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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 FPCR LLP was commissioned in November 2009 to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment of North Warwickshire Borough and a Landscape Capacity Study for the land adjacent to the main settlements and local service centres within the Borough.

1.2 The assessment has been undertaken to provide a better understanding of the District's landscapes in order to;

- provide the context for policies and proposals within the forthcoming Local Development Framework (LDF) for North Warwickshire
- inform the preparation of the Core Strategy of the Borough
- provide a robust evidence base to justify any future policy decisions

1.3 The primary objectives for the assessment were:

- To provide an impartial assessment of the landscape character within North Warwickshire;
- To undertake an assessment, focussed on the Main Settlements and Local Service Centres, identifying the distinctive landscape sub-units, together with the provision of broad descriptions and management prescriptions for each;
- To identify factors of change that have influenced landscape change in the past, and development pressures which are likely to influence change in the future;
- Identify a range of key issues that will inform the Local Development Framework preparation process, outlining principles for the siting and design of new development, including the pattern, form and scale which it might take in order to reinforce and enhance landscape character;
- To promote awareness of the landscape character and its social significance and the importance of conservation, enhancement and restoration;

- To establish a knowledge base upon which informed and justified landscape related decisions could be made.
- 1.4 The assessment work has been undertaken in two stages. Stage One involved the identification of Landscape Character Areas within the landscape around the settlements of the Borough. This stage identified key characteristics and provides broad descriptions of pressures for change / key issues and outlines potential landscape management / strategies. This stage does not provide a full Landscape Character Assessment but is sufficient to provide an appropriate level of context for Stage Two.
- 1.5 Stage Two comprised a more detailed assessment, focussed on the main settlements and local service centres (Atherstone / Mancetter, Polesworth / Dordon, Coleshill, Old and New Arley, Grendon / Baddesley Ensor, Hartshill with Ansley Common, Kingsbury and Water Orton) to identify distinct landscape sub units, together with broad descriptions and management prescriptions for each. The sensitivity and capacity for change of each of these areas was assessed. The assessment used a consistent method to evaluate the sub units against a number of criteria, to determine the relative sensitivity of the unit and its capacity for change and / or development in the context of the character of the wider landscape within which the sub unit is situated. Recommendations for assimilating development and provision of Green Infrastructure are included as part of the Landscape Capacity Assessment.
- 1.6 The assessment builds upon work undertaken at the National (Natural England) and County (Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines and the Historical Landscape Classification), which are discussed further within the report.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 The Landscape Character Assessment of North Warwickshire has been prepared following the “Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland” (LCA) published by the Natural England and Scottish National Heritage 2002, which identifies principles and good practice, and the Topic Paper 6; Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity.

2.2 The basic work stages were as follows;

Inception meeting and data review

2.3 An initial briefing meeting was held with the client to refine the project requirements and outputs. This confirmed the level of detail, project plan and outputs to be produced. Relevant background data was received and reviewed and a preliminary site reconnaissance carried out.

Desk study and initial mapping

2.4 All available published literature and mapping relevant to the study area was collated, reviewed and analysed including North Warwickshire Council information and plans, relevant background Landscape Character Assessment studies and aerial photographs.

2.5 The mapping received included GIS data provided by the Council (locations of the SSSI, SINC, SAM, Conservation Area, Historic Park and Garden, Ancient Woodland and RIG designations, and Green Belt and Flood Zone 2&3 data) and data from the Warwickshire County Historic Landscape Characterisation Project.

2.6 The context for the Borough wide study was defined through a desk based study of the broader landscape characterisation work undertaken by Natural England (formerly the Countryside Agency) and the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines. Surrounding authorities’ studies were also considered where they might have a bearing at the Borough boundaries; a list of all the documents referred to is included within the References section.

2.7 The information was then combined through initial mapping and layering of various elements within the landscape to provisionally identify areas of similar or common

character. Features such as land uses, field size and regularity, settlement form and scale, woodland cover, road network and topography were studied to identify corresponding patterns. The analysis established outline landscape character types to be refined through field assessment. Areas of uncertainty were highlighted as a focus for field study.

Field Survey

- 2.8 A comprehensive field survey was carried out based upon the initial character area mapping from the desk study to identify consistent landscape character areas. A field survey sheet was prepared and used for the assessment to ensure a structured, consistent record of information, and supported by written descriptions and a photographic record.
- 2.9 The field survey sheet was designed to record the following as part of the landscape classification exercise;
- The character area boundaries;
 - The pattern of landscape components that define the unique character of each character area;
 - Distinctive features, local building materials, plant species etc
 - Aesthetic/visual/perception of the landscape;
 - The landscape condition and any particular qualities / sensitive features; and
 - Identify pressures for change / management issues and opportunities.
- 2.10 The survey data informed the process of drafting the descriptions of and illustrating each character area in the final report. A sample of the pro forma survey sheet is included at Appendix A.
- 2.11 The urban areas were not surveyed but the interface of the settlements with the rural areas has been considered. The field survey was carried out in December 2009 and included all land within the Borough. The survey work was undertaken by chartered Landscape Architects, who were responsible for drafting the text and defining the boundaries of each Landscape Character Area.

Landscape characterisation (Stage 1)

- 2.12 Landscape Character Areas were classified using the data collated from the desk studies and field surveys and against the wider National and County characterisation framework. The combination of professional judgement and physical mapped data has enabled consistent landscape patterns to be identified.
- 2.13 In this study 13 Landscape Character Areas were identified across the whole of the North Warwickshire Borough landscape. Each of these areas has been clearly described and their characters captured through the use of photographs and written text. The text follows a clear format under the following headings;
- Key characteristics (bullet points);
 - Location and boundaries;
 - Landscape Character (key description);
 - Key landscape related designations;
 - Pressures for change / key issues; and
 - Landscape / management strategies.
- 2.14 A key map to show the location and boundaries of the identified character areas has been prepared using ArcView GIS mapping. Although the character area boundaries are clearly defined on the mapping, it is important to recognise that landscape character will not necessarily be dramatically different to either side of the boundary lines. In some places landscape character can suddenly change and be defined by a clear boundary (for instance at a settlement edge) however elsewhere the change may be more transitional. Generally boundary lines should not be regarded as indicative of a transition rather than definitive unless stated otherwise. Over time boundaries may also change with development and changes in land use.

Settlement Setting Assessment / Landscape capacity Study (Stage 2)

- 2.15 The Character Areas identified in Stage 1 provide the context for Stage 2. This study focuses on the landscape around the main settlements and local service centres:
- Atherstone / Mancetter,
 - Polesworth / Dordon,
 - Coleshill,
 - Old and New Arley,

- Grendon / Baddesley Ensor,
- Hartshill with Ansley Common,
- Kingsbury and
- Water Orton

2.16 The land areas surveyed are identified at Figures 12-19. As part of the assessment the Landscape Character Areas have been further divided into landscape units to provide a consistent and comprehensive landscape sensitivity and capacity assessment.

2.17 The methodology for this stage of work is based upon guidance within Topic Paper 6 'Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity' published by Natural England. A robust and transparent methodology has been devised to assess the sensitivity and capacity of each landscape unit.

Sensitivity

2.18 In order to assess the sensitivity of each landscape unit a pro-forma has been devised (see Appendix B) which clearly and consistently sets out within a matrix the relevant factors involved in judging the sensitivity under the following headings;

- Landscape character sensitivity
- Visual sensitivity
- Landscape value

2.19 The factors are described and then judged using a three-point scoring system, the scores are then added to give an overall sensitivity score for each landscape unit and the information is summarised in GIS mapping to provide an overview of the sensitivity of each landscape unit. Use of an elaborate scoring system has been avoided in favour of a simple coding system to assess and identify the broad relative sensitivity of each landscape unit. The possible score for each landscape unit ranges from 13 to 39, the following bandings have been determined based upon the range of scores for the landscape units;

| | | |
|--------------|---|--------------------------------|
| 25 and below | = | Higher landscape sensitivity |
| 26 – 31 | = | Moderate landscape sensitivity |
| 32 and above | = | Lower landscape sensitivity |

Capacity for change

2.20 Within Topic Paper 6 the following is said about Capacity:

6.5 Reaching conclusions about capacity means making a judgement about the amount of change of a particular type that can be accommodated without having unacceptable adverse effects on the character of the landscape, or the way that it is perceived, and without compromising the values attached to it. This step must clearly recognise that a valued landscape, whether nationally designated or not, does not automatically, and by definition, have high sensitivity. Similarly...landscapes with high sensitivity do not automatically have no, or low capacity to accommodate change and landscapes of low sensitivity do not automatically have high capacity to accept change. Capacity is all a question of the interaction between the sensitivity of the landscape, the type and amount of change, and the way that the landscape is valued.

6.6 It is entirely possible for a valued landscape to be relatively insensitive to the particular type of development in question because of both the characteristics of the landscape itself and the nature of the development. It may also be the case that the reasons why value is attached to the landscape are not compromised by the particular form of change. Such a landscape may therefore have some capacity to accommodate change, especially if the appropriate, and hopefully standard, steps are taken in terms of siting, layout and design of the change or development in question. For example, a capacity study may show that a certain specified amount of appropriately located and well-designed housing may be quite acceptable even in a highly valued and moderately sensitive landscape. This is why capacity is such a complex issue and why most capacity studies need to be accompanied by guidelines about the ways in which certain types of change or development can best be accommodated without unacceptable adverse effects”.

2.21 In accordance with the guidance set out in Topic Paper 6, it is important to emphasise that the numerical totals simply provide a guide to the relative landscape and visual sensitivity of each landscape unit, and this in itself only provides a broad indication of each landscape units' overall potential capacity for change. No absolute conclusion should be drawn from the totals and they must be read alongside the text for each landscape unit. The following is provided as a general guide;

Higher landscape sensitivity

Generally with good existing landscape structure and a higher proportion of sensitive

landscape features, potential for development not precluded, however there may only be very limited pockets where sensitive development with appropriate mitigation might be feasible

Moderate landscape sensitivity Some overall capacity for change with potential for development within pockets of land with appropriate mitigation, but there may be sensitive landscape components and or visual constraints that may limit the scope of development

Lower landscape sensitivity Visually contained and / or degraded landscapes lacking in landscape structure and /or without sensitive landscape components with the most capacity for change and / or development

2.22 These broad categorisations reflect that within each landscape unit there may be only a small proportion of the land that is assessed as potentially suitable in landscape and visual terms for certain types of development. Also the complex interaction of the landscape and visual components within each landscape unit must given due consideration. For instance one landscape may be well contained visually but have sensitive ecological features, whereas another may be visually open to the wider countryside but be lacking in inherent landscape features (for instance as a result of agricultural intensification), both potentially resulting in a similar score.

2.23 With the above considerations in mind the text that accompanies the score tables provides a broad assessment of the capacity of each landscape unit for change and its potential suitability for development. The text also identifies appropriate mitigation as well as general landscape management objectives and strategic opportunities for enhancing green infrastructure and biodiversity. Read as a whole the scores and text can be used to support and help define planning policy and provide guidelines for developers and land managers. It is important to note, however that it is not possible within the scope of this study to provide a comprehensive assessment of the capacity of each landscape unit to a specific type of development and that any development proposal would need to be considered on its individual merits.

3.0 LANDSCAPE CONTEXT

Background

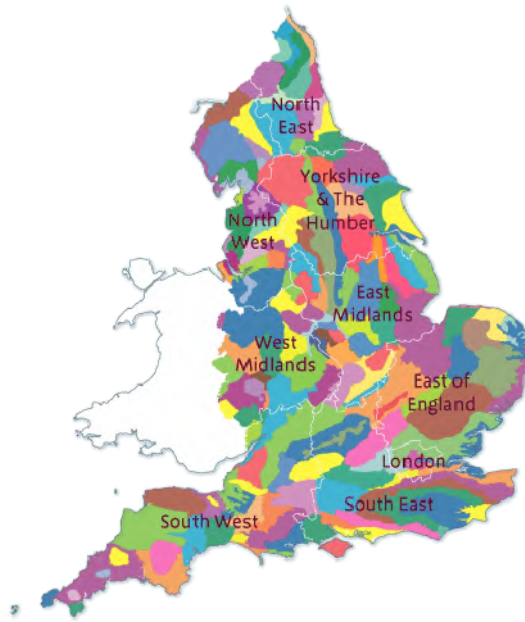
3.1 North Warwickshire Borough covers 28,418 hectares (110 square miles) and is illustrated at Figure 1. At its focus lie the market towns of Atherstone, Polesworth and Coleshill. The remainder of the Borough is predominantly rural with a number of small villages. As a consequence of its environment, and location immediately northeast of the West Midlands conurbation, and excellent transport links, the Borough has long been a focus of considerable development pressure. Approximately 50% of the Borough's rural area lies within the Green Belt (illustrated at Figure 2) and this has focused much of that pressure into the three towns. All saw considerable growth throughout the 20th century and North Warwickshire Borough now has a population of 61,000 (based on the 2001 census), a growth of 9.4% since 1981.

3.2 Several existing broad landscape characterisation studies, undertaken at a national and county level, relate to the landscape character of North Warwickshire and these provide the context for this assessment. The assessments are;

- The Character of England – Natural England
- Warwickshire landscape guidelines
- Warwickshire historic landscape characterisation project

National Context

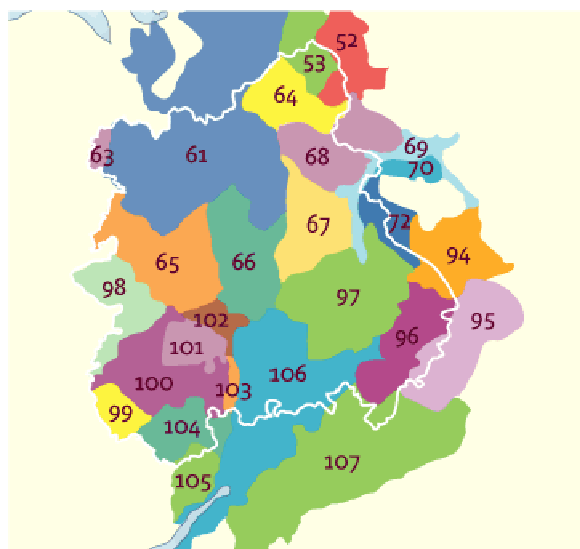
3.3 At a national scale, Natural England (formerly the Countryside Agency) has undertaken a process of landscape characterisation and assessment. This included at a broad scale, assessment of physical, historic and cultural influences, buildings and settlement, land cover and changes in the landscape to formulate 159 Character Areas. These were published as 'The Character of England: landscape, wildlife and natural features'. The detailed descriptions applicable to the North Warwickshire Borough are included within Volume 5: West Midlands.



Extract: Natural England: Character Map Of England

The Character Areas applicable to North Warwickshire Borough are;

- LCA 67: Cannock Chase & Cank Wood
- LCA 69: Trent Valley Washlands
- LCA 97: Arden
- LCA 72: Mease / Sence Lowlands



Extract: Natural England: West Midlands Character Map

3.4 A brief summary of each Character Area is outlined below;

LCA 67: Cannock Chase & Cank Wood

This area applies to a very small area close to Birmingham, within the North West corner of North Warwickshire and as such many of the characteristics are not directly applicable.

“Cannock Chase and Cank Wood is a landscape dominated by its history as former forest and chase and by the presence at its centre of the South Staffordshire Coalfield. It forms an area of higher ground, with the towns and large villages of the Black Country rising out of the lowlands of Shropshire and Staffordshire to the west. The Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands lie to the north and the Mease/Sence Lowlands are to the east. In the south it merges with Birmingham and the Arden”.

LCA 69: Trent Valley Washlands

This applies to the broad Tame Valley that extends south of Tamworth through the western side of North Warwickshire.

“The Trent Washlands form a distinct, linear, landscape character where the Trent passes through its middle reaches in central England. The character area includes the valleys of two main tributaries, the Tame and the Soar, which drain in from the south”.

LCA 97: Arden

The Arden Character Area applies centrally across the North Warwickshire Borough and covers the majority of the Borough land area.

“Arden comprises farmland and former wood-pasture lying to the south of Cannock Chase and Cank Wood. Traditionally regarded as the land lying between the river Tame and the river Avon in Warwickshire, the Arden landscape also extends into north Worcestershire to abut the Severn and Avon Vales. To the north and north-east it presents a steep escarpment to the open landscape of the Mease/Sence Lowlands. The eastern part abuts and surrounds Coventry... Within the overall character, there is wide variation which ranges from the enclosed river valleys, through the undulating wooded landscape and small hedged fields of the main plateau, to the remains of the coal industry in the northeast. Surviving features include sprawling settlements of

urban fringe character with red-brick terraced housing; spoil heaps and small pockets of rather run-down pasture and arable farmland”.

LCA 72: Mease / Sence Lowlands

This character area covers the north eastern part of the Borough.

“This area comprises the land hugging the western and southern flanks of the Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield. The Trent valley forms its western boundary between Burton upon Trent and Tamworth. From there eastwards it has a boundary with the Arden. On its south eastern boundary this area merges with the Leicestershire Vales”.

County Context

- 3.5 The Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines were prepared in 1993 by Warwickshire County Council and the Countryside Commission. The work was a pioneering approach to systematically analysing the major influences which have shaped the character of the landscape. The Guidelines are still current and provide at a county level guidelines for management which build upon the detailed understanding of the countryside gained through landscape assessment. The guidelines;

“offer guidance to landowners, farmers, planners, developers, road engineers, foresters, ecologists and landscape architects on how development and modern land management practices can best be integrated into the landscape. They define areas of strong landscape character and areas where a concerted effort is required to enhance areas of degradation. Ultimately they aim to ensure that the diversity and beauty of Warwickshire, Shakespeare’s County, is conserved for present and future generations to enjoy”.

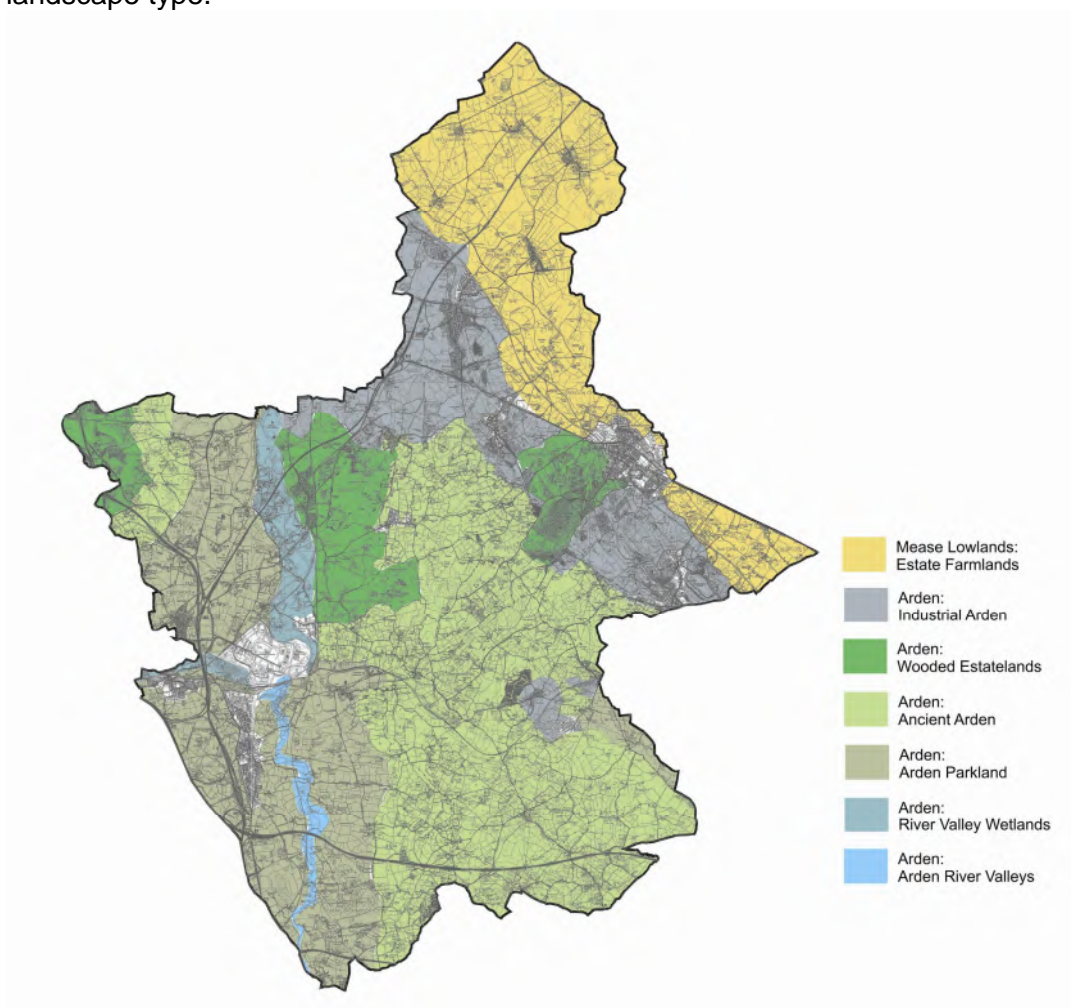
- 3.6 Within the Guidelines the majority of the Borough fits within the Arden Regional Character Areas, and the north east of the Borough within the Mease Lowlands. This broadly corresponds to the National Landscape Characterisation landscape character areas.
- 3.7 The Arden character area is described as *“an historic region of former wood pasture and heath characterised by a dispersed settlement pattern, ancient woodlands and mature hedgerow oaks”*, and the Mease Lowlands as *“a rural agricultural region of*

large country estates and small nucleated villages characterised by tall church spires”.

3.8 The Arden character Area is sub-divided into a number of Local Landscape Types, the following are applicable to North Warwickshire;

- Ancient Arden
- Wooded Estatelands
- Industrial Arden
- Arden Parklands
- Arden River Valleys
- River Valley Wetlands

3.9 Within North Warwickshire the Mease Lowlands are of the Estate Farmlands landscape type.



Interpretation of Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines Local Landscape Types

The Warwickshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Study

- 3.10 This study involved collation of detailed data on present and historic land use across North Warwickshire. The data was made available in GIS format and is referred to as part of the desk top study to assist in identifying landscape patterns and more sensitive historic landscapes. Some elements of the data are presented within this report; however the Warwickshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Study should be referred to separately for further detailed reference information.

Surrounding Authorities

- 3.11 The Warwickshire Borough abuts the County boundaries of Staffordshire and Leicestershire and the district boundaries of Lichfield, Tamworth, North West Leicestershire, Hinckley and Bosworth, Nuneaton and Bedworth and the Unitary Authorities of Coventry, Solihull and Birmingham.
- 3.12 A number of landscape character related studies have been undertaken for these authorities (refer to References for a complete list) and have been referred to in order to identify any potential cross boundary issues. Where these have been identified they are referred to within the descriptions of the landscape character areas defined within this assessment.

Other reference material

- 3.13 Other reference material helpful to understanding landscape character may be available, such as Warwickshire County Council's Historic Farmsteads Characterisation and Worcestershire Wildlife Consultancy and Natural England's 'Opportunity Mapping' (Landscapes for Living). At the time of writing this document these studies were still underway. Please note that since publication, new or updated material may now be available. For further information contact the Warwickshire County Council or North Warwickshire District Council.

4.0 OVERVIEW OF THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER OF THE DISTRICT

- 4.1 The following overview contains extracts from the Natural England and Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines that have been identified as relevant to the North Warwickshire Borough Landscape.

Physical Influences

- 4.2 This section provides a summary of the underlying physical factors which fundamentally affect the landscape under the headings; geology and soils, topography and hydrology, and biodiversity.

Geology and soils

- 4.3 The western, central and southern parts of the Borough lie across the eastern part of the Birmingham plateau, this “consists of two uplifted units of older Palaeozoic strata - the South Staffordshire and East Warwickshire plateaus – separated by an area of Triassic rocks covered for the most part by glacial drift. This central plateau is lower lying than the adjoining Palaeozoic areas and in Warwickshire it is largely underlain by Mercia mudstones with a covering of glacial sands and gravels or boulder clay. This gives the plateau a flat to gently rolling character, finely cut by the River Blythe and its tributary streams which flow northwards to join the Tame at Hams Hall. The Blythe is a slow-moving meandering river with countless minor tributary streams trickling in from every side. Many of these tributary valleys are badly drained and occupied by sluggish, braided streams...The Tame valley is wider than that of the Blythe and has a much more developed floodplain with at least two associated gravel terraces.
- 4.4 The East Warwickshire plateau is a dissected upland plateau closely associated with a spindle-shaped horst of Carboniferous and older rocks, which rise to just over 150metres near Corley. The major part of the plateau is occupied by the Upper Coal Measures, consisting mainly of red marls and sandstones and characterised by red, free draining soils. These are fringed on the north and north east by the Middle (Productive) Coal Measures with which the Warwickshire Coalfield is associated. A narrow band of Cambrian and Pre-Cambrian rocks also outcrop along the north-eastern edge of the plateau, between Atherstone and Nuneaton. These older rocks, mainly consisting of hard diorite and quartzite, are faulted against the adjoining Triassic mudstones and present a steep scarp slope towards the Mease Lowlands to the north-east. The Carboniferous rocks are also cut off on the west by a major

boundary fault which forms a pronounced edge to the plateau along the Blythe and Tame valleys. South and eastwards, where glacial drift deposits flatten the landform, the plateau slopes gradually into the valleys of the Avon and the Sowe". (page 5 Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines: Arden)

- 4.5 Within the north and east of the Borough the landscape is closely *"associated with a large tract of Mercia mudstone lying between two uplifted areas of older coal bearing rocks. These mudstones give rise to reddish clay soils which give way locally to well drained sandy soils derived from an irregular outcrop of Triassic sandstone.*
- 4.6 *The region is drained by three relatively minor rivers; the Mease to the north and the Anker and its tributary the Sence to the south and east. The many streams and Brooks which drain into these rivers have produced a dissected gently rolling topography rising to just over 130metres at No Man's Heath. In Warwickshire the River Anker forms a rather indistinct valley separating the region from Arden to the south west. The narrow floodplain is flanked by gravel terraces but in the lower valley some of the right bank tributaries flow over very wide spreads of alluvium. The most extensive of these forms a flat, low lying vale between Warton and Austrey". (page 22 Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines: Dunsmore, High Cross Plateau, Mease Lowlands)*
- 4.7 Within the Borough there are a number of Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) designations (see Figure 3).

Topography and Hydrology

- 4.8 There are distinct variations in topography across the Borough which combined with the underlying geology have a significant influence on the land use and subsequent character of the landscape. The Natural England landscape character areas reflect the topographical variations across the Borough. The topography of the Borough is illustrated at Figure 4 and Flood Zones at Figure 5.
- 4.9 Generally the south eastern part of the Borough, within the Arden LCA is more elevated (up to 190metres above ordnance datum) with a gently undulating landform, the most elevated land being around Corley and the rocky escarpment at Hartshill.
- 4.10 The landform gradually descends to around 60metres AOD at the river valleys of the Tame (where it meets the Trent Valley Washlands) and Blythe, which link south-north and create a low lying plain that dominates the western section of the Borough. To

the east of the Blythe the landform comprises a complex series of hills and valleys with minor watercourses that outfall to Shustoke Reservoir and the Rivers Blythe and Tame. To the West of the Blythe the landform rises slightly to a crest at Coleshill before descending into the Cole Valley to meet the eastern urban edge of Birmingham at the Borough boundary. To the North West, above the River Tame the landform rises more dramatically towards the Borough boundary, this more elevated land forms the south-eastern corner of the Cannock Chase & Cank Wood LCA.

- 4.11 To the east the Anker Valley is broad and low lying, however around Polesworth it narrows and steepens, this is emphasised by the artificial landform from former workings (now Pooley Country Park) just to the north of Atherstone. North of the Anker in the far north of the Borough the landform forms a wide bowl and includes a number of small watercourses which form tributaries of the Anker. These areas lie within the Mease / Sence Lowlands LCA.
- 4.12 There are a number of distinct artificial landforms within the Borough associated with the former minerals extraction workings these include hard rock quarries at Hartshill, significant spoil mounds east of Hartshill, west and north of Polesworth / Dordon and west of Packington Hall and the extensive former gravel workings alongside the River Tame.

Biodiversity

- 4.13 The underlying geology and variations in topography and hydrology contribute to the complex and diverse range of habitats across the Borough. As a whole the Borough appears well wooded, particularly within the upland areas, being most pronounced around Hartshill where extensive woodland blocks and plantations exist, some of which are classified as 'Ancient Woodlands'. Ancient Woodland areas across the Borough are illustrated at Figure 6, these tend to be located upon the higher ground.
- 4.14 Within the lower lying river corridors woodland is less pronounced, however arable areas with a good spread of hedgerow oaks and pockets of wetland vegetation (at Tame) and regenerating scrub at Anker and riparian vegetation along the SSSI Blythe also provide good tree cover. The large wetland areas formed from former extraction operations concentrated around the Tame Valley and at Alvecote on the River Anker provide notable wildlife habitats. There are 13 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and 43 locally designated Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) within the Borough, these are illustrated at Figure 7.

4.15 The Borough comprises a predominantly farmed landscape with a mix of arable and pastoral land. There are pockets of unimproved grassland in places adjacent to the many watercourses through the Borough and pockets of remnant heath, particularly notable around the elevated Baddesley and Packington Hall to the south. The heathy upland nature within parts of the area is also still evident as understory within woodlands and as bracken within roadside hedgerows and verges in the more elevated parts of the Borough. With regard to hedgerows there remains a relatively intact hedgerow field structure with pockets of former wood heath for instance to the west of Fillongley but also areas of wide open arable landscape, where the field structure has been removed / compromised, the most notable being between Austrey and Orton-on-the-Hill. Hedgerow lined lanes, often with grass verges and some upon banks are a common feature of the Borough. Within pastoral areas and areas of former wood heath field ponds are still a fairly common feature.

4.16 The following extracts are taken from the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines;

Within the majority of the Borough the natural vegetation “is thought to have consisted of dense broadleaved woodland, dominated by oak on the light sandy soils and lime on the heavier clays and loams. Woodland clearance, from earliest times, resulted in the development of grassland and wood pasture over much of the area with heathland on the poorer, leached soils. Marshland occurred in low lying areas along rivers and streams. All of these habitats have been greatly influenced by land-use history and no large areas have survived. The sites of greatest ecological interest today are those that retain remnants of these ancient vegetation types. They reflect the underlying geology and soils and make an important contribution to landscape character. Some, particularly woodlands, also form prominent visual features”.

Ancient Woodland

4.17 Bentley Park Wood is identified within the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines as a fine example of ‘Ancient Woodland’. The following is said of ‘Ancient Woodlands’ generally; *“Although none retain the climax species composition of the original wildwood, some on the sandy soils on the North Warwickshire plateau can still be classified as oak dominated woodlands. The rest are now best described, as a result of frequent disturbance by man, as oak-birch woodlands”.*

- 4.18 *“Many woods, although on the ancient woodlands register, have been substantially replanted in modern times and are reduced in their conservation value. However, their rich ground flora and fauna built up over centuries is often still present, particularly along rides and around the edge of the woodland. This makes them superior wildlife sites to more recent plantation woodlands and high priorities for conversion back to a semi-natural species mix. Ancient woodbanks, not found in recent woodland, add additional historical interest to many ancient woodlands”.* (page 8 Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines: Arden)

Heathland

- 4.19 *“Heathland and commons, now rare and greatly diminished in area, were historically associated with wood pasture and waste”.* The Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines refer to Baddesley Common as one of the most significant areas now remaining, Grendon Common, adjacent to Baddesley is also referred to and to Packington, where fragments of heathy grassland survive.
- 4.20 *“Although all three heather species exist, true heathland in Arden is characterised by ling heather with bilberry, purple moor grass, heath bedstraw and wavy hair grass. Where management has ceased, gorse, bracken and silver birch start to colonise. Bracken is perhaps the most obvious ‘heathy’ indicator and is a common feature of many woods and roadside verges”.* (page 8 Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines: Arden)

Hedgerows

- 4.21 *“Ancient, mixed hedgerows, often more than two metres wide, are a special feature of Arden, and some may represent remnants of the original wildwood as it was cleared and converted into small hedged fields by assarting. The hedges were assimilated from shrubs found along the previous woodland edge, or from the seed bank in the soil, and the species mix therefore reflects that from the woodland itself. A wide variety of woody species are typically present, often dominated by hazel, but with dogwood, field maple, hawthorn, blackthorn and holly also common...Where hedge banks complement ancient hedges, these often support a diverse flora with many woodland plant species”.*

Unimproved grassland

- 4.22 *“Permanent grassland is still a feature of the more pastoral Arden landscapes, and where this remains unimproved it can be rich in flowering plant species. Many sites which existed up to the Second World War have now been destroyed or damaged as*

a result of agricultural intensification, but many areas remain, particularly on marginal land. The best remaining sites are found on steep hillsides as rough, often scrub grassland; on high canal and roadside embankments; on disused railway cuttings; or as isolated groups of hedged fields”.

Field ponds

- 4.23 *“Field ponds, often fringed by scrub and trees are found throughout Arden and are associated with its history of stock rearing. Where they are managed to avoid silting up and over shading by surrounding scrub vegetation, they can be valuable wildlife habitats. Although many ponds have been lost as a result of agricultural intensification and neglect they are still an important feature of the region, and are particularly abundant in Fillongley and Meridian parishes”.* Meridian is located just to the south of the Borough boundary.

River wetlands

- 4.24 *“Historically river floodplains were managed as wet meadowland. These were floristically rich and of great nature conservation value”.* The Blythe River SSSI is described as remaining *“relatively unspoilt, retaining a good variety of marginal vegetation, wet grassland, riverside trees and scrub”*
- 4.25 Within the north east corner of the Borough the ecology is notably different and the following descriptions have been extracted from the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines;
- 4.26 *The Mease Lowlands are primarily an agricultural region and, as might be expected, most of the habitats of value to wildlife are associated with farmland. Unimproved grassland is the most valuable habitat types often in association with individual features such as hedgerows and field ponds. Streamlines are also important as wildlife corridors, forming a network of linked sites”* (page 22 Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines: Dunsmore, High Cross Plateau, Mease Lowlands)

Streams and Meadows

- 4.27 *“The streams and small rivers draining the Mease Lowlands support a wide range of aquatic plant and animal life. Associated areas of marginal marsh vegetation, unimproved meadow and alder/hawthorn scrub are of particular importance, while flowering plants such as water stitchwort, marsh marigold and yellow flag provide interest and colour. Hedges and ditches with great hairy willowherb, nettle, bittersweet and fools watercress bound the low lying fields at Austrey Meadows.*

Marsh marigolds (locally called mollyblobs) and lady's smock can also be found in the remaining damp grassland" (page 23 Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines: Dunsmore, High Cross Plateau, Mease Lowlands)

Unimproved Grassland

- 4.28 *"Unimproved pasture and hay meadows are two of the most important of Warwickshire's wildlife resources in national terms, and are probably its most threatened habitats. Most grasslands have received some level of improvement by drainage, reseeding or fertilisation. Most of the remaining fragments occur in pockets around the villages in the region and on slopes too steep for the plough. The latter group of mainly dry grasslands have a sward made up of meadow barley, sheeps sorrel, greater knapweed, harebell, devilsbit scabious, meadow cranesbill, great burnet and cowslip. Where grazing has ceased, coarse grasses, gorse, bramble and hawthorn quickly become dominant"* (page 23 Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines: Dunsmore, High Cross Plateau, Mease Lowlands)

Human Influences

- 4.29 This section addresses the effects man has had on the underlying landscape. It investigates the subdivision between rural and urban characteristics, the infrastructure of roads, canals and settlements, and the historic evolution of the landscape.

Land cover and land use

- 4.30 The Borough of North Warwickshire is predominantly rural in character. Settlements are small and concentrated within the coal belt to the north and east, or to the west close to the industrial areas of Birmingham, the remainder of the Borough is largely farmland and related land uses associated with rural areas. Woodland cover comprises almost 6.7% of the Borough. The Historic Landscape Characterisation Project undertaken by Warwickshire County Council has mapped the broad land uses across the Borough. These are illustrated at Figure 8.
- 4.31 A number of larger settlements and cities lie close to the boundaries of the Borough, namely Birmingham to the west, Tamworth to the north and the linked settlements of Nuneaton, Bedworth and Coventry to the southeast. At Birmingham the large scale industrial and employment land uses sprawl across the Borough boundary influencing the character of settlements of Coleshill, Water Orton and Kingsbury, which all lie within the context of large scale industry, Hams Hall Power Station dominates the land north of Coleshill and east of Water Orton and the oil distribution

depots to the east of Kingsbury dominate this area. A military training ground lies within the farmland south east of Kingsbury.

- 4.32 To the north and east former minerals extraction sites, with remnant spoil mounds at various stages of restoration and regeneration combined with large scale employment sites such as Birch Coppice Business Park lie adjacent to the settlement areas of Polesworth, Dordon, Grendon and Atherstone. Hard rock quarrying and associated industry lie within the uplands at Hartshill.
- 4.33 The most common land use is arable, although there are also significant areas of pastoral land. The farmed landscape occurs largely uninterrupted across the main, central part of the Borough. Former minerals extraction has also created significant extensive wetlands adjacent to the River Tame, most notable at Kingsbury Water Park.
- 4.34 Elsewhere there are a number of scattered country estates across the Borough, some of which (eg Packington Hall, Maxstoke Park and the Belfry) have now become golf courses but retain much of their original landscape structure. There are many golf courses across the Borough and these provide the most notable recreational facility in terms of land use. There are also a small number of Country Parks on restored land including Kingsbury Water Park, Pooley Country Park and Hartshill Country Park. The Coventry and Birmingham & Fazeley Canals and Dobbies Garden Centre and Maze World provide alternative recreational land uses.

Buildings and Settlement

- 4.35 Although clusters of small towns and larger villages associated with the industries have developed close to the peripheries of the Borough, the remainder of the Borough is relatively unpopulated. A dispersed settlement pattern exists with small nucleated villages predominantly in the north east and elsewhere scattered hamlets and small linear settlements predominate. Modern 20th century development has tended to focus on the larger towns and mining villages and within the rural areas small scale ribbon development and individual properties have been constructed that tend to follow the historic settlement pattern. The settlement pattern throughout the Borough is illustrated at Figure 9. This presents the North Warwickshire Borough Council's defined settlement boundaries and is supplemented by data from the County's Historic Landscape Classification project to illustrate the dispersed settlement pattern outside of the defined settlements.

- 4.36 Traditionally buildings within the area were red brick and tile, with some white rendered and timber framed properties. Across parts of the Borough, particularly notable in the north east, around Furnace End and at Coleshill distinctive spired churches are a distinctive and common feature within the landscape. In places stone has been imported for construction of important buildings. Maxstoke Priory Scheduled Ancient Monument is a typical example.

Infrastructure

- 4.37 Associated with the development of industry and growth of the towns the Borough is heavily influenced by a network of motorways and A roads that pass through its fringes; the M42 to the north, the M6 toll, M6 and M42 to the west, the M6 to the south and the A5 to the east. These corridors have a notable influence on the character and tranquillity of the areas they pass through.
- 4.38 A network of rail lines also passes through the area and penetrates further into the rural core of the Borough. The West Coast main line has the greatest impact on the landscape; this passes through the Anker Valley and is clearly discernible by the regular lines of overhead gantries.
- 4.39 Historically with the industries a network of canals were created through the area, the Coventry Canal passes through the Anker Valley and the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal through the Tame Valley.
- 4.40 The remainder of the Borough comprises a dense network of lanes and roads, these have been upgraded were busy roads connect the larger settlements, however within the core of the Borough a dense network of narrow winding hedged lanes still exist and connect the dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets and farmsteads.

Historical and cultural influences

- 4.41 The following extracts from the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines provide an overview of the historical and cultural influences that have helped shape the character of most of the Borough, the area defined in the Guidelines as 'Arden';

"...permanent pastoral settlements established at an early date. The resulting clearances were farmed as small hedged enclosures or 'closes' which created a characteristic pattern of small irregular fields. These were particularly representative of the areas...from Allesley [beyond the southern Borough boundary] to Fillongley"
(page 8 Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines: Arden)

- 4.42 *"In contrast open field agriculture was only represented to any degree in the Blythe Valley... Generally this was associated with nucleated villages...In the Blythe Valley full enclosure was not completed until the 19th century resulting in a more regular pattern of larger fields*
- 4.43 *Extensive woodland cover remained until the Norman Conquest, with the most heavily wooded manors recorded in the Domesday Survey...Subsequently much woodland was cleared and enclosed for arable and stock. Between the 12th and 14th centuries, numerous manorial deer parks were created which probably helped conserve woodland cover. Most have left little impression upon the modern landscape, though good examples survive at Packington ...Parks continued to be enclosed from the 15th century onwards and it is these, for example Merevale... which are most prominent today.*
- 4.44 *As late as 1540 Leland wrote that "...the ground in Arden is much enclosyd, plentiful of gres and woode". However, by 1822 C&J Greenwoods' one inch County map showed only small remnants of woodland. Little further shrinkage occurred during the 19th century as maps show only slightly more woodland than is found today. Minor additions resulted from the Enclosure movement of this period with the planting of many small woods and coverts. These are uniform in size and shape and lack the irregular and sinuous boundaries and woodbanks of ancient woods. Often they are named as 'coverts', 'gorses' or 'spinneys'".*
- 4.45 *"Commons were a feature of areas of remnant woodland and many were wooded until relatively recent times. A typical wood pasture common was grassland or heather with thickly scattered trees and bushes. Other commons represented areas of heathland on poorer soils and the numerous 'Heath' names indicate those cleared of woodland at a relatively early date. Commons did not disappear completely until the last stages of enclosure in the early 19th century... Commons have left little impression upon the present landscape, except that they can often be identified as areas with a geometric pattern of fields and lanes within a surrounding irregular or semi-regular pattern.*
- 4.46 *Commons attracted settlement by landless labourers and poorer sections of the community. These formed the basis of many Arden hamlets, especially those known as 'End' or 'Green'. An allied settlement type is the wayside cottage established on a roadside verge and taking in a long linear garden.*

- 4.47 *The dispersed settlement pattern more generally found in Arden was closely related to agricultural development. The typical expression of woodland assarting and heathland enclosure was a pattern of scattered farmsteads and hamlets. This dispersed pattern is reflected in a maze of narrow lanes, trackways and footpaths which grew up to serve outlying farms and hamlets. A land-owning peasantry gave rise to a wealthy class of yeoman farmers by the late medieval period. As a result many substantial brick and timber farmhouses were built in the 16th and 17th centuries, often on earlier moated sites.*
- 4.48 *A more recent and very distinct settlement type is associated with the pit villages of the coal mining industry. Extensive coal exploitation began in North Warwickshire in the 19th Century, shortly after the start of the Industrial Revolution. This has had a profound effect on the landscape of this part of Warwickshire. Mining villages contain much early 20th century terraced housing, often situated on hill tops and with a very distinctive 'northern' character. Some of these were new villages built to house mining families, while older villages relocated as a colliery expanded.*
- 4.49 *The presence of coal mines attracted secondary industry which relied on coal for power. Hams Hall power station was built to produce electricity directly from coal. Other industrial plants sprung up to convert coal to coke and other products. Railways and roads were also built to transport the coal to other areas of the country. The effects of the mines therefore have spread far beyond the colliery gates, and have made the north eastern part of Arden between Tamworth and Nuneaton, an industrial landscape unlike any other in the county”*
- 4.50 The development of the Mease lowlands differs from this. The Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines state;
- 4.51 *The Mease Lowlands were already cleared of woodland at an early date and there was little woodland recorded in the Domesday Book. The region has ...”small nucleated villages set amidst open arable fields, some of which survived until the late 18th or early 19th century. The late date of enclosure helped to preserve the strongly nucleated settlement pattern, which is particularly distinctive feature of the region. Villages tend to occupy high sites overlooking their surrounding fields while parish boundaries frequently follow the intervening streams. In Warwickshire these include Seckington, Austrey, Warton and Newton Regis. Seckington was also the site of a Norman motte and bailey castle.*

- 4.52 *The late date of enclosure in this region also resulted in the geometric pattern of large hedged fields characteristic of parliamentary enclosure which is still seen in parts of many parishes today. Although parts of these parishes were enclosed at an earlier date only Bramcote in Polesworth is known as a depopulated settlement. Today most of the enclosure hedges within this township have been removed. There were extensive meadows on the low lying area to the south west of Austrey. These were associated with alluvial deposits of a tributary stream of the Anker. Areas of heathland, Clifton Heath and No Man's Heath, persisted along the northern county boundary in Newton Regis until the late 18th century. The latter lay at a road junction and has become a small settlement focus but the former, part of which was once used as a rabbit warren, has now become subdivided into the regular geometric fields associated with late enclosure.*
- 4.53 *Minor manor houses and country houses abound through the region. Some of the earlier manorial sites were moated...Larger country houses, many of which are set within parkland, include...Caldecote Hall" (page 22 Dunsmore, High Cross Plateau, Mease Lowlands).*
- 4.54 The historical landscape designations (Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Registered Parks and Gardens and Conservation Areas) are illustrated at Figure 10.

5.0 CHARACTER OF THE NORTH WARWICKSHIRE LANDSCAPES

- 5.1 This study has identified 13 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) across the Borough. The accompanying plan at Figure 11 defines the broad location and boundaries of the character areas. The methodology for undertaking the assessment is set out within Section 2.0.
- 5.2 The LCAs broadly correlate with the Regional and County LCAs defined by Natural England and Warwickshire County. The following Landscape Character Descriptions and Landscape management recommendations provide a more localised Borough wide scale of detail;

Character Area 7: Church End to Corley – Arden Hills and Valleys



Corresponding National and County Landscape Character Areas

Countryside Agency: LCA 97 Arden

Warwickshire Landscapes Guidelines: Arden

Key characteristics;

- A broad elevated basin with numerous rolling hills and valleys;
- Mixed agricultural landscape with an ancient pattern of small fields, winding lanes and dispersed, isolated hamlets and farmsteads, particularly notable to the west of Fillongley Hall;
- Heavily wooded character due to presence of large woodland blocks on hilltops and associated with these numerous areas of former wood pasture with large, old oak trees and field ponds, often associated with heathland remnants;
- Wooded escarpments at the northern, eastern and southern boundaries;
- In places a more open network of large arable fields;
- To the east and south, towards Coventry, the area is permeated by a number of larger settlements with modern expansion with increasingly busy roads;
- The M6 motorway rows of pylons cut through the south and are highly visible locally from elevated slopes;
- Long views from western slopes across the Blythe Valley to Birmingham.

Location and boundaries;

This LCA covers an extensive area extending from just south of Birchley Heath in the north to Corley Moor in the south. The northern boundary is defined by the wooded Uplands close to Hartshill and to the east and south the boundary is defined by wooded ridges, south of Corley and Corley Moor the land tips to the south and the character changes towards Coventry. To the west the boundary is drawn at two distinctive escarpments where this upland LCA descends steeply into the Blythe and Tame Valleys.

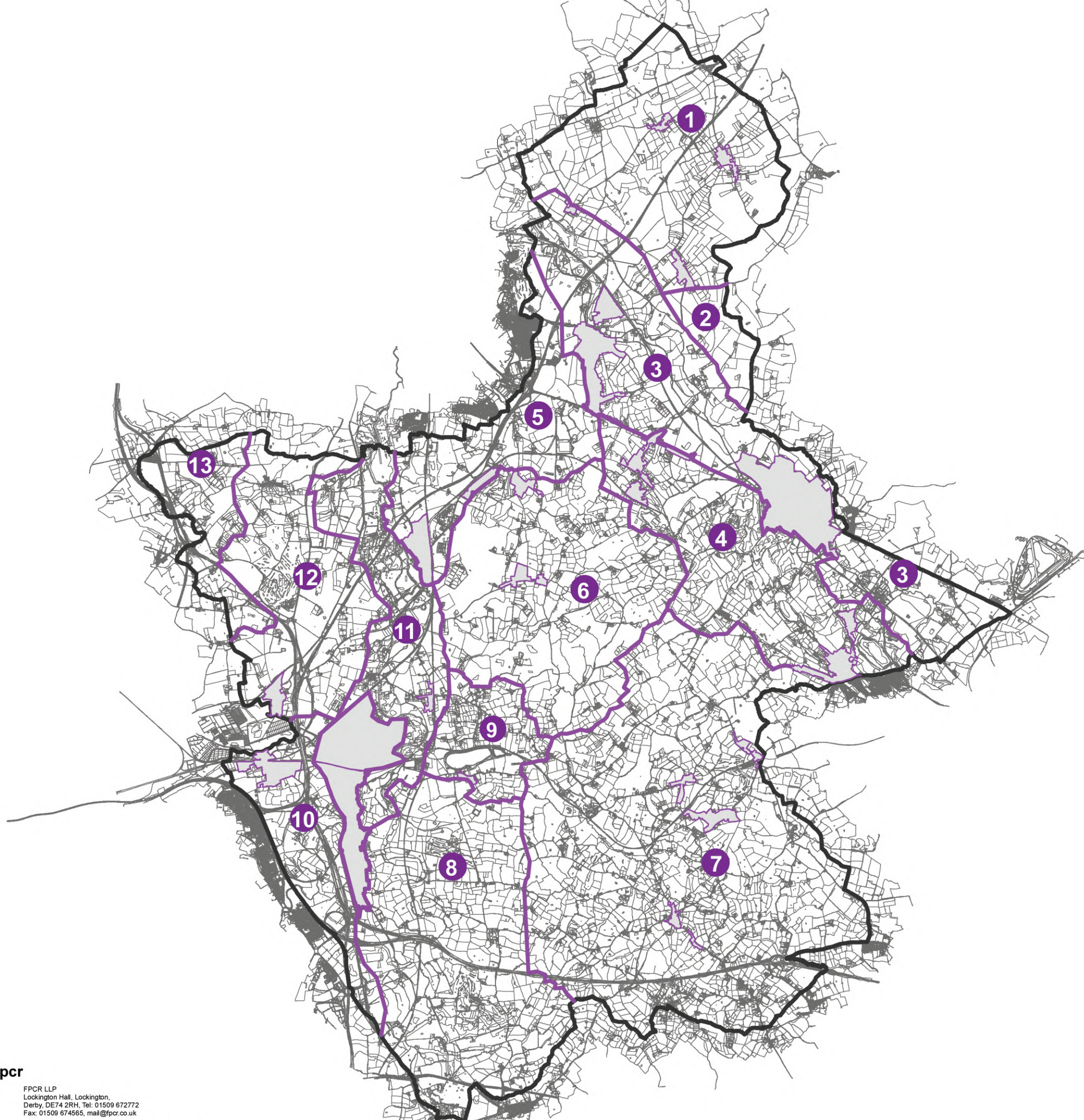
Landscape Character (key description);




An elevated farmed landscape of low, rounded hills, steep scarps and small incised valleys. This landform combined with extensive hilltop woodlands and tree cover creates an intricate and small scale character, punctuated by numerous scattered farms, and hamlets.

Streams within the valley bottoms generally converge to the west and outfall towards the Shustoke Reservoir. A rail line winds discretely through the base of the central valley. Daw Mill Colliery is nestled within this valley adjacent to the rail line and has little influence on the wider landscape. This settled landscape includes a dense network of older hamlets and farmsteads, ancient moated sites such as at Astley Castle as well as a number of settlements that have been subject to modern expansion, including Old and New Arley, Ansley, Fillongley, Corley and













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| | <p>Corley Moor. The majority of these settlements are located to the south and east where they are connected by a network of busier lanes which link to the nearby urban areas of Nuneaton, Bedworth and Coventry. Collectively, and combined with the M6 motorway and lines of pylons within the south, this area has many suburban elements.</p> <p>The majority of the character area is deeply rural and the tranquil. Ancient Arden landscape is apparent in the complex pattern of woodland, former wood pasture and heath, winding, frequently sunken hedged lanes and scattered farms and hamlets, built of wood or timber. This is most notable in close proximity to the hilltop woodland blocks and particularly to the west of Fillongley, where a complex and irregular network of small well-hedged pastoral fields with field ponds and numerous field trees is apparent in the vicinity of Fillongley Hall. There are similar areas around Fillongley Lodge and towards Over Whitacre. Elsewhere fields have been enlarged for arable production, although many still retain an irregular outline. To the south of Ansley and New Arley, numerous hedgerow trees around larger semi-regular arable fields combine to provide a sense of Parkland character towards Arbury Park located just to the east within the Nuneaton and Bedworth District.</p> <p>Throughout much of the area the landscape has a well wooded character formed by a mixture of woodlands, spreading hedgerow and field oaks, small parks and strongly wooded streamlines. Some areas retain a heathy character, and this is noted at Shaw Lane, where there is oak/birch mix woodland with an understory of bracken. Large mixed broadleaved and coniferous woodland blocks are located upon the peripheral escarpment to the north, east and south, framing the LCA.</p> <p>Within the area landform relates intimately with tree cover and field pattern to provide enclosure. In the more intimate pastoral areas views tend to be restricted by thick roadside hedgerows and are often short, overlooking two or three fields to a wooded skyline. Elsewhere there are local views across small valleys, often to wooded skylines. Occasional distant views are afforded from hilltops and ridgelines revealing a varied, wooded topography. From elevated western parts of the area and from the steep scarp at the western edge of the LCA there are occasional panoramic views across the Blythe Valley to Birmingham.</p> |
| <p>Key landscape related designations;</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numerous small-medium sized ‘Ancient Woodland’ blocks on higher land, some of which are designated as SINCs; • RIG and SINC site at railway line south of Ansley; • 3 further small RIGS; • SAMs at Astley Castle, Fillongley and south of Corley; • Conservation Area at Fillongley; • SINC site south of Fillongley; |
| <p>Pressures for change / key issues;</p> | <p>This area retains much of the classic ‘Arden’ landscape characteristics, the main pressure for change comprises agricultural intensification and conversion of broad land swathes to arable. Associated changes in land management practices lead to gradual loss or deterioration of hedgerows, field ponds, wetland and heathland habitats and hedgerow trees. Around the south and eastern peripheries settlement expansion and associated increase in peripheral road traffic along with the presence of the M6</p> |

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| | motorway and pylons have an urbanising influence and bring associated ongoing development pressures. |
| Landscape / management strategies; | <p>Conserve and restore the typical rural 'Arden' landscape character of this area;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain the predominant historic dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets and scattered farmsteads; • Conserve the built character of Arden by ensuring that new development reflects the vernacular style; • Protect and enhance the internal open space and irregular outline of village settlements; • New agricultural buildings should be sited, designed and landscaped to blend with the surrounding landscape; • Conserve and enhance tree cover within and around settlements, any new development should be integrated within the landscape through implementation of landscape framework planting appropriate to the local landscape character; • Restoration plans for the active colliery site at Daw Mill should be in keeping with the areas' unique character; • Conserve rural character by restricting changes in the use of rural land; • Maintain the quiet, peaceful character of the area and only encourage informal recreation; • Conserve areas of pastoral character and identify opportunities for conversion of arable back to permanent pasture; • Conserve and manage any remaining old permanent pastures and grassland areas; • Retain and manage field ponds in areas of permanent pasture; • Encourage development of wide and diverse field margins; • Conserve and restore the historic field pattern of ancient hedgerows and hedged lanes; • Diversify roadside character in appropriate locations through the creation and management of heathy vegetation on highway verges; • New hedge planting should reflect the irregular field pattern and include only mixed native species; • Conserve and enhance tree cover through natural regeneration of hedgerow oaks; • Encourage new woodland planting; plant native, locally occurring species and predominantly oak. The design of new woodland planting should complement the shape and scale of the surrounding landscape pattern, large woodland blocks predominate on higher land; • Promote conservation management of existing woodlands, particularly ancient and semi-natural woodlands, wood-pasture and heath, particularly within the area west of Fillongley Hall; • Enhance the continuity and wooded character of stream corridors. |



-  North Warwickshire Borough boundary
-  Proposed Landscape Character Area boundary
-  Current settlement area boundary

Landscape Character Areas

-  No Man's Heath to Warton Lowlands
-  Little Warton to Fields Farm-Fen Lanes
-  Anker Valley
-  Baddesley to Hartshill Uplands
-  Tamworth Fringe Uplands
-  Wood End to Whitacre Upper Tame Valley Farmlands
-  Church End to Corley Hills and Valleys
-  Blythe Valley Parkland Farmland
-  Hoggrill's to Furnace End Hamlets
-  Cole Valley
-  Tame Valley Wetlands
-  Middleton to Curdworth Tame Valley Farmlands
-  Wishaw to Trickley Coppice Wooded Uplands



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North Warwickshire Borough Council

North Warwickshire Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Areas

Figure 11

Scale 1:100000@A3. August 2010