



WARBURTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

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Agathoclis Beckmann Ltd
Onion Farm
Warburton Lane
Warburton
Lymm
Cheshire
WA13 9TW
01925 753403

www.agabeck.co.uk



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1 INTRODUCTION

I believe it is important to establish the context of Landscape Character Assessment. It was effectively established through the European Landscape Convention of 20th October 2000, for which the UK was a signatory and part of the preamble, quoted below, establishes the relevance to the community.

'Noting that the landscape has an important public interest role in the cultural, ecological, environmental and social fields, and constitutes a resource favourable to economic activity and whose protection, management and planning can contribute to job creation;

Aware that the landscape contributes to the formation of local cultures and that it is a basic component of the European natural and cultural heritage, contributing to human well-being and consolidation of the European identity;

Acknowledging that 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;

Noting that developments in agriculture, forestry, industrial and mineral production techniques and in regional planning, town planning, transport, infrastructure, tourism and recreation and, at a more general level, changes in the world economy are in many cases accelerating the transformation of landscapes;

Wishing to respond to the public's wish to enjoy high quality landscapes and to play an active part in the development of landscapes;

Believing that the landscape is a key element of individual and social well-being and that its protection, management and planning entail rights and responsibilities for everyone;'

It has been written of the village of Warburton that it 'retains many medieval elements making it the best preserved medieval landscape in the county.' (Nevell, 1997 'The Archaeology of Trafford'). The reason for this is mainly that the village was for many centuries in the ownership of a single family, the Egerton-Warburtons, whose family seat is now at Arley Hall. This family and its predecessors as lords of the manor of Warburton determined almost all the changes to the landscape in Warburton. Even after the sale of the Egerton-Warburton holdings in Warburton after the end of the Great War, their successors, the Co-operative Society acted in a broadly similar way, gradually selling off their holdings until in very recent times they no longer own land in the parish.

This gradual evolution of the landscape while retaining many of its original and particularly built features, continues to be the case, despite a continued slow erosion of some of the medieval elements. Rather perversely, the loss of some of the hedgerows in the area in the C20th has to some extent revealed older features in the landscape. The strip fields to the north of Townfield Lane would have been an entirely open landscape in medieval times. Their one-time presence is now confirmed in the preservation of one field ('Big Town Field' on the 1839 Cheshire Tithe Maps) and its peripheral hedges, making the point where a former strip was divided into two by the hedge. Similar hedgerow losses on Warburton Moss have resulted in the moss retaining some of its more open characteristics.

The morphology of the village of Warburton is clearly understood when the landscape elements are considered. Essentially the parish sits in a location bounded to the south by the River Bollin and to the west originally by the River Mersey and now it's successor, the Manchester Ship Canal. To the north Red Brook forms the boundary, while to the east the

boundary was more vague and subject to dispute for some time. The River Mersey (whose name can be translated as 'frontier') in early medieval times marked the boundary between the Kingdoms of Mercia (to the south) and Northumbria (to the north). The crossings of the Mersey would have been important points for trade.



Moss woodland on Warburton Moss

The original strategic roads in the area were Paddock Lane – running generally east-west parallel to the Bollin Valley originally to two fords crossing the River Mersey with an island between them. A short distance to the north of the Mersey the road joined the present Manchester Road running between Warrington and Manchester. To the east, Paddock Lane ran through Dunham and on towards Altrincham. It seems likely that this road replaced an even earlier trackway which ran along part of Carr Green Lane along the crest of the low ridge between the Bollin valley and the modern Dunham Road.

Another important road was from Lymm via Heatley running towards the fords and the bridges which later replaced them. This is Townfield Lane and the junction between it and Paddock Lane became the centre for the old village of Warburton, now the Conservation Area.

To the north of Paddock Lane, on an artificially raised and probably originally moated mound, stands Warburton Park Farm, originally the dwelling of the Lords of the Manor of Warburton, the Dutton family, who changed their name to Warburton c. 1311. At some point between 1248 and 1278, possibly under the lordship of Geoffrey de Dutton IInd, the family created a deer park around the manor and its boundaries remain clearly defined in the landscape. Despite later retrenchments, these boundaries are still in existence and the park pale (a ditch surmounted by an outer hedge or fence) would have been an important feature in the landscape for many centuries. The entrances into the park would have been important and there would have been entrance buildings or lodges at these entrances. Jack Hey Gate Farm stands at the eastern side of the park, constructed long after the park was retrenched from the south. Onion Farm was almost certainly the park steward's house until some time after 1600

and protected the park entrance from Paddock Lane to the south. Parkgate Farm on Park Road may have originally have been another lodge protecting the park entrance from the junction of Paddock Lane and Townfield Lane.

Settlement within the deer park was clearly not going to take place while it was used as a deer park, but two of the entrances to the deer park were possibly the nucleus of settlements. Moss Brow developed around the eastern Paddock Lane entrance to the park, Warburton village probably was pre-existing but have developed further around the western park entrance. Later development included The Saracen's Head, which occupied a sliver of land to the south of the park.

To the immediate east of the deer park and a short distance north of the present Dunham Road and occupying a large portion of the parish is Warburton Moss. This almost circular feature was a dominant landscape feature for centuries, the interior being almost impassible until farmers began to drain the area. Moss Lane, to the north of the moss ran between the moss and shallow valley of Red Brook. This was an ancient route from the east, but it is difficult to define where it originally ran to the west from its present junction with Warburton Lane. A small number of farms and cottages were built along Moss Lane and it is likely that was an early area of settlement within Warburton. It is very noticeable that the farms and cottages in the moss area were initially built around the perimeter of the moss, for obvious reasons.

Farm conversions and the conversions of some of the outlying cottages are an ongoing process in the area, some more recent ones have been extremely well executed, others considerably less so. At least some of the issues involved are the buyer's perceptions of disguising former use, of adding built features which did not exist previously or are distinctly alien to the area or of changing the appearance through the use of inappropriate materials. Despite these problems, the majority of domestic buildings and many of the farm buildings are distinctively different to those in adjoining parishes. This is due to the influence of Rowland Egerton Warburton of Arley, of whose buildings it is said, 'He always built them of brick: he used to say he loved the harmony of red brick breaking the background of green trees.' ('Memories of a Sister of S. Saviour's Priory,' 1912). Rowland Egerton Warburton was fortunate to secure the services of a famous Cheshire Architect, John Douglas in the design of most of these buildings.

The great majority of land in Warburton is farmland, mainly Grade 2 but with margins of Grade 3 land to the north (south of Red Brook) and to the south (north of the River Bollin). Many of the farms in the area are long-established holdings, some held for generations by the same family. Farming is by far the most important influence on the landscape of Warburton, providing food and the healthy soils to grow it. At the same time, farmers in the area provide a long-established backbone to the local community.

The skills of local farmers in understanding the land, particularly in more difficult land, such as the mossland are underappreciated, but climate change is likely to introduce problems which the farmers have never encountered on such a scale before and for which they will require considerable assistance. Seasonal flooding and summer droughts are demonstrably getting more frequent; Bluetongue and Avian Influenza is also becoming more frequent as are a raft of other animal diseases. Climate change will allow the growth of crops not previously seen, but at the same time, new pests will arrive creating new problems.

The appearance of the farmed landscape will almost certainly change, but it can only be hoped that the distinctive character of the Warburton landscape remains as long as possible. Some of the issues which face farmers throughout the UK and to some extent in Warburton include,

- About 60% of nitrates in rivers come from agriculture;

- Many important farmland habitats and species are still in decline in England.
- Farming is the single biggest source of nitrous oxide and also contributes over a third of our methane emissions.
- Cultivation of mosslands releases large quantities of CO₂e, while 7% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture.
- Over a fifth of land in England is at high risk of soil erosion, threatening the health and viability of our land.
- Increasing biosecurity issues, including dealing with Bluetongue, Bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD), Johne's disease, Leptospirosis and Neospora etc.
- Brexit impacts on farming include higher costs, uncertainty on Farm Payments (at least initially), higher supply chain costs, increased food wastage etc.

The planning law on Biodiversity (February 2024) should offer good opportunities for local farmers to introduce biodiversity on some areas of their farms. Areas of Warburton Moss could very effectively be re-established as 'active' mossland, both radically bringing in far greater biodiversity and at the same time sequestering carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Loss of hedgerow trees in Warburton is very clear when old maps are consulted. This decline is now accelerated by the use of modern hedge-cutting (flail) machinery which cannot reasonably select stems to be left to grow on and at the same time often damages mature trees. These losses appear to be increased through climate change, extreme storms and wet weather contributing to instability of the tree roots.

Loss of ditches is another feature of more recent Warburton history. Many ditches in the Parish are ancient and many act as a reservoir for wildlife; culverting these ditches to create more arable land available made sense at the time, but is now less excusable as habitat linkages are broken and biodiversity is very significantly reduced.

The attractiveness of the Warburton landscape is something the local community is both extremely proud of and determined to capitalize on. The historic landscape of Warburton is one of its greatest assets and one which could attract a great deal more tourism than at present. Similarly, the area has many wide, open spaces to attract recreational use and a number of long-distance footpaths running through it which connect to local paths.

As a small rural community, Warburton is not merely a commuter belt for the nearby city, nor is it an area of intensive agriculture and food production. It is developing a more diverse economy, incorporating farming, but also including home working and small-scale enterprise. The conservation of the historic landscape of Warburton is widely seen as exceptionally important, with all inhabitants being keen to support it.

E. P. Beckmann
Landscape Architect

Warburton Neighbourhood Plan

Landscape Character Assessment

2.0 The Purpose of a Landscape Character Assessment

It should be stressed that an LCA is not a policy document. If it does become a policy document its 'neutrality' is surely forfeit. The intention of the LCA is that it is as objective a view of the current landscape as possible – it has to be a 'snapshot' of the landscape as it is now, recording its condition and how it arrived in this condition. The 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition (2013) Glossary defines Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) as, *'The process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape, and using this information to assist in managing change in the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features that make landscapes distinctive. The process results in the production of a landscape Character Assessment.'* The LCA can and should be used as the base from which to formulate specific policies by the Planning Authority.

The key point about an LCA is that it should be seen as 'neutral' in planning terms, so that both sides in for instance a Planning Inquiry should be able to use it as a base to argue the pros and cons of a proposed development site.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Background

The methodology for carrying out the landscape character assessment follows the guidelines provided by the Countryside Agency and Scottish National Heritage as set out in their document 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland' as originally published in 2002.

This process entailed,

- Scoping
- Desk top study
- Field survey
- Landscape classification and description
- Consultation
- Analysis, judgements and recommendations

3.2 Base Plan

Map information was provided by Trafford Council.

3.3 Scoping

A scoping exercise was initially carried out to ascertain the level of detail required and the aims and uses of the study, together with an outline of the form of report required. The study specifically included the whole area of the Parish of Warburton as required to formulate a Neighbourhood Plan for Warburton.



One of the orchards at Onion Farm, planted in 1994, it replicates one that was on the same site in the 1890s.

3.4 Desk Top Study

Data and plans were collected from a variety of sources for several months prior to commencing field survey work. The major sources included:

- Landscape Strategy (September 2004) Trafford Metropolitan Borough SPG
- Landscape Character Assessment reports for surrounding Boroughs
- Trafford Council Strategic Planning Policies
- Agricultural Land Classification
- National Character Areas – Natural England
- The 'Greater Manchester Landscape Character and Sensitivity Assessment' prepared by LUC in August 2018
- 'An approach to landscape sensitivity assessment – to inform spatial planning and land management' June 2019, Christine Tudor of Natural England.

- The 'Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record' – Greater Manchester Archaeology Advisory Service
- Solid and drift geology
- Ordnance Survey Plans 1:25,000

3.5 Field Surveys

Field survey work was undertaken over a considerable period between 2019 and 2023. This enabled an assessment of the landscape at different times of the year, providing a more balanced assessment of the landscape character. All parts of the Parish were either assessed or viewed from a series of field station points and a comprehensive number of photographs were taken, both across the Parish generally and specifically at the field station points.

3.6 Classification and Description

Desk top studies and field study work were combined to confirm various areas of differing landscape character, setting out the different landscape character types. Further site surveys confirmed the more detailed boundary line between each area within the character type. This information was plotted onto 1:25000 O.S. base plan which was considered appropriate for the level of study.

3.7 Area Delineation

It must be stressed that in most locations the Landscape Character Type does not form a neat junction line between one 'type' and another. The junction often forms a zone of transition which, in some instances, may be of considerable width.

The boundary lines illustrated on the Landscape Character Types and Areas Plan should therefore be viewed as approximate, although a careful judgement has been made of the boundary line on site in each case.

However, in some cases the boundary lines between Landscape Character Types and Areas can be very precisely delineated, such as the edges of mossland to adjacent farmland, or the edge of a river flood plain to adjacent farmland.

3.8 Analysis and Judgement

Following the description of specific landscape types and areas, it was possible to evaluate key points and negative elements and traits in the landscape. These were highlighted under the following headings:

- Landscape Sensitivity
- Landscape Change

Together they formed the basis for a series of Management and Landscape Objectives for each area, specifically tailored to either improve existing positive landscape character or mitigate against current adverse trends in management or development.

A similar analysis was made of the settlement areas, together with limited guidelines for future development.

3.9 Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation work was to aid in strategic landscape planning and management and to assist in providing a more informed approach in responding to development proposals, both in the landscape and the villages.



The view north across the former deer park from the junction of Bent Lane and Paddock Lane. The Saracen's Head to the right.

4.0 Landscape Character.

4.1 Method of Assessment.

The method of assessment of landscape character included consideration of published Landscape Character Assessments together with a field assessment of the existing area around the parish. The parish and village of Warburton is covered by several existing Landscape Character Assessments. These are:-

1. Natural England publish 'National Character Area profiles,' of which '60. Mersey Valley' covers the Warburton area. This is a substantial document and deals with the whole length of the Mersey Valley, as a result, much of it is of little direct relevance to the parish of Warburton. However, under 'Landscape Opportunities,' the document does state 'Conserve the historic buildings and character of the villages ensuring high quality design.'

2. Trafford Metropolitan Borough prepared a Landscape Strategy in September 2004 as a Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) document further guiding prospective developers and land managers in considering landscape issues in determining appropriate land use and development and to raise public awareness. In addition it is to be used to assist Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council in making decisions on individual planning applications, and will be used to promote good practice.
3. The 'Greater Manchester Landscape Character and Sensitivity Assessment' was prepared by LUC in August 2018 and is further useful reference. It classes all of Warburton as 'Mossland and Lowland Farmland' Landscape Character Type. Generally this assessment categorises this Landscape Character Type as having a 'Moderate' Sensitivity Rating. (Sensitivity ratings are between Low sensitivity, Low-moderate sensitivity, Moderate Sensitivity, Moderate-high Sensitivity and High sensitivity). Moderate Sensitivity is defined as '*e.g. the area is semienclosed or has some enclosed and some open areas. It is likely to have some intervisibility with surrounding landscapes, and may have some visually distinctive or undeveloped skylines within the area.*' For Access and recreation, Moderate Sensitivity is defined as '*e.g. landscapes with green spaces or recreation areas valued in the local context. Well-used landscapes with some access land, footpaths and public rights of way, possibly with long distance recreation routes or presence of land under National Trust ownership.*' Finally, Perceptual and experiential qualities are defined as '*e.g. A landscape with some sense of rural character, but with some modern elements and human influences*'.
4. In June 2019, Christine Tudor of Natural England produced 'An approach to landscape sensitivity assessment – to inform spatial planning and land management'. In the introduction to this document, a useful description is found. '*Landscape sensitivity may be regarded as a measure of the resilience, or robustness, of a landscape to withstand specified change arising from development types or land management practices, without undue negative effects on the landscape and visual baseline and their value – such as changes to valued attributes of baseline landscape character and the visual resource. Landscape sensitivity assessment is a process that assesses the resilience / robustness of landscape character and the visual resource – and what we value - to a defined change, or changes.*'
5. The Natural England publication 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment' of 2014 by Christine Tudor on page 12 contains 'Five Key Principle for Landscape Assessment' and states –

'The following 5 Principles should be adhered to whatever the scope and methodology adapted in a Landscape Character Assessment:

1. *Landscape is everywhere and all landscape and seascape has character;*
2. *Landscape occurs at all scales and the process of Landscape Character Assessment can be undertaken at any scale;*
3. *The process of Landscape Character Assessment should involve an understanding of how the landscape is perceived and experienced by people;*

4. *A Landscape Character Assessment can provide a landscape evidence base to inform a range of decisions and applications;*
5. *A Landscape Character Assessment can provide an integrating spatial framework – a multitude of variables come together to give us our distinctive landscapes.'*

4.2 Hierarchy of Landscape Character Assessments.

Generally Landscape Character Assessments are undertaken at various scales, such as the 'National Character Area profiles' of Natural England, the 'regional' Greater Manchester Landscape Character and Sensitivity Assessment and the more local Trafford Landscape Strategy. Each of these focusses down to the local level, with more detail becoming apparent the nearer the Character Assessment is to the area in question. In the case of the Warburton Neighbourhood Plan, this Landscape Character Assessment is reduced to perhaps its most detailed scale. It should be noted that Character Types and Character Areas often do not have precisely defined boundaries and there may be some overlapping. For example, where council or parish boundaries often follow a stream or river, the whole width of the river valley is frequently included within the assessment.

4.3 Heritage assets in the landscape.

Another important consideration, particularly important in Warburton, is the need to consider both designated and non-designated heritage assets both in the landscape and as landscape features. Paragraph 203 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) refers to non-designated heritage assets and the need for '*a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset*'. Many of the Landscape Character Areas in Warburton are substantially valuable heritage assets and/or contain the settings of other heritage assets.

It will be immediately apparent on reading about the various character areas that there is great deal of historic material within them. This should be no surprise as the village of Warburton, as Dr Mike Nevell states '*...hides a rich landscape history with origins in the late prehistoric and Roman periods*'. What is particularly unusual about Warburton is that so much of this landscape survives and is relatively untouched.

4.4 Landscape Character Types and Areas.

Landscape Character Types comprise of one or more Landscape Character Areas of broadly similar character. Each landscape character type is dealt with in turn and is identified by a location plan illustrating both Landscape Type and sub-divisions of Landscape Areas, followed by a description of the landscape and its setting. This summarised by identifying the key characteristics which contribute to make the character type distinctive. The landscape description is followed by a brief overview of cultural history for the character type as a whole. Landscape Character Areas provide a more detailed landscape description of the individual areas concerned and are again summarised by their key characteristics. This is followed by a more detailed description of each area's cultural history and its relationship with the landscape – summarised by the key cultural elements in the landscape.

4.5 Landscape Sensitivity.

Landscape sensitivity considers the physical and visual features in the landscape which, if lost or altered, would change the area's character. The key elements of landscape sensitivity are summarised.

4.6 Landscape Change

Landscape change discusses those elements which are in the process of changing and have changed or contain aspects of the area's landscape character. These have been observed on site.

4.7 Recommended Management and Landscape Objectives.

This section considers the existing merits and de-merits of the area's landscape in relation to its sensitivity and existing or potential future change envisaged. A series of management recommendations are made to retain, alter or enhance the present landscape.

4.8 Photographs.

Photographs taken as part of the field survey work have been selected to illustrate the main landscape type and character areas together with other features which may be important to the text.

4.9 The Trafford Landscape Strategy

The Trafford Landscape Strategy identified several 'Landscape Character Types' which have been adopted in the Warburton Landscape Character Assessment. These however are broken down further into 'Landscape Character Areas' with the parish. This results in the following schedule of Types and Areas;-

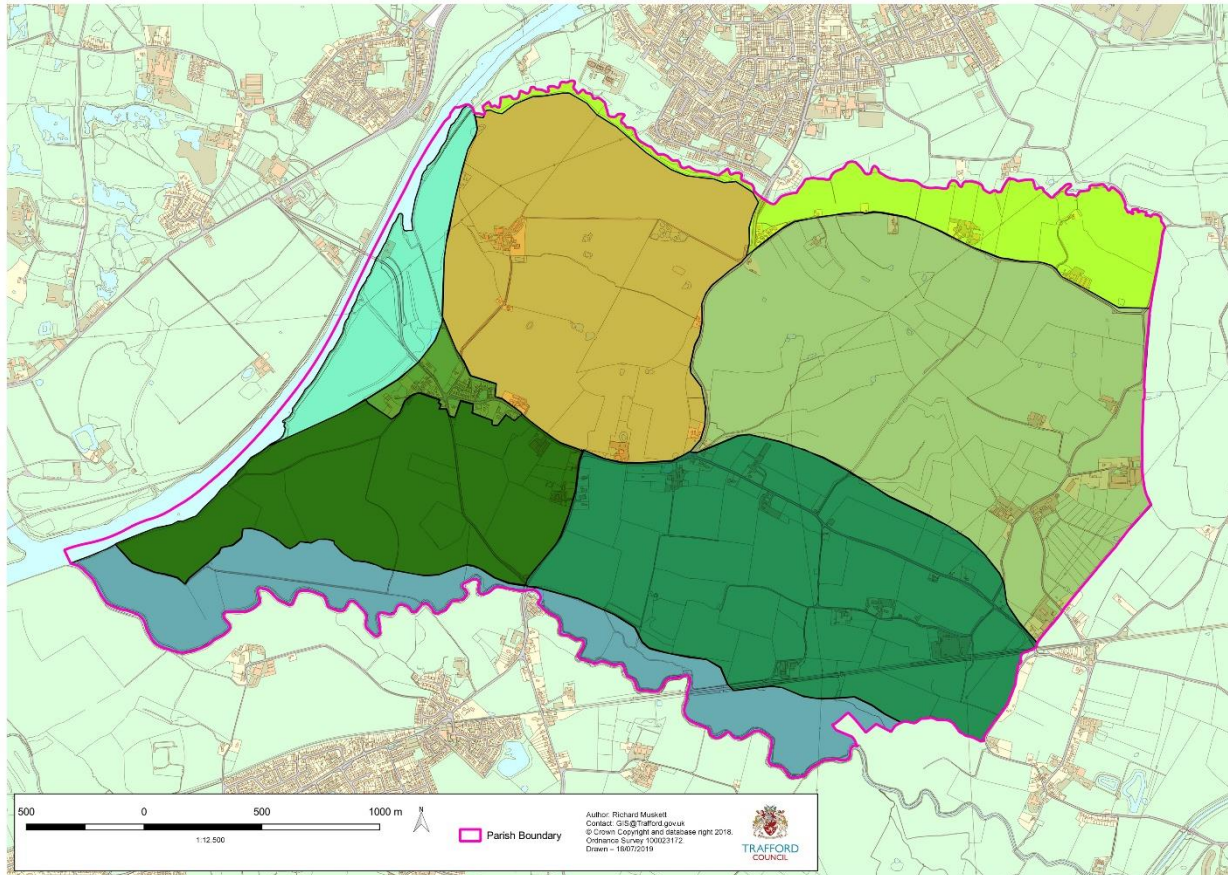
5.0 Warburton Landscape Types and Areas

1.0 River Meadowlands Landscape Type, comprising of;

- 1.1 The Mersey Meadowlands Landscape Area.
- 1.2 The Bollin Valley Meadowlands Landscape Area.

2.0 Settled Sandlands Landscape Type, comprising of;

- 2.1 The Long Ridge Landscape Area.
- 2.2 The Warburton Park Landscape Area.
- 2.3 The Town Field Landscape Area.
- 2.4 The Warburton Moss Landscape Area.
- 2.5 The Red Brook valley Landscape Area.
- 2.6 The Warburton village Landscape Area.



Warburton Landscape Character Types & Areas

1.0 River Meadowlands Landscape Type, comprising of;

- 1.1 The Mersey Meadowlands Landscape Area
- 1.2 The Bolin Valley Meadowlands Landscape Area

2.0 Settled Sandlands Landscape Type, comprising of;

- 2.1 The Long Ridge Landscape Area
- 2.2 The Warburton Park Landscape Area
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- 2.4 The Warburton Moss Landscape Area
- 2.5 The Red Brook valley Landscape Area
- 2.6 The Warburton village Landscape Area

1.1 The Mersey Meadowlands Landscape Area.

Description.

This was a relatively narrow area as the River Mersey originally ran close to the southern bank in Warburton. To the north-east of the Mersey bridge this area has been subject to landfill. However, Warburton has been extended up to the Ship Canal, taking in a large section of former meadowland on the north side of the River Mersey.

When the Ship Canal was built, the Borough boundary was moved from the old course of the River Mersey up to the centre of the Ship Canal. This adjustment gave Trafford a substantial area of river meadow on the north side of the former river course. Not as high as the land on the south side, it is still fairly high and quite distinguishable in the landscape. The Manchester Ship Canal cuts through this land with cliff-like edges. The northern section of this area was filled to create an approach ramp to the overbridge across the Ship Canal. Later still, a further area of landfill took place to the east, between the access ramp and the former river course, resulting in a further area of raised ground.

To the west of the bridge access ramp the land falls steeply away down to the original ground level and below is good agricultural land.

The area has an overhead powerline route running south-west to north-east across the approach ramp of the high-level bridge



View west from the old toll bridge with snow lying on the former bed of the River Mersey.

Key Characteristics.

- The Manchester Ship Canal, a commercial waterway, currently little used.
- The old course of the River Mersey, associated with wet woodland and swampy often waterlogged ground.
- Cliff-like edge to the Manchester Ship Canal
- Landfill, both to create the high-level bridge approach ramp and for 'reclamation'
- The presence of dominating features in the landscape, such as the high-level bridge and the old church of St Werburgh.

Cultural History.

The name Mersey is thought to derive from 'frontier' and certainly the River Mersey was the frontier between the Saxon Kingdoms of Mercia (to the south) and Northumberland (to the north), later it became the county boundary between Lancashire (to the north) and Cheshire (to the south). Warburton was almost certainly founded in its current location because there was ford across the River Mersey (probably adjacent to the old church of St Werburgh) and an eminently good defensive site. There would be a great deal of sense in guarding a strategically important ford across a navigable river.

There is some evidence that the name Warburton may derive from 'Werburgh's Tun' or Werburgh's Fort (after St Werburgh, daughter of the powerful King Wulfhere of Mercia). Equally it may be one of a series of forts built by Aethflaed 'The Lady of the Mercians,' the daughter of Alfred the Great, to keep the Danes out of Mercia. However the evidence for this is at best rather flimsy, despite the fact that Thelwall, a neighbouring village to the west was one of Aethflaed's forts.

Wigsey Lane was the original route from Warburton to the ford crossing the Mersey. The name may give a clue as to the landscape, 'ey' or 'eye' being an island (as in Thelwall Eyes) nearby and 'Wig' being a version of 'big.' 'Big Island' would be the island (now cut through by the Manchester Ship Canal) with the River Mersey flowing around it and clearly visible in the landscape. The two river courses would have been far shallower than the single course to the west, particularly around the confluence with the River Bollin.

At various times efforts were made to improve the navigability of the River Mersey. In 1677, Thomas Patten, a merchant, wrote that it would be an advantage if the Rivers Mersey and Irwell were made navigable around Manchester. By 1697 the Mersey had been made navigable from Liverpool to Warrington. In 1712, Thomas Steers, an engineer proposed eight locks on the Mersey and a cut at Butchersfield to cut off a loop in the Mersey near Lymm. After a late start, the improvement works to the Mersey were fully open to navigation in 1736. Just west of Warburton, a loop in the River Mersey at Butchersfield, had two cuts dug, the first in 1760 had a single lock in it, Old Lock. The second, in 1829, had a double lock at its lower end and was known as the Butchersfield Canal.



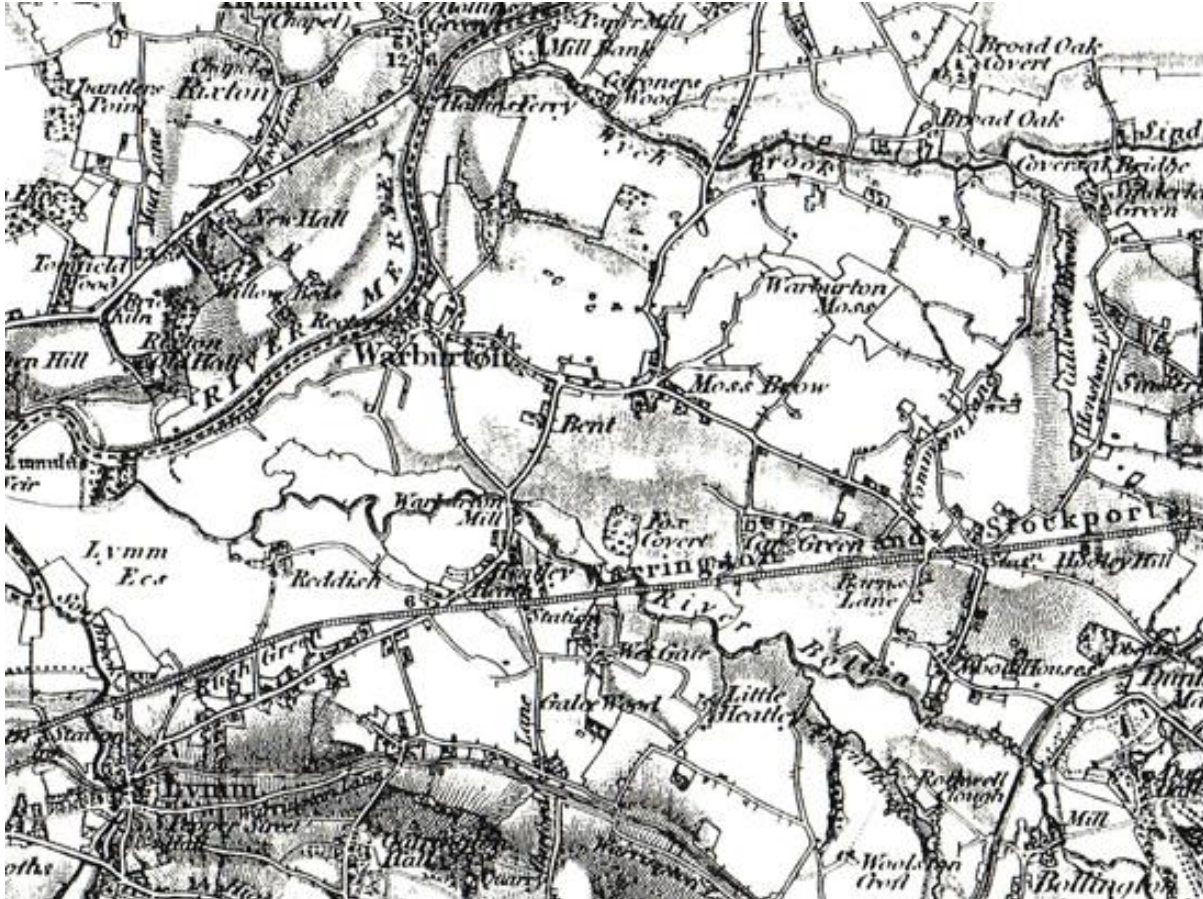
View north across the junction between the old course of the River Mersey (foreground) and the Manchester Ship Canal.

In 1759 the Bridgewater Canal was constructed, creating a rivalry between it and the Mersey navigation. Passengers could sail from the Cathedral steps in Manchester down to Liverpool and there were races between boats on the Bridgewater Canal and those on the River Mersey. Despite the lengthier course of the Mersey, there was no speed restriction and a 'flat' under full sail and with the wind in the right direction could move at far greater speed than the horse drawn barges on the Bridgewater Canal.

In 1816, packet steamers were introduced, speeding up services, although, the opening of the Liverpool Manchester railway line in 1830 meant that these were rapidly made redundant. However, bulk cargo was still carried in other boats. In 1872, the Mersey and Irwell Navigation and the Bridgewater Canal were bought out by a railway syndicate. In 1882, the Ship Canal Company was formed and the following year applied to construct a Ship Canal. This failed, as did a second application in 1884. However, in 1885 a third application succeeded and in 1887 the Ship Canal Company took over the Mersey and Irwell Navigation and the Bridgewater Canal, commencing the cutting of the Ship Canal in the same year. The Ship Canal cut straight through what had been a large island, but the exposed rock on either side was a good foundation on which to build a high-level steel bridge, allowing substantial ships to pass below it. On 1st January 1894, Queen Victoria opened the Manchester Ship Canal.

Prior to the opening of the Ship Canal and during a period of improvement works to the River Mersey, a stone road bridge over the river was built by the Rixton and Warburton Bridge Company in 1863. The bridge is listed and is a toll bridge, still in use although sadly very neglected. On 4th August 1873, the Mersey and Irwell regatta was held at Warburton Bridge; with excellent advance publicity this was an extremely popular event, attracting crews from all over England with its generous prizes. The regattas gradually faded in popularity largely because of rival attractions, but in any case, the river was far from attractive as raw sewage from Manchester flowed through the area. The regatta appears to have ceased after 1878.

With the construction of the Manchester Ship Canal, which acted as a giant flood relief channel, flooding in the area declined, but is still a problem in the tidal areas downstream. This regularising of the flow meant that some of the areas around the river could be successfully drained and there is little doubt that this at least partially brought about the demise of Warburton Moss as a wet mossland.



Part of an old map showing the River Mersey at Warburton prior to the construction of the Manchester Ship Canal.

Parts of this area, like many other parts of the Mersey valley have been subject to land fill, particularly the area immediately east of the toll bridge road (which has been filled almost up to road level) and the old river course as far north-east as the valley of Red Brook in Coroner's Wood. This area has been filled to a level matching the old deer park to the east and south.

The strip of land between Warburton Park and the former course of the River Mersey was occupied by a series of fields on the 1839 Tithe Map, known as 'The Pool Acres'. These have been subject to landfill in recent times.

Key cultural elements in the landscape:

- The Manchester Ship Canal
- The former course of the River Mersey (and possible site of the ford)
- The listed bridge over the previous course of the River Mersey (toll bridge)

- The steel bridge over the Manchester Ship Canal
- The old church at Warburton

Agricultural Land Quality

Grade 3. Land on the old course of the River Mersey is subject to seasonal flooding fairly regularly.

Landscape Sensitivity

The whole of the Mersey valley is sensitive to high structures, such as the high-level bridge, domestic refuse tips (outside the landscape area, but clearly in view nearby), land fill and overhead powerlines. Although a large scale landscape type, (of which the Warburton Character Area is a small part) it is very much a linear landscape.

The area is sensitive to traffic impacts, such as noise, air quality, movement and lights. These relate mainly to the high-level bridge with its toll bridge and often-occurring traffic queues at peak periods. These impacts are at key points in the landscape; elsewhere the landscape is extremely tranquil and relatively undisturbed.

Shipping along the Manchester Ship Canal while currently rarely seen, does have an impact on the area. It is understood that the Manchester Ship Canal Company are intending to increase shipping volumes along the route and this will undoubtedly increase the impacts on the surrounding land.

Key elements of landscape sensitivity:

- High level crossings of the ship canal.
- Land fill operations both within and adjacent to the character area.
- High level electric cable crossings
- Visually sensitive to overhead powerlines.

Landscape Change

This area is one which has seen possibly the largest extent of landscape change within the area of the village and changes which have had substantial impacts on a wide area. These changes principally focus on the River Mersey and its successor, Manchester Ship Canal and the features immediately adjacent to it. Primarily these changes have been navigational, canalizing much of the former river course, but at the same time increasing the clearance height of the bridges over the river.

The landscape of the Mersey floodplain has altered substantially throughout its history. The area would originally have been allowed to flood naturally over flood meadows and the river would have followed an ever-changing and unrestricted course. In more recent times, landfill

operations have taken place on some of the flood meadows, mainly in Warburton to reclaim land for farming operations, but also and especially in the wider area, for the disposal of inert fill and domestic refuse.

In some areas adjacent to the Mersey there are deposits of sand and gravel. Applications for extraction have previously been made, but these appear to have either lapsed or withdrawn. The possibility still exists that another such application may be made and this may have an impact on the setting of the village.

Landscape change to the area is summarised as follows:

- Abandonment of the ancient ford across the River Mersey
- Navigational improvements to the River Mersey over a prolonged period.
- Construction of a bridge over the River Mersey (now listed)
- Canalisation of the River Mersey to form the Mersey Ship Canal
- Abandonment of the old course of the River Mersey
- Construction of the high level steel bridge over the River Mersey
- Landfill sites on the floodplain

Recommended Management and Objectives:

A great deal of the remaining Mersey floodplain landscape has been badly damaged or altered and requires either careful management or, in many cases, substantial mitigation works. Immediately outside the area, several sites of important habitat or wildlife value have been recognised and are receiving appropriate management.

Management of the Landscape

- Discourage visually intrusive landfill operations in the floodplain
- Encourage more appropriate landform and restoration to existing landfill sites.
- Encourage long-term wildlife habitat and conservation management.

1.2 The Bollin Valley Landscape Area.

Description.

The Bollin Valley in Warburton is the lowest part of the village and includes the junction of the river Bollin with the river Mersey. The Bollin flood plain is broad, flat and relatively unspoilt. The relative absence of trees over much of the floodplain allows for long views, but has the effect of magnifying the impact of features seen in view. The river Bollin is the boundary between Warburton and Heatley (to the west), the Warburton boundary runs along the centre of the river from its junction with the River Mersey at Bollin Point / Rixton Junction up to a point where it joins the lower part of Carr Green Road close to Barns Lane Farm. To the east is the Parish of Dunham.

Much of the Bollin valley to the east of Warburton Bridge is the landscape setting for Dunham Massey and its grounds. The dominant location of Dunham Massey, set above the valley floor is a major feature of this area of the valley. The crossings of the Bridgwater Canal and the Trans-Pennine trail are locally important features in the landscape. There are wide, sweeping views out to the east across the Bollin valley from the eastern part of the valley in Warburton.

The river has been subject to various engineering operations over a considerable time, much possibly in connection with amending the river course above the Warburton Mill. It has resulted in a small tributary stream, the Old Bollin being formed to the east of the present river course. West of Warburton Bridge, where the flood plain is relatively narrow, the valley widens considerably, with a large extent of flood plain and a number of substantial drains and a low levee with a track on top of it.

Key Characteristics.

- Flat, linear, alluvial areas
- Often developed on used or permanent pasture
- Close association with water course
- Raised levees and river channel restrictions
- Contain a multitude of communication links – canals, roads, railways etc.
- Bridge and viaduct crossings



The River Bollin in flood in January 2021 viewed from the bridge near Heatley.

Cultural History.

The River Bollin is not suitable for navigation and this has greatly reduced human pressure on the river and its flood plain. This area and the area on the Warrington side of the river have been used as river meadows for many hundreds of years. Much of the land on the Trafford side and to the east of Warburton belonged to Dunham Massey, but on the Warrington side the land appears to have been farmed by a small number of large farm complexes.

The flood plain to the south of the river (the Warrington side) has been subjected to brine pumping and a number of pumping shafts exist close to Warrington Lane. These operations would have possibly created substantial water-filled voids in the salt-bearing sandstone (halite) beds below.

In addition, 'wild' brine pumping was carried out around a wider area to the south of the river, where a small drilling rig would be brought in, a shaft sunk and the brine pumped out until exhausted. The rig would then be moved on to another site. The sites of this wild pumping are unknown, but there have been a number of cases of subsidence in the area and there are a number of small ponds probably formed as a result of these operations. It is considered unlikely that Lord Stamford of Dunham Massey would have allowed such works on the Dunham / Warburton side of the valley, but this is unconfirmed.

In 1853 the London and North Western Railway opened a line running east west through Warburton. This was much used as a passenger line, but reverted to goods traffic only in the 1960s before being closed in 1989. The trackbed was converted to a footpath and is now an integral part of the Trans-Pennine Trail. The influence of the railway was dramatic. To the east of Lymm, Heatley saltworks had its own sidings from the line. Many small orchards in Lymm, Oughtrington, Heatley and Warburton supplied fruit to the markets in Manchester throughout

the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Many of the now familiar local building materials, such as Welsh slate, roof tiles, Accrington brick etc were brought in by rail.

In 1893, following heavy rain in the headwaters of the River Bollin, floodwater surged into the River Mersey and water levels rose by nearly 10m (30') causing damage in Warrington.



Above; the weir and modern flats replicating the old Warburton Mill.

There was a large Georgian / early Victorian water-powered mill at Warburton Bridge until the 1980s when operations ceased and the site was sold. The mill site is one of the earliest recorded in Cheshire with a reference to it in a charter of 1170. The mill was rebuilt in 1716 and in 1833 was advertised as being 'valuable and desirable'. In 1918 the Egerton Warburton family sold the mill, together with the Warburton estate to the CWS. In 1999 the University of Manchester Archaeological Unit (UMAU) carried out a survey and watching brief at the mill and demonstrated that the mill building extant at the time dated to the late C18th / early C19th. The stone-lined undershot wheelpit associated with the building was uncovered, and short tailrace tunnel of the same date. To the north of the wheelpit the discovery of a second undershot wheelpit was assumed to be associated with an earlier phase of the mill replaced around 1716. An earlier, medieval mill may have stood on the northern bank of the River Bollin close to the junction with the Old Bollin.

After a period standing empty, the mill was dismantled between September and December 1999 and a 'replica' mill built, containing apartments, while the mill outbuildings were replaced by conventional houses. The area of rock on which the mill stands was probably the only outcrop in the lower Bollin valley and made a strong foundation for the mill and contained the mill race which ran under the building past the wheel. The mill wheel was powered by river water held back by a weir. The weir holds back the water of the Bollin to a point approximately where the Trans-Pennine footpath crosses the river. To the north, a smaller brook, known as

The Old Bollin, acted as an overflow channel when the corn mill was operational and still carries flood water when the Bollin is in flood.



Above; The bridge at Warburton Mill from the east, showing the modern concrete widening of the bridge.

The same rock outcrop was a suitable base for the Warburton Bridge carrying the A6144 between Lymm and Trafford. This attractive stone-built bridge, with a load limit of a mere 7.5 tons is regularly crossed by far heavier vehicles. West of the road bridge are a number of flood channels running under the road, which allow for the River Bollin to flood on either side of Warburton Mill.

In 1992, the Greater Manchester Western and Northern Relief Road (M56 – M62) was proposed. This would have had a substantial impact on the Bollin Valley, but the scheme was dropped in 1993. The HS2 railway was proposed to run on a similar route, with a potentially even more substantial impact.



Above: Warburton Mill Bridge from the northwest showing the superb stonework.

Angling is very popular throughout the floodplain area and salmon have been seen at the Warburton Bridge weir. The Bollin Valley Way is a 25 mile recreational path starting in Macclesfield and ending at Partington. It was completed in 1993 and shortly afterwards it was connected to the Trafford section of the Trans Pennine Trail, originally connecting Heatley to Broadheath.

Key cultural elements in the landscape:

- Historic sites on either side of the flood plain
- Use of the river for water power
- The use of the flood plain for water meadows
- Use of the area as a fishery
- Use of the Bollin Valley for brine pumping
- The Bridgewater Canal
- The LNWR railway line, now the Trans-Pennine Trail

Agricultural Land Quality

The bulk of the area is Grade 3, but to the extreme south of the parish there is an area of Grade 4 land.

Landscape Sensitivity

The whole of the Bollin valley is particularly sensitive to high structures, such as viaducts, bridges etc. Chimneys well outside the area have a strong visual impact on the area. The area would be sensitive to wildlife disturbance if visitor numbers substantially increased or if more active recreational pursuits were introduced

Within Warburton, the River Bollin floodplain retains a more traditional agricultural landscape of cropped fields and few hedgerows and trees.

Key elements of landscape sensitivity:

- Sensitive to the visual and landscape impacts of potential high structures i.e the proposed M62 link and especially the proposed HS2 viaduct and embankments.
- Important areas of wildlife and habitat are sensitive to disturbance and vandalism
- Low, flat floodplain sensitive to high mounded landform or substantial buildings

Landscape Change:

The Bollin valley is remarkable in that there has been so little change for a considerable period of time. The course of the river has altered through time and a number of ditches have been created to drain specific areas. One of the largest changes to the river was the construction of a weir at Warburton Mill to create a pool to power the mill.

The construction of both the Bridgewater Canal and the LNWR railway line involved the construction of extensive areas of embankment in the Bollin valley as well as bridges over the river itself. Despite being relatively low structures, these embankments do have a substantial visual impact on the surrounding area.

Infestation of Himalyan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) has taken place along the Bollin banks. While this can be removed, either by pulling or by herbicide, it has undoubtedly suppressed and probably wiped out the native species which used to exist in the same area.

Recommended Management and Objectives:

The Bollin valley landscape is arguably one of the best in the village in terms of quality and condition, the situation would easily change through alterations to the farming economy. It is therefore important to monitor future change with a view to safeguarding, in particular, the areas of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. The hedgerow trees are virtually all at a mature stage in life and will require a programme of progressive new planting to ensure continuance of the present landscape character.

The existing landscape character would be strengthened and visually improved if hedges were to be replaced on the lines of their predecessors. Creation of a footpath system to follow the valley side above the Bollin should also be considered.

Management of the Landscape

- Monitor existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Encourage rolling programme of new hedgerow tree planting
- Investigate the opportunities for extended footpath systems associated with the river
- Remove the Himalayan Balsam



2.1 The Long Ridge Landscape Area.

Description.

This long low ridge runs approximately south-east to north-west to the south of Warburton Parish, from Dunham in the east to the edge of the Bollin Valley in the west. Dunham Road runs along the north-eastern side of the ridge effectively dividing this landscape area from that of the mossland to the north. Carr Green Lane runs south from Dunham Road and along the ridge just below and south-west of the ridgeline. A long hedge line continues this line, suggesting that there may have been a longer trackway, possibly linking in to the present Bent Lane and the crossing of the River Bollin. This track is shown on the 1757 Map of Warburton held at Arley Hall. The presence of this trackway would tend to indicate that it may have been used in prehistoric times.

This ridgeline is visually dominant from both north-west and south-east and forms much of the skyline from both sides. The fields on either side of the ridge are relatively large and regular, most of them aligned with the hedge along the centreline of the ridge. There are few trees in these hedges, most of them are in the roadside hedges of the Dunham Road.

Towards the western edge of the ridge and on its south-westerly side is a substantial area of plantation woodland. Fox Covert has been woodland since at least 1757 (it is shown on the 1839 Tithe Map and the 1757 Map of Warburton).

A footpath from Bent Lane runs along the ridgeline to the corner of Carr Green Lane (where it changes direction from running south from Dunham Road to running eastwards just south of and below the ridge top). At this same junction, another footpath runs south through Lower Carr Green Farm and then across the River Bollin to Wet Gate Lane, Heatley. From Higher Carr Green Farm (which sits in the central section of Carr Green Road) another footpath runs southwards, crossing the Trans-Pennine Trail before turning south-east to run to Dunham.

In 1853 the London and North Western Railway opened a line running east west through the southern edge of Warburton. This was much used as a passenger line, but reverted to goods traffic only in the 1960s before being closed in 1989. The trackbed has now been converted to a footpath and forms part of the Trans-Pennine Trail, a long-distance route.

The few properties along Carr Green Lane enjoy extensive views both north and south. There are exceptionally good views from the various footpaths in the area

Key Characteristics.

- Long, low ridge
- Absence of trees along hedge lines – trees only occur closer to buildings, in a sole block of plantation woodland and along roadside hedges.
- Rectangular fields with hedges running up and down slopes or horizontally.
- A number of footpaths, including the Trans-Pennine Trail.



The magnificent sundial on the southern elevation of St Werburgh's Church. The characteristic red tiles and snecked red sandstone walls can easily be seen.

Cultural History.

It is likely that this ridge was cultivated in very early times because of its light, sandy soils. It was also the site of some early Roman activity, the nature of which is yet to be determined. (A Time Team investigation in March 2007 identified that there was no Roman Fort above Moss Brow Farm.) A series of Roman metalwork finds from the 1st to the 3rd centuries AD between The Bent and Moss Brow indicate that there may have been some habitation in the area.

The name 'Carr Green' probably relates to the 'carrs' or marshy land either along the Bollin Valley immediately to the south and/or to the small area of mossland to the east, between Dunham and Carr Green Lane.

The site of 'Wittenspithall,' recorded on the 1839 Tithe Map as 'Three cottages, gardens and land...' is an interesting one. Now occupied by a row of three modern cottages, this site has a

name, thought to be an amalgam of 'Witten' or 'Whitten' meaning either wayfaring tree (*Viburnum opulus*) or (more likely in this area with this soil) rowan tree (*Sorbus aucuparia*) with 'spithall,' meaning belonging to the 'Hospital' (as in Spitalfields, London). This may indicate that this area belonged to the Knights Hospitaller, who held the eastern side of the manor of Warburton for some time.

Higher Carr Green Farm is an C18th building with an unusually long five-bay threshing barn combined with a shippon. Moss Brow Farm has a large five bay barn with a date stone of 1716 and spectacular tall, open and strutted oak trusses (some possibly re-used) on stone plinths.

The Altrincham Royal Observer Corps Monitoring Post was opened in 1965 as a nuclear monitoring post (taking advantage of the elevation of the ridge) in a slightly raised platform within a compound west of Carr Green Lane (at the western end of the lane). It was sold in 2003 and a Planning Application lodged to build a house on the site in 2006, but this was refused. Some works have been carried out on the structure, essentially an underground bunker / monitoring room, but the site remains in private hands.



The ROC monitoring post off Carr Green Lane in 2020.

To the north of the ridge and based around the junction of Dunham Road, Warburton Lane and Paddock Lane is Moss Brow. Moss Brow probably developed around the junction between Paddock Lane, the access to Warburton Moss and possibly an access into the Warburton deer park via Onion Farm (the present Warburton Lane had not been constructed at this date). Buildings to the east of this junction are within the Long ridge Character Area.

Moss Brow Farm comprises of a collection of buildings around a large central barn which has historic interest and is a major feature in the landscape of Moss Brow. Adjacent to Moss Brow Farm is a pond which is a feeder pond to the former deer park ditch to the north. It almost certainly pre-dates the deer park and is located on a spring-line below the ridge.

The Post Office House designed by John Douglas and built c 1893 is listed Grade II. This building is visually striking with its decorative gables and massive central chimney facing along Warburton Lane.

Further east from the Post Office House, and facing Dunham Road is the Old School House, yet another John Douglas design which encased the oak frame from a pre-existing barn.



The new church of St Werburgh

At the western end of the ridge is St Werburgh's Church, standing on the highest part of Bent Lane and therefore in a visually dominant location. Built in 1883 - 85, to replace the old St Werburgh's Church sited to the north-west, it was designed by the Architect, John Douglas, who also designed the adjacent Parish Rooms and the connected Caretaker's House, both listed Grade II and both of which are splendid examples of his work. The church was paid for by Rowland Eyles Egerton Warburton (14th December 1804 – 6th December 1891 - Lord of the Manor, keen hunter, poet and designer of the magnificent herbaceous border at Arley Hall) from the receipts of having let the shooting rights of the parish for a period of ten years. St Werburgh's is listed Grade II and is built of snecked red sandstone with a steeply-pitched red

tiled roof and a prominent castellated tower. It is a superb example of Arts and Crafts style applied to a church.



The War Memorial in front of St Werburgh's Church



The date stone in the wall of St Werburgh's Church



The Warburton Parish Rooms and the Caretaker's House, off Bent Lane, Warburton.

Key cultural elements in the landscape:

- Ancient trackway along the crest.
- Lynchets indicating ancient cultivation.
- Roman artefacts in the area, indicating possible habitation.
- Higher Carr Green Farm threshing barn.
- Moss Brow barn.
- Moss Brow pond
- Former Royal Observer Corps monitoring post.
- St Werburg's Church (new church).
- The War Memorial
- Parish Rooms / Caretaker's cottage.
- Post Office House.
- Old School House

Agricultural Land Quality

The northern side of the ridge and part of the eastern end are Grade 2. To the south and towards the lower part of the Bollin valley the land is Grade 3.

Landscape Sensitivity

The slight elevation afforded by the ridge gives superb views to both north and south, north over towards Partington and beyond, south towards Dunham Massey and the Bollin valley. Conversely this crest is extremely sensitive to any structures being built on or near it, particularly if they have any substantial height. This sensitivity extends to both sides of the ridge. From the north the ridge is visible across the low-lying area of Warburton Moss and the area of the former deer park. From the south east, the ridge is visible from Dunham village. From the south the Trans-Pennine footpath, although partially in cutting where it crosses the ridge, also has views across the area. The most extensive views are from the village of Heatley on the southern side of the Bollin valley.

The area is generally extremely quiet and peaceful away from Dunham Road and particularly on the south side of the ridge. The group of buildings around St Werburgh's Church and The Bent opposite (which are particularly outstanding examples of John Douglas architecture) are particularly important as both heritage assets and as focal points in the landscape.

Pylons running across this area are particularly visible.

Key elements of landscape sensitivity:

- Structures being built on or near the ridge, especially high ones.
- Structures being built on or near the Trans-Pennine and other footpaths in the area.
- Noise generation on the south side of the ridge.

Landscape Change:

- Loss of hedges throughout the area, but particularly to the east.
- Loss of trees throughout the area. These were associated with hedges.



A view across the western end of the ridge from the western end of Carr Green Lane.

Recommended Management and Objectives:

New tree planting within the hedges would be an advantage to create both screening and shelter. It would be particularly desirable to retain the few hedges left in this area as these help delineate the original historic field pattern.

Footpaths within the area are well-used, but there are some problems with connectivity to other footways and footpaths. The western end of Carr Green Lane is a single-track, deeply incised lane and potentially dangerous for pedestrian use. Yet this is an important link to a footpath running north across Warburton Moss.



View along the western section of Carr Green Lane

Management of the Landscape

- Monitor existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Encourage rolling programme of new hedgerow tree planting
- Investigate the opportunities for extended footpath systems and linkages to other areas.

2.2 The Warburton Park Landscape Area.

Description.

The Warburton Park landscape area was occupied by a medieval or possibly post-medieval deer park. It is very clearly a 'designed landscape' although not currently registered as such. It is a substantial area of relatively flat land with curved boundaries. In the centre of the area lies Park Farm, standing on a slightly raised area of land. The park has a distinctive plan, with sinuous, curved edges and no right-angled corners; this strongly suggests that the park may have been used for deer hunting. Within the park, the land is very gently undulating, creating, in combination with the several small copses of woodland a range of views, from relatively short internal views to long views of surrounding features outside the park. The core of the park is Park Farm, the site of the original manor house surrounded by a number of agricultural buildings. The farm is accessed from the south and two buildings, one on either side of the drive are fairly prominent, these are West Cottage and Park Cottages.

The former deer park occupies to the northern part of the village and its presence has determined the shape of the village since its creation. It is hard not to overstate how important to the landscape of Warburton this area has been and continues to be. The core of Warburton village is the present Conservation Area, lying just west of the park where the access road to Park Farm joins the main highways. The hamlet of Moss Brow lies to the east of the deer park, around its original eastern entrance and at the junction of Warburton Lane and Dunham Road.



View north-east from the Deer Park path showing the small copses around ponds.

The original boundary to the park appears to have followed Warburton Lane, to the east and south and then Paddock Lane to the west. However, to the east the park pre-dates Warburton Lane, which was constructed in the area immediately outside the deer park and



Panoramic view from Warburton Lane just south of Jack Hey Gate Farm looking WNW.



Panoramic view from the Warburton Park Farm footpath just west of Jack Hey Gate Farm looking north.

this accounts for the numerous bends in the road. To the north, the top of the embankment to the old course of the River Mersey was part of the boundary, while to the west a small lane (running down towards the Mersey) skirts a remaining visible part of the park pale. To the north-east, the top of the embankment to the Red Brook valley was the boundary. These boundaries are used now to define this character area. Through the centre of the park flows a small stream, Warburton Park Brook, now partially culverted and flowing from eastern edge of the park (fed from Warburton Moss) through a shallow valley to the old course of the River Mersey to the west.

There are a number of small ponds in the area, which were deliberately dug to encourage wildfowl into the area and to stock fish. These ponds are surrounded by small copses of woodland, of which the most substantial stands immediately north of The Saracens Head public house. This particular group of trees is one of the most important in Warburton, forming much of the horizon when seen from the east or west. To the centre of the eastern part of the park is a group of approximately ten small, interconnected ponds again surrounded with trees, forming one of the larger copses in the park.

At some point, the whole of the park was divided into fields (see below) these being fairly large rectangular fields divided by hawthorn hedges with oak trees at irregular intervals planted into them. In more recent years, some of the hedges have been removed, although the oak trees remain, while in other areas there are few oak trees, but the hedges have been maintained. Few trees remain in the peripheral hedges, partially due to vehicle damage, but also due to the modern maintenance technique of flailing hedges. The few trees which do remain are of considerable value even if they are not of considerable age.

As the park occupies the centre of the village (even if it is to the northern corner of the village) the peripheral roads run along the eastern, southern and south-western boundaries of the park, so that passers-by have continuous and varying views into the parkland landscape.

An overhead powerline crosses the park running west-south-west to east-north-east approximately 200m north-west of Park Farm. While this is notable its impact is minimised by the pylons being few and partially screened. To the west the high-level bridge over the Manchester Ship Canal is a prominent landmark. A number of taller buildings around the fringe of the park are distinctive; these include The Saracen's Head public house and Paddocklake Farm, but in the case of the former it is partially concealed from the park by two copses of trees. To the north-east, the group of buildings around Top Park Close is particularly visible from the western part of the park and to the north; houses on Oak Road, Partington are also visible although partially screened by trees. To the south-east, the hamlet of Moss Brow around the junction between Dunham Road and Warburton Lane is visible from much of the adjacent park area. Most prominent of all is the dark mass of the trees of the ancient woodland, Coroner's Wood forming the northern boundary of the park.

The funnels of ships using the Manchester Ship Canal can occasionally be seen moving along the north-west boundary of the park. These funnels can be seen almost right across the park.

The peripheral roads just outside the park boundary are generally not well-screened and traffic noise penetrates well into the park area. The A6144 runs along Warburton Lane to the eastern boundary of the park and along Paddock Lane to the south before running along Bent Lane. This is a 40mph speed limit road with traffic noise increasing considerably at peak periods. Paddock Lane continues along the boundary to the west from its junction to Bent Lane and this leads to the Warburton Toll Bridge. Queuing traffic frequently backs up from the bridge along Paddock Lane and not infrequently along Warburton Lane into Partington.

A footpath runs west from just north of Jack Hey Gate Farm, to a point close to Warburton Park Farm, where it runs diagonally across a field to join Park Road. There are superb views

from the footpath but unfortunately it lacks connectivity to other footpaths and is accessed via heavily trafficked or fast-moving traffic roads.

Key Characteristics.

- Groups or copses of trees.
- The backdrop of woodland, Coroner's Wood, to the north.
- Curved boundaries.
- Relatively flat or low-lying ground
- Numbers of small ponds within copses of trees.
- Large, relatively regular field pattern.
- Irregular sections of 'park pale' earthworks or ditches at various points around the perimeter.
- Scattered properties around the park perimeter to the south and east, with the exception of the hamlet of Moss Brow.
- Many viewpoints around the perimeter into the park as well as from the footpath through the park.
- Heavily trafficked roads to the east and south boundaries.
- Only one footpath into the area, giving a very 'private' feel to the area.

Cultural History.

This parkland (Not currently registered on the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes) may have fairly ancient origins, it is difficult to find specific evidence, but it could be reasonably assumed that it was originally medieval. A Royal licence to 'empark' would have been necessary, but there is no record of such a licence for Warburton. The Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service Monument Full Report records of Warburton Park (HER no. 383.2.0) that *'The park is first mentioned in 1469 and occurs on Speed's map of Cheshire. It is shown on Saxton's map of Cheshire for 1577 and Bleau's map of 1645, but not on Burdett's map of 1777. However, Warburton Park Farm occurs in the 17th century in the parish registers, suggesting that this landscape was enclosed by this period.'* The peripheral hedges to the park are classed as 'Important' hedgerows as they visibly relate to the original Warburton Park. In 1577, William Harrison in his 'Description of England' stated *'The twentieth part of the realm is employed upon Deere and Conies (rabbits) already....the owners still desirous to enlarge those groundes do not let daily to take in more'*. implying that deer parks were still very popular. A characteristic of deer parks is the park pale, the boundary to the park usually designed to allow wild deer in but keep them it once they were there. 'Salters' (or deer leaps from 'saltatorium' – a leap) may well have existed, presumably on the northern (Coroners Wood) and eastern (Warburton Moss) sides where at the time there were no roads and the outlying landscape would have been an ideal habitat for deer.

Fallow deer would have been the favoured species in the park requiring cover during the day and moving from coverts at dawn and dusk. During adverse weather conditions, deer would have kept away from the open 'launds' (extensive areas of grassland), possibly dotted with trees, and grazed or browsed around the edges of woodland. The small copses still present in the landscape (also called holts or coppices, or if mainly holly 'hollins') would have been used to feed the animals in the park, the holly being used in winter. Despite this feed additional feeding with hay, oats, ivy and pollarded tree foliage would have had to be provided as required. Most deer parks had an extensive and substantial park pale, but the pale is only visible in a few areas in Warburton, possibly because of the sandy nature of the soils. Parks were also used for falconry, the keeping of rabbits (in artificial warrens) and also the ponds for fisheries. The shape of the Warburton deer park is of interest, the essentially 'clover-leaf' plan with its distinctively-rounded corners designed to avoid chased deer being cornered by the mounted hunters.

Deer hunting took two forms, the first was the 'Par force de chiens,' (or 'par force') the ancestor of the modern fox hunt, where privileged, generally aristocratic riders would career round after deer with a pack of hounds chasing the deer. (This kind of hunting was generally preferred in forests, with larger spaces). It was highly ritualised and comprised of eight specific elements. The second kind of hunting was 'Bow and stable,' where 'lymer' (scent hounds) dogs scented out the deer and they were carefully driven to a 'stable' or standing, where previously concealed bowmen or crossbowmen shot the deer down. Lacking the status of hunting on horseback, the latter method was far more effective and essentially provided meat for the pot.



The pillow mound (former rabbit warren) within the Warburton Deer Park.

Warburton park may have provided all of these things, there is a pillow mound, surrounded by a shallow ditch, which was almost certainly a rabbit warren. (Reputed to be a burial mound, it is very clearly in the wrong place for such, being located in a shallow valley at the confluence of two smaller shallow valleys. It is clearly man-made and the obvious candidate for a rabbit warren). At the northern end of the mound there is a small pond, possibly the remnant of the

original ditch. The 1888 – 1913 OS one-inch map clearly shows that the mound is effectively an island in a shallow valley. There are also numerous artificial small ponds surrounded by small copses providing fisheries, game coverts and waterfowl breeding areas.

Outside the deer park pale would have been a 'freeboard' (or 'Bucks Leap'), usually one bound (7 or 8 yards) wide. In the case of Warburton, Warburton Lane to the east of the park and built long after the park's establishment, occupies the freeboard area, as does Paddock Lane to the south. Some sections of the freeboard / pale appear to have been reduced back into the park around Jack Hey Gate Farm and Onion Farm; these slivers of land, ('slangs' in Derbyshire) possibly being formed to simplify the deer-proof boundary around entrances to the park, where human activity would otherwise compromise the security of the park pale. These areas clearly show on the old maps of the area.

One of the interesting features of the park is that there is an area where the boundary appears to have been very substantially set back, in effect a phased 'retreat' of the park boundary. What is more certain is that the entire southern and part of the western boundaries of the park were withdrawn back into the park and this retrenchment is clear on the 1757 map of Warburton held at Arley Hall and on the 1839 Tithe map of Warburton. However, these do not confer a date. The fact that the enclosures to the south are longer and far narrower than those within the park on the 1757 map suggests that the retrenchment of the park is quite an old one. It is interesting to speculate that if the Onion Farm wall painting is dated to c.1575 and that at that date it was still functioning as a keeper's lodge, the retrenchment would have occurred sometime after that date.

Jack Hey Gate farm is located at the northern end of the retrenchment and the site may have been used as a replacement keeper's lodge to the original Onion Farm, as there is a long-established footpath to Warburton Park Farm immediately adjacent.

Deer hunting declined during the enclosure era and it is possible that the Warburton family, strong Royalist supporters, had little choice at the end of the English Civil War, but to carry out enclosure work in the park. In any event, deer parks effectively made a loss for the landowner and were expensive to maintain, far more money could be made from running cattle or growing crops in the same area. Contrary to popular opinion, a deer park pale was not always a massive mound surmounted by a paling fence and with a deep and wide ditch on the park side. Some parks had a pale fence alone, where the topography assisted this, others had wide ditches and low mounds for the pale fences. Warburton park has some fairly deep ditches along some of the boundaries to the east and south and these were fed, as now, from the mossland and the pond at Moss Brow Farm. There are substantial earthwork indications near the village centre. As a deer park pale was very expensive to build and maintain, practicality was always the order of the day. As a result, the park pale varied in type and extent around the entire perimeter.

Rowland Eyles Egerton-Warburton (1804-1891) was the owner of the Warburton Estate (as well as the Arley Estate) and he commissioned John Douglas to design many and various buildings in Warburton. Egerton-Warburton was a poet, writer and above all, a keen huntsman (President of the Tarporley Hunt Club) who undoubtedly would have made use of the deer park for hunting, but for foxes and pheasants instead of deer.



Jack Hey Gate farm, a distinctive John Douglas styled building.



Onion Farm, north elevation, showing the reused stone on the gable end of the original house (left) and the John Douglas designed stable block (extended 1994) right.



An extract from the O.S. 6" map of 1888 – 1913 showing the extent of the former deer park.

The entrance to Warburton Park Farm is via Park Road which runs from a point near the centre of the village (the old cross) to the north-east to the farm. Onion Farm, to the east-south-east, may have been sited on another access into the deer park as is suggested by the alternative name of 'Onion Lodge', the presence of the village pinfold on the opposite side of Warburton Lane to Onion Farm and the strong possibility that the northern bay of the old house at Onion Farm may have been used to hang venison. There is generally a strong link between ancient woodland and parkland and Warburton is no exception. The ancient woodland of Coroner's Wood lies just outside the northern boundary of the park and the valley edge is defined by a clearly 'engineered' line to the park. This engineered boundary originally continued to the north-west but in 1996 permission was granted to import fill into the adjacent land outside the previous park boundary. This has been completed to the level of the land within the park.



Fallow deer at Dunham Massey

Onion Farm, as described above, may have been a keeper's lodge or cottage, but may have been of very early construction, part of the interior being constructed of high-quality ashlar, clearly once an external wall the bulk of which has been removed and remodelled to form the northern bay of the house (possibly for hanging venison). It may have originally been a chapel, with an east-west orientation. The rest of the house is timber-framed with a Tudor wall painting of c. 1570 on an interior wall. The old farm house has been connected to a John Douglas-style barn via a green oak framed link. It is listed Grade II.

The Saracen's Head public house is not listed but is an important cultural feature in both the community and the landscape. Again of John Douglas style construction, the outside has been painted a cream colour. This is a very attractive 17th Century Inn, said to retain many original features. The Saracens Head on the front elevation (a reference to the Egerton Warburton family crest) is particularly notable feature.

Parkgate Farm, as its name suggests is the site of the main entrance to the park and the buildings may have medieval origins.

Park Farm is set, like the nearby rabbit warren(?) in the same shallow valley and again the farm and most of its buildings are located on a locally mounded area which had a moat around it. A small pond to the south is possibly all that remains of this feature. The farm has an ancient barn within it, now listed grade II.

The 1757 Estate Map of Warburton (held at Arley Hall) shows the parkland to have been divided up into enclosures; many of these hedges are still in place today, others have been removed in more recent times. Interestingly, the ponds and copses are shown, implying that they were sufficiently established as to be not worthwhile removing. These hedges were planted with hedgerow trees, a few of which still survive. The 1839 Warburton Tithe Map shows almost exactly the same pattern of fields, ponds and copses as in the 1757 Estate Map.

Possibly circa 1880 (when new housing and barns etc. were built to the plans of the architect John Douglas throughout the parish) the former rabbit warren was planted with beech trees. This is an ideal location for the species (which thrives in drier soils) and is close enough to the original manor house to be considered a landscape feature within the designed landscape. Other beech trees and some Scots pine were planted in the copse to the north of The Saracen's Head, both reinforcing and extending it.

In more recent years there is some evidence of the enclosure hedges being removed and some of the ponds appear to have been filled in, but overall, the deer park retains its integrity

and distinctive character in the surrounding landscape. In many respects, the landscape of this area is reverting to its original appearance as a deer park.



West Cottage on the west side of the road to Park Farm, built to the distinctive designs of John Douglas of Chester. The date on the façade giving a clue as to when it was built.

Key cultural / heritage elements in the landscape:

- Former deer park, a designed landscape, whose original perimeters are clearly still present in the landscape.
- The very distinctive and dominating outline of the park pale in the surrounding landscape and the 'Important' perimeter hedges.
- Remains of a complex system of streams, drainage ditches, ponds and moats throughout the park and its perimeter.
- 'Modern' roads occupying the freeboard immediately outside the park pale.
- C19th plantings within the park area (north of The Saracen's Head public house and on the pillow mound near Park Farm).
- Presence of deer park features including small ponds and associated copses, probable rabbit warren and pin-fold (east of Onion Farm and outside the park).
- General absence of development around the core grouping of buildings of Park Farm.
- Association with Coroner's Wood (typical of many deer parks)

- Onion Farm (Medieval internal wall and Tudor wallpainting)
- The Saracen's Head public house
- A number of listed buildings and structures around the perimeter of the park.



The Saracens Head main entrance off Paddock Lane.

Agricultural Land Quality

The park area is Grade 2 agricultural land, grading into Grade 3 to the north and west.

Landscape Sensitivity

The flat land of the park is extremely sensitive to expansive views with little opportunity to screen any new substantive feature in the landscape, either permanent or temporary. Adjacent higher ground and features on it, such as the nearby listed Warburton bridge and the bridge over the Manchester Ship Canal are extremely prominent features in the landscape. There are good views from the park area towards the hills and to the north-west as well as the chimneys of adjacent industrial areas.

As a very significant heritage asset (although not protected as such), containing several other heritage assets and the unifying element to the setting of many listed structures (including the Warburton Conservation Area) the former park has an exceptionally high sensitivity.

The area has several ponds and ditches feeding and draining them. These ditches need routinely digging out and there is some evidence that any fluctuation in drainage could result in flooding problems in some of the fields.

Some of the woodland in the park area is visually extremely valuable. To the rear of the Saracens Head public house is a fairly extensive area of woodland running approximately north-south forming the most important visual barrier in the centre of the village. The effectiveness of this feature as a visual barrier is reinforced by smaller areas of woodland on either side, such as the short section running between The Saracens Head and the junction to Paddock Lane just to the west.

Coroners Wood to the north provides an important, if incomplete visual screen between the Green Belt and open landscape of Warburton and the housing in Partington.

The peripheral roads, Warburton Lane and Paddock Lane are heavily trafficked and at peak hours noise and movement dominates the deer park to the east and south. As Warburton Lane particularly incorporates many bends, this creates further traffic noise as traffic slows and speeds up; motorbikes in particular are extremely noisy on this road.

Key elements of landscape sensitivity:

- A very significant heritage asset, containing several other heritage assets, featuring in the settings of many listed buildings and structures around the park perimeter.
- Sensitive to any development around the perimeter of the area.
- Sensitive to any development within the core area of Park Farm.
- Open views to and from the area, locally restricted by copses of woodland.
- Visual screen between Warburton and Partington provided by Coroner's Wood.
- Visually extremely sensitive to the imposition of high structures and/or mounding, such as the high-level bridge over the Manchester Ship Canal.
- Visually sensitive to overhead powerlines.
- Extremely sensitive to the removal of any trees or woodland within the area.
- Very sensitive to drainage fluctuations.
- Very sensitive to traffic movement and noise.

Landscape Change:

Change in the area has been relatively limited for a considerable period. A number of hedges have been removed (leaving a few isolated oak trees) and this has had the effect of restoring, to a degree, the original parkland landscape of the former deer park. It would appear that a number of smaller ponds have been filled in and removed over a very long period. Ditches within the park have been progressively culverted, resulting in a loss of biodiversity as the fields have expanded over the former ditches.

The major changes have been in the buildings on the southern and eastern fringes of the area. The brick buildings at Onion Farm have been linked to form a single dwelling, while the outlying Dutch barns have been removed. The Saracen's Head has had some large single-storey buildings erected to the rear several years ago. Paddock Lane Farm has been entirely reconstructed on its original footprint and is an important landmark on Paddock Lane.

To the centre of the park, Warburton Park Farm has accrued several modern agricultural buildings, but the most significant change was probably in 1880, when John Douglas-designed cottages were built on the access road to the farm and other improvement appear to have been carried out. Possibly around this time the pillow mound (former rabbit warren) was planted with beech trees as part of the wider landscape viewed from Warburton Park farmhouse.

Recommended Management and Objectives:

The current usage of this land, for mixed grazing and arable farming is generally beneficial. The hedges are well-maintained. There are opportunities to plant more hedgerow trees, particularly along the boundaries of the former deer park and to carry out new and replacement hedgerow planting in the same areas. The ponds within the deer park are extremely valuable both as habitats and for partial visual screening, the trees around the margins being especially valuable.

It would be useful to create wider field margins where possible to allow greater biodiversity to develop and to create more interconnection to the various copses and associated ponds. The copses should be acting as reservoirs for wildlife and some of these areas, being so long established, may accommodate relict plant communities, as does Coroner's Wood.

As the current trees within the area die off, it would be useful to plant further trees within the hedges and on the pond margins when space occurs. Hedges within the former park area are of recent historical origin. Hedges around the former park perimeters are probably much earlier in origin, particularly those around the park's original perimeters. These would clearly benefit from additional tree planting as well as extensive gapping up at certain points.

Management of the Landscape

- Monitor existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Encourage rolling programme of new/replacement hedgerow tree planting, especially to the perimeters of the former deer park and including hedgerow trees.
- Encourage management of the small copses around the numerous ponds in the former deer park.
- Clean / dredge the numerous ponds to encourage wildlife back into the ponds.
- Protect the pillow mound / former rabbit warren from further erosion.
- Protect the link between the deer park and Coroner's Wood and the engineered embankments.
- Ensure that the footpath through the park is not abused by the public.

2.3 The Townfield Landscape Area.

Description.

This area includes the former strip fields of the Town Field area as well as some adjacent areas. It runs south from the rear of houses along Paddock Lane and west of Bent Lane (from its junction with Paddock Lane). To the south it borders the meadowland north of the river Bollin, while to the west it borders the steep banking of the former course of the River Mersey. Generally the land slopes down to the south west, merging into the valley floor of the River Bollin from village centre to the north-east. A small local stream, now ditched, flows to the west from the centre of this area, giving a characteristic semi-circular 'dished' form to the area.

Immediately west of Townfield Lane is the area of arable open field, with very few trees and there are few hawthorn hedges left from the relatively recent enclosure of the strip fields. Those hedges that are left include at least two which 'fossilise' the former strip field system, where they include a half strip within the hedge line producing a characteristic shape. They are illustrated on the 1839 Tithe Map of Warburton and at least some of the strips are indicated on the 1757 Estate Map of Warburton held at Arley Hall. Since 2001, a number of hedges have been removed, to the point where there are now only two enclosed fields left.

Between Townfield Lane and Bent Lane and south of the buildings along Paddock Lane is another area of arable land, which looks very like the former open field system, but referring to the two maps above, the area clearly has a different history. One of the peculiarities of this area is the locally high mound at its south-eastern extremity adjacent to the junction between Bent Lane and Townfield Lane. As with the former strip field area, at least one hedge has been recently removed and this is another area of large open fields

Townfield Lane has hedged sides to it but no hedgerow trees and there are no hedgerow trees within the old open field area to the west of Townfield Lane, nor in the area between Townfield Lane and Bent Lane. Only in the boundary hedge to Bent Lane are there a very few oak trees.

Wigsey Lane which runs along the southern edge of the village from the cross to the west turns to the south west just before the old St Werburgh's Church and continues as an unadopted road following the old course of the Mersey and the Manchester Ship Canal to the confluence with River Bollin. To the west and abutting St Werburgh's is the old Rectory, a much-restored and extended building, built on the site of a Norbertine Priory.

To the east the Townfield area land begins to rise into the Long Ridge landscape area, Bent Lane being a convenient boundary between them. On the west side of Bent Lane, opposite the new church of St Werburghs are Bent Farm and Field Walks, while a little further north is a pair of semi-detached houses. In the corner between Bent Lane and Paddock Lane is Pie Corner. To the west, along the Paddock Lane area boundary, Overtown Farm is also within the Townfield area. Bent Farm and Overtown Farm are both groups of farm buildings many of which are in active use.

Key Characteristics.

- Areas largely devoid of trees (except for Bent Lane and along the north-western boundary).
- Areas of few (and declining numbers), but historically interesting hedges.

- Open views to and from the area, locally restricted by woodland in the medium distance.
- Almost flat, gently sloping ground, forming a shallow bowl towards the River Bollin.

Cultural History.

The area of former strip fields probably dates to early medieval times as part of the feudal 'open field' system (as still exists in the Derbyshire village of Laxton). The principal was that the strips were allocated to the villagers only for the growing season, after which the area would be turned over to grazing. This area is a rare survivor in the region; even if the strip fields no longer exist. Clearly evident in the 1888 -1913 map are a number of long narrow fields. These are even more apparent on the 1839 Tithe Map, with the 'Townfield' name occurring on both sides of Townfield Lane. The same map refers to 'The Moors' field names nearer to the River Bollin implying that these fields were perhaps similar to the water meadows along the Bollin. Near to the northern edge of the area is 'Abbey Croft' implying a relationship to the site of the former Norbertine Priory, now the old Rectory. The name 'Loont' (Land) appears several times in connection to the fields west of Townfield Lane, 'Loont' is a name common in the Cheshire Tithe maps and signifies arable land, but is common to strip field names.



An extract from the O.S. 6" map of 1888 – 1913 showing the enclosed former strip fields of Townfield and the Abbey Croft.

The southern hedge boundary to the former 'Big Town Field' (as shown on the 1839 Tithe Map of Cheshire) still exists from the period when the strip fields were enclosed, possibly in the C16th or C17th. The same Tithe Map indicates that the northern part of Townfield field was a mixture of arable and pasture, while to the south and west, meadowland predominated. The area between Townfield Lane and Bent Lane and south of the buildings along Paddock Lane appears to have developed differently to the strip field area. On the 1839 Tithe map it appears to have comprised of a number of smaller fields, to the west these are similar to the strip fields while to the east is a large field around Bent Farm.



The south elevation and main entrance to The Bent, showing much of the John Douglas design of 1880.

Bent Farm near Bent Lane was built around 1600 by Robert Drinkwater as a timber-framed building on a stone plinth. In the 1880s it was restored by John Douglas as part of large-scale improvements to the Warburton Estate for Rowland Egerton-Warburton of Arley Hall. It is listed Grade II and has an Arts and Crafts-style façade. It appears that John Douglas spent some time designing the alterations and improvements to this building which is one of the outstanding buildings of Warburton. There is some interesting Jacobean or possibly Elizabethan oak panelling in bay window. It is associated with a number of barns, at least one of which, cruck-framed and on a stone base may be contemporary with the house.

Overtown Farm is a relatively modern farmhouse on Paddock Lane, but has a timber-framed barn on a stone plinth, with brick infill and some brick replacement works which is probably C17th and is listed Grade II.

Other buildings along Paddock Lane within this landscape area are described under 'Warburton Village' landscape area.

Key cultural elements in the landscape:

- 'Fossilised' strip fields in the enclosure hedging.
- Absence of trees of any age.
- Mounded hedgerows to Townfield Lane.
- The Bent farmhouse
- Half-timbered barns at Bent farm and Overtown Farm.

Agricultural Land Quality

This area entirely comprises of Grade 2 (very good) agricultural land.

Landscape Sensitivity

This area is fairly low-lying and relatively flat with very few trees on it. As a result it is extremely sensitive to any changes in levels, overhead powerlines etc. The area is clearly defined to the north-east by the houses of Warburton village and particularly the housing within the Warburton Conservation Area. To a great extent, the area to the north of Townfield Lane is the landscape setting to the old church of St Werburgh, the old Rectory and especially the houses along Rectory Lane.

Equally, the landscape to the south of Townfield Lane is the landscape setting to the new church of St Werburgh and the buildings around it. Bent Farm, standing to the west of the church stands on a local prominence (the end of the long ridge from the 'Long Ridge' landscape area) and is an outstanding focal point, the red tiled roofs of the farm buildings to the west often glowing in the evening sunshine.

Traffic movement along Townfield Lane and Bent Lane is a constant issue, but these impacts become worse at peak hours when commuter traffic is held in a queue to cross the Warburton Toll bridge.

Key elements of landscape sensitivity:

- Prone to development change or expansion of Warburton village
- Vulnerable to changes in agricultural practices
- Exceptional landscape setting to Bent Farm and the new St Werburgh's church

Landscape Change:

The landscape change in this area is fascinating, from being an area of open field it has been enclosed and now, in turn, the enclosure hedges have gradually been removed. In some respects the area is returning to its medieval appearance. What is slightly more concerning is that the few remaining hedges, (one of which preserves half a medieval strip) are clearly under threat.

There have been very few trees on the site for many years, but in recent years several of these have disappeared.

It is clear from the older maps that there were many pathways through the area, but these have sadly largely disappeared

Recommended Management and Objectives:

New tree planting within the hedges would be an advantage to create both screening and shelter. Planting on the peripheral hedges would be particularly desirable. It would be particularly desirable to retain the few hedges left in this area as these help delineate the original historic field pattern

Management of the Landscape

- Monitor existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Encourage rolling programme of new hedgerow tree planting
- Ensure survival of 'fossil' strip hedge (off Townfield Lane)

2.4 The Warburton Moss Landscape Area.

Description.

The mossland landscape constitutes a distinctive character comprised of almost flat land divided into medium to large-sized arable fields interspersed with small areas of moss woodland. The mossland core is characterised by its perceptibly very gently sloping basin form. This basin often fill with low-lying mists and fogs on cooler nights, sometimes causing problems on adjacent roads.

Hedgerow trees are notably absent except in the older fields and are replaced by a rectangular pattern of ditches and associated hedges forming the field boundaries. The resulting mainly open nature allows sweeping long distance views in all directions. The presence of houses and farms on the mosslands are infrequent due to the difficulty of construction on the deep peat. Major roads also tend to avoid the mossland areas, leaving many areas within the mosses as tranquil open spaces favoured by wildlife.



View east into Warburton Moss from the Moss Lane / Warburton Lane junction.

Older roads and tracks tend to fringe the mosses and these were used by farmers for access to cultivate the mossland edges. Shrinkage of the drained peat (which also tends to blow away in summer winds) has resulted in land levels being lower than they were when first drained. Lanes and tracks within the mossland, reinforced with hardcore and hard surfacing are therefore often noticeably higher than adjacent land.

There are areas of woodland in Warburton Moss, one associated with a disused refuse tip accessed from Dunham Road, where the birch / willow scrub forms a dense fringe. Another area of mainly birch woodland is all that remains of the core of Warburton Moss, named as 'White Head Moss' on the 1839 Tithe map.

Mosslands are defined by their dark, organic, peat soil although mossland landscape characteristics often tend to fade imperceptibly into adjoining areas. For the purpose of this study, the 'mossland landscape' therefore includes some areas of peripheral land, which displays the same character as the mossland type proper.



View south into Warburton Moss from Moss Lane during a particularly wet winter.

Key Characteristics.

- Relatively flat or low-lying land
- Arable fields or 'moss' woodland
- Absence of hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Wide expansive and sweeping views
- Open and exposed
- Often containing tranquil areas
- Dark peaty soil to mossland proper
- Frequent occurrence of low-lying mists and fogs
- Lack of important roads through the area
- Subsidence issues with buildings, roads and telephone / powerline poles.
- Use of open ditches as field boundaries
- Importance to wildlife

Cultural History.

The mosses which run along the sides of the Mersey Valley form a part of a great chain of mossland stretching from Ashton Moss in the east. Most of these mosses are on the north side of the River Mersey, but Carrington Moss and Warburton Moss are to the south, the latter close to the Borough boundary.

All of these mosses are of a type known as raised bogs. Raised bogs occur when a depression fills with water and is colonised by sphagnum mosses and other acid-loving wetland vegetation. Over a long period of time this vegetation builds up and slowly consolidates to form peat. The peat continues to build up until the original bog is entirely subsumed within the bulk of the peaty deposits.

Additional plants of the raised bog community include cotton-grass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and cross-leaved heath (*Erica tetralix*). As the raised bog matures, other species such as hairy birch (*Betula pubescens*) begin to colonise. In almost all of the mossland in the Mersey Valley an area of birch woodland exists, usually in a much reduced area.

In ancient times the mosses were regarded as dangerous wildernesses, with deep dark pools of acidic water, treacherous areas of boggy ground, mists and fogs and the haunt of wild animals. As such, these areas were good for hunting (on foot) but were to be avoided at other times. The spiritual dread with which these wildernesses were regarded may readily be guessed at with the discovery of a corpse known as the 'Druid Prince,' whose amazingly well preserved remains were dug out of the peat at nearby Lindow Moss. The fact that he appears to have been possibly drugged and then ritually sacrificed gives some indication of how Iron Age man may have regarded the mosses.



A view along the edge of moss woodland, showing the deep drainage ditches and characteristically lower level of the moss fields, where the peat has shrunk.



An extract from the O.S. 6" map of 1888 – 1913 showing the extent of Warburton Moss.

'An estimated 22,500 archaeological sites may survive beneath or within peat deposits. The largest surviving prehistoric terrestrial landscapes in the UK and Ireland are also sealed beneath the peat of areas such as the Humberhead Levels National Nature Reserve in eastern England.' ('Peatlands and the Historic Environment' 2010 <https://www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org/sites/www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org/files/Review%20Peatland%20Historic%20Environment,%20June%202021%20Final.pdf>)

The archaeological and paleoecological value of peatlands is hard to understate. Peat itself is an archive of past human activities, dating back several thousand years. Waterlogged conditions preserve natural and organic remains, such as the 'Druid Prince' and other more mundane objects in a way which dry land archaeological deposits do not.

The eastern boundary of the Warburton Moss character area was the subject of argument between the adjacent baronries of Warburton (to the west) and Dunham (to the east). This dispute dates back to at least 1446 (quoted in Nevell 1997 'The Archaeology of Trafford') and appears to have been resolved by the construction of a large ditch running north-south, which forms the parish boundary.

Medieval and post Medieval farmers tried to drain some of the mossland, 'assarting' - clearing the mosslands around the fringes in order to cultivate the rich peaty soils. Clearly, unless the 'valley bog' - the original depression in which the peat formed - could be drained any efforts to drain the perimeter would be fraught with difficulty. John Aitkin ('A Description of the Country from Thirty to Forty Miles around Manchester,' 1795) recorded (in respect of Trafford Moss) that the ditches should not be cut at one operation but allowed time to harden otherwise the sides would give way. It would have been slow and laborious manual work. For this reason many of the original peripheral field shapes were in plan like the slices of a pie, cutting into the moss and this is clearly visible in both the 1756 map of Warburton held at Arley Hall and in the 1839 Tithe map.

Both maps show a large number of small fields, implying that drainage techniques were relatively limited and that there must have been some element of risk in cultivating these fields.

In 1726, the writer Daniel Defoe passed through the nearby area, journeying from Warrington along Manchester Road, recording his visit in a book published a year later.

'From hence, on the road to Manchester, we passed the great bog or waste called Chatmos, the first of that kind that we see in England, from any of the south parts hither. It extends on the left-hand of the road for five or six miles east and west, and they told us it was, in some places, seven or eight miles from north to south. The nature of these mosses, for we found there were many of them in this country, is this, and you will take this for a description of all the rest. The surface, at a distance, looks black and dirty, and is indeed frightful to think of, for it will bear neither horse or man, unless in an extremely dry season, and then not so as to be passable, or that any one should travel over them. What nature meant by such a useless production, tis hard to imagine; but the land is entirely waste, except for the poor cottager's fuel, and the quantity used for that is very small.'

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

Defoe's opinion of the mosses shows that perhaps little had changed in nearly 2,000 years. The mosses were still dreadful places, to be avoided at all costs.

The Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service Monument Full Report under HER Number 7932.1.0 records the following about Warburton Moss, *'No archaeological data. Documentary and place-name evidence shows the site was important during the Saxon period. The area is mostly devoid of peat but what survives lies in the centre of the moss. Another area to the south contains dark peaty soils. The moss probably originally extended over 300 hectares, southwest of Carrington Moss. It is also possible that the moss was quite shallow. The peat deposits are in a state of poor preservation. Detailed description can be found in section 5 of the survey. All but c.30 hectares have been reclaimed. Thought to have begun during Flandrian VIIIb period.'*

Mossland which at its maximum extent, probably in the medieval period, is believed to have extended from Moss Lane on the north to Dunham Road on the south. This area has now been mostly stripped of peat, with surviving deposits in the area of Moss Wood (at about SJ 720 898), c.150m east of the proposed power line. At the time of the walkover survey [1999] much of this former area of the moss was under cereals.'

In the early C20th, farmers finally had the tools to deal with the mosslands. Mechanisation meant that long, deep drainage trenches could be cut through the mossland in a relatively short period of time, when the moss had dried enough to support the weight of a tractor. The rich peaty soils, once drained, were very productive. Farmers who had land on the perimeter of the mossland, as well as in the mossland itself, benefited greatly and were able to remove hedges and trees on the perimeter land to facilitate mechanised farming. Many of the mossland farms, especially on the reclaimed areas were relatively small, reflecting the high

quality of the land, the ability to grow high quality crops and especially the proximity of good local markets.

The current situation of farming on the mossland is subject to some fluctuation. The high quality of the drained land remains, but the drainage has to be renewed after five to ten years, as the drying of the peat and soil loss through wind-blow and shrinkage slowly makes the existing drains shallower in the soil. This inevitably results in the drainage pipes being ploughed out. These drainage costs are relatively high for a farmer. Traditionally, farmers alternated their crops on the mossland, so that they would not be too vulnerable to financial hazard through the risks associated with monoculture. Even so, there was reputedly a high rate of land turnover on the mossland, farmers who had suffered from poor crops for a year or two selling or swapping land with their neighbours in the hope of a better year to come.



Flooded areas of Warburton Moss in 2020 looking north-east from Warburton Lane near Moss Brow.

More recent extreme weather patterns pose a problem for mossland farmers. Periods of exceptionally heavy rain make the mossland incapable of withstanding the weight of farm machinery as well as causing rot in root crops and mildews in grain crops. Exceptionally hot, dry summers cause problems for farmers in irrigating their crops; although water is present in the deep drainage ditches, it has to be pumped onto the crops for irrigation. This reduces the water table under the peat, causing further ground shrinkage etc. Increasing rainfall has led to farmers seeking to improve drainage from the moss areas, but this has proved difficult, with the result that larger and larger areas of the moss are flooded each year.

The depth of peat on the mossland has always varied, during recent times high winds often blew away particles of peat, no doubt stubble-burning also reduced it, but these were the

upper layers which had dried out following drainage operations. It is apparent, from the streams emanating from the mossland that the depth of peat was considerable before man began to reclaim the area and it is possible that as much as 3m depth of peat has been lost in historic times. This would have held large volumes of water in what is frequently a perched water table in the mass of the peat.

The mosslands are extremely important for wildlife. In Europe, intact lowland raised bogs are one of the rarest and most threatened habitats. (They are listed in Annex 1 of the EC Habitats and Species Directive.) North West England had the largest proportion of this habitat, a total area which has fallen by 94% since the beginning of the C19th. There is a very specialised range of both flora and fauna in mosslands, including birds such as the nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*), curlew (*Numenius arquata*) and snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) and insects such as the downy emerald dragonfly (*Corulia aenea*) and the large heath butterfly (*Coenympha tullia*).

In the UK, peat bogs are *'our largest terrestrial carbon store, a haven for rare wildlife, a record of our past, and natural providers of water regulation. – Only 13% of England's peatlands are in a near natural state.'* (From the foreword of the *'England Peat Action Plan'* of May 2021.) The *'UK Peatland Strategy 2018-2040'* by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has similar statements on the value of peatlands as a carbon store and unique habitat.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012, states in paragraph 180, clause (c) that *'development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists;'* Natural England have argued that peatlands are clearly irreplaceable habitats.

It is particularly noticeable that there is a paucity of footpath provision through the mossland areas, reflecting the centuries through which the mossland was impassable and the difficulties of passing over often very deep and wide ditches. This lack of visitors is to the benefit of the wildlife, which is relatively undisturbed.

For the last two hundred years, the unreclaimed mosslands have been seen as the perfect place to tip waste materials, with very clear deleterious effects on the landscape. These effects include polluted runoff into the mossland and especially the visual intrusion of what are often very high refuse tips.

Key cultural elements in the landscape:

- Extremely valuable and increasingly rare habitat
- Regrettably, common use of the type for landfill sites
- Historically 'waste,' forbidding, dark appearance and sense of dread felt by all visitors
- Strategic value of the impassable nature of the mosses
- Lack of agricultural use prior to 'reclamation' in the late C19th
- Long, deep drainage ditches of the C19th reclamations



A panoramic view east across the moss from the Warburton Lane / Moss Lane junction, Heathlands Farm Barn to the right. One of the best views in Warburton.



A panoramic view south-east across the moss from Warburton Lane, Heathlands Farm Barn to the left.

Agricultural Land Quality

The mossland area is Grade 2 agricultural land. Various areas around drain outfalls have flooded seasonally in recent times and the extent of the flooding appears to be increasing.

Landscape Sensitivity

The mossland farmland is very fertile and intensely used for arable crops, particularly potatoes and other root crops. It is also particularly sensitive to changes of water level and problems of wind erosion can occur over areas of bare ground under dry and windy conditions. The peat soils are also unstable when structures are placed on them and cannot support weight without foundations extending down to the clay beds beneath. This accounts for the sparsity of buildings within the peat moss areas. Even properties on the mossland fringes often show signs of subsidence. Telegraph poles, in particular, are often seen leaning at various angles.

The flat open landscape, often without visual protection of hedgerow trees, is also sensitive to expansive views with little opportunity to screen any feature in the landscape, either permanent or temporary. The mosslands are therefore also poorly equipped to absorb any recreational use and would suffer from erosion of footpaths based directly on the peaty soils. The mossland woodlands are also sensitive to changes in water level. The water table in the peat woodlands is normally high and can support only surface rooting species such as birch, rhododendron and goat willow. These species dominate in such areas but often die before reaching maturity if the water levels are too high.

The flat mossland landscape is also very sensitive to the visual impact of high or mounded structures. The landfill tip at Moss Side presents a particularly unnatural element in the landscape.



View to the east from Warburton Lane, showing the impact of electricity pylons on the landscape.

Key elements of landscape sensitivity:

- Very sensitive to water levels and drying out
- Prone to windblow and erosion
- Prone to subsidence of structures and buildings
- Open, unrestricted views
- Potential footpath erosion on the peat
- Mossland woodlands and little frequented areas are a haven for wildlife but sensitive to disturbance.
- Visually extremely sensitive to the imposition of high structures and/or mounding
- Visually sensitive to overhead powerlines.
- Extremely sensitive peripheral development etc around the margins of the moss.

Landscape Change:

The mossland area has changed dramatically over the centuries, originally presenting hostile or dangerous, swampy and unhealthy areas, devoid of habitation. Even today the main roads can be seen to skirt around the mossland fringes. Originally the mosslands would have been largely wooded with birch, willow and alder and probably interspersed with open water and marshland.

The depth of peat on the mossland has shrunk since drainage was first inserted. It may have been as much as 3m higher than current levels, but the peat has shrunk as it dries out. This historically caused massive releases of CO₂e. In exceptionally dry conditions it was common for the dried peat to be blown off the fields in dust clouds.

Progressive stages of drainage 'reclaimed' the mosses for agricultural use and most of the woodlands were felled and grubbed out. In common with nearly all the landscape in the village, the mossland landscape of today is entirely man-made. However the small areas of residual woodlands, such as Moss Wood represent a close likeness to the 'original' natural landscape.

Historic peat cutting and the more recent intricate, geometric pattern of open ditches, have contrived to create the landscape seen today. This formality is reinforced by the associated raised hardcore tracks forming straight access routes.

More recent changes have seen large-scale landfill tipping in the centre of the moss and both south and north-east of Moss Wood

The increasing pressure to improve the drainage from the mossland because of increasing rainfall is noted. Several farmers have dredged out their ditches to improve drainage, but this has done little to improve the situation. Hedges across the mossland area are now relatively few and far between and are relatively neglected (as little livestock is kept there).

In a number of areas there have been new and occasionally large agricultural buildings erected with very powerful visual impacts on the surrounding area.

The redevelopment of a former landscape contractor's yard on Barn's Lane has led to the construction of a number of new dwellings in the area. The Parish Council has engaged with the developer and as a result we now have houses which incorporate various elements of the Arts and Crafts style used by John Douglas. While the density is considerably less than first proposed, these dwellings do have a visual impact on the mossland area.



New housing on Barn's Lane viewed from Warburton Lane to the west.

Landscape change to the area is summarised as follows:

- Drainage of the mossland areas altering the landscape from marsh and wet woodland to mainly agricultural land.
- Considerable reduction in the numbers and extent of hedges (reflecting mechanisation of farming techniques).
- Little to no change experienced in the mossland woodlands
- Creation of raised hardcore tracks, with assorted open drainage ditches, accessing the area
- Landfill tipping
- Overhead power cables

- Additional agricultural buildings and a small number of dwellings

Recommended Management and Objectives:

The mossland landscape is very distinctive and special. It is also extremely sensitive to change and should be managed carefully to maintain an environmentally stable and sustainable landscape. The mossland today provides a rich agricultural resource but also contrive to provide invaluable and diverse habitats for wildlife. The following objectives are broadly designed to conserve this balance.

- Retain, monitor and adjust current water levels within the mosslands to avoid fluctuations, drying out and potential wind erosion.
- Consider the balanced needs of both agriculture and wildlife habitat.
- Consider the merits of higher water levels in areas of less productive mossland, promoting greater habitat diversity and wildlife value – effectively reinstating the moss.
- Retain the existing quiet and tranquil character of the mosses without encouraging excessive recreational use or built development.
- Urgently consider methods of mitigation to reduce the visual impact of the landfill tips around Moss Wood and in the centre of the moss.
- Encourage the management of Moss Wood woodland, diversifying habitat for wildlife.
- Retain the basic landscape structure of the mossland fields and ditches, whilst encouraging a greater diversity of native flora to the ditches and trackway verges.

2.5 The Red Brook Valley Landscape Area.

Description.

This area is confined to the valley of the Red Brook, which runs from the east into the River Mersey, under the A6144 (Warburton Lane). To the west of this road and north of the brook is Coroner's Wood, an ancient woodland, part of it scheduled as a Site of Biological Importance (SBI) by Trafford Council. To the east of the road the valley is much more open, merging into the mossland to the south. Moss Lane forms an approximate boundary with its hedges on both sides of the road and runs more or less along the valley side.

Only the western part of the woodland to the west of Warburton Lane is scheduled by Trafford MBC (on advice from the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit) as a 'Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (ENV9)' on the Trafford MBC Adopted Policies Map. This is despite the fact that all the woodland west of Warburton Lane is almost certainly ancient woodland, since it patently cannot be cultivated, is immediately adjacent to the former deer park pale and is not marked as fields on the maps of Warburton of 1757 and 1839. The definition of ancient woodland is that in England and Wales it should have persisted since 1600. In NW England it is notoriously difficult to determine if woodland is ancient or not using the species present as a guide.

The Red Brook course within the woodland is sinuous despite being fairly swift-flowing. The volume of water is added to by the outfall from the Partington Sewage Treatment Works at a point approximately half-way through the woodland. The stream is quite deeply incised at several points with small river cliffs of approximately 1m high mainly on the Warburton side of the stream.

The valley floor is almost flat, with localised low points where parts of the old brook course have been cut off and slowly silted up. The valley sides within the woodland are fairly steep, much of the northern side being lined with housing and a considerable extent being covered with garden debris.

Views along the woodland floor are discrete, but to the north-east the overlooking housing does not give any sense of privacy and destroys the sensation of isolation which the rest of the woodland has. Views to the south include much of the 'engineered' edge to the former deer park.

To the east of Warburton Lane it is evident that any woodland was cleared in relatively early time. The soils here are deep, rich and fertile. Sandwiched between the mossland to the south of Moss Lane and the course of Red Brook, this area is relatively narrow and with a slightly steeper gradient to the west (adjacent to Warburton Lane, but becomes broader and with a more gentle gradient to the east. It is separated from Warburton Moss by Moss Lane, which effectively forms the boundary between the two Landscape Character Areas.

The river valley as classed 'River Valley Floodplains (ENV13)' on the Trafford MBC Adopted Policies Map and the valley to the east of Warburton Lane regularly and more and more frequently floods.

Warburton Lane crosses the brook via a modern concrete box culvert and the road dips gently into the valley at this point. There is a pedestrian bridge crossing over the brook to the east, running from Moss Lane at a point opposite Mosslane Farm and crossing into Partington.



View north east from the footpath junction with Warburton Lane.

A number of farm clusters are located east of Warburton Lane either within this area or abutting it. These include Heathlands Farm, Mosslane Farm, Birch Farm, Midlands Farm and Lands End Farm. Heathlands Farm has a farmhouse and barn, both Listed Grade II, Birch Farm has a barn Listed Grade II. There are a number of cottages just north of Moss Lane. Adjacent to the junction between Moss Lane and Warburton Lane there is Brook House, the original farm house to Brook Farm, the site of which has been recently redeveloped to form a small group of houses known as Top Park Close.

Key Characteristics.

- Steep-sided valley to the west of Warburton Lane.
- ‘Engineered’ deer park embankment to the west of Warburton Lane adjacent to the former deer park.
- More gentle southern side to the valley east of Warburton Lane.
- Sinuous course of Red Brook, slightly more incised west of Warburton Lane.
- The presence of housing (west of Warburton Lane) and a school (east of Warburton Lane) at the top of the northern bank of the stream.
- Almost flat flood plain west of Warburton Lane.
- ‘Wet’ woodland (alder and especially crack willow) on the valley floor west of Warburton Lane.

- Ancient woodland west of Warburton Lane.
- Rich farmland east of Warburton Lane and south of the brook.
- Farmsteads and houses scattered generally along Moss Lane.
- Periodic flooding along the whole valley.

Cultural History.

This is an ancient Parish Boundary, one that might well date back more than 1,000 years, the demarcation line being the Red Brook itself. To the west of Warburton Lane the boundary of the former Warburton deer park aligns with the top of the southern embankment to the Red Brook valley and may be of similar age.

There is an accepted view that ancient woodland is commonly found in association with deer park boundaries, as is the case with Coroner's Wood. The boundary pale to the deer park runs all along the southern edge of the woodland and it is clearly to be seen from the footpath along the valley floor through the woodland.



Plants of Coroner's Wood – Left, Wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*). Right, Wild garlic (*Allium ursinum*).

Interestingly the alternative (and older) name for Red Brook is Wych brook, the 'Wych' name meaning pliant when referred to branches (as in Wych elm and Wych hazel). This possibly refers to hazel coppicing within Coroner's Wood and there are at least two previously heavily-coppiced hazel stools still standing in the woodland to the west. Coppiced hazel was extensively used for woven wattles as in wattle and daub construction and also for making sheep hurdles etc. Equally it could refer to coppiced willows (basket making was common in Lymm and probably in Warburton) although there are only specimens of Crack willow (*Salix fragilis*) in the woodland rather than the basket – making varieties used in areas where basketry continues. Coppicing in this area, adjacent to the deer park is entirely consistent with manorial land-use patterns.

Holmes cottage, which stood on the line of Warburton Lane into Partington and just to the west, possibly derived its name from 'holm' meaning a piece of flat land near a river submerged in times of flood.



More plants of Coronor's Wood – Left, remnant ancient coppiced hazel (*Corylus avellana*). Right, Wild garlic (*Allium ursinum*) with Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) growing on the drier bank above. Both locations in Partington, close to Red Brook.

Much of the western valley floor supports crack willow (*Salix fragilis*) and some alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and there are extensive areas of yellow flag (*Iris pseudacorus*). The ancient woodland is not in good condition, despite being very clearly ancient in origin, with all the species indicative of this. These species include Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*), Cow Parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), Salad Burnet (*Sanguisorba minor* ssp *minor*), Cuckoo-Pint (*Arum maculatum*), and Dog's Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*). Ramsons is present along the length of the woodland, from the Warburton Lane bridge right down to the edge of the Manchester Ship Canal. There are of course many other species present in the woodland. In more recent times there has been extensive colonisation by Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) and this is beginning to suffocate much of the ancient woodland flora.



The old bridge carrying Warburton Lane over Red Brook.

The crossing of the valley by Warburton Lane is more recent than the adjacent former deer park, but the old bridge still exists, used occasionally by walkers. It has been replaced by the rather amorphous concrete box culvert bridge

Key cultural elements in the landscape:

- To the west, a substantial area of ancient woodland (of which the western end is scheduled as being a Site of Biological Interest (SBI))
- Again to the west, the edge of the deer park pale, an engineered slope to the park designed to prevent deer escaping the park.
- The flat flood plan to the base of the valley.
- The presence of former coppice stumps.
- To the east of Warburton Lane, the old road bridge.



View of the medieval 'scarped' embankment to the deer park on the south side of the Red Brook valley.

Agricultural Land Quality

The land to the west of Warburton Lane (Coroners Wood) is Grade 3, to the east of Warburton Lane, the lower part of the valley is Grade 3 and the upper part (bordering Moss Lane) is Grade 2.

Landscape Sensitivity

The area to the west of Warburton Lane comprises of ancient woodland, which throughout the UK is extremely sensitive to disturbance and is extremely fragile. It has been given high levels of statutory protection. This is an area of intimate scale, the shallow but steeply-sided valley a distinctive landform, with an uninterrupted/ undeveloped southern skyline which has not changed since the construction of the deer park boundary, a distinctive historic landmark. It is a highly susceptible landscape.

Despite being in a shallower valley, and not having the intimate scale as the land to the west of Warburton Lane, the area of land east of Warburton Lane shares many of the characteristics of the land to the west. This is a landscape of a slightly wider scale, the shallow, gently sloping valley a distinctive landform, with an uninterrupted/ undeveloped southern skyline which has not changed for many centuries, a historic landmark. It is a susceptible landscape.

Both areas are extremely sensitive to visual impact and to noise, the western area also extremely sensitive to direct human impacts, such as fires, litter, trampling etc.

Key elements of landscape sensitivity:

- An area of ancient woodland, which is extremely fragile and irreplaceable, a habitat very much under threat throughout the UK.
- The land to the west of Warburton Lane has an intimate scale and distinctive lanform.
- A southern skyline which has remained largely unchanged for hundreds of years.
- Rare and delicate ground flora (not always under trees) and associated invertebrate species.
- Highly susceptible to disturbance through trail bikes, trampling etc.

Landscape Change:

By its nature, landscape change within the woodland has been minimal for some centuries. Construction of housing in Partington immediately adjacent to the woodland has on ongoing impact with increased levels of disturbance and the disposal of garden and other refuse into the northern edge of the wood. Increased footfall into the area and the occasional use of scrambling bikes has also impacted the area. With the construction of the housing, a sewage treatment plant was established to the north of the wood with its outfall approximately halfway along the course of the brook within Coroners Wood. Another sewage plant upstream discharges into the brook and there appears to be very little life in the water body.

Some historic landscape change has occurred along the interface between the woodland and the deer park. The deer park pale has already been referred to and was a substantial element of earth moving / landscape work. More recently, it is likely that stubble-burning adversely affected these same areas, probably damaging some of the original hedge and ground flora.

The most concerning current aspect of landscape change is the colonisation of Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) which has occupied substantial areas of the wetter woodland floor and threatens the survival of native species in the same area.

Construction of a footpath and steps to link to the housing to the north has reduced erosion to some of the steeper slopes, but the issues of balsam invasion, refuse disposal and human disturbance remain.



The attractive flowers and stems of Himalayan balsam, a garden escapee with thuggish tendencies.

Recommended Management and Objectives:

Urgent action is required to remove Himalayan balsam, which is occurring in increasingly large quantities on the northern side of the stream along the relatively flat flood plain. Himalayan balsam seed is viable for a period of four years, which means that 'balsam-bashing' the concentrated efforts to either pull out or slash down the balsam plants just before they come into flower is an essential requirement and will need to continue for at least five years.

Action is also required to remove garden debris from the woodland area, although this is most often found in association with the gardens to the north site of the woodland, in Partington.

Management of the Landscape

- Remove all Himalayan balsam plants as soon as possible
- Monitor existing woodland and woodland trees
- Encourage rolling programme of new tree planting, using locally sourced seed supplies.

- Investigate the opportunities for extended footpath systems and linkages to other areas

2.6 The Warburton Village (including the Conservation Area) Landscape Area.

Description.

Much of this relatively small area comprises of the existing Warburton Conservation Area, but includes more recent housing to the east. Its historic centre is Warburton Old Church, dedicated to St Werburgh. This church was located on the high southern embankment of the River Mersey and is set in an originally ovoid plan church yard, indicative of great age. To the immediate west is the Old Rectory, itself built on the site of earlier structures. The setting of the village is one of its key features. It sits in the wooded arc of a bend in the former course of the River Mersey on the high southern bank, but the settlement extends back from the river bank to the east, along the line of an approach road to a ford across the Mersey. The older houses in the village enjoy good views to the south-west across the town field area.

This central area of the village was formed around the junction of four roads, Townfield Lane, leading south, Paddock Lane leading east, Park Road (the entrance to Warburton Park Farm and the deer park) leading to the north-east and Wigsey Lane leading to the west. In 1863 a further road (Warburton Bridge Road) was built leading to the toll bridge across the River Mersey. The 'core' of the village is the village cross and stocks, placed in their current position when the new road to the bridge was built. Originally they stood diametrically opposite their current location.

The conservation area can itself be divided into several distinct areas. To the west is the old church of St Werburg and west of that again is the rectory. Both buildings are of ancient origins, the church almost certainly of Saxon origin and the rectory being at least partially built of the remains of a former priory. Both buildings have had numerous later alterations. To the north-east of the old church is a row of cottages, their style indicating John Douglas influence and probably built in the 1880s. This row was a former public house, the 'Pipe and Punchbowl.' There are later additions to this row, but the style is similar.

East of the cottages are the properties along Wigsey Lane, again showing much influence from John Douglas, with exception of one relatively modern property, which replaces the previous John Douglas – style original building on the plot. At the eastern end of Wigsey Lane, the thatched building is a modern replica of what probably stood in the plot earlier.

To the north of the Wigsey Lane houses and closed in to the north by Warburton Bridge Road are some modern houses in infill plots not in the same style as their immediate neighbours but discreetly located. South of Wigsey Lane, in the junction between Wigsey Lane and Townfield Lane and immediately adjacent to the new cross site is The Cross Cottage, thought to be an C18th building. Opposite the Cross Cottage is Townfield House, which although probably contemporary with the adjacent John Douglas buildings and with several similar features, lacks the decorative features of the John Douglas buildings.

The Conservation Area was recently extended to include properties south of Paddock Lane and the original toll bridge and Toll House. The properties south of Paddock Lane comprise of two farm complexes, Wigsey Farm and Paddock Lake Farm, their original buildings converted to domestic use. Wigsey Farm is a farmhouse from the late medieval or early post-medieval period with many interesting original features as well as later alterations in the John Douglas style. The barn at Wigsey Farm is a good example of a threshing barn converted into a dwelling and was probably built early in the C19th. Wigsey Cruck was originally an C18th shippon but was converted into a dwelling in the 1990s. It retains the tradition 'pig-slabs' to the frontage. Paddock Lake farmhouse and Pasture View and Church View located further east are a group of farm buildings now converted to dwellings and probably date from the early C18th.



Views of the old church of St Werburgh.

The magnificently eccentric Toll House is a superb example of Arts and Crafts style taken to extremes and in many ways exemplifies Warburton village as it stands on one of the principle roads into the village and is a local landmark.

A number of buildings within the Conservation Area have been whitewashed or rendered and these tie in visually with the John Douglas houses adjacent with their decorative white-painted gable patterns in recessed brick.

Outside the Conservation Area, to the north, but of some heritage significance are Park Gate Farm and Pool Head Farm. Park Gate Farm appears to have been remodelled in the 1880s around an C18th original building, but further research is needed. Pool Head Farm also appears to be based on an earlier original building. Both are accessed from Park Road. Also outside the Conservation Area, the Toll Bridge bungalows are located near the Toll house at the southern end of the cast iron bridge over the former course of the River Mersey. These bungalows are typical of the 1960s.

Paddock Lane Farm, standing opposite Paddock Lake Farm on the north side of Paddock Lane was demolished and rebuilt in 2001 as a replica of the original building. The original building contained elements from the late C15th / early C16th within a Georgian structure.

The village was expanded fairly extensively outside the Conservation Area in the 1920s and 1930s when Bucklow Rural District Council built a terrace of two storey brick council houses on the north side of Paddock Lane. In the later 1940s a crescent of eight pre-fabricated concrete houses was built still further east along an access road, Egerton Avenue. These have subsequently been re-clad and many of the former council houses are now in private ownership.

A study of Warburton and Bucklow Rural District Council by Cheshire County Council Planning Department in June 1969 concluded that further houses could be accommodated in the area. As a result, two pairs of semi-detached bungalows were built along the north side of Paddock Lane between the terrace of two storey brick council houses and Park Road. To the rear of these buildings another terrace of houses was built on the north side of Beckett Drive.

In the early 2000s further development took place east of Egerton Avenue with the construction of five affordable homes by the Templar Housing Association. These smaller houses comprise of a pair of semi-detached and a short terrace of three houses and have no local vernacular design connection. They are accessed off Paddock Lane via Werburgh Close.

Key Characteristics.

- Generally open views to the south and west.
- Intimate scale of the groupings of older buildings in the west of the Conservation Area.
- Wooded backdrop to the northern side of the village (the old bank of the River Mersey)
- Original farm complexes south of Paddock Lane and on Park Road.
- Important open areas of land, such as 'The Green' enclosed by Egerton Avenue and Paddock Lane, the area south-east of St Werburgh's Old Church.
- An overall John Douglas style or earlier style to the majority of buildings within the Conservation Area.

Cultural History.

As mentioned above, the core of the conservation area is the Grade 1 listed old Church of St Werburgh's, which stands to the west of the village on a locally high area of ground within a roughly 'D'-shaped area of ground, suggesting possible earlier origins than its late Saxon attribution. The old church is a Grade I listed building and is possibly the most important building in the village and very highly regarded. The church is timber-framed, making its survival remarkable as the structure is at least 700 years old; it is one of the oldest timber-framed churches in England. The churchyard also has a listed Grade II lychgate and a sundial. Immediately south of the old church is an area now used as a car park, but this was originally the village pond and still occasionally floods. The Rectory, to the west of the old church was rebuilt in 1838, but its predecessor is shown on the 1834 Tithe Map. This would originally have been an imposing building within the village.

Saint Werburgh, the saint to whom the church was dedicated, was the daughter of King Wulfhere of the Mercians and it may be that Warburton was named after her. However, as described under the Mersey Meadowlands Landscape Area, it may be that the church stands within a 'burgh' or fort built by Aethlfloed 'The Lady of the Mercians,' the daughter of Alfred the Great, to keep the Danes out of Mercia, although recent excavations indicate that this is unlikely. The fact that the church stands on locally high ground above the steep bank to the former course of the River Mersey gives it some defensive status. More importantly, the River Mersey was the frontier between the Saxon Kingdoms of Mercia (to the south) and Northumbria (to the north) and an increasingly important shipping route. The river was forded at Warburton, where an island in the river's course divided the flow, making the fording much easier. This is commemorated in the name of the local road, Wigsey Lane (meaning 'big island' – see The Mersey Meadowlands Landscape Area). Only two miles downstream the river is tidal.

The frontier status of the village may have given it higher importance in Saxon times. The presence of a market cross perhaps implies that the village was certainly more important than now. The cross is constructed of a soft local red sandstone comprises of a single dished vertical stone standing on a traditional pyramidal stepped plinth. It was originally situated near the Park Road – Paddock Lane junction, but was moved when Warburton Bridge was constructed requiring a new road. Interestingly, the dished upper stone may have functioned as a plague stone, when in times of plague it would have been filled with vinegar as a disinfectant, so that coins could be deposited in it as payment for foodstuffs left adjacent. Although the timbers are replacements for the original, the stone pillars of the adjacent stocks are thought to be of considerable age. The vertical stone slab wall around two sides of the cross and stocks are probably more recent, but this form of mudstone walling, known locally as pig-slabs, used to be widely used locally and there are many extant examples.

At least one Viking raid on Manchester is recorded and there may have been more. There is a local legend that a Viking fleet was attacked as it passed across the Warburton ford, but there is no direct evidence for this. Viking movements during the period around the Battle of Brunanburh in 937 (following the death of Aethlfloed) might be the source of this legend.

In 1745 a Scots Jacobite army marched along the north side of the River Mersey past Warburton's ford on its way to Manchester. As the army had been foiled in its attempts to cross the Mersey via the bridge at Warrington, guarded by Brigadier Douglas and the Liverpool Blues (a militia unit) one can assume that similar units guarded the Warburton ford.

In 1863, a toll bridge was built and a new access road created from the village centre out to the northwest. This is a cast iron bridge in the tradition of the bridge at Ironbridge, Shropshire (b. 1779 some 85 years previously to Warburton Bridge). The Warburton Bridge is more refined, having very fine lines. The spandrels have a Gothic appearance and in style it is very similar to Westminster Bridge, designed by Thomas Page in 1862 and given Gothic detailing by Charles Barry to complement his adjacent Gothic pile of the Palace of Westminster. The abutments are redolent of the bases of church steeples.

The balustrade to the west side is now almost entirely missing apart from the abutment cappings, but on the east side the original cast iron balustrades are still in position. The construction of the new road meant that the market cross and associated stocks had to be relocated to a site just to the west of Wigsey Lane adjacent to the junction with Townfield Lane.

The high-level cantilever bridge was constructed when the Manchester Ship Canal was built and was authorised by the Manchester Ship Canal (Various Powers) Act 1890. It comprises of three steel spans of cantilevered and suspended span type, the cantilevered sections anchored into brick abutments on either side of the ship canal. Nearly 100m long, the bridge has a 5.5m wide carriageway, with 1.13m wide footways on either side. The weight limit of 3 tonnes considerably reduces the traffic flow of heavier vehicles. In recent years, the bridge

has been the subject of considerable dispute on the tolls and the maintenance of the bridge and the old bridges. The high-level bridge is a landmark feature in Warburton and there are good views from the bridge.

A public house, the 'Pipe and Punchbowl' was located to the immediate east of the Old Church. Old photographs confirm that a regatta was regularly held in the river by and no doubt the 'Pipe and Punchbowl' supplied good fare and ale to all who attended. The licence was withdrawn in 1851 (before the bridge was built) and the building appears to have been reconstructed / altered in the Arts and Crafts style possibly in the 1880s.

Wrought iron, black and white painted 'Cheshire' railings are very prominent around the road junction in the centre of the village and date back to when Warburton was a village in Cheshire and many such junctions had such railings erected to improve visibility splays.

The Warburton Conservation Area has some good examples of John Douglas architecture, designed by the office of the architect John Douglas of Chester. It also has some superb old farm buildings from the late medieval/post medieval periods (with later additions) many of which have been carefully converted into domestic residences.

Key cultural elements in the landscape:

- The old church of St Werburgh.
- The Toll House at the southern end of the old bridge.
- The former 'Pipe and Punchbowl' pub, now a row of cottages.
- Predominance of John Douglas style houses to the west of the Conservation Area.
- The 1863 cast iron toll bridge.
- The old cross and stocks.
- Pig-slabs to gardens adjacent to the old cross and the cross space itself.
- Cheshire railings

Agricultural Land Quality

Not relevant

Landscape Sensitivity

The village and particularly the Conservation Area is a particularly important area of historic features and cultural heritage. The tranquillity around the old Church of St Werburgh is immediately apparent to a visitor as is the sense of remoteness (even though dwellings are just to the east and west). The church is a local landmark and an extremely valuable heritage feature as is indicated by its grade 1 listing. The church and surrounding area have a very high level of sensitivity.

The tranquillity of the village core is severely compromised by traffic problems. Speeding traffic creates noise and movement as well as being dangerous as it passes along Townfield Road / Warburton Bridge Road and Paddock Lane. In peak hours, the volume of traffic dominates the local area. Frequently traffic queues waiting to pass over the toll bridge build along Paddock Lane and Townfield Lane, bathing the surrounding houses in exhaust fumes and noise. These areas also have a very high level of sensitivity.

The old Toll House and the original bridge over the Mersey are another area of sensitivity. This is mainly because of their relative height above the surrounding landscape to the west, south and east, which gives them a fairly dominating position over the village. The less than sympathetic maintenance of the Toll House and the old bridge is a matter of concern, as is the design of the present toll booth.

Key elements of landscape sensitivity:

- The area around the old church of St Werburgh, Wigsey Lane and the former 'Pipe and Punchbowl.'
- The area around the old cross and the junctions of Townfield Lane, Paddock Lane, Wigsey Lane and Warburton Bridge Road.
- The area around the old Toll House, including the Warburton cast-iron bridge of 1863
- The Warburton high-level cantilever bridge of 1890



The magnificent steam traction engine belonging to Mr Frank Lythgoe of Warburton on display on 5th June 2022 at the celebrations for HM Queen Elisabeth's Platinum Jubilee on 'the green' and Paddock Lane, Warburton.

Landscape Change:

The changes to the village have already been largely covered under the 'Description' of the area above. Growth of the village has been generally to the east (along Paddock Lane) with infill to the north behind houses facing Wigsey Lane and Paddock Lane. Conversion of old farm buildings into dwellings is a feature on both sides of Paddock Lane.

The houses built post-war by the then District Council are described in a 1969 report as, 'although built at a time of building material shortages, have nevertheless blended into the village setting'. The houses built subsequently have been less successful in blending in, although the prefabricated concrete houses have been rendered, making them look redolent of a couple of rendered houses within the Conservation Area.

The lack of success in blending newer houses into the fabric of the village was one of the motives behind the Warburton Parish Council producing a Village Design Statement (VDS) in 2004. This had two main purposes, firstly to describe the village as it was in 2004 and secondly 'to provide guidance as to the form and design of future developments in the village'. Much of the guidance was incorporated into the 'Warburton Village Conservation Area – Conservation Area Appraisal' of 2016.

Recommended Management and Objectives:

Much of this is covered in the 'Warburton Village Conservation Area – Conservation Area Appraisal' of 2016. However, it is worth noting that the 'pig-slabs' (the upright flagstones) used for boundaries to older properties and around the old cross are not locally-sourced and a suitable source is required. The slabs vary from a thin shaley sandstone which has an irregular texture when split, to a thicker, more consistent sandstone with a 'worked' face. An increasing number of these slabs are deteriorating, as they become brittle through time.

Outside the Conservation Area there has been little change since 2004, but the Warburton Village Design Statement design guidance still stands and is largely incorporated in the Warburton Neighbourhood Development Plan.

6 Summary.

The Warburton landscape is very old and its medieval heritage is easily distinguished on a map. It is perhaps less easy to distinguish on the ground, but there are tell-tale signs around if the observer looks carefully. It is a generally flat landscape with little variation in height over most of the area making it extremely easy to see elevated structures well beyond the Parish boundary as well as those within the boundary. Aircraft and their trails dominate the clear skies when they occur. Ships funnels can be seen from a considerable distance away when larger vessels navigate the Mersey Ship Canal. Noise within the area carries a long way, so that bird-scarers can be heard almost a mile away from their location. It should be considered a sensitive landscape.

The evolution of this landscape was at its fastest when the Warburton Deer Park was constructed, prior to that our knowledge of the landscape is sketchy at best. However, in comparison with much of England, since the construction of the Deer Park this evolution slowed down until approximately 1850, when the outside world intruded in a big way. Communication routes opened up, new materials were readily available for building and new housing construction became more common towards the end of the C19th.

The mechanisation of farming throughout the C20th began to increase the speed of change in Warburton, a trend which continues to this day. The incorporation of Warburton into the Metropolitan Borough of Trafford in 1974 changed Warburton from being an isolated and rather quiet rural village into being a satellite village of a far larger city. Traffic flows and their attendant noise and visual impacts are increasing exponentially over recent years.

Recent applications for large numbers of houses to the north of the village would have very substantial and permanent impacts on the landscape of Warburton. The mitigation of these impacts and the preservation of unique historic landscape features are important issues for the Warburton community to address.

Finally I think part of the preamble to the European Landscape Convention quoted in the introduction, is worth quoting yet again, *'Believing that the landscape is a key element of individual and social well-being and that its protection, management and planning entail rights and responsibilities for everyone;'* The people of Warburton are strong believers in this phrase and believe passionately that the landscape of Warburton is both extremely special and very dear to them.

E. P. Beckmann
Landscape Architect

Agathoclis Beckmann Ltd.