

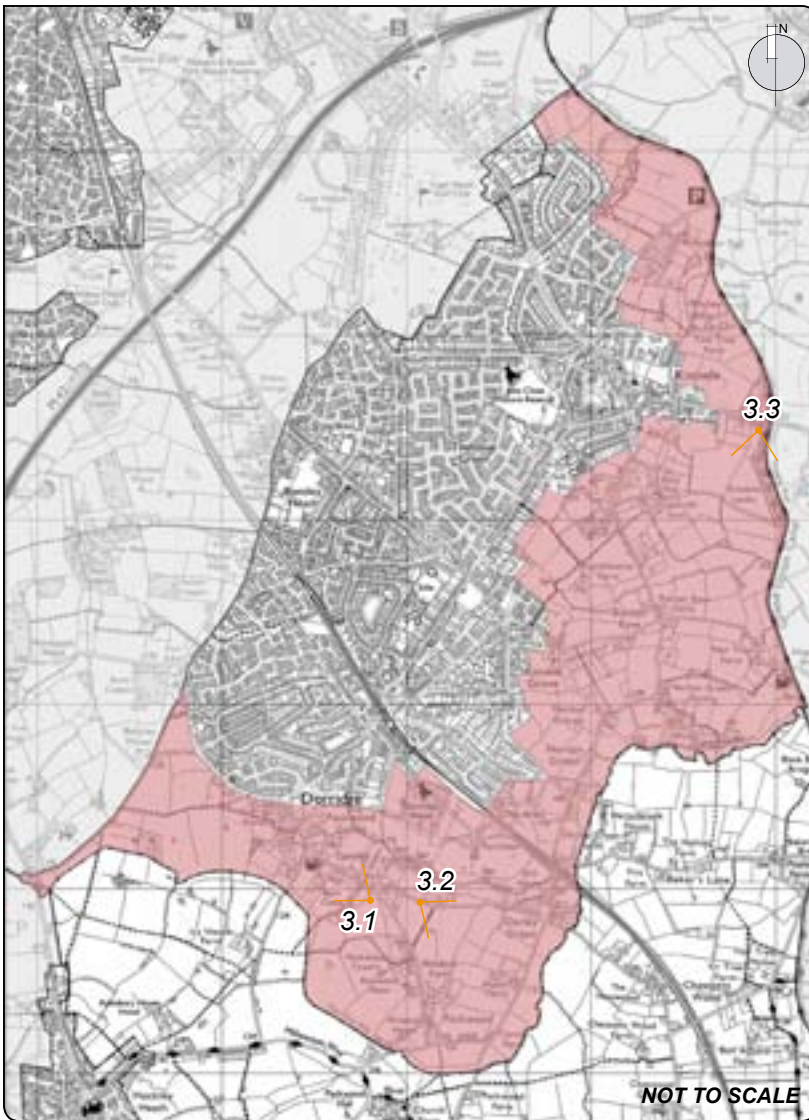
Solihull Borough Landscape Character Assessment

for

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council



December 2016



Knowle & Dorridge Fringe

LCA 3



Photograph 3.1:
Tree cover is present in hedgerows and pockets of woodland, particularly in the south of the area.



Photograph 3.2:
There is a network of narrow, winding rural lanes often well enclosed by tall hedgerows and mature trees, such as at Mill Pool Lane.



Photograph 3.3:
Knowle Hall Wharf, part of the Grand Union Canal which contains the area to the east. The towpath is part of a long distance trail.

Description:

This area covers approximately 5.8km² 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.

Key Characteristics:

Geology, soils and drainage:

- Slowly permeable clayey soils, seasonally wet with impeded drainage.
- Bed rock Triassic Rocks (undifferentiated) of Mudstone, Siltstone and Sandstone.

Landform and Drainage Pattern:

- The land gently slopes from a high point of 130m AOD down to 110m AOD from west to east eventually falling towards the River Blythe in LCA 4.
- Purnell Brook, Cuttle Brook and Canal Feeder along with their associated springs form the main drainage pattern within the LCA. These waterways and watercourse are a valuable landscape asset to the area.

Land use, fields, boundaries, trees and wildlife:

- Land use is varied with some residential development, individual farmsteads, horsiculture, parkland and agricultural land (mostly Grade 3 with some Grade 4).
- Urban influences are evident with managed green spaces, telegraph poles and manicured hedgerows specifically along Windmill Lane.
- Field pattern is varied with the north of the LCA consisting mostly of small to medium scale fields in contrast to the south, which generally comprises medium to large scale fields.
- Field boundaries follow the watercourses and are generally delineated by hedgerows, although a small number of open fields are also noted.
- Pockets of woodland are scattered across the area. Despite the larger concentration of woodland towards the south, woodland cover is not entirely absent from the north of the LCA as evident at Purnell Brooks Woodland.
- Well wooded water courses are an important feature in the area with willows being the dominate species. A small number of poplar shelterbelts are also noted.
- Mature hedgerow trees are a key feature within the area, although some have become tall and leggy through lack of management. A few individual scattered trees are also noted within the northern extent of the area where oak and ash are the two dominant species.
- Bracken hedgebanks are noted within the southern extent of the area.
- A number of Local Wildlife Sites are located within the area including three potential ancient woodlands: Dorridge Wood, Purnell Brooks Woodland and woodland bordering Box Tree Road.
- Darley Brook Meadows is a Local Wildlife Site of note, comprising a large area of meadow and woodland.
- Dorridge Wood, located at the southern edge of Dorridge adjoining the railway line is designated as a Local Nature Reserve.
- Dorridge Park is the only Principal Park within the area.

Settlement, built environment and communications:

- This LCA, being adjacent to the settlement of Knowle and Dorridge, has no other major settlements within it apart from smaller residences along the roads and individual farmsteads.
- Large individual residential properties with associated gardens/ garden style ornamental planting are also present.
- Most built form in the area consists of red brick and/or render with tiled roofs. Timber and brick buildings are present along Warwick Road and Norton Green Lane to the east of the LCA.
- There are no conservation areas within this LCA, however it lies in very close proximity to Knowle Conservation Area and therefore forms part of its setting in the northern extent of the LCA.
- Most of the listed buildings are concentrated along Kenilworth Road, although there are a number others scattered across the area such as Grove Farmhouse to the north, Mill Pool Cottage and Darley Mill House to the south, some of these are indicators of the small scale industrial past.
- Grimshaw Hall, a 16th century manor, is a Grade I listed building in the north of the area which, along with its parkland landscape, is a key historical feature of the landscape.
- The Chilterns Railway adds to the fragmentation of the area dividing the LCA into a northern and southern extent.
- Single track roads and winding lanes are characteristic of the area, some of which follow the water courses such as Mill House Lane which contributes to the distinct character of the area that evokes a strong sense of isolation and tranquillity relative to the northern extent of the LCA.
- A number of short sections of public footpaths are present within the LCA connecting the settlements to the major roads and Grand Union Canal Walk (long distance trail), which skirts along the eastern boundary of the area.
- The Grand Union Canal forms the eastern boundary of the LCA and is also used for mooring specifically in close proximity to Knowle.

Sensitivities and Pressures:

- Possible increase pressure for access to open countryside from edge of Knowle and Dorridge may impact upon the rural character of the area.
- Pressure for development close to the urban edge of Knowle and Dorridge. Further development is likely to result in encroachment into the rural area as evident at the edge of Knowle.
- Desire for new housing in this attractive commuter area close to Solihull and the M42 due to the easy access generates pressure along the motorway corridor. Limited capacity of the motorway corridor to accept development without impact upon character.
- Pressure for conversion of farm buildings into residences.
- 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, degraded landscape 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.
- Neglect of field barns and vernacular buildings is impacting upon landscape character.

Guidelines:

Aim: Preservation of Landscape Pattern

- Discourage planting along the Cuttle Brook that would affect the nature conservation and river corridor landscape character of the area.
- Encourage reinstatement of water meadows along the valley floor to create a buffer zone between Cuttle Brook river corridor and southern edge of Dorridge.
- Encourage appropriate management to retain strong hedgerow structure and the planting of individual trees along field boundaries particularly in northern and central extents of the area. Tree planting in the vicinity of Dorridge is important to its setting and approaches.
- Resist loss of field boundaries to retain irregular field pattern to south of the LCA. Discourage amalgamation of fields and promote awareness of the Hedgerow Regulations. Refer to Habitat Biodiversity Audit for detail.
- Promote proactive management of existing woodland and the planting of new woodland to fit with landscape pattern in particular trees and woodland at the urban edge.
- Identify appropriate access points to the countryside and ensure that new facilities, signs and paths are low-key and respect landscape character.
- Encourage use of fencing with less intrusive materials in combination with hedges and follow traditional post and rail or post and wire design. Promote positive management of roadside hedgerows.
- Conserve pastoral character and identify opportunities for conversion of arable land back to grazing land.
- Conserve the diversity of old permanent pastures. Reseeding or ploughing must be avoided and tree/woodland planting is inappropriate in these areas.

Aim: To promote understanding of the heritage features in the area and their contribution to landscape character.

- Identify heritage canal features of interest and develop strategy for their protection particularly around the northern and central extents of the LCA.
- Resist any development that would risk the character of the canal landscape and its historic value. Any new development in the vicinity of the canal needs to preserve and enhance its setting.
- Promote the use of high quality materials around the canal network to assist with improving its legibility and integration with its historic landscape setting.
- Promote connections across the area via the intricate network of footpaths. Promote new studies and provide interpretation of historic features in the landscape.
- Protect the landscape setting of Grimshaw Hall and resist development that would impact upon the character of the scattered farmsteads, manor houses and listed buildings across the area.
- Protect ancient woodland and follow management guidance in line with the Solihull Woodland Strategy. New planting should be encouraged to diversify age structure of tree stock.
- Research small woodland blocks to establish whether they are Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland.
- Protect the landscape setting of the Cuttle Brook and Mill Pool Lane, which are key features of the area.
- Identify further historic and archaeological features suitable for scheduling and explore the potential to use as an educational resource.

Aim: To manage access for recreation at the urban edge:

- Survey how walkers use the area to improve the safety and enjoyment of the countryside particularly around Dorridge urban edge.
- Promote the enhancement of the footpath network and its contribution to landscape character and appreciation.
- Explore opportunities to improve public enjoyment of the area, through access agreements following appropriate routes, that would cause minimal disturbance.

Overall Landscape Sensitivity:

Landscape Character Sensitivity:

- The Landscape Character Sensitivity of this LCA is considered to be **Medium**.
- This is a landscape with a strong sense of local connection to the place, defining landscape features and a characteristic pattern including the watercourses and associated willow planting, bracken hedgebanks, creating a balanced landscape in a good to fair condition. The single track roads and winding lanes enhance rural character of the area and the pastoral character in some parts add to local distinctiveness. There are a few detracting features within the landscape including poor legibility of the canal and some of the suburban influences. Access to public footpaths and bridleways is limited.

Visual Sensitivity:

- The Visual Sensitivity of this LCA is considered to be **Low**.
- The general visibility in this LCA is contained, short distance and low level where small scale fields and watercourses add intimacy and close down views across the area. The urban interface with Dorridge is well screened, although some views of the built form play a minor role in terms of visual coalescence in some parts of the character area.

Table 9: Overall Sensitivity for LCA 3 – Knowle & Dorridge Fringe: Medium

		Landscape Character Sensitivity			
		High	Medium	Low	Very Low
Visual Sensitivity	High	High	High	Medium	Low
	Medium	High	Medium	Medium	Low
	Low	Medium	Medium	Low	Low
	Very Low	Low	Low	Low	Very Low/ Negligible

Landscape Value:

- The value of this character area is considered to be **Medium**.
- This is a locally distinctive landscape containing valued characteristics. The wooded watercourses along with the ancient woodlands are key to the local distinctiveness. Historic sites such as Grimshaw Hall and the Grand Union Canal adds to the cultural and local value of the area. Value is increased by the presence of the long distance trail at the Grand Union Canal Walk within this character area.

Landscape Capacity:

- As set out within the Methodology and in line with the current guidance, it is not possible to establish a definitive baseline sensitivity to change without having details of a given development proposal. However, for the purpose of this report a general assessment of the LCA's capacity to accommodate change has been undertaken. This should be used as a guide only, and will need to be re-assessed once details of any proposed development and site location are known.
- This LCA being of **Medium** overall landscape sensitivity and **Medium** landscape value, suggests that the LCA would typically have an overall **Low** landscape capacity to accommodate new development.
- The LCA is a largely rural landscape with some urban influences and distinct watercourses with pastoral fields. The Grand Union Canal is a natural boundary to the area and provides good recreational value.
- Overall, this area is likely to be able to accommodate small areas of new development, which would need to be of an appropriate type, scale and form, in keeping with the existing character and local distinctiveness. Any new development should not result in the loss of the irreplaceable habitats or destroy the setting of the Grand Union Canal and Knowle Conservation Area.

Table 10: Landscape Capacity for LCA 3 – Knowle & Dorridge Fringe: Low

		Overall Landscape Sensitivity			
		High	Medium	Low	Very Low
Landscape Value	High	Very Low/ None	Very Low	Low	Medium
	Medium	Very Low	Low	Low	Medium
	Low	Low	Low	Medium	High
	Very Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	High

Appendix F: Glossary

Terms	Definitions
Above Ordnance Datum (AOD)	A spot height relative to the average sea level.
Arden	A National Character Area comprising farmland and former wood-pasture lying to the south and east of Birmingham, including part of the West Midlands conurbation.
Borough	The Metropolitan Borough of Solihull.
Broad Character Area	Area defined by the National Character Area (NCA) profile.
Characterisation	The process of identifying areas of similar character, classifying and mapping them and describing their character.
Characteristics	Elements, or combinations of elements, which make a particular contribution to distinctive character.
Classification	Is concerned with dividing the landscape into areas of distinct, recognisable and consistent common character and grouping areas of similar character together.
Elements	Individual components which make up the landscape, such as trees and hedges.
Features	Particularly prominent or eye catching elements, like tree clumps, church towers, or wooded skylines.
Intermediate Character Areas	Defined areas classified to update and refine the assessment of character areas identified in the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines (Arden)
Key Characteristics	Those combinations of elements which are particularly important to the current character of the landscape and help to give an area its particularly distinctive sense of place.
Landscape Capacity	The degree to which a particular landscape character type or area is able to accommodate change without unacceptable adverse effects on its character. Capacity is likely to vary according to the type and nature of the change being proposed.
Landscape Character	A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.
Landscape Character Areas	These are single unique areas which are the discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape type. Each has its own individual character and identity, even though it shares the same generic characteristics with other types.
Landscape Character Assessment	This is the process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features (characteristics) that make landscapes distinctive. This process results in the production of a Landscape Character Assessment.
Landscape Character Types	These are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different areas in different parts of the country, but wherever they occur they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, historical land use, and settlement pattern.

Terms	Definitions
Landscape Designations	Statutory and non-statutory national landscape and local planning policy designations relating to landscape.
Landscape Quality	is based on judgements about the physical state of the landscape, and about its intactness, from visual, functional, and ecological perspectives. It also reflects the state of repair of individual features and elements which make up the character in any one place.
Landscape Sensitivity	The extent to which a landscape can accept change of a particular type and scale without unacceptable adverse effects on its character.
Landscape Value	The relative value or importance attached to a landscape (often as a basis for designation or recognition), which expresses national or local consensus, because of its quality, special qualities including perceptual aspects such as scenic beauty, tranquillity or wildness, cultural associations or other conservation issues.
Land Use Pattern	The amalgamation to of multiple land uses with the landscape such as settlements and semi-natural habitats such as arable fields, pastures, and managed woods.
Local Character Areas	Areas identified to provide greater understanding of distributed landscapes, townscapes, urban fringe, villages and land management areas.
National Character Area	Areas that share similar landscape characteristics, and which follow natural lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries, making them a good decision-making framework for the natural environment.
Visual Sensitivity	The overall visibility of each landscape character sub area, visual enclosure, openness of the area, distribution and number of visual receptors and the importance and prominence of any skyline that may be visible in the area.

Solihull Borough Landscape Character Assessment

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