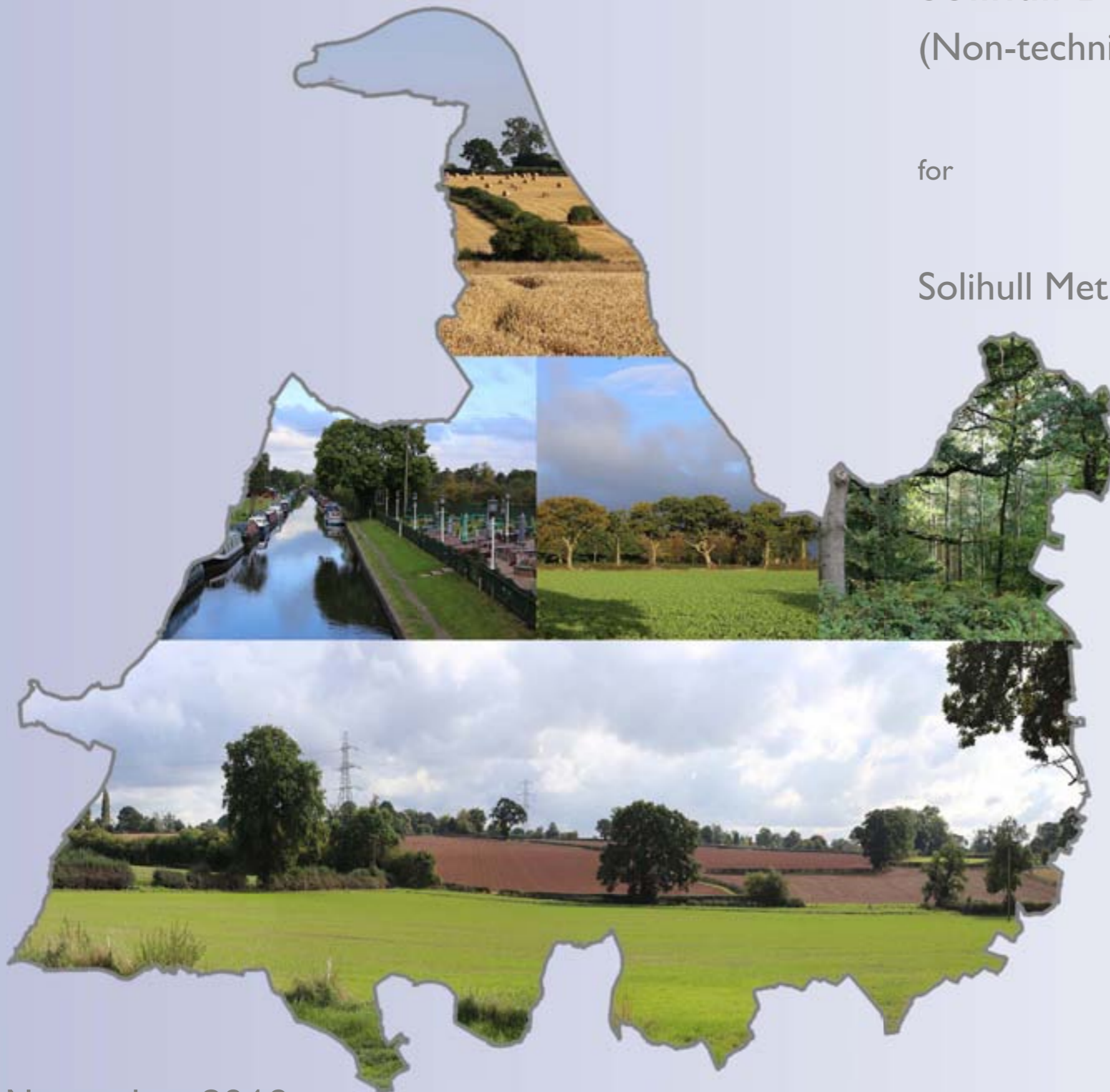


# Solihull Borough Local Character Guide (Non-technical Summary)

for

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council



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The view from Lodge Green Lane, Meriden, looking across the arable landscape with the city of Birmingham in the distance.

## Local Character Guide

The Local Character Guide is a non-technical information document which can be used to explain the meaning, value and sensitivity of landscape character within Solihull Metropolitan Borough. The purpose of the Local Character Guide is to:

- Define landscape character;
- Explain the concept of landscape character assessment including the value, service, quality, sensitivity and capacity of landscape within Solihull;
- Outline the distinct landscape character areas within Solihull; and
- Highlight key features and/or issues of Solihull's landscape character.

## Landscape Character

Landscape character can be defined as a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another.

The character of landscape is determined by a combination of natural, cultural, social, aesthetic and perceptual influences. Geology, hydrology, climate, landform and soils are related to the natural processes that give rise to the physical structure of the landscape. These natural processes have complex interrelationships with the physical, cultural and social use and development of landscape, so influencing land cover, land use and settlement. Inextricably linked with this are the aesthetic and perceptual elements, strongly related to our own personal appreciation of landscape, how we experience it, relate to it or make use of it.

## Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Assessment is used to identify individual areas that are distinct from one another due to their prevailing characteristics and features. These individual areas are then presented in further detail by looking at the unique combination of these characteristics and features. Though one individual area may be distinct from the next in terms of its core characteristics, often the boundaries may have overlapping features or elements.

The Local Character Guide is intended to be used in conjunction with the Solihull Borough Landscape Character Assessment. All documents prepared through the landscape character assessment process are intended to form a part of the evidence base for Solihull's Local Plan process. The Solihull Borough Landscape Character Assessment provides a detailed breakdown of areas of distinct landscape character in the Borough of Solihull. It determines and describes the character and the sensitivities, pressures and capacity for each area and makes judgements about each area resulting in guidelines to help manage landscape change. The document is supplemented by other background evidence and source material.

## Sensitivities and Pressures

One outcome of the landscape character assessment is the identification of issues specific to a given landscape character area, referred to as 'sensitivities' and 'pressures'. Such considerations are directly related to landscape value.

'Sensitivities' are physical or visual aspects of landscape character which are susceptible to change. Sensitivity is deemed to be highest where landscape character is highly valued i.e. an internationally or nationally designated landscape of high quality and distinctive characteristics (e.g. National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or World Heritage Site), or any other relatively undisturbed landscape with a strong sense of place. Sensitivity is lowest in landscapes which are of low quality and/ or poor condition, capable of tolerating substantial change.

'Pressures' are the drivers which have the ability to impact upon or change landscape character and can include pressure for development, changes in agricultural practices or lapses/ neglect in landscape management practices.

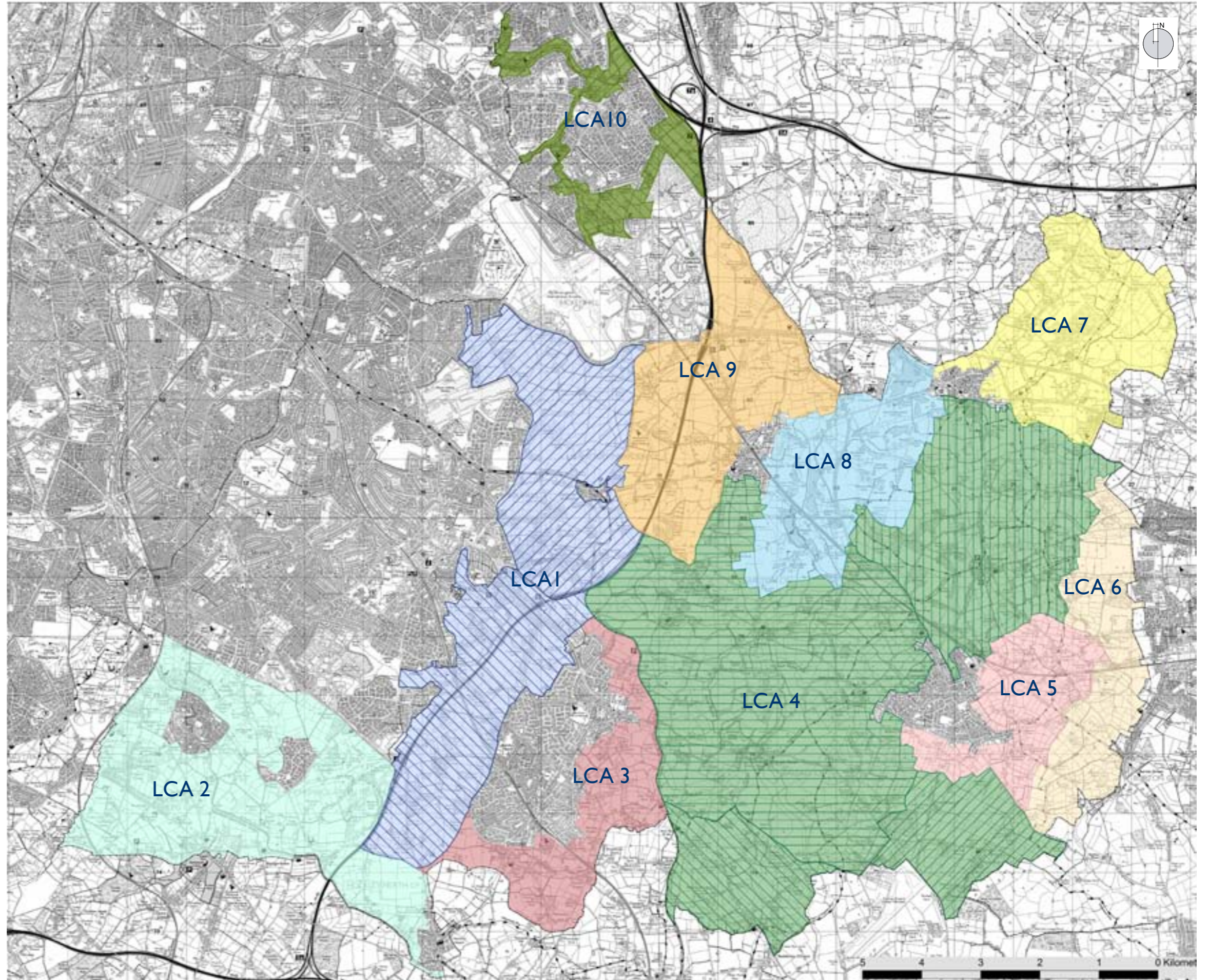
Following desktop studies, field work and consultation, ten Landscape Character Areas (LCA) have been identified within the borough.

The description, key characteristics and pressures of the ten LCAs have been set in brief in the following sheets with accompanying photographic evidence.

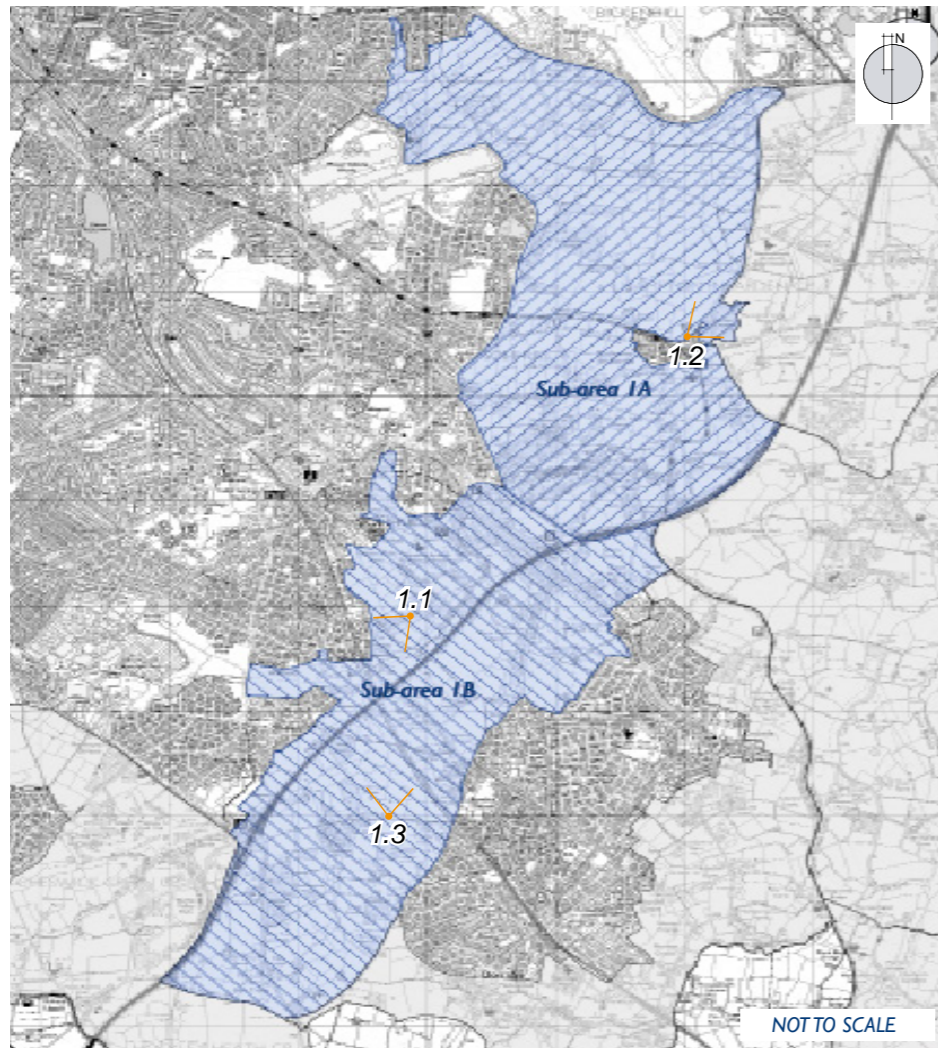
The full list of Landscape Character Areas is as follows:

- LCA 1 – Solihull Fringe
- LCA 2 – Southern Countryside
- LCA 3 – Knowle & Dorridge Fringe
- LCA 4 – Rural Centre
- LCA 5 – Balsall Common Eastern Fringe
- LCA 6 – Eastern Fringe
- LCA 7 – Northern Upland
- LCA 8 – Blythe Lowland
- LCA 9 – Motorway Corridor
- LCA 10 – Urban Green Spaces

Of these, three areas (LCA 1, LCA 4 and LCA 10) have been further divided into sub-areas, details of which can be found within the Solihull Borough Landscape Character Assessment.



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## Description:

This area covers just under 19km<sup>2</sup> at the eastern urban fringe of Solihull, where the settlement of Knowle and Dorridge lies to the east.

The landform across the area gently rises forming a northward facing slope extending from Birmingham International Airport towards the small settlement of Catherine-de-Barnes in the south. The mid southern extent of this area that stretches from the Grand Union Canal is characterised by the River Blythe SSSI, which has shaped a shallow valley along its course and where woodland and tree cover associated with the river valley is a key feature of the area.

Land use in this character area is influenced by the direct proximity of the urban edge to the open countryside, which exhibit contrasting fields patterns where strong hedgerow boundaries exist in the north in contrast to the more irregular pattern towards the south becoming interspersed by golf courses and ribbon development extending from the urban edge of Solihull and Dorridge. Within the M42 corridor and the airport area in the north, road and air traffic noise is a significant detractor to the tranquility of the area.

A diverse range of medium distant and short distant views are prevalent across this character area, where church spires from nearby settlements such as St Peter's Church in Bickenhill and St Alphege Church in Solihull form vertical features within the views across the area.

Pockets of ancient woodlands are characteristic of this character area, which are also designated Local Wildlife Sites such as Botts Coppice and Parlour Coppice. Woodland cover is a key feature of the area such that views throughout this character area are generally typified by a backdrop of wooded land.

Table 1: Key Characteristics of LCA I - Solihull Fringe

Component	Characteristics
Topography	• Undulating landform ranging from 100m to 140m AOD
Geology	• Triassic Rocks (undifferentiated) - Mudstone, Siltstone and Sandstone solid geology.
Soils	• Predominantly slowly permeable clayey soils, seasonally wet with impeded drainage. An area of permeable alluvial and glacial clays, sand
Drainage	• The Grand Union Canal and the River Blythe with its tributaries along with associated lakes, ponds and field ditches. • The Hatchford Brook to the north also plays an important role.
Land Use	• Arable and pastoral fields, parkland, deciduous and mixed woodland, agricultural land, residential, a few golf courses and industrial including business park
Vegetation Cover	• Tree cover is extensive with several woodlands, some of which are ancient • Strong hedgerow structure plus parkland trees east of Hampton Coppice and near Malvern & Brueton Park and east of the M42. • Bracken hedge banks along the roads form a distinctive feature.
Development	• The main settlement is Catherine-de-Barnes, however this area is located at the edge of Solihull and therefore heavily influenced by it. • Ribbon residential development. • Several scattered farmsteads and manor houses are present. • Street Lamps, communication masts, telegraph poles and electricity pylons add vertical elements.
Historic Value	• Ravenshaw Hall with its associated fords and Old Berry Hall, both being Grade II* listed buildings. • Ancient woodlands and veteran trees.
Accessibility	• The M42 dominates the north-south transportation corridor segregating the east from the west • The Chiltern Railway runs across the breadth of the site • Birmingham International airport is situated to the north of the LCA. • A network of footpaths (including the Grand Union Canal Walk) and roads criss-cross the LCA, though most follow an east to west direction connecting Solihull with other settlements.
Visual Dynamic	• The visibility in this LCA consist of generally medium to short distance views that are framed or wide, deep, upwards and horizontal orientation. • There are some long views out to the landscape in the north with views towards the airport
Key Features	• The Grand Union Canal, fords around Ravenshaw Hall and River Blythe. • Views to the historic church spires of St Peter's Church in Bickenhill and St Alphege Church in Solihull. • Strong tree cover including ancient woodland. • Bracken hedge banks along the roads. • Numerous Local Wildlife Sites.



Photograph 1.1:

Residential areas form part of the varied land use. The environment around Malvern & Brueton Park has a well wooded character.

## Sensitivities and Pressures:

- Potential loss of veteran trees and ancient woodland from development pressure.
- The straight edges of the M42 corridor are insensitive to the irregular field pattern.
- Possible increased pressure for access to open countryside from edge of Solihull and Dorridge may impact upon the rural character of the area.
- Pressure for development close to the urban edge of Solihull and Dorridge as is evident on either side of the M42 south of the A41 intersection.
- Landscape at the urban edge of Solihull and Dorridge is sensitive to loss of tree cover and is important to the rural setting of the settlement.
- Maintenance of public rights of way, which are sparsely distributed and limited footpath network close to urban edge places walkers on narrow roads.
- Decline in frequency of hedgerow trees due to neglect and lack of management and replacement.
- The southern half of the area plays an important role in separating Solihull and Dorridge and is sensitive to development which would result in coalescence. Therefore, a limited capacity to accept development.
- Pressure for new housing in this attractive commuter area close to Solihull and the M42 corridor due to the easy access. Limited capacity to accept development without impact upon character.
- Views across the area are enclosed in places for example Gate Lane and Lovelace Avenue but extensive in others such as views across from the northern extent of the area towards the settlement of Catherine-de-Barnes.
- Noise from M42 corridor and the Birmingham International Airport impacts upon tranquillity of area.
- The M42 almost defines the eastern extent of the urban edge in the south of the area with only a narrow buffer.



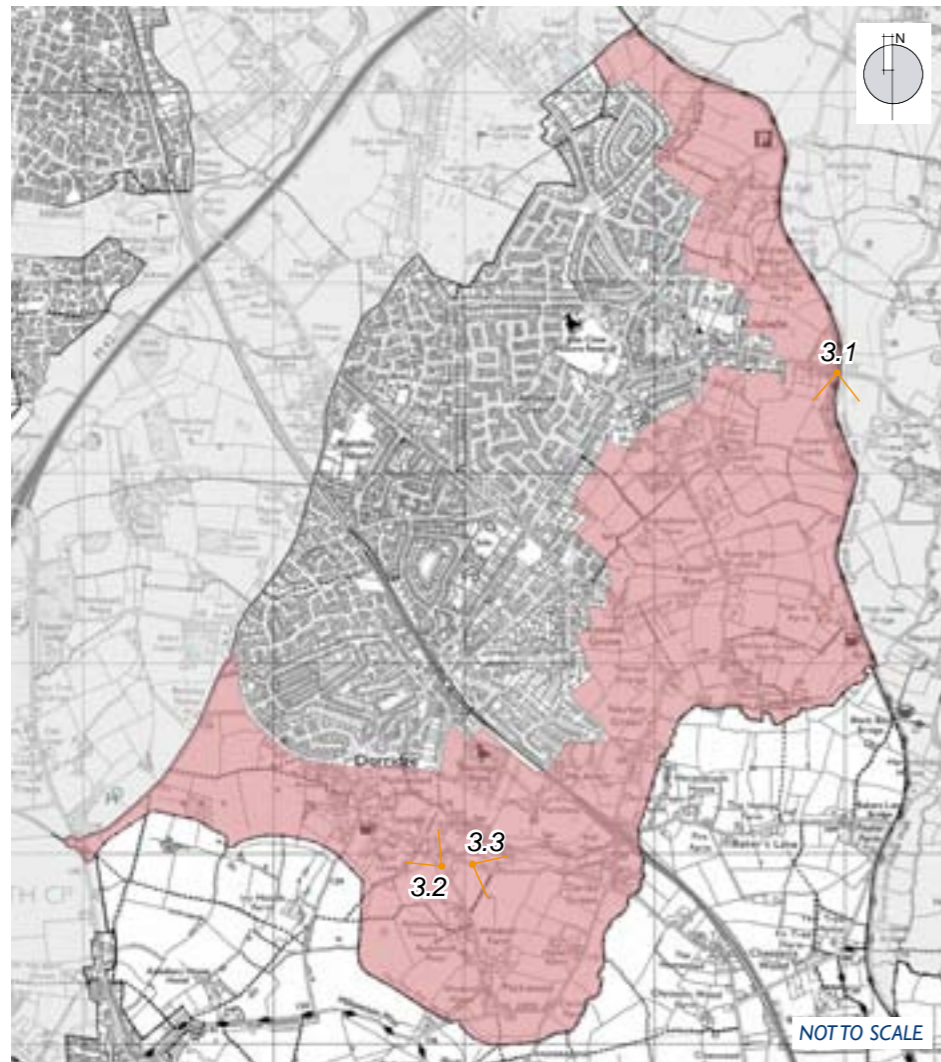
Photograph 1.2:

Road and aeroplane noise is constant. The spire of St Peter's Church, Bickenhill is a frequent landmark in the distance in views from northern parts of this LCA.



Photograph 1.3:

Arable fields are also part of the varied land use. Field boundaries are in variable condition and poor in some areas particularly in the south and to the east of the M42. In many places traditional hedgerows have been replaced with post and wire fencing.



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## Description:

This area covers approximately 5.8km<sup>2</sup> and includes the urban fringes of Knowle and Dorridge and rural areas to the south and east of the settlement. The LCA is contained by the Grand Union Canal which skirts along the east boundary of the area, Dorridge urban edge and Box Trees Road to the south-west of the area.

The land gently slopes down from west to east eventually falling towards the River Blythe in LCA 4. Purnell Brook, Cuttle Brook and Canal Feeder and their associated springs drain the area. These watercourses are well wooded and provide a distinctive characteristic within the landscape, specifically to the south of the LCA, which is perceived as being more enclosed and intimate.

Small blocks of woodland are scattered across the area, a number of these are ancient woodlands, Local Wildlife Sites and Local Nature Reserves. The woodlands are a valuable asset and combined with the winding lanes, mature hedgerow trees and ditches/watercourses running across the fields they provide a rich complexity and strong structure to the landscape, which is a key characteristic of the area.

This area, being in close proximity to Knowle and Dorridge, shows signs of urban influence especially within the northern extent of the LCA on the approaches to the settlement of Knowle. A large proportion of the character area remains unspoilt and is distinctively rural in character with pastoral fields despite the close proximity of the urban edge. Although much of the historic environment has been developed over the years, remnants of the past are evident in the names of places. Grimshaw Hall provides a historical connection and is of great heritage value to the landscape character of the area.

The area provides a gateway to the countryside from the southern and eastern fringes of Dorridge. Public footpaths and bridleways are present and assist in connecting the settlements to the major roads and the Grand Union Canal Walk to the east.

Table 3: Key Characteristics of LCA 3 - Knowle & Dorridge Fringe

Component	Characteristics
Topography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The land gently slopes downwards from west to east from a high point of 130m to a low of 110m AOD.</li> </ul>
Geology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bed rock Triassic Rocks (undifferentiated) - Mudstone, Siltstone and Sandstone.</li> </ul>
Soils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slowly permeable clayey soils, seasonally wet with impeded drainage.</li> </ul>
Drainage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Purnell Brook, Cuttle Brook and Canal Feeder along with associated springs.</li> <li>Grand Union Canal forms the eastern boundary.</li> </ul>
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Land use is varied with some residential, few individual farmsteads, horsiculture, parkland and agriculture.</li> </ul>
Vegetation Cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Well wooded water corridors dominated with willow trees.</li> <li>Pockets of woodland are scattered across the area.</li> <li>Bracken hedge banks are present within the southern part</li> </ul>
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No major settlement being adjacent to Knowle and Dorridge.</li> <li>Urban influences are evident including communication masts, farm conversions and other large residential properties</li> </ul>
Historic Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grimshaw Hall, a 16th century manor, is a Grade I listed building in the north.</li> <li>Remnants of small scale industrial past.</li> <li>This area adjoins Knowle Conservation Area which lies to the immediate west.</li> </ul>
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Single track roads and winding lanes are characteristic of the area.</li> <li>Short sections of PRoW connect the settlements to the major roads and to the countryside.</li> <li>Grand Union Canal Walk (long distance trail) is an important recreational route.</li> </ul>
Visual Dynamic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The general visibility in this area is contained, short distance and low level.</li> </ul>
Key Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No major settlements, although influenced by Knowle and Dorridge.</li> <li>Pastoral fields.</li> <li>Grimshaw Hall.</li> <li>Darley Brook Meadows – a Local Wildlife Site.</li> <li>Grand Union Canal and other water courses.</li> <li>Narrow and winding street structure like Mill Pool Lane.</li> </ul>



Photograph 3.1:

Knowle Hall Wharf, part of the Grand Union Canal, contains the eastern boundary of the LCA. The towpath is part of a long distance trail.

## Sensitivities and Pressures:

- Increased pressure for access to open countryside and for development close to the urban edge of Dorridge would impact upon rural character. The existing impacts of encroachment are evident at the edge of Knowle.
- Desire for new housing in this attractive commuter area due to easy access to Solihull and the M42 corridor. Limited capacity of the motorway corridor to accept development without impact upon character.
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings into residences.
- Neglect of field barns and vernacular buildings is impacting upon landscape character.
- Limited footpath network close to urban edge places walkers on narrow and dangerous roads.
- Overgrazing of land by horses gives the appearance of over use and impacts upon biodiversity. Inappropriate fencing also impacts on rural character.
- The landscape to the south and around Cuttle Brook contains many scattered buildings and has limited capacity to accept additional built development without detriment to landscape character through coalescence.



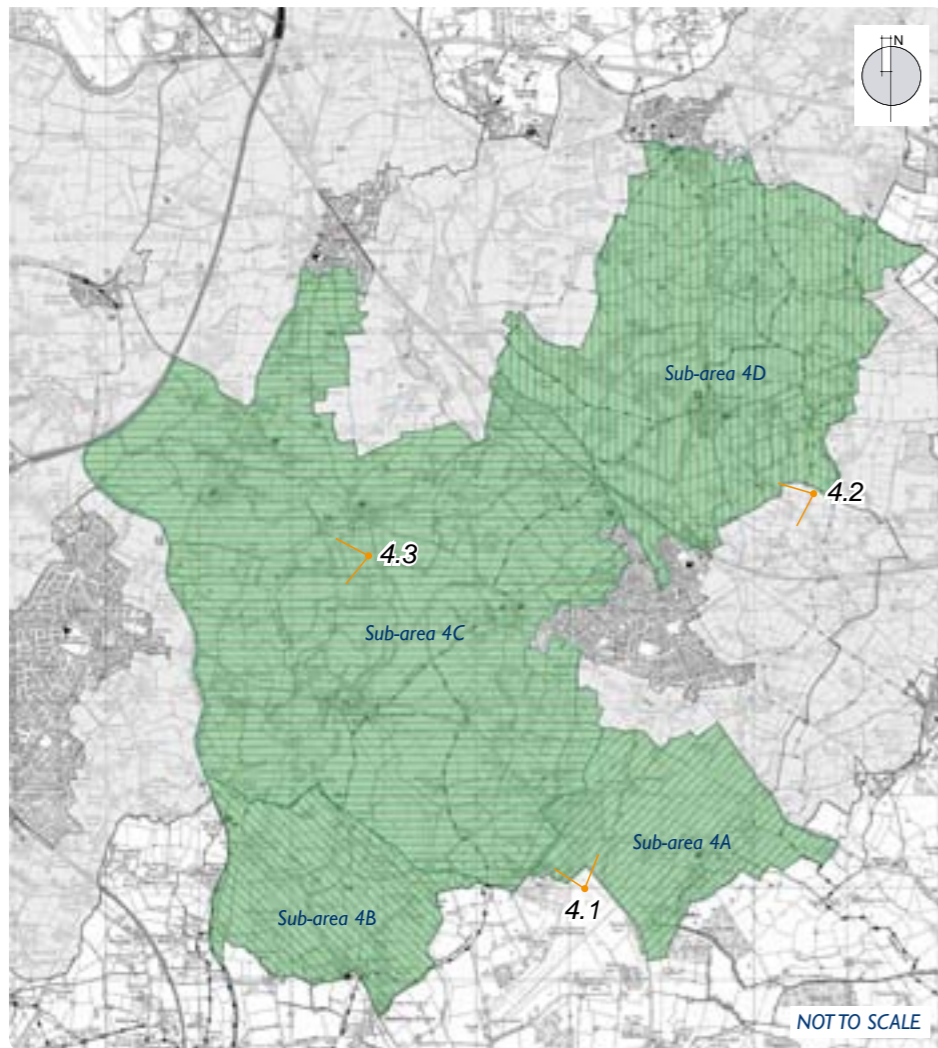
Photograph 3.2:

Tree cover is present in hedgerows and pockets of woodland, particularly in the south of the area.



Photograph 3.3:

There is a network of narrow, winding rural lanes often well enclosed by tall hedgerows and mature trees, such as at Mill Pool Lane.



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## Description:

This is a large area covering approximately 42km<sup>2</sup> and is within the rural heartland of Solihull. The area has been sub-divided into four sub-areas due to the scale of the LCA and subtle variations of characteristics within it. The sub-areas 4A, 4B, 4C and 4D are presented within the accompanying document Solihull Borough Landscape Character Assessment.

LCA 4 is an active rural agricultural landscape with arable and pastoral fields that support animal grazing.

Historically important nucleated settlements centred around road junctions are noticeable such as Temple Balsall and Berkswell. Other linear development such as Chadwick End and Barston are among the many smaller settlements prevalent in the wider countryside. Watercourses include the River Blythe SSSI, which forms an important feature within the area. This LCA is remote from larger areas of population giving a generally tranquil and unspoilt open character to the landscape.

The north-eastern extent of the character area adjoining LCA 8 is safeguarded as a mineral search area and the north-eastern and south-eastern extent of the LCA are also safeguarded as an area for search for coal. Mid-distance views with an open character and generally with a wooded backdrop are commonly experienced across this character area. The Conservation Areas play an important role within this LCA and their wider settings as an important characteristic that should be protected. The rural character of this LCA is a key element that requires protection and enhancement.

Table 4: Key Characteristics of LCA 4 - Rural Centre

Component	Characteristics
Topography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gentle valley landform centred on River Blythe, ranging from 90m to 140m AOD.</li> </ul>
Geology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Triassic Rocks (undifferentiated) - Mudstone, Siltstone and Sandstone. Wilmcote Limestone and Saltford Shale Member north of Knowle. Warwickshire Group of Siltstone and Sandstone with Subordinate Mudstone solid geology covers the north-eastern extent of LCA.</li> </ul>
Soils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The central section comprises permeable alluvial and glacial clays, sand and gravel deposits, naturally wet soils with high groundwater. The western section comprises freely draining sands and gravels.</li> </ul>
Drainage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The River Blythe and tributaries, Cuttle Brook, Long Brook and several pools, ditches and springs.</li> <li>The Grand Union Canal forms the western boundary of the LCA.</li> </ul>
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Predominantly agriculture (mix of arable and pastoral) with scattered residential development and rural farm businesses.</li> </ul>
Vegetation Cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Field boundary hedgerows of varying condition. Dense hedgerows often contain mature oaks and bracken. Some individual field trees.</li> <li>Pockets of woodland and plantation, Frogmore Wood is prominent. Some veteran trees near historic settlements.</li> <li>Well vegetated river corridor.</li> </ul>
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Main settlements of Temple Balsall and Berkswell with smaller settlements of Walsal End and Barston.</li> <li>Smaller linear settlements including Chadwick End and Fen End, and scattered farmsteads.</li> </ul>
Historic Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Four Conservation Areas - Temple Balsall, Berkswell, Barston and Walsal End.</li> <li>Four Scheduled Monuments including the Preceptory at Temple Balsall.</li> <li>Historic farmstead, moated sites, listed buildings throughout the LCA.</li> <li>The Arden landscape, ancient woodland, and mature hedgerows.</li> </ul>
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some major roads including the A4141, A452 and M42. Minor roads connect various smaller settlements.</li> <li>Mainline railway crosses the LCA towards the north east.</li> <li>Several public footpaths and bridleways. There are three long distance trails: Heart of England Way, Millennium Way and Coventry Way. The Grand Union Canal Walk forms the western boundary.</li> </ul>
Visual Dynamic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Views are often contained and narrow within historic settlements, but wider and longer within the rural, agricultural environs.</li> </ul>
Key Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Predominantly agricultural land use.</li> <li>River Blythe (SSSI) and associated Blythe valley.</li> <li>Fields boundary hedgerows of varying condition, some only post and rail fencing, some tall and dense with mature oaks.</li> <li>Individual mature trees within fields are characteristic.</li> <li>The presence of Conservation Areas creates a distinct character with attractive historic buildings and intimate settings.</li> <li>Aside from the major roads, minor roads are generally narrow, winding and often enclosed by mature hedgerows.</li> </ul>

## Sensitivities and Pressures:

- Neglect and potential loss of woodland.
- Pressure for development close to the edge of Balsall Common.
- Maintenance of public rights of way.
- Loss of biodiversity through intensive farming and land management.
- Overgrazing and trampling of land by horses which give the appearance of over use degrade landscape and impacts upon biodiversity. Inappropriate fencing also impacts on rural character.
- Proximity of urban areas and their influence upon the River Blythe Corridor.
- Potential of farmstead sprawl with new large modern buildings that detract from the area.
- Noise from M42 corridor in the north west of the area affects the tranquility.



**Photograph 4.1:**  
Whilst trees are frequently a feature of field boundaries, hedgerows are often low and sparse.



**Photograph 4.2:**  
Land use is predominantly agricultural, generally with medium to large sized fields and a variable pattern. Electricity pylons are visible particularly to southern and western areas.



**Photograph 4.3:**  
Historic settlements have a distinctively intimate and well conserved feel. There are many attractive historic buildings within Conservation Areas and scattered throughout the rural landscape.



# Solihull Borough Local Character Guide

(Non-technical Summary)

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