Harborough Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Type 4: Settled and Farmed Edge

Harborough District Council

Prepared by LUC
August 2024

LCT 4: Settled and Farmed Edge

Figure 1.1: LCT 4: Settled and Farmed Edge with component Landscape Character Areas

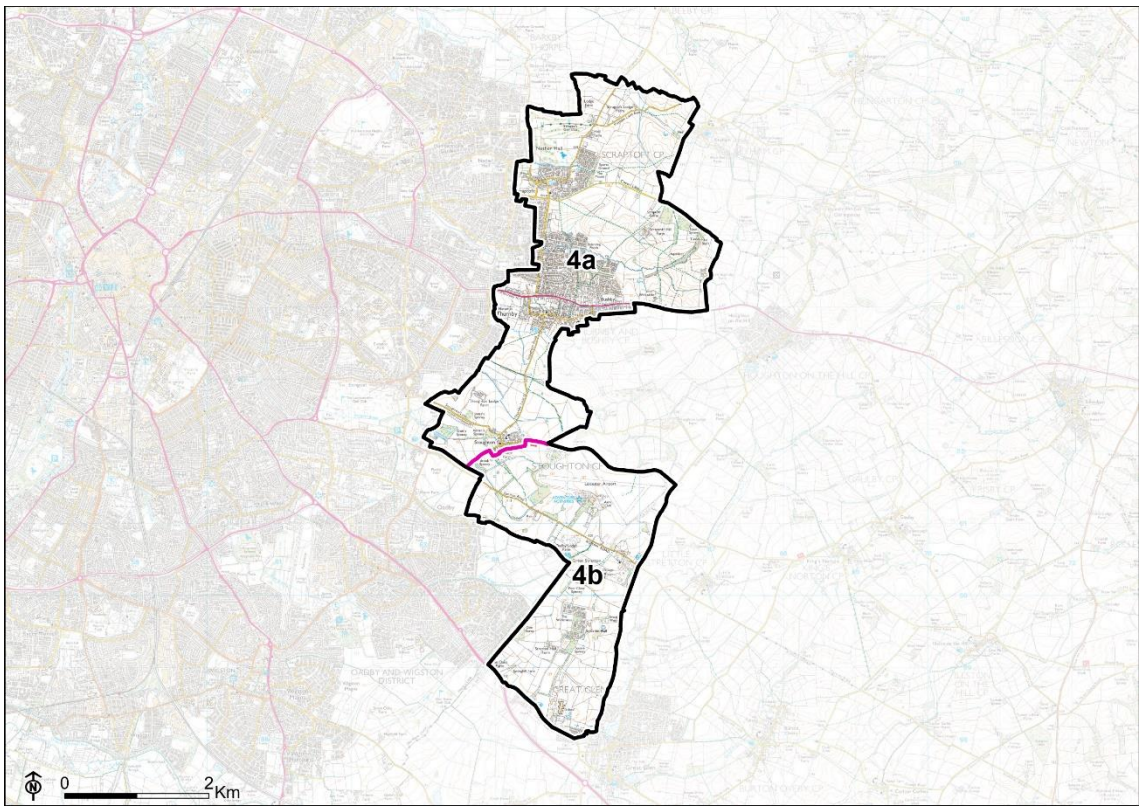
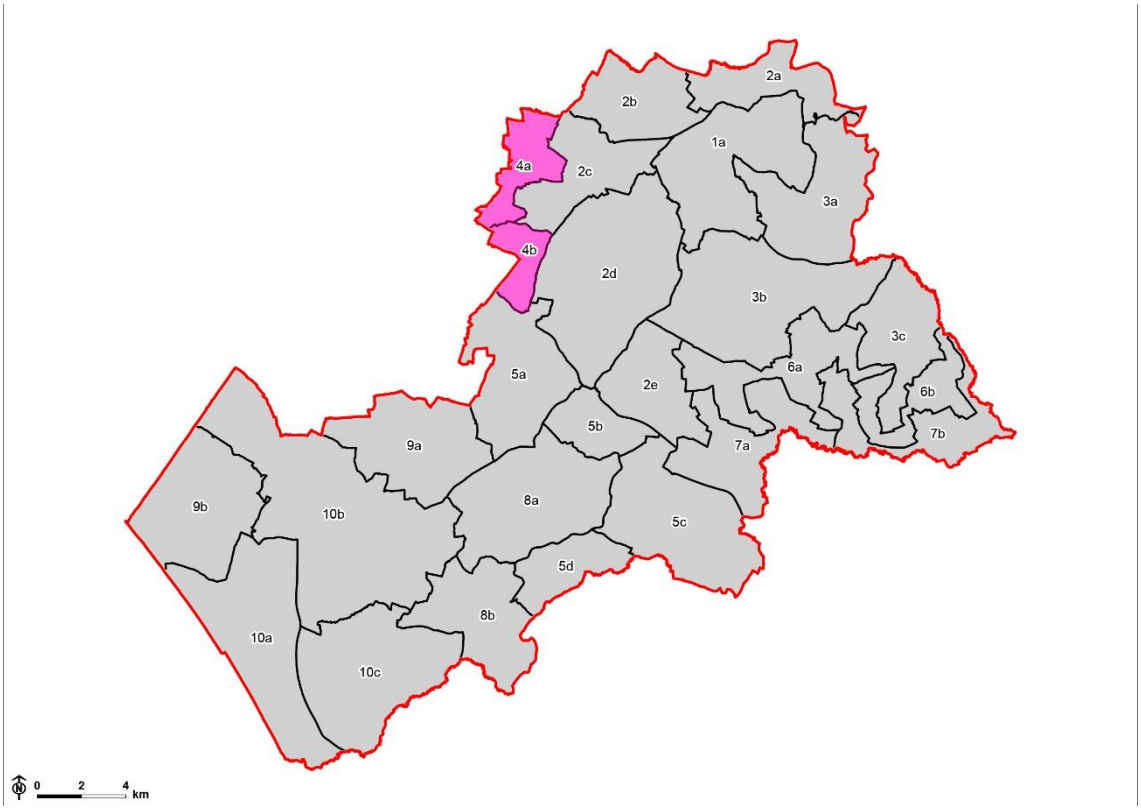


Figure 1.2: Location of LCT 4: Settled and Farmed Edge within Harborough District



Component Landscape Character Areas (LCAs)

- LCA 4a: Stoughton to Scraptoft
- LCA 4b: Great Stretton to Newton Harcourt

Location and Summary

Lying in the north-west of the District, the Settled and Farmed Edge Landscape Character Type (LCT) is located between the urban edge of Oadby and the city of Leicester to the west, the rolling tributary farmland of LCT 2 to the east and the settled vale of LCT 5 to the south. The western and northern boundaries are defined by the district boundary. The LCT is broadly defined by its mixed farmed landscape and its proximity to settlement. There is continuity in character between this LCT and farmland on the edge of Oadby which includes LCA A(i): Stoughton, LCA A(ii): Thurnby and Oadby Green Wedge and LCA A(iii): Oadby Grange within the Oadby and Wigston LCA and with the High Leicestershire LCA within Charnwood LCA.

This LCT is defined by undulating mixed farmland with strong hedgerows and occasional small blocks of woodland, ponds and streams within gentle valleys. The varied topography allows for elevated long-distance views from the eastern edge of the LCT back towards the settled edge of Leicester. Built form and trees create some sense of enclosure along the settlement edge itself. Piecemeal enclosure and historic village cores provide a sense of time-depth. However, this is diluted by modern expansion and some field amalgamation.

Representative Photographs

Figure 1.3: LCT 4 representative photograph 1

Figure 1.4: LCT 4 representative photograph 2

Key Characteristics

- Varied landform, which is gentler in the south and undulating in the north where valleys contain small watercourses. Small ponds are common across the landscape, as well as springs and small streams.
- A farmed landscape of mixed arable and pastoral farmland with a varying scale and pattern, with occasional linear belts of woodland, small woodland blocks, strong hedgerows, mature trees and riparian vegetation.
- Settlement is predominantly large villages with historic cores, which have been expanded by modern development. Historic features such as conservation areas and listed buildings are characteristic.
- Examples of larger commercial scale development and land uses, such as Leicester Airport, a school complex, golf course and commercial nurseries.
- A landscape with limited historic features, but historic villages, the medieval village of Stretton Magna and Gartree Road Roman Road provide localised time-depth.
- A sense of elevation and long-distance views from higher landform in the east, across neighbouring Charnwood District and towards LCT 2. Views include settlement and modern development which limits the sense of relative remoteness.
- A sense of enclosure and limited views on flatter landform and in proximity to large villages, woodland and high roadside hedgerows.
- A busy area due to proximity to the urban edge of Leicester, settlements and road infrastructure, introducing light pollution, noise and movement.
- A fragmented landscape which is complex and varied in pattern but still displays some rural character in proximity to the urban edge of Leicester.
- Relatively sparse recreational resources, confined to a small network of local public rights of way (PRoW) and National Cycle Network (NCN).

Natural Influences

The LCT is underlain by a bedrock of Triassic to Jurassic mudstone, siltstone, limestone and sandstone. This is overlain with superficial clay, sand and gravel deposits which were deposited during glaciation. This varied underlying geology has influenced the varied landforms within this LCT. Across much of the area the soils are loamy and clayey, supporting traditional agricultural land uses, orchards and more modern intensive arable farmland, with some impeded drainage which creates some seasonally wet pasture and wet woodland.

The landform is varied, gentler in the south and slightly steeper in the north due to the river valley landform, ranging from approximately 90m to 140m AOD. Small ponds are common across the area. As well as contributing to biodiversity, these ponds add to a sense of time-depth within the landscape. Small streams and springs, such as the Bushby Brook, are common in the north.

The land is primarily in arable cultivation with some pastoral farmland located near settlements. Fields are bound by strong hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees, which provide a strong landscape framework and ecological connectivity.

Occasional small woodland blocks, riparian vegetation along streams and woodland within a golf course at Scraptoft provide texture to the farmed landscape. Linear deciduous woodland is common along settlement edges and aligns a former railway east of Bushby. Tree species include ash, horse chestnut field maple and occasional pines.

Semi-natural habitats are limited, with a local nature reserve (LNR) at Scraptoft and scattered local wildlife sites (LWS) designated for their mesotrophic grassland, mature and veteran trees, hedgerows and wet woodland. Traditional orchards, associated with farmsteads are also valued, as are the parkland landscape and trees at Stretton Hall.

Cultural Influences

Cultural heritage features are limited to the historic village centres which are covered by conservation areas and contain many listed buildings, notably grade I and II* listed churches such as the grade I listed Church of All Saints in Scraptoft. Outside of settlements, cultural heritage assets are limited to occasional scattered listed properties, and the medieval village of Stretton Magna (scheduled monument).

Fields are primarily re-organised piecemeal enclosure and planned enclosure which date to the 18th and 19th centuries, with some examples of piecemeal enclosure in the north which dates to the 16th and 17th centuries. However very large post-war fields, which are a result of field amalgamation, are also common, such as north-east of Scraptoft, and result in an open character to the landscape. This contrasts with the sense of enclosure closer to settlements and woodland and where smaller, more historic fields are located. Development at Leicester Airport and Scraptoft Golf Club and plant nurseries/garden centre at Thurnby are relatively well integrated into the landscape by high hedgerows and trees in proximity to them.

Settlement is in the form of large villages at Thurnby and Bushby and Scraptoft, which have historic centres, expanded with modern housing development. This includes developments dating from the mid-19th century to the present day. As a result the historic character of these villages has been diluted by a more suburban character. An exception to this is at Stoughton which, despite some modern development, has retained its historic character. Typical architectural materials are red brick and slate, however this does not create a particularly distinctive local vernacular. The parkland surrounding Stretton Hall has also been expanded with mid-late 20th century housing development which disrupts the historic character of this landscape. There are examples of larger infrastructure and peri-urban land uses, including a school, Leicester Airport, plant nurseries and a golf course.

Settlement is connected by a network of trunk roads (including the A47 and A6) and fast local roads, lined with mature trees. Gartree Road follows the route of a

Roman road and the well-wooded former route of the Great Northern Railway Leicester branch runs to the east of Bushby.

Recreational resource across the LCT is limited to NCN Route 63 and a network of local PRoW which connect into the wider countryside to the east. This network is interrupted in the south by Leicester Airport and Stretton Hall.

Perceptual Influences

The mixture of settlement and farmland, combine to create a rural character, particularly in the east. This is diluted in closer proximity to the settlement edge and along faster roads. There is a sense of elevation, particularly in the east, where there are long-distance views afforded back towards settlement in the west towards the urban edge of Leicester which is softened by tree cover. This contrasts with the sense of enclosure created by undulating landform, tree cover and built form on the edges of settlement or on valley bottoms. Wood pole lines and large sheds such as Oadby Farm Lodge introduce more modern infrastructure into views, however historic church spires (including within LCT 2) create landmark features. Leicester Airport is well integrated into the landscape by its boundary vegetation.

Tranquillity is limited within this LCT due to the presence of settlement and larger development (such as the school and airport) and the audible and visible traffic along the A47 in the north and the A6 in the south, as well as smaller roads which are still fast in nature. There are however pockets of tranquillity in the east. Although the landscape is generally well maintained this changing landscape is complex in pattern and fragmented in places, with evidence of fly-tipping. Light pollution originating from the Leicester urban area (including Oadby & Wigston) in the west, as well lighting associated with the A roads which radiate out from the city, influence the character of the landscape.

Landscape Character Areas

LCA 4a: Stoughton to Scraptoft

Including the settlements off Scraptoft, Thurnby and Bushby and Stoughton.

Figure 1.5: Map of LCA 4a: Stoughton to Scraptoft

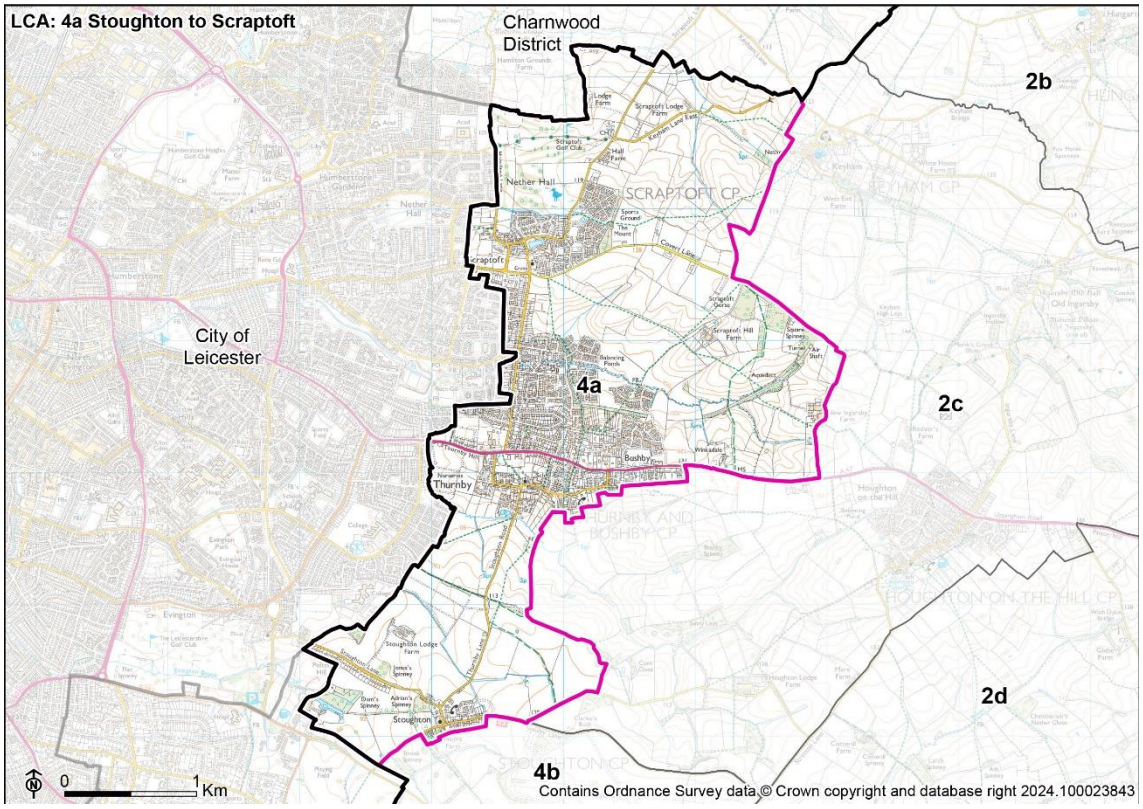


Figure 1.6: LCA 4a representative photograph 1

Figure 1.7: LCA 4a representative photograph 2

This LCA is located in the north of the LCT and spans from Melton Brook in the north to Gaulby Lane at Stoughton in the south. The eastern boundary borders the rolling tributary farmland of LCT 2, and the northern boundary borders the district boundary with Charnwood, which forms a continuous character with LCA High Leicestershire in this location, albeit less settled than this LCA. This LCA forms a continuous character with the urban edge of the City of Leicester and LCA A(i) Stoughton within the Oadby and Wigston LCA, which form its western boundary.

Natural Influences

Landform is shaped by the valleys of Melton Brook, Bushby Brook and smaller tributaries, with landform ranging from approximately 90m AOD in valley bottoms to approximately 140m AOD at Bushby. Springs are common across the area and soils with impeded drainage support arable landcover, with pasture and wet woodlands, including the wet woodland at Stoughton Grange which is designated as a LWS for its ditches, stream and wet willow woodland. Linear woodland and small woodland blocks, riparian vegetation along Melton and Bushby Brooks, as well as a strong hedgerow network and mature roadside and hedgerow trees – often ash – contribute to the pattern of the farmed landscape and ecological connectivity of the area. There are numerous scattered semi-natural habitats (some designated as LWS), which are small in size and often cover a single tree or hedgerow, including veteran oaks and ashes and a double hedgerow with a ditch near Nether Hall in the north. The LNR at Scraptoft is noted for its herb-rich mosaic of scrub and mesotrophic grassland, which is of value to invertebrates and birdlife however it has not been actively managed and has been heavily grazed, which has reduced its ecological connectivity somewhat. Traditional orchards, which are priority habitats, are located at Nether Hall near Keyham and at Winkerdale. Field size varies from smaller more geometric fields in pockets near settlements to medium to large arable fields which are sinuous and irregular in shape across much of the LCA and some very large post-war fields which were created through field amalgamation and more modern farming practices. Historic field patterns are predominantly reorganised piecemeal enclosure dating to the 19th century, some of which are large and show signs of modern amalgamation, particularly in the north-east. Fields of older (16th/17th century) piecemeal enclosure, which display a smaller and slightly more geometric pattern, are located to the north and east of Scraptoft and a small pocket south of Thurnby and Bushby.

Cultural Influences

Settlement is centred around the large, expanded, villages of Scraptoft, and Thurnby and Bushby, which have historic cores. However, this historic character is diluted by the large amount of mid to late 20th century and modern-day housing development, for example north and east of Scraptoft. The small historic settlement cores are covered by conservation areas and contain listed buildings. Some have occasional glimpses towards former parkland landscapes associated with halls such as Scraptoft Hall in Scraptoft and Manor House in Thurnby and Bushby. Buildings of note include the grade II* Church of St Luke in Thurnby and Bushby and the grade I listed Church of All Saints in Scraptoft, which in contrast to the primarily brick and slate construction of the villages, are built from squared stone of coursed ironstone and granite. The village of Stoughton, located in the south of the LCA, also has a historic core which is covered by a conservation area and although this settlement has seen some modern expansion, it is not to the scale of its neighbouring villages and still retains a strong historic character. A particular building of note is the grade II* listed Church of St Mary which has a distinctive spire, behind which is a moated grange, designated as a scheduled monument. The Great Northern Railway Leicester branch runs to the east of Bushby, its former route marked by linear woodland. Land use in the LCA includes market gardening (with a nursery within Thurnby and near Stoughton Lodge Farm) and Scraptoft Golf Course is located to the north of Scraptoft. Also in this location, is the LNR at Scraptoft which was once the site of a 2nd World War military camp and the remains of structures, although grown over, are noticeable in the landscape. The A47 runs through Thurnby and Bushby and although it is a main road, it is well integrated into the landscape by the dense tree cover within gardens and along the roadside, which creates a leafy suburban character. Elsewhere roads are more rural in character, although busy and fast in places, with strong hedgerows and mature roadside trees. Recreational resource is limited to a network of local PRoW and NCN Route 63 which runs along Stoughton Lane.

Perceptual Influences

There are long-distance views afforded from higher elevations, particularly in the east, including views north towards Charnwood District, west towards Scraptoft, Thurnby and Bushby and east towards the rolling tributary farmland of LCT 2. However, in proximity to settlement, views are often screened or filtered by tall roadside vegetation, and near to woodland and built form such as within Thurnby and Bushby there are pockets of enclosure. An exception to this is on the outskirts of Scraptoft where the elevated landform allows for views towards Thurnby and Bushby visible nestled into the landscape below. This is a busy and complex landscape comprised of a mosaic of land uses and fragmented by roads and settlements. Church spires provide local landmark features nestled into the landscape. Tranquillity is limited due to the high concentration of development and associated light pollution and there is evidence of fly tipping.

LCA 4b: Great Stretton to Newton Harcourt

Including the settlement at Stretton Hall.

Figure 1.8: Map of LCA 4b: Great Stretton to Newton Harcourt

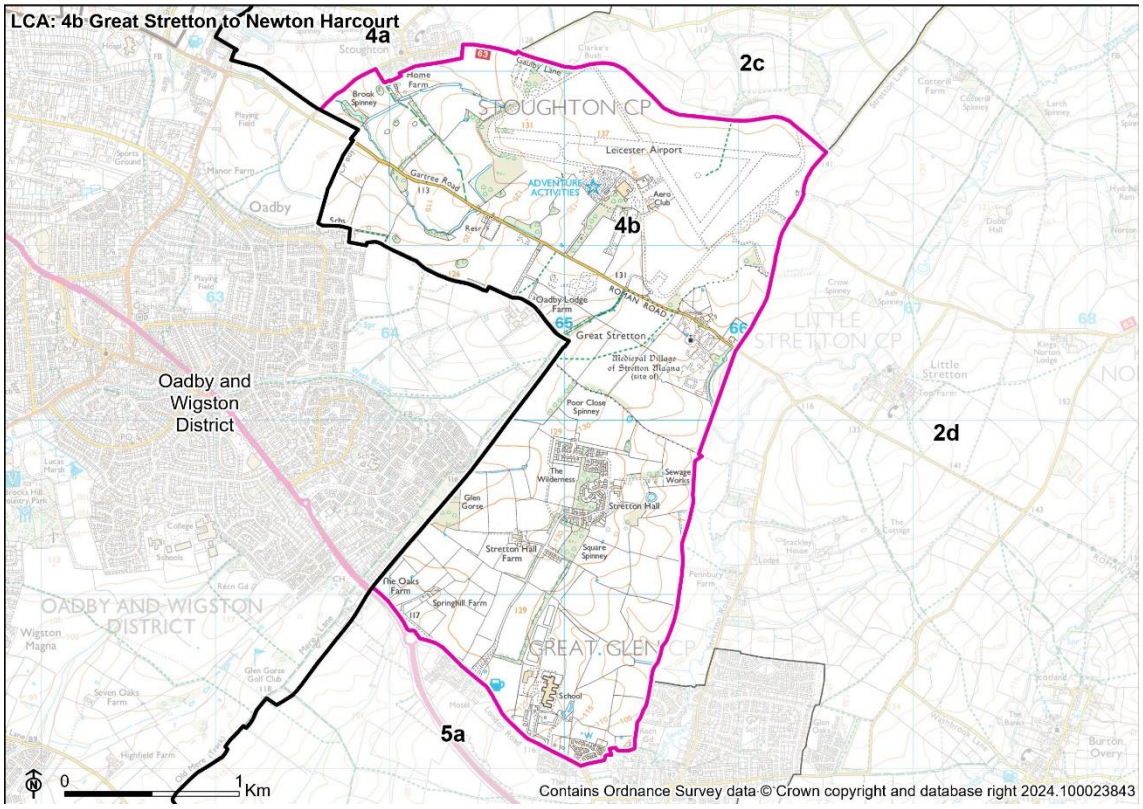


Figure 1.9: LCA 4b representative photograph 1

Figure 1.10: LCA 4b representative photograph 2

This LCA is located in the south of the LCT and spans from Gaulby Lane south of Stoughton to the A6 and London Road west of Great Glen. To the east is the rolling tributary farmland of LCT 2 and to the south is the settled vale of LCT 5. The western boundary forms the border between Harborough and Oadby and Wigston districts. The character of LCA's A(ii) Thurnby and Oadby Green Wedge and A(iii) Oadby Grange within the Oadby and Wigston LCA is continuous with the character of this LCA.

Natural Influences

Landform is gentler than in neighbouring LCA 4a and although there are examples of small streams crossing the landscape, they are not located within pronounced valleys. The landform ranges from approximately 100m AOD in the north-west to approximately 140m AOD within Leicester Airport. There is a slightly more wooded character to the landscape than within LCA 4a, with scattered linear and small blocks of deciduous woodland and a small traditional orchard near the Oaks Farm (all priority habitats). Although these features are limited and some hedgerows have been replaced with fencing, mature trees and otherwise strong field boundary hedgerows (those associated with Stretton Hall are designated as LWS) contribute to the landscape structure and provide ecological connectivity.

Cultural Influences

Field size varies but fields are predominantly medium scale, sinuous and irregular in shape, in use for arable cultivation, with an area of smaller and more geometric fields located at Spring Hill Farm, The Oaks Farm and Stretton Hall Farm in the south-west, albeit with signs of amalgamation. A large proportion of the historic field pattern is re-organised piecemeal enclosure and planned enclosure which date to the 18th and 19th centuries with a pocket of ridge and furrow located in the south-west at The Oaks Farm. These historic field patterns are interspersed with infrastructure and larger commercial developments, including at Leicester Airport and a school complex along London Road in the south. Settlement is in the form of scattered farmsteads and Stretton Hall, where late 20th century development has been built within the old historic hall grounds. Stretton Hall is a grade II* listed manor house which dates to the 18th century and was used as a hospital in the mid-20th century. An area of parkland, including parkland trees, is still noticeable in this area, although it has been diluted by the more modern development. A Roman Road and the site of a deserted medieval village at Stretton Magna (scheduled monument) with fishponds and a moated site, is noticeable in the landscape, with visible earthworks and hollow ways (sunken paths denoting village streets). It

surrounds the grade II* listed Church of St Giles, which is a small rubble stone church dating to the 12th and 13th centuries. However, the sense of time depth is localised. Few roads cross the landscape but where they do, they are relatively busy and fast, and include Gartree Road, a Roman Road, and along the southern boundary, the A6 and London Road. The recreational resource is poor, interrupted by Leicester Airport and Stretton Hall, and is limited to a small number of PRoW.

Perceptual Influences

Views are generally enclosed by woodland and roadside vegetation and are short to medium in distance across the immediate landscape, with some glimpses of longer distance views towards LCT 5 in the south. Large buildings within the school complex introduce a more commercial character to the landscape in this location. There is a sense of openness within Leicester Airport due to the absence of vegetation, however the airport buildings are well screened and integrated into the landscape by trees and woodland. Generally, this is a relatively simple landscape, disturbed by larger infrastructure and development. Although the LCA is located further from the urban edge of Leicester, than LCA 4a, it borders the edge of Oadby's built form. It is therefore impacted by light pollution from settlement, traffic noise and movement from the A6 on the southern boundary and there is evidence of fly tipping.

Landscape Character Type Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- Steeper valley landform in the north of the LCT (within LCA 4a) and the numerous ponds, springs and streams.
- Woodland, which although not in great abundance, helps to soften the urban edge and screen larger development, such as the airport buildings (within LCA 4b), helping to integrate development into the rural landscape.
- The network of strong hedgerows, mature trees and occasional orchards which, despite the sparse natural heritage features, provide connectivity and biodiversity value.
- The historic centres of villages which are small in scale in comparison to the larger more modern development, and the historic value of Stretton Magna, parkland at Stretton Hall, and Gartree Road Roman Road which contribute towards the sense of time-depth.
- The mix of field scales and patterns, particularly the smaller and historic fields, including piecemeal enclosure in the north and ridge and furrow located near to The Oaks Farm in the south.
- The rural character displayed in the east, which is not as influenced by settlement as the west.
- The long-distance views afforded towards neighbouring districts and LCTs, including towards landmark church spires, and the sense of elevation experienced from higher landform.

Landscape Strategy

The strategy for the Settled and Farmed Edge LCT is to conserve and enhance the hedgerow and woodland network to strengthen the ecological network, to

protect and manage development pressures on the rural and farmed landscape, conserve and enhance the remaining historic assets and to improve and enhance the recreational network, extending access from the urban edge into the surrounding countryside.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Protect and manage the streams and watercourses for the benefit of flood alleviation and biodiversity, particularly in response to the introduction of new built form.
- Manage the rivers and the adjacent land to ensure good water quality for the benefit of wildlife, addressing issues such as agricultural run-off, particularly relevant to the larger arable fields.
- Ensure in-field ponds are retained for their biodiversity value and sense of time-depth they provide to the landscape.
- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of agricultural fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods and restore field boundaries where there is evidence of amalgamation.
- Protect, enhance and extend the linear and small blocks of woodland, particularly wet woodland within LCT 4a. Provide new habitats and enhance ecological connectivity between them, particularly where there are gaps in habitats.
- Identify, monitor and manage any effects of pests and diseases on trees and woodland. Replace trees lost with species appropriate to the site conditions and likely to withstand the effects of climate change in the future.
- When planting new trees, ensure they are resilient species, in appropriate locations and with adequate management and maintenance

methods in place to ensure resilient and robust woodlands for the future (particularly where ash trees are identified).

- Protect and enhance hedgerows as an important habitat and reinforce this already strong network.
- Conserve traditional orchards for their historic and biodiversity value.
- Protect remaining historic field patterns, particularly where there are ridge and furrows. Protect and appropriately manage the cultural heritage features, such as scheduled monuments and conservation areas to preserve the sense of history.
- Promote further interpretation of the cultural associations and historic assets, such as at Stretton Magna within LCA 4b, where this would not be at odds with the conservation of these assets.
- Protect and manage the remnant parkland features, including at Stretton Hall and particularly where there are pressures form housing expansion.
- Enhance the relative tranquillity of the area, including screening development and movement and reducing audible effects, which provides a respite from nearby urban areas.
- Promote, create and link up PRoW to neighbouring countryside within LCT 4 and surrounding districts, particularly in LCT 4b where recreational resource is limited.

Development Management

- Avoid locating development (both buildings and other structures) in proximity to elevated valley tops and in locations where they can be viewed from higher land and would be visually prominent within the landscape.
- Utilise the tight valley landform and extensive woodland cover to integrate new development into the landscape.
- Avoid siting development that would lead to loss or fragmentation of the landscape's habitats including nature conservation designations.

- Plan for the further enhancement and improved integration of existing urban edges.
- Retain a sense of separation between the settlements of Scraptoft and Thurnby and Bushby to conserve their individual historic village cores. Avoid development which would lead to the coalescence of settlements.
- Ensure access to the LCT is promoted and enhanced, due to its importance as an immediate rural hinterland to urban development within Leicester.
- Avoid development which will interrupt long-distance views across neighbouring districts and LCTs or spoil views to the landmark church spires, which provide a strong sense of place and orientation in the landscape.
- Utilise trees and woodland to screen major transport routes to reduce their visual and audial impacts.
- Protect the unifying local vernacular of the area which includes red brick and slate. New development or conversions should retain some local character by incorporating traditional building styles and materials where possible. Protect dark skies by preventing and positively reducing artificial light pollution.

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