

Landscape Character Assessment for Rufford Parish Council



Final Report, October 2018

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Contents

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Landscape Character Assessment Purpose
- 1.2. Future planning policy making
- 1.3. Future planning applications for development

2. Planning Policy & Document Review

- 2.1. Revised National Planning Policy Framework, July 2018
- 2.2. Approach to Landscape Character Assessment
- 2.3. National Character Profile Area 32: Lancashire and Amounderness Plain
- 2.4. Liverpool City Region SHELMA
- 2.5. The West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 & the New Local Plan
- 2.6. Rufford and Holmeswood Parish Area Plans

3. Planning Context

- 3.1. Planning and Environmental Designations
- 3.2. Heritage
- 3.3. Agriculture
- 3.4. Drainage issues
- 3.5. Ecology

4. Area Survey

- 4.1. Area Assessment Methodology
- 4.2. Landscape Character Typology
- 4.3. Aesthetics
- 4.4. Tranquillity
- 4.5. Cultural
- 4.6. Natural Factors
- 4.7. Ecology
- 4.8. Water
- 4.9. Access

5. Stakeholder Consultation

- 5.1. Historical and cultural associations
- 5.2. Significant Landscape Value

6. Conclusions

7. Recommendations

8. Appendices

- 8.1. Field Survey Map
- 8.2. Survey proforma
- 8.3. Photographic record
- 8.4. Stakeholder list and questions
- 8.5. Campaign to Protect Rural England, & Jackie Copley Resume

1. Introduction

1.1. Landscape Character Assessment Purpose

Rufford Parish Council commissioned a Landscape Character Assessment for the Rufford and Holmeswood Area. It will be used by the Parish Council and others when progressing planning policy and taking development management decisions in the future, including forming an important part of the evidence base for progressing a new West Lancashire Local Plan and a Neighbourhood Plan for the area, should one be progressed.

A Landscape Character Assessment is the process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features that make landscapes distinctive. This process results in the production of a Landscape Character Assessment, which gives a finer grained understanding of landscape and set out key characteristics and special qualities.

An assessment provides detailed descriptions of the landscape and in some cases also provide strategy and guidance for the future of the landscape, including its planning, management and conservation.

Landscape is more than just 'the view'

The relationship between people, place and nature is the ever changing backdrop to our daily lives. What turns land into landscape is our perception of a place, combining how we appreciate its aesthetic qualities - its patterns, colours, smells, textures and sounds - and the associations we attach to them, such as memories, feelings of familiarity or a sense of awe.

Landscape is everywhere; from mountains, uplands, moors and the seascapes of our stunning coastline, to rolling countryside and traditional green parks in urban and rural areas, each with their own distinctive character and sense of place. All landscapes matter - wherever they are and whatever their condition.

Rufford with Holmeswood has a valuable rural landscape, with special historical, cultural merit due to agricultural traditions and ecological importance, that ought to be protected and enhanced when planning for the future of the area. For the Parish Council and local people this is the primary purpose of the Landscape Character Assessment.

1.2. Future planning policy making

The revised National Planning Policy Framework, July 2018 sets out the Government's planning policies for enabling growth across England. It provides a framework within which locally-prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced.

Landscape Character Assessments can be used to help inform the drafting of planning policy in both Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans. Including planning policy reference to landscape is helpful as it provides an opportunity to identify what makes the place where you live unique, and to ensure that its special qualities and distinctive characteristics are protected, and enhanced.

A commonly used definition of 'landscape' is that of the European Landscape Convention:

“an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and or human factors”.

England's landscapes are hugely diverse: England has 159 distinct National Character Profile Areas, including ten National Parks and 34 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). Our landscapes vary because of their underlying geology, soils, topography, land cover, hydrology, historic and cultural development, and climatic considerations. These physical and socio-economic influences combine to make one landscape different from another. Rufford is located in Natural England's NCPA 32: Lancashire and Amounderness Plain.

1.3. Future planning applications for development

Planning applications will be submitted to West Lancashire Borough Council for permission to develop land in and around Rufford with Holmeswood parish in the future. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The National Planning Policy Framework, July 2018 must be taken into account in preparing the development plan (local plan and neighbourhood plan), and is a material consideration in planning decisions. Planning policies and decisions must also reflect relevant international obligations and statutory requirements.

By having a completed Landscape Character Assessment Parish Councillors, planning officers and developers, will better understand the local landscape character when considering how best to bring needed new development forward in order to protect and enhance Rufford and Holmeswood's landscape. In recent years there has been new residential development and it is considered locally that there was a missed opportunity for more locally tailored and distinct design. The Landscape Character Assessment articulates what Rufford and Holmewood aspire for the landscape when planning applications are decided in the future.

2. Planning Policy & Document Review

2.1. Revised National Planning Policy Framework, July 2018

The Government sets out its expectations for the landscape by local planning authorities in National Planning Policy Framework, July 2018 Paragraph 20, that “Strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development, and make sufficient provision for ... conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.”

Achieving well designed places

The Government sets out in Section 12: Achieving well-designed places, Paragraph 127, that “planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and
- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

Green Belt protection

The NPPF, 2018 goes on to set out once Green Belt designated land is defined it should have positive policies to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.

Climate change

Local planning authorities and communities are urged to take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change, taking into account the long-term implications for flood risk, coastal change, water supply, biodiversity and landscapes, and the risk of overheating from rising temperatures, however the cumulative landscape and visual impacts must be fully understood in order to be satisfactorily addressed and this is where a Landscape Character Assessment can be used to inform future plan making.

Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

With regards to conserving and enhancing the natural environment, NPPF, 2018, Paragraph 170, states “Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services - including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land (BMV: Land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification), and of trees and woodland;
- c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;
- d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
- e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and
- f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.

Paragraph 171 states “Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework⁵³; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.

Footnote ⁵³ *Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality.”*

Other than those set out above, important landscapes referred to in the NPPF include:

- **Heritage asset:** A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. It includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).
- **Historic environment:** All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible, buried or submerged, and landscaped and planted or managed flora.
- **Nature Recovery Network:** An expanding, increasingly connected, network of wildlife-rich habitats supporting species recovery, alongside wider benefits such as carbon capture, water quality improvements, natural flood risk management and recreation. It includes the existing network of protected sites and other wildlife rich habitats as well as and landscape or catchment scale recovery areas where there is coordinated action for species and habitats.

For the Landscape Character Assessment achieving well designed places, beneficial use of open and protected Green Belt, climate change resilience, conserving and enhancing the natural environment including Nature Recovery Networks, heritage assets, historic environment is important.

2.2. An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, October 2014 by Natural England

An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, October 2014 by Natural England says in its foreword that:

“Landscape reflects the relationship between people and place, and the part it plays in forming the setting to our everyday lives. It is a product of the interaction of the natural and cultural components of our environment, and how they are understood and experienced by people. This Approach to Landscape Character Assessment follows a well-established process developed over many years. By setting down a robust, auditable and transparent baseline Landscape Character Assessment not only helps us to understand our landscapes, it also assists in informing judgements and decisions concerning the management of change. The publication of this document should help to generate discussion and encourage methods, techniques and skills relating to Landscape Character Assessment evolve.”

Background

The European Landscape Convention (ELC)¹ definition of “landscape” is:

“ ...an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and / or human factors.”

Our landscapes are extremely important to us; they are part of our cultural heritage. With sympathetic planning, design and management they offer an opportunity to provide a more harmonious link between people and the natural world, for the benefit of both.

Sensitive, informed, and integrated approaches should help us all to conserve, enhance, restore and regenerate landscapes that are attractive, diverse and publically valued, showing that environmental, social and economic benefits can go hand in hand.

Over the centuries writers, artists, and others have described and enthused about our landscapes. They have linked them with the social and economic processes and practices of the period, successfully describing and articulating what it is that is special about our landscapes, whether urban, rural, or somewhere in between. Importantly, they illustrated what makes one landscape different from another. Appreciation and understanding of our landscapes has increased over time, latterly via qualitative and quantitative methods associated with the social and natural sciences and often prompted by the need and desire to record, understand, influence, and manage change.

One of Natural England's predecessors, the Countryside Agency (formerly the Countryside Commission), had a long association with areas designated as being of national landscape importance, such as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. However, it was also concerned about the active management of the wider countryside and its work highlighted the need for a consistent and comprehensive understanding of what gave the countryside of England its' character. So, following on from work in the 1980s the Countryside Commission and others developed the technique of landscape assessment - in 1993 Landscape Assessment Guidance was published. From its' outset, in the early 1990s, the "Countryside Character Programme" was designed "to be a framework for helping to incorporate the rich heritage of landscape diversity into present day decisions, not as a process that seeks to prevent activities." It was envisaged that the Programme would have 4 main uses:

- to provide a landscape context;
- to guide policy development and help to target resources;
- to identify opportunities for local action, and;
- to provide a base for advice.

Over the years this work evolved to give us the best practice approach, Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland, (2002), which has over the years helped to inform the management of change and deliver sustainable development.

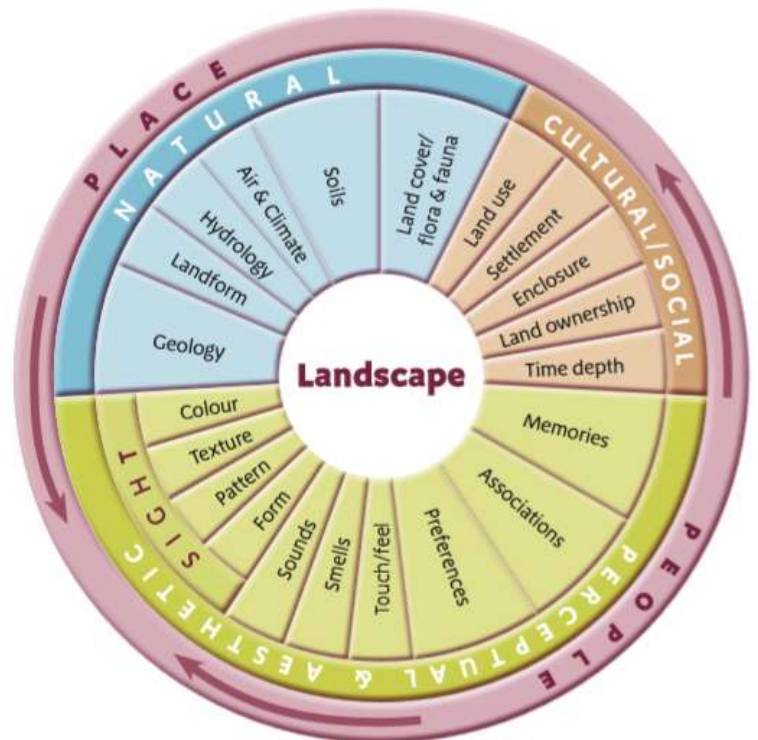
Our landscapes vary because of, amongst other variables, their underlying geology, soils, topography, land cover, hydrology, historic and cultural development, and climatic considerations. The combination of characteristics arising from these physical and socio economic influences, and their often complex interrelationships, makes one landscape different from another. Landscape character may be defined as a distinct and recognisable pattern of elements, or characteristics, in the landscape that make one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is the process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique

combination of elements and features (characteristics) that make landscapes distinctive (Figure 1. What is Landscape?). This process results in the production of a Landscape Character Assessment.

Figure 1. What is Landscape?

The Landscape Character Assessment process is used increasingly to inform urban, or townscape, assessments, and Seascape Character Assessments. The scope of the ELC applies to natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas and includes land, inland water and marine areas. As the European Landscape Convention acknowledges, “the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas.”.



All landscapes matter to someone. By setting down a robust, auditable and transparent, baseline Landscape Character Assessment can not only help us to understand our landscapes, it can also assist in informing judgements and decisions concerning the management of change. The involvement of people in the process of LCA is key. Both communities of place and communities of interest must be engaged in LCA.

This Approach to Landscape Character Assessment follows on from the influential Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002). The document is split into three parts.

Part One explains the background to LCA and the informed management of change. It suggests who the intended audience for LCAs are, and why having an LCA matters, the benefits to local areas noted for their landscape are numerous. Five key principles for LCA are referred to

In Part Two the Process is set out in more detail. There are four key steps for a LCA process:

1. Defining the LCA purpose to understand the parameters for the study;
2. Desk study to decide on relevant information to gather, analyse and key stakeholders and people who may be interested. This stage leads to the preparation of a survey form.
3. Field study to record relevant field survey information, and then to review of findings.
4. Classification and description of landscape character types and areas - this helps to write up the report and draw conclusions and recommendations.

By implementing the four stages above a clear and objective appraisal of the landscape can take place, leading to the recording of landscape classification and description. The records will lead to an output that will draw on data to form a robust report to guide future decision making and taking (the former relates to local and neighbourhood plan production and the latter to decisions on planning application - this is an important distinction.)

Part Three sets out relevant technical annexes including a glossary of terms and a Landmap (Wales).

2.3. National Character Profile Area 32: Lancashire and Amounderness Plain

As part of Natural England's responsibilities as set out in the [Natural Environment White Paper](#), [Biodiversity 2020](#) and the [European Landscape Convention](#), it revised profiles for England's 159 National Character Areas (NCAs) in 2014.

These are areas that share similar landscape characteristics, and which follow natural lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries, making them a good decision making framework for the natural environment.

Each profile includes a description of the natural and cultural features that shape our landscapes, how the landscape has changed over time, the current key drivers for ongoing change, and a broad analysis of each area's characteristics and ecosystem services. Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEOs) are suggested, which draw on this integrated information. The SEOs offer guidance on the critical issues, which could help to achieve sustainable growth and a more secure environmental future.

Rufford in NCPA 32. Lancashire and Amounderness Plain

Rufford Parish is located within the National Character Area Profile 32. Lancashire and Amounderness Plain (see map extract below), with key characteristics for the area as follows:

- A rich patchwork of pasture, arable fields and drainage ditches, on a relatively flat to gently undulating coastal landscape.
- Extensive views across the plain, within which small to medium-sized blocks of mixed woodland (wind-sculpted near the coast) provide punctuation and vertical accents.
- Thickly blanketed by glacial till, with poorly-drained peat-filled hollows that give rise to mosses and meres (now mainly remnants).
- Medium-sized to large fields form an open, large-scale agricultural landscape. There is a high density of relict pastoral field ponds on the eastern side of the NCA.
- Localised areas of intensive market gardening provide seasonally varied colours and textures.
- A complex network of wide meandering rivers, raised drainage ditches and dykes divide and drain the landscape. Along with fragmented relicts of reed beds and mosses, and historic place names, these provide a reminder of the areas heritage of wetland reclamation.
- Coastal habitats and large areas of open water are of international importance for their migratory and wintering wildfowl and wading bird populations.

- Mixed arable and pastoral farmland habitats support a nationally important assemblage of breeding farmland bird species.
- A complex network of channelized rivers, canals, drainage ditches and dykes supports a nationally important population of water vole.
- The Leeds and Liverpool Canal all cross the NCA.
- Designed landscapes associated with large houses are locally common in the south, where they provide enclosure in an otherwise open landscape.
- A rectilinear network of lanes and tracks - usually without fences or hedges- subdivides the landscape, and isolated brick farmsteads occur in rural areas.
- Tourism is an important contributor to the local economy, with many opportunities for informal recreation.
- Several long-distance paths cross the NCA, including the Lancashire Coastal Way, the Ribble Way and the Wyre Way, as well as canal towpaths.

Designated Nature Conservation Sites

The coastal habitats along with the large areas of open water and linear canals such as at Martin Mere, Mere Sands Wood and Marton Mere, are of international importance for their migratory and wintering wildfowl and wading bird populations. Both are designated Ramsar sites, all comprise the same areas as their equivalent SPAs.

Soils and Agricultural Land Classification

The basin and coastal peats together with podzolic soils overlying the Shirdley Hill Sands produce high quality soils over much of the area. Grade 1 soils occur south of the River Ribble and Grade 2 occurs in the north. There are 10 main soilscape types in this area:

- 1) slowly permeable seasonally wet slightly acid but base-rich loamy and clayey soils (39 per cent);
- 2) naturally wet very acid sandy and loamy soils (16 per cent);
- 3) loamy and clayey soils of coastal flats with naturally high groundwater (8 per cent);
- 4) raised bog peat soils (7 per cent);
- 5) slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage (7 per cent);
- 6) fen peat soils (7 per cent);
- 7) loamy and clayey flood plain soils with naturally high groundwater (5 per cent);
- 8) salt marsh soils (3 per cent);
- 9) loamy and sandy soils with naturally high groundwater and a peaty surface (2 per cent); and,
- 10) freely draining slightly acid loamy soils (1 per cent).

Habitat Distribution/coverage

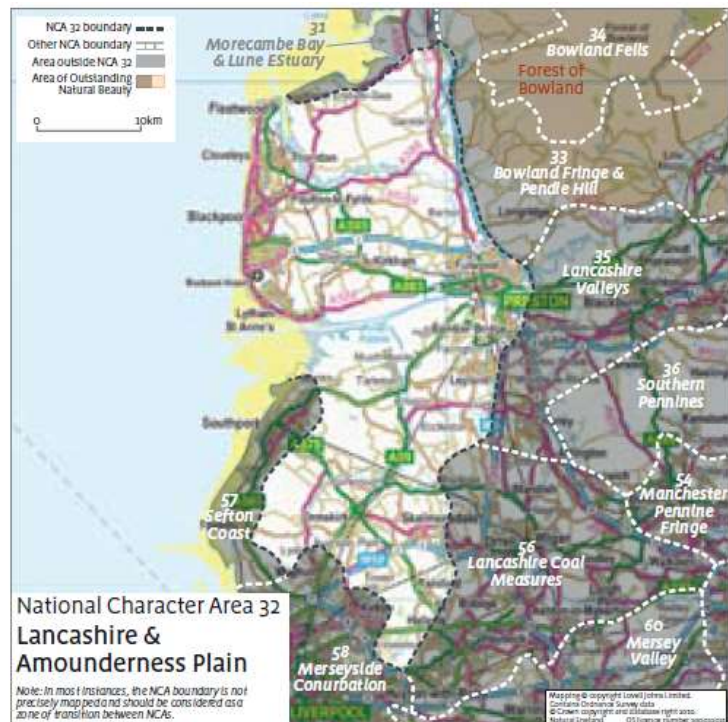
A large scale agricultural landscape with a patchwork of pasture and arable fields dominates the area. Arable fields provide a habitat for farmland birds such as the lapwing, grey partridge, corn bunting and skylark. High densities of field ponds are characteristic of the north of the area providing an important habitat for aquatic plants, invertebrates and amphibians. During the winter months, large areas of stubble provide important feeding grounds for internationally important flocks of pink footed geese and whooper swans.

Remnant mosslands such as the Martin Mere/Halsall Moss and Cockerham /Pilling Moss complexes are of considerable nature conservation interest. These support bog plant communities dominated by sphagnum mosses, cotton grass and purple moor grass with heather, cross leaved heath, sundew, cranberry and the nationally scarce bog rosemary. Invertebrate populations are diverse and on some sites include the rare bog bush cricket, the uncommon large heath butterfly and black darter dragonfly.

Biodiversity

The NCPA 32. Lancashire and Amounderness Plain is an intensively farmed landscape, and agricultural changes over the past 200 years have seen the majority of habitats considerably reduced in size and quality. Despite this, the NCA supports a range of important habitats and species, and contains one Special Area of Conservation, three Special Protection Areas and three Ramsar sites, with over 2,700 ha nationally designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

In addition, the area has seven Local Nature Reserves and 219 Local Wildlife Sites, which provide further habitats for wildlife and also opportunities for communities to engage with and enjoy nature close to where they live.



The principal priority habitats within the NCPA.32 are coastal and flood plain grazing marsh and salt marsh, with some arable margins, lowland raised bog, lowland meadows, fens and lowland heathland also represented. The large number of ponds and marl pits are a particularly important but vulnerable resource.

Most of the prime agricultural land within the NCPA.32 is former mossland - under 400 ha of lowland moss habitat remains. What is left exists as small, isolated, hydrologically damaged remnants of a once-extensive moss resource. Only one of these remnants, Winmarleigh Moss SSSI, now retains anything like the original raised mire conditions supporting Sphagnum mosses.

The NCPA.32 is home to two plant species endemic to the British Isles: purple ramping fumitory and Isle of Man cabbage. The coastal habitats, along with the large areas of open water and linear canals (such as at Martin Mere, Mere Sands Wood and Marton Mere), are of international importance for their populations of migratory and wintering wildfowl and wading birds. The intertidal flats of the Ribble Estuary support thousands of birds including the knot, oystercatcher, redshank, dunlin, curlew and godwit, while the extensive areas of grazed salt marsh are of considerable importance for feeding flocks of widgeon, pink-footed goose, whooper swan and Bewick's swan. The ungrazed salt marshes

on the Wyre Estuary are of importance for their plant communities, including large areas of sea lavender, sea purslane, thrift and sea aster.

Blocks of mixed woodland occur throughout the landscape. Wood anemone and false brome are characteristic of the ground flora. Red squirrels are especially important in woodlands dominated by conifers, where the introduced grey is not as competitive. Wet woodlands with alder are common in wet hollows or areas of impeded drainage and provide a habitat for willow tit, lesser spotted woodpecker and turtle dove.

Large areas of open water and linear canals such as at Martin Mere, Mere Sands Wood and Marton Mere are important as habitats for breeding and wintering wildfowl. These habitats support internationally important populations of wintering pink footed goose, teal and pintail, as well as nationally important numbers of Bewick's swan, gadwall, whooper swan and shoveler. The Lancaster Canal supports rare aquatic plants such as flowering rush, greater spearwort and various pond weeds.

Landscape attributes

The complex network of raised drainage ditches and dykes with localised reed beds is a reminder of the area's heritage of wetland reclamation. Shallow lakes exist at Martin Mere, Mere Sands Wood and Barrow Sands. There are numerous historic structures associated with land drainage including former wind and steam driven pump houses and windmills. A few isolated windmills built to drain the water and grind the first crops of corn have also survived on the Plain.

Key cultural services (inspiration, education and wellbeing)

Sense of place/inspiration: A sense of place is provided by the generally flat, fertile and gently rolling coastal plain, interrupted by isolated hills. The plain is dissected by wide, meandering rivers and an extensive network of rectilinear raised drainage ditches and dykes, with wind pumps that form distinctive features in the landscape - a reminder of the area's heritage of wetland reclamation from mosses and meres.

Extensive intertidal sand and mudflats are backed by remnant dunes and some of the largest salt marshes in the country.

Settlement pattern: The development of settlements on the plain is a relatively recent occurrence and coincides largely with the drainage of the marshes in the 19th century and expansion during the industrial revolution. However the plain still remains rural in character with isolated brick farmsteads, small villages and numerous manor houses. The main areas of settlement which influence the plain are located at the planned Victorian coastal resorts such as Blackpool and Lytham S Anne's, and the large inland towns including Preston, Ormskirk and Leyland.

Local vernacular and building materials: Isolated brick farms are common. Older buildings and loose knit linear villages along embanked roads on low ridges are found at the edge of the mosses. Brick, cobble, stone and slate replaced clay and thatch from the late 17th century. There is some survival of timber framed buildings in the central and southern parts of the area dating from 15th to 17th century.

Sense of history: The history of the landscape is evident in its transformation from an area of extensive lowland raised mires to productive reclaimed farmland, beginning in the 18th and 19th centuries and reflected in the regular drainage ditches and dykes, canals, windmills and isolated red-brick farm buildings. Little evidence remains of the area's former landscape, aside from small areas of remnant mosses or fen carr that provide indications of strip cultivation on boundaries of ancient enclosure between the rivers Wyre and Ribble, and place names that refer to 'moss' or 'mere'. Aspects of history likely to be most evident to the general public are to be found in the Victorian seaside towns of Blackpool and Lytham St Anne's, as well as in the area's parklands; these are most notable to the south, and include Knowsley Park, Rufford Abbey, Lytham Hall and Stanley Park.

Recreation: There are many opportunities for informal recreation, particularly along the Fylde coast. The area is surrounded by large population centres, including Liverpool to the south and Preston in the centre; urban areas are also concentrated along the Fylde and Sefton coasts. Wyre Estuary Country Park and Lostock Valley Country Park are the only statutory country parks within the NCA, although Cuerden Valley Park fulfils a similar function. All the major conurbations have municipal parks. A number of the nature reserves within the area are free and open to the public, and offer opportunities for quiet recreation and enjoyment of the natural world. These include Mere Sands Wood, Marshside, Hesketh Bank, Fleetwood Marsh, Marton Mere and Longton Brickcroft.

Brockholes and Martin Mere require payment for access, and there is restricted public access to the Ribble Estuary National Nature Reserve.

Supporting Document 2: Landscape change

In the supporting document 2, key landscape changes are observed, including:

Trees and woodlands

- About 4 per cent of the NCA area is existing woodland is ancient woodland (156 ha), of this 17 per cent (27 ha) is plantation on ancient woodland sites.
- Existing woodlands, which are important landscape features, often lack management. In 2003 there was limited evidence of any active management under the Woodland Grant Scheme.
- Some new woodlands have been planted particularly in the south, through the Mersey Community Forest.

Boundary features

- The estimated boundary length for the NCA is about 6,538 km. The total length of Environmental Stewardship agreements for linear features as at March 2011 is approximately 1,229 km.
- The most frequent Environmental Stewardship agreements for linear features as at March 2011 were for hedgerows (886 km) and ditches (259 km).

Agriculture

- Changes in agricultural practices have resulted in field expansion and a decline in the biodiversity of the landscape.

- Between 2000 and 2009 there has been a decrease in the number of holders of 21 per cent (2,774 to 2,179).
- Between 2000 and 2009 sheep numbers decreased by 18 per cent, cattle numbers decreased by 16 per cent and pig numbers decreased by 56 per cent.

Settlement and development

- Large scale residential development and introduction of urbanising elements into the rural landscape such as golf courses and static caravan sites, as well as substantial leisure complexes. Particularly on the fringes of the major coastal urban areas and in the vicinity of the M6 motorway corridor.
- The conversion of historic brick-built barns for use as residential dwellings or for intensive agricultural practices, with harshly coloured imported bricks and other inappropriate materials have, in some areas, resulted in poorly integrated developments which compromise the historic buildings and the wider landscape setting of groups of farm buildings.
- Waste management developments including treatment works and land raising have already had a significant influence on local landscape character, particularly on the Ribble and Wyre estuaries.
- Tranquillity and intrusion levels have declined significantly in the past fifty years, with the total 'undisturbed' area of the NCA having decreased from 50 per cent in the 1960s to 18 per cent in 2007. The largest 'undisturbed' areas remain on either side of the A59 around Hesketh Bank, Rufford and Halsall, and to the east of the A59 around Mawdesley, as well as to the north of the NCA on either side of the River Wyre.

Semi-natural habitat

- A decline in landscape diversity has been caused by the expansion of commercial scale agriculture. Ongoing loss of permanent grassland and use of herbicides and fertilisers have caused the loss of wild flowers within fields and eutrophication of watercourses and wetlands.
- Drainage and flood control have affected important ditches, mosses and areas of fen carr. Lowering of water tables (due to agriculture or abstraction for development) has caused loss of characteristic wetland vegetation and encroachment by scrub; it also threatens damage to archaeological remains.
- Many ponds are now in the late stages of natural succession and are starting to fill with silt and vegetation. Others have been infilled for agricultural purposes or have been lost to road construction and building developments, especially in urban fringe areas. Drainage, pollution and agricultural runoff are also an issue.

Historic features

- Degradation and loss of the area's distinctive field ponds has occurred as a result of drainage, pollution by agricultural runoff, natural succession and infilling. These ponds are important cultural remnants of historic marl and brick pits and have valuable relic landscape features.
- Lowering of water tables (due to agriculture or abstraction for development) threatens damage to archaeological remains.

- There have been a significant number of barn conversions throughout the area.
- In 1918 about 2 per cent of the NCA was historic parkland. By 1995 it was estimated that 50 per cent of that area had been lost. By 2003 about 62 per cent of the remaining parkland was covered by a Historic Parkland Grant, and 2 per cent included in an agri-environmental scheme.

Coasts and rivers

- In the River Wyre area in the north of the NCA, the Pilling and Garstang-Woodplumpton aquifers are 'over-licensed', whilst streams forming part of the River Wyre catchment within this NCA have 'water available'.
- The River Ribble catchment in the centre of the NCA generally has 'water available'. In the Douglas area, groundwater units of the Rufford Aquifer in the north and east have 'water available' whilst units in the west and south are 'over licensed' or 'over abstracted'. Surface water resources generally have 'water available' with the exception of Eller Brook, a tributary of the River Douglas that drains an area to the north east and east of Ormskirk; this is 'over abstracted' owing to summer irrigation abstractions for agriculture.
- The Ribble Estuary and its associated banks and channels exert a significant control on the evolution of both the important tourist areas of Southport frontage (Sefton Coast NCA) and the Fylde Peninsula. It contains internationally important areas of environmental designation and is naturally accreting, which has allowed widespread land reclamation in the past.
- The Fylde Peninsula, including Lytham, Blackpool and Cleveleys, has potential to be affected by changes within these systems. There is a sand dune system to the south at Lytham, which is fronted by a wide sandy beach, although the majority of dunes have been significantly modified and built upon.
- From central Blackpool to Anchorsholme, high protected cliffs back the sand beach, while north of Anchorsholme the frontage is low-lying and potentially at flood risk from both the open coast and the Wyre estuary. The frontage is heavily urbanised, with the town of Blackpool spreading into Thornton and Cleveleys and much of the shoreline now held seaward of its natural position.

Minerals

- Marl pits excavated in the 19 century are associated with a particular soil type, the Salop and Salwick Flint Associations, which contain deposits of lime. These pits have since filled with water to form ponds.
- Continued sand and gravel extraction which may result in significant landscape change, including the substitution of managed pasture and arable farmland with water bodies and other new habitats of nature conservation and recreational potential.

Drivers of change

Climate change

- Evidence from the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCP09) shows that over the coming century the area's climate is expected to become warmer and wetter in

winter and hotter and drier in summer. Under the medium emissions scenario by 2080: mean winter temperatures will increase by 2.6 °C, mean summer temperatures will increase by 3.7 °C, winter precipitation will increase by 16 per cent, summer precipitation will decrease by 22 per cent and there will be an increased frequency of extreme events (floods/drought).

- The North West Landscape Framework Climate Change Assessment 2010/11 identifies urban areas as having a higher vulnerability to climate change due to their lack of habitats and for generally being located on the flattest areas of land. These two factors restrict species movement and ecosystem functionality.
- The predicted rising sea levels are likely result in an increased risk of flooding, high tides and tidal surges. While the existing flood defences would provide much protection, there is a risk that the extensive mudflats and saltmarshes would be lost. This would have a major impact on the internationally significant bird feeding grounds in these areas.
- The increase in sea levels and storm surges might change the rate of sediment input to dunes and even the location of sand dunes along the coast. Pressures for hard sea defence works to combat this risk may themselves alter the dynamics of sand movement.
- Prolonged periods of drought, could lead to reduced ground water and drying out of peat habitats making them more prone to soil erosion and wildfire events.
- Smaller, fragmented patches of habitat are vulnerable to loss of biodiversity arising from changes in rainfall and temperature.
- More intense and more frequent rainfall may lead to an increase in flooding and an increased risk of soil erosion or weakened soil structure due to flash flooding. There is also an associated greater likelihood of pollution of watercourses downstream, and a potential increased risk of landslides, during times of increased rainfall.
- Potential for more favourable conditions for crops and other farming practices not presently possible within this area may also lead to an alteration in the character of the landscape as a result of changing cropping patterns.
- Threat to trees and woodland from changing pests and diseases and extreme weather events.
- Possible expansion of arable or energy crops into areas currently under permanent grassland.

Other key drivers

- There is continued pressure for the construction of large scale residential development at the edges to local villages and introduction of urbanising elements into the rural landscape.
- There is continued pressure for development including pylons, communication masts, sewage works and other infrastructure including wind turbines and solar farms.
- The increased development is likely to result in continued pressure for the construction of services such as sewers and pipelines, which may destroy small relict areas of valuable dune habitat, and further fragment the small remaining tracts of dune.
- Development has potential to lower the water table due to increased water abstraction, which may affect dune slack and pools. Pressure for development is

particularly intense on the fringes of the major coastal urban areas and along strategic transport corridors are also attractive locations for large out-of-town retail, industrial and leisure complexes.

- The area has a large number of historic brick-built barns, which are under pressure for conversion for use as residential dwellings or for intensive agricultural practices.
- On the fringes of the marsh increased recreation can lead to problems such as erosion and fly-tipping. Car parks are often visually intrusive in these fragile, open landscapes and may lead to erosion.
- The degradation of valuable wetland habitats due to polluted run-off from adjacent farmland and intensive agricultural practices such as drainage, intensive sheep grazing and hedgerow removal is continuing. The drainage and the lowering of local water tables may lead to drying out on the fringes of mosses and marshes so that these habitats are vulnerable to the invasion of birch and willow scrub.
- There is pressure for continued sand and gravel extraction which may result in significant landscape change. This may include the substitution of managed pasture and arable farmland with water bodies and other new habitats of nature conservation and recreational potential.
- The threat of water-borne pollutants from some of the major industrial premises is ongoing. Such contamination could have a severe impact on vulnerable ecosystems such as the open coastal marsh.
- The future expansion and restoration of waste management developments including treatment works and land raising.
- Economic pressures causing changes in land ownership and development are resulting in the fragmentation of historic estates and their associated designed parklands, trees, shelterbelts and coverts. This may lead to the loss or degradation of historic landmark woodlands which are key features in this relatively large scale open agricultural landscape.
- Development pressure from new sources of fossil fuels, such as shale gas.

2.4. Liverpool City Region SHELMA

GL Hearn (part of Capita Real Estate) produced the Liverpool City Region (LCR), the Strategic Housing and Employment Land Assessment (SHELMA). Despite West Lancashire not being a constituent authority of LCR Combined Authority. The evidence base for the Spatial Development Strategy refers West Lancashire as part of the functioning housing and economic markets and highlights West Lancashire as a place for future growth.

The SHELMA executive summary sets out that Liverpool is the largest economy within the LCR Functioning Economic Market Area (FEMA) and contributes 34% of GVA. This is followed by Wirral at 14%. The smallest economies within the FEMA are those of St Helens (9%) and West Lancashire (7%). Whilst Wirral and Sefton are the authorities with the next highest number of jobs with 112,000 (16%) and 102,000 (14%) jobs respectively. The remaining four local authorities all have lower numbers of jobs: 68,000 jobs (9%) in St. Helens; 67,000 jobs (9%) in Knowsley; 60,000 jobs (8%) in Halton; and 53,000 jobs (7%) in West Lancashire.

In Figure 4 the SHELMA shows West Lancashire baseline scenario as 6,000 jobs and 6,800 with growth applied. GL Hearn then translates this as 221 dwelling per annum for the

baseline scenario or 241 dpa with growth applied. They state in Paragraph 6.13 that: “A detailed interrogation of household formation rates suggests that for Halton and West Lancashire there is local evidence that more positive household formation amongst those aged 25-34 and 35-44 would be a reasonable planning assumption. These are therefore adjusted in the projections.”

The SHELMA concludes that Objectively Assessed Housing Need for West Lancashire is 241 dwellings per annum. OAHN figure is calculated by considering which is higher of the demographic-based housing need figure or the economic-led housing need figures. In Halton, Warrington, and West Lancashire the Economic Baseline suggests a higher housing need than suggested by the demographic-based modelling. In these authorities GL Hearn make the case that it is appropriate to consider the housing need resulting from the Economic Baseline Scenario as the minimum basis for calculation of OAN.

An affordability uplift of 10% of the demographic-based need figure is then applied in West Lancashire. Fifty-seven homes per year are identified for older households.

The evidence base has not yet been examined. In mid-September, new household projections, which form a key part of the government's new standard method for assessing housing need, will be published by the government's Office for National Statistics (ONS). As a result, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) said, when the revised NPPF was published in July, that it expected the new household projections to also show a lower expected growth rate. This should mean a downward adjustment in housing figures.

2.5. The West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027

The Local Plan was adopted by Council on 16 October 2013 and shows Rufford as a SP1 Rural Sustainable Village. In the spatial portrait it shows West Lancashire to have a population of 110,300 (Office of National Statistics Mid-Year Estimates 2009). The main towns are Skelmersdale, Ormskirk and Burscough, the latter is situated to the south of Rufford, and accommodates 8,668 people.

The Local Plan shows the Borough to be a predominately rural area with a large proportion of the best and most versatile land (BMV land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification) in Lancashire and the highest area of wildlife sites in the County. The River Douglas flows east through the Borough and poses a flood risk. The mossland and agricultural land form a key part of the local natural assets.

Key visitor attractions include Martin Mere (Wildfowl and Wetland Trust), Rufford Old Hall (National Trust) and Ormskirk Market. Other key recreational site is Mere Sands Wood (Lancashire Wildlife Trust) and the Leeds and Liverpool Canal and River Douglas with its network of footpaths.

Affordable housing is scarce across the area, particularly in rural parts of the Borough. The majority, 80%, of the economically active age group is in employment.

In Paragraph 2.38 the local plan states that “Rufford is small settlement located on the A59 in the north east of the Borough, with a population 2,048 people (2001 Census). The village lacks basic village lacks basic facilities and looks to Burscough for many of its

services. Rufford is reasonably well served by public transport with its own railway station on the Ormskirk to Preston Line, and a number of regular bus services providing links to Southport, Preston, Ormskirk, Burscough, Tarleton and Chorley. Rufford contains the heritage assets and tourist attraction of Rufford Old Hall. Other smaller settlements in the Northern Parishes include Holmeswood and Mere Brow.

Key issues identified in the spatial portrait that are relevant to Rufford are:

- Need for affordable housing, particularly for older people.
- Infrastructure capacity - the community infrastructure, especially drainage is at capacity and until resolved the area cannot absorb more development.
- Green Infrastructure - the linkages between the natural assets need to be maximised.
- Health is an issue in parts of the Borough, so opportunities for health and well-being need to be optimised.
- High grade farm land (BMV grades 1-3a ALC) is a natural asset that ought to be protected for future generations.
- Traffic - there are congestion hot spots.
- Transport - there are deficiencies (recent problems of Northern Rail services have been highlighted in the press with a threat of a takeover of the franchise, furthermore Lancashire County Council has axed many rural bus services due to cuts in funding from Government).
- Flooding and Climate Change - high risk flooding from the River Douglas and drainage issue associated to capacity and pumping need to be resolved.
- Environment/heritage - the need for development should be pursued in Tandem with the protection, conservation and enhancement of the environment. This includes the safeguarding and enhancement of West Lancashire's distinctive landscapes, its nature conservation and heritage assets, historic places and public realm.

The Local Plan Vision states the Northern Parish (including Rufford) area will continue its important horticultural role, and will have to accommodate more than 800 dwellings, equal to 3.5 hectares. The Local Plan acknowledges that the Government has let brownfield reuse slip down its agenda, wherever possible, derelict sites will be regenerated to meet needs, and inappropriate development in the floodplain will not be allowed. Objectives of most relevance to Rufford include health, natural environment, location of development and built environment and climate change.

2.6. The New Local Plan to 2050

West Lancashire Borough Council is preparing a new Local Plan. The first draft will be consulted upon in October/November 2018. The revised Local Plan is to guide how the borough develops up to 2050, in particular around the Borough's two largest towns of Skelmersdale and Ormskirk. The Local Plan proposals also allocate land for smaller opportunities for new developments in the rest of the Borough to meet local housing and employment needs.

Included in the proposals are three new Garden Villages and a Logistics Park alongside the M58. This proposal would make a significant contribution to the business case for creating a Skelmersdale Rail Link, make development proposals in the Town Centre more attractive to businesses and create a wide range of new job opportunities in growing business sectors.

Within Ormskirk and Aughton, a new Knowledge Park and Student Accommodation Village on St Helens Road to complement what is already offered at Edge Hill University is planned with the aim of attracting new, hi-tech businesses to Ormskirk, provide much-needed purpose-built student accommodation to alleviate the demand for houses of multiple occupation. They will also enable university graduates to stay in West Lancashire by offering more of the right type of jobs and accommodation for young professionals to buy and rent, and support Ormskirk town centre businesses.

The proposed Preferred Options will also ensure that the rural areas of the Borough will continue to be strongly protected from inappropriate development (over 88% of West Lancashire will remain as Green Belt). This will allow the agricultural sector to continue making its significant contribution to UK food production and ensuring that the natural environment of the Borough will be protected and enhanced.

As mentioned under the SHELMA sub-heading the new household projections, which form a key part of the government's new standard method for assessing housing need, were published by the government's Office for National Statistics (ONS) in September 2018. A reduction in household growth translates to -75 homes reducing the OAHN figure from 212 dwellings per annum to 137 dpa for West Lancashire. These latest figures should guide the quantity of housing. The Landscape Character Assessment will help guide the location and quality of new housing.

2.7. Rufford and Holmeswood Parish Area Plans

Rufford is a civil parish, which includes the neighbouring village of Holmeswood (see insert below). It is located in the local planning authority boundary of West Lancashire, England. It is situated in the River Douglas catchment area at the point where the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, Liverpool, Ormskirk and Preston Railway line, and the A59 Liverpool Road/Causeway Lane and B5246 Holmeswood Road highways converge.

Rufford Parish Area

The area is predominately rural, with key characteristics associated with high grade agricultural land, nationally and locally significant heritage assets, and notable ecological areas.

Rufford Parish Plan, October 2005

The Rufford Parish Plan dated October 2005 published by the Parish Council with support from Community Futures, Rural Evaluation Action Lancashire (REAL), Council for Voluntary Services West Lancashire and The Countryside Agency set out key information about the area and how community improvements in the future. The headline message was Rufford is a great place to live, but there were future ambitions for the future, set out under the

themes of public transport services improvements; better health services, especially for the elderly and those without their own transport; response to local crime and community safety concerns; traffic and road safety; improved community facilities; environment protection and enhancement; and monitoring of applications for housing development to ensure the needs and wishes of Rufford Parish residents are understood by appropriate planning authorities. There has been community action taken in accordance with the Village Plan.

Holmeswood Village Plan 2004

Holmeswood Village Plan dated April 2004 published by the Parish Council with support from the Council for Voluntary Services West Lancashire and The Countryside Agency set out key information and needs identified in the area to guide community improvements in the future. The topics in the table below related to in need of improvement. Themes included traffic and road safety; community and youth action; environment; local amenities, crime and public transport. Progress against the Village Plan has been achieved.

3. Planning Context

3.1. Planning and Environmental Designations

The area has a number of important planning and environmental designations. The Local Plan Interactive Allocations Map shows the entire Rufford Parish Council area as Green Belt designation (shown as green shading) except for land covered by Policy SP1: A Sustainable Development Framework for West Lancashire as a Rural Sustainable Village (land shown in pink shading), the tightly defined settlement boundary GN1: Settlement Boundaries (brown line). See Extract below.

West Lancashire Local Plan Interactive Allocations Map



Green Belt designation protects land from inappropriate development that would harm the purpose of the planning policy designation.

Of note to the Landscape Character Assessment is that there are three EN2.1 Wildlife Corridors shown by blue hatching, along the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, the River Douglas corridor and the railway embankment. The area has a number of EN2.1 Nature Conservation Sites shown by green dotted areas. There are areas of defined EN2.6(i) Landscape Character outlined with a light brown hatching (see extract below) and also areas of defined EN2.6(i) Landscape Character outlined with a dark brown hatching. There are a few areas denoted as EN3 Green Infrastructure / Open Recreation Space.

As part of the monitoring and refinement, the West Lancashire Local Plan is currently being reviewed.

3.2. Heritage - Rufford Park Conservation Area

According to West Lancashire Borough's Heritage and Conservation Strategy, 2009 the local built heritage provides a huge resource that can play an important role in the future of West Lancashire. It goes on to say that heritage can be an important stimulus to regeneration, be used to promote tourism and visitors into the area, provide a sense of local pride and importantly by preserving it we are contributing to a more sustainable future. http://www.westlancs.gov.uk/media/35882/2009_heritage_strategy_final.pdf

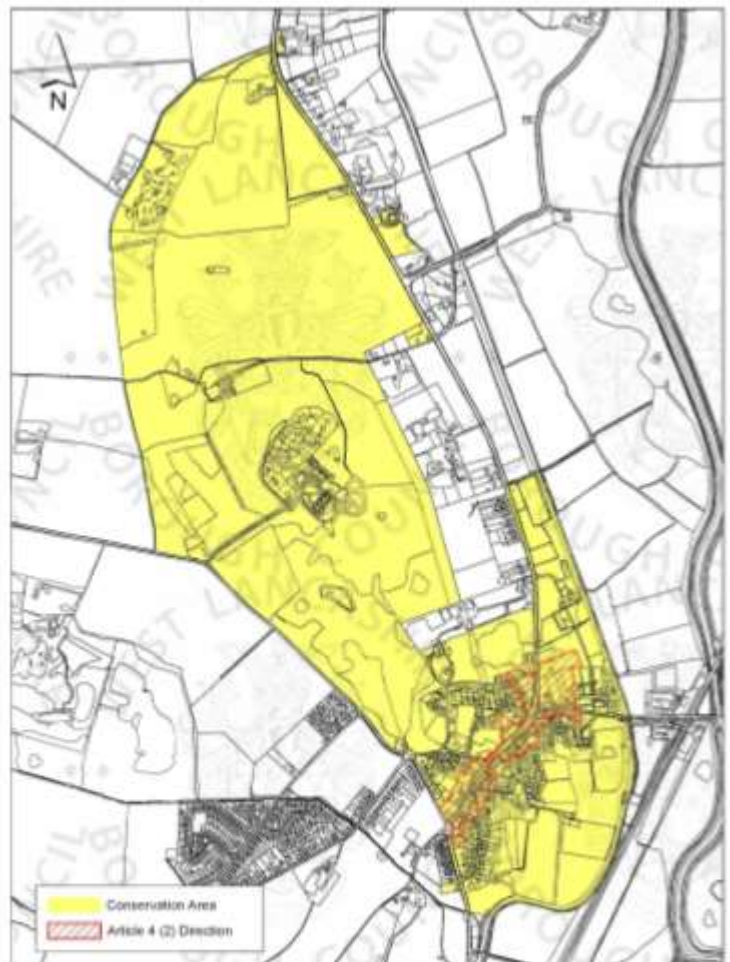
In Peter Fleetwood Hesketh's book "Murray's Lancashire Architectural Guide" Rufford was described as 'a white washed village of Jacobean and Georgian cottages backed by the trees of the park.'

The map of Rufford Park Conservation shows the extent of the Conservation Area in yellow and properties covered by an Article 4 Direction in red hatching. Article 4 Direction removes National Permitted Development Rights and any development, including minor alterations, is subject to formal planning applications.

The Council's vision for heritage in West Lancashire is:

"To raise awareness to the value that heritage can play in people's lives and to ensure that our historic environment is afforded the proper protection and management it warrants."

The management of the historic environment is a long-term commitment, which involves a mix of statutory and non-statutory controls and powers. Because heritage is unique and irreplaceable, it is recognised that the Council needs to co-ordinate efforts to maximise its effectiveness and ensure that we protect it for future generations to enjoy.



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There is no doubt that we need to work in partnership with other agencies to fully secure the aims and objectives of the strategy. We will continue to maintain close links with (then) English Heritage (now Historic England), other regional bodies working in the heritage field, and the voluntary sector to help deliver projects. Other similar funding partnerships will be investigated and encouraged.

Many of the actions outlined in the above strategy relate to ongoing work in which the Council is already involved. It is important that work continues in these subject areas and that improvements in the delivery of the service are achieved wherever possible, to realise the principal aims of the strategy. However it needs to be recognised that issue's relating to the capacity of available staff resources could ultimately be a barrier to delivery. Some actions rely on others and their implementation is not directly under the control of the Local Authority.

Local Plan Policy EN4: Preserving and Enhancing West Lancashire's Cultural and Heritage Assets relates the protection of Conservation Areas and in particular the need to ensure that any development either preserve.

Despite the Conservation Area setting, some planning applications have been submitted relating to properties within it, including to fell trees, in some cases, covered by Tree Protection Orders.

3.3. Agriculture

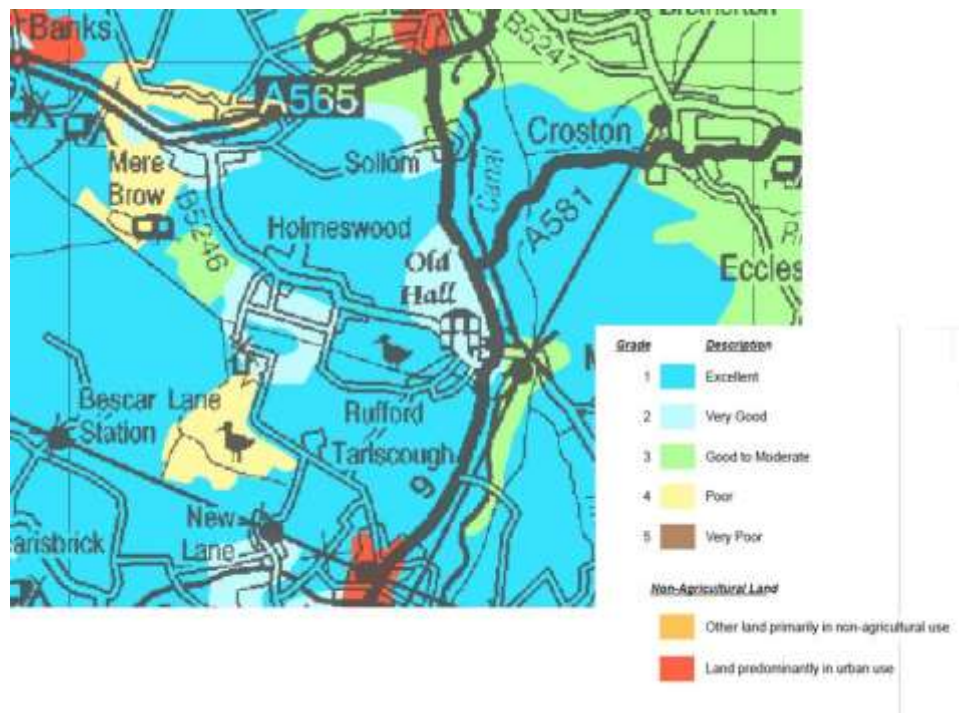
As mentioned above, the National Planning Policy Framework, July 2018 Paragraph 170 states:

Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services - including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land (BMV land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification), and of trees and woodland;

North West Region 1:250 000 Series Agricultural Land Classification Map (see extract below) represents a generalised pattern of land classification grades. The whole of the Parish area is dark blue legend referring to Excellent Grade 1 grade.

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/144015?category=5954148537204736>



This map does not show subdivisions of Grade 3 which are normally mapped by more detailed survey work. For further information, details of the system of grading can be found in: Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales: revised guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land. www.defra.gov.uk.

For further information about the availability of Agricultural Land Classification data, including more detailed local surveys, please contact the Natural England Enquiry Service on 0845 600 3078 or e-mail enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk

3.4. Drainage issues

A significant landscape element in the Rufford Parish Council area relates to the drainage of the area that previously formed Martin Mere. The drainage ditches and sluices are of two kinds. Water drainage from Burscough and Ormskirk hinterland flows by gravitation from a higher level than that of the lower levels which carry the water from below sea level, and which is constantly pumped to Crossens on the coast and goes into the sea.”

Rufford was located on a ‘ford’ that was an outlet of the famous Martin Mere that once drained into the River Douglas to the east. The mere also had drainage to the sea at Crossens, perhaps simultaneously, for it was once a large sheet of water in the flood season. On the main road from Burscough to Rufford there remains to-day the significant place-name Causeway End.

According to a local history book Lancashire Plain and Seaboard by Herbert C Collins (1953), “The mere still receives drainage from the Leyland Hundred, which in turn is fed from the Pennine Hills further east. But before the era of steam pumping engines the drainage settled into this bowl between the hills and sea to form a swampy lake, which varied in size, but was frequently 18 miles in circumference. Where the first drains collect the first runlets partridge and coot find cover between the crops. At Mereside is an old windmill and the last remains of the moss show brown-green against the emerald of the surrounding cultivated ground where cattle field luxuriously. The mere took 150 years to drain, from 1692 to 1849 when pumps were handling 17,000 gallons a minute to keep the land clear.”

Collins explains the economic reasons behind the decision to drain the mere. “Then the high price of wheat caused by the Napoleonic wars, which cut off European imports, gave Parliament the opportunity to foster home production as a precautionary measure, and foreign imports of corn were forbidden as long as the English wheat did not exceed eighty shillings a quarter.”

“This was the climax of a growing attention to agriculture which necessitated a preliminary drive to drain the land. In Lancashire the meres, lakes and marshes gradually disappeared as the land drainers got to work. The most notable attempt to drain the mere was made in 1781 by Mr Thomas Eccleston of Scarisbrick Hall (a noted agriculturist of his day). In 1784 a few acres were ploughed and yielded spring corn and pasture. Thereafter land which had previously let at 4s per acre yielded barley at £11 17s, and land which had brought no price at all yielded oats at £10 17s. From lands which had given only poor pasture in the driest summers Eccleston raised Scotch cattle which fattened better than any on the best grazing ground in the district.”

In recent years the area has suffered widespread flooding as captured in the Parish Newsletter, January 2018.

Locally there is concern as the Environment Agency has served notice to stop pumping water. New arrangements for a Water Level Management Board need to be identified. Local farmers are concerned that the Environment Agency is dumping its responsibilities on to them. Local people have met with Seema Kennedy MP to raise the issue at a higher level.

Ecology - A brief history of the Mere Sands Wood area

In the Middle Ages the land of what is now Mere Sands Wood was under the waters of Martin Mere, the largest lake in England, four miles long and two miles wide.

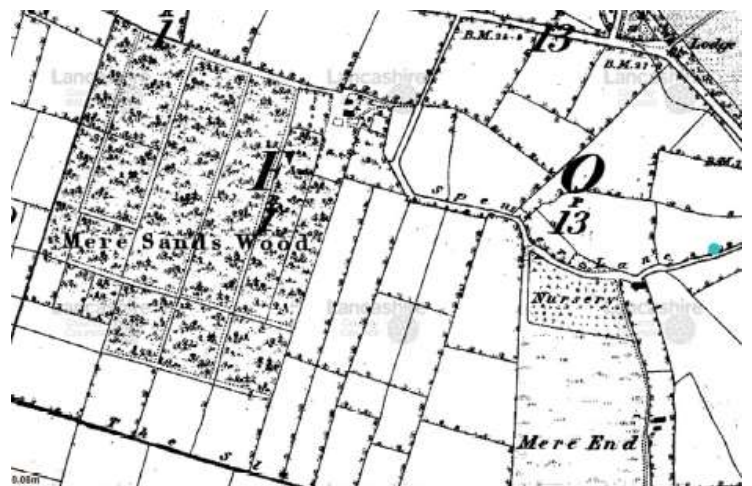
Map of Lancashire from 1577, showing Martin Mere; reproduced by permission of Lancaster University Library



In 1695 the local landowners agreed to drain the mere to create the farmland that surrounds the reserve today. However, over the next 250 years the land still frequently flooded and there were many more unsuccessful attempts to keep it dry all year round. Only with the opening of the new pumping station on the coast at Crossens in 1961 was the area reliably drained.

Ordnance Survey 1845 map showing the original area of the wood

Mere Sands Wood was planted sometime between 1818 and 1845. It was much smaller than it is today; what is now the eastern half of the wood was fields. The 1845 map shows the field layout and a nursery garden on what is now woodland. The line of oaks alongside the ditch by Mere End Lake marks the run of one of the old hedges.



In the 1800s game shooting became a popular pastime and Mere Sands Wood was planted with oak trees and rhododendron bushes as a covert, or

shelter, for game birds. It was known locally as Yen's Wood, after the head gamekeeper, Yen Counce.

**Gamekeepers at Rufford New Hall in the early 1900s; Yen Counce is on the far right.
Photo courtesy Richard Sephton**

In 1920 Mere Sands Wood was sold in a package with Rufford New Hall, which became a hospital. The oak trees were felled and a fire destroyed most of the remaining wood. Birch trees and rhododendron colonised the bare ground, and in the 1930s the pine plantation was created. By the 1960s Mere Sands Wood was a single dense woodland.



Mere Sands Wood in the 1960s and sand extraction in progress in 1977 (Photo by Peter Pearson)



In 1958 Mere Sands Wood was sold to a sand extraction company. The wood sits on a bed of very fine Sherdley Hill sand, which is used in the glassmaking industry; sand from here was taken to Pilkington's glassworks in St Helens. It was the process of sand extraction that created the lakes.

A condition of the planning permission for the sand extraction was that, when the extraction had finished, the land would become a nature reserve. Members of the Lancashire Trust for Nature Conservation worked with the sand extraction company to shape what would become the reserve it is today. In 1982 the land was sold for a nominal sum to Lancashire Wildlife Trust which manages the reserve as a mix of woodland, meadow, heath and lakes.

Following sand extraction, (photo by Bill Hale), and creation of Mere Sands Wood 2000



The Trees of Mere Sands Wood

Like almost all woodland in England today, the trees at Mere Sands Wood are the product of human activity. They were planted as boundaries, for fuel, for timber and to provide habitat for wildlife. The most common trees are: Common Beech, Silver Birch, Hawthorn, Hazel, Sycamore, Alder, Holly Scots Pine, English Oak, Goat Willow, Bird Cherry and Rowan.

The Wildflowers of Mere Sands Wood

The unique geology and sand extraction has led to the creation of a variety of habitats and there are various aquatic and lakeside plants, woodland plants, meadow plants, wet heath plants and dry heath plants. There are a variety of orchids, and more common species such as evening primrose and rose bay willow herb.

The Birds of Mere Sands Wood

The mixed habitat is biodiverse with a wide range of birds including Kingfisher, Dunnock, Reed Warbler, Sparrow, Tit, Finch, Thrush, Woodpecker, and Nuthatch, to name just a few.

4. Area Survey

4.1. Area Assessment Methodology

The methodology for the area survey was to divide the parish council area up into a grid and complete a field survey proforma (see Appendix 8.1 Field survey map and Appendix 8.2 Field survey proforma) to provide a standard approach to identifying and describing variation in character of the landscape. A photographic record is included in Appendix 8.3.

The field survey proforma was prepared, and then tested before being used across the whole area. The surveys were completed on days on 26th, 29th June, 3rd and 7th July, all of which were hot, sunny blue sky days capturing aesthetic, perceptual and experiential qualities of the landscape. The completed proformas aided the recording and identification of differences across the parish council in order to explain the unique combination of elements and features that make up the local distinctive landscapes by mapping and describing character types and areas. The Assessment details the character of the landscape and, as appropriate photographs, in the appendices.

4.2. Landscape Character Typology

The vast majority of the Rufford and Holmeswood Parish Area is flat, and low-lying with prominent arable agriculture. There are half a dozen wooded areas providing quiet, shady natural habitat, with Nucks Wood, Mere Sands Wood and Rufford Park being particularly significant.

While there is considerable evidence of human effort with the network of lower and higher sluices draining the area to Crossen, field boundaries marked by ditches and the installation of electricity cables and telephone lines, the area is relatively tranquil and free of manmade structures and other built intrusions.

The built up area of Rufford is pretty and notable for its clustered heritage buildings of Jacobean and Georgian styles. Many properties are white washed cottages and a grand residential estate with mature trees around the Rufford Park. The Hesketh Arms is a key focal point, as is the church of notable architecture, and the junction of road, rail, footpath, river and canal marina. There is a pleasant café at the Marina, where people sit in an outside eating area overlooking the water.

Holmeswood is relatively undeveloped. It has a cluster of redbrick cottages built in a linear form along the B5246. There are a number of properties around the Methodist church and school. There is a bowling and tennis club.

4.3. Aesthetics

The rural parts of the parish comprise a mosaic of fields, some yellow, brown, lush green and others of dark black-brown bare soil. The rural idyll is captured in most parts of the parish area with abundant flora and fauna.

The canal marina is a special area with brightly coloured barges, moored.

The Conservation Area is a mature environment with grand houses, mature trees and a variety of cottages with well-maintained gardens.

4.4. Tranquillity

Around 60 % of the area, the majority is tranquil. In the farm fields, only the wind, can be heard and the whirring of working tractors. Birdsong, including a peacock calling for a mate, and flying insects could be heard. Occasional farm animal noises were audible, such as barking near to Mere Sands Kennels.

By the River Douglas and Leeds and Liverpool Canal the noise of crickets were noted. In the wooded areas birdsong and wing flapping was rife as birds bolted out of their nests.

Near to Rufford's Conservation Area (see insert map for extent of the designated Conservation Area in Section 3), church bells were recorded.

The noisiest part of Rufford is by the junction of the A59 and B5246. Both roads are noisy and walking along the footpaths adjacent to the main highways is an unpleasant experience as when traffic passes, it does so at close proximity, at substantial speeds, with loud noise. Many HGVs were observed on the A59 and B5246, despite the latter being restricted and unsuitable for heavy freight.

Light pollution was not observed during the surveys, as the summer days stayed light until very late.

4.5. Cultural

Any cultural references visible during the site survey were noted.

The main landowning interest of the Hesketh family are evident at Rufford Old Hall and the Hesketh Arms pub. Wooded areas were noted linked to field sports, presumably linked to the Hesketh family.

The main cultural reference is farming, and existence of brick tracks, drainage ditches. Farm workers were in the fields harvesting crops and tractors with trailers carted off produce to market.

Other than isolated farm buildings, the main residential use is focused in Rufford and Holmeswood, with some linear development along the main highways. St Mary's Church buildings and cemetery, former church and schools exist in Rufford and Holmeswood.

The former mere is mentioned in a number of buildings.

Consultations with relevant stakeholders enabled additional relevant information to be noted. It was said Lancashire Sunshine Club, a naturalist club is located to the west of Rufford Park.

There are properties relating to transport, such as the station, the garage, the Marina and a haulage business on the B5246.

When undertaking surveys ramblers, bird-watchers and cyclists were recorded enjoying leisure time in the area.

4.6. Natural Factors

The natural environment is mostly used for farming. The ditches have flora growing alongside, with older boundaries having more diverse species evident.

The woodlands have mature deciduous and alpine trees and shrub including Rhododendron providing woodland cover.

The meres at Mere Sand Wood provide water habitat for wildfowl and other wildlife.

4.7. Ecology

During the surveys many birds were recorded including Ducks, Finches, Dunnock, Thrush, Warbler, Tits, Jay, Woodpecker, Sparrow, Robin, Wood Pigeons, and Sea Gulls.

Insects were observed including Horse-Flies, Butterflies (species of White, Peacock and Red Admiral), and Blue and Yellow Damson Flies.

Mammal holes were observed throughout the area, including mole hills.

Anecdotal evidence is that Brown Hares exist in a couple of Warrens and a variety of bat species in barns and tree cover (due to legislation and protected status it is not possible to specify exact locations.)

4.8. Water

Water is a significant landscape element across the Rufford Parish Area. The former mere is notable due to the extensive drainage infrastructure in the form of very straight stretches of drainage ditches that feed the upper and lower sluice network draining the area, and for irrigation making it suitable for farming. The ecology alongside the drainage and irrigation channels promote flora and fauna specific to this local area.

There are subtle features in the landscape too such as the lip of the mere formed by tidal action creating sand banks around the mere edges. These became footpaths and then lanes and roads following the drainage of the Mere. These features should be protected and enhanced in the future as they have historical, ecological and geographical value for the area.

To the east of the area is the Leeds and Liverpool canal that curves around the settlement, complete with towpath and upper and lower marinas and the River Douglas that meanders through the floodplain that is susceptible to flooding in extreme rainfall.

4.9. Access

The Rufford and Holmeswood area is at the convergence of road, river, rail and canal. There is a small station adjacent to the canal, served by an infrequent rural rail service.

The area has two main highways the A59 trunk road connecting Burscough to the North and the B5246 that connects east to west, unsuitable for HGVs on the eastern section due to the White Bridge and acute bend and narrow carriageway width.

The canal marina had many narrow boats berthed and barges traveling along the canal. There is a Public Right of Way along the canal and sections of the River Douglas.

There were farm workers driving tractors around the network of rural lanes servicing fields and a number of people (residents and visitor) driving, cycling walking around the network of narrow country lanes.

There appeared to be little to no cycle infrastructure, yet a lot of cyclists, cycling through the area.

There is an extensive network of Public Rights of Way across Rufford and Holmeswood area, with historical origins relating to the mere, farming, markets, village, schools and churches.

5. Stakeholder Consultation

5.1. Questions for stakeholders

A key part of the Landscape Character Assessment was to record the cultural associations with the landscape of Rufford with Holmeswood, so interviews were held with a number of relevant people and the following pre-prepared questions were posed (See Appendix 8.4 for stakeholders and questions.)

When answering, stakeholders were encouraged to consider the different areas of Rufford, such as the built up Conservation Area including Rufford Old Hall, the Rufford Marina, railway station, the former mere, the rural areas and agricultural history, and the area of special ecology at Mere Sands Wood, (including other defined landscape areas.) A map was used to help stakeholders refer comments to the survey map as appropriate.

5.2. Historical and cultural associations

History

Rufford is located on the shores of what was once the biggest Lake in England. The settlement grew up on an area of higher ground between Martin Mere and the River Douglas. Its name is thought to be derived from “rough ford”; another theory is it is from the “Ruff” bird, the male of the species having a frilly ruff round its neck in the summer.

Martin Mere formed in the depressions of the land once scoured by glaciers in the last ice age. From this low lying area views of Parbold Hill and Winter Hill in the distance are visible. Parbold Hill is a shelf of sandstone and has a 92 ft. deep artesian flow. The aquifer is formed from a geologic layer of porous and permeable material, through which water flows and is stored. Of note is that the Mere water drained inland towards the River Douglas, rather than out to sea.

There are many references to the edge of the Mere, with a common local name being Rimmer, relating people who lived at the edge of the Mere. Mere End Farm is located at the end of the Mere. Evidence of tidal sand banks exists here. Causeway Farm that produces vegetables does not take its name from agriculture.

At the time of the Domesday Book (1086), Rufford was an area of one ‘carute’ or the amount of land that could be ploughed in one year and a day.

The oldest routes, such as Mere Lane, pre-date roads, canal and rail, curve across the area where the edge of the Mere used to be. Sand dunes formed from the Mere’s tide. The older side of the dunes have richer ecology and the drained sides have newer species and are less biodiverse.

Grey Gutter Farm House (Priest Hole and exterior stone steps to 2nd floor) was demolished in the 1960’s for the rerouting of the A59 in the centre of the village. An interviewee asked whether planning would have allowed that to happen today.

Properties of note are Rufford Old Hall, with the Old Moat on Moat Crosten Road (former garden centre), Rufford New Hall with an ice house in the grounds. Also, Rufford

Conservation area has a cottages in Church Road that is Grade 2 listed, and there are other old houses of heritage value. Many farm buildings are very old and reflect traditional styles of building.

The local friary provided customers for the fishery based in Rufford. There is a flat stone at the rear of the chemist that was used by monks (from Burscough Abbey) to sell fish from. Fishing was focused in Scarsbrick at Bescar Lane to the south.

The landscape was relatively untouched up to the English civil war. But today, a lot of what can be seen in the landscape has been impacted by humans. Landowners, the Hesketh family, traditionally grew their land holding through marriage and dictated the landscape by seeking permission to drain the Mere over 300 years ago, in order to create more land to farm.

It took centuries to drain the mere with varying degrees of success. Crossens with its tidal gates wrecked by storms to tidal flaps and to the present day all water pumped at Crossens from 1961(pumps upgraded 2014) is a huge story in itself. Of particular interest to Rufford was in the mid-19th century when the Hesketh family commissioned the first use of steam power on the mere for drainage. The steam engine drove a water wheel approximately 30 ft. in diameter located at Wiggins Lane Holmeswood to drain Rufford pump basin. The land drained became from scrub grazing to grade 1 and 2 arable, land prices tripled. Since being drained the landscape has stayed more or less the same with some tree planting to stop the effects of wind erosion and to provide cover for game birds.

The A59 -Causeway Lane-Dam Brook Bridge is where the Rufford Boundary Sluice passes under the A59 (Dam Brook Bridge). In the past it is believed this area was one of the Mere's draining points (The Main outlet at Crossens) in to the River Douglas and when the River Douglas flooded this is believed to be the route the water would take so topping up Martin Mere.

Farming

In the past there were three times more farmers, with average farm sizes of 30 acres. Now there are a reduced number of much larger farms at around 300 acres. There are still local ties to farming with farms going back for more than four generations. One farmer interviewed had worked on the land since he was six years old and continues to do so some seventy years on. Many people continue to be employed by these farms with tractors ploughing the fields and other associated agricultural traffic moving produce to processing plants, such as Fiddler's Crisps on Brick Kiln Lane, and to markets outside of the area.

The farm land is high grade (Best and Most Versatile Grade 1. BMV land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification) land owing to the geology of peat over clay, and peat over sand and red sandstone. However, of concern is that soil is being eroded and measures to prevent soil loss should be harnessed by farmers. Ditches must be dug, but not over dug, as part of catchment sensitive farming, or as one farmer said:

"Thy's going-ta farm thy Sen out".

Tootle Farm is at the meeting of two gullies. Previously Mere End Farm had been a cattle farm. There is still a north facing old cart and bull barn, facing away from the scorching sun. In the past other farms kept sheep to keep grasses low.

The fields have a high yield, and are subject to annual crop rotation to avoid disease and pests. There is seasonal change with less happening over the winter, turnips in January and the sowing of typical crops include cereals such as barley, wheat, feed beans, potatoes, turnips in February and March for May growth. Lettuces and maize is also grown.

Hugely important to the production of food is the irrigation of the land in drier periods. Rufford receives 34 inches of rainfall per year, compared to 19 in Warwickshire and 120 inches at Rivington, Bolton.

Rufford Pump Basin takes water in from the East to the West part of Rufford, part of Holmeswood and Part of Mere Brow. It is then pumped out to sea via Crossens pumping Station by low level ditches, Tootle Brook and Back Drain. (Mere Sands Wood is also drained through Holmeswood Pumps).

The basin is clearly defined on its northern side by the high level Catchwater Drain. The Southern side of the basin is not as clearly defined and is drained by the high level Rufford Boundary Sluice which is elevated above the surrounding land in the vicinity of Mere Lane, Tootle Brook passes under Rufford Boundary Sluice at this point. Rufford Boundary Sluice and Catchwater Drain both flow by gravity to be pumped into the sea at Crossens Pumping Station.

The farmers have license agreements for water abstraction covered by lots of regulations. Storage ponds have been dug and one farmer has installed over three miles of underground irrigation pipes. This relies on Significant engineering infrastructure and ongoing maintenance of Rufford Boundary Sluice and other drains and ditches for the benefit of farmers, Rufford Residents and Highway drainage. Most field boundaries are separated by ditches.

An early map dated 1763 shows the field patterns



Access

Tracks became roads between wet peat bogs on higher ground. Crossing points across the Mere were the focus of early development such as the village, Abbey at Burscough. Newer routes are much straighter.

An Act of Parliament in 1720 allowed the River Douglas to be made navigable to small ships between Wigan and Tarleton. This was completed in 1742.

The Leeds and Liverpool Canal is 127 miles (204 km) Long and crosses the country from Liverpool, Merseyside to Leeds, West Yorkshire. It has two main side branches, the Leigh Branch and the Rufford Branch. In 1760 the Rufford to Sollom part of the branch was dug by the Douglas Navigation company with lock gates at Sollom to access the River Douglas. In 1781 the Leeds and Liverpool Canal Company opened a branch from Burscough to Rufford. In 1805 as part of the Croston drainage improvements the River Douglas was rerouted between Rufford and Tarleton. This allowed the Sollom to Tarleton section of the canal to use the old course of the River Douglas with new lock gates at Tarleton to access the River, the lock gates at Sollom were then removed.

Since 1805 the Rufford Branch of the Leeds Liverpool Canal links Burscough to Tarleton.

The new white bridge conveys the B5246 over the River Douglas, past the railway station with its level crossing and over the Leeds and Liverpool Canal where the Rufford Marina is located to the A59. The new white bridge has access restrictions and local haulage company Thompson's ask drivers to avoid this narrow bend, however during the visits to Rufford unsuitable HGV vehicles were observed trying to squeeze through the narrow lanes.

Ecology

The geology, and sand extraction, has also provided the unique habitat leading to the Site of Special Scientific Interest designation at Mere Sand Wood. There are Bats, and other notable mammals such as protected Water Vole, Brown Hare, and more common Roe Deer, and Foxes.

There are a lot of visits to the nature reserve, and wider Rufford and Holmeswood area, from bird watchers who come to see the vast array of species including wildfowl, including protected species such as Pink Footed Geese, and Barn Owls. It was noted that on occasions bird watchers can be a nuisance to farmers if they park without due attention.

In addition to sand extraction there traditionally was peat cutting for the village.

The woodland was planted as cover for game birds, and for pheasant shooting

Everyone interviewed referred to the permission to drain by the landowner and draining of Martin Mere by an intricate system of upper and lower level sluices to Crossens pump. The Sluice and Burscough boundary are high level, whereas Mere Sands South is and Mere Sands North is low are low level. There is a single place, Tootle Brook under the road where the two drainage systems (high and low) cross one another.

The area is subject to seasonal flooding, with a large flood recorded in 2016. There is concern that development of new land uses including housing up the river course has increased the amount of water discharging into the system, with the impacts of climate change leading to an increased occurrence of intense rainfall events.

The Environment Agency has served notice to stop pumping and new arrangements for a Water Level Management Board need to be appropriately identified. Local farmers are concerned that the Environment Agency is dumping its responsibilities on to farmers.

An application was received for a change of use for the pumping station at Holmeswood, but the community campaigned successfully to save it on the grounds of heritage value.

Social ties

Important social ties include the Heskeths, the cricket team, Rufford Church. The Methodist Church has closed down and has been converted to residential use.

Brick Kiln Lane refers to brick making area for the old hall.

The history of Cousins Lane is not known.

Berry House in Scarisbrick, Shortwood Hall at Mere Brow, Moss Side Farm at Sollom, Great Hanging at Crosten are all old properties. Mere Farm has folk lore relating to a Hell hole.

The police used to host a Police and Community Together meeting but have stopped attending.

Many visitors come into Rufford to walk, cycle, and visit Rufford Old Hall, Mere Sands Wood and the Marina, which was built ten years ago.

Concern was expressed that new housing that has been developed is “could be anywhere” houses, as generic in style. People don’t want to miss an opportunity to have more locally tailored and distinct design in the future.

5.3. Significant Landscape Value

All of the people interviewed mentioned the following as having significant local landscape value:

- The Mere and the local drainage infrastructure;
- Agriculture, high grade farmland associated with soil and geology;
- Ecology associated with the geology, such as water fowl, water voles and bats;
- Heritage assets of Rufford Old Hall, Rufford New Hall and the Conservation Area;

Everyone interviewed considered speculative housing development on high-grade farmland in Green Belt as a threat to the landscape and problems of local infrastructure, including drainage and community facilities being over-capacity.

6. Conclusions

The Landscape Character Assessment has identified and described the variations in Rufford's landscape. The conclusions from the policy and document review, planning context, area survey and stakeholder consultations to guide the Parish Council and others in protecting and enhancing the areas key characteristics and special qualities are as follows:

1. National Planning Policy Framework, 2018 states strategic planning policies should set out an overall pattern, scale and quality of development, and make sufficient provision for conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment. As Rufford is part of the National Character Area Profile 32. Lancashire and Amounderness Plain, its key characteristics relate to its valuable rural, flat, low lying, landscape, with special historical, cultural merit due to agricultural traditions and ecological importance.
2. The Liverpool City Region has identified very high housing growth figures and threatens to sprawl into West Lancashire, despite the area not being a constituent authority area. The figures are yet to be examined and updated figures from the Office of National Statistic show a reduced household growth rate. This needs to be applied to the Spatial Development Strategy. The current West Lancashire Local Plan (2012-2027) identifies Rufford as a Rural Sustainable Village in protected Green Belt. The Council is commencing a consultation for preferred options for a New Local Plan to 2050.
3. There is an absence of a Neighbourhood Plan tier of planning policy to articulate how the landscape character would be best protected and enhances if new development is brought forward. Rufford and Holmeswood benefited from village plans (2005/2004), but these are dated and of little weight when planning decisions are taken. The Conservation Area has a tight boundary area covered by Article 4 Direction, which removes permitted development rights in order to protect heritage assets. Despite this some planning applications have been submitted relating to properties in the Conservation Area, including felling of trees, in some cases trees covered by Tree Protection Orders.
4. Much of the area is high grade farm land. In accordance with the NPPF this should be protected as a valuable economic asset.
5. Drainage infrastructure is visible in the landscape with a higher and lower level network of drainage ditches and sluices. Without the drainage the land would be subject to flooding. Locally there is concern about the Environment Agency giving notice to cease the pumping of water.
6. Mere Sands Wood is a nature reserve with special environmental designation. It should be seen as part of a wider Nature Recovery Network increasingly connected, to an expanding network of wildlife rich linked to the coastal habitats along with the large areas of open water and linear canals such as at Martin Mere, Mere Sands

Wood and Marton Mere, are of international importance for their migratory and wintering wildfowl and wading bird populations. Both are designated Ramsar sites, all comprise the same areas as their equivalent SPAs.

7. The majority of the area benefits from tranquillity due to being predominately rural and of agricultural land use. Tranquillity is an essential characteristic of Rufford and must be considered when planning the future of the area.
8. Climate change poses threats to the environment. When planning for Rufford's future building for life and other sustainable development principles should be harnessed to reduce the carbon footprint of the parish. The Parish must consider action to improve the resilience of the area against short, medium and long term impacts arising from climate change.

7. Recommendations

Based on the collated evidence for the Landscape Character Assessment the following recommendations are made:

1. In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, 2018 the parish council should ensure that essential elements of the landscape such as historic fabric, agriculture, ecology and drainage are best protected and enhanced in the future. Therefore, the parish council should engage with the strategic planning processes occurring at the City Region and West Lancashire Borough spatial levels, using up to date growth figures from the Office of National Statistics to ensure Rufford remains a Rural Sustainable Village in protected Green Belt.
2. Ideally the parish council would progress a Neighbourhood Plan to articulate how the landscape character would be best protected and enhanced if new development is brought forward. The Neighbourhood Plan would set out qualitative design principles for assessment and only be locally supported where it demonstrably:
 - a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
 - b) is visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
 - c) is sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
 - d) would establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
 - e) would optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and
 - f) would create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.
3. A key consideration should be to retain high grade farm land as a valuable economic asset in the future.
4. Linked to the above point, the parish council should liaise with relevant partners, including farmers to identify an appropriate water land drainage board replacement to the Environment Agency function.

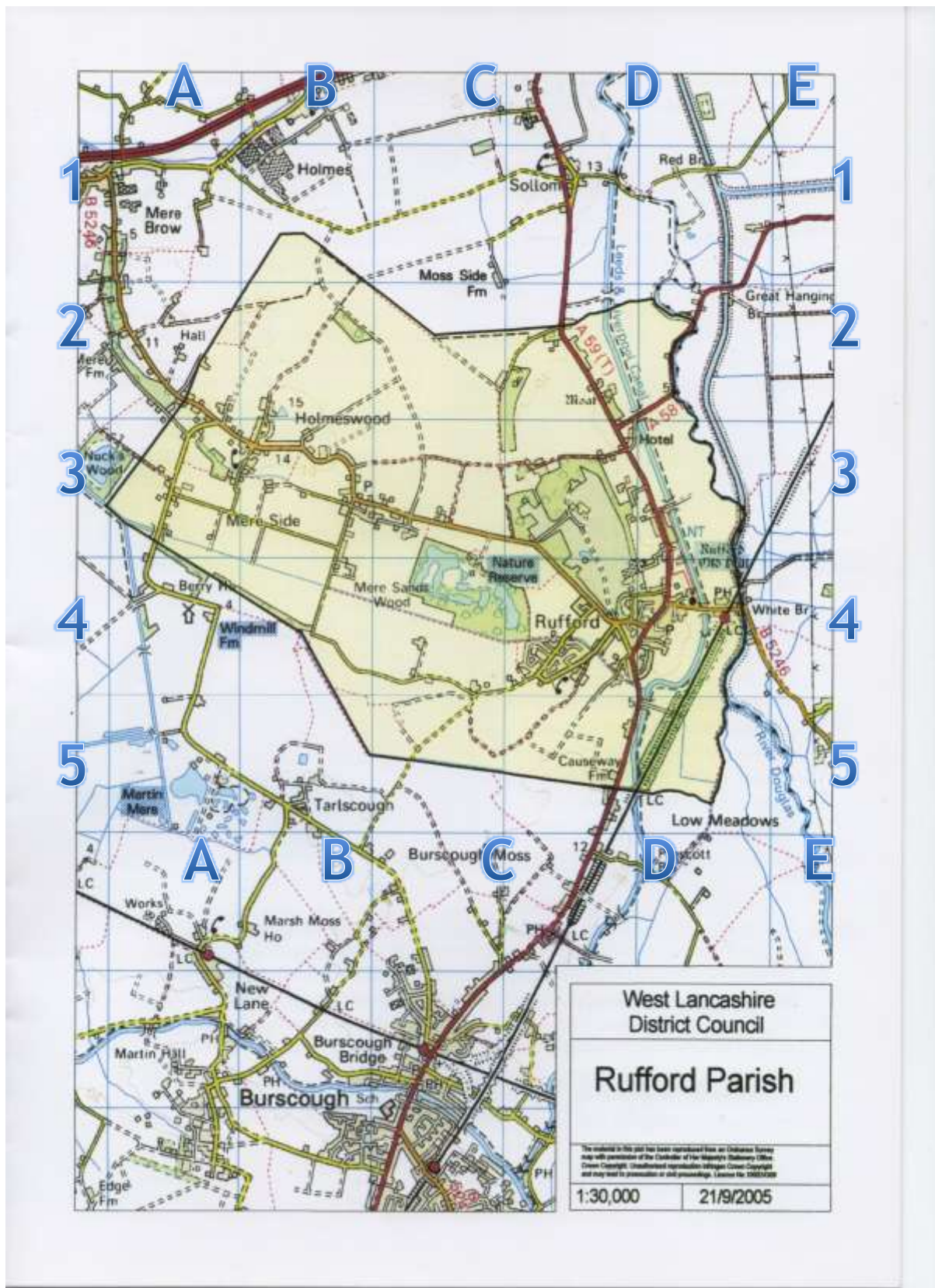
5. In accordance with the 25 year Environment Plan, the ecology of the area ought to be achieve net gains. Planning decisions should fully consider the wider Nature Recovery Network to link with Mere Sands Wood nature reserve with RAMSAR and SPA designations. The local ecology is important in its own right, but also attracts a high number of visitors into the area each year.
6. The area's tranquillity should be valued and fully considered when planning the future of the area.
7. The parish council should ensure sustainable development principles under pin future decisions to reduce the carbon footprint of the parish in the future. To aid decisions on planning applications a checklist has been produced to guide decision taking.
8. In supporting planning decision taking in the future the planning checklist is included on the next page.

Rufford Parish Council Planning Application checklist	
Does the application comply with the National Planning Policy Framework, 2018 requirements for protecting and enhancing landscape character as set out below:	
A) Will it function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development?	
B) Is the design visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping?	
C) Is the proposed development sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities)?	
D) Does the application establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit?	
E) Does the proposal optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks?	
F) Does the application create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.	
Are threats highlighted in Natural England's NCPA 32: Lancashire and Amounderness Plain avoided?	
Is the application compliant with the policies for landscape character in the West Lancashire Local Plan?	
Rufford Landscape Character Assessment, key considerations	
Residential development in Green Belt designated land is inappropriate, therefore are the Very Special Circumstances (VSC) robust?	

Have alternative land options, such as brownfield sites elsewhere in West Lancashire have been adequately considered? To check the robustness of the Brownfield Register, refer to the CPRE Brownfield Land Register Toolkit .	
Locally soil is high grade and therefore Best and Most Versatile grade 1-3b. This should be retained for valuable economic asset for future farming and jobs. Soil Surveys must be accompanied by applications.	
Is the Rufford Conservation Area and other heritage assets, including veteran or ancient trees positively impacted by the proposals?	
Are any significant landscape features such as the sand banks associated with the original mere or network of drainage ditches and sluices enhanced?	
Is there a flood impact assessment? Are drainage and flood mitigation methods proposed adequate?	
Should there be an Environmental Impact Assessment? Is Mere Sands Wood or the wider Nature Recovery Network protected? In accordance with the 25 Year Environment Plan, is there a demonstrable net biodiversity gain? Will there be more trees and hedgerow planted? Will there be green space for wildlife corridors? Will nature be nurtured?	
Will the tranquillity of the area be maintained? A noise assessment may be required to consider whether natural buffers could screen and reduce noise impact, without harming the landscape?	
Have sustainable development principles been harnessed to reduce the carbon footprint of the development, i.e roof mounted solar PV, sustainable urban drainage, and CHP?	
Will the layout fit in with the local character of Rufford and Holmeswood?	
Will the materials respect local styles?	

8. Appendices

8.1. Field survey map



8.2. Rufford Landscape Character Assessment - Field Survey Proforma	
Study Area Grid Reference	Person undertaking survey
Date and time of Survey	
Weather	
Landscape character type	Agricultural, wildlife habitat, built (residential or other land uses)
Aesthetics	Sight, colour, textures, pattern, form.
Tranquillity	Quiet, Noise from nature, human intrusion, vehicle noise, or other
Cultural	Cultural Associations - historical references, social ties, heritage assets
Natural Factors	Green Infrastructure - trees/hedgerow/shrubs etc.
Ecology	Protected flora or fauna?
Water	Are there flood risk or other drainage issues?
Access	Road, rail, canal, river, footpath
Protected land	Is the area, in whole or part, in land designated as Green Belt? Are there any designations such as Conservation Area or biological?
Planning Policy and applications	Is the area impacted by planning policy at the national, local or neighbourhood level, of relevance to the Landscape Character Assessment?
Photographic records	Photo file references.
Other comments	

8.3. Photographic Record - Landscape Character Typology

Typical agricultural landscapes



Mosaic of fields



Natural sandbank rim of the former mere



Irrigation of farm fields



Ecology in drainage ditches



Mere Sands Wood



Wooded area



Sluices and ditches with view of Parbold Hill in the background



Pump House on Wiggins Lane



Conservation Area



Rufford Old Hall



Rufford New Hall



Hesketh Arms



Church



Graveyard



Garage



A59/B5246 Junction



Gateway into Rufford from B5246



White Bridge (unsuitable for HGVs)



Gateway into Holmeswood from B5246



Rail



Canal Marina



Canal



Cycling



Public Right Of Way



Holmeswood School



White washed houses



New “could be anywhere housing” - missed opportunity for local tailored design.



8.4. Stakeholder list and questions

Jim and June Golding, Farmers, Helm House Farm

Joan Rimmer, resident & author of *Rufford: Its Past and Its People*

Lindsay Beaton, Manager, Mere Sands Wood

Kevin Newsham, Clerk to Rufford Parish Council

Richard Sephton, Owner of Rufford's garage, convenience and gun shop

John Gordon, Rufford Parish Councillor

Stakeholders were asked the following questions:

1. Can you tell me of any historical references relating to the local landscapes across the area?
2. Are there any important national or local social ties? Are there annual or seasonal events that are important to the landscape.
3. Are you aware of any significant heritage assets that have a relationship to the landscape?
4. Is there any other information you consider relevant.
5. Who else should I be speaking to?

8.5. Campaign to Protect Rural England, & Jackie Copley Resume

The Campaign to Protect Rural England, CPRE

The Campaign to Protect Rural England campaigns for a sustainable future for English countryside, a vital but undervalued environmental, economic and social asset to the nation. We believe that a beautiful, tranquil, diverse and productive countryside is fundamental to people's quality of life, wherever they live.

CPRE is an active and long-term supporter of Neighbourhood Planning as a means to ensure local people's aspirations for the future of the places in which they live can be identified and acted upon. Understanding and communicating what makes your local landscape special, and reflecting that understanding in a Neighbourhood Plan, can help to ensure that future change is in harmony with landscape character. In areas of notable landscape's CPRE recommends the production of a LCA to form a key part of a Neighbourhood Plan.

If the Neighbourhood Plan articulates what is special and distinct about a local landscape it is more likely the landscape will be protected and enhanced as new development and other future change is planned.

CPRE Lancashire has rural planning resources available: www.cprelancashire.org.uk.

Jackie Copley MRTPI, MA, PGCert

Jackie Copley is a chartered town and country planner with more than twenty years professional experience. She graduated from a Town and Country Planning degree with a BA (Hons) at the University of Manchester, then went on to read a Masters in Town and Regional Planning at Leeds Metropolitan University focusing on place marketing. She has also gained a Postgraduate Certificate in Urban Design from the University of Salford.

As a professional planner she has worked for local authorities, regeneration partnerships, private sector planning consultancies, and for the last five years for a rural charity. During this time she became skilled and developed expertise in the following: progressing environmental projects, economic development, housing, retail and transport studies, brownfield regeneration - including site survey and preparation of development briefs, community consultation, local plan and neighbourhood plan making, funding appraisal, and evaluation and monitoring.