

## TECHNICAL NOTE

**Project:** Ellesmere Port

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## LANDSCAPE - TECHNICAL NOTE

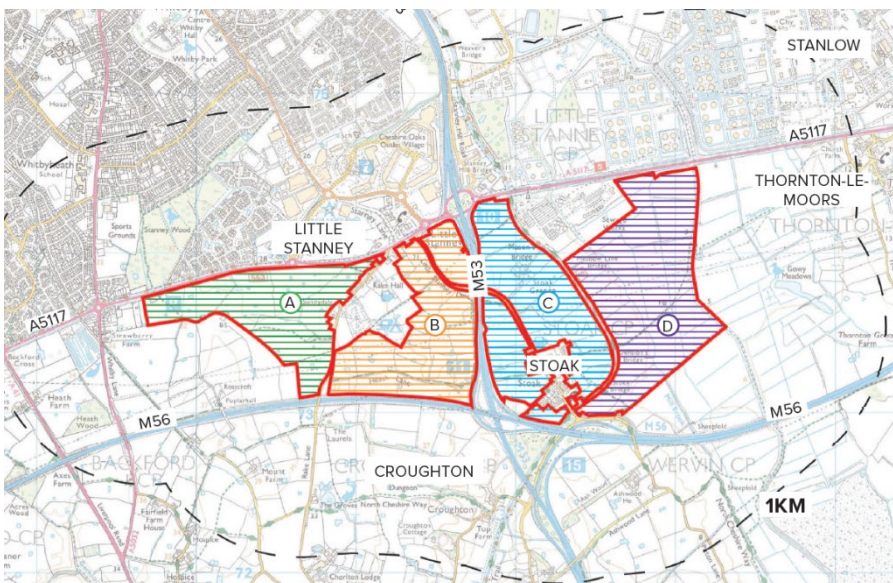
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Following a request from the Church Commissioners for England (CCfE), Bradley Murphy Design Ltd. (BMD) have prepared this high-level Landscape Technical Note to summarise why - from a landscape, biodiversity and placemaking perspective - allocation of land to the east and west of the M53 would provide wider benefits as part of a sustainable, landscape and community led development. At present the Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWCC) Regulation 18 Local Plan Issues and Options (2025) only proposes to allocate the land to the west of the M53.

The area of study (referred to as the 'Site') is focused on the land adjacent to the southern settlement edge of Ellesmere Port, Stanney and Stanlow Oil Refinery. The Site is bound to the north by the A5117, to the south by the M56, to the east by the River Gowy and to the west by hedgerow field boundaries. The Site is dissected by the M53 and also borders the nucleated village of Stoak (which lies within the eastern part) and an element of ribbon development within the village of Stanney (which lies within the western part).

The Site comprises a collection of land parcels separated by road infrastructure and water (Shropshire Union Canal) and includes the following references, as shown in the map extract below (refer to **Figure A**):

- Area A: Land to the west of Stanney and Rake Lane
- Area B: Land to the east of Rake Lane and west of M53
- Area C: Land to the east of M53 and west of The Shropshire Union Canal
- Area D: Land to the east of The Shropshire Union Canal



**Figure A: Site context and Parcels**

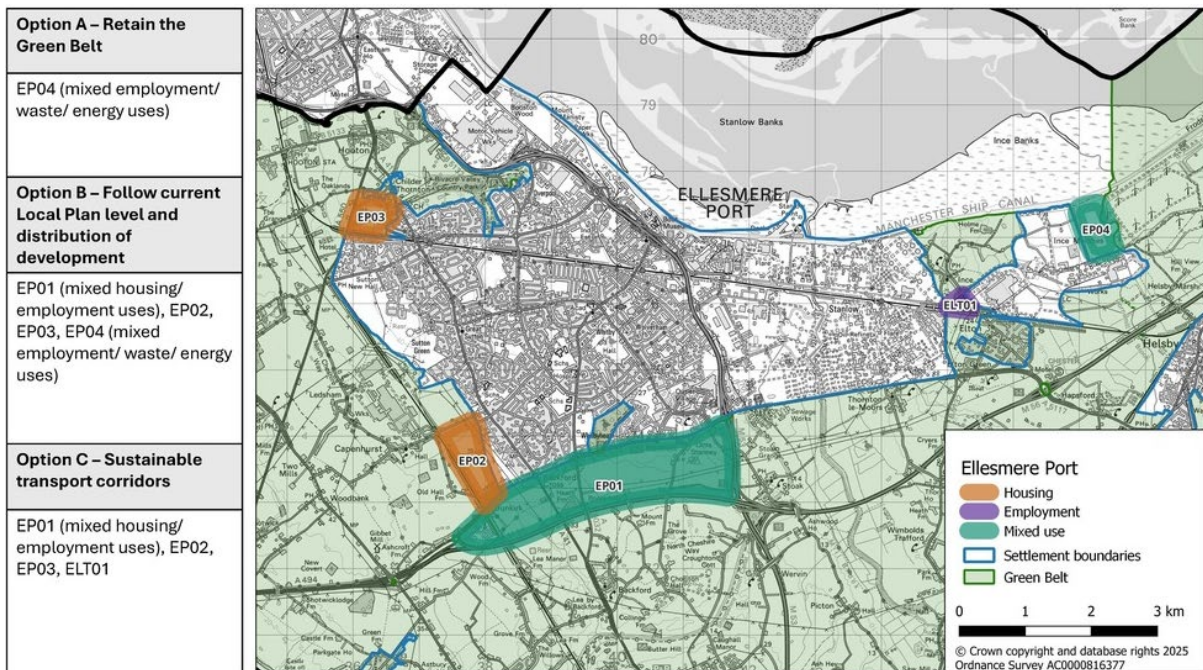
BMD have been working with the Commissioners since 2023, advising on landscape and visual, green belt and ecological matters - in collaboration with the wider consultant team, to explore how the Commissioners significant landholdings south of Ellesmere Port could play a part in a sustainable regeneration and future growth of the town.

Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWCC) agreed on 10 January 2024, to commit to preparing a Local Plan under the new national system for plan-making and support the development of a borough-wide design code, to eventually be incorporated into a new Local Plan or Supplementary Plan.

CWCC are currently consulting on the Regulation 18 Local Plan Issues and Options 2025. The new Local Plan sets out where development will take place in Cheshire West and Chester. Within the Consultation documentation Draft Spatial Strategy Options Map, there are three options for growth across the borough, presented as:

- Option A – Retain the Green Belt
- Option B – Follow current Local Plan level and distribution of development
- Option C – [Development Along] Sustainable Transport Corridors

Part of the CCfE Site (to the west of the M53 – Site Parcels A & B) has been proposed as a potential ‘Mixed Use’ area for growth, under both ‘Option B – Follow current Local Plan level and distribution of development and ‘Option C – Sustainable Transport Corridors’, facilitated through Green Belt release. This is shown below as ref: EP01 (refer to **Figure B**):



**Figure B: Ellesmere Port Growth Options, Cheshire West and Chester Council**

This technical note sets out why, from a landscape, biodiversity and placemaking perspective – the extension of proposed allocation EP01 to include land east of the M53, as part of a sustainable, landscape and community led development.

This technical note draws upon the following information, submitted to evidence promotion of the wider CCfE site for sustainable landscape and community led development:

- The Landscape & Visual Appraisal – Technical Note (BMD.23.0061.TN.001)

- The Vision Document (JTP, December 2024)
- The Green Belt Review (BMD.23.0061.RP.GBR.001, August 2025)
- The Full Draft Cheshire & Warrington LNRS (2024) and its Summary Consultation Document

## **Green Infrastructure (GI) / Landscape Opportunities**

Following a combined landscape and biodiversity analysis and consideration of baseline findings, the following section summarises landscape and GI opportunities that have informed the design process and helped shape the vision for the whole of the CCfE Site – referred to as Land at Little Stanney Lane, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire.

### ***New Nature Recovery Network (NRN)***

The Site intersects with a number of Green Infrastructure (GI) corridors, linking core biodiversity areas identified within the Ellesmere Port and Chester GI Actions Plan (2011). The Site provides the opportunity to enhance and connect the green network, resulting in a valuable contribution to Cheshire and Warrington Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

The existing highway infrastructure (A5117, M53, Rake Lane and Little Stanney Lane) creates severance across the Site and barriers to the safe movement of people and wildlife. The landscape and biodiversity analysis, and subsequent visioning, identified the potential for a new east / west green corridor through the whole of the Site. This new corridor could be of a scale (+100m wide) that it presents a new a Nature Recovery Network (NRN) opportunity - connecting Stanney Woods, the Shropshire Union Canal, the River Gowy Corridor and Gowy Meadows Local Wildlife Site (LWS) – providing a transitional landscape corridor through the Site, grading from woodlands to wetlands (refer to **Figure C**).

The opportunity to realise this strategic GI and biodiversity initiative to the benefit the movement of people and wildlife is severely weakened by the proposed EP01 allocation terminating at the M53.

**Figure C: Existing and potential strategic GI / biodiversity corridors**



### ***Shropshire Union Canal***

The Shropshire Union Canal runs through the Site (between Site Parcels C & D) with a 1.5m wide towpath and associated cycle paths running alongside. There is potential to improve the accessibility of this route and for development to interact with the canal and its views. There is an opportunity to unlock the leisure

potential and activate the Shropshire Union Canal as part of proposals - creating a new tourism offer and improvements to the towpath network. The towpath is also an important leisure route, used by walkers and cyclists, however the section running through the Site is narrow, poorly surveilled and not surfaced.

If the whole of the Site is brought forward, as part of a future CWCC EP01 allocation, there is an opportunity for CCfE to collaborate and partner with the Canals & Rivers Trust, as part of future development proposals (refer to **Figure D**) to:

- enhance and activate the canalside with development frontages, public open space and marina / moorings
- improve the recreational capacity and connectivity along towpath, with an enhanced leisure route for cycling and walking
- celebrate and enhance the canalside, its natural and historic assets, with the creation of a new quayside parkland destination
- create a new tourism offer and relieve the recreational pressure along the towpath, by providing an alternative recreational route through the adjacent CCfE land
- create a new marina and canalside frontages, through a leisure hub, providing a stop off point for boats between Chester and Ellesmere Port and bring a host of economic benefits to the area. Any development along the Shropshire Union Canal would seek to engage positively with the canal and retain ecological features of value.

Exclusion of the land to the east of the M53, from any future EP01 allocation, precludes the ability to enhance these strategic GI initiatives, with the wider benefits and opportunities from development of the Site not fully achieved - the Shropshire Union Canal would remain enclosed on its boundaries, lacking activity and positive frontages and with ongoing limits to the recreation capacity on the towpath (due to existing narrow width of c. 1.5m and poor surfacing).



**Figure D: Illustrative visual of a Quayside Park destination, leisure hub and improved leisure routes along the Shropshire Union Canal, delivered as part of future development to Parcels A, B & C, with Parcel D retained in the Green Belt but also enhanced (see below)**

### ***Trees, woodland & Hedgerow***

The Site features a strong existing hedgerow and tree network, interspersed with woodland blocks, many of which are associated with watercourses, field margins or historic land parcels.

The draft Cheshire & Warrington Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) places significant emphasis on the restoration, expansion, and improved connectivity of woodland habitats, ancient woodland remnants, traditional orchards and hedgerows. It promotes a landscape-scale approach, supporting the principle of creating more, bigger, better connected habitats that deliver ecological and social value with climate

resilience. The CCfE development proposals and green infrastructure vision for the Site aligns with these priorities, including the potential to:

- conserve & strengthen the tree, hedgerow & pond network (GCN potential)
- collaborate & partner with Mersey Forest, facilitating new tree / woodland community planting
- enhance ecological connectivity and biodiversity across the Site
- strengthen the existing hedgerow, tree and pond habitat mosaic - whilst reinforcing local character
- create a rich tapestry of new 'community woodlands' and tree typologies, to strengthen and connect existing woodland, whilst supporting species diversity and resilience

Exclusion of the land to the east of the M53, from any future EP01 allocation, weakens this strategic GI initiative and the wider benefits of this opportunity are weakened and not fully achieved – significantly reducing the area of potential hedgerow, tree and woodland enhancement and creation. If Site Parcel D is included in the wider allocation (albeit remains as Green Belt) measures could include additional landscape buffer planting on the boundaries of this parcel, to reduce the visual intrusion and urban influence of Ellesmere Port, the Effluent Treatment Works and Stanlow Oil refinery.

### ***Gowy Meadows Reserve***

Site Parcel D, the land to the east of the Shropshire Union Canal, is open grazing marshland, with a large proportion (c.80%) designated 'Coastal and Floodplain' priority habitat which, whilst not automatically considered an 'irreplaceable habitat', are identified as being particularly important, threatened and a material consideration in planning decisions. A large proportion of the Site (c.75%, all the land to the east of Mill Brook) is within Flood Zones 2 and 3, considered a significant area at risk of flooding.

The Green / Grey Belt Review, Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) and Vision for the Site, highlight opportunities (as part of Proposed Development of the Site) to enhance and expand Gowy Meadows and Ditches LWS and Nature Reserve in Site Parcel D. It is recommended that this area of the Site is retained as Green Belt and has the potential to be enhanced, reconnecting characteristic floodplain habitats that contribute to the distinctive and natural character of the floodplain. This landscape could be managed for biodiversity and recreational use - conserving and enhancing the grassland and wetland habitat mosaic and improving the movement of wildlife / people.

A potential partnership with the Cheshire Wildlife Trust could also explore areas for colocation of renewable energy generation and nature enhancement (on Site Parcel D), looking to maximise land efficiency and biodiversity net gain. Extension of Gowy Meadows nature reserve, across Site Parcel D, could form a large scale wetland destination that transforms farmland pastures into a biodiverse wetland habitat mosaic, supporting regional wetland birds and high-value habitats that align with conservation priorities (as part of the draft Cheshire & Warrington LNRS).

Exclusion of the land to the east of the M53, from any future EP01 allocation, would fail to achieve this strategic GI initiative and opportunity, as the land would remain as part of the CCfE estate and leased to tenant farmers for grazing livestock. As a result, public access will remain as limited PRoW routes that cross the current grazing land, which would not be accessible as a recreational and biodiversity resource.

### ***Cheshire & Warrington LNRS***

The LNRS (produced in draft form by Cheshire West and Chester Council (2025) in collaboration with Cheshire East, Warrington Borough Council and other stakeholders) sets out a statutory framework for reversing the decline of nature and restoring biodiversity across the region. It forms part of the legal duty under the Environment Act 2021, for Local Authorities to take biodiversity into account across decision-making and development planning.

The entirety of the Site offers multiple opportunities for ecological enhancement, that align with the LNRS' six key habitat themes, including the creation and restoration of woodland, watercourses, hedgerows and grassland. These opportunities are significantly reduced by constraining development west of the M53 corridor.

The Site lies within and adjacent to several Nature Recovery Opportunity Areas and ecological corridors identified in LNRS mapping, which can be leveraged as part of the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) strategy.

A key component of the LNRS is the spatial mapping of Nature Recovery Network (NRN) opportunity areas and ecological corridors. These areas represent the best locations to deliver action, that will have the most strategic benefit for wildlife and ecosystem services. Mapping presented in the strategy and reviewed in the context of the Site (refer to **Figure E** below) shows that the Site overlaps with or is directly adjacent to several habitat opportunity zones, including designated Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and potential LWS. The Shropshire Union Canal corridor and Stanney Woods represent mapped corridors of regional significance.



**Figure E: Extract of BMD Habitat Opportunities Map – which influenced the opportunities set out in the Site wide Landscape Framework and Vision Document**

The positioning of the Site, within these opportunity areas, reinforces its potential importance for optimising nature recovery. For instance, corridors running north-south/west-east through the Site should be protected and enhanced, to allow for species movement and connectivity from Stanney Woods to the River Gowy landscape. These landscape connections will be vital for building ecological resilience in the face of climate change and land use pressure.

The Vision Document and Landscape Framework for the Site proposes a strategic green network which, if designed in alignment with these opportunity areas, could substantially contribute to regional priorities. However, this will require a precise understanding of the LNRS spatial layers and integration into the development's spatial design.

Exclusion of the land to the east of the M53, from any future EP01 allocation, would preclude achievement of this strategic GI initiative and opportunity, with the Site's contribution to the LNRS weakened.

## Public Open Space & Recreation

Ellesmere Port has number of green spaces from the more formal Whitby Park in the town centre to the wilder Gowy Meadows and Stanney Woods to the south. An open space analysis, using Natural England Accessible Greenspace Standards (AGS), found the existing settlement of Ellesmere Port is currently served by Rivacre Valley, Whitby Park and Stanney Woods - all designated Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) (refer to **Figure F** below). The analysis showed there is a lack of doorstep, local and neighbourhood greenspaces to the immediate south and south east of Ellesmere Port, along with a deficiency in amenity based, formal open space, including: productive landscapes (allotments, community gardens and orchards); children’s play facilities; amenity green space; and formal sport. Development of the entirety of the Land at Little Stanney Lane, provides an opportunity to deliver a linear ‘Green Ribbon’, running east / west through the Site (see **Figure G** below), which would:

- transform an existing overhead power line corridor into a 2 km long connected parkland, with open space and trails
- create a series of parkland destinations, that offer opportunities for social interaction and activity, through a diverse range of recreational facilities for the existing and new community
- provide a range of informal activity spaces for community cohesion, including food growing, play, sport and fitness, and health and wellbeing.

Currently the Site lacks any recreational and amenity value. By developing the whole of the CCfE land, including areas to the east of the M53, there is an opportunity to provide access on land currently private and inaccessible, through the delivery of substantial areas of high quality accessible green open spaces, integrating active travel and recreational routes.

Exclusion of the land to the east of the M53, from any future EP01 allocation, results in a substantially reduced recreational and amenity offering - particularly around the village of Stoak (where there is sport, productive landscape and parkland potential), alongside the Shropshire Union Canal (Quayside Park) and as part of the Gowy Meadows nature reserve extension.

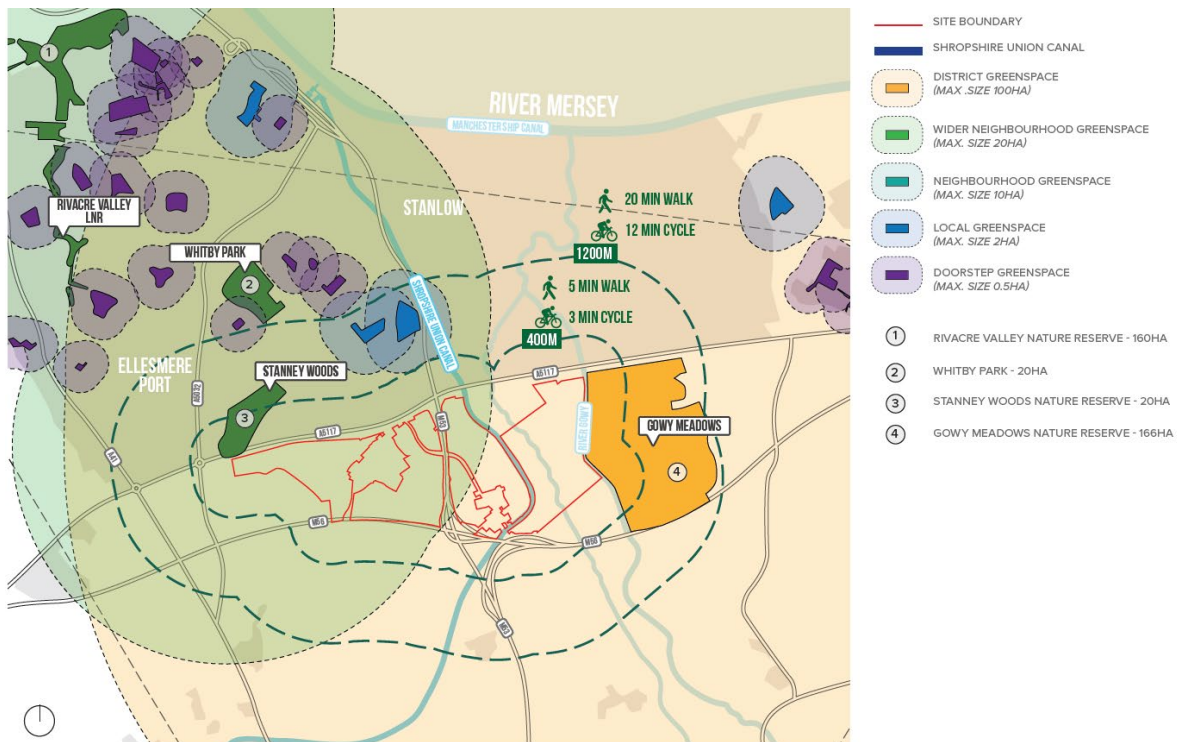


Figure F: Ellesmere Port, Open Space Analysis, Natural England Accessible Greenspace Standards (AGS)



Figure G: Land at Little Stanney Lane - Landscape Framework