow trees generally
- Introduction of woodland plantations
- Haigh Hall creating areas of parkland landscape
- Introduction of recreation to the Haigh Hall estate
- Enlarged field sizes to west-facing slopes

## **Recommended Management and Landscape Objectives**

The area contains a variety of landscape features and characteristics forming its distinctive landscape character. It is equally important that each element is managed, conserved or enhanced in order to retain this character.

Field boundaries are mainly formed by hawthorn hedging and are particularly gapped and in poor condition to the cereal growing areas on the west-facing slopes to the west of School Lane. These areas are highly visible from the west and it is therefore important that hedges on these slopes are reinstated. On the 'plateau' areas the hedgerows enclose pasture fields and these tend to be maintained to a higher standard although hedgerow trees are notably scarce due to ground conditions and exposure. The 'softer' landscape of the west facing slopes however favours hedgerow trees and replanting of trees in this area should be encouraged. Gritstone walling is mainly found in association with the Haigh Hall estate and is also a characteristic feature of the area, particularly in the north. This walling is generally well-maintained although minor sections are beginning to deteriorate in association with the B5239. It is important that gritstone walls and their copings are maintained and not allowed to fall into disrepair leading to theft, vandalism and higher/prohibitive reinstatement.

With the exception of the woodlands of the upper part of the Haigh Country Park and adjacent Holly Nook, woodlands of any scale are absent from the plateau areas. This general lack of woodland and exposed elevated landscape relates the area to the characteristically bleak Pennine foothills a short distance to the east. In order to retain this character, planting should only be considered on a minor scale on the Borough boundary along the stream valley from Worthington Lakes and along the upper reaches of Borsdane Brook. This should be low key in nature and just sufficient to pick up the line of the streams which are currently difficult to define in the landscape. Planting should consist of scattered bank side trees.

Woodland to the ridge line and west facing slopes is, in contrast to the plateau, extensive and forms a major constituent of the character of the area. The Haigh Upper and Lower Plantations create wildlife corridors down to the Douglas Valley towards Wigan centre with potential for extended linking woodlands to the north and south. (See Landscape and Management Objectives under 1D) Woodland management should continue to concentrate on a combination of both recreation and wildlife conservation.

The ridge line and west facing slopes are highly visible from the west and would be extremely sensitive to development. The character of the higher plateau areas is characterised by isolated farmsteads surrounded by farmland and interspersed with the separated communities of Aspull/Haigh and smaller settlements of Dodd's Farm and Pennington Green. These villages are relatively tightly developed and retain their own sense of identity and history. To retain this sense of identity, further piecemeal development in the

countryside would run against the existing landscape character and should perhaps be restricted to the improvement of existing property. Minor infill development may be considered to the villages but further linear development along the B5239 linking Aspull to Dodd's Farm should be discouraged.

Village Design Statements for Aspull and for Pennington Green would be useful to ensure that the still strong identities for these areas are not damaged through inappropriate development.

This area includes a section of woodland planted using Forestry Commission grants and has been designated as an area of Open Access. While welcome in principle, open access land should be subject to careful monitoring to ensure that public access does not result in disturbance of wildlife habitats i.e. dogs being allowed to run without leads.

### **Management of the Landscape:**

- Conserve and manage field patterns and reintroduce new hedgerow trees to the west of School Lane
- Encourage replanting of hedgerow sections lost in association with cereal crop production
- Regularly maintain gritstone walling retaining original materials and design
- Consider additional native planting to encourage habitat diversity and to pick out stream courses along the northern boundary
- Continue woodland management to benefit wildlife and recreation
- Encourage the removal of eyesores such as derelict steel barns, tipped materials, refuse etc. particularly when these are easily viewed from major routes.
- Discourage new development to the plateau areas, west facing slopes, along the B5239 and along the ridge skyline