

## **Appendix 2: Historic Environment Character Area Overviews for Gnosall**

This appendix provides an overview of the historic environment for each of the Historic Environment Character Areas (HECAs) that fall within the Gnosall project.

It should be noted that the information and any recommendations contained within this appendix is subject to amendment should any new information become available.

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Staffordshire County Council  
August 2009

## **Historic Environment Character Area (HECA) 5c**

### **Introduction**

This document forms an overview of the HECA which specifically addresses the potential for medium to large scale development to impact upon the historic environment.

The character area includes a variety of settlements and field patterns, most of which have their origins in the medieval period. The historic settlement of numerous villages, hamlets and farmsteads also survives.

The character area is one of the largest identified for Staffordshire and covers 13,479ha. The northern half lies within Stafford Borough and the southern half lies in South Staffordshire. For the purposes of the Gnosall Historic Environment Assessment (HEA) this document will only deal with the portion lying within Stafford Borough.

#### *Archaeological and historic documentation*

A number of archaeological investigations have been carried out across the character area, which include field walking, building surveys and watching briefs, but on the whole little research has been carried out. The results of these archaeological works and other archaeological information are recorded on the Historic Environment Record (HER) held by Staffordshire County Council.

### **Historic Environment Assets Summary**

Small scale investigations into past environments have been carried out to the north west of Gnosall, and also on a larger scale in Stafford. The results of these studies have suggested that western Staffordshire was mostly heavily wooded until the later Neolithic/Bronze Age, when clearances may have begun to be made to support a small scale pastoral economy when humans were settling down to farm specific landscapes. At both Gnosall and Stafford there is some evidence for burning episodes during the Mesolithic/Neolithic period which may indicate some level of human activity<sup>1</sup>. Within the wider HECA there is evidence for prehistoric activity where ring ditches and enclosures have been identified on aerial photographs<sup>2</sup>. These are mostly concentrated around Water Eaton to the south east of Penkridge, which is also associated with intensive activity in the Roman period. Another enclosure was identified during an archaeological survey carried out as part of the proposals to widen the M6. There are currently no known Prehistoric sites within the Stafford Borough portion of the character area. However, this is likely to be because of a lack of survey work having been carried out to date rather than a definite lack of activity during this period. Three finds have been recovered from the Stafford Borough section of the HECA; two Neolithic/Bronze Age hammers and a probable Iron Age coin. These

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<sup>1</sup> Leah et al 1998: 101, 204-206; Greig 2007: 43

<sup>2</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRNs 01798; 02031, 04018 and 04555

artefacts were found to the north east of the HECA within a couple of kilometres of Berry Ring hillfort (see HECA 5b).

Hillforts are usually associated with the Iron Age and some are known to have earlier origins. The presence of the hillfort suggests a centralised power base was present within the area from at least the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age, which oversaw a dispersed settlement pattern across the landscape supporting the theory of woodland clearance from this period. The hillfort would have provided a cultural, economic and administrative focus for the surrounding communities. Consequently the proximity of the hillfort suggests that there is the potential for features of prehistoric origin to survive within the HECA.

There is evidence for intensive activity during the Roman period near Stretton on the line of the Roman road, Watling Street (now the A5). These include the Scheduled Monuments of several military camps and the settlement of *Pennocrucium*. Evidence for Roman activity within the Stafford Borough portion is currently limited to stray finds, but this once again is likely to be as a result of the minimal archaeological work having been carried out to date. By the late Saxon period there were 18 places recorded in Domesday Book (1086) for Stafford Borough (out of a total 30 for the whole HECA) and it is possible that the intensity of activity was similar during the Roman period.

Later medieval settlements are also likely to have become established during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century when there appears to have been an increase in the national population. Within the Stafford Borough portion there are twenty-two moated sites, seven of these probably represent the sites of manor houses lying within or adjacent to medieval villages. Two moated sites are known to have existed within Haughton and another lies approximately 1km to the south of Bradley<sup>3</sup>. A further two moats may have been associated with deserted or scattered settlements. A moat survives near Lower Woollaston Farm with possible settlement earthworks surviving to the north. Tax records dating to the 14<sup>th</sup> century for this area suggest at least six households<sup>4</sup>. Nine people are recorded in the 1327 tax record for Reule<sup>5</sup>. The manor house and moat there belonged to the de Chetwynd family from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This was probably abandoned or demolished circa 1680<sup>6</sup>.

The remaining moated sites are likely to represent small homesteads which created holdings through assarting during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>7</sup> with two notable exceptions. The possible moat near Lodge Farm may represent the site of a lodge associated with the medieval Ellenhall deer park<sup>8</sup>. The other moated site forms part of the Scheduled complex of Ranton Priory<sup>9</sup>. The religious site was founded by Robert Fitznoel as an Augustinian priory in the

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<sup>3</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRNs 00801, 00803 and 02464

<sup>4</sup> Staffordshire Historical Collections viewed on the British history online on 27/08/2009

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 00846

<sup>7</sup> Assarting: processes where fields are enclosed piecemeal in an area of woodland or heathland. Assarting occurred throughout the medieval period and later, but is particularly recorded in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century in Staffordshire (cf Palliser 1976: 70-76).

<sup>8</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 04313 and PRN 00816

<sup>9</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 00030; English Heritage SM no. 21516

mid 12<sup>th</sup> century as a cell of Haughmond Abbey in Shropshire. The surviving late medieval church tower survives and is protected as a Grade II\* Listed building. The priory was dissolved in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century and a mansion was later built upon the site, although this is now also in ruins<sup>10</sup>.

The majority of the medieval settlements discussed above were located within areas of open field systems, which dominated the landscape of the character area during this period<sup>11</sup>. The open fields were a system of arable agriculture, where two or more large fields were divided into individual strips; the local people held scattered strips among the fields. Evidence of this form of arable agriculture was identified on aerial photographs across the HECA in the form of ridge and furrow<sup>12</sup> earthworks including around Haughton, west of Gnosall and south of Bradley<sup>13</sup>.

Piecemeal enclosure involved the sub-division of the open medieval field system and was probably created in the post medieval period by a process of informal, verbal agreements between farmers who wished to consolidate their holdings into a block rather than being scattered across two or more fields. This field pattern mostly survives across the Stafford Borough portion of the HECA.

Other historic field patterns are also present whose origins are not as clearly defined. These include the irregular field patterns around Long Compton and to the east of Ranton hamlet. These may represent assarting or encroachment onto former heathland in the medieval period. The early irregular field patterns around the former Ellenhall deer park may well suggest that it had been turned over to farmland by the post medieval period.

Later field systems are also present in the form of 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century planned enclosure. This form of enclosure has obscured the earlier history of these landscapes because the boundaries were laid out by surveyors creating geometric grid-like patterns. Without more detailed research it is difficult to establish whether they represent the very late enclosure of the open fields or former heath land. However, the latter appears to be the case at Shut Heath to the north of Haughton.

Planned enclosure occurred at a period when landowners were being encouraged to maximise agricultural output and to apply industrial processes to their work. This extended even to the farm buildings themselves. Within the Stafford Borough portion of the HECA there are 138 surviving farmsteads of which 60% have been identified as exhibiting a regular courtyard plan form, which nationally is seen to date from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>14</sup>. The regular

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<sup>10</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 00029; English Heritage SM no. 21516

<sup>11</sup> Open Field: An area of arable land with common rights after harvest or while fallow. Usually without internal divisions (hedges, walls or fences). (Scope note reproduced from the Thesaurus of Monument Types by kind permission of English Heritage © 2009)

<sup>12</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 20370; Ridge & furrow: A series of long, raised ridges separated by ditches used to prepare the ground for arable cultivation. This was a technique, characteristic of the medieval period. (Scope note reproduced from the Thesaurus of Monument Types by kind permission of English Heritage © 2009)

<sup>13</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRNs 20382, 20342, 20374 and 52394

<sup>14</sup> Lake 2009: 19

courtyard plan is the most common form in Staffordshire and is spread widely across the landscape. These forms appear to represent a deliberate development in improving agricultural productivity being taken forward by wealthy landowners at this period. Four of these farmsteads are associated with 17<sup>th</sup> century farmhouses and one with a 16<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse. This suggests that the farm complexes were rebuilt upon an earlier site. The farmhouse at Booden Farm was re-modelled in the late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> century and Aston Hall was refashioned at some point in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The alterations to these buildings perhaps date the associated farmstead complexes<sup>15</sup>. Thirty-one of these farmsteads may be associated with areas of 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century planned enclosure.

The remaining historic farmsteads may retain elements of earlier buildings within their fabric. The majority (27%) of these farmstead types exhibit a loose courtyard plan form, which suggests incremental development over a number of years if not centuries. Three farmsteads are associated with 17<sup>th</sup> century Listed farm buildings, although one of these is a dispersed farmstead which also exhibits incremental development. Two buildings within the Lower Cooksland Farm loose courtyard complex, the farmhouse and a barn, are Grade II Listed buildings of 17<sup>th</sup> century date. This suggests that the site's origins are of at least this date. The nearby Cooksland House farmstead is also a loose courtyard, which may prove to have similar origins. Further research into the origins of these farmsteads may assist in the dating of the surrounding field systems. Twenty of the loose courtyard farms are associated with areas of piecemeal enclosure whilst a further 18 are associated with early irregular enclosure. Of the latter, three were located within the hamlet of Ranton and two in the nearby hamlet of Long Compton.

Of a similar date to the planned enclosure are the watermeadows which lie along part of the Clanford Brook and the Meece Brook north of Seighford, both of which survive in relatively good condition. The development of water meadows during this period meant that the landowners could control the flooding of land and ensure an early crop of grass and subsequent multiple crops for fodder. This enabled them to over-winter larger numbers of animals. The watermeadows to the north of Seighford form part of a much larger complex which continues on to the River Sow (see HECA 14d).

Overall the field patterns and historic dispersed settlement pattern have seen little impact from large scale 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century change within the Stafford Borough portion of the HECA. A couple of the villages have seen housing expansion notably at Bradley, Gnosall and Haughton.

### **Designated Historic Environment Assets**

There are nineteen Scheduled Monuments lying within the whole of the Character Area, nine of which lie in Stafford Borough including Ranton Priory and three further moated sites. Eleven Conservation Areas lie within the HECA and five fall within Stafford Borough: Bradley (003), Church Eaton (046), Gnosall (034), Shropshire Union Canal (081) and the Staffordshire and

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<sup>15</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 14291 and PRN 08134

Worcestershire Canal (073). Within the Stafford Borough portion there are 43 Listed Buildings.

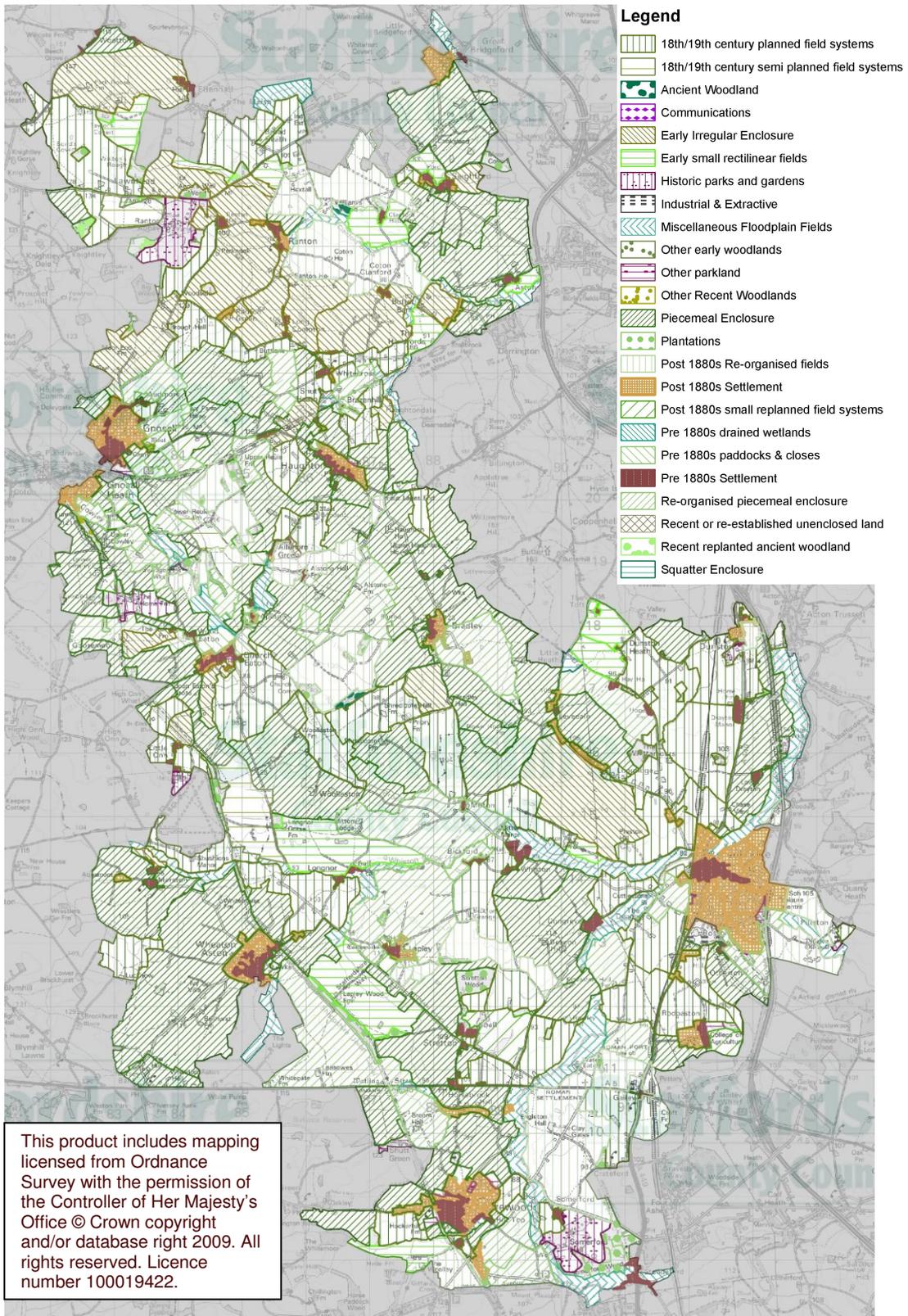
### **Historic Environment Considerations**

The historic landscape character of early field systems and the associated settlement pattern of villages, hamlets and farmsteads remain legible within the HECA. There is the potential for further archaeological work, particularly in the form of aerial photographic surveys, to identify the potential for prehistoric and Roman sites within the Stafford Borough portion of the Character Area.

Any future development within the character area would need to consider the following issues:

- Potential impact upon the surviving dispersed settlement pattern and in particular where the origins of the landscape are closely tied to the origins of the villages, hamlets and farmsteads.
- The impacts upon the farmsteads, particularly those with surviving historic buildings.
- Potential impact upon the historic character of the landscape and how this could be retained or reflected in any development; particularly where it is strongly associated with the historic built environment.
- How development may impact upon the designated sites and their settings.
- The potential for further unknown archaeological sites to be present within the character area.

It would need to assess the impacts upon above and below ground archaeology.



Map 1: Refined HLC

## Historic Environment Character Area (HECA) 5e

### Introduction

This document forms an overview of the HECA which specifically addresses the potential for medium to large scale development to impact upon the historic environment.

Early field systems survive associated with the medieval settlements of Weston Jones, Knightley Dale and Norbury. On the whole the field pattern has not survived well due to the removal of field boundaries during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There are 18 surviving historic farmsteads and the form of the three hamlets remain legible.

The character area covers 1,533ha and falls wholly within Stafford Borough.

#### *Archaeological and historic documentation*

Very little archaeological or historic research has been carried out within the character area other than a watching brief and architectural assessment. All known information is recorded on the Historic Environment Record (HER) held by Staffordshire County Council.

### Historic Environment Assets Summary

Small scale investigations into past environments have been carried out to the north west of Gnosall, and also on a larger scale in Stafford. The results of these studies have suggested that western Staffordshire was mostly heavily wooded until the later Neolithic/Bronze Age, when clearances may have begun to be made to support a small scale pastoral economy when humans were settling down to farm specific landscapes. At both Gnosall and Stafford there is some evidence for burning episodes during the Mesolithic/Neolithic period which may indicate some level of human activity<sup>16</sup>. Within the character area there is evidence for human activity in the form of a late Neolithic/Bronze Age bowl barrow lying to the north of Norbury, which is protected as a Scheduled Monument<sup>17</sup>. Two possible ring ditches which are visible on aerial photographs may represent the remains of further barrows dating to the same period<sup>18</sup>. These were located approximately 500m to the north of the Scheduled bowl barrow.

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<sup>16</sup> Leah et al 1998: 101, 204-206; Greig 2007: 43

<sup>17</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 00135; English Heritage SM no. 22424. Bowl barrow: A round barrow featuring a mound surrounded by a ditch, with no intervening berm. The ditch may be accompanied by an external bank. (Scope note reproduced from the Thesaurus of Monument Types by kind permission of English Heritage © 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 00838 and 00839; Ring ditch: Circular or near circular ditches, usually seen as cropmarks. Ring ditches may be the remains of ploughed out round barrows, round houses, or of modern features such as searchlight emplacements. (Scope note reproduced from the Thesaurus of Monument Types by kind permission of English Heritage © 2009).

At Knightley Green an enclosure also survives as an undated earthwork, but whose irregular form may suggest that it is of prehistoric origin<sup>19</sup>.

The line of a Roman road crosses the character area on an approximately north west – south east alignment and which appears to run from the A5 (Watling Street) at Stretton through to Whitchurch in Shropshire<sup>20</sup>. Little archaeological work has been carried out within the character area and the relationship between the road and the wider landscape is currently poorly understood, although findspots of Roman coins and a brooch have been found within its vicinity.

Evidence for settlement in the Saxon period comes from entries in Domesday Book (1086) where three places are recorded; Norbury, Knightley and Brough Hall<sup>21</sup>. Norbury was the largest settlement boasting 18 households and two priests. Knightley had eleven households, but it is likely that they were dispersed across the landscape. A Scheduled moated site is located at Knightley Dale which was probably the site of Knightley's manor house<sup>22</sup>. Moated sites are generally seen to date between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>23</sup>. A further Scheduled moated site is located approximately 1km west of Norbury and probably also represents the site of Norbury's fortified manor house by at least the late 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>24</sup>.

Other medieval settlements within the character include Weston Jones, which was mentioned in 1242, but may also represent a settlement recorded in Domesday Book, and Warton first mentioned in the 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>25</sup>. A possible deserted settlement, formerly known as Weston Hawes, has been suggested to lie at Weston Wood<sup>26</sup>. All of these settlements have the potential for the survival of archaeological deposits associated with previous domestic and even small-scale industrial activity.

The medieval settlement within the character area was all associated with the large arable medieval open fields, which dominated the landscape at this period<sup>27</sup>. The open fields were a system of arable agriculture, where two or more large fields were divided into individual strips whereby the local people held scattered strips among them. Evidence of this form of arable agriculture was identified on aerial photographs taken in the early 1960s in the form of

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<sup>19</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 04433

<sup>20</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 01729 and 05208

<sup>21</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 02518; PRN 02491 and PRN 02398

<sup>22</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 00847; English Heritage SM no. 21517

<sup>23</sup> Roberts & Wrathmell 2002:58

<sup>24</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 00188

<sup>25</sup> Horowitz 2005: 569 and 561

<sup>26</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 02633

<sup>27</sup> Open Field: An area of arable land with common rights after harvest or while fallow. Usually without internal divisions (hedges, walls or fences). (Scope note reproduced from the Thesaurus of Monument Types by kind permission of English Heritage © 2009)

ridge and furrow<sup>28</sup> earthworks to the south of Weston Jones and to the east of Knightley Green<sup>29</sup>.

Piecemeal enclosure involved the sub-division of the medieval open field system and was probably created in the post medieval period by a process of informal, verbal agreements between farmers who wished to consolidate their holdings into a block rather than being scattered across two or more fields. On the whole the field patterns have not survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, having been subject to the removal of field boundaries during the course of the previous century. However, there are areas of surviving piecemeal enclosure surrounding the medieval settlements of Weston Jones as well as to the east of Knightley Dale and to the south of Norbury. Norbury has seen some limited housing expansion during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although within the settlement core two historic buildings survive which are of circa 17<sup>th</sup> century date; Church Farm and the Grade II Listed Old Post Office; the Old Rectory is also Grade II Listed and appears to date from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>30</sup>. Both Norbury and Knightley Dale remain as small settlements. Weston Jones in particular continues to be a small hamlet dominated by farmsteads.

Across the whole character area there are 18 surviving historic farmsteads, although only the farmhouse appears to survive from the earlier complex at Weston Wood Farm. Bank Farm in Weston Jones appears to have originated as a linear plan farmstead and probably dates to the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>31</sup>, although potentially on the site of or incorporating elements of an earlier property. There are five farmsteads which probably developed incrementally over a period of time, possibly even centuries and have been identified as having either loose courtyard plans or dispersed plans. This includes Church Farm in Norbury whose farmhouse retains elements of potentially 17<sup>th</sup> century origin. The remaining four farmsteads have not been studied in any depth and they may also retain elements of early buildings within the farmstead complex.

The majority of the farmsteads within the character area (66%) display a regular courtyard plan form, which nationally is seen to date from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>32</sup>. The regular courtyard plan is the most common form in Staffordshire and is spread widely across the landscape. These forms appear to represent a deliberate development aimed at improving agricultural productivity being taken forward by wealthy landowners at this period. The location of a number of these farmsteads, most notably the four within Weston Jones, may lie on the site of earlier properties. There is therefore also the potential for fabric from earlier buildings to be retained within these complexes.

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<sup>28</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 20370; Ridge & furrow: A series of long, raised ridges separated by ditches used to prepare the ground for arable cultivation. This was a technique, characteristic of the medieval period. (Scope note reproduced from the Thesaurus of Monument Types by kind permission of English Heritage © 2009)

<sup>29</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 02314 and PRN MST 14741

<sup>30</sup> South Staffordshire HER: PRN 53365, PRN 08109 and PRN 08113

<sup>31</sup> Edwards 2008: 53

<sup>32</sup> Lake 2009: 19

## Designated Historic Environment Assets

There are two Scheduled Monuments lying within the character area; Knightley moated site and Norbury moated site<sup>33</sup>. Three Conservation Areas lie within or partly within the character area; Forton & Meretown (074), Norbury Canal Junction (017) and the Shropshire Union Canal (081). There are also four listed buildings.

## Historic Environment Considerations

There are extant historic farmsteads and the historic form of the hamlets also survives. Historic field patterns exist around the three hamlets, but the remainder have been largely impacted by the removal of field boundaries during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Any future development within the character area would need to consider the following issues:

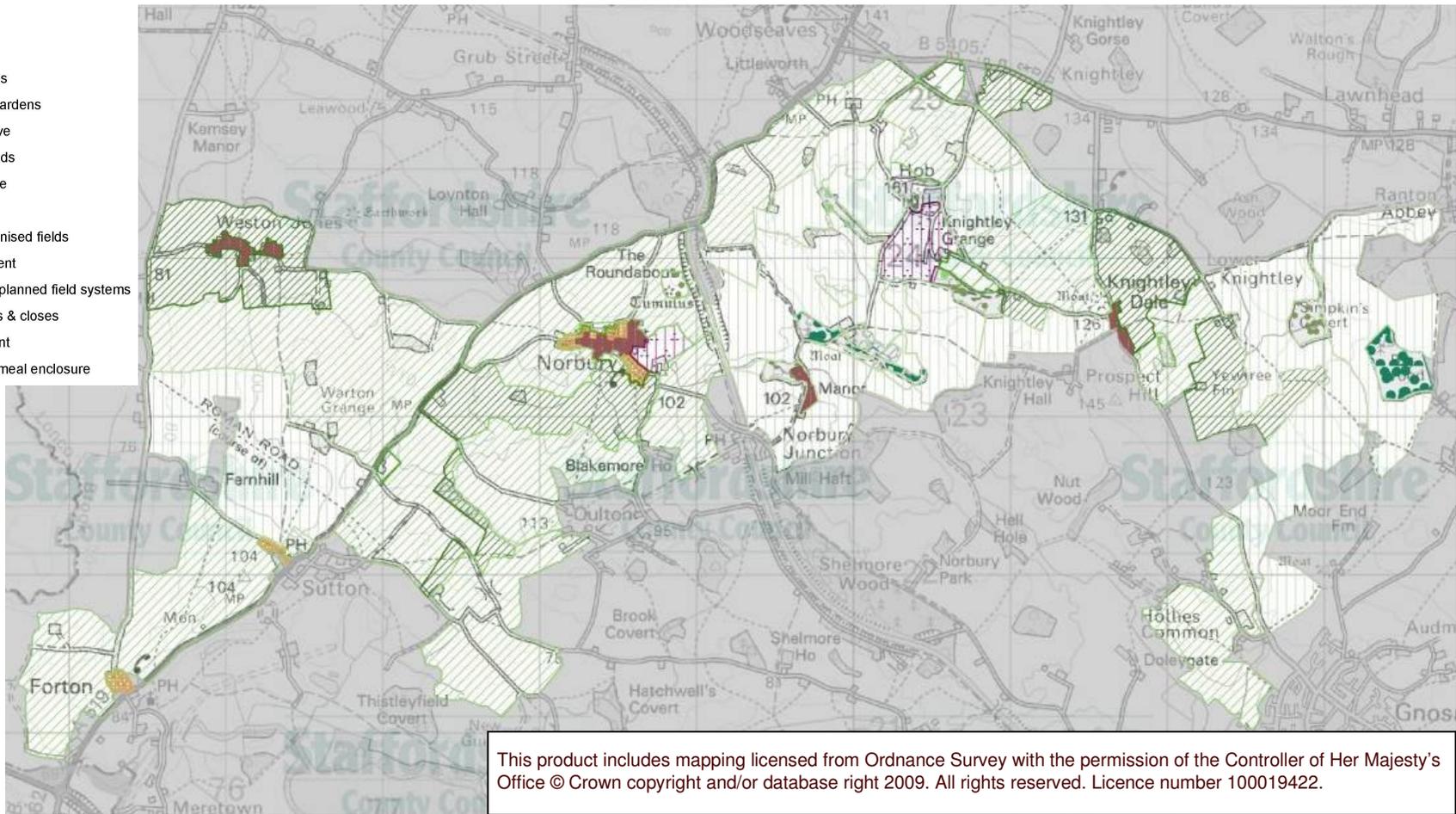
- Potential impact upon the surviving dispersed settlement pattern and in particular where the origins of the landscape are closely tied to the origins of the settlements.
- The impacts upon farmsteads, particularly those with surviving historic buildings.
- Potential impact upon the surviving areas of historic character of the landscape and how this could be retained or reflected in any development; particularly where it is strongly associated with the historic built environment.
- How development may impact upon the designated sites and their settings.
- It would need to assess the impacts upon above and below ground archaeology.

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<sup>33</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 00847; English Heritage SM no. 21517 and Staffordshire PRN 00188; English Heritage SM no. 13471

**Legend**

-  Ancient Woodland
-  Artificial water bodies
-  Historic parks and gardens
-  Industrial & Extractive
-  Other early woodlands
-  Piecemeal Enclosure
-  Plantations
-  Post 1880s Re-organised fields
-  Post 1880s Settlement
-  Post 1880s small replanned field systems
-  Pre 1880s paddocks & closes
-  Pre 1880s Settlement
-  Re-organised piecemeal enclosure



Map 2: Refined HLC

## Historic Environment Character Area (HECA) 33

### Introduction

This document forms an overview of the HECA which specifically addresses the potential for medium to large scale development to impact upon the historic environment.

Historic field patterns continue to dominate the landscape of the character area, which are associated with a dispersed settlement pattern. Two areas of Squatter Enclosure represent one of the rarest historic landscape types within Staffordshire.

The character area covers 1,771ha and lies entirely within Stafford Borough.

#### *Archaeological and historic documentation*

Very little archaeological or historic research has been carried out within the character area and all the known information is recorded on the Historic Environment Record (HER) held by Staffordshire County Council.

### Historic Environment Assets Summary

The results of limited environmental sampling from within the character area have suggested that an open landscape was present by the Iron Age at the latest<sup>34</sup>. This record compares well with the current understanding of the later prehistoric landscape of the country which suggests that it had mostly been heavily wooded until the Bronze Age when clearance occurred to support a small scale pastoral economy. At a couple of the sites examined within the HECA there was evidence for burning during the Mesolithic/Neolithic which may suggest human activity. There is some evidence for localised burning episodes in other parts of the West Midlands region during this period, including at Stafford<sup>35</sup>. The only tangible evidence for human activity within the character area is a Bronze Age palstave axe<sup>36</sup>, found near Norbury, although this probably represents a casual loss.

The line of a Roman road crosses the character area on an approximately north west – south east alignment and which appears to run from the A5 (Watling Street) at Stretton through to Whitchurch in Shropshire<sup>37</sup>. Little archaeological work has been carried out within the character area and the relationship between the road and the wider landscape is currently very poorly understood. There is evidence within the character area for settlement by the late Saxon period at Wilbrighton<sup>38</sup> which is recorded in Domesday Book

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<sup>34</sup> Leah et al 1998: 101, 204-206

<sup>35</sup> Greig 2007: 43

<sup>36</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 1994. Palstave - A bronze axehead of middle or late Bronze Age date in which the side flanges and the bar/stop on both faces are connected, forming a single hafting aid. Some types feature a side loop to further assist hafting. (Scope note reproduced from the Thesaurus of Monument Types by kind permission of English Heritage © 2009).

<sup>37</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 01729 and 05208

<sup>38</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 02093

(1086) with five households and also within adjacent HECAs where three settlements are recorded; Gnosall, Beffcote and Norbury<sup>39</sup>.

Other places within the character area are first recorded from the late 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century, although it is not known to what degree this referred to settlement rather than land holdings. However, there appears to have been settlement at Coton, to the south of the HECA, since the early 14<sup>th</sup> century when four people were recorded in a tax return.<sup>40</sup> By 1680 there were five or six households with a further four being recorded at Coton End<sup>41</sup>. The historic landscape character suggests that this zone had previously been settled by squatters probably upon heathland and the placename Coton End, may support this interpretation<sup>42</sup>. It is possible that squatting on the heathland had begun within the zone by the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, a period of high population, and that Coton itself has its origins as assarting upon heath or waste land<sup>43</sup>. An area of ridge and furrow was recorded from aerial photographs taken in the 1960s, which may relate to arable activity associated with Coton following assarting in the later medieval period<sup>44</sup>. Another area of Squatter Enclosure has been identified further north at Coton Wood. The Squatter enclosures are associated with three small historic farmsteads, Coton Wood Farm, Coton Farm and Cross Fields Farm, which may have originated as squatter's farmsteads. Surviving Squatter Enclosure is a rare landscape within Staffordshire and as such is highly sensitive to change.

Plardiwick, located in the east of the character area is first mentioned in documentary sources at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and by the late 17<sup>th</sup> century there were six houses, one of which appears to have been a manor house<sup>45</sup>. By circa 1839 only two farmsteads survived; Plardiwick Farm and Plardiwick Manor Farm which lay adjacent to one another<sup>46</sup>. It has been suggested that the latter was built upon the site of the manor house. Both of the farmhouses were said to have late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> century origins, although that associated with Plardiwick Manor House was demolished sometime after the 1950s as was the majority of the farm complex. A further historic farmstead survives within the zone, Willey Farm which probably represents a small holding, which was present by at least the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The historic landscape character around Plardiwick is dominated by surviving piecemeal enclosure which was probably created in the post medieval period

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<sup>39</sup> Staffordshire HER: Beffcote PRN 02378 see HECA 5d; Norbury PRN 02518 see HECA 5e and Gnosall PRN 03862 see HECA 5c

<sup>40</sup> Staffordshire Historic Collections volume 7 part one (1886) viewed on <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/> (17/08/2009).

<sup>41</sup> Midgley 1958: 111

<sup>42</sup> Horowitz 2005: 210

<sup>43</sup> Assarting: processes where fields are enclosed piecemeal in an area of woodland or heathland. Assarting occurred throughout the medieval period and later, but is particularly recorded in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century in Staffordshire (cf Palliser 1976: 70-76).

<sup>44</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 20370; Ridge & furrow: A series of long, raised ridges separated by ditches used to prepare the ground for arable cultivation. This was a technique, characteristic of the medieval period. (Scope note reproduced from the Thesaurus of Monument Types by kind permission of English Heritage © 2009).

<sup>45</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 53336

<sup>46</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 53337 and PRN 53338

from a medieval open field system. The open fields were a system of arable agriculture, where two or more large fields were divided into individual strips whereby the local people held scattered strips among them. Evidence of this form of arable agriculture was identified on aerial photographs taken in the early 1960s in the form of ridge and furrow<sup>47</sup> earthworks to the south of Plardiwick Farm. Some of these fields are likely to have been associated with the village of Gnosall. Further surviving piecemeal enclosure, indicating earlier open fields, can be found to the north west of the character area, possibly associated with settlement at Lower Oulton, which is recorded by the early 15<sup>th</sup> century<sup>48</sup>.

Further medieval settlement exists within the character area in the form of two moated sites; one lying on the south side of the A518 near Coley Mill and the other lying near Hollies Farm in the north east of the HECA<sup>49</sup>. Both of these sites probably represent isolated homesteads owned by freeholders and are likely to have been the result of assarting in the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>50</sup>. The possible site of a grange belonging to Shrewsbury Abbey lay to the west of Aqualate Mere; it was present by at least the late 14<sup>th</sup> century<sup>51</sup>. This latter site lies in an area of post medieval piecemeal enclosure, which had originated as arable open fields and is therefore likely to have been closely associated with the grange.

On the whole the earlier landscape of the character area has been obscured by field systems whose form suggests they were created in the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century as planned enclosure. There appears to have been relatively low population across large parts of the character area. This may suggest that the earlier landscape had been dominated by heath land, woodland and areas of wetland and been relatively unpopulated. Elements of these landscapes do survive including Dolegate Common, an area of heath to the east of the HECA which is flanked by areas of former wetland to the north west and south east along the Doley Brook. Shelmore Wood survives as ancient woodland to the north of the HECA.

There are twenty-three surviving historic farmsteads within the character area. Eight of these may have early origins and are generally associated with landscapes of medieval or post medieval origin. These include the two farms at Plardiwick which are associated with piecemeal enclosure and the three farmsteads on squatter enclosure noted above.

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<sup>47</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 20370; Ridge & furrow: A series of long, raised ridges separated by ditches used to prepare the ground for arable cultivation. This was a technique, characteristic of the medieval period. (Scope note reproduced from the Thesaurus of Monument Types by kind permission of English Heritage © 2009)

<sup>48</sup> Horowitz 2005: 424

<sup>49</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 52962 and 00850

<sup>50</sup> Roberts & Wrathmell 2002:58

<sup>51</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 03656; Grange: An outlying farm or estate, usually belonging to a religious order or feudal lord. Specifically related to core buildings and structures associated with monastic land holding. (Scope note reproduced from the Thesaurus of Monument Types by kind permission of English Heritage © 2009)

The remaining historic farmsteads (representing 65% of farmsteads within the character area) are of a regular courtyard plan form and are generally, although not exclusively, associated with the areas of 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century planned enclosure. Consequently it is possible that these were constructed as new farmsteads within the landscape during this period and were built to farm the newly created land holdings. Norbury Park Farm is potentially an example of this being associated with a Grade II 18<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse<sup>52</sup>. Coley Farm comprises a complex of farm buildings of 1830s/40s date including a malthouse and malt kiln. A watermill, also on the site, has been dated to 1842. However, it appears to be on the site of an earlier watermill first mentioned in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly Wilbrihton Hall is of 16<sup>th</sup> century date, whilst the barn is late 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>53</sup>. Knightley Hall dates to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century but contains architectural evidence for 17<sup>th</sup> century origins<sup>54</sup>. In these two cases it is possible that the 19<sup>th</sup> century alterations to the farm complexes are contemporary with a re-planning of an earlier field system.

The HECA is also crossed by two lines of transportation, both of which have their origins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Birmingham to Liverpool Junction Canal was begun circa 1830 by the canal engineer Thomas Telford<sup>55</sup>. Fifteen years later it became part of a wider canal network known as the 'Shropshire Canals Union' which went on to construct the Stafford to Wellington Railway line circa 1849. By the time of completion the railway line was leased to the London and North Western Railway (LNWR) Company<sup>56</sup>. The railway line closed to passengers in 1965, but survives as a substantial earthwork. The canal continues to enjoy increasing popularity among the pleasure boating fraternity and has been designated as a Conservation Area which recognises its importance to the historic landscape. Norbury Junction where the Newport Branch canal leaves the Shropshire Union, to the north of the character area, has also been designated as a conservation area. There are a collection of listed buildings associated with the junction including a boat maintenance yard dating to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Newport Branch canal was completed in 1833, but is no longer in use<sup>57</sup>.

### **Designated Historic Environment Assets**

There are two Conservation Areas lying within the character area: the Shropshire Union Canal (081) and the Norbury Canal Junction (017). There are also twenty listed buildings.

Gnosall Conservation Area (034) lies adjacent to the east.

### **Historic Environment Considerations**

The historic field patterns and dispersed settlement pattern remains legible within the landscape.

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<sup>52</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 08115

<sup>53</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 01035 and PRN 51030

<sup>54</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 53364

<sup>55</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 05238

<sup>56</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 50655

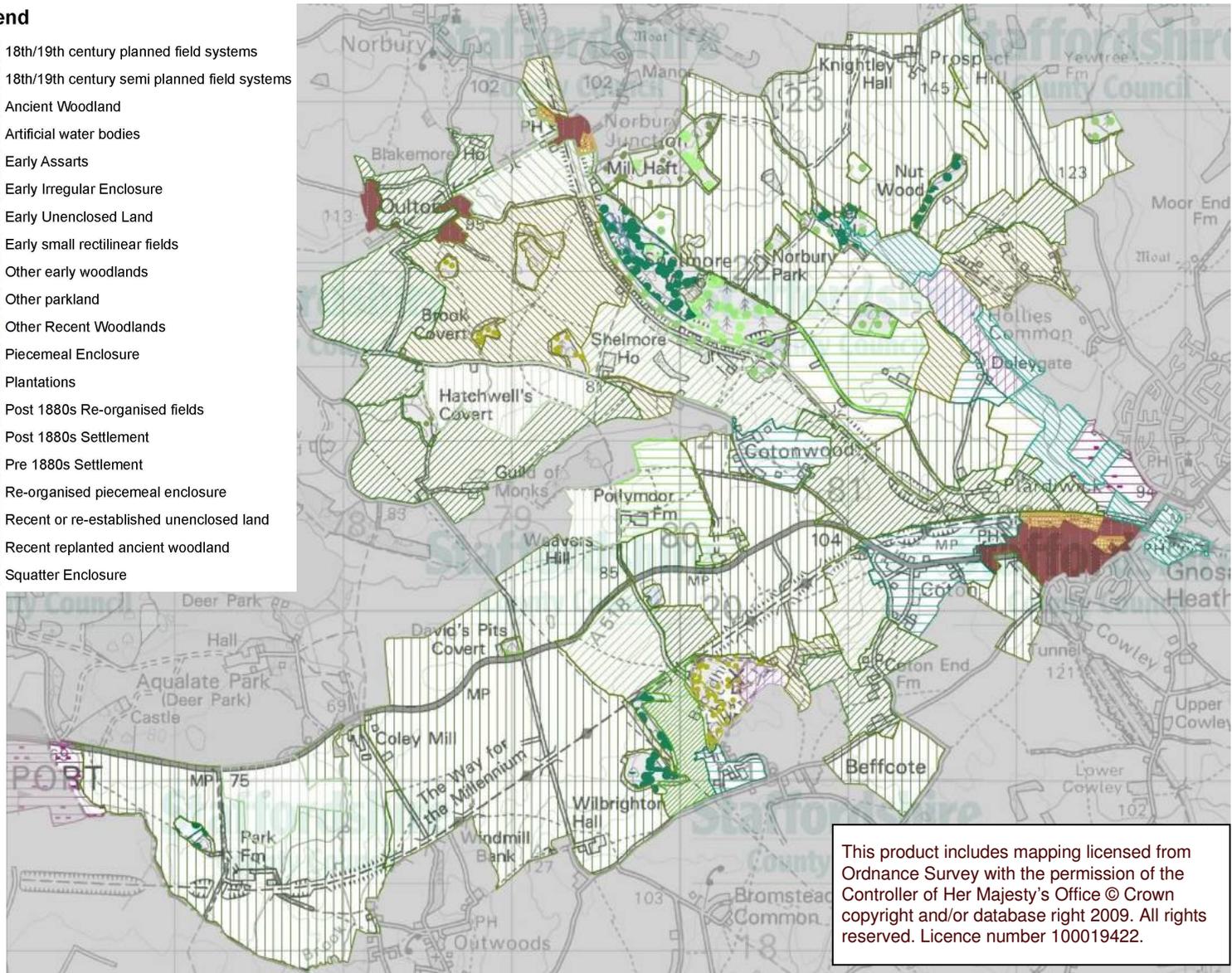
<sup>57</sup> Staffordshire HER: PRN 02219

Consequently any future development with the character area would need to consider the following issues:

- Potential impact upon the surviving dispersed settlement pattern.
- The impacts upon the farmsteads, particularly those with surviving historic buildings.
- Potential impact upon those aspects of the historic character of the landscape which is still legible within the character area and how this could be retained or reflected in any development; particularly where it is strongly associated with the historic built environment and historic settlements.
- How development may impact upon the designated sites and their settings.
- It would need to assess the impacts upon above and below ground archaeology.

**Legend**

-  18th/19th century planned field systems
-  18th/19th century semi planned field systems
-  Ancient Woodland
-  Artificial water bodies
-  Early Assarts
-  Early Irregular Enclosure
-  Early Unenclosed Land
-  Early small rectilinear fields
-  Other early woodlands
-  Other parkland
-  Other Recent Woodlands
-  Piecemeal Enclosure
-  Plantations
-  Post 1880s Re-organised fields
-  Post 1880s Settlement
-  Pre 1880s Settlement
-  Re-organised piecemeal enclosure
-  Recent or re-established unenclosed land
-  Recent replanted ancient woodland
-  Squatter Enclosure



Map 3: Refined HLC

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