

Land at the west of Smithy Bridge Road

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Appendix C

Extract from Greater Manchester Landscape Character and Sensitivity Assessment

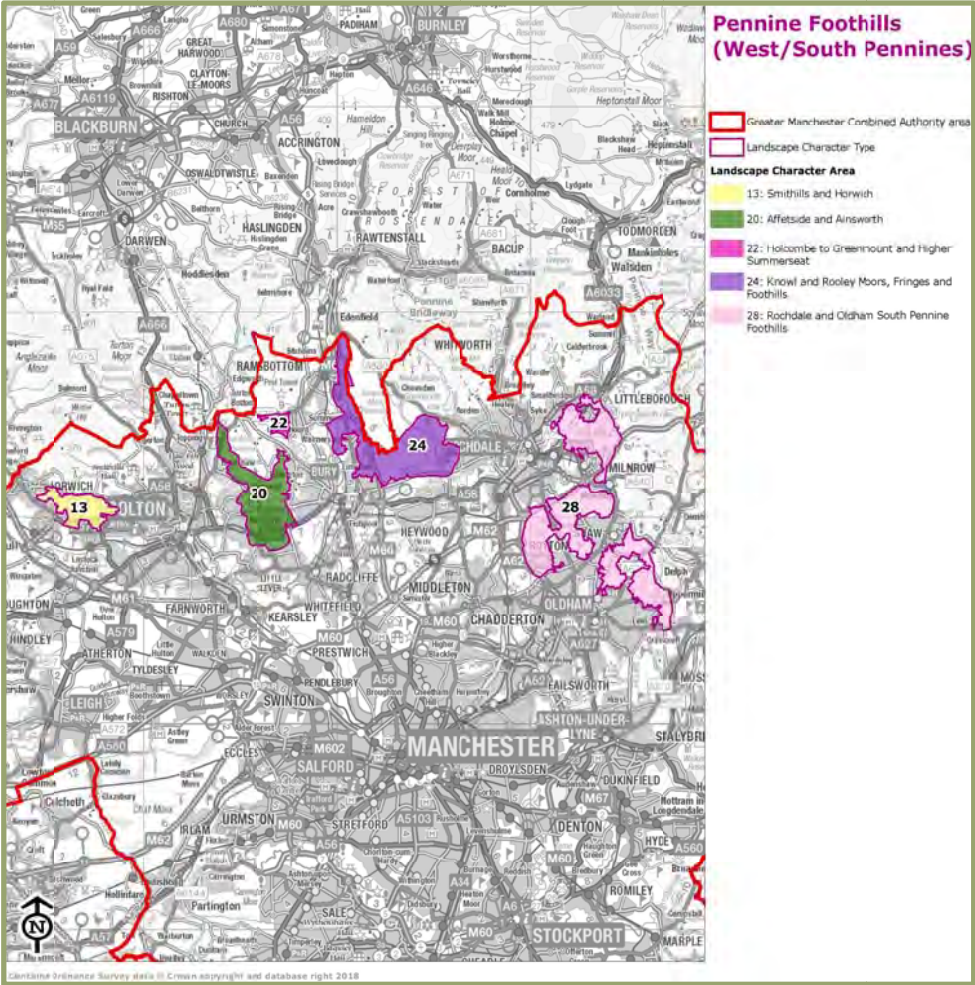
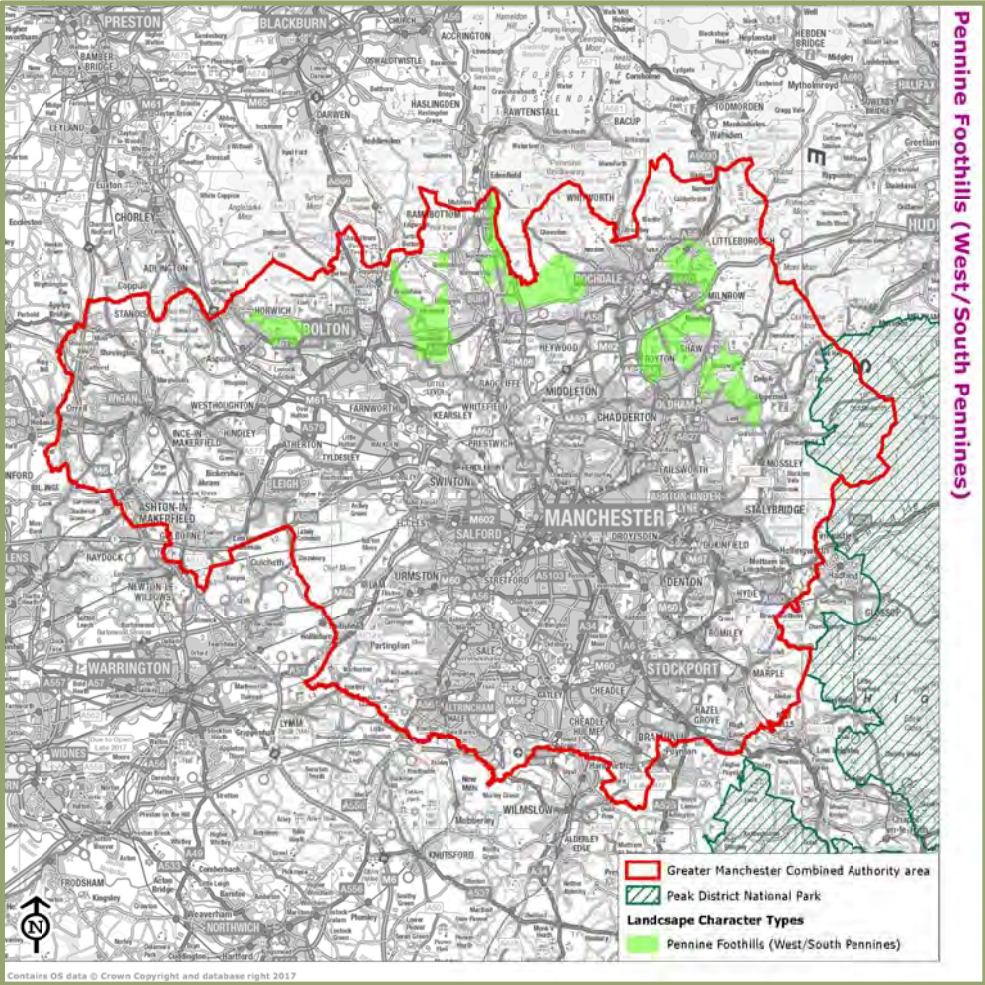
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Prepared for:



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LCT: Pennine Foothills (West/South Pennines)



This Landscape Character Type (LCT) is found in Bolton, Bury, Rochdale and Oldham Districts.

Representative photographs



View to chimney stacks on the edge of Brightmet



The hilltop War Memorial in Tandle Hill Country Park



View across Hollingworth Lake to the uplands beyond



Pylons and overhead lines cross the farmland south of Scouthead, with the Pennines visible beyond



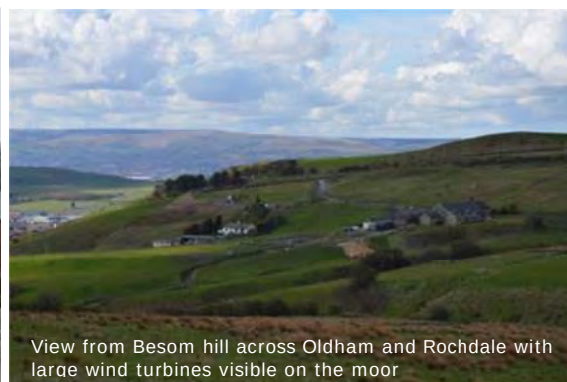
Wet grassland and broadleaved woodland habitats, with a mast dominating the skyline



Modern housing at Smithy Bridge, locally prominent on the skyline



Birtle brook Retirement Village, a converted mill



View from Besom hill across Oldham and Rochdale with large wind turbines visible on the moor



View from Grotton Hall across the Oldham to the uplands beyond. A pylon breaks the skyline.

Landscape character description

Key characteristics

Topography, geology and drainage

- Transitional landscape sloping up from the northern fringes of Greater Manchester towards the uplands of the South and West Pennines.
- Strongly rolling and undulating topography punctuated by locally distinctive hills and carved by intricate stream valleys. Elevation ranges from 100 to over 350 metres AOD at Besom Hill.
- Primary underlying geology of Pennine Coal Measures, with areas of Millstone Grit overlain with glacial till deposits. Soil fertility is generally poor, with much of the LCT defined as Grade 4 agricultural land, with some pockets defined as Grade 3.
- Streams drain through cloughs to a number of reservoirs, although these are generally smaller than those on higher ground within the Unenclosed Uplands and Fringes LCT.

Land use and field patterns

- Land use is dominated by lush semi-improved grassland pastures enclosed by a mix of gritstone walls, hedgerow boundaries and post and rail fencing. Horse paddocks are often found adjacent to settlement.
- Varied small-medium scale enclosures, divided by a mixture of field boundaries including gritstone walls, hedgerows and post and rail fencing. Field are predominantly piecemeal post-medieval enclosures, with some modern agglomeration.
- Various other land uses, including quarries and reservoirs and frequent recreational facilities such as golf clubs. Country Parks are located at Tandle Hill (Oldham District) and Hollingworth (Rochdale District).

Semi-natural habitats and woodland cover

- Numerous semi-natural habitats scattered throughout the farmland including woodland, grassland, heathland and streams/brooks, some of which are locally designated as Sites of Biological Importance.
- Well wooded landscape with extensive tree and woodland cover with trees in stream valleys, along field boundaries and avenues of trees along roads. Tracts of dense broadleaved woodland also define cloughs, including large areas of ancient woodland.
- Reservoirs including Hollingworth Lake (designated as a Site of Biological Importance) enhance the nature conservation interest and are important for wintering waterfowl.

Archaeology and cultural heritage

- Numerous Conservation Areas reflecting the historic character of settlements, including Ainsworth, Nangreaves, Stone Breaks, Clegg Village and Riding Gate which contain clusters of Listed Buildings.
- A number of historic buildings are scattered throughout the landscape including Grade II* Listed Buildings including Clegg Hall, Grotton Hall and Birchinley Manor Farmhouse.
- Evidence of the area's industrial heritage in the form of old mill buildings, chimneys, disused quarries and mines and the Rochdale Canal.

Settlement, road pattern and rights of way

- Settlement mainly comprises scattered traditional stone farmsteads and halls, with some small groups of dwellings including Victorian terraces. The largest settlement is Ainsworth, located between Bury and Bolton. The foothills provide an important separation function between distinct urban areas.
- Numerous footpaths and bridleways cross and provide access to the landscape from nearby urban areas and also link to the moorlands. These include the Rotary Way, Oldham Way and Rochdale Way.
- Road pattern mainly comprises minor winding lanes and tracks connecting farms. Occasionally, more major routes cross through the LCT, including the M62 and several A-roads.

Views and perceptual qualities

- Variable visual character depending on topography and vegetation cover; there are long views across the urban conurbation to the West and South Pennine uplands beyond where vegetation allows. Areas within the Peak District National Park are visible from some vantage points. Other areas are visually enclosed due to valleys or vegetation which creates wooded skylines.
- Occasionally, masts and pylons/overhead lines intrude on the wooded skylines. Other intrusive modern influences include the M62 motorway and prominent views of urban development, including tower blocks breaking horizons.
- Other skyline features including chimneys, the war memorial in Tandle Hill Country Park and views to monuments on higher ground within the uplands including Peel Tower and Bishop Park Monument.
- Windswept and exposed on higher ground as the landscape transitions to the upland fringe. This contrasts with the sheltered, enclosed feel of the valleys which have limited views in and out.
- Areas with relatively high levels of tranquillity despite the close proximity of urban development and major infrastructure e.g. Tandle Hill Country Park.

Intactness and condition

Despite the close proximity of urban development, this is a strongly rural and traditional working landscape characterised by pasture fields, reservoirs and wooded stream cloughs with a transitional, upland fringe feel. Trees are frequent and provide a naturalistic quality to the landscape and characterise skylines. Locally designated habitats actively managed for the benefit of wildlife are found throughout the foothills landscape. Some former industrial and agricultural buildings have been converted to new uses, often retaining traditional features.

The deterioration of stone walls is visible in many places, with supplementation by post and wire fencing frequently occurring. Adjacent to settlements, there are often urban fringe influences including areas of horsiculture with associated structures and pony tape and numerous golf courses. Within the wooded stream valleys, invasive species are present including large areas of rhododendron which outcompete native vegetation. Anti-social behaviour including fly tipping and litter has an adverse effect on the landscape in some localities. Pylon lines and masts form intrusive modern features on the skyline, while noise and movement introduced by transport infrastructure can detract from the rural qualities and sense of tranquillity in the landscape.

Landscape sensitivity assessment

Criteria	Description	Sensitivity Rating
Physical character (including topography and scale)	- Strongly rolling and undulating landscape, rising towards the South and West Pennine Uplands. - Punctuated by locally distinctive hills (reaching a maximum elevation of 356 metres AOD) and carved by intricate stream valleys. - The overlying field pattern is small-medium in scale. - Frequent small-scale features occur throughout the landscape, including trees, stone walls, hedgerows and buildings. These contrast with larger-scale features including pylons and masts.	M-H
Natural character	- Land use is largely semi-improved pastures used for traditional sheep grazing. - Well wooded character with extensive tree and woodland cover with trees in stream valleys (including tracts of ancient woodland) and along field boundaries. - Semi-natural habitats include woodland, grassland, heathland and streams/brooks. A number of these are locally designated as Sites of Biological Importance, including Hollingworth Lake. - Areas of wet grassland often occur on lower ground.	M
Historic landscape character	- Conservation Areas including Ainsworth, Nangreaves (Mount Pleasant), Stone Breaks, Clegg Village and Riding Gate which contain clusters of Listed Buildings. - Other historic buildings are scattered throughout the foothills, including a number of Grade II* listed halls and farm houses. - Evidence of industrial heritage including frequent mill buildings, chimneys and the remnants of mines and quarries. - Fields are mostly of post-medieval origin, with some 20th century boundary loss and field agglomeration.	M
Form, density and setting of existing settlement / development	- A sparsely settled landscape. Settlement mainly comprises scattered traditional farmsteads and halls, small groups of dwellings and the larger village of Ainsworth. Mix of traditional vernacular and modern houses. - Immediate undeveloped backdrop and upland fringe setting to adjacent large urban areas, as well as small villages/scattered dwellings within the LCT. - In a number of places, this LCT provides an important sense of separation between distinct settlements and urban areas.	M-H
Views and visual character including skylines	- There are long views across the urban conurbation to the dramatic uplands beyond where the topography and vegetation cover allows. These views include the uplands of the Peak District National Park from some vantage points. - The frequent trees create wooded skylines, while mill chimneys and church towers/spires form landmark built features on the skyline. - Occasional overhead pylon lines and telecommunications masts are intrusive features on skylines. - Some elevated locations are marked by monuments e.g. Tandle Hill. There are also views to features on the adjacent uplands including Peel Tower (Grade II Listed). - Prominent views to nearby residential and industrial development in Greater Manchester, including tower blocks and large-scale warehouses.	M-H
Access and recreation	Dense network of footpaths and bridleways provide access between urban communities and the adjacent uplands. The LCT contains parts of the Oldham Way, Rotary Way and Rochdale Way.	M-H

	- The road network is relatively sparse and mostly limited to minor roads and tracks. Occasional A-roads and the M62 cross through the landscape. - Golf courses are a frequent feature within the landscape. - Reservoirs form popular recreation destinations, including Hollingworth Lake. - Pockets of Open Access Land are located on higher ground and within some valleys. Country Parks are located at Tandle Hill and Hollingworth.	
Perceptual and experiential qualities	- Highly varied perceptual qualities which are dependent on the elevation of the landscape, vegetation cover and the proximity of urban development. - Strong rural and upland fringe qualities despite the close proximity of urban development. These qualities are broken locally by pylon lines/overhead wires and masts which form occasional features. - The foothills have a strong visual and perceptual connection within the surrounding uplands.	M

Overall assessment of landscape sensitivity

Landscape Character Type level					
Development scenario	Sensitivity				
2-3 storey residential housing developments			M		
Commercial/industrial developments				M-H	
Areas of steep and/or complex landform, distinct hills, and prominent ridgelines would be of high sensitivity to any type or scale of development. These include (but are not limited to) Besom Hill, Tandle Hill, the ridgeline south of Bentgate, Strine Dale, Wood Brook (all within LCA 28), north of Harwood (LCA 20) and Green Hill (LCA 30). These areas are highly prominent, widely visible from existing urban areas and the surrounding uplands and provide an undeveloped setting to development. It is therefore of paramount importance that the guidance below is closely followed when development proposals are considered within these parts of the landscape.					

Special landscape qualities and key sensitivities

The following provides a summary of the special landscape qualities and key features/attributes that would be sensitive to change (e.g. as a result of development): - The strongly undulating landform punctuated by distinctive hills and carved by intricate stream valleys. - The undeveloped skylines, including both wooded and open skylines. Some hill summits are punctuated by monuments which form landmarks in the wider landscape (e.g. Tandle Hill). The views to landmarks in adjacent landscapes (e.g. Peel Tower on the adjacent uplands) are also distinct. - The distinct field pattern of enclosures demarked by a mixture of gritstone walls and hedgerows. - The sparsely settled traditional rural character of the landscape, with scattered farms and houses and occasional settlements constructed of a local stone vernacular, a number of which are designated as Conservation Areas. - Pockets of upland habitats amongst the pasture fields. Locally designated habitats including broadleaved woodland, wet grassland and wetlands (including Hollingworth Lake SBI). - Areas of woodland including tracts of ancient woodland along stream corridors. Creating wooded skylines and a sense of visual enclosure. - The undeveloped backdrop and the sense of separation that the landscape provides between distinct settlements. - Views to and from the Peak District National Park and the surrounding South and West Pennines which overlook the landscape. - Important recreational value of the landscape with important networks of public rights of way including Rotary Way, Oldham Way and Rochdale Way and destinations including Tandle Country Park and

Hollingworth Country Park.

- Features relating to the industrial heritage of the area including chimneys and mill buildings. Chimneys form distinct skyline features.
- Long views afforded from higher ground which reach across Greater Manchester and to the surrounding uplands.
- Pockets of tranquillity and remoteness despite the close proximity of urban development.

Guidance and opportunities for future development and landscape management / enhancement

Guidance and opportunities to consider within this Landscape Character Type include:

- Avoid areas of the landscape with distinct or complex landforms, including the locally prominent hills and intricate stream valleys, including Besom Hill, Tandle Hill, the ridgeline south of Bentgate, Strine Dale and Wood Brook.
- Ensure that the sense of separation the landscape provides between distinct settlements is retained.
- Retain the role of the landscape as an undeveloped backdrop to existing development.
- Strengthen the stone wall and hedgerow network, using local gritstone for walls and locally prevalent and climate resilient species for hedges. Any new boundaries should reflect local characteristics, including the planting of a new generation of hedgerow trees.
- Utilise areas of undulating landform and woodland cover to integrate new development into the landscape, avoiding sites designated for their nature conservation importance.
- Protect areas of semi-natural habitat including woodland, grassland and heathland which are locally designated as Sites of Biological Importance. Seek to enhance these where possible and provide linkages to form robust habitat networks.
- Protect areas of broadleaved woodland (particularly ancient woodland) which provide important semi-natural habitat and create wooded skylines. Utilise the screening effects of existing woodland to integrate development into the landscape where possible.
- Encourage the natural regeneration of woodland and wetland habitats within valleys (as well as new planting/habitat restoration) to improve their function in flood prevention and preventing diffuse pollution.
- Ensure that any development is in keeping with the form, density and vernacular of existing buildings. Avoid any large scale development to retain the sparsely settled character of the landscape.
- Protect the setting of important heritage assets within the landscape, including Conservation Areas/Listed Buildings.
- Retain the important recreational function of the landscape. Seek to improve public rights to way to encourage sustainable travel. Join up and promote multi-use routes to major destinations within the landscape including Hollingworth Country Park and Tandle Hill Country Park.
- Retain the distinct visual character of the landscape, including views to monuments on skylines which form local landmarks (including Tandle Hill War Memorial and Peel Tower), church spires and chimneys.
- Ensure any new development does not adversely affect the special qualities of the Peak District National Park, including its beautiful views, sense of tranquillity and dark night skies, and the vital benefits that flow beyond its boundary¹.
- Reinforce the structure of the landscape, through strengthening the stone wall and hedgerow network, using local gritstone for walls and locally prevalent and climate resilient species for hedges. Any new boundaries should reflect local characteristics, including the planting of a new generation of hedgerow trees.
- Design-in the introduction of SuDS to any new development, addressing any changes in hydrology (and subsequent knock-on effects such as increased diffuse pollution from agricultural run-off).

¹ Taken from the Peak District National Park Management Plan 2018-23 (Final consultation draft, March 2018)

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